



7 | **THESE BONES CAN RISE:** BEA AKOTO'S AFRICAN FEMINIST BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS OF LIBERATION

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Abstract

“These bones can rise” is the response of Reverend Dr. Dorothy BEA Akoto to the question “can these bones rise?” which was posed in Ezekiel 37:3. Her article “Can these bones rise? Re-reading Ezekiel 37:1-14 in the HIV/AIDS Context” clearly reflects her contextual feminist and liberation theology. Her research in Gender studies in the Bible relate to marriage, ministerial education, missions, poverty, rights/health of women and children, issues of masculinity, sexuality and HIV/AIDS, issues of race, class and what promotes justice and equity and reveals God’s dignity in everyone created in God’s image regardless of their sexual orientation. This study analyzes and investigates the uniqueness of the works of Dorothy, BEA Akoto as an African woman and Biblical theologian who seeks to leave a legacy of theology of liberation.

Keywords: Dorothy BEA Akoto-Abutiate, Dry Bones, Ezekiel, Decolonization, Gender Studies, African, Liberation Theology, Contextualized Biblical Interpretation

Introduction

Professor Dorothy BEA Akoto is an African Biblical theologian who engages in theology of liberation, gender studies, contextual and in-culturation theology. The work of feminists (and that of liberation theologians at large), analyzing both scripture and culture, has resulted in uncovering structures of oppression and discrimination within church and society and has resulted into the world-wide demand of women for wholeness and liberation. This quest for wholeness and full humanity also occurs in African women’s theology and has led to an African feminist liberation

theology (Frederiks, 2003:68). The fact that feminism developed in the religious and the secular sphere has also helped women in their political, economic and social struggle for liberation (Frederiks, 2003:68). Dube observes that, “liberation theology rose from a context of resisting both imperial oppression and deformation of people through exploitation, racism, and dispossession” (Dube, 2004:291). This study aims at discovering the liberation theology of an African Biblical theologian.

This paper attempts to understand the political, cultural, social and religious contexts that inspired her works. It also seeks to discover the sources of her findings which led to her theological propositions. The work also surveys how her contextual biblical interpretations, gender and liberation theological propositions address patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism, sexual and disability-based discrimination. This is achieved in five sub-sections. The first sub-section is a brief introduction to the work. This is followed by a short write-up on Professor Dorothy BEA Akoto. The third sub-section explores the political, cultural, sociological and religious contexts that inspired her works. Specific areas where her contextual biblical interpretation, gender and liberation theological propositions address are patriarchy, colonialism and disability-based discrimination. These are surveyed in the fourth sub-section. The fifth sub-section focuses on the possible application of Akoto’s hermeneutics to future world and work.

A Short Write-up on Professor Dorothy BEA Akoto

Rev. Professor Dorothy BEA Akoto is a native of Avatime Biakpa and An-yako-Asadame in Volta Region Ghana. She was born on the 27th of January 1957. She is the 5th of the 7 children of her parents. Unfortunately, she lost her mother at the age of 9. She attended the following schools: Evangelical Presbyterian Basic School, Avatime, Biakpa; John F. Kennedy Memorial Preparatory School; Saint John’s Preparatory School, Nswam Road Accra. For her secondary education, she attended Mawuli School, Ho Volta Region. She obtained her first degree at Cape Coast University Institute of Education, ATTIC, Winneba. She worked with Volta Regional Administration as an Executive Officer and also as a Telephonist. She

also worked with Ghana Education Service (GES), teaching English Language and Literature in various schools and Colleges. Dorothy BEA Akoto served as a National in-service Trainer of Teachers of Primary, Middle, Junior secondary schools and Colleges on the preparation and appropriate use of Teaching/Learning Aids.

She holds a degree in Master of Divinity (MDiv), Master of Arts in Christian Education (MACE), Master of Theology (MTh), Master of Theology (MTh) from various universities in the USA. She obtained her Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Hebrew Bible, Culture and Hermeneutics from Chicago Theological Seminary (C.T.S.), Chicago/IL, USA. Currently, Akoto is the Vice President of Trinity Theological Seminary (TTS), Legon, Accra, where she is a Professor of Hebrew Language, Old Testament and Gender Studies and the immediate past academic Dean. She has been an Adjunct Professor of Hebrew Bible at the Interdenominational Theological Center (I.T.C) in Atlanta/GA, USA and a visiting Lecturer at McCormick Theological Seminary (MTS), Chicago/IL, USA. She is an ordained Minister of the Word and Sacrament/Minister of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (EPCG).

Rev. Professor Akoto has been an Executive Committee member of African Biblical Hermeneutics of SBL, West African Association of Theological Institutions Ghana, Ghana Association of Biblical Exegetes, (GHABES), *Hokma* House, *Theta Phi* International Honour Society, World Alliance of Reformed Churches and held various positions in several academic Associations. Her area of specialization and research interests borders on Wisdom Literature (especially, the Bible and African Proverbial Communication), Cultural, Postcolonial and Gender Studies. Rev. Professor Akoto is a researcher, Christian Educator, Pastoral Counselor, Preacher and Public Speaker and has presented papers, held panel discussions at many Church, Academic, Social Activism, HIV and AIDS, as well as Women's/Leadership Conferences in various parts of Africa, the USA, Middle East, Asia (Korea), the Caribbean, Rome, Corinth and other places. She is a published author of books, articles in books and academic Journals in Africa, the USA and Europe.

Political, Cultural, Sociological and Religious Contexts that Inspired her Works

African feminists maintain that the cultural context is not neutral, but is gender biased and hence needs to be handled with care and suspicion. There is therefore the need for what Kanyoro calls “an engendered communal theology” (Fredriks, 2003:73; cf. Kanyoro, 2001:169). Most of Dorothy Akoto’s theological propositions were done in the “Circle of Concerned African Women” (henceforth Circle). The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians started in 1989 when Mercy Oduyoye called together a group of women at Trinity College in Legon, Ghana around the theme: *Talitha Cum!* Daughters of Africa arise! The theme was taken from the story of the nameless daughter of Jairus who was raised from the dead by Jesus with the words: *Talitha Cum!* (Luke 8:40ff.). Like this little girl called Miss Jairus by African women theologians, African women were challenged to get up and speak (Fredriks, 2003:70; cf. Dube, 2001:5). Akoto’s involvement with the Circle was in the mid 1990s while doing Masters degree in the USA.

A meeting and discussion with Professor Mercy Oduyoye at a Presbyterian Church, USA gathering in Louisville, Kentucky was a great motivation. Some of the issues discussed bordered on the challenges faced by women in theological education, domestic violence against women, racism, sexism and other forms of dehumanizing “isms” affecting the female species, as well as “feminine” males. Professor Mercy Oduyoye and some other “Circle sisters” encouraged them to start writing articles for Circle publications. The “Circle” writings addressed issues of injustice in society and related issues in “patriarchally”-inclined stories in the Bible.

As an African feminist and a liberation theologian, Akoto’s works started from the premise that women are regarded as lesser than men. Women are “underrated and not affirmed or offered the opportunity to affirm themselves” (Akoto, 2000:274). “Women and their works as mothers and homemakers have often been bypassed as if women did nothing beyond producing and raising offspring” (Akoto, 2000:274; quoting Oduyoye, 1995:81). Akoto observes that when s/he is not nurtured or allowed freedom of expression, the individual begins to live as a victim and experiences difficulties in resolving emotional trauma and it gradually

becomes an accumulation of unfinished psychological and emotional business leading to chronic anxiety, fear, confusion, emptiness and unhappiness. This can explain some causes of ill-health; emotional or mental, among African women who have been denied the freedom to be themselves, resulting in their ill-health. (Akoto, 2006:99-100). I agree with Okure that “the liberative elements in the Bible with respect to women stem from the divine perspective, the oppressive ones from the human perspective” (Okure, 2006:52).

Akoto conflates issues concerning women’s health with the issue of their rights and also the rights of children. Life has been terrible for children in Africa in that they have little or no security. Some of the evils that children face in Africa include: rape, famine and warfare. They also face lack of some basic human rights that UNICEF have outlined for children such as affection, love and understanding (Akoto, 2006:101), a right to food and medicine, education, play, a name and nationality, “special care if handicapped” (Akoto, 2006:101), or to be put first in times of disaster, participate in society, be raised in society in a universal brotherhood and sisterhood, and to “enjoy these rights, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national or social origin” (Akoto, 2006:101). These rights are not realized in Africa. In Zimbabwe for instance, children are “raped and tortured by Security Police and Youth Brigade members” (Akoto, 2006:101; cf. Landsberg, 2013:109-110). In some parts of Africa like Uganda, children are used as child soldiers. It is true that men do fall victims to the conditions of violence, rape, war, poverty, famine and injustice, in Africa, however, women and children are most at risk.

The missionaries enforced Christianity with other foreign cultural elements on Africans. Africans were dehumanized; their race and religion were regarded as inferior. Akoto gives an example of the Ewe people who originally worshipped their god, Mawu. (Landsberg, 2013:110-111). When the missionaries came with the Judaeo-Christian concept of God, the Ewe began to scorn their own cultures in favor of the European culture seeing their own culture as substandard. With the missionaries tagging everything African as “savage” or “devilish” (Akoto, 2000:262) even the Ewe themselves started to look down on their understanding of self. They were no longer being defined by themselves but by the missionaries and by Europe. God, divinity and culture were present in Africa before

the advent of Christianity and the work done by the missionaries and the ideas such as god, divinity and culture need to be reclaimed by people who work in favor of Africa (Landsberg, 2013:108).

Akoto wrote in the context of postcolonialism, hence she proposes a decolonial turn in African epistemological system. It was a period of the demise of colonialism through the eradication of colonial administration, giving rise to the concept of postcolonial world. According to Stuart Hall (1996:249), it is a period of shift from the age of empires to the post-independence/post-decolonization moment. However, as Hall observes, colonialism was a process which had as its “outer face” expansion, exploration, conquest, colonization, and imperial hegemonisation. The removal of the “outer face” did not amount to a completely decolonized world – the longstanding patterns and structures produced by colonialism did not magically disappear (Hall, 1996:249). Mignolo opines that “modernity”, a complex narrative originated in Europe, building Western civilization, and celebrating its achievements, while hiding its darker side, “coloniality”. Hence, coloniality is constitutive of modernity (Mignolo, 2011:2-3) therefore, decolonisation cannot be rendered as a completed project. The colonial matrix of power that privileged the Euro/Western culture, political system, economic system, knowledge and epistemological systems, while trampling over and ploughing under the non-Euro/Western systems continue to survive. This situation is one which decolonial scholars refer to as “coloniality”, which Mignolo regards as the hidden and darker side of modernity (Mignolo, 2011:2-3). Thus, coloniality is the continuing patterns and structures of domination, produced through centuries of colonialism. Hence “to be socially located in Africa does not automatically imply a position of colonial difference” (Ramantswana, 2017:352-353).

Coloniality survives colonialism which is kept alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of the self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience... (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:243). The modern/colonial world-system succeeds in making subjects that are socially located in the oppressed side of colonial difference, to think epistemically like the ones in the dominant positions.” (Grosfoguel,

2007:213). Furthermore, “the colonial system survives even in the absence of the colonial administration because part of the strategy was to colonize the minds of the others. It relied on turning the colonized to think epistemically as the colonizers by imposing Euro/Western knowledge forms into their minds (Ramantswana, 2017:354). The colonization of the mind remains a current reality even today.... We are not yet free; we continue to live within the global structures of coloniality. Colonial systems continue to shape our traditions, religious inclinations, languages, politics, fashion, ideology, education, and so on. The colonial values, norms, and ideologies continue to subtly shape us and to some extent, have become part of our identity and being (Ramantswana, 2016:188; cf. Ramantswana, 2017:353-354).

The decolonial turn in Africa and elsewhere is not just the demise of the imperial political administration that came from foreign lands; it also challenges the body-politics in which Africans or the indigenous people in Africa and elsewhere were considered less human and so their institutions, knowledge, and knowledge systems were made inferior (Mignolo, 2009:16). The decolonial turn is a restorative process through which those who were regarded as racially inferior and dehumanized were recognized as deserving of privilege and access to opportunities and resources, people whose institutions and knowledge matter, not only to challenge white superiority but to assert their blackness (Flagg, 2005:1-11). The decolonial turn is what Césaire (2010:147) describes as the “coming to consciousness” of the self...and are ready to assume at all levels and in all areas the responsibilities that flow from his awareness (Césaire, 2010:147).

For Steve Biko, the “coming to consciousness” means coming into “black consciousness”. He observed that the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his misery, a slave, and an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity. The first step to change is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to instill him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore, letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is an inward-looking process and the definition of “Black Consciousness” (Biko, 2004:31).

The philosophy of Black Consciousness, expresses group pride and determination by the blacks to rise and attain the envisaged self. Its aim is the realization by the blacks that the mind of the oppressed is the most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor. Once the oppressor is able to effectively manipulate and control the mind of the oppressed, the latter sees himself/herself as a liability to the white man and unable to resist. Hence, the Black Consciousness makes the black man see himself as a being, entire in himself, and not as an extension of a broom or additional leverage to some machine (Biko, 2004:74; Aime Cesaire, 2010:148). Black consciousness is the coming to the realization, that black is beautiful (Biko, 2004:115). Beauty in this sense is not just about the looks; it implies overcoming the self-negation tendency by affirming blackness and Africanness. Therefore, the decolonial turn is about making a racial or an ontological shift through the affirmation of our being; it also requires making an epistemological shift, a shift in the geography of reason (Ramantswana, 2017:355).

Specific Issues Dorothy Akoto addressed in her Contextual Biblical Interpretations

Dorothy Akoto's "hermeneutic of grafting" depends on, and grows out of the other efforts by African peoples to articulate an adequate hermeneutic for the understanding of the Bible (Akoto, 2014). The hermeneutic avoids using academic jargons such as inculturation, acculturation, indigenization and others developed in West". Akoto "locates the hermeneutic of grafting within the decolonial turn, considering its tenet that regards Africa as having fully fledged knowledge systems". She highlights the "pillars of the hermeneutics of grafting" which she identifies as "an Africanizing approach". The question of how far we can go with the hermeneutic of grafting without violating the African tree of life remains. There is also the possibility of "reverse grafting", the possibility of grafting the African knowledge systems onto the Biblical "tree" (Ramantswana, 2017:352). The colonial system relied on turning the colonized to think epistemically as the colonizers by imposing Euro/Western knowledge forms into the minds of the colonized others. This was achieved through "invidious comparison" (Dascal, 2009:308-332) system of privileging of the

Euro/Western systems by regarding them as “superior” or “civilized” and regarding systems of the colonized as primitive.

According to Ramantswana (2016:188) the colonization of the mind remains a current reality that we live with and have to wrestle with.... we are not yet free; we continue to live within the global structures of coloniality. Colonial systems continue to shape our traditions, religious inclinations, languages, politics, fashion, ideology, education e.t.c. The colonial values, norms, and ideologies continue to invisibly shape us in our subaltern locations and have become part of us – identity and being. Akoto’s “hermeneutic of grafting” is located within the decolonial turn, since it makes a shift in the geography of reason by making Africa the focus and the priority in the art of Biblical interpretation, thus she brings the previously disqualified into the frame of knowledge. Again, this hermeneutic of grafting indicates a refusal to bow down to the Biblical text as the dominant other; and it is rather the Biblical other that has to submit to the African other. In our African context, being part of our interpretive communities is not something static; rather, it is to be part of interpretive communities which have to engage in a restorative process through a delinking from the shackles of colonialism and coloniality and a relinking with our African cultures, heritage, and knowledge systems. Akoto-Abutiata’s approach is a relinking strategy (Ramantswana, 2017:358).

The “hermeneutic of grafting” takes as its ideological angle or option, Africanization. In line with this approach, the book is organized around four African-Ghanaian virtues: diligence, humility, prudence, and sociability. In chapters 2 and 3, which are the core of the book, these virtues are discussed on their own without interruption, from the Biblical text. The Ghanaian folk proverbs are discussed as a fully-fledged tree. In the final chapter of the book, shoots from the Biblical tree of life are identified and grafted into the African tree of life (Ramantswana, 2017:360). In the hermeneutic of grafting, the Biblical proverbs that are identified as shoots worthy to be taken over and grafted into the African tree of life are those that share the agricultural setting; comment on similar situations; have similar or identical wording with those in the African context; and have similar or matching ideas or motifs. The study does not identify proverbs that seem to contradict the virtues identified, rather, focus is on those that share certain similarities.

In investigating Akoto's methodological tools in dealing with the biblical text of Proverbs 25-29, Landsberg opines that Akoto makes use of rhetorical arguments in this regard, extracting symbols and ideas and explanatory elements from the text. She goes further to explain that “inculturation informing Akoto's theoretical framework becomes the basis of how she extracts symbols and ideas from the text, using rhetorical method in approaching the text as the methodological tools that she uses. Akoto's methodological tools, reclaiming constructive African cultural notions and reversing the effect that colonisation has had on the African peoples show the degree to which Akoto's rhetorical process is informed by inculturation, as well as postcolonial thought. In an attempt to re-read biblical passages from the context of self-definition, Akoto reads Ewe notions into the text. Akoto's extraction of symbol and concept from the text rescues good elements of African culture as something valuable and workable in the modern world (Landsberg, 2013:110-111).

According to Yafeh-Deigh, Akoto's “contextual feminist reading allows the Bible, particularly the book of Proverbs, to become a relevant and transformative word of God within the Ghanaian social locations” (Yafeh-Deigh, 2021:65). Akoto's approach to the biblical text is informed by feminist, liberation theology and inculturation. Women's health: mental and physical wellbeing are also intimately tied up in Akoto's feminist approach. She links it to the Hebrew word *shalem*, derived from *shalom*. These words signify health and wellbeing for the whole person, not only physical, but also social and spiritual. Akoto stresses African symbols and meanings and prefixes the African experience as a point of view when approaching the biblical text (Landsberg, 2013:108). Landsberg observes that “although Akoto is critical of the patriarchal values within African culture, she is more critical of European and colonial patriarchal values that have been imposed on African peoples...Akoto's inculturation theology is seen where she works towards retrieving images and symbols from African culture and redeeming them, making them accessible African theological resources once again” (Landsberg, 2013:110).

Akoto's theological approach extracts theological meaning from these symbols and cultural elements and rhetorical ideas, particularly in the light of HIV/AIDS as to promote healthier theological models. For Akoto, it is important for theological models to be socially constructed in their

nature so that HIV and AIDS become the concern of every person in society and not just the concern of the people who live with it. Her use of images with regards to her inculturation is one way in which she defines theological and cultural structure inside African communities. The use of symbols and images and archetypes in this regard roots African experience of the theological in a very practical way. Akoto uses these images to illustrate how theology is understood and expressed by certain African communities (Landsberg, 2013:111).

One of the main images that Akoto employed in her biblical works is the image of the Good Shepherd (Psalm 23) and within the gospel of John. She reread them with Ewe notions of what it means to be a shepherd (Akoto, 2000:260-277). For Akoto, it is too abstract and foreign to hold the image of the Good Shepherd as merely the domain of God. Jesus is not just the Good Shepherd but he also acted to show example of what our attitude towards one another should be (Landsberg, 2013:111-112). Akoto brings the Ghanaian notion of shepherding into her interpretation of the text. The image of the shepherd is likened to people who perform roles of guiding or fighting for people in the society. She compares mothers and first-born daughters to shepherds in society. (Landsberg, 2013:113). Furthermore, the roles of the Ewe mother in the cultural context of the Ewe people can be seen as shepherding. She is the channel by which ancestors return to life, a homemaker as she bears children, takes care of them, loves, provides for and protects her family and also meets the needs of other extended family members. She is actively involved in the community's life.

As a local politician, she helps to maintain the smooth-running of life in the community. She is a custodian of law and order, ensuring that these are not violated but are carried out to provide for the welfare of the living and the goodwill of the leaving-dead (Akoto, 2000:267). Hence, for Akoto, women are not simply the timid creatures portrayed in Christianity but are active agents in society, working for the welfare of their families and the larger social space. The European image of the Good Shepherd is too abstract and foreign for Akoto, but to reclaim images like this, from the perspective and experiences of the peoples of Africa can provide concrete ways of self-definition and socially aware frameworks that can

better deal with social issues faced by people in Africa, especially women and children (Landsberg, 2013:113).

Akoto narrated the story of Trokosi practice in Ghana with similar stories of enslavement in the Bible (Akoto, 2006:96-110) with a few examples from Exodus 21:2; Leviticus 25:39-41; Nehemiah 5:4-5; 2 Kings 4:1-7. Akoto sees this story echoed in the plight of “both men and women theologians” in speaking out against cultural practices and “scriptural authority” (Akoto, 2006:105) that enslave women and children and put them into situations where they are exploited and dehumanized. Her linking of the story of Elisha and the Trokosi is not only a call on the church, but also on government and cultural authorities that reinforce systems of slavery and the abuse of women. (Landsberg, 2013:115). Akoto calls for an African feminist framework through which this contextualization protects the rights of women and children. She does not mention the risk that this poses for all individuals who are a part of the Trokosi practice with regards to infection of HIV/AIDS. However, Akoto does deal with HIV/AIDS and the Bible, but her theological process changes in that she seems to abandon some of her feminist and inculturation categories at times and concerns herself with more rhetorical models that are life-affirming theologies.

Akoto uses the story of the valley of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14 as a metaphor for people living with HIV/AIDS. She asks the question as it was posed to Ezekiel by Yahweh (Akoto, 2004:97), “Can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:3b and Akoto, 2004:97). HIV/AIDS has left many people in Africa in a state of total despair. People living with HIV/AIDS are likened to “the dry bones” in the valley”. Ezekiel 37:1-14 is situated in the context of the Babylonian Exile (Akoto, 2004:99; cf. Landsberg, 2013:116). Akoto compares the situation of the people living with HIV/AIDS with the devastating exilic situation. She spends time to explain that everybody in the world lives with HIV/AIDS; one may not be infected, but all are certainly affected (Akoto, 2004:100f.). In speaking out in prophecy for the people who live with HIV/AIDS, Akoto invokes God as a vital force in society, bringing people back from the dead and revitalizing them. Consequently, she prophesied to the people like Ezekiel.

We, like Ezekiel, act not of our own accord, but on behalf of God, a larger ethic that seeks to heal and to bring people out of desolation. We

have to call God to breathe life back into the bodies of the devastated, to offer them hope for a full and fulfilling life. Just as Ezekiel called Israel back to their homeland, we are to call people living with HIV/AIDS back to society, to reintegrate them as *bona fide* members of society (Akoto, 2004:105-107). This implies humbly accepting every member and empathizing with them in order to heal them (Akoto, 2004:110). Akoto criticizes patriarchal frameworks that would undermine the rights and well-being of women and children on the basis of culture. She uses rhetorical means of deriving meaning from the biblical text and in distinguishing between what she considers to be African versus foreign and colonial theologies (Landsberg, 2013:116). She envisions a human society that allows for self-definition, self-expression and self-determination. She foresees a possible future in which the voices of women and children are heard alongside those of men; fighting not only for the benefit and interests of men, but also to provide theologies of life and rebirth, in order to reclaim the dead (Akoto, 2006:105; cf. Landsberg, 2013:117).

Possible Application to Future World and Work

Although the “hermeneutic of grafting” which Akoto developed and exhibited in her book is undertaken only in relationship to the biblical Book of Proverbs and Eve folk sayings, the main features of this hermeneutic may also be relevant for understanding how other biblical discourses might be grafted on to other sorts of African discourses that are more effectively encountered and involved in Africa. Akoto’s book used mainly Eve folk sayings. Her approach of hermeneutic of grafting can be replicated within other African cultures, utilizing the virtues that are identified, which are not unique to the Ghanaian Eve people. The virtues identified are general categories, which can be applied in any cultural group. Ramantswana highlights this by providing proverbs from his own cultural group; the Vhavenda people, which also deal with the issue of diligence with particular reference to the issue of laziness and poverty (Ramantswana, 2017:360). Akoto’s study does not identify proverbs that seem to contradict the virtues which she identified in the work. The focus is rather on those that share certain similarities. There are other ways in which African proverbs can be employed (Heerden, 2006:429-440; 2002:462-475; cf. Ramantswana, 2017:362-364).

For example, they can be used as hermeneutical lenses through which to interpret the Bible. Masenya utilizes Biblical proverbs as lenses to critically engage with the Biblical text. This way of utilizing African knowledge systems is not an uncritical one. As Masenya (2004:61-63) would argue, there are oppressive elements within both our African cultures and the Bible which we have to negate while appropriating the positive elements (Masenya, 2004:61-63). They can be used to illustrate Biblical passages which are exemplified in Tshivenda proverbs that can also be seen in other parts of Africa. Proverbs can be illustrated by a Biblical passage (Ramantswana, 2016:178-203). They can also be used to show contradictions between the Biblical text and African tradition. Ramantswana, following up on Adamo's work 2001, on Africans in the Bible, proposes to investigate the connectivities between African sources of knowledge and the Bible through the connection of the Egyptian wisdom literature Amenemopet.

While Ramantswana recognizes the potential gains from the hermeneutic of grafting, she argues that the approach risks undermining its own gains, as the African tree of life ends up becoming a hybridized tree; producing hybridized fruit. She questions "such imagery as cutting, blending, and production of hybridized fruits different from that of either of the two plants, associated with the hermeneutic of grafting" (Ramantswana, 2017:351-352). The approach seems to reproduce that which it seeks to overcome. (Ramantswana, 2017:358). This hermeneutic of grafting signals a refusal to bow down to the Biblical text as the dominant other; and it is rather the Biblical other that has to submit to the African order? There should be a way that both of them can be grafted without any of them bowing down to the other. Akoto's hermeneutic of the rising of the dry bones can be appropriated in other social, gender and political contexts in Africa and elsewhere where people are experiencing similar devastating situations. The concrete way in which she utilizes the image of the good shepherd can also be used in other contexts.

Concluding Remarks

Dorothy Akoto engages in contextual feminist theology and theology of liberation. She proposes theological models that are life-affirming. Her

theological hermeneutics were construed in the context of postcolonialism. Her interpretations critiqued oppressive discriminatory powers, caused by the negative effects of patriarchy, colonialism, and other forms of discriminations which have affected the self-esteem and even the African epistemological system. Africans, particularly women and children should after the example of Akoto, affirm and convince themselves that “these dry bones can live again”. The main purpose of Akoto’s theological/Biblical interpretations, as evident in her works, is the emancipation and liberation of women, children and the oppressed in Africa at large. It is one of those attempts of hearing, reading and interpreting the scriptures with “African spectacles”. Akoto’s hermeneutics can rightly be considered a delinking from the shackles of colonialism and coloniality and a relinking with our African cultures, heritage, and knowledge systems. I agree with Akoto that “Biblical interpretation is like the baobab tree and no single scholar, group of scholars or any human society, regardless of their socio-political, economic, religious hegemonic or what-have-you orientations has been and probably will be able to embrace it single-handedly”.

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