

**DECOLONISATION IN THE WORKS OF SELECTED AFRICAN OLD
TESTAMENT SCHOLARS**

BY

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CERTIFICATION

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DEDICATION

To the Quest to succeed despite the obstacles...

And to

...my wife, Cynthia; and children: Osasere and Osaretin.

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My greatest appreciation goes to *Osanobua* (God Almighty), the source of my life, for His extravagant grace and unquantifiable benevolence to me since the beginning of my academic sojourn at the prestigious and premier university in Nigeria, the University of Ibadan.

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ABSTRACT

Decolonisation in biblical hermeneutics, an attempt to free biblical interpretation from Western hegemony, features prominently in African Old Testament scholarship. Previous studies on the decolonisation of the Old Testament (OT) in Africa focused largely on its history, methods and process, with little attention paid to examination of the works of African OT scholars. This study was, therefore, designed to examine decolonisation in the works of selected African scholars, with a view to determining the themes and biblical hermeneutics used for representation in their texts.

Justin Ukpong's Inculturation Hermeneutics was used as the framework, while the interpretive design was adopted. Purposive sampling was used to select three scholars: David Adamo, Madipoane Masenya and Gerald West, being the foremost African OT scholars that had an avowed penchant for the place of Africa/Africans in the OT. Six texts were purposively selected owing to their thematic relevance. The texts were Adamo's *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament (AAOT)* and *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African indigenous Churches (RIBICs)*, Masenya's *How worthy is the woman of worth? Rereading Proverbs 31: 10–31 in African-South Africa (HWWWRPASA)* and *Redefining ourselves: a bosadi (womanhood) approach (ROBWA)*, and West's *Biblical hermeneutics of liberation: modes of reading the Bible in the South African context (BHLMRBSAC)* and *Biblical hermeneutics in Africa: a reader in African theology BHARAT*). The texts were exegetically analysed.

Three themes in the texts were identified: cultural empowerment, gender emancipation and political liberation. Adamo deploys $\forall \text{Wk}$ "Cush" and its derivative $\forall \text{v} \dot{\text{I}}^2 \text{Wk}$ "Cushite" for cultural empowerment, Masenya employs $\text{I} \text{y} \text{I} \text{x} ; \hat{\text{a}} - \text{tv}, \text{a} \in$ (virtuous woman) for gender emancipation and West uses the OT Exodus story for political liberation. The presence, role and cultural contribution of Africans to the holistic history of ancient Israel are implied in the OT's passages (AAOT and RIBICs) While the usage of $\forall \text{Wk}$ and its derivative $\forall \text{v} \dot{\text{I}}^2 \text{Wk}$ (AAOT) agree with proper Hebraic semantics for blacks, thereby implying Africa/African; the existential use of the Bible in indigenous churches is canvassed (RIBICs). Exegetically, the texts (AAOT and RIBICs) are inapplicable to the average black man. Women, from the Western and male perspectives in the OT, are characterised by invisibility, silence and obscurity (HWWWRPASA and ROBWA).

$\text{I} \text{y} \text{I} \text{x} ; \hat{\text{a}} - \text{tv}, \text{a} \in$ is deployed to appraise the strength of womanhood, especially the black South African women and girl-children (HWWWRPASA), but did not align with its Hebraic portrayal as defined within the married status (ROBWA). Both texts (HWWWRPASA and ROBWA) are opaque in translating theory into practicable steps. Political liberation is epitomised in the OT Exodus story, but the Apartheid regime uses the biblical hermeneutics to justify suppression and dominance (BHLMRBSAC and BHARAT). Although a white South African, West uses insights from the OT Exodus story to exemplify black liberation in South Africa (BHLMRBSAC and BHARAT), as against alienation and oppression. However, he makes subtle reference to the rights of the oppressed.

In their selected works on decolonisation, Adamo, Masenya and West foreground the interpretation of the Old Testament in African socio-cultural experience, but are unable to match theory with practice.

Keywords: Decolonisation, Contextual hermeneutics, African biblical scholars, Ordinary reader
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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The quest at foregrounding and making the Bible to address Africa in its cultural, gender, political and socio-economic contexts led some African biblical scholars to champion decolonisation of biblical hermeneutics. Biblical hermeneutics in the Euro-American world have always embraced the historical-critical and grammatical dimensions of the biblical text. These dimensions include Textual, Form, Literary, Source, Canonical and Redaction Criticisms. Though, African biblical hermeneutics is aware of these, its focus is different. Three perspectives are often present in African biblical hermeneutics: the perspective of the biblical text, the perspective representing the African context, and the perspective pole representing appropriation.¹ The subject of decolonisation in biblical studies is brought to the forefront by this third perspective. This kind of approach has been referred to as “tripolar” by Jonathan Draper. An intriguing and also practical observation regarding Draper’s claim is that it exposes the sometimes obscure third perspective or pole of “appropriation”² This third pole provides a crucial foundation for comprehending the various emphases in African biblical hermeneutics. The biblical text and the African context, the other two perspectives, are equally significant. They help in bringing to the fore the pivotal position of the Bible and the African all-emcompassing context in which the biblical text is read. However, by focusing on the third perspective, it is possible to better understand how the biblical text and the African context are brought into conversation. Fundamental to African biblical studies is the connection of biblical text with

¹G. O. West, n.d. *Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa. A reader in African theology*, Revised edition, John Parrat (Ed) London: SPCK

² J. A. Draper, 2001. Old scores and new notes: where and what is contextual exegesis in the new South Africa? *Towards an agenda for Contextual Theology: essays in honour of Albert Nolan*. M. T. Speckman and L. T. Kaufmann. Eds. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications. 17-40

African context.³ The dialogical aspect of biblical interpretation has always been an explicit part of African biblical hermeneutics, in contrast to Western forms of biblical interpretation that have been slow, until lately, to recognise that text and context are always, at least implicitly, in conversation. Unlike how Western biblical research has been reticent to admit a real human reader, African biblical scholarship has been forthright about the interpretive presence of the African reader. An examination of the published works of African biblical research critically reveals this to be the case.⁴ Biblical hermeneutics in Africa does not view interpretation of the text as a goal in and of itself. The African context must always be brought into the discourse in order to interpret the Bible. Reading or studying the biblical text is insufficient in and of itself. It must be done with the motive of transforming the life and social concerns of the reader. Thus this transformation becomes necessary because reading/studying the biblical text must go beyond merely learning new things. African Bible readers appear to be in desperate need of improvements in their personal lives, particularly with regard to the difficulties they face on a daily basis.⁵ It is this shared desire to read the Bible for individual and societal transformation that binds African biblical research and common African interpretation of the Bible.⁶

The Western or Eurocentric tradition of biblical hermeneutics has long been followed by the majority of academics in the field of biblical studies.⁷ Most seminaries, Bible colleges, and universities that teach Religious Studies and Theology have adopted this condition as their standard.⁸ There is no interpretation of any biblical text that is void of the circumstantial background, ethos and belief of the interpreter.⁹ However, how biblical text and African context are brought into dialogue depends on the type of

³ I.J. Mosala, 1989. *Biblical hermeneutics and black theology in South Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

⁴ G. LeMarquand, 2000. A bibliography of the Bible in Africa. *The Bible in Africa: transactions, trajectories, and trends*. G. O. West and M. W. Dube. Eds. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

⁵ S.O. Abogunrin, (Ed) 2005. *Decolonisation of biblical interpretation in Africa*: Ibadan: NABIS.

⁶ G. O. West. 2002. Indigenous exegesis: exploring the interface between missionary methods and the rhetorical rhythms of Africa; locating local reading resources in the academy. *Neotestamentica* 36:147162.

⁷ D.T. Adamo 2001. *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African Indigenous Churches*. Oregon: WIPF and Stock Publishers.

⁸ D.T. Adamo. 2001. *Explorations in African Biblical Studies, Oregon*. WIPF and Stock Publishers.

⁹ T. W. Randolph. 1997. *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach. Rev. Ed.* Peabody: Hendrickson

contextual development and transformation envisioned in various African contexts.¹⁰ Some of the most established forms of appropriation in African Biblical scholarship have included cultural, feminist, liberation, contextual, inculturation and postcolonial. It is very significant to note that each of these strands of appropriation has its own type of ideological appropriation that engages the African setting and the biblical text in dialogue (or, maybe, contestation).¹¹

A critical assessment of the works of notable African Old Testament scholars like David Tuesday Adamo, Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) and Gerald West, with respect to decolonisation, shows that their quest had been directed at championing different interpretive models. These models place emphasis on the role Africa and Africans played in the Old Testament, fostering the cause of womanhood and breaking the jinx of patriarchal hegemony, as well as using the Bible as an instrument of political liberation. However, as plausible as their enterprises had been, there had been a lacuna in their enterprises, in that there had not been the possibility of relating and appropriating their theories to solving the myriads of cultural, gender and socio-political problems that daily buffet the average African. In other words, there is more to merely identifying the textual and historical location of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament text, and using the text to support the important roles played by women in the socio-cultural reconstruction of the text. However, the questions that readily come to mind are: how have these scholarly enterprises influenced the wellbeing of contemporary Africa and how do we translate from theory to praxis?

The thrust of this work is to assess Adamo's African Cultural Hermeneutics¹², whose interpretive method focused on cultural liberation, Madipoane Masenya's (ngwan'a Mphahlele) *Bosadi* Hermeneutics whose focus is on womanhood and dignity of the African (South African) women, and Gerald West's Liberation Hermeneutics in its

¹⁰A.O. Dada, 2010. Repositioning contextual biblical hermeneutics in Africa towards holistic empowerment, *Black Theology: An International Journal* 8.2:160–174. Retrieved April 13, 2015 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1558/blth.v8i2.160>

¹¹G. O. West. 2005. Shifting perspectives on the comparative paradigm in (South) African biblical scholarship. *Religion and Theology* 12.1:48-72.

¹² D.T. Adamo, 1999. African cultural hermeneutics. *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, R.S. Sugirtharajah. Ed. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

political underpinnings, with respect to their origin, veracity, challenges and applicability to solving Africa's myriads of problems.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The dominance of Western modes of biblical hermeneutics in the past cannot be doubted. In a rebuttal of this dominance, a number of African biblical scholars have also challenged this Western superintending tendency by way of decolonisation of African Biblical Studies. In this vein, previous studies on Decolonisation of the Old Testament in Africa have focused on its history, methods and process, with little attention paid to an extensive examination of the works of its leading exponents: Adamo¹³, Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele)¹⁴ and West¹⁵, who had championed cultural empowerment, gender emancipation and political liberation respectively. These previous works have also focused on theoretical comparison with no attention paid to how the fruits of decolonisation in the works of the trio could be used in addressing cultural, gender and political issues. Put succinctly, the questions that bug the mind are: how have their enterprises influenced the cultural empowerment, womanhood consciousness and political liberation of Africans? How do we translate from theories to praxis with respect to their decolonisation undertakings? Evidently, it appears enough scholarly works had not been done in this respect; hence this is the gap in scholarship this research is out to fill.

When the Bible is "re-Africanised," evidence that has been corrupted by Eurocentric scholars and historical events can be recovered by showing that some significant biblical individuals were Africans and some biblical locations are in Africa. This is what Adamo meant by "re-Africanising" the Bible,¹⁶ and is the crux of Adamo's quest at decolonisation in biblical studies. It also lends credence to his African cultural

¹³ K. Holter, 2000. Should Old Cush be rendered Africa? *Yahweh in Africa: Issues in Africa and the Old Testament*, New York: Peter Lang; M.H. Lavik, 2000. The African text of the Old Testament and their African interpretations, *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, M. Getui, K. Holter and V. Zinkuratire, Eds. Nairobi: Peter Lang.

¹⁴ M.W. Dube, 2009. *Talitha Cum* Hermeneutics of liberation: some African women's ways of reading the bible, *The bible and the hermeneutics of liberation*, A.F. Botta and P.R. Andinach, Eds. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

¹⁵ K. Holter, 2000. The current state of Old Testament scholarship in Africa: where are we at the turn of the century, *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, M. Getui, K. Holter and V. Zinkuratira, Eds. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc. See also H. Schilling 2007. A handbook of biblical interpretation (third edition), Abak: Equipping the Saint Trust.

¹⁶ I.J. Mosala, 1995. Spirituality and struggle: Black and African Theologies. *Many colours, one nation (Festschrift for Beyer Naude)*. C. Villa-Vicencio and C. Niehaus, Eds. Cape Town: Human and Rousseau

hermeneutics, which amongst other things, seeks to apply African socio-cultural worldview in interpreting the contents of the bible.¹⁷ In the same vein, Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) has championed what she coined the “*Bosadi*” (Womanhood) approach to biblical hermeneutics – a type of feminist biblical interpretation that uses the Bible as a powerful instrument to challenge patriarchal/masculine dominance, while Gerald West focused on political dimension of liberation hermeneutics. The works of the trio call for assessment in translating from theory to praxis. This is the gap in scholarship that this study is out to fill.

1.3 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

This research aimed at examining the decolonisation efforts in selected works of David Adamo, Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) and Gerald West, with a view to assessing their hermeneutical enterprises as against Western modes of biblical interpretations.

Very importantly, the research objectives were to evaluate the veracity and applicability of Adamo's African Cultural Hermeneutics with its cultural and ideological empowerment, Masenya's (ngwan'a Mphahlele) *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Hermeneutics, with its gender emancipation consciousness, and West's Political Liberation Hermeneutics. Finally, the research was carried out to assess the level of understanding and impact of decolonisation on biblical scholarship, as well as the ways to translating from theory to praxis.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study covered selected works of Adamo, Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and West that focused mainly on Decolonisation in biblical hermeneutics. Adamo's *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament*, and *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African indigenous Churches* were used. The choice of Adamo hinged on the fact that he was credited with the honour of being “the African scholar who has made the single most important contribution to the field of African presence” in the Old Testament.¹⁸ Furthermore, he got the Biblical Archaeology Society's award of Who is Who in Biblical Studies and Archaeology for the 1986–1987 edition, and Who is Who among Black

¹⁷ D.T. Adamo, 1998. *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament*. San Francisco: Christian University Press.

¹⁸ M.H. Lavik, 2000. The African text of the Old Testament and their African interpretations, *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, M. Getui, K. Holter and V. Zinkuratire, Eds. Nairobi: Peter Lang.

Americans for the 1992–1993 edition too. The Department of Federal Housing Authority, Fort Worth, Texas, USA, awarded Adamo a Certificate of Recognition for Outstanding Contributions to Black History Month in 1986.¹⁹ And very recently, he was celebrated in 2019 by the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), USA, which is the most renowned academic association in the field of Biblical Studies in the world. In the same vein, Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele's) *How worthy is the woman of worth? Rereading Proverbs 31: 10–31 in African-South Africa*, and *Redefining ourselves: a bosadi (womanhood) approach*, were selected. The choice of Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) was premised on her achievement as first black Old Testament Bible scholar in South Africa and the first female Old Testament scholar in Sub-Saharan Africa. She has also published numerous articles in internationally renowned journals, and books.²⁰ She has also published extensively on African biblical hermeneutics, with emphasis on black women in South Africa in general, and women in Northern Sotho Province in South Africa specifically.²¹ Furthermore, West's *Biblical hermeneutics of liberation: modes of reading the Bible in the South African context*, as well as *Biblical hermeneutics in Africa: a reader in African theology*, were equally utilised. The choice of West hinged on the fact that, though a privileged white during the apartheid, he chose to align his scholarship in support of the oppressed black majority; thereby endangering his own life. He championed political liberation as a form of biblical hermeneutics. This model of biblical hermeneutics focuses on political emancipation of the oppressed and downtrodden, using the Contextual Bible Study approach. He played a key role in the 1989 establishment of the Ujamaa Center at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics. Since its foundation, the Centre has pioneered and still supports a fusion of academic biblical studies and local readings of the Bible in the context of South Africa's political transformation.

¹⁹ M. Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele), 2021. Ululations to Professor David Tuesday Adamo, *Old Testament Essays*, 34(2), 337 – 352. Retrieved on 29th October, 2021 from DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2021/v34n2a2>.

²⁰ M.W. Dube, 2009. *Talitha Cum* Hermeneutics of liberation: some African women's ways of reading the bible, *The bible and the hermeneutics of liberation*, A.F. Botta and P.R. Andinach, Eds. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

²¹ M.W. Dube, 2009. *Talitha Cum* Hermeneutics of liberation: some African women's ways of reading the bible, *The bible and the hermeneutics of liberation*, A.F. Botta and P.R. Andinach, Eds. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is of immense significance in that it brings to limelight the current state of appraisal of decolonisation in biblical studies. It also brings to the fore the various ways by which decolonisation in biblical studies could be used in championing the cause for better cultural, gender and political empowerment for the average African, since biblical hermeneutics, void of relevance to the socio-cultural, economic, ideological and political life of the people, is mere theoretical academic exercise. Also, it advocates for synergy between African biblical scholars and Church leadership so as for the fruits of decolonisation in biblical researches to get to the people at the grassroots. Furthermore, it will contribute to the body of knowledge on the prospects of African contextual hermeneutics in Old Testament biblical studies.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviewed some relevant literature in relation to the study. Such scholarly works were thematically divided into the following areas: beginning and development of Western approaches to biblical interpretation in Africa; colonisation in Old Testament scholarship; and decolonisation in Old Testament scholarship.

2.2 Beginning and Development of Western approaches to biblical interpretation in Africa

Biblical interpretation in Africa did not commence arbitrarily. It had its foundation in the works of some African Church Fathers. These Fathers contributed immensely to the formation of some underlying principles in biblical hermeneutics. According to the *New Dictionary of Theology*, biblical hermeneutics is the study of the rules of interpretation of the books of the Bible. It is a component of the larger discipline of hermeneutics, which entails the investigation of textual interpretation guidelines for all media of communication: verbal and non-verbal.¹ Despite considerable overlap and conversation between Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Bible, they have clearly distinct interpretive traditions.²

This definition becomes imperative in understanding the underlying principles of biblical interpretation from the Eurocentric or Western perspective. It helps in shedding light on the imperatives of “entering” the text as an “informed” reader. This forms the basis for the mode of biblical interpretation employed by many of the African Church Fathers who lived in the second and third centuries after the establishment of the Early Church in Jerusalem. Their hermeneutics were basically literal and on some other

¹ S.B. Ferguson, F.W. David and J.I. Packer 1988. *New Dictionary of Theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

² S. Perry 2005. *Resurrecting interpretation*. Bristol Baptist College: University of Bristol.

occasions, allegorical. African Church Fathers contributed to biblical hermeneutics and their legacies are still felt in contemporary biblical scholarship. Their contributions could be summarised under the following sub-headings:

African Church Fathers shaped Christian theology

Notably, the Bible claims that the episode of the initial African convert to Christianity took place just one year after the ascension of Christ.³ It is clear that Christianity spread to Africa rapidly by at least the Pentecost story and undoubtedly due to the actions of Roman troops in the second century A.D. Philip meets the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 and baptizes him. From then, the Gospel was brought to Africa, and African intellectuals started to have an impact on the doctrines and practices of the Early Church. Tertullian (160 - 225 AD) was a renowned early African thinker who contributed to doctrine in a number of ways. He is also credited as being the first theologian to use the term “trinitas” (trinity) to describe the Godhead, amongst his numerous accomplishments. Athanasius (293 - 373 AD) clarified the biblical canon in his festal letter written in 369 AD. Christians owe a debt of gratitude to theologians like Athanasius, Tertullian, and Augustine for influencing Early Church’s doctrine.⁴

African Church Fathers protected the Church from heresies

During the early decades of the church, the African Fathers were able to withstand the barrage of erroneous teachings. Numerous heresies emerged and required consideration; many of them had to do with the deity and humanity of Jesus. Arianism was the heresy that acquired the most popularity. An Alexandrian priest named Arius started arguing that Jesus was the Father’s creation rather than the everlasting God. It is well known that Arius asserted, “there was a time when (the Son) was not.” Though it persisted for the majority of the fourth century A.D., this issue was notably resolved at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. The Early Church rejected Arius’s doctrine in the first ecumenical council and reaffirmed the long-held conviction that Jesus was “...of the

³ J.E. Hartill, 1960. *Principles of biblical hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan

⁴ W.C. Kaiser and M. Silva, 2007. *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. (Rev. Ed.) Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

same substance” as the Father and was eternally God. The Nicene and Athanasian Creeds further defined the church’s view on God’s nature. For more than 1600 years, churches have recited these creeds, which were composed by African theologians. The Early Church would have fallen away to erroneous doctrines if it were not for the African Fathers’ relentless efforts to defend the faith.⁵

The African roots of the African Church Fathers

Throughout the course of the history of humanity, God has operated sovereignly to accomplish His will. It is crucial that we examine how God established His church, encompassing black history and the role played by Africans in the early development of Christianity. Forgetting the Early Church’s African origins and contributions is detrimental for at least two reasons. One reason is that it is possible to “whitewash” church history. Although many non-Africans were aware that Jesus was Jewish, they nevertheless saw Him as a “white man,” someone who resembled an American. As a result, they viewed the founding fathers of the Church in the same light. Black history and Church history are closely related, as may be seen through researching church history. In actuality, this extends beyond the Church Fathers. It is critical that we learn about or relearn black history in the writings of the Church Fathers since it appears that their contributions to the Church have been minimised, disregarded, or ignored altogether.⁶

Secondly, the activeness of the African Church Fathers dispel a widespread myth that Christianity is a “white man’s religion.” The opposite is true, as evidenced by this. Instead of having it the other way around, Christianity was introduced to Europe through its rich African past. Given that it is a part of our shared history and legacy as Africans, the African Church Fathers tell us that we should study black history.⁷

Missionary legacies in biblical hermeneutics as colonial

It is true that the earliest missionaries to Africa started the evangelisation process by thinking of the African setting as lacking any characteristics that may help people

⁵ J.S. Kaminsky, J.N. Lohr, and M. Reasoner, M. 2014. *The Abingdon introduction to the Bible: understanding Jewish and Christian scriptures*, Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House

⁶D.T. Adamo 2001. *Explorations in African Biblical Studies*, Oregon: WIPF and Stock Publishers.

⁷ D.T. Adamo 2001. *Explorations in African Biblical Studies*, Oregon: WIPF and Stock Publishers.

grasp and interpret the Bible. Ehioghae asserts that missionaries' attempts to christianise Africa included introducing elements of their European culture.⁸ Aben⁹ agrees that missionaries imposed their austere socio-political, cultural and religious beliefs on Africans and forced Africans to take on European cultural habits. Consequently, evangelisation was more authoritarian in its conception. Due to this, women were also marginalised in biblical readings and in general in typical African culture, including churches. Additionally, it gave rise to ethnocentrism, which resulted in prejudice, bad judgement, and detestation.¹⁰ Kanyandago, as quoted by Dada¹¹, posits that:

The missionaries set out in principle to convert “pagans” to Christianity and to preach the gospel, but in practice they also participated in denying the particularity of the Africans. No one can deny that some good things were done by the missionaries, but this must be weighed against the harm that was done against the people of Africa and their cultures. Western Christianity must face the fact that it was used against values it was intended to promote and defend.¹²

The critique of missionaries' hermeneutical views is not an unjustified condemnation of all European missionaries or an expression of ungratefulness. It is rather an acknowledgment of the dynamics at play between the centre and the periphery. That is, the unwholesome relationship between the imperial powers and the missionaries from those nations of the civilised world. In this study, imperialism and hegemony are being examined in relation to various biblical interpretations. These problems aid African reader of the biblical text in understanding how missionaries' alliances with imperialist settlers have influenced and shaped how the colonised people are organised now. The missionary operations have developed into some dubious undertakings in some circles. The missionaries' narratives are now viewed from a decolonised point of view. However, this part of the current study focuses on hidden texts (bad aspects) of missionaries'

⁸ E.M. Ehioghae, 2005. Decolonising Jesus in Africa: A critical evaluation of the missionary influence *Decolonisation of biblical interpretation in Africa*. S.O. Abogunrin. Ed. Ibadan: NABIS. 307–321

⁹ Aben, T.A.. 2008. *African Christian Theology: Illusion and reality*, Bukuru, Jos: Africa Christian Textbooks

¹⁰ K.V. Korostelina, 2007. Social identity and conflict: Structures, dynamics, and implications. New York: Macmillan . Retrieved on 17th May, 2021 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230605671>

¹¹ A.O. Dada, 2013. Repositioning the use of the Bible towards a mission-oriented Theological Education *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34.1. Retrieved on February 23, 2017, from [http:// dx.doi org/ 10.4102/ve.v34i1.696,](http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i1.696)

¹² P. Kanyandago, 2003. The experience of negation of particularity and Africa's struggle for survival *Chakana: Intercultural Forum of Theology and Philosophy*, 43-58.

activities. It also in a way strengthens Walligo's cry for making a Church that is truly African and authentic Christian.¹³ Thus, Kanyandago's work stands to question the foundational interpretive process of colonial practices and mandate of translating, interpreting and disseminating the text to its end users.

The accounts surrounding its text-reading resources obscure the multiple layers of textual meanings that are pinned on its uncritical position on previous missionary activities. These also include the ideological developments behind this history of charitable acts. Notably, the generalisation of African identity via this approach has left the European colonial missionaries' spectrum of interpretation with a mark of marginalisation. It aids the reader in comprehending the role that binary opposition and racial limits played in colonial church and regime's creation of hermeneutical framework.¹⁴ The binary fusion of moral and spiritual heresy of European missionaries was ingrained in the official text-reading perspective of colonial Christianity during crucial periods of human rights violations. This was made clear during the anti-colonial uprising, when missionaries made use of the binary fusion in hermeneutics of life to ignore and deny the suffering of the poor and oppression experienced by the wounded text-readers in some regions of Africa. Despite the fact that throughout this time of the battle for liberation, the need for a new framework for interpreting texts had increased, missionaries' efforts were ignorant to this indigenous desire. In order to preserve the existing status quo, they took the settlers' side in the argument for white hegemony by trading on the rights of African people. The entrenched motives of European Christianity were founded on its aspirations of trying to improve the appalling circumstances of text-readers who were not given a means of subsistence by colonial settlements on their country. The claims of the indigenous text-readers to ancient institutions were threatened by the Christian requirement for acts of love and compassion that were blind to sorrow and anguish. This also led to extinguishing all the people's claims to the land that was occupied by mission stations and white settlers.¹⁵ Without a doubt, the missionaries were

¹³ J.M. Walligo, 1986. Making a church that is truly African. *Inculturation: its meaning and urgency*. Nairobi: St. Paul Publications- Africa.

¹⁴ I.J. Mosala, 1989. *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

¹⁵ I.J. Mosala, 1989. *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans

so clearly shown in the violent conflict that Christians were singled out as colonisers or collaborators of colonisers.

Effects of missionary approaches to biblical hermeneutics on African biblical scholarship

Early biblical academics were degraded by the Protestant missions to becoming Eurocentric hypocrites and iconoclasts who assailed African forms, symbols, and parallels. Animistic idols were used to represent indigenous African hermeneutical figures. They were perceived as lacking any organised intellectual involvement with respect to the socio-cultural, gender, political, and economic challenges of the indigenous people. Before the arrival of the European exegetes and their allies, no one ever cared to ask the local indigenous population their views or showed any interest in doing so. Most protestant missionaries were not particularly concerned in cultivating an indigenous collective consciousness of always being alert and engaged with text interpreters. Racist prejudice that promoted the idea that African brains were *tabular rasa* (a blank sheet of paper) on which one could write anything, including foreign biblical hermeneutical ideas, hijacked, crushed, and suppressed the indigenous communal psyche. This racial presumption was a key hermeneutical device used to legitimise the alienation and deportation of the African mind from its native worldview to dogmas of modernity by Christian mission.¹⁶ Indigenous populations were taught how to choose specific life paths and attitudes by the introduction of modernity, whose latter phases are evident in the present state of crumbling life expectations in the area.

According to the aforementioned, thinking and acting in a contemporary manner has placed the text-reader in a class of elitists that undoubtedly supported change and growth brought about by colonialism and imperialism. The intellectual foundation of brainwashing education and its initiatives was to support the colonial goal of shaping the colonized people in the likeness and image of European civilization. The advantages of this colonial imitation were the results of hermeneutical techniques that rendered the

¹⁶ G.O. West, 2002. Indigenous exegesis: exploring the interface between missionary methods and the rhetorical rhythms of Africa; locating local reading resources in the academy. *Neotestamentica* 36:147 - 162.

locals dependent on foreign hermeneutical beliefs forever. Through two interrelated strategies - active detachment from the world around oneself and active affiliation with that which is most foreign to one's environment - the hermeneutics inculcated through colonialism worked to isolate people from their communities. It all began with a conscious separation between language used in daily interactions at home and in the community and language used in conceptualisation, thinking, formal education, and mental growth. Due to these, it became more and more challenging to talk to the most accomplished African biblical scholars on the topics that were familiar to them and that they were most knowledgeable about. In like manner, theological education offered by missionary enterprise to the indigenous people was one that alienated the human psyche from the realities on ground. The body of the colonised exegete was perpetually made to represent two unconnected or dissimilar entities in the same person.¹⁷

From the foregoing, it is evident that the Eurocentric modes of biblical interpretation had been dominant for long. The works of some African Church Fathers attest to this. However, it is obvious that the African roots of the African Church Fathers cannot be denied. The foreign missionary efforts in the Eighteenth century helped in entrenching foreign approaches to biblical interpretations in Africa. Unfortunately, these approaches were unable to meet the existential needs of the African readers of the Bible.

2.3 Colonisation in African Old Testament Scholarship

Musa Dube¹⁸ appraises Colonisation in biblical scholarship, submitting that the early commercial phase of European imperialism of the fifteenth century were not beneficial to Africans. This became more prominent with the Western empire-building era of the nineteenth century to the contemporary capitalist stage of high imperialism. Western imperialistic traditions and Christian missionary movements have travelled hand-in-hand. Missionaries, who were protected by the empire, justified foreign domination as God's will. Relying on texts like the Exodus, many Christian missionaries entered and took the

¹⁷N. Wa Thiong'o, 1993. *Moving the centre: the struggle for cultural freedom*. London: James Curry, p. 28

¹⁸M. W. Dube, 1997. Toward a postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible. *SEMEIA-MISSOULA*- 11-26.

lands of non-Christian Asians, Africans¹⁹, and Native Americans either to convert them, or to promote self-serving claims of superiority and election.²⁰ Echoing Segovia, Musa Dube offers a similar hermeneutical methodology, one with a feminist perspective. Since the Bible was written in imperialist contexts, interpreted by Western imperialists, and used to colonize readers' minds, Dube insists that the essential task of biblical criticism is to decolonize the Bible and its readers. Methodologically, she focuses attention on seven areas of inquiry: 1) Whether the lands in the Bible are empty, unoccupied, and waiting to be discovered (Land); 2) whether the text legitimizes white imperialism, and the victimization of other races (Race); 3) whether the Bible endorses unequal power, and the distribution of land based on race (Power); 4) whether there is biblical authority for Westerners to invade and take non-Christians' lands (Readers); 5) whether modern-day notions about the text prevent Westerners from understanding imperialism, its nature and its scope (International Connections); 6) whether biblical texts have any relevance to the modern political world (Contemporary History and Liberation); 7) whether the Bible only imagines women as oppressed voiceless victims rather than as the subjects of their life, albeit a harsh one (Gender)

Musa Dube's work is relevant in that it evaluates the purported relationship between early missionary enterprises and Eurocentric modes of biblical hermeneutics. These modes of doing biblical interpretation were such that promoted hermeneutical hegemony of the Western scholarship and still promotes it till date. However, the work is deficient, in that it fails to mention the reaction of African biblical scholars to the interpretive modes of the Eurocentric scholars.

Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele)²¹ takes a swipe at colonisation asserting that the general but erroneous view that South Africa is not an integral part of the African continent seems to persevere in the minds of many a South African. This mindset continues even in the post-apartheid South Africa, many years after the inauguration of the

¹⁹I.J. Mosala, and B. Thlagale (Eds). 1986. The unquestionable right to be free. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.

²⁰ M. W. Dube, 2000. Postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 3-21

²¹M. Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), 2005. Struggling to find "Africa" in South Africa: The *Bosadi* (Womanhood) approach to the Bible. *SBL Forum* , n.p. Retrieved April 13, 2015, from <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=402>

new democracy. Unfortunately, this same view continues despite the calls to take the African rebirth seriously. It may be argued that such a perception is rooted in the “colonial mentality”, given the observation that though South Africa is a Black majority country, historically and even today the views of the White minority have continued to dominate the South African landscape. It is not out of place to say here that this colonial mentality equally had impacted on the interpretive modes in biblical scholarship in South Africa, specifically; and Africa in general, until the emergence of the quest to decolonise biblical hermeneutics in Africa.

This tendency to view South Africa through non-African eyes is evidenced by, among other factors, a general Western outlook on life. The latter is manifested not only in the everyday lives of the peoples of South Africa, but also in the nature of the curricula for higher education, with the curricula for theological education and biblical studies being no exception. It is on account of this foreign state of affairs, this general tendency to alienate Africa in the South African Biblical Studies methodologies, that Masenya (ngwana’ Mphahlele) was prompted to develop a uniquely African-South African methodology: a methodology she calls the “Bosadi” (womanhood) approach to the reading of biblical texts.

Masenya’s (ngwana’ Mphahlele) work is relevant to this study in that she unveils the mind-set that pervaded (and still pervades) present day South Africa – the mind-set that the hermeneutical methods proposed and championed by Western scholars should continue to hold sway in biblical studies. A major deficiency of the Western mode of hermeneutics is that it suits the academy and does not address the cultural, gender, political, socio-economic and ideological challenges that confront Africa.

Of great importance to this study is the work of Laurie Brink²² who opines that paying attention to the cultural world of the biblical text and the cultural world of the reader is a particular reading strategy. She takes some cue from what Fernando Segovia calls “intercultural criticism”. According to her, “Segovia’s method challenges the idea of a neutral reader, preferring the “real” reader “who is always situated and engaged, socially and historically conditioned, reading and interpreting from a variety of different and complex social locations”. Such a reader is never universal, but always contextualised.

²² L. Brink, 2013. In search of the biblical foundations of prophetic dialogue: engaging hermeneutics of otherness. *In Missiology: An International Review*, 41.1: 9–21 DOI: 10.1177/0091829612464744. Retrieved April 13, 2015, from www.mis.sagepub.com

Segovia's strategy also attends to the critical study of texts inferring that all interpretations that all interpretations are constructions formulated by contextualised readers..

Though plausible as it may be, Laurie Brinks work only addresses the context in which biblical interpretation should be done, that is in comparative sense. It does not address the stark socio-cultural, gender and political challenges that daily confront Africa, and neither does it mention possible ways of moving from theory to praxis in terms of ameliorating Africa's socio-economic and political problems through findings from researches in biblical hermeneutics. Here, Samuel Abogunrin posits that the (African) biblical scholar requires a spiritual perception that will allow him to translate the Bible in such a way that the Word will become incarnate once again in the language and life of the peoples of Africa.²³

Larry Enis²⁴, while assessing the work of Myers, "The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student", opines that Myers enthusiastically argues that academic biblical interpretation, inasmuch as it is grounded in post-Enlightenment thought, inadequately equips African-American biblical students to address pertinent issues in their own socio-cultural and ministerial contexts. He notes that biblical interpretive methods employed by marginal members of society are often tested by normative approaches - mainly those related to historical criticism. The "dilemma" which Myers articulates illumines historical criticism's ideological presuppositions, thereby subverting its perceived predominance, and validates a liberationist African-American hermeneutic, which, as Myers points out, 'has not been as systematically articulated or described in literature as has the Eurocentric method'. By 'the Eurocentric method', Myers is referring to positivistic, post-Enlightenment thought, which he critiques for the following reasons: (1) it is too exclusive; (2) it tends to reduce the meaning of the text to only one legitimate meaning; (3) it appropriates the text only as a product of history; (4) it minimizes the importance of text reception while overemphasizing text production and mediation; (5) it is too "letter-conscious" and not narrative conscious enough; (6) it is too heavily dependent

²³ S.O. Abogunrin, 1986. Biblical research in Africa: the task ahead. *African Journal of Biblical Studies*. I: 14.

²⁴ L.L. Enis, 2005. Biblical interpretation among African-American New Testament Scholars. *Currents in Biblical Research* 4.1, 57-82. Retrieved April 13, 2015, from <http://cbi.sagepub.com/> DOI: 10.1177/1476993X05055640

on the historical-critical method; (7) it places the reader in a passive state; and (8) it caters to a literate bourgeois class, while debasing the oral traditions of minority cultures.

Enis' critical assessment of Myers's essay brings to the fore the inadequacy of Eurocentric approach to biblical interpretation in solving the day-to-day problems that confront Africans. However, the work fails to analyse and bring to the fore the possible ways of applying the outcome of the hermeneutical enterprise in addressing key life issues: poverty, oppression, political instability, domestic violence against women, subjugation of the masses through unwholesome government policies, widening gap between the rich and the poor that daily buffet Africans.

In the same vein, Fernando Segovia's²⁵ analysis of biblical hermeneutics is important here. His overview of biblical criticism presents the basic principles of the three consecutive paradigms which he observes. They are namely: historical criticism, literary criticism and cultural criticism. He argues that at present there is an emerging fourth paradigm, cultural studies; which, unlike the preceding paradigms which for the most part assume a neutral and disinterested reader, focuses on the "flesh-and-blood reader." The "flesh and blood" reader is he/she who is historically and culturally conditioned and constructs an interpretation out of his/ her social location. Furthermore, Segovia sees trends of the last twenty years as a process of liberation and decolonisation away from one dominant model (with its neutral reader), that is Eurocentric and imperialist and thus tending to "absolutize" its position, to a valuing of diversity of models arising from the variety of sociocultural locations of real readers. Segovia presents a helpful overview, particularly in its insights about the politics of interpretation. He presents the first three paradigms as expressions of Western hegemony, claiming to have the right tools to uncover the "correct" meaning of the text, while in reality focusing on a Western, male (often clerical) perspective under the guise of scientific inquiry. Though Segovia characterizes the four paradigms as "competing," he still advocates a familiarity with all of these methodologies for the purpose of "critical dialogue." Recognizing the prevalence of the Western so-called "objective" insights all along, his work seeks multiple voices from

²⁵ F.F. Segovia, 1995. Social location and biblical interpretation in the United States. *Reading from this place*, Vol. 1. F.F. Segovia and M.A. Tolbert Eds. Minneapolis: Fortress. Retrieved April 10, 2015, from <http://paa.sagepub.com>

various viewpoints to interact about (1) the methods we use to study the biblical texts, (2) the text itself, and (3) the readers themselves who engage in biblical studies. Though the biblically educated - especially the so-called “experts”- bear a great responsibility (and privilege) in the dialogue, Segovia desires to invite others who read the Bible as well. He recognizes that such multiplicity of voices must be held in tension, but advocates engaging the complexity for the sake of depth of understanding, not only of the text, but also of ourselves.

As a Cuban immigrant to the U.S. himself, he describes “from the margins” a move away from Western generated and sustained forms of reading the text, and reading ourselves (our own experiences, perspectives and motivations). The goal is not to rid ourselves of unnecessary biases to become “objective” (a wholly impossible task), but rather to bring the richness of ourselves into dialogue with the texts and with others of various expertise and background.

However, there is an apparent deficiency in Segovia’s work in that, in places his categories are somewhat rigid and artificial: for example, he sets the reader-response criticism, much of which focuses on the role of the reader and his/her social group, within literary criticism which he categorises as still adhering basically to a disinterested reader. More so, the work does not highlight possible ways by which African biblical scholars and their Eurocentric counterparts can pave the way to ensuring a more meaningful reading and implementation of gleanings from biblical hermeneutics for the good of Africans. In addition, Segovia is greatly concerned with pedagogy²⁶.

Analysing the “inglorious” modes of interpretation used by the colonialists, Mark Brett²⁷ opines that biblical interpretation ought to bring some leverage to the oppressed and down-trodden. With an ethics of reconciliation and restitution in view, Brett brings to his analysis of biblical texts - especially those which have been used by imperial interests to support colonization categories, for example, “traditional owners”, learnt in his dialogue with indigenous people. He holds that a genuine and open conversation with the biblical texts is possible. Where he finds them useful, Brett draws on a variety of critical and post-

²⁶ M.T. LaFosse, 2004. Decolonising Biblical Studies: a View From the Margins. *Consensus*. 29.2: 12.

²⁷ M.G. Brett, 2008. *Decolonising God: The Bible in the tides of Empire*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press. Retrieved April 10, 2015, from <http://www.paa.sagepub.com>

colonial theorists to inform this conversation. He illustrates uses of the Bible in colonization, colonialism and resistances to such. Recognising that the production of most biblical texts occurred under the influence of, and in response to, “the shifting tides of ancient empires”, Brett is prompted by the ambiguous status of the Bible in relation to the colonisation of Australia to re-read key biblical texts with a view to opening an interpretive space for a “decolonization of God”.

Though instructive in bringing to the fore the ambiguous status of the bible, Brett’s work fails to highlight ways through which Africans can utilise the bible for the kinds of liberation: socio-economic, gender, ideological and political etc they so cherish. It also fails to draw parallels between current researches in African biblical hermeneutics and the hermeneutic hegemony enjoyed by Eurocentric biblical scholarship.

In their book: *Unthinking Eurocentricism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam²⁸ highlight that colonial discourse has thoroughly informed academic paradigms, by situating the West (Europe, North America) as the centre of knowledge production to maintain the ideology of superiority and the suppression of the other. This discourse which they name as Eurocentric presents Western history, philosophies, theories, methods, texts, stories; culture and structures as the epitome of knowledge production and all that is best. Holding that “Eurocentrism is the discursive residue or precipitate of colonialism, the process by which European powers reached positions of economic, military, political and cultural hegemony in much of Asia, Africa, and the Americas,” Shohat and Stam, point out that the Eurocentric discourse is multi-faceted; including that it projects a linear historical trajectory leading from classical Greece (constructed as “pure,” “western,” and “democratic”) to imperial Rome and then to metropolitan capitals of Europe and the United States of America. Eurocentricism attributes to the “West” an inherent progress toward democratic institution...elides non-European democratic traditions, while obscuring the manipulations embedded in Western formal democracy and masking the West’s part in subverting democracies abroad.... In sum Eurocentrism sanitizes Western history while patronizing and even demonizing the

²⁸ E. Shohat and R. Stam, 1994. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. New York: Routledge, 15.

non-West, it thinks of itself in terms of its noblest achievements - science progress, humanism - but of the non-West in terms of its deficiencies real or imagined.²⁹

With respect to Crowell's³⁰ position, the field of biblical studies continues to become more diverse; scholars incorporate theories and methods from other areas of research. One of these fields is postcolonial theory, which makes the role of empires and their effects on society and literature the primary focus of the interpretive effort. Postcolonial theory is currently being integrated with the study of the Hebrew Bible and how its interpretations have affected Africa and Africans. Biblical scholars incorporating postcolonial theory focus on three major areas: how colonial empires interpreted the Hebrew Bible and how indigenous populations reacted to the colonial interpretations, interpretations from previously colonized populations, and the role of empires and reactions to them in the composition of the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

Crowell's work is apt in that it identifies damages done to Africa and African by the Western world through religious imperialism and political conquests. However, in proffering solution or the way forward, his work fails to critically examine the extent of the damage done, the right of African biblical scholars to champion an interpretive cause in the bible, irrespective of whether their Euro-American counterparts agree with them or not.

It is clear that mainstream academic biblical studies and theology are heavily influenced by Eurocentric viewpoints. It proudly and far from the shores of redemption, wades deep in the waves of Eurocentricism. The discipline uses terms like "exegesis," "eisegesis," "hermeneutics," "ekklesia," "soteriology," "kyriarchy," "democratic," "theology," "androcentric," "rhetoric," and the Greco-Roman context as the privileged history upon which academic biblical interpretation must occur, all of which are drawn primarily from Greek culture as evidenced by the terms it uses for analysis and knowledge production. Hermes, the Greek gods' messenger, is invoked every time we use the term hermeneutics! Most Euro-American biblical scholars would not know what to do without

²⁹ S. Kelley, 2018. *Racialising Jesus: race, ideology and the formation of modern biblical scholarship* Routledge: New York

³⁰ B.L. Crowell, 2009. Postcolonial studies and the Hebrew Bible, *Currents in biblical Research*, Retrieved on July 5th, 2021 from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X08099543>

these Eurocentric frameworks. If you give a reading from a different worldview to most Euro-American biblical scholar, they disapprove and dispense it off as unscholarly. Indeed, myopia reigns!³¹

2.4 Decolonisation in African Old Testament Scholarship

Ogbu Kalu³², quoting Hargreaves, submitted that the concept of decolonisation may have appeared around 1932, coined by the German scholar, M.J. Bonn who later migrated to London School of Economics, but it acquired prominence in the 1950s during MacMillan's "wind of change" response to colonial agitation and preparedness to let the colonies go as Egypt did of old. But scholars have debated whether decolonisation was planned or came as a series of untidy exits forced by situations which could no longer be put under control. It handed over all the church posts to black people merely because the colonial administrators had left. Decolonisation in the churches took a much longer time as deliberate actions designed to maintain influence even when indigenous people were at the helms of administration. Missionaries always perceived their mission as different from the colonial governments' quest for imperialism. They assumed that they were more successful than the latter and that the weight of moral integrity planted them deeper in the interior of the colonised people's psyche. More so, in terms of biblical studies (emphasis on Old Testament Studies), the colonisers continued to champion what they felt should be the "ideal meaning or interpretation" of a given passage. This hermeneutical dominance was what a number of biblical scholars of African descent have tried to repudiate in their scholarly endeavours.

Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole³³ opined that African biblical Scholarship has not only shown a great of vitality but also has particularity as "an assortment of ways that link the biblical text to the African context". This implies that biblical scholars in Africa, in the recent time have had reasons to re-evaluate their seemingly avowed stance at aping after western modes of doing biblical hermeneutics with all its attendant models of biblical criticism. But they have had reasons to break away and challenge this hermeneutical

³¹ Shohat and Stam, Eurocentricism, 55–58

³² O.U. Kalu (nd). *Decolonisation of African Churches: the Nigerian Experience* 1955-1975.

³³ J. Loba-Mkole, 2008. Rise of intercultural biblical exegesis in Africa. *HTS* 64.3:1347-1364

hegemony and dominance enjoyed by western biblical scholarship. On the one hand, African biblical scholarship underscores the “inclusiveness” with regard to the interpretative communities. On the other hand, this “inclusiveness” involves an extensive range of interpretative methods (historical critical studies, literary approaches and new hermeneutics including Bible translation theories and practices. In this variety of methods, Inculturation or “theologies of being” and liberation or “theologies of bread” emerge as the main trends and constitute the “most persuasive paradigms” of African biblical scholarship. In fact, the ultimate goal of African biblical scholarship has been perceived as the willingness to be “related to life” for the purpose of cultural, gender, political emancipation, spiritual uplift/deification and socio-economic transformation and restorative justice.

Loba-Mkole’s work is relevant to this research in that reference is made to the expected end-users of African biblical Studies, which has to do with taking into consideration the important aspect of “inclusiveness”- male and female, rich and poor, clergy and laypeople etc. Despite the plausibility of the work, it fails to relay the process via which the poor and destitute would benefit from the outcome of biblical researches in Africa; neither does it mention possible ways of implementing the suggestions raised by African biblical Scholarship in curbing the myriads of problems facing Africans in spite of their knowledge of the Bible.

Gerald West³⁴, while assessing Justin Ukpong’s Inculturation hermeneutics³⁵ says that, the most common African form of ideo-theological orientation is Inculturation hermeneutics. Like other forms of African biblical interpretation, Inculturation hermeneutics takes its nod from life outside the academy. The dominant and prevalent experience of many African Christians was that African cultural, gender, political and socio-economic concerns were not reflected in the missionary and Western biblical scholarship, especially biblical hermeneutics. Inculturation hermeneutics arose as a response, “paying attention to the African socio-cultural context and the questions that arise therefrom.” Quoting Ukpong, he goes further, saying that: Inculturation hermeneutics

³⁴ G. O. West, n.d. *Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa. A reader in African theology*, Revised edition, John Parrat (Ed) London: SPCK

³⁵ J.S. Ukpong, 1995. Rereading the bible with African eyes. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*. 91: 3-14.

denotes an approach to biblical hermeneutics that strives to make the myriads of African context its subject of interpretation. This implies that every aspect and phase of the process of interpretation is consciously programmed by the worldview, thought-pattern, life experience and perceptions within that culture. While the Nigerian biblical scholar Justin Ukpong includes the historical, social, economic, political, and religious as elements of Inculturation hermeneutics, the tendency of most African Inculturation hermeneutics is to concentrate on the cultural and religious elements. These elements, then, make a substantial contribution to the ideo-theological orientation of Inculturation hermeneutics.

West's position and assessment of Ukpong's Inculturation hermeneutics is relevant to this work in that it hinges its argument on the need to having a real-life and first-hand experience in the interpretive process in African biblical scholarship, which are not reflected in Western academic forms of biblical interpretation. However, a lacuna is left in his work in that he is mute on the possible ways of bringing the findings in African biblical scholarship to the knowledge of the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities and agencies in order to have them implemented for the good of the people.

James Harding³⁶ opines that Postcolonial biblical criticism relates to the development of post-colonialism as a critical enterprise elsewhere in the humanities in tackling the domineering effect of Western hegemony in biblical hermeneutics. Quoting R. S. Sugirtharajah, he says:

Anyone who is familiar with writing on recent trends will know that it has been going through different phases, often described as pre-critical, critical and post-critical, sometimes as historical and narrative, or author-centred, text-centred and reader-centred. These phases describe how it has been seen from a Western perspective. Those of us who have been at the receiving end of colonialism would want to present biblical scholarship as falling into two categories - colonial and postcolonial.³⁷

Sugirtharajah here pinpoints the significance of the interpreter's viewpoint for how interpretive trends are perceived. Uncritically adopting a "Western perspective" risks either

³⁶ J. Harding, 2006. Caribbean biblical hermeneutics after the empire, *Pacifica* 19: 18-21. Retrieved April 10, 2015, from <http://paa.sagepub.com>

³⁷ R.S. Sugirtharajah, 1998. A postcolonial exploration of collusion and construction in biblical interpretation. *The Postcolonial Bible* (The Bible and Postcolonialism). R. S. Sugirtharajah Ed. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 91-116. Retrieved April 10, 2015. from <http://paa.sagepub.com>

the continuance of the dominance of Western discourses or, in the case of a sympathetic reading of non-Western discourse from a Western viewpoint, the fantasy or patronage of that discourse.

Notably, Harding's assessment of Sugirtharajah's work is relevant here in that it brings again to the front burner the reasons why there had to be a shift from colonised to decolonised methods of biblical interpretation. However, Sugirtharajah's words could imply a claim to speak for all the colonised, yet not all biblical interpreters from former (or current) colonial territories engage in biblical decolonisation discourses. This is what is quite evident in the works of some White South African Old Testament scholars. It also highlights the danger of responding to Western discourses that claim utter legitimacy with a counter-claim to absolute validity; perhaps unintentionally re-inscribing the binary opposition between West and non-West.

Mario Aguilar's³⁸ essay is relevant in that it supports a contemporary African trend in contextual biblical exegesis that embraces the study of biblical documents in their original socio-cultural context, and interaction of that study with the socio-cultural experience of contemporary communities. Taking up a critique of Grant LeMarquand³⁹, she suggests that both studies should first be attempted separately, while allowing for the possibility that textual exegesis can be extended into an interpretive project of seeking further understanding by past and present comparison. Such an attempt at an African biblical exegesis can be expanded to a full commentary on the whole of the Old and New Testament as well as the Inter-testamental literature. Such a project requires a rigorous and intensive study of the original texts, however, with the condition that African exegesis does not seek to understand the text merely for its own sake, or out of an intellectual curiosity. African exegesis is need-driven and faith oriented so that the boundary between popular and academic readings is an important motif in African exegesis.

³⁸ M.I. Aguilar, 2002. Time, communion and ancestry in African biblical interpretation: a contextual note on I Maccabees. 2:49-70, *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 129-144. Retrieved April 13, 2015, from <http://btb.sagepub.com>

³⁹ G. LeMarquand, 2000. New Testament Exegesis in (Modern) Africa. *The Bible in Africa: transactions, trajectories and trends*, G.O. West and M.W. Dube. Eds. Leiden: Brill. Retrieved April 13, 2015, from <http://btb.sagepub.com>

Aguilar rightly argues that the Western and “Africentric” (to use Adamo’s designation) modes of interpretation ought to be studied interdependently, while paying attention to the fact that Africentric readings are need-driven. However, her work fails to relay how to use the bible in addressing contemporary issues in Africa. These issues are alluded to in her work but not explicitly dealt with. This obvious gap therefore makes this research imperative.

Numberger’s work is highlighted in a similar manner. He draws attention to the status of biblical research in Africa prior to the advent of some African academics who were prepared to reject the flimsy pretences of objectivity made by Euro-American biblical scholarship. Although Nurnberger does not directly employ the concept of trajectories, a few aspects of his methodology are significant. Tracing historical developments is clearly being done. Instead of focusing on a single social setting or symbol, he focuses on a certain core issue or problem that was addressed by people in various social contexts using a variety of metaphors. He demonstrates how deviations from the norm occurred in the canonical texts but also how these deviations were frequently redirected in later stages. The historical development of a broader tradition, which spans further discussions in the development of Christian thought, is seen as beginning with and serving as a model for the biblical canon. In both situations, extrapolating these traditions is essential. The goal of modern biblical hermeneutics is not to choose texts that can only be directly appropriated in modern situations. Instead, the task of interpretations entails making an effort to meticulously trace a trajectory's past (in all its innovations and aberrations) in order to determine the thrust or direction of its advancements and, using that information, extrapolate this dynamic into the future.

Therefore, the hermeneutical cycle should focus on explaining the dynamics and direction of a soteriological paradigm or tradition into current constellations of need rather than on the interpretation of a particular text into a specific scenario. The idea of hermeneutical trails is valuable because it places the usage of experiential keys in a historical context. It emphasizes how dynamic and subject to constant change the environment of interpretive communities is due to on-going interpretation. But it must be remembered that the identification of a trajectory itself is still a product of modern scholars, unable to fully reflect the diversity of perspectives found in the biblical canon.

Choosing, prioritising, and organising these perspectives (into a trajectory) is an inescapable and important undertaking, but it also carries the risk of coercing marginalized voices due to ideological bias and abuse. But what exactly does this extrapolation entail? Extrapolation is a concept that implies both critical innovation and a degree of trajectory continuity. Such extrapolation does in fact call for a sort of analogous imagination. In order to respond to the demands and concerns of the contemporary setting, interpreters must pinpoint some components of the tradition that could be expanded upon. An analogy can be used to support, enhance, derive conclusions from, familiarize, refute, or question pre-existing beliefs and practices, according to a wide range of possibilities. These parallels must be made in a concrete, substantive manner that is understandable in the given setting. Extrapolation does not have any set norms that are unambiguous. To develop new, original interpretations, one needs to have a thorough comprehension of the heritage as well as creative imagination. To recognize the "signs of the times" and choose the right words to use in a given situation, one needs prophetic talent. To develop a suitable means of living in God's presence when circumstances are changing, a priestly consciousness is necessary.

These statements once again demonstrate that interpretation cannot be boiled down to a formula, plan, or precise procedure. It still counts as an artistic skill that can only be learned and appreciated through practice. A good method or strategy for interpretation does not ensure a good result. Only after the fact can it be determined whether interpretations were adequate. To get at a specific interpretation, it is not especially beneficial to follow the right process, technique, or approach. It matters less where an interpretation came from and how it was arrived at because even the most effective techniques might be flawed. Allowing for a process of meticulous critical analysis in which as many pertinent questions as feasible may be asked is far more crucial.

Abreast of the dichotomy between institutional and popular reading of the Bible in Africa, Peter Nyende⁴⁰ asserts that one could take the principles in explicating texts operating in institutional interpretations thus. Historical criticism seeks to recover what the

⁴⁰ P. Nyende, 2007. Institutional and popular interpretations of the Bible in Africa: Towards integration. *The Expository Times*. 119.2:59-62. Retrieved April 10, 2015, from <http://ext.sagepub.com/> DOI: 10.1177/0014524607084084

text meant to the original audience - those who first heard and read it. Such a delicate task of recovery is done by ascertaining the meaning of the given text of the Bible with reference to its first writer and audience. This also includes its world and with reference to its contemporary literary forms and styles. This meaning is usually taken to be definitive of the meaning of the text and, by that very fact, other variant readings of the Bible taken as not being true to the historical reading of the biblical text. The strong point of such principles for the clarification of the Bible is that there is an admission of the fact that the Bible is replete with words that were first spoken to a specific person or people, in a particular way, place and time. More so, it lends credence to the fact that we can get the significance of those words by determining the significance they had on the first or original audience. This is crucial because the Bible has a historical component with theological ramifications that are extremely important to Christianity. According to Nyende, if the biblical text is understood to be God speaking to us, then these principles would be an admission that God talked to people in a particular way, at a specific place and time. By attempting to determine what God said back then, the reader of today can then understand the meaning of what God said. Thus, we can rule out some readings as not being the "voice" of God. On the other hand, historical interpretations of the Bible have the shortcoming of not always leading to a moral or theological appropriation of the text. This appears to be the key difference between religious scholarship and religious faith. Religious faith is as vital to the Christian societies as religious research is. We can assess the advantages and disadvantages of such interpretations using the previously understood principles of historical readings of the Bible. One would not be able to make such a judgement without understanding these ideas.

Taking up a critique of his own work, Nyende argues that because we have so little established about their guiding principles for illuminating the Bible, we cannot make the evaluation he is arguing for of popular African interpretations of it. He queries, "What are the guiding principles of the figural readings?" More specifically, given that we cannot assume it to be a free market, left to the preferences of interpreters, what are the standards by which popular interpreters decide what symbols should be applied to that individual, location, or occurrence they read about in the Bible? It therefore follows that biblical interpretation in Africa still grapples with institutional interference and as such needs to be

realistically appropriated to the needs of the poor, needy and marginalised, rather than for “scholarly tussle” in the academy. Against this backdrop, Robert Francis, a theologian, suggested that decolonisation will necessitate a long sequence of decreasing reliance on colonial order – culturally, gender-wise, politically, theologically, psychologically and economically.⁴¹ The reduction of this dependence affects all African communities, not only those who are revitalising their economic systems and traditions. Additionally, it affects all groups who get their identities from the Bible both directly and indirectly. It also includes people who are researching postcolonial politics, gender, and cultural issues. Examination of biblical traditions, both in their creation and reception, will be included in the above procedure with the objective to identifying less skewed ways of thinking and behaviour that could be applied to the unfinished task of reconciliation with indigenous people. After all, the colonisers' motivations for taking over Africa were multifaceted. To this, Aime Cesaire is apt when she submitted long ago that... no one colonises innocently.⁴²

Yamauchi⁴³ explores the historical and archaeological background of biblical texts that deal with Africa and the Bible. He also looks at the exegetical analyses of these texts and explores how they have been misunderstood and later interpreted. Yamauchi discusses issues like Simon the Cyrene, the Ethiopian eunuch, Moses' Cushite bride, the Canaanite curse, and Africentric biblical interpretation. Along the way, he debunks falsehoods, engages with contemporary views, and offers reliable assessments of what the Bible says and what it is silent about.

Yamauchi's submission is apt in that he critically asserts the presence and contributions of Africa-related personalities to the formation of the Hebrew canon. However, he failed to clearly express how these affirmations will better the lot of contemporary Africans in the context of cultural, gender and political quagmire Africans find themselves.

⁴¹ R. Francis, 2007. From bondage to freedom, unpublished paper. See also C. Taylor, 2007. *A secular age*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 29.

⁴² A. Cesaire, 1972. *Discourse on colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 4

⁴³ E. M. Yamauchi, 2008. *Africans and the Bible*. New York: Baker Academy

Lending support to the quest at decolonisation in biblical scholarship, Andrew Mbuvi⁴⁴ outlines a number of reasons why African biblical scholars had to champion the cause of decolonisation in biblical studies. They include:

1. Challenging Eurocentric biblical presuppositions and their fallible imposition of Western values on African communities. Mbiti demonstrates how Western Christianity encounters an eschatological outlook that is distinctly different in the context of African religions by focusing on eschatology. He criticises the application of a futuristic, Western eschatological conceptualisation to an African eschatological reality that was diametrically opposed to it. Africa traditionally views eschatology in terms of indefinite past and active present..
2. Drawing attention to the western missionaries' unwillingness to acknowledge and engage with African religious reality when sharing the gospel with Africans, particularly by criticising African religious philosophy that was seen as incompatible with Christianity. Mbiti observes how the understanding of "time" differs between a western linear paradigm and the cyclical African concept, which is possibly the most contentious component of his scholarship.
3. Examining verb tenses in the Kamba (and Swahili) languages to show how the translations of the Bible were interpolated with insertion of foreign, western meanings. This brought about misinterpretations of the biblical message in the context of the Kamba people.
4. Showing how African religious perspectives are more similar to the biblical perspective of the very first century than are western approaches that were influenced by the Enlightenment and placed an emphasis on scientific methods and assumptions in the interpretation of the Bible.
5. Putting forth the idea that the community nature of African contexts should be acknowledged in order to support the idea that the Eucharist should be understood with respect to the traditional communal meal of Africa..

⁴⁴A. M. Mbuvi, 2017, African Biblical Studies: An Introduction to an emerging discipline. *Currents in Biblical Research*. 15.2: 149 –178. Retrieved on 17th May, 2021, from journals.sagepub.com/home/cbs <https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X17692689>

6. Making a significant contribution to biblical studies as a discipline by expanding its pre-existing bounds.

Obviously, this list is not all-inclusive. But it perfectly encapsulates African biblical studies. The outcome is an emphasis on African perspectives in the interpretation of the Bible as well as a challenge to Eurocentric theories regarding biblical studies. This invariably offers a novel interpretation of the biblical text from an African viewpoint.

Humphrey Olumakaiye⁴⁵, taking up argument in support of decolonisation in biblical studies in Africa, opines that African biblical hermeneutics and interpolations should be brought to bear in the liturgy of the church. He emphasises the importance of this in the Anglican Communion, Nigeria, in order to making the gospel more meaningful to the Nigerian church. He observes that after almost two centuries since the arrival of the Anglican Communion in Nigeria, a greater deal of the Church's liturgy is still Westernised.

Olumakaiye work is laudable in that it argues for a decolonisation of oral and liturgical theology of the Anglican Church, Nigeria. However, it fails to address the issue of appropriating biblical hermeneutics to solving life's daily challenges in Africa. While Africanised Christian liturgies are good in themselves, they seem to bring temporary reliefs to those who face life-threatening challenges. In the long run, they are deficient of the holistic solutions Africans need to confront life's problems. This gap unarguably makes this present research relevant.

In a bid to contextualising biblical interpretation in Africa, Kuwornu-Adjaottor⁴⁶ avers that one of the offshoots of African biblical studies is Mother-Tongue biblical hermeneutics which is the scholarly engagement of the indigenous language translations of the Bible in order to understand what they say and mean to the readers. He submits that its proponent in the Ghanaian subculture is John D. K. Ekem who says that "The diverse mother tongues of Africa have a lot to offer by way of biblical interpretation in Ghanaian/African languages as viable material for interpretation, Study Bibles and Commentaries." Ekem's point is that, the mother-tongue Bibles have issues which need

⁴⁵ H.B. Olumakaiye, 2014. *Inculturation and Decolonisation of oral and liturgical theology of the Anglican Communion, Nigeria*. Ile-Ife: Success Graphics and Publishing House

⁴⁶ J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, n.d. *Doing biblical studies with the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics approach*. Kumasi: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

interpretations and as such a person who wants to engage themselves in this adventure must of a necessity include formal exegesis that reflects a dynamic encounter between Christian and traditional African world-views, both of which continue to exert a powerful impact on communities. Mother-tongue biblical interpretation uses the mother-tongue Bibles - the translations of the Bible into such languages into which people are born and nurtured. Mother-tongue Bibles give Ghanaians/Africans the opportunity to interpret Scripture from their own world-view.

This method is heterogeneous in nature, as evidenced by a critical examination. There is a chance that any given text may be interpreted in an unfavourable, prejudiced, or distorted way due to the diversity of languages spoken in Africa. Many African language Bible translations make this very clear. As a result, the meaning of some biblical terminologies and expressions is frequently and skilfully altered in African languages. More so, Kuwornu-Adjaottor fails to suggest ways that this mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics could be used in addressing the myriads of socio-cultural, gender, political issues that daily affect Africans and Africa at large.

One of the most fascinating aspects of theological interpretation, in terms of African biblical scholars and their roles in hermeneutics, is the potential for connecting biblical texts with similarly intricate, complex, diverse, and eclectic contemporary African contexts. David Tracy suggests that this is practically possible through the power of what he calls an analogical imagination.⁴⁷ In the case of theological interpretation between the biblical texts, the Christian tradition, and contemporary context or setting, interpretation can only occur when certain parallels, that is, similarities-amidst-differences, are recognised. Tracy (with Paul Ricoeur)⁴⁸ refers to the classic maxim of Aristotle in this regard: “To spot the similar in the dissimilar is the mark of poetic genius” The ability to identify these similarities, and to express them in an accessible form (image), is based on the power of the imagination.

⁴⁷D. Tracy, 1987. *Plurality and ambiguity: hermeneutics, religion, hope*. San Francisco: University of Chicago Press

⁴⁸ A.D.S. Itao, 2010. Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of symbols: a critical dialectic of suspicion and faith. *Kritike* 4.2: 1-17

There are no coincidences involved in the discovery of these correlations. Long-standing theological traditions that have established the essential conceptual tools to aid in this process have formed and identified these parallels. It is proposed that proposed that certain heuristic keys in the world of the interpreter play an important role in this regard. Heuristic keys are typically based on the dominant beliefs, doctrines, values, customs, and habits of interpretive communities. They are the result of earlier attempts to build a connection between text, tradition, and context; they are not directly derived from the biblical texts or the contemporary society. Since such heuristic keys frequently correlate with some of the main theological themes within a specific setting, it may be advantageous to characterise such heuristic keys as doctrinal keys.⁴⁹

Doctrinal keys serve two purposes in theological interpretation. They give a key for unlocking both the deeper significance of the contemporary context and of the Scriptural passages. They therefore (and simultaneously) enable the interpreter also to establish a connection between text and contemporary context. Doctrinal keys are not only applied to detect similarities but to build similarities, to make things similar, if necessary. Such doctrinal keys frequently cover a wide range of topics; they aim to provide light on the fundamental significance of both the biblical text and the larger modern context. The risks of oversimplifying and harmonizing discrepancies in an understanding of both the biblical text and the current social context are extremely clear. This may, however, be unavoidable because any act of interpretation necessitates the discovery of some sort of similarity-in-difference. The following renowned illustrations of such comprehensive doctrinal keys may be mentioned: the victory over the powers of death (Eastern orthodox), justification by faith alone (Lutheran), the kingdom of God (Calvin). Others include sin-grace (Augustine), nature-grace (Thomas), the imitation of Christ (Thomas a' Kempis), the notion of a new covenant, Christian love and charity.⁵⁰ The incarnation, the cross-resurrection dialectic, the on-going work of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit (the charismatic movement) are not left out. In addition, the duty of Christians as “prophets, kings and priests,” freedom from subjugation, ecological wholeness, mission and witness, hope constitute the beliefs in christianity. In each case, a specific doctrinal key not only

⁴⁹ H. Schilling, 2007. *A handbook of biblical interpretation* (third edition). Abak: Equipping the Saint Trust.

⁵⁰ T.W. Randolph, 1997. *Biblical Interpretation: an Integrated Approach*. Rev. Ed. Peabody: Hendrickson

provides an explanation of the historical meaning of the Biblical texts; it also provides the parameters for contemporary Christian living in the continued presence of God.

This proposal may be illustrated with the example of “liberation from oppression”:
When this doctrinal key is used, the Bible is read to find support for the notion that the God of the Bible is, in a special way, a God who cares for and liberates the poor and oppressed. This soon becomes a strategy to read the Bible as a whole, i.e. to identify this as a persistent theme throughout the plurality of Biblical texts. At the same time “liberation for the oppressed” may also be used to highlight the most salient features of a contemporary context, e.g. as a context of desperate poverty, oppression and marginalisation, a world in need of God's liberation. The message follows clearly: the same God of the Bible is still present to liberate the poor and oppressed in their present circumstances.⁵¹

This doctrinal key thus provides a strategy to establish a link between text and context. When such a doctrinal key is used persistently and pervasively, a plurality of connotations is likely to be associated to, in the above-mentioned example, the notion of "liberation." This would call for a systematic clarification of this particular doctrinal key and its relationship with other core Christian symbols. Inevitably, it becomes the contribution of Christian (systematic) theology to provide such a clarification and perhaps also an imaginative reconstruction of the content of such doctrinal keys.

This study has the implication that, without the use of such doctrinal keys, it is simply not feasible to make the connection between the biblical text and a particular issue in the modern setting. The continual employment of heuristic keys allows freshly built doctrines to emerge in developing religious traditions, despite the fact that some interpreters may desire to avoid or even fight old doctrinal divisions at all costs. In light of this research, it is confirmed that Christian teaching and values have a widespread, albeit frequently extremely unclear, impact on how the Bible should be understood.

On the platform of feminist biblical hermeneutics, we have Elizabeth Shussler Fiorenza,⁵² Phyllis Trible⁵³, Perdue⁵⁴, Mercy Amba Oduyoye⁵⁵ and others, who suggest a

⁵¹ H. Schilling, 2007. *A handbook of biblical interpretation* (third edition), Abak: Equipping the Saint Trust

⁵² S.E. Fiorenza, 1983. *In memory of her: a feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins*. London: SCM Press. For additional works of Elizabeth Shussler Fiorenza, see Fiorenza, S. E 1984. *Bread not stone:*

hermeneutics of suspicion in their robust criticism of patriarchal overtones in the text. Through the rediscovery of women's history, which has been ignored, their works propose a method of bridging the gap between the past and the present. The reader's imagination and response to the pervasive cultural schizophrenia and alienation of women are evoked through remembering and recalling previous symbols.

For instance, Tribble's analysis of the "weeping Rachel" in Jeremiah as it is presented in her book "God and Rhetoric of Sexuality" suggests that there is a symphony of voices that arrange structure, fill material, and shape vision to produce something new. She described the progression from Rachel's sad mourning and tears to God's redeeming compassion, which characterises the fundamental essence of the Bible as hermeneutical.

As a result, the Bible is presented as a pilgrimage of ideas among the poor and the oppressed who desire a decolonised and post-colonial fusing of the past and the present. In *Texts of Terror*, Tribble explores the imaginative recounting of the accounts of the four women from the Hebrew Scriptures - Hagar, Tamar, Jephthah's unidentified daughter, and Ruth - who were terrorised, raped, killed, and dismembered by men. Oduyoye draws attention to the fact that women are using traditional knowledge and abilities to manage the hectic communal life. This is necessary in order to envision a particular meaning of lamentation through genre-bound decolonised and post-colonial feminist pursuits of the African woman.

By imagining the history and developing ideas of a continuing battle against the dominant group who have introduced the dread of a skewed socio-economic system into the society for their own benefit and greed, these writers use the voices of women to reveal the present. Through a hermeneutics of suspicion, which encourages African women to reread male-dominated texts by exposing the activities that are oppressive to women, lamentation of women is regarded as a way to counteract this dread. Oduyoye's efforts to preserve Africa's positive values and customs of the culture of women aid in challenging Eurocentric interpretations that rejected anything positive about Africans while going on to

the challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation. Boston: Beacon Press. Fiorenza, S. E. 1984. *Texts of terror: literary and feminist reading of biblical narratives*.

⁵³ P. Tribble, 1977. *God and the rhetoric of sexuality*. OBT. Philadelphia: Fortress press, 40-65

⁵⁴ L.G. Perdue, 2005. From the colonial Bible to the postcolonial text: Biblical theology. *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After Collapse of History*. L.G. Perdue. Ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press .280-339.

⁵⁵ M.A. Oduyoye, 2002. *Beads and strands: reflection of an African woman on Christianity in Africa*. Cambria: Paternoster Press.

support patriarchy and hegemony as beneficial to them.⁵⁶ By connecting the divide between the past and the present, where common text readers must strive to realise their full potential, Phyllis Tribble hopes to stimulate the creativity of female text readers. They achieve this by contending with God's absence, silence, and resistance while contending with their prior experiences.⁵⁷ The perspective of African women and their history are introduced to the decolonisation discourse using the biblical accounts of women as a springboard. This is accomplished by highlighting their pains and supporting them as they bravely challenge patriarchy. Reading these stories again brings out the terrible details of the lives of African women text-readers as they struggle to make sense of contradictory opinions and general concerns of estrangement, as well as the brokenness and alienation that patriarchal epithets of colonial legacy have imposed upon them. These authors use the voices of women to shed light on the present in an effort to uphold, support, and challenge the re-reading of the Eurocentric texts from below in opposition to activities that oppress women. Additionally, they reflect on their history as a result of opinions on on-going resistance to the prevailing worldview. This powerful and influential group is the guardian of the prevailing ideology, and by their self-interest and selfishness, they have perverted the socioeconomic structure of the society.

Biblical hermeneutics is a multifaceted and dynamic process, as is the case with any interpretation. This implies that a number of variables have roles to play in the process of interpretation.⁵⁸ In most cases, interpreters are aware that some of these elements are important, but there are frequently many more aspects that come into play while interpretation is being done. Unconsciously, these elements have an impact on the process. One must carefully consider these elements before venturing a description of the process of interpretation in Bible study groups. These elements should be easier to detect if hermeneutics is thought of as the theoretical reflection on interpretation. Assumedly comprehensive, a list of elements that could affect how Bible study groups read the text of

⁵⁶ M.A. Oduyoye, 2002. *Beads and strands: reflection of an African woman on Christianity in Africa*. Cambria: Paternoster Press

⁵⁷ P. Tribble, 1977. *God and the rhetoric of sexuality. OBT*. Philadelphia: Fortress press, p. 46

⁵⁸ M.R. Cosby, 2009. *Interpreting biblical literature – an introduction to biblical studies*. Grantham, Pennsylvania: Stony Run Publishing.

the Bible is emphasised. Listing or even classifying these elements would not offer a sufficient foundation for characterising the dynamics of the interpretation process, though. The explanation of how these components interact should also benefit from the use of hermeneutics. Therefore, hermeneutical contemplation ought to advance a step further and put these aspects on an “interpretation map”. There is obviously more than one “correct” way to making a map. A map of this kind can never contain all the information, but it may at least attempt to depict the location of several beacons in connection with one another.

Some critical factors playing roles in biblical interpretation

At this point, it becomes imperative to explore some factors that impinge on biblical interpretation,⁵⁹ especially in the quest at decolonisation with respect to African biblical scholarship. The factors include the following:

- a. **Various sender levels:** Every verse in the Bible is the product of someone or something. No text just appears and has no history. Thus, individual senders may be differentiated across the various stages of textual production - which, in the case of historical books like the Bible, encompass several centuries. A dynamic process of growth occurs from the period of oral transmission to the phase of the finalisation of written texts, compositions, and redactions. Oral traditions, writers, compositors, and redactors, among others, are the senders in this dynamic process. Even the earliest Bible translators (such as those of the Greek Septuagint) fall within the category of senders.
- b. **Different stages of textual development (oral traditions, written sources, compositions, redactions, canon, textual variations and translations):** The many stages of textual development can be distinguished as a separate factor that is closely related to the prior and subsequent elements. Biblical scriptures should not be thought of as an all-encompassing, one-dimensional block that came into being all at once in the distant past. The issue of various historical eras are present in biblical texts because of the lengthy process of textual development that led to their creation.

⁵⁹ E. J. Van Wolde, 2010. *Reframing biblical studies: when language and text meet culture, cognition and context*. Winoma Lake: Eisenbrauns

- c. **The historical, socio-cultural, political, economic, and religious contexts of each sender level:** Texts frequently (but not always) reflect their original context more than the context they describe. Consequently, it is crucial to evaluate every element that contributes to the socio-historical foundation of each sender level. Different combinations of these socio-historical elements (together with all the values that go along with them) can be used to characterise each sender level. These facts and principles served as the context in which the process of textual development took place. This interplay between the biblical texts and the ancient socio-cultural setting is a focus of the social-scientific methods of interpretation.
- d. **Ideological biases during the process of textual production:** The above-mentioned historical contexts, from which biblical scriptures emerged, often produced certain ideals that people aspired to. These ideals often matched up with a certain worldview and perspective of reality. These principles give rise to ideological prejudices like classism, racial discrimination, discrimination based on gender, foreign rule, and elitism when they are entwined with some type of fight for power or control. Naturally, literature published at the time (and still do) reflect these ideological prejudices. As a result, it is not uncommon for "systematically altered perceptions" of biblical passages to develop from ideological influence, according to Habennas.
- e. **Literary genre:** Literary genres are not only an issue of personal preference. The reader or listener often experiences distinct emotions depending on the genre. When the reader or listener does not correctly identify the genre, it might even cause incorrect questions to be asked about that work of literature or an unwanted reaction. The Bible undoubtedly comes under this as well. The Bible has a wide range of literary techniques. Many of these genres are widely known to modern readers, and they are aware of how to respond to them. However, many (if not all) of these antiquated genres are unfamiliar to current readers and are open to misunderstanding.
- f. **Linguistic structure of text:** The structure of language as a system of communication may be studied. Only by examining the deeper connections within the system of communication can the meanings of various signs in a text be

ascertained. A text is never simply an arbitrary assortment of words and phrases, according to how a language is to be utilised. The arrangement of words in a text affects how those messages are understood. So the question is, how does a text's structure convey its meaning? The superficial architecture and the underpinning framework of a text are distinguished in a structuralist's thinking and approach. The external syntactical representation of an internal and deeper-lying mental structure is the surface structure. The reader or listener can learn more about the sender(s)' thoughts by analysing the syntactical structure (surface structure) of a document.

- g. **Semantic structure of text:** Language is composed of signs, and each symbol has a unique significance. These indications can be seen not just at the word level but also at the phrase and sentence levels. There are no reliable indications. An individual and arbitrary signifier is given specific implications in every language. A signifier and the signified only have a conventional and accidental relationship. It is predicated on the accidental association between an infinite stream of signifiers and a correspondingly homogenous flow of interpretations. This aspect makes one aware of many interpretations and forces them to address the uncertainties in language.
- h. **Rhetorical stance/register/mood of text:** While the study of written communication can also utilise the word rhetoric, it is most often used to refer to conversations between an individual speaking and a listener. Rhetoric was viewed in the ancient tradition as the art of persuading in areas where disagreement is feasible, such as Aristotle's Rhetoric. In actuality, rhetorical criticism focuses primarily on two aspects of how texts function: Firstly, it can draw attention to the key ideas in the line of reasoning and the usual rhetorical devices used in the particular text. And secondly, it can focus on the specifics of each sentence's unique techniques as well as the rhetorical twists that contribute to the overall persuasiveness of the discourse.
- i. **Rhetorical stylistics of text:** Occasionally, the expressions: "rhetoric" and "rhetorical analysis" refer to and examine still another element of texts. A remedy for formal criticism's partiality would be rhetorical criticism. The latter frequently

focuses on the overall characteristics of the genre of a particular literary work. The distinctive characteristics of the particular unit blend into the backdrop throughout this process. Additionally, form criticism frequently focuses on the more compact objects that might be classified as “pure genres.” The larger structures within which the individual components are creatively intertwined eventually vanish from the critic’s field of perception. Thus, this method concentrates on a piece of rhetorical stylistics of the text (here, rhetoric is defined as “fine communication”), which might help the person reading or listening to understand the sender’s main point, theme, or stream of thoughts.

- j. **Narrative structure of text:** The examination of literary works has underlined how diverse storytelling approaches are used by tales to engage listeners and readers. A narrative’s storyline, characterisation strategies, viewpoint switches, etc., compel the hearer or reader to respond along a certain line of tension. As a result, the listener or reader is lured into the story and encouraged to follow along with the plot, connect with particular characters, or even alter their lifestyle, morals, etc. Biblical stories are, of course, also accurate in this way.
- k. **Intertextuality:** No text can be fully comprehended by itself. Whether they are spoken texts (such as other passages in the Bible) or texts in the post-modern logical sense, it always has strong links to various other texts. Since postmodernist thought does not confine the term text to written texts, the term intertext permits one to use pertinent indicators drawn from other spheres of human experience. These indications are a component of the textuality that enhances the deeper significance of the written content rather than acting as outside variables. A work of literature, in this case, a text, is not just there as an impassable, impenetrable relic; rather, it is a web, or divergent system, of signals rather than a contained collection. The parallels to and differences from a limitless variety of additional signs used in various texts have an impact on the importance and purpose of indicators. Therefore, a text is essentially an occurrence in which a number of fascinating indicators engage in an interaction of signs and in which the reader is briefly incorporated.

- l. **Textual context:** This phrase frequently applies to the contemporaneous textual or literary environment of a piece of writing. The literary setting in which a narrative, for instance, is told (that is, what occurs preceding and following the event), affects how the reader or listener comprehends that narrative. In order to differentiate it from the context that exists in the world-behind-the-text, the material setting is sometimes referred to as “co-text” in certain quarters. If the textual context is disregarded, the interpretation of a particular passage may become distorted.
- m. **Historical, socio-cultural, political, economic, religious context of each reception level:** The Bible is interpreted uniquely by various people in various circumstances. The readers/hearers are determined by a number of factors. Political beliefs, socio-economic standing, gender, culture, language, educational background, and ecclesial/theological heritage are a few examples of elements that might be stated. These elements influence readers’/listeners’ quest of certain ideals and their perception of reality. These beliefs and ideas about reality serve as the backdrop for interpretation.
- n. **Ideological biases during the process of interpretation:** The aforementioned ideals can result in ideological biases like classism, racial discrimination, sexism, imperialism, and elitist mind-set when they are rooted in conflicts for dominance or authority, as was already discussed in the subject matter of the function of ideology in the creation of texts. When reading or hearing the Bible, readers/hearers cannot avoid certain prejudices. They (the readers) can nevertheless become conscious of them but they can mitigate the influence of the ideological biases on their interpretation of the text.
- o. **Creative role of the reader/hearer:** Interpretation involves more than just passively absorbing textual information. Messages in text format commonly (always) aim to reveal more to the reader/hearer. Gaps in texts should be filled in as readers go through them. In a way, interpretation acts as a creative gap-filling technique. This emphasises how meaning is now seen as the outcome of the reader's or listener’s interaction with texts rather than as something ingrained in them, such as in the environment behind the text or the text structures altogether.

- p. **Ecclesiastical tradition of the reader/hearer:** very importantly too, the ecclesiastical traditions and beliefs of any reader or listener creates the theological backdrop for the understanding of biblical passages. The interpretation of the central message of the gospel, the canonisation procedure, the tenets and declarations, the impact of theological schools, as well as the effect of contemporary church practice, are some of the several variables that are significant in the development of such a tradition.
- q. **Psychoanalytical disposition of the reader/hearer:** The study of psychoanalysis helps in bringing our focus to the unconscious desires and motives that lie under the surface of the allegedly logical, organised world of awareness. It also includes the function that psychoanalytical inclinations perform in the course of interpretations.
- r. **Traditional process of texts (or: tradition):** The term is used to indicate that interpretation of texts never takes place isolated from previous attempts at interpreting those texts. Interpretation always connects up with already existing interpretations and simultaneously has an innovative effect on the existing tradition of interpretation. The tradition process is an on-going event that transcends any individual interpreter. The tradition gains a life and momentum of its own. Each new interpretation is a moment in the tradition process. The tradition provides an on-going mediation between past and present.
- s. **Configuration of communication process:** The sender, the medium, and receptor don't function independently of one another during communication. They instead create an ever-changing environment. Naturally, this also applies to the transmission of the interpretation of the Bible. Each distinct method of communication has a distinctive composition, or structure, known as its coordinated component. The fact that each communication process and structure or degree of compositeness fluctuates over time and depending on the circumstances, however, sets each one apart from the others. This fluctuation, which is closely related to the conventional text-writing process (as previously mentioned), can be referred to as the diachronic element of communication.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this research is Justin Ukpong's Inculturation Hermeneutics,⁶⁰ which designates an approach to biblical interpretation that seeks to make the African context the subject of interpretation. This implies that every aspect of the interpretative process is "consciously informed by the worldview of, and the life experience within that culture. Justin Ukpong includes the historical, cultural, social, economic, political, gender and religious dimensions as features of inculturation hermeneutics. These features, then, make a significant contribution to the ideo-theological direction of Inculturation hermeneutics. Like other forms of African biblical interpretation, Inculturation hermeneutics takes its cue from life outside the academy. The thrust of this theory hinges on the fact that the ordinary people who read biblical texts do not really care about the nuances of biblical languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. Their reading, interpretation and application of the texts are influenced by how these texts could bring about transformation to their daily life's experiences. Ukpong, abreast of this, sought to reinvent an ideal that challenges the status quo of biblical hermeneutics among Western or Euro-American scholars, and encouraged African biblical scholars to redirect their research focus towards holistic liberation of Africa and Africans. The Western models: historical-critical and grammatical approaches had no place for the daily life-challenging experiences of African readers of the bible. The all-pervasive experience of African Christians was that African cultural, gender, political and social concerns were not captured in the missionary and Western forms of biblical hermeneutics. Inculturation hermeneutics arose as a response, "paying attention to the African socio-cultural context and the question that arises therefrom." Ukpong involves three elements: the use of people's socio-cultural resources as hermeneutical tools for the reading; the use of the socio-cultural context and world view of the people as the perspective and background against which the reading is made; and the use of African conceptual reference in the reading. In this interpretative paradigm, the readings of the ordinary people (or marginalised) are seen as what is essential in the production of the meaning of the text.

⁶⁰ J. S. Ukpong, 1995. Re-reading the Bible with African eyes. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91:314.

The Western academic approaches of reading the Bible that concentrate on the text's history or on the text itself and serve western interests and purposes are inadequate for the purpose of addressing questions and difficulties from African contexts.⁶¹ Thus, this made the emergence of Inculturation hermeneutics, which uses the mediation of African cultural resources to interpret the Bible in its social-historical setting and present circumstances, to be important. The reading will be informed by both contexts in this way, and the biblical message will be able to resonate in the context of contemporary life. Ukpong's inculturation hermeneutical method contains five distinct features or components: "an interpreter in a certain context making meaning of a text using a specific conceptual framework and its procedure."⁶²

The interpreter of the biblical text is the first component of the Inculturation hermeneutics proposed by Ukpong. Ukpong acknowledges that by putting the reader/interpreter first, his reading style shares a lot of similarities with the group of reading theories that are not only interested in the literary merits of the text itself or the history of the text (the historical event recorded, the author's intentions), but also in the reader as a dynamic participant in the reading process. Ukpong contends that the interpreter should instead be viewed as a "reader-in-context," or as someone who is already familiar with the culture for which the interpretation is being provided rather than as an isolated reader. This insider-reader ought to be able to be critical of the culture while yet being sympathetic to it. The reader's intimate familiarity with the culture ought to cause certain biases in the interpreter's mind as he/she approaches the biblical text. These biases are recognised and have the potential for constructive usage in that the interpretation is done in a particular context. The insider knowledge of the culture that the reader possesses should give rise to certain biases in the interpreter's mind as he/she approaches the biblical text. These biases are acknowledged and capable of being used positively.

The way Ukpong sees the interpreter's function in the hermeneutical process is similar to how Michael Polanyi views personal knowledge. While critiquing the ideal of scientific detachment, Polanyi contends that the subject, that is the researcher, is constantly

⁶¹ D.T. Adamo, 2001. *Black American Heritage* (Reprint). Eugene: WIPF and Stock Publishers

⁶² J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, n.d. *Doing biblical studies with the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics approach*. Kumasi: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

implicated in the process of knowing, even in a scientific environment. Speaking of Einstein's theory of relativity, Polanyi notes,

We cannot truly account for our acceptance of such theories without endorsing our acknowledgement of a beauty that exhilarates and a profundity that entrances us. Yet the prevailing conception of science, based on the disjunction of subjectivity and objectivity, seeks – and must seek at all costs – to eliminate from science such passionate, personal, human appraisals of theories, or at least to minimize their function to that of a negligible by-play. For modern man has set up as the ideal of knowledge the conception of natural science as a set of statements which is “objective” in the sense that its substance is entirely determined by observation, even while its presentation may be shaped by convention.⁶³

This perceived “modern” perspective on knowledge makes the paradoxical assumption that all truth is observable, which is also a non-observable assumption. This is in contrast to how Polanyi refers to knowledge as “personal knowledge.” He asserts that the knower “shapes” all factual knowledge. Knowing involves making an assessment, and this subjective evaluation, which forms all factual information, fills the gap between subjectivity and objectivity. Tools are a help to scientific investigation, but they do not invalidate the subject that is being studied because they are merely an extension of the researcher. Despite the fact that we use a tool or a probe, these are not treated as external objects. Hence, we seem to empty ourselves into them and integrate them as components of our own existence. Therefore, it follows that neither biblical scholars nor scientists are able to simply distance themselves from their research. The tools of biblical critical approach do not grant the scholar an impartial detachment or objectivity. The scholar remains solely liable for the exegetical choices made when he or she makes use of those resources. Instead, the tools of biblical criticism are a critic's extension. The tools themselves are also not exempt from criticism. A biblical scholar could work on a completely acceptable and legitimate task yet utilise the wrong tool, leading to an incorrect conclusion. According to Ukpong, the interpreter takes part in the interpretive process. There is no detached neutrality. An interpreter's perspective on a biblical text can be

⁶³M. Polanyi, 1958. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a post-critical Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 15-16

influenced by a variety of personal and social factors, including the readers culture, race, gender, political inclination and socioeconomic standing.

The second aspect of Ukpong's theory is what he calls the "context" or setting.. Ukpong here uses the term: context, to refer to the reader's context rather than the context of the original text being read. Ukpong emphasises the confidence of the African reader as a member of a community by utilising the word "context." In actuality, it is undeniable that African personal identity is expressed in overtly communal terms. For example, the expression, coined by John Mbiti, "I am, because we are,"⁶⁴ stands in contradistinction to the post-Enlightenment (Cartesian) personal worldview. A specifically African understanding of personal identity in terms of community identifies the reader of the text as the community. The Euro-American reader is typically seen as an individual rather than in terms of the community. Any human community in existence (such as a nation, local church, or ethnic group) and is designated as the interpretation's subject is referred to as the context in Ukpong. Worldview, as well as cultural, gender, political, historical, social, economic, and religious life events, all have an impact on this. Human societies perceive reality from local, and not from universal perspectives. Therefore, Inculturation hermeneutics is always contextual in that it is with the perspective of a particular context in mind. Ukpong lends credence to David Tracy who says no interpretation, interpreter, or text can be considered innocent."⁶⁵ Therefore, the interpreter can only be truthful to scholarship if the issues of his or her context are consciously included in the hermeneutical conversation. This also means that one aspect of the academic task is to consider how a specific text or reading of a text interacts with, responds to, and is reflective of the lives of individuals who read or hear it. In the end, it is impossible to circumvent the issue of how a piece of research will actually be used in the community where the interpreter is from. Many North Atlantic or Euro-American researchers have current interests, but they are frequently underdeveloped or perhaps unknown to the scholars themselves. Unprejudiced forms of academic endeavour may seem to be relegated by the clear admission of personal commitment to a particular group, thus some researchers are doubtless hesitant to voice

⁶⁴ J.S. Mbiti, 1969. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, p.108.

⁶⁵ D. Tracy, 1987. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion and Hope*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, p.79

their concerns. However, in the Euro-American school of biblical scholarship, this part of interpretation, the contextual dimension of inquiry, is frequently ignored or suppressed. This is not to say that European-American biblical research does not show the contextual paradigms of a specific interpretation of a text. They exist, yet they might go unnoticed. They do, however, make up the foundation upon which the exegetical structure is constructed. Ukpong asserts that scholars cannot and should not avoid making contextual assumptions during exegesis.

The third component of Ukpong's approach is the text. There are three scopes to the text: it is an ancient document, a literary text, and a text that has the power to transform lives. The Bible is a historical text. It is important to highlight that the exegete is required to pay close attention to the historical context of the text being interpreted because it is an ancient text. Historical-critical tools become indispensable and inevitable in dealing with the text. A historical investigation must be included in any research of an ancient text in order to pinpoint the work's precise orientation because it developed within a particular sociocultural environment. This becomes crucial because it will enable a genuine and accurate evaluation of the biblical context, from which the text emerged and which also gave the text significance in the first place.⁶⁶ The African exegete must be aware of the literary paradigm and context of a particular biblical passage in addition to the historical configuration. For a reader to comprehend a work, they must take into account its structures, rhetoric, narrative elements, and internal logic.

The Bible is a book that has the power to transform the lives of those who read it. Therefore, in addition to elucidating the meaning of the text in its original context, the scholar must also discuss the significance and relevance of the text in contemporary times. In other words, African and other researchers from the developing world approach history as a means to a goal, in contrast to most Euro-American scholars who view historical endeavours as primary. They employ historical research as a means of reshaping the present.

⁶⁶ D. Tracy, 1987. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion and Hope*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, .7

The Bible is interesting not just because it is an ancient text but also because it is believed to have the power to transform the world. The contemporary relevance of the biblical text, according to Ukpong, is found precisely in its theological significance. He believes that because the theological meaning of the text is sought rather than its historical context, historical-critical methods are utilised specifically as a means of achieving a higher goal. And that goal is making the meaning of the text applicable to contemporary circumstances. The objective of text interpretation is to ascertain what Ukpong refers to as the “gospel message.” Ukpong uses the term “gospel message” to refer to a specific message from God to the readers as it developed from their conversations with one another, their circumstances, and the text under consideration.⁶⁷

Additionally, as this message manifests, it might provide an assessment of the society or the culture might illuminate the text. The contemporary context of the reader and the biblical text would reciprocally interrogate and illuminate each other. This is not something that should or can only be done by Africans, according to Ukpong. However, given that the “gospel message” results from a conversation between the text and the African reader, African scholars discover that it is pertinent to Africa. Consequently, argues Ukpong, a scholar can truly comprehend the practical ramifications of a particular Bible passage if they are in relationship with both the community that needs to hear the message and the God of the community, who is also the God who communicates through the Bible.⁶⁸

Biblical scholars in Africa see themselves as engaged not only with the text but also with the people who, in their fight for political emancipation, gender equality, cultural recognition, justice, peace, prosperity, and health, see biblical perspectives as essential elements in their pursuit of life-changing experiences. The word of God is addressed to them directly in Deuteronomy 5:1–4, just as it was in the biblical account of the Israelites at Mt. Horeb. It should be understood that the necessity of African exegesis meeting urgent requirements is one reason why the pragmatics of interpretation will not be forgotten.

⁶⁷ J.E.T. Kuwornu-Adjaottor, n.d. *Doing biblical studies with the mother-tongue biblical hermeneutics approach*. Kumasi: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.

⁶⁸ J. S. Ukpong, 1995. Re-reading the Bible with African eyes. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91:314.

African study on the Bible is not impartial. The emergence and improvement of survival, liberation, and life are its main objectives. The goal of exegesis, in Ukpong's view, is to enable the "gospel message" to enhance transformation for the benefit of the people for whom the biblical hermeneutics is carried out. African scholars cannot and should not avoid this goal if they are to be seen as being concerned with the challenges confronting Africa. It has as its goal the emergence and enhancement of "survival, liberation and life. According to Ukpong, African scholars neither can nor should avoid the contextual inferences of exegesis, because the purpose of exploring a text is to allow the "gospel message" to enhance transformation for the good of the people for whom the biblical hermeneutics is done.

The fourth component of Ukpong's Inculturation hermeneutics is the purported exegetical conceptual framework. Ukpong defines the exegetical framework as the mental architecture within which scholars are trained. It is essentially a perspective in biblical interpretation targeted towards specific areas of concern to the biblical text. As examples of potential conceptual frameworks, Ukpong mentions historical criticism, literary criticism, and liberation hermeneutics. According to Ukpong, current frameworks have not proved satisfactory in Africa. Referring to Thomas S. Kuhn's theory of paradigm shifts in science,⁶⁹ Ukpong states that due to the challenges and problems arising from the African Christian experience with the Bible, Africa needs a theoretical foundation that is different from those often used in the Euro-American world. These, of course are issues the Euro-American current exegetical frameworks are unable to suitably handle. He continues by saying that because the historical-critical method is based on the central tenet of a certain culture - that of the Western exegete, it is inadequate in an African environment. Since Deism, Rationalism, and the Enlightenment served as the cultural setting (that is, intellectual culture) of historical-critical method, and the History of Religions movement as its methodological mentor, it is impossible to consider the development of the historical-critical method without considering these historical influences. Likewise, it is indisputable that the allegorical framework employed by the Early Church Fathers for interpreting the Bible is thus inextricably linked to the ancient Greek literary tradition of the age in which these Fathers were educated. However, Ukpong was not out to outrightly denounce either

⁶⁹ T.S. Kuhn, 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press..

historical-critical or allegorical methods as it might seem. His linking of these methods with their cultural contexts helped in bringing to the fore the fact that they are interdependent of one another.

Finally, the fifth component or approach in Inculturation hermeneutics canvassed by Ukpong is the procedure for carrying out the hermeneutics of a given biblical passage. Ukpong asserts that there must be an initial scenario and a number of analytical processes. Obligation to the Christian religion and the process of bringing the Christian message into line with the contexts of the people's lives is the initial predicament. Because of this, the average African Christian finds biblical hermeneutics to be an appropriate subject of study. Or, to put it another way, the exegete's methodology and methodology itself are equally crucial. Inculturation hermeneutics is not a neutral endeavour in Ukpong's submission. People who are not devoted to the work of incarnating the faith of the church in a specific location are excluded by Inculturation hermeneutics. Class, gender, and race are not excluded by Ukpong in this instance. Dedication to the beliefs and doctrines of the church are what is essential and not dichotomous issues like class, gender and race.

It should be reemphasised here that for many years, the prevalent model of biblical scholarship in the Euro-American world has been the historical-critical method. In this method, the text is studied as one part of the evidence meant for the reconstruction of the world of the past (that is, the world of the biblical time). The arrival of African biblical studies with its much more realistic concern for the present world and immediate context appears to be at variance with the Euro-American biblical scholarship. Justin Ukpong's Inculturation hermeneutics provides an exemplar that may help the Euro-American or North Atlantic and African biblical scholars to begin a dialogue about ways the Bible can and should be read in and for the twenty-first century world.

2.6 Conclusion

A review of some of the relevant literature reveals the attempts and contributions of scholars in the area of assessment of decolonisation in African biblical scholarship, with reference to the works of David Adamo, Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and Gerald West. However, it is evident that no critical and detailed study had been done in appropriating the works of the trio in solving the myriads of cultural, gender and political

issues that daily batter Africa and Africans. More so, these previous scholarly efforts are silent on how to translate from theories to praxis. This is the gap in scholarship that this study has investigated and filled.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter overview

This chapter basically addresses the procedure adopted for collection of information and analysis. It consists of research design, study area and population, sampling techniques, method of data collection, and analysis of data

3.1 Research Design

Interpretive research design was adopted in this study. It dealt essentially with decolonisation efforts in the works of the selected African Old Testament scholars. Their works focused on cultural empowerment, gender emancipation and political liberation.

3.2 Study Area and Population

This study assessed the works of David Adamo, Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and Gerald West. The choice of these scholars hinged on the fact that Adamo had been credited with being the scholar that has contributed most to the issue of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament, thereby championing cultural identity and empowerment for the African readers of the Bible. Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), on her part, was credited with being the first black South African to hold a Doctorate in Old Testament Studies in South Africa, as well as the first female Old Testament scholar in Sub-Saharan Africa. West, on his part, though a privileged white, decided to align his research in support of black liberation from the oppressive apartheid system of government in South Africa. This culminated in his founding of the Ujamaa Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

3.3 Sampling Procedure

The sampling technique adopted in this study was purposive sampling technique. It involved deliberate selection of two texts each from the myriads of works of the three scholars. The texts were Adamo's *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament (AAOT)* and *Reading and Interpreting the Bible in African indigenous Churches (RIBICs)*, Masenya's *How worthy is the woman of worth? Rereading Proverbs 31: 10–31 in Afri.can-South*

Africa (HWWWRPASA) and *Redefining ourselves: a bosadi (womanhood) approach (ROBWA)*, and *West's Biblical hermeneutics of liberation: modes of reading the Bible in the South African context (BHLMRBSAC)* and *Biblical hermeneutics in Afri.ca: a reader in African theology BHARAT*). The selected texts addressed the issues of cultural empowerment, gender emancipation and political liberation in their interpretations of the Old Testament.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

The method of data collection employed in this study was exegesis. Through it, the study had access to ample and holistic information from the selected books. It also shed some light on what prompted the three scholars into aligning their researches with decolonisation in Old Testament studies, as against the Euro-American modes of biblical hermeneutics. Regarding their published works, the works of the three scholars that dealt on cultural empowerment, gender emancipation and political liberation in their interpretations of the Old Testament were retrieved, both in hard copies and electronic formats.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

Based on thematic relevance in the selected texts, the issues of cultural empowerment, gender emancipation and political liberation were discovered and exegetically analysed. Also, selected biblical texts, especially with their Hebraic nuances were subjected to exegesis. Being a textual and contextual study, exegetical analysis and contextual hermeneutic was utilised in exploring the selected works of the three scholars. Exegetical analysis,¹ with emphasis on written works, is a method for drawing conclusions by empirically and analytically finding specific meanings and interpretations of messages. Words, their etymologies, meanings, and usages over time are compared. This is because meanings of biblical texts are context-based and subject to text, author and reader's determination of meanings. Exegesis aids in reviewing and analysing an author's work with the goal of analysing the content critically and considering potential ways to making the results beneficial to the end users. The exegetical analysis took care of application of the interpretive nuances of the texts so appropriated by biblical scholars to real life

¹ S. Stemler, 2001. Overview of Exegesis, Contextual method, Content analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*. 7:17. Retrieved 30 June, 2015, from <http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=7&n=17>.

experiences of the people. Within the contextual paradigm, this research employed contextual hermeneutics – for reading the bible in its social-historical context and contemporary contexts using the mediation of African cultural resources. In this way, the reading is informed by both contexts and the biblical message is enabled to come alive in the contemporary context.

CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS OF ADAMO’S AFRICAN CULTURAL HERMENEUTICS,
MASENYA (NGWANA’ MPHAAHLELE’S) *BOSADI* HERMENEUTICS AND
WEST POLITICAL LIBERATION HERMENEUTICS

4.1 A brief biography and academic background of David Adamo

On January 5, 1949, a Tuesday, David Tuesday Adamo was born. The day started off as any other day in the peaceful Nigerian community of Irunda in Yagba Local Government Area, Kogi State, Nigeria. In the rural comfort of her modest house, a woman who was well past reproductive age planned to give birth like the Hebrew women. Before her womb was reportedly blocked, she already had three children: two girls and a boy. Everything looked gloomy when, in her old age, she became pregnant once more. She had planned and determined to terminate the pregnancy. However, the oracles foretold that the child growing inside of her will be seen and heard throughout the world. The anxious woman returned home to await life or death. She did give birth to a boy on Tuesday, January 5, 1949, but he was born into a world of material hardships and a low socio-economic status. He had lost his father. The youngster, Tuesday, completed his elementary schooling and learned that, despite having the desire to become a pastor, he was unable to continue because of lack of funds. He travelled to Ikare-Akoko (in modern-day Ondo State) to find work while his classmates from elementary school departed for secondary schools, teacher training institutions, or even the modern secondary schools. He wandered about the town every day shouting, “fine medicine!” while toting a wooden box of medicine on his head. Later, he joined the workers at a saw-mill where he was selling wood. Nevertheless, at a different period, he sold leather for shoes.¹

Some few years later, he then sought and obtained admission to Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) Bible College, Igbaja, Kwara State. He paid a portion of

¹ D.T. Adamo, 2004. *Decolonising African Biblical Studies, 7th Inaugural Lecture of Delta State Univerisity*. Abraka: DELSU

his tuition out of the money he had saved via street hawking. David Tuesday Adamo intended to enrol in a seminary after graduating from the Bible College. But additional obstacles appeared in his path like Goliath. His application was denied by the missionary in charge of the seminary on the grounds that he could not have been called to the ministry because he did not attend a secondary school. David Tuesday Adamo enrolled for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level in response to this challenge. He took the GCE O'Level test in 1973 and was successful in seven out of eight subjects, including English Language. From that point in time, his academic journey became smoother. He gained admission into ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja and obtained the Bachelor of Theology (B.Th) in 1977. While at the seminary, he registered for GCE Advanced Level (A'L) but could not pay for the tuition. But he had a friend who had attempted the A'L GCE examination, failed and had abandoned the correspondence modules. David borrowed his books, dusted and read them. He eventually passed Economics and Government at Advanced Level.

In 1978, he received a scholarship from Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, to study for a Master in Theology and graduated in 1980. He thereafter went for further studies at the University of the State of New York in Albany, where he earned a second Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Liberal Arts. But Adamo was not done yet. He had the conviction and desire to learn more. In 1981, he moved to Indiana Christian University in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, and bagged the degree of Doctor of Religion (RelD) in 1983. He was not satisfied yet. He received a scholarship from the Nigerian Federal Government to attend Baylor University in Waco, Texas, where he earned a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) degree in religion with a specialisation in Old Testament studies.²

Regarding academic appointments, David Tuesday Adamo has had a varied and rich work experience. He began his full time university teaching career in 1986 at the University of Ilorin when he was appointed a Lecturer II. He rose to the post of a Senior Lecturer in 1990. From 1991-1993 he was also a Senior Lecturer at Moi University, Kenya. From 1993 till 2007, he was a Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies at Delta

² D.T. Adamo, 2004. *Decolonising African biblical studies, 7th Inaugural Lecture of Delta State University*. Abraka: DELSU

State University, Abraka, Nigeria and was the pioneer Head of the Department of Religious Studies in the same institution. Along the way he was a visiting or an adjunct professor as follows:

- a. Visiting Professor at the University of Edingburgh, United Kingdom. 1997,
- b. Visiting Professor at the School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway; 1999
- c. Adjunct Professor at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, USA; 2002
- d. Adjunct Professor at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, USA; in 2002,
- e. Visiting Professor at University of Pretoria, South Africa.

He held several pastoral positions, including pastor and counsellor at Radio ECWA, Igbaja, Nigeria from 1972-77; Associate Chaplain, Chapel of Light, University of Ilorin, in 1986-89; Founder and Director, Homeland for Christ Ministries, Nigeria from 1986-1991; and Chaplain, Delta State University Interdenominational Chapel, 1993 to 2007. During his academic sojourn, he held numerous administrative positions, including Deputy Vice Chancellor, Administration at Kogi State University, Anyigba.

Seven years after he was appointed Lecturer II, he became a full professor. Apart from two scholarships that he was awarded, he had several other distinctions as a student and as a lecturer. He was nominated the most distinguished scholar of the year by Paul Quinn College, 1986. The Biblical Archaeology Society, USA, listed him in *Who's Who in Biblical Studies and Archaeology* in 1986, and in 1999, he won the research grant of the American Academy of Religion, USA. David Adamo is widely travelled and is a known voice at learned religious studies conferences in Nigeria and overseas. He has numerous publications: books, chapter contributions and articles in learned journals. He is widely acclaimed to have published in every continent of the world, except Antarctica, and was inducted a Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters (FNAL) in 2010.³

4.2 Background to the development of African Cultural Hermeneutics

Biblical hermeneutics, generally, had been championed by Western scholars from the inception of Old Testament biblical scholarship, superintending over what the

³ D.T. ADamo's Curriculum Vitae

biblical text meant and how it should be interpreted and understood. Many western biblical scholars' writings, including those of Ibn Ezra, J.J. Owen, E. Binns, Martin Noth, Gerhard von Rad, and a host of others, demonstrate this assertion.⁴ Until different interpretations from the so-called third world: Africa, Latin America and Asia emerged to question what Adamo has referred to as the hermeneutical monopoly held by Euro-American biblical studies, this perspective remained the prevailing viewpoint. So who or what is Africa or African? When John Pobee⁵ asks, "What is African?" He seems to propose six facets, as enumerated below:

1. Africans are human beings.
2. Africans seem unable to explain life without reference to what is religious and spiritual.
3. An African person finds his or her being and its meaning in community.
4. Africans perceive reality in holistic terms.
5. In Western Africa, the institution of chieftaincy is the focal point of culture and a model for leadership patterns in society.
6. Africans have often urged that the churches project an "African Christ"⁶

One observes broad, transcultural characteristics mixed with incredibly specific features within these six aspects. These enable one to move toward the interpretation of the Bible and commentary aided by insights into social, cultural, ideological, and rhetorical aspects of religious life as a whole. This blend of elements is noticeably specific and distinctive with features that are widely shared throughout the world and is very instructive. A comprehensive examination of Adamo's writings, according to Dada, might reveal four grounds for his interest in African cultural hermeneutics, with a focus on Yoruba cultural proclivities.⁷ The first is that biblical studies in the African setting need to be decolonised. Despite the long presence of the Bible in Africa, it was Western

⁴ D.T. Adamo, 2004. *Biblical interpretation in African perspectives*. Midland, OR: University Press of America, 14

⁵ J. S. Pobee, 1976: Church and State in Ghana 1949-1966. *Religion in a Pluralistic Society; Studies on Religion in Africa*. J. S. Pobee. Ed. Leiden: Brill, 121-144

⁶ J. S. Pobee, 1976: Church and State in Ghana 1949-1966...141

⁷ A. O. Dada, 2021. Culture in biblical interpretation: the use of Yoruba cultural elements in Adamo's African Cultural Hermeneutics," *Old Testament Essays* 34.2: 428 – 444. Retrieved 29th October, 2021, from DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2021/v34n2a7>.

missionaries who first spread its use in the contemporary era. More so, the missionaries gave the Bible a Western cultural interpretation. In effect, this resulted in colonised people who had little regard for or no appreciation for their culture and were unable to read the Bible through the lens of their culture. Additionally, Adamo's interpretive framework included Yoruba cultural components to make the Bible applicable to the African context. The approach that was passed down from Western missionaries did not account for African worldview. The word "worldview" is derived from the German "Weltanschauung," which is also roughly translated as "world hypothesis" or "world picture," and it refers to a broad range of presumptions and assumptions regarding the ultimate reality of life. More so, it performs the role of a perceptual filtering process, which may discard information that appears incongruous.

Furthermore, adopting cultural elements by Adamo in the course of his biblical hermeneutics is an avenue for addressing social and existential needs. In Africa today, poverty, hunger, disease and war are ever-present and threatening realities. These debilitating conditions call for urgent solutions. In this aspect, the African context becomes a compatible subject of interpretation of the Christian biblical messages, with a goal to transform the existential, social, economic, political and religious life of the people.

The fourth motivation for the adoption of cultural elements in Adamo's African cultural hermeneutics is to offer a sense of belonging to the people. Having gone through the harrowing experience of colonialism in which the African cultures and persons were unwholesomely and overwhelmingly denigrated, the period following independence was one that sought to raise African consciousness and pride. This mentality was an all-pervasive one. The search for African pride cuts through the social, political and religious spheres. In the area of biblical studies, it is reasoned that one of the best ways to conveying African perception to the reading and understanding of the Bible is to engage the traditional cultural elements that take into account the people's existential context.

Since the inception of Adamo's academic career, his preoccupation in biblical hermeneutics has been to establish and commemorate the African God-giving identities by way of challenging and refusing the superintending inclinations of western

intellectual tradition. It is true that in Adamo's early career, African biblical studies using African cultural hermeneutics were rarely understood, noticed, and accepted in western academies..”⁸ At the onset of Adamo's quest at decolonising Biblical Studies in Africa, after a critical examination of his theological training in Nigeria and the United States, he says:

I felt that all the theological training that I received in those universities had great elements of colonisation. I felt dissatisfied with the colonisation of my thought and the thought of my people and the methods of biblical interpretation imposed on us. During the period of my training, I struggled with this fact and tried to find out ways to make a difference in decolonising biblical studies in Africa. The process of this did not start until I was at the final stage of my doctoral training. I insisted, despite all threats and rejection, on doing my doctoral research on Africa and Africans in the Old Testament and its Environment. In my academic career, I have been trying to pursue this aim of decolonising African biblical studies in Africa.⁹

Adamo posits further that in Africa, the exposition and interpretation of the Bible has always taken place in the “religious room.” The Bible is still read and understood inside the institutionalised environments of synagogues and churches, and it is frequently interpreted in a manner relevant to the goals of a specific denominational setting. This is somewhat either directly or indirectly still under Western authority and influence. Take for example, the contents of numerous Study Bibles, Bible dictionaries and commentaries. The Bible has been studied and analysed at seminaries and universities with Departments of Religious Studies since the seventeenth century, maintaining the tradition of western study or approach. Our theological or biblical studies curriculum reveals us as still being captives to the heritage of western biblical studies even at our universities, particularly in the Departments of Religious Studies in Africa. In other words, we continue to be colonised in our interpretive paradigm.¹⁰

A critical look at the nature of theological trainings received by African scholars decades back, showed how Eurocentric the studies seemed to be. Just like Adamo posited

⁸ D.T. Adamo, 2004. *Biblical interpretation in African perspectives*, 18

⁹ D.T. Adamo, 2004. *Biblical interpretation in African perspectives*, 20

¹⁰ D.T. Adamo, 2004. *Decolonising African biblical studies, 7th Inaugural Lecture of Delta State University*. Abraka: DELSU

in his inaugural lecture, they were trained to interpret the bible the Western way. A non-African colleague of Adamo, Professor Knut Holter, points out these problems:

.....it is increasingly being experienced as a problem that the training is given in a context that both culturally and scholarly is non-African. One result of this is that questions emerging from cultural and social concerns in African only to some extent are allowed into the interpretation of the Old Testament. As a consequence, there is a gap between the needs of ordinary African Christians for modes of reading the Old Testament, and the modes provided by scholars trained in the western tradition of biblical scholarship. Another result of the location of the training outside Africa is a feeling, at least in some cases, of inferiority vis-à-vis the massive western tradition. This might eventually lead some scholars to neglect their African context, and instead see "...themselves as ambassadors of Cambridge, Oxford, (the) Tubingen school etc.¹¹

At some point in past decades, many African biblical scholars travelled to the western world for theological training. This seems to be what was in vogue at that time. Sending the would-be scholars to western colleges and seminaries for biblical instruction would seem to be the only option given the aforementioned circumstances. The bulk of famous African biblical scholars we currently have had their training at western universities, where they learned how to study the Bible from a Eurocentric perspective. One thing is certain, as much one may enjoy the chance to study at many of these prestigious western colleges and seminaries: receiving biblical studies and theology training abroad is one of the ways that African biblical academics have been colonised. Adamo says by the time we graduated, we became expert Eurocentric interpreters of the Bible. By the time we came back to our institutions at home, we spread the good news of Eurocentric biblical interpretation. They taught pastors, priests and other leaders in the church the Eurocentric method and these pastors, priests and leaders passed them to their congregations. All the pastors, priests, their congregations, other leaders and biblical teachers became colonised with Eurocentric methods of biblical interpretation.

Furthermore, consciously and unconsciously, the establishment of churches became another means of colonising Africans. As was previously said, pastors, priests,

¹¹ D.T. Adamo, 2004. *Biblical interpretation in African perspectives*, 20

and other leaders have been colonised as a result of the African biblical experts' immersion in a Eurocentric approach to biblical interpretation. They subsequently distributed it to their congregations, who are on the lookout for both Christian and Eurocentric converts. The congregational manner of Bible study continues to be Eurocentric because of this. One should not be shocked if they are quickly branded as an infidel when they offer an alternative approach to bible studies, such as an Africentric approach. This Afrocentric approach is categorically rejected. We have been extensively "Eurocentrically" educated, thus thinking and interpreting "Africentrically" has become a difficulty.

Another significant method of colonising African biblical studies is the complete dominance by researchers who are Eurocentric in the aspect of major texts. Most commentaries, Bible introductions, Bible atlases, histories of ancient Israel, and major Bible translations that we use in colleges and seminaries across the world were written by Eurocentric experts. Not only do they approach biblical studies from a Eurocentric perspective, but they also fervently work to de-Africanize the Bible. However, it is what we read and study at our universities, seminaries and Bible colleges. These authors write with scholarly bias and steadfastly adhere to the idea that the methodologies of biblical interpretation that are Eurocentric are "the ideal interpretation." Therefore, it is greater and all-encompassing. This additionally contributed to the evaluation of all Africentric materials using Eurocentric standards. Adamo again say that as a result, the major publishers in religion in the western world rejected our manuscripts for publication. Additionally, they rejected the majority of our manuscripts under the pretext that there would be no market for them once they were published. In the words of Adamo, for example:

...in 1989, I sent an article on African Presence in the Bible to a reputable journal, and in return, I was accused of trying to "smuggle Africa and Africans into the Bible." Also in 2001, a reputable publisher refused to publish my book manuscripts for the reason that there will be no market for it in the western world and that Africans do not buy many books....¹²

¹² D.T. Adamo, 2004. *Decolonising African biblical studies, 7th Inaugural Lecture of Delta State Univerisity*. Abraka: DELSU

4.2.1 The growth and development of African Cultural Hermeneutics

Adamo, in his inaugural lecture at Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria , says:

My candid opinion is that colonisation of biblical studies began with the establishment of Bible Colleges and seminaries, the establishment of universities in Africa by the missionaries. These Bible Colleges and Seminaries became places where priests, pastors, and evangelist were trained. During the early period the teachers in these colleges were missionaries from the Western world. Their methods of teaching were western. In their enthusiasm to teach students how to communicate the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, they also taught western culture and ways of life. All students must learn how to interpret the Christian scripture the way it is interpreted in the West. African culture and religion were not important and therefore were not taught to the students. I will like to illustrate this fact with my eight years' experience in the Bible College and Seminary in Nigeria between 1968 and 1977. Throughout my years in the Bible College and Seminary in Nigeria I cannot remember courses in African culture and religion. The only course in African indigenous religion was taught with the main purpose of showing how heathenistic and useless the African religion and cultures are. When I first entered the Bible College in 1968, I was taught how to sit on the toilet waste closet, how to use toilet papers, how to dress like Americans and even how to use spoons and forks on the dining table. But not any atom of the value of African culture was taught. By the time I graduated, I had learned to interpret the Bible the American way. I preach the Bible the American ways, and in fact tried to talk, walk, eat and do everything the American way. More importantly I learned how to condemn African culture and religion perfectly well because I was taught that they were not valuable.¹³

African biblical hermeneutics thus refers to the reading of the Bible that takes into account the social and cultural background of Africa. It involves reinterpreting Christian scripture from an intentional “Africentric” standpoint. It essentially implies that the biblical text is examined from the standpoint of the African worldview and culture. The notion of interpreting the Bible for change in Africa is known as an African biblical hermeneutic (or hermeneutics). The biblical hermeneutic, which is essential to the health of our society, is what we are talking about when we consider the hermeneutic(s) that may

¹³ D.T.Adamo, 2004. *Decolonising African biblical studies*...18.

transform Africa. This can be called African cultural hermeneutics or African biblical transformational hermeneutics or African biblical studies.¹⁴

4.2.2 “Africentrism” versus “Eurocentrism” in Adamo’s African Cultural Hermeneutics

The word “Africentric” now used by many scholars instead of “Afrocentric” has a wide range of meaning among African Americans and this is because of its more appropriate etymological connection to its root, “Africa”. Asante, a professor and the head of the African American Studies Department at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is the author of the word.¹⁵ The actual terms he used are “Afrocentric and Afrocentricity”.¹⁶ Thus, the word “Africentrism” derives from the way African Americans live their lives (and has come to include all of Africa) and refers to their comprehensive strategy to undermine the dominance of the western interpretation of classical history. From the perspective of Africa as subject rather than object, it lays claim to generality, restoration, and advancement in all dimensions of the African world. This include culture, religion, and legacy, whether on the continent or in the Diaspora. It is a unique African philosophical and intellectual construct that is accompanied by an African feeling of self-determination, dignity, and value.¹⁷

There is need to align with the statement of Njeza¹⁸ that it has become fashionable in certain circle of contemporary discourse to talk about Africentrism. While the religious and theological aspects of the discussion centre on African biblical studies and African Christianity, the socio-political argument focuses on the idea of the African Renaissance. In order to correct the inaccurate writings and viewpoints of the Eurocentric scholars and to put Africa and Africans in their correct perspectives, a number of scholars of African descent have been involved in biblical/theological studies,

¹⁴ D.T. Adamo, 2015. The task and distinctiveness of African biblical hermeneutic(s), *Old Testament Essays*, vol. 28.1 Retrieved January 20th, 2020, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2015/v28n1a4>

¹⁵ A.O. Idamarhare, 2005. Africentrism: A focus on the Historical Biblical Perspective. *Journal of Religion and Culture*, 130-132

¹⁶ K.M. Asante, 1988. *Afrocentricity*. Trenton: United World Press.

¹⁷ A.O. Idamarhare, 2005. Africentrism: A focus on the Historical Biblical Perspective. *Journal of Religion and Culture*, 130-132

¹⁸ M. Njeza, M. 1998. Fallacies of the new Africentrism. *Journal of Theology in Southern Africa*, 99:48- 57.

either intentionally or unintentionally, from an Africentric context. Africentric interpretation is not a “fallacy” neither is it simply “Europe turned down” as Appiah¹⁹ claims. Africentric biblical hermeneutics essentially includes much of Black studies, Black theology, and biblical interpretation based upon the definition of blackness as it relates to religious experience. In contrast to Egypt in the early African kingdoms, it has roots in ancient Egypt and Ethiopia. It asserts that both Egypt and Ethiopia - the emblem and embodiment of African civilisation - belong to Black Africa and are the origins of western civilization. Its viewpoint on biblical hermeneutics exposes biblical figures and locations with roots in Africa during and after the time of Christ. Clearly, these findings have contributed to confirming the black man’s ancestry with illustrious individuals in classical Africa. As a result, Africentric interpretations of the Bible strengthen the black man's cultural origins while simultaneously empowering his life and religion.

Africentrism is a response to Eurocentrism, but not necessarily against it. Rather, it is a reaction to Eurocentric discrimination and its arrogant supremacy claims.²⁰ The goal of Africentrism in its essence is to promote a more authentic view of Africa as a continent, the African culture and peoples of African descent. An African-centred strategy called Africentrism aims to decolonise any discriminatory literature or opinion towards persons of African heritage. Therefore, it is not unexpected that Africentrism is being embraced by many African Americans and Africans at home since it is African. It resonates in Africa and is essential to the life of that continent. There is no doubt that a correct understanding of the Africentric approach will result in a new African outlook on life, a cultural resurgence, a correct comprehending of African history. This also includes African interpretations of the Bible, African awareness and the empowerment of the black race, the encouragement of African studies and ideology. Furthermore, it champions the promotion of peaceful-coexistence with an African focus, and the promotion of ideologies (whether cultural, religious, political, historical, or economic) that will help the continent of Africa. This was what made Adamo to delve into decolonisation of biblical studies.

¹⁹ A.K. Appiah, 1997. Europe upside down: fallacies of the new Africentrism. *Perspectives on Africa*. R. R. Grioker and C. B. Steiner. Eds. London: Blackwell Publisher, .730

²⁰ M. Njeza, M. 1998. Fallacies of the new Africentrism. *Journal of Theology Southern Africa*, 99:48- 57.

From the onset of Adamo's quest at decolonising biblical hermeneutics, he outlines the task of African biblical hermeneutic (s). First and foremost, is to formulate a biblical hermeneutic that liberates and transforms. A casual look at biblical interpretation in Africa by Africans shows that our interpretation has been colonial. As far as can be understood, colonialism encompassed more than just the division or partitioning of Africa and the eventual hegemony of the European nations over the whole continent; it also involved the colonisation of our mentality and all-encompassing approach to life. The Bible was historically utilised by South African oppressors to justify the marginalisation of the indigenous population, according to Gerald West, a South African biblical scholar. Now, the same Bible is also being employed as a weapon for liberation by the oppressed as it serves as a symbol of God's presence amongst them. Arising from the submissions above, the fact is that biblical studies have been colonised in Africa. Biblical hermeneutic(s) has also been colonised in various ways, as well.

More so, Adamo surmises unequivocally that the task is not only to understand the Bible and God in the African experience and culture, but also to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that Eurocentric biblical scholars have long enjoyed. One thing is obvious, though a privilege: receiving biblical studies and theological training abroad is one of the ways that African biblical academics have been colonised. This is true even if one appreciates the chance to study in many of these top Western colleges and seminaries. Church establishment evolved into yet another deliberate and unintentional method of colonising Africans. As was said previously, pastors, priests, and other leaders have been colonised by African biblical academics who are steeped in a Eurocentric approach to biblical interpretation. They subsequently disseminated it to their churches, who seek out converts to both Christianity and Christianity with a European focus! As a result of our extensive exposure to Eurocentric education, it has become difficult for us to conceive and interpret in an Africentric manner. Eurocentric scholars who write Eurocentrically author the majority of the commentaries, atlases, histories of ancient Israel, and major Bible translations that we use in universities and seminaries around the world. This is another major technique for the colonisation of African biblical studies. Not only are they Eurocentric in their approaches

to biblical scholarship, they feverishly attempt to deafricanise the Bible. Yet, that is what we read and consume in our universities and seminaries.

These authors write with scholarly prejudice and hold tenaciously to the conception that the Eurocentric methods of biblical interpretation are “the interpretation;” therefore, it is greater and all-encompassing. This has also led to the evaluation of all Africentric materials using Eurocentric standards. Adamo comes to the conclusion that it is urgently necessary to eliminate the ideological and hermeneutical shackles that Eurocentric biblical academics have subjected African biblical scholarship to.

African biblical hermeneutics is “postmodern and postcolonial” in its aim to acknowledge the locally acquired insights and concerns about the Bible. It is poised to challenge the dominant imported western principles, notwithstanding the claims of universality made by Eurocentric interpreters. African bible studies that concentrate on African cultural hermeneutics, are scarcely acknowledged in western institutions or heard of. This is because they want to acquire and celebrate their God-giving identity by sifting through their indigenous resources and rejecting the supervising proclivities of Euro-American intellectual traditions.²¹ This is unpopular in western convention, not because it is inexplicable, untranslatable to indigenous languages, but because they employ the ground rules, which differ from the normal western rules set by the Eurocentric or Euro-American biblical academies. They address matters that are more personal to their own people. In order to suit their local demands, they “learned and absorb concepts and approaches from external resources but mould them and add their own indigenous texture.

The concept of God as a one-way track God is not accepted in African biblical studies. God cannot be confined in how He reveals Himself to the world. Based on where you are and who you are, you will see God uniquely because we are all uniquely formed. An individual’s reasoning might make no sense to another. The implication of this is that ideas are perspectival. The real issue therefore, is how to use our finite human knowledge and experience, and communication to speak about God who is all-embracing. More so, is

²¹ D.T.Adamo, 2015. The task and distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutic(s), *Old Testament Essays*. 28.1. Retrieved 20th January, 2020, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2015/v28n1a4>

the fact that no one has yet been able to invent such language to encapsulate God's completeness. Aime Cesaire was apt when she voiced out that no one colonises innocently.²² True Africentricism²³ is therefore the idea of placing Africa as an ideological construct at the core of biblical exploration. This then serves as a veritable tool for scholars of African descent in our endeavour to create a biblical interpretation that addresses the needs of a historically relegated people. African biblical scholars are emphasising the significance of African people, places, and events in the biblical canon and text while simultaneously working to expose a troubling trend of de-Africanisation of the Bible in western scholarship. Many African and African-American writers now view the "discovery" of Africa in the Bible as both an inspiration (since Africans are viewed as an essential component of God's story) and a threat to western interpretive hegemony.²⁴

For instance, the Bible and its interpretation, continues to be crucial issues despite all the changes that have made up present South Africa, or the New South Africa as it is known there in local phraseology. On the one hand, attitudes regarding the Bible are continually changing in South Africa despite the recent developments, a secularising tendency, and a swing toward Pentecostal evangelicalism (even though their juxtaposition occasionally seems like an aberration). Even on political and other public settings, the Bible is still there, and it is being frequently invoked. The deliberate attempts at accounting for the practices of biblical interpretation inside and as a component of certain social contexts, on the other hand, already raise a first significant worry for thinking about the future of biblical studies in South Africa.²⁵

Up until recently, South Africa was distinguished as much by the abundance of scholarship on the Bible and related subjects as by the seeming indifference of biblical studies to their modern social context. When seen within the backdrop of earlier South African biblical research, the neglected emphasis on the social setting of biblical interpretation may be understood. While serious consideration of theory remained mostly absent, considerable effort was formerly devoted to discussing methods at the expense of examining the social significance of the Bible, notably its use and misuse in

²² A. Cesaire, 1972. *Discourse on colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 4

²³ M.J. Brown, 2004, *Blackening of the Bible: Aims of African-American Biblical Scholarship*. Harrisburg, PA:Trinity Press International, 54

²⁴ D.T.Adamo, 2015. The task and distinctiveness of African biblical hermeneutic(s)...33

²⁵ M. Njeza, 1998. Fallacies of the new Africentrism. *Journal of Theology Southern Africa*. 99:48- 57

national politics. For its own unique and possibly very distinct causes, South Africa was characterised by this absence of, or at best deficiencies in, the debate of theory. The theoretical gap was, and some would argue still is, a major feature of biblical scholarship in general until recently. In reality, it has been claimed that biblical scholarship as a whole has continued to be less interested in debating theory and more interested in utilising theory as a tool to accomplishing a greater purpose, namely producing specific interpretations, explanations, or understandings of biblical texts. While one contribution can hardly undo the theory deficit in biblical studies, at least the deficit can be pointed out as part of the larger parameters of any attempt to survey and size up the field of biblical studies. This accounts for how biblical studies, however brief, incomplete and (necessarily) perspectival an endeavour, will inevitably be.

The lack of theoretical cogitations on hermeneutical tactics and exegetical methods does not imply that there is no theoretical reflection on theory in biblical interpretation. Obviously, there are links between these reflections, but they naturally do not have the same focus or emphasis on the same problems and difficulties. In reality, new hermeneutical approaches and interpretational ideas have proliferated recently. Nevertheless, there is little agreement whether the current plethora of and diversity in methodologies in biblical interpretation is cause or effect of what constitutes an interpretive crisis for many. It could be reiterated that the only reason one could think of denying that there is a crisis in biblical interpretation today is that there are so many of them. Some academics view the process of determining the meaning of a text as only a symptom of “one of the dilemma of our contemporary situation.” Others draw a parallel between the perceived contemporary hermeneutical crisis and the inadequacy of historical-critical methods to produce an interpretation that can appropriately answer interpretive requirements and concerns.²⁶ It has been critical in the last three decades or so to explicitly account for present settings, of individual interpreters as well as interpretive schools and trends, because every debate of Old Testament interpretation is rooted in a certain historically and socially defined period. The criticisms aimed at the

²⁶G.O. West, 2005. Shifting perspectives on the comparative paradigm in (South) African biblical scholarship. *Religion and Theology* 12.1:48-72.

historical-critical model during the past three decades are frequently cited as the cause of these phenomena, which attract the most profound interest to the astounding array of paradigms of interpretation.

The three main issues that have prevailed in the (theory of the) interpretation of the Bible for a long time have been addressed in the past by a number of helpful frameworks, paradigms, or taxonomies of biblical hermeneutics endeavours. Taxonomies provide perceptions about hermeneutics in general and interpretive processes in particular, therefore they are enlightening in more ways than one. This is because they naturally also reflect more than the obvious classification of approaches. Put differently but from mostly a communication perspective, as author-text-reader or history-structure-theology or the worlds behind/in front of the text, these taxonomies are primarily intended to provide some background for biblical hermeneutics, as grids to plot the enterprise, as it were. The taxonomies have been useful in two ways: (1) by giving the variety of hermeneutical approaches and methodologies a handle or interpretive framework; and (2) by highlighting underlying theoretical and ideological issues, particular areas of access as exegetical foundations, or priorities within academic investigation. Taxonomy of hermeneutical technique, like any hermeneutic device, is both enlightening and tends to reflect the social position and vested interests of people who adhere to it. It may even generate and authenticate specific structures and the vested interests that go along with them.²⁷

Taking social location as the primary marker for thinking about and evaluating biblical hermeneutics, however, may prove to be more than just a substitute to the communication approach used in biblical hermeneutics. This, in fact, may amount to more than an equitably fruitful endeavour with the democratisation of biblical studies broadly conceived. A renewed historical awareness and, to some extent, a reframed historiography have resulted from the emphasis on the importance of social location in biblical studies, despite these conceptual tensions regarding biblical scholarship. This

²⁷ G.O. West, 2005. Shifting perspectives on the comparative paradigm in (South) African biblical scholarship. *Religion and Theology* 12.1:51

includes the social location of the contemporary interpreter or scholar as well as, more generally, the social location of the texts and their prior and afterlives.

In order to achieving a practical and holistic outcome of the interpretive enterprise in African biblical studies, Idamarhare²⁸ suggests that an Africentric reading of the Bible can be achieved by following the four steps indicated below:

1. Select an Old or New Testament biblical chapter or text, read it carefully, and consider how it speaks to an African audience or culture.
2. To be able to link it to the situation in Africa, look for an African historical, socio-cultural, political, gender, or religious life experience that fits within the African context. Put differently; give a setting in Africa where the Bible may be related. This may take the shape of a story, poetry, prose, folktale, myth, custom, tradition, work of art, legend, musical composition, religious ceremony, dance, etc., and it would include comparing the Bible and its African features in order to identify the African centrality of the book. The traits or qualities will work as the hermeneutical materials and instruments for interpreting the biblical text.
3. Look at the manner in which the passage or text has been overlaid by prejudiced Western scholars in their reading of the text; then, erase or purge the same, giving it a fresh meaning that is appropriate for the African scenario or an approved interpretation by everyone.
4. Examine the interpretation to ensure that it does not disparage other people's cultures, because Africanism or an Africentric viewpoint do not criticise Western culture. It should be emphasised that not all African biblical scholars are in favour of the field of decolonisation in African biblical scholarship. As Tati-siong Benny Liew remarked, “racial/ethnic minority scholarship often finds itself facing a crisis of legitimacy from both friends and foes.”²⁹ Hence, it becomes a matter of if one chooses to be a well-fed “slave” or a hungry free man!

²⁸ A.O. Idamarhare, 2014. Africentric hermeneutics: Methodology towards decolonising Biblical Studies in Africa. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice*, 6.1:52

²⁹ T. B. Liew, 2008. What is Asian-American Biblical Hermeneutics? *Reading the New Testament*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press

4.3 A brief biography and academic background of Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele)

Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) was born in the settlement of Moletjie, Ga-Manamela, which is a part of Polokwane, South Africa's Western region. Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele), who was raised in a male-dominated Christian church in her home village of Ga-Mphahlele, never in her wildest dreams imagined that she would eventually earn a doctorate in Biblical Sciences (Old Testament Specialisation), as well as ministerial credentials for ordained ministry. Her Master's dissertation was titled "In the School of Wisdom: An Interpretation of Some Old Testament Proverbs in a Northern Sotho Context." at the University of South Africa. Masenya conducted research on womanist/feminist biblical hermeneutics at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, from March to June 1995 as part of her doctoral research. Her doctoral research focus was on the Old Testament and Bosadi (womanhood) Hermeneutics and the title of her thesis was: Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context: A Bosadi (Womanhood) Perspective. Her doctoral work is now available in the form of a book titled: *How Worthy is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31:10-31 in African-South Africa*, published by Peter Lang in New York, USA.³⁰

In 1982, she began her career as a junior lecturer at what is now known as the University of Limpopo. She subsequently relocated to Setotlwane College of Education before getting employed as a lecturer at the University of Limpopo in 1991. She started working at the University of South Africa in Pretoria in 1996 as a lecturer in the Old Testament Department. By 2006, she had advanced through the ranks and was appointed full professor. She once served as the Department's chair, of which is currently known as the Department of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies.³¹

4.3.1 Prelude to the emergence of *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Hermeneutics

The feminist interpretation of the Old Testament could be said to have started with the works of Virginia Ramey Mollenkott³² and it became more open with Phyllis Trible.³³

³⁰ M. Masenya, (Ngwan'a Mphahlele). 2004. *How worthy is the woman of worth? Rereading Proverbs 31: 10–31 in African-South Africa*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc

³¹ M.Masenya,. (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) curriculum vitae. Retrieved on 30th July, 2020 from www.unisa.ac.za.

³² V. R. Mollenkott, 1977. *Women, men and the Bible*, Nashville: Abingdon

Three fundamental approaches formed the basis of the early researches in this field. They include: (1) literary readings that looked for women in the texts; (2) readings that looked for themes of female liberation in the texts; (3) historical and cultural readings that looked into the women behind the texts in their historical contexts.³⁴ It has now grown to encompass new approaches. The feminist movement in the United States at the time was liberating exclusively western middle class women, neglecting the struggle of poor women, women of colour, and women in other countries, and its expansion is the result of the realisation that this was happening. This opened the door for African American feminists' womanist strategies.³⁵ As Latina women lend support to feminist theology, the appellation: *Mujerista* - a Spanish term for women ingrained in their cultural admiration of motherhood, was coined. The search for the feminist identity became even more in scope in the United States.

African women soon entered the discussion as well. African women theologians and academics also got busy looking for and uncovering their unspoken perspectives by expressing religious and moral concerns after seeing flaws in the current feminist hermeneutics. This hermeneutic is now referred to as the Talitha Cum hermeneutic of life and liberation. The name Talitha Cum, which simply means "little girl, I say wake up," is taken from the Markan narrative found in Mark 5: 21–43. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, a pan-African women's movement founded by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, launched the *Talitha Cum* life-affirming theologies and ethics in 1989.³⁶ This was achieved with the goal of making their numerous unrecorded experiences, perspectives, and reflections in various fields of theology and ethics visible in bookstores and on shelves of anyone who cares to hear them speak.³⁷

³³ P. Trible, *God and the rhetoric of sexuality OBT*. Philadelphia: Fortress

³⁴ K. M. O'Connor, 2006. *The Feminist Movement meets the Old Testament: One Woman's Perspective. Engaging the Bible in a gendered world: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honour of Katherine Doob Sakenfeld*. L. Day and C. Pressler. Eds. Westminster: John Knox Press, 19.

³⁵ R. J. Weems, 1993. *Just a sister away: A womanist vision of woman's relationships in the Bible* San Diego: Lura Media; and D. S. Williams, 1993. *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis.

³⁶ R. N. Fiedler, 2017. *Front Matter. A history of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians 1989-2007*, *JSTOR*. Northern Malawi: Mzuni Press, 1–4 .Retrieved 12th June, 2023. from <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh8r2j5.1>.

³⁷ Masenya, M. (Ngwan'a Mphahlele). 2004. *How worthy is the woman of worth? Rereading Proverbs 31: 10–31 in African-South Africa*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc

In line with the brief narrative above, a history of Masenya's initiation into what she prefers to call "women liberationist discourses," is necessary here. Given the diversity of women's experiences covered by the women theologians in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, she started with reading feminist resources, but with no mentor by her side. She discovered that African-American women (womanists) also communicate about their own lives in their search for reinforcing notions of everything that constitutes being a woman and advocate of the feminist cause. This came as result of her continued reading and mentoring of herself on issues of women (*basadi*). Over the years, feminist biblical hermeneutics have taken up the garb of being assertive regarding the role of women in the interpretive process. The hermeneutical hegemony, (to use Adamo's words), long enjoyed by male biblical scholars had become an object of stiff resistance by feminist scholars. At the Society for Biblical Literature meeting in 2010, the authors present adopted the following exposition of the meaning of "feminist," which Monica Melanchthon³⁸ articulated as follows. Feminist work:

- a. must challenge/destabilise/subvert the subordination of wo/men, rather than strengthen or reinforce it;
- b. must reflect appreciation of and respect for wo/men's experience by acknowledging wo/men's capacities and agency;
- c. must be sensitive to context - both the immediate and possibly the larger context as well;
- d. must be critical of the manner in which wo/men have both aided and resisted oppression, subjugation, and violence;
- e. must have as its consequence far-reaching changes in religion and society, as well as political and revolutionary significance. Hence, it must be practical, this-worldly, transformative, renewing, and transitional.

Masenya found the situation of her African-American sisters to be almost exactly the same as that of African-South African women. The latter's focus was on their Africanness, issues of class, race, and gender, while the former's main focus was on

³⁸ M. Melanchthon, 2021. Gender, violence, and the Dalit Psyche: The Jephthah Story Reconsidered (Judges 11 & 12). *Terror in the Bible: Rhetoric, Gender, and Violence*. Atlanta: SBL Press.

gender. She noticed that, given the history in which the racial factor played a major role in many aspects of South African life, a history in which African peoples were named and their culture defined, she needed to name herself appropriately, even at the cost of being misunderstood. She already knew then that it was going to be artificial, if not impossible, to share the same women's liberation discourse with her White counterpart. In her own words, she says "... all my actions were carried out in isolation, with no guide at my side, on account of the severe lack of Black female biblical scholars in the South African context."³⁹

At Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, USA, Masenya came to be aware that though American or Eurocentric Feminism has close points of resemblance with what might be an African-South African theological or hermeneutical discourse, it is still uniquely American. It was on account of this discovery, and also owing to her commitment to make Africa a hermeneutical focus - given the history of the denigration of Africa through the years - that she has decided to name her framework a Bosadi (womanhood) approach to the reading of biblical texts, thus undergoing one more session of "surgery" that has enabled her to put on "horns" that will, for the first time, hopefully stick!

4.3.2 *Bosadi* (Womanhood) versus Eurocentric Feminist Hermeneutics

The Northern Sotho word *Bosadi* (womanhood) is an abstract noun which comes from the word Mosadi. The word, Mosadi⁴⁰, can mean "woman", "married woman" or "wife". The word comes from the root -sadi which denotes womanhood; the word bosadi may for example be translated as "womanhood" or "female genitals."⁴¹

The Bosadi approach to biblical hermeneutics is not simply a comparative analysis between the biblical text and the African culture. It not only critiques both cultures and texts in terms of gender concerns, but it also includes issues of class, of "woman-as-

³⁹ M. Masenya, (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) 2004, Teaching Western-oriented Old Testament Studies to African students: An exercise in wisdom or folly? *Old Testament Essays* 17.3 455-469.

⁴⁰ D. Ziervogel and P.C. Mokgokong, 1975. *Comprehensive Northern Sotho Dictionary*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

⁴¹ J.T. Brown, 1979. *Setswana English Dictionary*. Johannesburg: Pula

strange,” and of Africans-as-strange in their very own territory. It is an African woman’s liberation hermeneutic. Unlike many past Black male theological South African discourses and those African theological discourses that set great store by inculturation hermeneutics, the Bosadi concept does not accept uncritically the idea of the Bible as word of God. It is therefore aware of the (self-perceived) chosen-ness of the Israelite nation and of how this same notion has been used in apartheid theology to justify the exploitation of Black peoples. Masenya’s (ngwan’a Mphahlele) very elaborate background to the situation of the Black South African woman in chapter two of her dissertation and her engagement with issues of “insider/outsider” dynamics in the Book of Proverbs bears witness to the fact that the Bosadi approach cannot afford to be blind to the political crisis into which African-South African peoples, particularly women, were thrown in the past dispensation. At the same time, though the Bosadi concept is an attempt to resuscitate the African culture from the ashes into which it was thrown, it does not idolize that culture. In the context of biblical studies, a *bosadi* approach examines what ideal/liberating womanhood should be for an African-South African woman Bible reader. The approach aims at challenging disempowering notions of womanhood as embedded in African cultures. The approach includes the following elements:

- i. A critique of the oppressive elements of African culture evident in women’s lives, while reviving aspects that uplift the status of women.
- ii. A critique of the oppressive elements of the Christian Bible, while highlighting the liberating elements - although the Bible is a product of patriarchal cultures, it does contain liberating elements, if read from a gender perspective.
- iii. The interplay of post-apartheid racism, sexism, classism, and the African culture as significant factors in the context of an African-South African woman, factors that in one way or another shape woman’s reading of the Bible.
- iv. The concept of *botho/Ubuntu*.
- v. The significance of the family for Africans.

Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele)⁴² quoting Goduka, said that the *botho/ubuntu* concept rests on the African proverb and is an integral part of all African cultures and languages spoken in South Africa - the Northern Sotho version is *Motho: ke motho ka batho*, which means "a human being is a human being because of other human beings." Furthermore, the communality, collectivity and the human unity implicit in the proverb operates in the philosophical thought of African peoples. It is the guiding principle for relating with other people. It also forms a basis for thinking, behaving, speaking, teaching and learning, and is devoted to the advancement of human dignity and respect for all. Taking the botho/ubuntu concept seriously implies that the liberation of all African women in South Africa calls for the involvement of all Africans (both women and men) and the involvement of all South Africans.

The significance of the family for Africans, which is also highlighted by the *bosadi* concept, is of such sociological importance that it cannot be overemphasized. A gender-sensitive perspective that undermines the family and family-oriented matters is not balanced. However, neither man nor woman is supposed to be bound to the family. It should be the responsibility of all South Africans - both black and white, men and women, poor or rich, gay or straight - to promote the spirit of communality. From the preceding analysis, it has hopefully become evident that a *mosadi* within the *bosadi* framework, will, unlike the traditional African *mosadi*, not be a voiceless woman who allows her voice to be muted by anyone, including all life-denying peoples and systems.

Since her employment of the concept: *Bosadi*, in numerous published works, readers have drawn their own conceptions of what they think about this hermeneutics. Some have found close similarities between the *bosadi* approach and African inculturation hermeneutics. Plaatjie submits that Masenya's approach is somewhat akin to African inculturation hermeneutics, which compares biblical and African cultures. A feature that distinguishes Masenya's approach from inculturation is that she foregrounds gender concerns. As a matter of fact, Plaatjie devotes almost four pages to what one might, to a large extent, call an unfounded critique of the *Bosadi* approach. In this

⁴² M. Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahl.e), 2012. Without a voice, with a violated body: Re-reading Judges 19 to challenge Gender Violence in sacred texts. *Missionalia*. 40.3: 205-216

critique, she makes definite, conclusive, but erroneous assumptions regarding the *Bosadi* hermeneutic/concept, basing her arguments on an article that was submitted to *Semeia* in 1995, while the research on this same concept was still in process. In Masenya's (ngwan'a Mphahlele) own words ... one however wonders why she (Plaatjie) chose to focus only on an incomplete version, which she, as a matter of fact, also misunderstood!

4.3.3 The achievements of *Bosadi* Hermeneutics

The words of Okure concerning the desirability of a relationship between grassroots African women and professionally trained theologians seem to endorse Masenya's conviction:

Our greatest, but not yet fully tapped resources, are these so-called ordinary women. They are close to life at the grassroots; they see themselves in the texts of scripture and respect them as God's abiding word, sometimes too literally and in ways that oppress rather than liberate them. The professionally trained African women theologians, on the other hand, can be tempted to subscribe to abstract ways of theologising in order to find acceptance in the field. Thus they can lose focus on life, or seek answers to hermeneutical questions put by others, instead of identifying and addressing their own questions. The sisterhood in reading is needed by all.⁴³

In the elaborate response to Plaatjie's critique earlier mentioned, Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) hopes that it will become clear to biblical scholars and readers that the major hermeneutical focus in the *Bosadi* biblical hermeneutics is on the unique experiences of an African-South African woman, with a view to her liberation. It is, first and foremost, an African woman's liberation hermeneutic. African women, facing such multiple life-denying forces as sexism in the broader South African society, inherited from the legacies of colonialism and apartheid; sexism in the African culture; post-apartheid racism; classism; HIV/AIDS; woman-as-strange; and xenophobia, are made the main hermeneutical focus. As in liberation theologies, the experiences of the marginalized, in this case women, and not the contexts that produced the Bible, are the starting point of one's encounter with the biblical text. It is therefore a contextual

⁴³ M. Masenya, (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) 2004, Teaching Western-oriented Old Testament studies to African students: an exercise in wisdom or folly? *Old Testament Essays* 17.3:455-469.

woman's liberationist approach geared towards reading the Bible to empower African women. In her words:

Apartheid was terrible in my view. Being Black, Coloured or Indian was associated with ill-treatment. At some point, the Coloured and Indians were somewhat preferred by the apartheid regime as compared to Blacks. To worsen the situation, black women of South African roots were at the lowest ebb. They received ill-treatment from the apartheid regime and worse still, from Black men (fathers, husbands, brothers, uncles etc). I saw women and womanhood being treated with utmost disdain. Funny enough, these maltreatments were legitimised by the prevailing culture and appeals to biblical texts of women's subjections.⁴⁴

Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) argues that the *bosadi* (womanhood) approach to problematic cultural and sacred texts can be helpful to African women in their struggle to regain their dignity and sense of self-worth. This approach helps to counter the stereotypes and beliefs found there that a woman is less human than a man, that her inferiority is divinely ordained, that she cannot be a leader. In contrast, the Bosadi hermeneutics elevates the positive elements of African cultures for both women and men, including the institution of the family and its significance in and for Africa, the spirit of communality, the spirit of botho (ubuntu), commitment to hard work and a healthy code of sexual morality. Foregrounding the positive elements of African cultures gives us a more balanced view of Africa and its peoples, a view far removed from the negative one challenged by Biko during the time of apartheid South Africa. Such a view deviates from the negative one inherited during the colonial and apartheid eras and perpetuated today by the media.⁴⁵

More so, it is noteworthy that the positive aspects of their culture are not re-appropriated uncritically by African women. As a result of the approach's commitment to the life-affirming experiences of African women folk, these positive aspects are redefined and reappropriated in order to facilitate the transformation of the lives of African women and men. One example will suffice. The concept of mosadi (woman) is redefined to mean a complete adult woman/female person who is a whole person in her own right without

⁴⁴M. Masenya, (Ngwan'a Mphahlele). 1997. Redefining ourselves: a *bosadi* (womanhood) approach...448.

⁴⁵ M. Masenya, (Ngwan'a Mphahlele). 1997. Redefining ourselves: a *bosadi* (womanhood) approach,...441

any attachment to a male person in marriage. Although the latter definition contrasts diametrically with the African cultural notion that neither a man nor a woman can be considered complete outside the state of marriage, such a redefinition of *bosadi* helps to affirm the humanness of an individual African woman or an individual girl child.

Nambalirwa Helen Nkabala⁴⁶ surmised that with a view that western feminist and womanist approaches may contain aspects that are foreign to an African woman, Madipoane Masenya championed a *bosadi* (womanhood) approach for reading the Bible in a South African context. Through the *bosadi* hermeneutics, Masenya practices her *Talitha Cum* by re-reading Prov 31:10-31, to investigate what ideal womanhood should be for an African South-African woman reader of the Bible. This approach, according to Masenya, is an African woman's liberation reading of the text and would take into account the African-ness of an African woman and her attributes. Other issues addressed by the *bosadi* approach include poverty, sexism, racism, foreignness, classism, family, suffering and African cultural practices vis-à-vis the African woman's social status. Masenya's hermeneutics is an African woman's effort towards redefining and renaming herself and her fellow women, equipping them with an ability to call themselves in their own names and saying what they want to say in biblical interpretation by their own voices. Masenya argues that the text of Prov 31:10-31 is liberative for women because it pictures women as being hard workers, independent and powerful who like the virtuous woman can hold her own in the world of men. It is also worth mentioning that the same Proverbs text is used in honour of women in the Nigerian culture.⁴⁷

In traditional African cultures, a woman (and a man for that matter) becomes a complete, normative adult only after marriage. The African-South African word, *mosadi*, *musadzi*, *wansati*, etc., has that connotation. Not only is a *mosadi* supposed to marry and not remarry after the death of her spouse, she is supposed to bear children, preferably sons. These are roles that are akin to those that were expected from Israelite / Jewish

⁴⁶ N. H. Nkabala, n.d. A gender-sensitive ethical reading of Old Testament texts: The role of African women as characters in the text and exponents of the text, *OTE*, South Africa

⁴⁷ M. J. Obiorah, 2010. Reading the Old Testament from a Nigerian background: a woman's perspective in Global Hermeneutics? *Reflections and Consequences*. K. Holter and L. C. Jonker. Eds. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, .42.

women (and men). However, in Masenya's rereading of the text of Proverbs 31:10-31, it seems to her that these roles, particularly that of *mosadi* as mother, do not emerge clearly.

In its redefinition of womanhood/*bosadi*, the *bosadi* concept acknowledges the important role that women as wives and mothers played in pre-colonial and apartheid South African settings. Though it also acknowledges that African cultures were sexist even before colonialism and apartheid, it contends that the latter systems helped to exacerbate the already marginalized position of African women. This was a situation that led to the devaluing of the important private sphere of the home and of the person who operated from there: the devaluation of the hard work (with no remuneration) carried out by African women in favour of western money introduced by the capitalist economy. In the *bosadi* view of reality, a woman or a man who chooses to operate from the private sphere of the home should be allowed such a space. The private sphere of the home, just like the public sphere of church and work, should be found to be providing, for both women and men, girl children and boy children, safe and affirming spaces in which they exercise their God-given potential. Masenya therefore problematized the absolutization of the public sphere (though she is aware that in traditional pre-colonial African-South Africa, African women, just like the Woman of Worth in Prov 31:10-31, also went out to the public sphere of work). She problematize this "idolization" of the public sphere of work in view of the fact that if this sphere is to be viewed as one of the key signs for the empowerment of women today, and thus as providing the definition of affirming notions of womanhood, it will leave many African-South African women forever disaffirmed. As she has argued, many of these people, having faced the reality of the previous systemic social evils of apartheid and African patriarchy may find it difficult to lead an ideal life. The past experiences afforded little or no education to the girl child even as she goes out to "the public sphere of work" - end up in the "privatized" semi-public sphere of domesticity in the houses and farms/gardens of White bosses/madams and middle class black women and men.

A *mosadi* could therefore be defined as any African-South African woman human being, irrespective of her socio-economic status, ethnic status, marital status, and her status in respect to child bearing, as well as irrespective of her sphere of operation (private or public), who is created in God's image (*imago Dei*) and all such women are.

Such a woman - human being has been endowed with the potential to exercise her God-given capacity. If the *bosadi* biblical hermeneutics can produce not only such a view of what it must mean to be a *mosadi* in the African-South African context, and the African context to an extent, but also such persons in reality, it will have succeeded in its goal.⁴⁸

4.4 A brief biography and academic background of Gerald West

Gerald Oakley West was born on 10th April, 1956 in Zimbabwe, but of South African parentage. He had his elementary education in Zimbabwe, secondary education at Kimberley Boys' High School, in South Africa and Higher School Certificate at Waiarapa College, Masterton, New Zealand. He then proceeded to Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa and bagged a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in 1978, Bachelor of Arts Honours (BA Hons) degree in 1979. He thereafter launched into Theological Studies with a Higher Diploma in Education of Theological College of South Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa between 1979 and 1982. For postgraduate studies, he attended Sheffield University, Sheffield, England between 1985 and 1987 and bagged a Master of Arts (M.A) degree (with Distinction). The title of his dissertation was *The Succession Narrative as History: a critical discussion of the debate in the light of recent work in the Philosophy of History*. He eventually capped it with a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in 1990 in the field of Biblical Studies, with a thesis titled: *Biblical Interpretation in Theologies of Liberation: modes of reading the Bible in the South African context of Liberation*.⁴⁹

Regarding academic employment, he started as a Graduate Assistant in the Department of Linguistics and English Language, Rhodes University, South Africa in 1978. After several years and rising through the ranks, he was lectured at the Department of Biblical Studies, Sheffield University, England between 1985 and 1986. Returning to South Africa his home country, and during the heat of the oppressive apartheid regime, he taught at several academic institutions before finding a permanent academic base at the School of Theology, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, where he

⁴⁸ M. Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele), 2005. Struggling to find "Africa" in South Africa: The *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Approach to the Bible, *SBL Forum*, n.p. Retrieved on 24th May, 2021 from <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=402>

⁴⁹ G.O. West. 2016. Curriculum Vitae. Retrieved from www.ukzn.ac.za

rose to the post of professor. He was also Director of the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research, School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and by 2012, he was elevated to Senior Professor in the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal. As a Biblical scholar, Gerald West has over 146 conference papers, and has been Series and General Editor in over 23 publications. His chapter contributions in books exceed 101, and has over 100 articles in Learned Journals. With respect to awards, he won numerous accolades which include the following:

- a. British Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals Overseas Research Student Award (1986-1988)
- b. University of Natal Special Research Fund Award (1994)
- c. Vice Chancellor's Award, University of Natal (1995)
- d. Bray Lectureship, USPG and SPCK, United Kingdom (2005)
- e. DVC's Award for Research Excellence, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal (2012)
- f. Fellow of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (2013)
- g. De Carle Distinguished Lectureship, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand (2018)

Gerald West, as a renowned Old Testament biblical hermeneutist, had the privilege of teaching biblical studies in a number of reputable institutions as a visiting lecturer. Some of the institutions are mentioned below⁵⁰

- a. Religious Studies Department, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA, October, 1993.
- b. New York Theological Seminary, New York, USA, November, 1993.
- c. Howard University, Washington DC, USA, December, 1993.
- d. Alexander Robertson Lectureship, Department of Biblical Studies, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland, April-July, 1995.
- e. Chicago Theological Seminary, Chicago, USA, April-December, 2000
- f. School of Oriental and African Studies, London, UK, July-August, 2000.

⁵⁰ G.O. West. 2016. Curriculum Vitae. Retrieved from www.ukzn.ac.za

- g. Gurukul Theological College and Research Institute, Chennai, India, September, 2003.
- h. Gurukul Theological College and Research Institute, Chennai, India, January, 2005
- i. Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway, November, 2005.
- j. Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, USA, August-December, 2009
- k. School of Oriental and African Studies, London, UK, July, 2012.
- l. Nida School of Translation Studies, Misano Adriatico, Italy, May/June, 2014.
- m. Tainan Theological College and Seminary, Tainan, Taiwan, March, 2016.
- n. De Carle Distinguished Lectureship, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, February-April, 2018.

At some point in the heat of the resistance to apartheid government and policies, his life became endangered as a result of his avowed and open support for the black majority, as well as his intellectual and scholarly repudiation of the oppressive policies of apartheid. He was declared wanted by the agencies of the government. In his own words:

When I saw that I could not go “underground” anymore in my attack of the government of the day, coupled with the fact that some of my peers among fellow white South Africans were monitoring my movements, reporting on me and trying to sabotage my efforts, I emigrated to Zimbabwe my place of birth. I was there for some time so as to allow the wave of violence against me to subside. At that time too, many academics became very critical of the apartheid policies. There were pressures on the government from the international community, challenging the South African government on their dealings and brutalities on the blacks and the dissidents. When the wave of threat subsided a bit, I afterwards returned to South Africa.⁵¹

Despite the fact that he was a privileged white South Africa, he channelled his research enterprise towards identifying with the oppressed and impoverished black majority. On the eve of the end of apartheid, he recalled that a friend approached him and with a chuckle, asked: Gerald, after the apartheid, what happens to his researches and his quest for political liberation for the blacks, coloured and Indians. The question hit him like

⁵¹ G.O. West, 1995. *Biblical hermeneutics of liberation: modes of reading the Bible in the South African context*. Second Edition . Maryknoll, NY and Pietermaritzburg: Orbis Books and Cluster Publications.

a thunderbolt and he responded...the poor.... The poor will always be around him, so the struggle for political independence, when achieved; focus will be shifted to other components of the struggle - egalitarian society, socio-economic advancement for the people, rehabilitation, reconstruction, redistribution of wealth, decolonised biblical interpretations...e.tc.⁵²

4.4.1 Prelude to the emergence of Political Liberation Hermeneutics

In the latter part of the 1980s those working within the framework of liberation theologies began to explore other ways of talking about “liberation.” While the term “liberation” was still of immense rhetorical importance, given its rich heritage⁵³, the terrain from within which the term had arisen was shifting. There was not the same hope that imagined socialist forms of political liberation would materialize. The collapse of the Soviet Union had much to do with this, as did the failure of socialist-inclined movements and parties to establish themselves politically and economically in nation states in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. So those working within this hermeneutic framework began to reimagine what “liberation” might look like, both in terms of what liberation was “from” and what liberation was “to.” One way of talking about “liberation” which began to emerge during this time was to speak of “the God of life” and “idols of death.”⁵⁴ What liberation theology was about, it was argued, was taking sides with the God of life against the forces of death. The call and task of Christians was to “read the signs of the times,” discerning where God was already at work bringing life in the midst of death, and then to become co-workers with God. This idea of the struggle for survival (on the part of the blacks, coloured, indians) was prevalent in South Africa during the apartheid.

The terrain in South Africa in which Gerald West found himself, after being born in Zimbabwe, was one of harshness, acute racial profiling/discrimination, political subjugation of Black South Africans. Being White, West enjoyed privileges that his background and status conferred on him.

⁵² G.O. West, 1995. *Biblical hermeneutics of liberation: modes of reading the Bible in the South African context*. Second Edition. Maryknoll, NY and Pietermaritzburg: Orbis Books and Cluster Publications.

⁵³ J.M. Bonino, 1975. *Doing theology in a revolutionary situation*. Philadelphia: Fortress

⁵⁴ F.J. Hinkelammert, 2018. *The Ideological weapons of Death: A Theological Critique of Capitalism*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis

4.4.2 The place of Liberation Hermeneutics in the quest for self-governance

As much as the apartheid regime in South Africa made use of the bible in the defence of many of its obnoxious policies, Liberation hermeneutics was to be done, within this revised terminology, in the context of the struggle for life in the midst of death. In the South African context, for example, the key concept became that of “struggle.” The emphasis became less on the end product (“liberation”) and more on the on-going process of God’s liberating project. The advantage of this shift in emphasis and formulation has been that there is a place for liberation theologies after political liberation, as is the case in South Africa. As long as the God of life is engaged against the idols of death - whether these be the idols of neoliberal capitalism in the South African government’s macro-economic policy, or the idols of patriarchy within South African cultures and religions, or the idols of moral and medical discrimination in the context of South Africa’s HIV and AIDS pandemic - there is a need for forms of liberation hermeneutics that work with and proclaim the God of life.

Biblical liberation hermeneutics has at its core five interrelated distinctive features, which can be found across a range of liberation theologies. Frostin⁵⁵ highlights these distinctive features: “the choice of ‘interlocutors’, the perception of God, social analysis, the choice of theological tools, and the relationship between theory and practice.”. Frostin’s analysis of liberation theologies is a useful starting point because it draws directly on a wide range of related liberation theologies in dialogue with each other. The data Frostin uses are drawn substantially from the self-constituted dialogue of Third World theologians working together in forums such as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

4.4.3 The Bible as instrument of enslavement and/or liberation

The Bible is a controversial document in Africa. Africa’s traumatic encounter with the West led not only to a loss of political control, but also to a damaged self-understanding. Independent Africa’s preoccupations were to resist continued Western

⁵⁵ P. Frostin, 1988. *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation*. Lund, Sweden: Lund University Press.

economic domination, and assert African identity over the West, especially by affirming its identity with Africa's traditional heritage and resisting Western intellectual hegemony. So in the second half of the twentieth century, this issue of African authenticity and self-reliance, coupled with a comprehensive critique of the West and its role in Africa, has been the principal dynamic of Africa's intellectual life in all fields, not least biblical studies. Of course, this did not go unchallenged – African Marxists like Fanon claimed that variations of this “Negritude” constituted a blind alley; it might satisfy one craving of the African soul, but only political liberation and total social restructuring could guarantee Africa's future. African Christian theologians accepted, too, the assumption of African intellectuals that Christianity was an integral part of the West's assault on Africa. So African theology came to revolve around two poles: first to rehabilitate African culture and religion, and second, to critique the Western impact on Africa, no least that of the missionaries, and naturally their Bible. So although there is no one method of studying the Bible in Africa, this is one of the most dominant strands, particularly evident in South and East Africa: to question its role as an instrument of oppression, dispossession and alienation. In South African theological circles, Afrikaner historical criticism, which left unchallenged even if it did not support apartheid, has been a particular focus of attack. Many of the oppressive tendencies in the apartheid era in South Africa were justified by the whites as being in line with God's mandate! The bible became a tool of holistic subjugation.

This ambivalence has at its extreme led to a rejection of the Bible, even to the extent of creating a new scripture specially for Africa, intended to replace the Bible which is considered the scripture for Europeans. More commonly, though, it has led to an interpretation of the Bible in relation to African culture, what has been called the comparative method, in which biblical texts or motifs are compared to African parallels, letting the two illuminate each other. Such studies form the great bulk of all African biblical interpretation. This comparative method, however, has changed over time. In its earliest phase (1930s to 1970s) the aim was to legitimate African religion and culture in relation to the Western tradition. In the next phase (1970s to 1990s) the African reality became more central as a resource for biblical interpretation. In its current phase (since the 1990s) the African reality is foregrounded as the explicit focus of biblical

interpretation, with the biblical parallel serving to illuminate the African reality. Currently, much African biblical hermeneutics (and theology) has come to turn on African culture. In many cases, this involves rejecting the staple Western approach to biblical studies, the historical or historical-critical method, as irredeemably Eurocentric. This has led to some (though remarkably few) decolonization and similar readings, but such study is in the main done by Western-trained academics and is directed at Western readers in Western journals. If those academic approaches are abundantly documented, the use of the Bible in African churches or in private African reflection is much less so. How ordinary Africans either at church or at home utilize the Bible is not well researched.

4.4.4 The achievements of West's Political Liberation Hermeneutics

West's political liberation hermeneutics has been able to achieve a number of feats. The awareness of poor and marginalised Bible readers was enhanced with the fact that, unlike the way the oppressors used the Bible in defending the apartheid policies, passages abound, especially in Exodus on the liberation of Israel from Egypt. As a follow-up to this, the Contextual Bible Study as a form of liberation hermeneutics that emerged in South Africa in the 1980s was birthed. In it, socially engaged biblical scholars and ordinary readers of the Bible collaborate in the interpretive process, each bringing different sets of critical resources to the interpretive process. The interpretive process follows the contours of the See-Judge-Act method, moving from social analysis to biblical reflection to social action. The social analysis and the social action are primarily in the hands of the community of ordinary readers using Contextual Bible Study. The biblical reflection draws on an array of biblical studies resources, and so the shape of the biblical reflection is primarily the contribution of the socially engaged biblical scholar. The distinguishing feature of Contextual Bible Study, however, is not in its components but in the collaborative work that configures these components.

Contextual Bible Study shares with other forms of liberation hermeneutics the inclusion of so-called "ordinary readers" of the Bible, privileging both the non-scholarly dimensions of ordinary readers and the contexts of a particular sector of ordinary readers, the poor and marginalised. Like other forms of liberation hermeneutics, Contextual Bible Study is dialogical, including not only the dialogue between context and the biblical text

but also a dialogue between “ordinary” and “scholarly” readers as they together - in some way - dialogue with the Bible. It is a collaborative and communal process.⁵⁶

Biblical liberation hermeneutics is fundamentally a process, but the precise nature of the process is open to discussion and even debate. Liberation hermeneutics has tended over time to become more creative and open to a diverse range of facilitative techniques. There are, however, certain constants. The See-Judge-Act framework captures rather well some of the constants. Contextual Bible reading begins with an analysis of reality - See. Though as we have seen, the question is who provides the categories. Furthermore, the concepts of analysis may differ. Having interrogated the lived reality of the particular marginalized sector taking up the process, the process moves from analysis of context to the next phase, bringing contextual analysis into dialogue with prophetic biblical resources. This reality is “Judged” in terms of the shape of God’s prophetic project in the biblical and theological tradition. Though, again, precisely what the shape of God’s project is is open to ideo-theological interpretations. Liberation hermeneutics then moves into the next phase, action - Act. Having analyzed contextual realities, having judged these realities against the shape of God’s redemptive project, the community now acts to ensure that the kingdom of God comes ‘on earth, as it is in heaven.’⁵⁷

As Chair of the Ujamaa Centre then, West championed the Contextual Bible Study - their version of political liberation hermeneutics. Participants are required to develop three related sets of actions: immediate actions that can be taken up without too much delay or too many additional resources; intermediate actions that, whilst feasible, require further planning; visionary long-term actions that draw us forward into the future of God's project.

4.5 Conclusion

The quest at championing a different interpretive scope, with regards to the overbearing tendencies of Euro-American biblical scholarship, led the trio of Adamo, Masenya and West to their respective methodologies, approaches and theories of

⁵⁶ P.F.C. De Andrade, 199. Reading the Bible in the Ecclesial Base Communities of Latin America: The meaning of social context'. *Reading from this place: Social location and biblical interpretation in global perspective*. F.F. Segovia and M.A. Tolbert. Eds. Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 237-249

⁵⁷ G. Philpott, 2019. *Jesus is tricky and God is undemocratic: The “kin-dom” of God in Amawoti*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications

decolonising biblical hermeneutics. It should be noted that all their enterprises were reactionary in nature and possessed the tendencies of being ideologically subjective.

CHAPTER FIVE
DECOLONISATION IN ADAMO, MASENYA (NGWANA' MPHAAHLELE'S) AND
WEST'S WORKS

5.1 Biblical text and African context(s): points of interaction

One of the major problems faced by most contemporary biblical interpreters is that ancient texts like those in the Old Testaments (likewise the New Testament) have been described by anthropologists as 'high context'¹ documents because they are written within the context of the ancient Mediterranean world.² Consequently, authors of these texts presume a 'high' knowledge of their context on the part of their readers.³ As a result, little or no background information is given to these texts in order to explain why certain events occur the way they are described.⁴ Rather they leave much to the reader or hearer's imagination and common knowledge. This is so because authors and original readers of such biblical texts share the same social system and experiences. Of course no biblical author had twenty-first century readers and their various contexts including the African context in mind.⁵ Now, modern readers, most of whom are from 'low context' societies, need knowledge of the 'missing' information in these texts in order to understand the attitudes of the various characters. Rohrbaugh describes the eagerness of these readers to understand as well as to 'fill in' the 'missing' information as a situation of someone

¹High context societies are homogeneous societies where contextual knowledge is widely shared by everybody. Changes are rare in such societies. Low context societies, on the other hand, often witness social and technological changes as well as anonymous social relations. For high context societies to be understood, more background information is required. For high context societies expect listeners to know the context and low context societies expect to have to spell it out.

² R.L. Rohrbaugh, 2007. *The New Testament in cross-cultural perspective*. Eugene: Cascade Books, .9

³ E. Van Eck, 2009, Interpreting the parables of the Galilean Jesus: A social-scientific approach, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*. 65.1. Retrieved 17th May, 2021 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v65i1>

⁴ M.D. Nyiawung, 2010. Who is the Christ? Leadership and conflict in Luke 9:18–22: A social scientific– and narratological analysis from an African perspective. PhD thesis, Department of New Testament Studies, University of Pretoria. xii + 186

⁵B.J. Malina, 2001, *The Social Gospel of Jesus: The kingdom of God in Mediterranean perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press

struggling to “sing the LORD’s song in a strange land.”⁶ This is an example of difficulties that one may need to face with the African Biblical Hermeneutics because of the diversity in African cultural contexts. Many biblical scholars prefer to distinguish between three major “worlds” involved in the process of biblical interpretation. This is because there is wide time-frame between the time the biblical texts were written and our contemporary era. The worlds are highlighted below.

- a. **The world-behind-the-text:** This refers to all the circumstances (that is, the historical context - not only physical, but also in terms of values, customs, cultural habits, etc.) and hands (be they oral traditions, authors, composers or redactors) that produced the texts. Not only the history of the events behind the text, but also the history of the text itself is included in this world. However, one should keep in mind that the world-behind-the-text could, in the case of ancient texts, only be known by means of and through the texts. The study of this world thus has an ever-theoretical and speculative nature.
- b. **The world-inside-the-text:** This refers to those structures (be they grammatical, semantics syntactical, rhetorical, or narratives) that relate signs to one another in texts. The focus in a study of this world is thus on the text itself.
- c. **The world-in-front-of-the-text:** This refers to the contemporary contexts in which the texts are being interpreted. The study of this world represents a significant shift in emphasis from the two previously mentioned worlds. Those who study the world-behind-the-text and the world-inside-the-text normally regard meaning as something inherent to texts. Meaning is either seen as something that should be uncovered in the events behind the text, or in the structures of the text itself. However, those who study the world-in-front-of-the-text normally are of the opinion that meaning is not something inherent to texts, but that meaning is creatively produced in the interaction between readers/hearers and texts.
- d. **The world-underneath-the-text:** Some scholars complement this map with a fourth world, This is an attempt by scholars to additionally account for the

⁶ R, L, Rohrbaugh, 1996, Introduction. *The social scientific and New Testament interpretation*. R.L. Rohrbaugh Ed. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1-15

ideological biases that play significant (even determining) roles on all levels of communications and interpretations of the biblical texts.

5.2 Important issues in Decolonisation of biblical hermeneutics.

The biblical text (the source of biblical hermeneutics) and the African context (the perspective from which the bible is read, interpreted and appropriated) seem to be contentious with each other. It creates a package somewhat like a map. This map also makes a tripartite distinction between the historical context, the text and the contemporary context. However, it also elaborates on what happens between the text and the contemporary context during the process of interpretation. Intrinsicly it is an attempt to criticize those who want to “jump” the historical gap between the completion of the written texts and the contemporary contexts in which the texts are read and/or heard. This gap is bridged by a tradition of interpretation that is constituted ecclesiastically and theologically. Each new act of interpretation also involves other and new filters of suspicion over against the historical context, the text, the tradition and the contemporary context. This results into a never-ending spiral of renewal in interpretation.

- a. **Text - Context:** The presupposition of this map is that interpretation entails the linking of text and context in some or other way. According to this map, the crucial questions are: Is the bridge of interpretation well founded on both sides (text and contemporary context)? And how “strong” is the bridge? The factors that are listed above are thus separated into three groups: those referring to textual matters, those referring to contextual matters, and those referring to the hermeneutical strategies that are utilised in bridging the gap between text and context.
- b. **Sender - Medium - Receiver:** According to this map the process of interpretation is viewed as a communication process. The most basic description of this communication process is to distinguish between sender, medium, and receiver. This description is often complemented with a distinction of various sender and receiver levels. Most scholars that use this communication model as a description of the interpretation process emphasize that the communication process is not a linear or one-dimensional process, but that one should rather perceive the process

as being complex and multidimensional. No textual communication is merely a movement from sender to medium to receiver. Each interaction between these communication elements is a dynamic and unique act of communication.

- c. **Textual production - Textual reception:** This map distinguishes between two phases in the process of textual communication. Textual production would then refer to those processes that brought about the ancient texts (initially oral, but later written and canonised). Textual reception would refer to those processes that appropriated these ancient texts for contemporary contexts. Pertaining to textual reception a distinction is often made between textual reception by the first/early readers; and textual reception by contemporary readers. The benefit of this map is that the process of communication is portrayed as a dynamic one. However, some poststructuralists would say that textual reception and textual production should not be regarded as two processes. The reciprocal processes of textual production and textual reception in ancient and contemporary contexts tend to obliterate the boundaries between them. Textual production becomes textual reception, and vice versa. The boundaries between texts and their interpretations become irrelevant.
- d. **Centrifugal (deductive) - Centripetal (inductive):** This has to do with the concerns given to certain factors, or the sequence in which they should be taken into account in the interpretation process. A centrifugal (or deductive) approach gives priority to factors pertaining to the text, while a centripetal (or inductive) approach gives priority to factors pertaining to the context. However, these two approaches can be distinguished logically, but not temporally. They normally occur simultaneously. The constant interaction between deductive and inductive approaches forms the theoretical backbone of the interpretation model that is proposed. Aspects of both approaches are indeed usually present in the concrete act of biblical interpretation. Perhaps the point of departure is not all that crucial. One may start with either the text or the context. It is far more important to maintain the dynamic interplay between the two. This interaction between text and context leads to an on-going process in which one's pre-understanding of the meaning and implications of the text is continuously revised and refined with respect to both the faithfulness of the interpretation to the text and its relevance

with a contemporary context. This constant interaction is never stabilized or completed.

- e. **Diachronic – Synchronic stance:** According to De Saussure, a diachronic study is an investigation of the relationship between sequential elements or constructions that cannot be perceived by a common collective consciousness, and which do not form a system. A synchronic study, however, is an investigation of the logical and psychological relationships between elements that exist collaterally, which form a system of signs and which can be perceived by a common collective consciousness. A diachronic analysis thus involves temporality, whereas a synchronic study focuses only on the relationship between signs on a given time. This presupposes that one could approach biblical texts in the interpretation process either diachronically, or synchronically. However, this distinction often leads to the unsatisfactory situation that either the diachronic, or the synchronic factors of biblical texts are ignored. Discussions among those who favour this map therefore centre on the questions of priority and the possible integration of these two approaches.
- f. **Multidimensional:** This takes its point of departure in the multidimensionality of the interpretation process. It therefore incorporates aspects of more than one of the above-mentioned maps, but also shows how these aspects are related to one another. The main emphasis of this is its description of the communication process that takes place in interpretation (sender-medium-receiver) not only synchronically, but also diachronically. Each element of the communication process has a synchronic as well as a diachronic aspect. This also applies to each new configuration of the communication process. The interaction that takes place between sender and medium is described in terms of the synchronic aspect of the sender, while the interaction between receiver and text is described in terms of the synchronic aspect of the receiver. Accordingly, the factors mentioned above can be grouped multi-dimensionally.
- g. **Source oriented and discourse oriented:** This proposal made by Sternberg suggests two modes of inquiry which are not mutually exclusive, but rather function in close cooperation. No temporal precedence of the one over the other

exists. Rather, it depends on the aim of the inquiry. Source-oriented inquiry addresses itself to the biblical world as it really was, usually to some specific dimension thereof. Discourse-oriented analysis, on the other hand, sets out to understand not the realities behind the text, but the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect.

- h. **Syntagmatic and paradigmatic:** This distinction has also been developed within the specialised field of structural linguistics under the influence of De Saussure. However, it could also be utilised to map the process of textual interpretation. The textual structure is basically one of combinations, contrasts, and oppositions, since the elements of texts achieve meaning only in relationship. The sequence of relationships for both sender and receiver, is linear or syntagmatic. At the same time, every textual element prompts associations with other related unspoken (or “unwritten”) signs. Such relationships are of a paradigmatic type. However, as stated earlier, African readers of the bible are more concerned with how the text could be used in addressing their various problems, than concentrating on scholarly spectrums of the bible. This then makes African biblical scholars to go beyond mere interpretation of the text to appropriating the text with contemporary African contexts.

The importance of Old Testament scholarship and specifically Old Testament Hermeneutics in Africa can also be seen in the fact that the future of African Christian theology depends on it. For Christianity to have meaning in Africa, the gospel message which is an off-shoot of the Old Testament should be presented in the light of African culture and experience. In the words of Madu⁷, “In fact the feeling of estrangement on the part of the African Christian viewed against the received Euro-Christianity has become extremely pronounced in the fervent search for African self-identity” Theologically, the Old Testament provides firm background or foundation for the Christian faith.

Africa is a vast continent, with a great diversity in terms of peoples, beliefs and language. Pobee has agreed that Africa is not only a “polyracial” and a “polyethnic” continent, but it is also “polycultural” in terms of its structure.⁸ Such a variety also poses

⁷ J.E. Madu, 2004. *Honest to African cultural heritage*. Onitsha: Coskan

⁸ J.S. Pobee, 1992. *Skenosis: Christian faith in an African con.text*. Gweru: Mambo Press

a huge problem of appropriation, interpretation and reinterpretation to exegetes involved in African biblical studies. It becomes pertinent to note the assertion of Schüssler Fiorenza that hermeneutics involves the translation of meaning from one 'world' to another⁹, hence, African Biblical Hermeneutics targets the African context as the subject of interpretation. Nevertheless, interpreting and applying a biblical text from one context to another is an uphill task because it becomes an activity of re-interpretation especially if it is from a different epoch. Such re-interpretation assumes that exegetes are equipped with some kind of basic cultural knowledge from their own resources, which illumine and grant them the various possibilities of completing the text to be interpreted.

In spite of this cultural diversity, African traditional society has some value features like respect and integrity and the concern for moral values that are common to all its societies. It is this conviction that renders the exegetical exercise within the African context possible and practicable. However, the exegete must guard against the dual risk of ethnocentrism and anachronism.

Ethnocentrism and Anachronism

In the submission of Van Eck¹⁰, Ethnocentrism is a term that was introduced by Sumner, referring to a 'view of things in which one's own group is centre of everything, and others are scaled and rated in reference to it'. In other words, ethnocentrism is an attitude through which values derived from one cultural background are applied to another cultural context, where different values operate.¹¹ Hence, an in-group culture or attitude is considered as a norm for what is human, whilst out-group behaviour is seen as a deviation. This judgemental attitude relegates one culture whilst affirming cultural superiority to the other.¹² Everyone, everywhere at every time, however, does not reason, act and behave identically.

Etymologically, anachronism comes from a combination of two Greek words: *ana* and *chronos*, meaning an error in chronology in terms of events. The exegete treats a text

⁹ E. S.chüssler Fiorenza, 2009. *Democratizing Biblical Studies: Towards an emancipatory Educational space*. Loiseville: Westminster/John Knox Press

¹⁰E. Van Eck, 1995. *Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark's story of Jesus: A narratological and scientific reading.. (HTS/Theologese Studies/ Theological Sudies, suppl. 7.*

¹¹ R.A. L.ev.i.ne, and D. Campbell, 1972, *Ethnocentrism: Theories of conflict, ethnic attitudes and behaviour*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

¹² C. Strecker, 2019. *Jesus and the demoniac. The social setting of Jesus and the Gospels*. W. Stegemann, B.J. Malina and G. Theissen. Eds. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 119

with the understanding that it is a product of its own social context, although it represents a different time frame. Anachronism then refers to the approach of a text by bringing into it a foreign social world, timing and all sorts of illogical comparisons. It is the projection of the patterns and dynamics of the modern world back into the world of antiquity. It is an attempt to concoct or fashion figures or events of the past to support a twenty-first century agenda.¹³

It is common knowledge that in a society, people have the tendency of projecting their identity whenever the opportunity arises. Also in biblical interpretation just as it is the case with communication, personal identity and cultural orientation are always involved in one way or the other, with exegetes often being tempted to ‘fill’ the missing gap in the text with information with which they can easily identify. Quite often such information either reflects their world view or it reflects the identity of the group to which they belong. Rohrbaugh opines that such an attitude could lead readers to reject the other, or they project stereotypes onto the other or they simply project the characteristics of their own identity which is considered as a norm. This attitude erroneously gives such readers the impression that their context is of superior value.¹⁴ As a remedy to the above situation, several African scholars have insisted on a search for an authentic African theology which consists of seeking for similarities between the present day context and the context of the Bible, an attitude of anachronism. One could surmise that the process of understanding another culture is never an easy one. Consequently, modern exegetes must be careful when biblical stories seem familiar and comfortable because the Bible was not written specifically for African readers; not even for Africans of the twenty-first century! The activity of biblical interpretation necessitates a lot of creativity. However, to fall into the trap of ethnocentrism and/or anachronism is a wrong theological creativity, which is eisegesis, because in that way the exegete simply sticks his own words into the mouth of the biblical writer.

Very importantly too, the doctrinal inclination of the African biblical scholar also has its bearing on how such a scholar approaches the issue of biblical interpretation. This

¹³ B.J. Malina, 1991. Reading theory perspective: Reading Luke-Acts. *The social world of Luke-Acts: Models for interpretation*. J.H. Neyrey Ed. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 3-23

¹⁴R.L. Rohrbaugh, 2007. *The New Testament in cross-cultural perspective*. Eugene: Cascade Books, .9

has been labelled as doctrinal keys. Three further comments on the role of doctrinal keys are important here:

- a. The identification of the role of these doctrinal keys may clarify the often rather diffuse use of the word “hermeneutics”. It is often employed to describe the results of a particular interpretation of the Bible - instead of a theory of interpretation (that is,. at a multifaceted level). It has, for example, become customary to talk about a feminist hermeneutics, a “black hermeneutics of liberation,” an “ecological hermeneutics” or even a reformed, Pentecostal, African or a Lutheran hermeneutics. Technically, these uses of the concept hermeneutics do not indicate a new or a different theory of interpretation but refer to the use of specific doctrinal keys, e.g. “the oppression of women”, “liberation for the poor and oppressed,” “the struggle of the black working class” or the “need to re-appropriate traditional African customs”. A discussion of the implications of the use of such keys for an adequate understanding of text, tradition and context usually forms an integral part of such an analysis.
- b. These examples make it clear that doctrinal keys have both a constructive and an ideology-critical function. They enable interpreters to identify and construct the meaning of the text (and the context) but they also provide a tool to evaluate the available evidence and to unmask (in terms of that particular perspective) any distortions in the process of interpretation (in the world behind the text, the world of the text, the history of interpretation of the text and the contemporary context).
- c. The choice of doctrinal keys will necessarily (by definition) lead to a distortion of both text and context. Such distortions may well be ideological in the pejorative sense of the word. A hermeneutics of suspicion towards the use of heuristic keys is therefore of the utmost importance. However, this is hampered by the pervasiveness of heuristic keys because they also influence the selection of ideology-critical tools. Heuristic keys prescribe to their users what they should be suspicious about.

5.3 Apparent weaknesses of Decolonisation in African Old Testament Scholarship

As much as the gains from Decolonisation in African biblical scholarship stand to be celebrated, a critical assessment of the efforts of Adamo, Masenya and West show that they were poised at undoing the various strangleholds that biblical scholarship was subjected to. However, some of the weaknesses of their academic enterprises are explored below.

5.3.1 African Cultural Hermeneutics (cultural)

Adamo, from the onset, was ready to ensure that all that involves Africa/Africans in the Old Testament were brought to the fore in his scholarly quest. This is reflective of the numerous books and articles he wrote over the last three decades. However, a number of scholars have accused him of deliberately blackening the bible, smuggling Africa into stories and context that bear no semblance with Africa.¹⁵ Could he have been blamed? The answer to this question stems out from the fact that he laboured to break the hermeneutical stranglehold, superintending control and hegemony enjoyed by Eurocentric biblical scholarship.

Biblical interpretation, unwittingly commemorating liberation in Africa, can become an alibi unless it is situated within the parameters of African culture - past, present, and future. It is no accident that, in spite of Western oppression and apartheid, Christianity has become one of the native religions of Africa to an extent that people in Africa have renamed it “African Christianity.” While the presence of Christianity has deep historical roots that go back to Apostolic times, the interpretation of the Bible faces a complex and a daunting challenge. This challenge is motivated by the hunger for an appropriation of the gospel in ways that are pragmatic and existential in nature. Therefore, biblical interpretation in Africa must, first and foremost, acknowledge the rich mosaic of the African worldview. In other words, biblical research methods urgently needed in Africa must be community oriented. During and after colonisation, African Christianity re-established itself anew and exploded geographically. The motive for this

¹⁵ M.H. Lavik, 2000. The African texts of the Old Testament and their African interpretations, *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*, M. Getui, K. Holter and V. Zinkuratire, Eds. Nairobi: Peter Lang.

explosion of Christianity was newfound independence from the British and, in the case of South Africa, from apartheid. In this wide spread of African-Christianity, biblical studies faces a multitude of challenges, such as culture, HIV/AIDS, famine, abject poverty, neo-colonial dictators, ecclesial conflicts, economic downturns, closure of healthcare facilities, mortality, as well as a fast decline in life expectancy for both female and male. Thus the challenges biblical interpretation and criticism face arise from the geopolitical legacies and cultural context of Africa.

With all the competing critical methods advocated by biblical scholars, the question that remains is which method will allow people to hear God addressing them in the midst of all these life threatening issues? African biblical interpreters and theologians need to develop creative methods that serve the present neo-political African context. However, one's reflections on the needs and challenges, the conceptualizations and methods, of biblical studies are in conversation with other African scholars, both in and outside of Africa. The world of the Bible and the world of African traditional religion overlap and dovetail at many important points, yet Africa itself continue to grapple with issues of identity. Africa continues to wrestle with the issues of demonization imposed on her by missionaries and colonialists. No continent or nation has been associated with heathenism more than Africa; indeed most history books refer to Africa as a "Dark Continent" or as a continent behind God's face! Africa finds itself at a crossroad: searching and longing for a salvation that addresses not only the soul but also culture at its deepest level. Thus, first and foremost, Africa needs to address the issue of renaissance, especially in this age of globalization and financial downturns.² Although Africa blames the West for the reality and experience of colonization, the urgent need is for African biblical scholars to assist people in defining who they are and where they are heading in the global community and to formulate practical strategies and solutions for future action that will benefit the African church. Together, the Bible and the rich mosaic of religious heritages strongly affect methods of biblical criticism taking shape in the present.

While the historical-critical method has been of value, new and indigenous methods are needed in order to address and engage the issues currently faced by African Christians. Mimicry is not an option in this regard. Here I have in mind a formative

concept of the postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha, for whom mimicry represents the adoption, adaptation, and alteration of the culture of the colonizer by the colonised. Africa simply cannot continue to imitate the missionary interpretations of the Bible. While the historical-critical method is oriented toward discovering the past, the urgent need in Africa is for ways to appropriate the gospel in an existential manner. African biblical interpretation needs to be authentic to an authentic culture. This calls for authentic critical dialogue between the Bible and the African culture.

The word culture points beyond such components as music, tribal boundaries, artefacts, and heritages. Culture has to do with the worldview of a people, that is, their identity, their origins, their purpose, and their way of worship. It is, therefore, for biblical interpretation to become indigenized in a manner that assists Africans in being true to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible has become part of the heritage of the African continent, but interpreters continue to use Euro-American methods of biblical criticism. In so doing, people have failed to connect the message of the Bible with their culture. Therefore, the need for a cross-cultural method is urgent

From the perspective of Africans, biblical scholars, clergy and laity, the Christian gospel cannot be seen as impactful apart from the socioeconomic status of the people. Thus, first of all, African Cultural Hermeneutics has to address the present status of cultural challenges, gender biases and political instability (especially as noticed in the recent military coup in some West African countries). Other life-threatening challenges like poverty, hunger, disease, economic retrogressions, insecurity etc in the continent are issues that people grind with on regular basis. In this sense, salvation for an African must no longer be approached as an issue of life after death but rather as lived-out experience. Also, it must have a holistic and ethical agenda capable of bringing into being a new person and a qualitatively different society. Consequently, the socioeconomic reality of Africa can only be properly addressed by a methodology that takes the biblical text seriously, because the God of the Exodus as well as the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, coupled with the salvific Christ of the New Testament, were focused on overthrowing the oppressive status quo. The Magna Carta of the historical Jesus is an example of liberation praxis, and the apologetic literature of both Old and the New

Testament carries a message of practical life. Thus, biblical interpretation in Africa needs to be politically and culturally relevant.

5.3.2 *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Hermeneutics (gender)

The *bosadi* approach, as championed by Masenya, encompasses the struggle for the affirmation of the dignity of women as equal human beings created in God's image. This struggle, according to her, should not be, only a woman's struggle. The expression: *Motho ke motho ka batho*, translated, "a human being is a human being through other human beings," could guide us in this regard. Applied to African *bosadi* communal-oriented mentality, it therefore means that a man cannot be fully human if he still revels in denying woman her full dignity. Given the racial oppression to which Africans in South Africa have been subjected through the years, it makes sense that of all the people to understand and support the struggle of African women against all life-denying forces, our African brothers and fathers should be the most keen to do so. Such should naturally be the case because it is they who know, fairly well, how wounding and dehumanizing it is to be discriminated against as a person, merely on account of one's God-given skin colour. The situation existed in which a less educated Afrikaner person could remind an educated African person that: My graad is my vel, "My degree is my skin." That is, "No matter how educated you might be, if your skin colour is not politically correct, you will not win the game". If African menfolk continue to shun attempts at liberating fellow African women and girl children, can they really hope to succeed by means of their "androcentric degrees" and fully enjoy their proceeds freely? Is it not the case that the apartheid era Black slogan, "an injury to one an injury to all," still holds water today, when more than half of the South African Black majority still remain injured? This is truly the case, even when we consider our fight against all that which denies our womenfolk their God-given dignity. The words of the former president of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, on the African renaissance come to mind:

As we dream and work for the regeneration of our continent, we remain conscious that the African renaissance can only succeed as part of the development of a new and equitable world order in which all the formerly colonised

and marginalised take their rightful place, makers of history rather than the possessions of the others.¹⁶

The *bosadi* approach is one of those responses that took this call seriously: as African persons, in the process of making our own “her story”/history and charting the course for our own futures, we will have the courage to call ourselves by our own names and in our own voices. In Masenya (ngwan’a Mphahlele) own words:

There was virtually nothing for the girl-child, who supposedly will grow to adulthood and motherhood. The future was bleak! Preachers and teachers of the Bible did not see any need to repudiate and challenge the prevailing culture of subjugation of the female folk. Not that we wanted to be independent of our men, but we wanted to be seen as equally human, created in the image of God like our male counterparts. Since our men – religious, biological and cultural fathers were not prepared to help us out, we felt it was time to practically sieve through the Christian Bible to ascertain if God really cared about us. These were some of the issues I grappled with in my quest to creating a scholarly framework that is indigenous yet global.¹⁷

5.3.3 Hermeneutics of Liberation (political)

The hermeneutics of liberation gave birth to what Gerald West has come to label as Contextual Bible Study. The question that bugs the mind is: Can the Contextual Bible Study approach suffice in confronting the problems that daily buffet Africans in the face? The answer is complicated and has to do not with the formulation of the method itself but with its focus and its end goal. What is of concern for, after several near-exhaustive reading, is that in most academic reflections and analyses of political liberation hermeneutics in South Africa, the focus is not on how participants are challenged to change and transform their interpretations of the Bible or their analysis of the social context in which they find themselves. Rather, the preoccupation is on a rather bland and, dare we say, romantic description of both the participants in the Bible study and the intellectual. On the one hand, descriptions of the participants range variously from

¹⁶ M. Masenya, (Ngwan’a Mphahlele). 1997. Redefining ourselves: a *bosadi* (womanhood) approach, *Old Testament Essays* 10, 444

¹⁷ M. Masenya, (Ngwan’a Mphahlele). 1997. Redefining ourselves: a *bosadi* (womanhood) approach, *Old Testament Essays* 10, 439 - 448.

“oppressed,” “poor and marginalised,” “other,” “ordinary,” to “survivors.” On the other hand, descriptions of the intellectual range from “trained reader” to “socially engaged biblical scholar” to “activist-intellectual. At the time when these epithets were coined, which was mostly during the period when South Africa was “burning,” as it were, on the brink of the demise of apartheid or in the infancy of post-Apartheid South Africa, it was clear who the “ordinary” readers were and who the “trained readers” were: the “ordinary” readers were black, poor, and marginalized; the “trained” readers were white, middle-class intellectuals. Political liberation was important because it was a tool that could be used to engage people and convince them of the injustice of apartheid, especially in a context in which apartheid was religiously sanctioned. Contextual Bible Study was only one such tool among others.

However, the objective of liberation that Contextual Bible Studies claims to have had as an end goal seems to have gotten lost in the academy. The hermeneutics of liberation, which was born in the academy, seemed to stay within the academy, with a proliferation of new and more fashionable liberation hermeneutics being born at a consistent rate. Feminist, womanist, *bosadi*, inculturation, divination, and postcolonial hermeneutics are just some examples of the plethora of innovative and perhaps even “exotic” methods that flooded the biblical scholarly guild. The academy was taking seriously the call of liberation scholars such as Gerald West to experience a “conversion from below,” to be “partially constituted” (as it were), by the real experiences of those who are “poor and marginalised.” Out of this desire to take the muddy experiences seriously was also born a series of empirical research projects into Bible reading practices of grassroots communities. Consequently, a series of critical analyses of the praxis of political liberation hermeneutics in communities began to be reflected on in the academy.¹⁸

It is in academic reflection on the process of Contextual Bible Study that my concern lies, and perhaps where we might find an answer to the question of why

¹⁸ S. Nadar, 2009. Beyond the ordinary reader and the invisible intellectual: shifting Contextual Bible Study from liberation discourse to liberation pedagogy. *Old Testament Essay*, 22.2:384-403

liberation hermeneutics has not been that effective. In a sense, liberation discourses force biblical scholars to use their skills of interpretation not just for the sake of scholarly debate but in service of the project of liberation in the wider society. Contextual Bible Study, as an offshoot of liberation hermeneutics, is an attempt at doing precisely that. But if what is being represented and reflected back to the academy about this process is anything to go by, then it becomes terrifying that the assessment of some divergent views is correct: we are not succeeding in the cause of liberation toward which we are working, however noble those attempts may be. Maluleke has averred that there is need to critically reflect on the method and the objectives of political liberation hermeneutics with its contextual Bible study, so that perhaps the contours of the discourse can be adjusted or reshaped to suit the changing realities of the world in which we find ourselves. Drawing on experiences at facilitating Contextual Bible studies, the boundaries of the understanding of the roles of the “ordinary” or “untrained” reader and the intellectual in the process of Contextual Bible Study - a method to which Gerald West is deeply committed, because he still think that it is one of the few viable ways to work at the interface between faith communities and the academy around issues of social transformation; It can be argued that, if transformation and liberation are the end goal of Contextual Bible Study, the critical resources the intellectual brings to the process will have to be far more emphasized and nuanced than in the past, that the effects of globalisation - particularly as reflected in the ubiquitous term “biblical values,” which comes up often in contextual Bible studies- will have to be addressed, and that the identity of the intellectual will have to be more fully explored than simply declaring one’s social location and then carrying on with business as usual.¹⁹ I want to argue that neither an understanding that promotes “community wisdom” or “hidden transcripts” nor an understanding of the “all-powerful” intellectual is helpful for understanding the dynamics of Contextual Bible Study. What is needed is a more nuanced and honest exploration of the identities and functions of the intellectual and the “ordinary” reader.

In order to facilitate this assertion, it would be helpful to elucidate some of the characteristic features of political liberation hermeneutics using the means of contextual

¹⁹ S. Nadar, 2009. Beyond the ordinary reader, *Old Testament Essay*, 22.2:384-403

Bible study, so that we can begin to engage some of the concerns raised above. Nadar has elucidated what he called the “five Cs” of liberation hermeneutics in contextual Bible study. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it is helpful for sketching the contours of the method of political liberation hermeneutics. It is based on how he defined the term in the training workshops he had been asked to facilitate over the years, and it may be helpful to restate this here. Political liberation hermeneutics is the tendency to bringing contextual Bible study into focus as an interactive study of particular texts in the Bible, which brings the perspectives of both the context of the reader and the context of the Bible into critical dialogue, for the purpose of raising awareness and promoting transformation.” The five key words which correspond to the five Cs in the above definition are: interactive (Community), context of the reader (Context), context of the Bible (Criticality), critical dialogue and raising awareness (Conscientisation), and transformation (Change).

1. Community

As already said, political liberation hermeneutics takes its cue from liberation theology, and one of the central tenets of liberation theology is a focus on the community as opposed to the individual. The method of Contextual Bible Study takes community very seriously, and hence it is always interactive and participatory in nature. It is not “taught”; it is facilitated. It requires the voices and opinions of all who participate in the study. This means that questions are engaged with and debated, not simply answered by the facilitator. This is not to downplay the role of the facilitator but to help participants draw conclusions through logical and critical argument, rather than to have a simple return to the all-powerful pastor or intellectual who says “the Bible says” or, worse still, “God says.” In the process of doing the Bible study, all answers provided by the participants are put up on newsprint or on a board. In one Bible study group, a woman pointed to the newsprint proudly and declaring to another participant that she had provided that particular answer. Thus, this tool empowers those who are not often given spaces within a church setting to articulate their views. Although all answers provided are written up, the method is not a way of validating what Kelly Brown Douglas calls “vulgar relativism” of anything goes. During the discussion, for example, on what the theme of a

text is, heated debate ensues among the participants themselves. An example will help at this point. In Nadar's own words:

Over the years, I have facilitated several Bible studies on the book of Esther, and the participants usually have a very spirited discussion about whether the king in the story actually rapes the virgins or whether they are willing participants in the act. In one group, some male pastors who were very resistant to feminist interpretations of the text even went as far as to suggest that saying that the king was drunk was a "feminist distortion" of the text. They debated whether the phrase "merry with wine" meant drunk.²⁰

However, putting up participants' responses to questions makes other participants react, creating a discussion that often even goes beyond the text. As facilitator, Nadar says:

I have to choose the level of intervention. As a feminist scholar, I often find it more important to engage the group on the issue of the rape of the virgins rather than on whether the king was drunk or not. Some interpretations are not necessarily life-denying and so do not require as much intervention as others do.²¹

Unfortunately, the academic discourse on community engagement and popular usage of the Bible does not often capture the fierce debates that can go on between participants, but also between the facilitator and the participants. In other words, "community wisdom," like culture, is not a monolith. It is fiercely contested, legitimized, and defended. Yet all academic discourse has done with this is to amplify the interpretations of the community and raise them to a level of community wisdom. Such a modus operandi can sometimes actually be counter-productive to the goal of transformation we seek. Although not an analysis of Contextual Bible Study, Gerald West's article on Isaiah Shembe and Jephthah's daughter²² is an example of how liberation (of women, in this case) can be sacrificed on the altar of "community wisdom." So engrossed is West in the notion of community that is created in the Shembe community with the Bible that he devotes almost the entire article to simply describing

²⁰ S. Nadar, 2009. Beyond the ordinary reader, *Old Testament Essay*, 22.2:386

²¹ S. Nadar, 2009. Beyond the ordinary reader, *Old Testament Essay*, 22.2:384-403

²² G.O. West, 2007. Isaiah Shembe and Jephthah's daughter, 489-509

how the Bible is appropriated by Shembe, who “steals” the story of Jephthah’s daughter and reshapes it for the sake of the AmaNazaretha community, along with the rituals that were supposed to be observed by the virgins in honour of Jephthah’s daughter. It is clear from West’s descriptions of the liturgical and hermeneutical practices of Shembe that there were clear “hierarchies of compliance,” in West’s own words. Yet Shembe’s hermeneutics is amplified simply because he reads and appropriates the Bible over and against the ways the missionaries did. This is a concern when it comes to the discourse of liberation that focuses on community and indigenous knowledge. There is uncritical acceptance of indigenous knowledge as almost sacrosanct, without an acknowledgement that the community itself can be in possession of destructive and life-denying interpretations which need to be exposed, interrogated, and ultimately transformed. Of course, this may be because the community has simply “internalised” its oppression, or because of some romantic attachment to outdated forms of culture and tradition, or even because the community has an “incipient theology” that is yet to be articulated. Whatever the reason may be, the fact is that after eight years of experience of working in communities of faith with the Bible, Nadar discovered from the participants shocking and disturbing interpretations of biblical and social contexts, more life-denying than life-promoting. It has also been documented elsewhere how this is made even worse because of globalized forms of religion, such as the increasing “charismatisation” of churches in the Global South, which promote “biblical values” as a universalizing standard for how people should live their lives.

Cochrane²³ avers that from his experience facilitating Bible studies in communities that are both poor and middle class, black and white, educated and uneducated, male and female, and with people from across the world, from India to Canada, he can honestly say that, in all of these interactions, “I have struggled to find “incipient theologies” and “hidden transcripts. Most times during the course of such Bible studies, I have wanted to do nothing more than shake people out of their complacent “survival” mode and bring them to a point of realising that it is not “God’s

²³ J.R. Cochrane, 1999. *Circles of dignity-community wisdom and theological reflection*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

will” that they suffer or that oppression of women, for example, is not acceptable just because “it is part of my culture!” In other words, what is being expressed here is the frustration at the “exoticizing” discourse that permeates the discussion around Contextual Bible Study. Of course, there are lotuses, but these cannot be cheap plastic flowers that say “made in China” when turned over. The lotuses must be acknowledged with and because of but also in spite of the mud from which it emerges and grows.

As facilitator, the bible scholar would have often had to challenge participants particularly when their interpretations have been sexist. This is what it means to read the Bible in community and not individually. It is understood that there is a wider spectrum of interpretation which exists beyond the individual and often pious interpretations that are peddled from the pulpit. Reading in community helps overcome the challenge of the power imbalance that is created when interpretation is left in the hands of one all-powerful individual. Even so, “reading in community” must not be mistaken for a “valorization” of “community wisdom” when such wisdom is not always life-giving or liberationist.

2. Context

A second feature of political liberation hermeneutics making use of its contextual Bible study is its focus on context. Inspired by liberation theology, it always begins with context and experience. However, in the discourse around it, which is reflected back to the academy, “context” is used to describe the contexts of those who are more often than not poor, women, or black. For example, in Mary Hunt’s work on embodiment, she urges us to consider that we find suffering bodies across the world, and yet most of her examples take us to Palestine, Zimbabwe, and Cambodia - which, of course, begs the question if suffering occurs in the United States. Context is the starting point for, Contextual Bible Study but I ask whether that context always has to be that of the poor and marginalised. Is it easier for the poor to pass through the eye of the Contextual Bible Study needle than it is for the rich? One of the insights that was shared by a group of biblical scholars was that they found it difficult to identify with the text of Esther.²⁴ They

²⁴ Maluleke T. S. 1996. Theological interest in AIC’s and other Grass-root Communities in South Africa. *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 10.1: 18-29

said sexual violence was not as big a problem in their context as perhaps it was in others. However, when pushed to consider further how the text did apply in their context, they revealed that beauty standards set by glossy magazines was increasing the prevalence of eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia in the Swedish context for example. It became very clear as time progressed that context was not “out there,” but at hand. We are all embodied. We are all in the mud. Everybody has a context. So, political liberation’s contextual Bible study cannot be only for the poor and the marginalized. I am concerned that when we talk about context and embodiment in our academic discourses, we talk about women’s bodies and women’s contexts only - or black bodies, or bodies with disability, or bodies with HIV. What about the bodies of men? What about white bodies? Is there not a context for this? Can political liberation hermeneutics be done among white, middle-class communities, or is it only a tool for the “poor and marginalised,” as Gerald West’s discourses have tirelessly revealed?

Anders Hagman, the Swedish photographer and journalist at the “Bible Days” in Sweden, captured this tension very clearly in a beautiful reflection on the process which was sent out to the participants and the four facilitators:

After 20 years of visits by fantastic individuals that come to inspire us with their theology I must ask: are you more than Esters [sic] more unfortunate sisters to us? Passive representations of “the other” that come one by one called by the King in the North, to spend a night with us before we send you off as not quite exotic, thrilling, or beautiful enough to satisfy more than our most urgent desires. Are we able to fall in love with the message you bring; are we prepared to invite you to our dinner table. Are we able to show that commitment?²⁵

He was also able, very insightfully, to put his finger on the problem of contextuality as restricted to the “other” or the exotic and on the difficulty of making context more real at home: The space for contextual theology that we offer, mainly fills a representative role; representations of colour of skin, of other faiths and cultures. We are driven by feelings of bad conscience, of ambitions to be worldwide and open, of a longing

²⁵ S. Nadar, 2009. *Beyond the ordinary reader, Old Testament Essay*, 22.2:386

for someone to save us, but we do not really open any channels into the heart of our churches that could transform us in any deeper sense, or on a bigger scale.

Hagman's reflections hit the nail on the head in terms of the failure of our academic discourse to see the benefit of Contextual Bible Study beyond simply servicing the "other," to see it also as in service of the cause of transformation - whether that is in a white middle-class church in Hillcrest, South Africa, or a rural community church in Inanda, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Political liberation hermeneutics has the potential to transform us, if we are committed to addressing the challenges we face in our particular contexts. These contexts cannot continue to be named in the abstract. As Freire has argued, "The oppressor is solidly with the oppressed only when he stops regarding the oppressed as an abstract category and sees them as persons...to affirm that men and women are persons and as person should be free, and yet do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce."

3. Criticality

A third feature of political liberation hermeneutics in contextual Bible study is its focus on the critical. This is where the role of the intellectual is crucial, not just in deploying and employing biblical studies tools but also in making it contextually applicable and relevant to the participants. While the context of the reader is important, particularly in an increasingly globalised world that tends to make ubiquitous phrases such as "biblical values" universalised absolutes, this feature of contextual Bible study cannot be downplayed. Contrary to the misperception of those in the academy who are beholden to the historical-critical method, and who think that liberation hermeneutics' contextual Bible study is "uncritical," I would point out that, actually, respect for the text in its own context is an important characteristic of political liberation hermeneutics. As noted, this facet of contextual Bible study is to understand that reading "the Bible is like reading someone else's mail" - it was not written to us, but we nevertheless are trying to derive meaning from it. It is here that critical tools are employed to attempt to understand the text in its own context. Most of the time, the easiest way into the text is through a literary methodology - asking questions regarding character, story, plot, and so forth. However, depending on the context and the ability of the participants to engage in

historical discussion, the facilitator may also introduce some socio-historical information regarding the text. For example, in the Bible studies on Esther, questions of empire often come up, since Esther is a text set in exile. Easing into a socio-historical discussion of the text helps participants realize that, notwithstanding the sacred nature of the Bible, it was written, read, translated, and interpreted in a time different from our own. The critical nature of political liberation hermeneutics also means that participants are sometimes enthused to ask general theological and hermeneutical questions that are beyond the text. For example, at the end of a Bible study on Esther with a group of middle-class, Indian Pentecostal women, one participant asked, “Why did God choose the Israelites to be His chosen people and not anyone else, for example the Indians?”²⁶ The participants learn very quickly that a good interpreter does not only know all the right answers but learns the skills to ask the right questions.

Again, in the academic discourse on contextual Bible study, the role of the intellectual has been downplayed and to a certain extent underestimated. In wanting to foreground “community wisdom,” its discourse has failed to recognise the yearning of participants in it for the professional biblical scholar to provide insights to which they would have otherwise been blind. biblical scholars who have facilitated Bible studies often share their experiences, as one person put it, of the participants’ eyes going as “wide as saucers” when confronted, for example, with the idea that there are two creation stories in the Bible. I think that the problem in academic discourse is that the phrase “reading with” according to Gerald West, has obscured the power imbalance between facilitator and participant. The researcher’s experience has been that participants want to hear from the “expert” and that the critical skills and tools gained through the academic study of biblical texts prove crucial in order to meet this need.

4. Conscientisation

Another important aspect of Gerald West’s political liberation hermeneutics with its contextual Bible study underpinnings , and one that is related to its critical and intellectual dimensions, is the question of conscientisation. This implies a particular interventionist strategy on the part of the intellectual. However, not all intellectuals agree

²⁶ S. Nadar, 2009. *Beyond the ordinary reader, Old Testament Essay*, 22.2: 390

on conscientisation as a goal of political liberation hermeneutics. West, for example, avers that the socially engaged biblical scholar is called to read the Bible with them (ordinary readers), but not because they need to be conscientised and given interpretations relevant to their context. No, socially engaged biblical scholars are called to collaborate with them because they bring with them additional interpretative resources which may be of use to the community group.

Later, in another article, he elaborated on why he made such an argument against conscientisation, saying that he realised that in making this argument he may simply be exhibiting his own identity dilemmas as a white, male South African. For who am I to intervene in breaking the culture of silence of blacks or women? So instead of naming false-consciousness for what it is, I call it something else, so assigning myself a less problematic role

Haddad made a similar admission when she describes how her attempts at intervention were met with silence in a Bible study group made up of black women:

I now recognise that my role is not to conscientise but to enter into mutual dialogue and collaborative work with those I work with. . . . I am less bold or hasty than I used to be about what action I think should be taken against the many gendered injustices I see around me. I listen more, speak less and do not rush into any prescribed solutions to these evils. . . . At times in discussions with women of Sweetwaters and Nxamalala, I have not been able to be quiet and found myself speaking out my perspective on their oppression. Instead of having the desired effect of moving them into unanimous agreement, it has more often than not elicited silence.²⁷

Notwithstanding that both West and Haddad admit that they choose not to conscientize because of their identity as white and privileged, their admission does little to help inquisitive minds who asks why liberation theology has not fully succeeded in its aim to liberate. Yet this is precisely where the answer lies. Perhaps instead of only attempting to bring the poor into the academy, we should be taking the academy to the poor. It seems as though the purpose of Contextual Bible study reflection in the academy

²⁷ S. Nadar, 2009. *Beyond the ordinary reader, Old Testament Essay*, 22.2:392

has been to use it as a research tool, to allow scholars to be peeping toms into the lives of the poor. Although Gerald West has outrightly rejected the use of Contextual Bible Study as a research tool, in a sense this is exactly what his and other similar scholarly work has done. Although claiming to bring the “resources of biblical scholarship to the community,” West nevertheless admits that he also intends to “take the questions of the community into the field of biblical scholarship.” It is the latter intention of bringing the voices of the community into the academy that is foregrounded in the discourse rather than the former intention of education and conscientization of the community. There is nothing wrong with doing this, provided that we are overt about it, rather than claiming liberation and transformation as our only goal. Again, Maluleke has already urged us to consider this matter: “More reflection on the evaluation process within grassroots research must be done. The impression is that apart from blindness to biases, some researchers tend to fail to differentiate between the tools used in evaluating on the one hand, and the data unearthed in the investigation, on the other.”

Having said this, it must also be added that the tendency to empower community interpretations, or to use contextual Bible study as a research tool, has not only been restricted to white intellectuals; it has been present among black intellectuals, as well. Madipoane Masenya’s *Bosadi* hermeneutics and Musa Dube’s divination hermeneutics and Segovia’s readings have also come under scrutiny for attempting to simply replace the “lost figure of the colonised” in academic discourse without being critical of the inherent inequalities and even injustices that may be present in such grassroots approaches. The attempts to bring the voices of the marginalised into the academy have been done through a reinforcement of the survival methods of the oppressed rather than through a critique of why survival is needed in the first place. As Maluleke²⁸ has argued, “Survival is necessary but it is not subversive activity. Survival theologies and hermeneutics may empower the agency of women in oppressive situations, but it does not change the systems”. And it is changing the systems, not glorifying the mud, which will help to answer the question of to what extent has liberation hermeneutics being

²⁸ T.S. Maluleke, 1996. Theological interest in AIC’s and other Grass-root Communities in South Africa. *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 10.1: 18-29

liberating? A pulsating issue is “whether the academy ought to see its role in relation to the poor and marginalised as that of conscientisation, education, and the imparting of skills. We argue that “for some, the fact that the poor and marginalised are and can be agents of survival and transformation, implies all intellectual interventions should be dialogical (reading with, for example) rather than pedagogical and kerygmatic. However experiences at facilitating politically motivated biblical hermeneutics in contextual Bible studies over the years reveal that it must of necessity be both, lest we be judged that the only people who are ever transformed through our hermeneutical practices are those within the academy. Besides, while we carry on talking to ourselves, people of faith continue to live and die by the very texts over which we spend our lives arguing. In a globalised world, where the Bible is being increasingly deified and used as a “textbook” rather than as a “sourcebook,” it has never been more urgent to rouse people out of their false consciousness. A precursor to this conscientisation must of necessity be critical thinking, which we have outlined above. As Freire describes it, “True dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking...thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity - thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved.”²⁹

5. Change

The fifth and final characteristic of political liberation hermeneutics is its focus on change. Inasmuch as it is the muddy experiences which ground us and make us more attentive to the cry of the oppressed, our task is, nevertheless, still to ask whether our liberation discourses can help us transcend the mud. Has it only ever succeeded in transforming, or perhaps even venerating, the mud? We have to ask the critical questions that will ultimately help us transcend suffering, but then we also have to do something about the suffering. Change and transformation must be a constant goal. Transformation happens on various levels. On the one hand, the ways in which we read the Bible are transformed. In other words, we learn how to read the Bible in a way that is liberating and inclusive and in a way that stays faithful to who we are in our contexts. On the other

²⁹ S. Nadar, 2009. *Beyond the ordinary reader, Old Testament Essay*, 22.2: 390

hand, it is also transformative in that it is hoped that the Bible study can transform us to such an extent that it spurs us to action for change and justice in a world that is often unjust and unwilling to change. Bishop Dom Helder Camara captures some of the hermeneutical moves of political liberation's contextual Bible study: "When I give food to the poor, I am called a saint. When I ask why the poor are poor they call me a communist." Criticality and conscientisation - asking why the poor are poor - must lead to some change. However, whether that means actually being challenged enough to give food to the poor seeks to be seen. On the other hand whether that means protesting at the unequal neoliberal and self-serving economic policies of successive African Governments is not left out. These economic policies are notably, political; liberation hermeneutics is supposed to be conscious of whether participants are required to say how it has challenged them and what measurable difference they can make in response to it.

5.4 Decolonisation: moving from theory to praxis

The challenges faced by both African biblical interpreters and lay people together cannot be ignored at this point. These challenges could be designated under three categories; poverty, the political realm, and globalisation. A simple search on the internet for problems confronting Africa will pop up a kaleidoscope of challenges haunting Africa today. Without mentioning HIV/AIDS, Africa is on the brink of cultural, economic, and political collapse. As African readers and interpreters of the Bible, we are not just mere spectators but must play a crucial role in assisting people to navigate through these daunting scenarios. The question facing critical readers of the Bible is: What does it mean to interpret and read the Bible in a state of emergency? Our contention is that, as critical exegetes and interpreters of the Bible, we have to speak "prophetically", on the basis of scripture, to both neo-colonial African political leaders and ecclesial leaders, holding them accountable for the dilemmas facing the African continent. Indeed, the challenges are daunting and cannot be ignored. They beckon us to search for a hermeneutics that is relevant to the state of emergency in which the masses of people are trapped. This hermeneutics must be a way of entering into the struggle for justice, reconciliation, and peace.

It should be noted that the Bible is a book of stories of people who responded to God in their own way. In other words, early Christians were able to place their stories within the larger story of God's salvation. The people of Africa are a story people, and therefore they must be given a platform to tell their own stories and be able to place these stories within the context of God's workings. The function of the Bible is to unite Christians against those things that hurt and divide them.³⁰ Africa is a tribal continent, and these tribes need to seek ways of working together to remove barriers that have separated them even before the arrival of the missionaries. It must be added that Africa needs to view itself as part of a larger global context within which it has major contributions to make in terms of biblical interpretation. It has always been assumed that the roots of the exegetical tradition are sunk deeply in ecclesial tradition, and thus the dominant view continues to be that historical criticism. But with the emergence of several modes of doing biblical hermeneutics in Africa, the bible must be brought alive to serve the faith and life of the Church. However, this view does not give credit to the people who form the ecclesial community; it treats people as objects rather than subjects. What cross-cultural hermeneutic does is give various tribes a voice and allow them to have a meaningful dialogue. In other words, there is no interpretation without a critical engagement with "real flesh and blood" readers. In the same manner, there is no world peace without ecclesial and religious peace. The horizon of our critical readings is now larger and ecumenical. It must involve those who are suffering daily from lack of food, medicine, freedom, and who struggle to live meaningful lives. Both public intellectuals and laity must become partners in the interpretation of the Bible and think together to conceive roadmaps to end Africa's ill.

Decolonisation in African biblical studies has an aim. It is never done just for the fun of it. African biblical scholars are aware that readers of the Bible, especially in the African context want the Bible to speak to the myriads of problems: cultural, gender, political etc. in reading the Bible, African readers have several assumptions. This led Ukpong to attempt a brief enumeration of African assumptions. This is no simple task.

³⁰ W.V. Heerden, 2006. Finding Africa in the Old Testament: Some hermeneutical and methodological considerations," *Old Testament Essays* 19.2: 500-524

Ukpong was aware that any description of “Africa” will be defective. Africa contains a “multiplicity” of cultures and worldviews. Ukpong did thought it possible, however, to name certain features which appear to be common across the board in Africa and to argue that these common features point to the “root paradigm” of African cultures. Ukpong named four aspects of African life that he believed belong to the root paradigm of African cultures

The first aspect has to do with the nature of the world, the question of “where are we?” Ukpong said that Africans do not make a distinction between matter and spirit, secular and religious. Rather, life is viewed as a unity. There is a distinction, however, between the visible world and the invisible world. Every person has a visible and an invisible dimension. The dead do not cease to be; they have moved into a different sphere of existence whence they impact our visible dimension of reality. Spirits, both good and evil, also interact with the visible world.

The second feature of African life is that this two-dimensional universe has a divine origin. God is the Creator of the world and God continues to be involved in the creation. And because there is a network of relationships between God, humanity and the rest of the cosmos, human actions are not isolated events. Rather, every human action is a social event, affecting relationships not only with one another, but with God and with the rest of nature.

Related to this is the third feature: the African answer to the question “who are we?” The answer is, “we are a community.” Since the creation is a network of interrelations, “African authors see the Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I exist) replaced in the African thought system by *cognato ergo sum* (I am related by blood/I belong to a family, therefore I exist.)” This communal view of humanity has a multitude of implications.³¹ There is no such thing as a “private” matter in Africa. Problems and issues in the community are seen and treated not as a function of the actions of and dispositions of the individuals concerned, but primarily as a function of the relationships within the community. Thus, for example, a person is not considered

³¹ W.V. Heerden, 2006. Finding Africa in the Old Testament: Some hermeneutical and methodological considerations,” *Old Testament Essays* 19.2: 500-524

rich through his/her ingenuity and industry alone but through sharing in the blessings of the community. Death and illness are explained not in terms of natural causes but in terms of negative forces, like witchcraft, in the community.

The final African assumption noted by Ukpogon is that Africa has an emphasis “on the concrete rather than the abstract, on the practical rather than theoretical.” Although Ukpogon left this point without explanation, this pragmatic dimension of African life has obvious implications for African exegesis: the relevance of scholarship must be made obvious for the task to be considered worthwhile.

Having elucidated what he took to be the basic cultural assumptions of Africa, Ukpogon moved on to explain how these assumptions operate in his understanding of the process of inculturation hermeneutics. His explanation seemed to focus especially on two interrelated issues: the tension between the Bible as an ancient book and the need to find a present meaning; and the tension between historical critical tools and the Bible as a sacred religious book. For him, the goal of hermeneutics/exegesis is “to actualise the theological meaning of the text in a contemporary context.”³² Since the Bible is an ancient text, historical tools must be used. However, the task is not completed when the historical meaning is discovered. Since the goal is finding the contemporary theological meaning, the historical tools must always be seen “as servant not as master.” The present meaning of the text will emerge in the interaction between the ancient text and the contemporary context. This discovery of the present meaning, however, must be done from a perspective of faith. “Inculturation hermeneutics sees the Bible as a document of faith and therefore demands entry into and sharing the faith of the biblical community expressed in the text.” Part of the “faith of the biblical community” appears to be that the presence in the text “of the supernatural and the miraculous is taken for granted.”

More so, Ukpogon acknowledged that the text is “plurivalent”. This does not mean, however, that the text can mean whatever the reader wishes it to mean. Two limits are put on “plurivalency.” The first is the canon: “any meaning must be judged in the light of the

³² Holter, K. 2000. The current state of Old Testament scholarship in Africa: where are we at the turn of the century, *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa*. M. Getui, K. Holter and V. Zinkuratira, Eds. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

meaning of the entire Bible.” The second is something like the rule of faith: “the theology of any text must be judged against the basic biblical affirmations and principles” such as “the existence of God as creator and sustainer of the universe, love of God and neighbour, etc.” Ukpong’s language seemed to imply that the reading of a particular text is to be judged by its conformity to, or tension with the overall thrust of the biblical message seen as an entirety. Just as an African individual is known in relation to his community, so a biblical passage is only truly “known” in relation to the whole “book.” Ukpong further attempted to define “basic biblical affirmations” by which to judge a particular reading in a manner similar to Jesus’ use of Torah in his critique of the Pharisees in Matthew’s gospel. In Mt 23:23-24, Jesus judged the Pharisees’ reading of scripture by appealing to the spirit of the whole of the Torah, as opposed to an atomistic exegesis which neglects the “weightier matters” of Torah.

However, it is not entirely clear how the limits of “canon” and “rule of faith” function for Ukpong. In Ukpong’s use of these two limits as a “standard” by which the validity of a particular reading of the text can be judged, it was not clear, at times, whether it is the interpretation or the text itself which is being judged. What is clear is that Ukpong believed that there are theological limits to exegesis. But most importantly, exegesis must be geared at solving real-life problems. In reading and interpreting the bible in Africa, both scholar and lay people face a number of challenges. The issue of poverty, political realm, and globalization cannot be jettisoned. All one needs to do is to search on Google African problems and one will see a kaleidoscope of challenges haunting Africa today. Africa is on the brink of cultural, economic, and political collapse. As African readers and interpreters of the Bible, we are not just mere spectators but must play a crucial role in assisting people to navigate through these daunting scenarios. The question facing critical readers of the Bible is: What does it mean to interpret and read the Bible in a state of emergency? The contention is that, as critical exegetes and interpreters of the Bible, we have to speak prophetically, on the basis of scripture, to both neo-colonial African political leaders and ecclesial leaders, holding them accountable for the dilemmas facing the African continent. Indeed, the challenges are daunting and cannot be ignored. They beckon us to search for a hermeneutic that is relevant to the state

of emergency in which the masses of people are trapped. This hermeneutic must be a way of entering into the struggle for justice, reconciliation, and peace.

In our engagement with lay people, we must remember that we have been called to be a critical intelligentsia, individuals who are not comfortable with the status quo in our societies. Our call is to “afflict” the comfortable and transform the uncomfortable. The problem with African ecclesial leaders and biblical interpreters is that they have to some extent aligned themselves with the status quo and become comfortable in their individual settings. Justin Ukpong has argued that “critical scholars must not be comfortable with the status quo of oppression and domination of the poor.” While faith has played a major role in Old (likewise New) Testament Studies, the world of the twenty-first century calls us to grow beyond the naive faith of the past - a faith that has proved to be an illusion.

Biblical interpretation in Africa must be done in the spirit of mutual respect, which means that all cultures must be allowed to define God in their own terms. The bible is a record of peoples whose lives and faith responses to God provide a window of lessons for the present generation. All cultures have a record of such people or heroes. These heroes are similar to figures such as Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and Isaac, insofar as they point people to ethical and spiritual ways of living; yet, they are not talked about in the field of biblical interpretation. This way of allowing religious and spiritual voices should shape the ethos of African cultural readings of the Bible.

In implementing decolonisation of biblical research in Africa, using the lens of Inculturation Hermeneutics, Ukpong opined that the first step in the actual exegetical process is to identify a dynamic correspondence between the reader’s current context and the historical context of a biblical passage. This, of course, implied that the exegete has some knowledge both of the contemporary context and of the text. Given this, the scholar engaging in Inculturation hermeneutics must seek to find the common ground between the two. In a study of Lk 16:1-13, for example, Ukpong found that Luke’s gospel speaks of the “rich” in largely negative terms. In Ukpong’s reading, the rich man in this parable has no doubt become rich because of an exploitative economic system which gave him the advantages he needed to acquire wealth. Seeing a similar disparity of wealth in the

exploitative economic system at work in Africa, he brought the text and the context together. The cultural context informing this biblical interpretation is primarily that of exploited peasant farmers of West Africa as well as the concerns of the international debt burden of the Two-Thirds World. While most interpretations viewed or have read the parable from the perspective of the rich man's economic system, he read the story from the perspective of the peasant farmers in the story. Ukpong did not limit his work to the socio-economic, however. Any text whose historical context appeared analogous to an African idea or situation: cultural, gender, political etc would be considered appropriate material for the Inculturation hermeneutics project.

Furthermore, the second step in Ukpong's procedure is analysis of the context of interpretation. The (contemporary) background against which the text will be read must be analysed from as many different perspectives as necessary: culturally, gender-wise, politically, socio-anthropologically, historically, socially and religiously. For a reading of Lk 16:1-13, for example, the African exegete must acquire some knowledge of peasant conditions in West Africa. This prompted Adamo to focus on Old Testament passages that had to do with Africa and Africans, Masenya (ngwan'a Mphalele) to do exhaustive works on the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31. In addition, West concentrated on the Exodus as a lens for mirroring political liberation. Therefore, to do an African reading of Leviticus for example, one should undertake an investigation of African sacrificial rituals and ideas and so on.

The third step is a historical analysis of the biblical text. Ukpong does not often differ from the majority of North Atlantic scholars in his use of specific historical-critical tools. The difference is that many North Atlantic scholars would consider exegesis complete after just this one step - an end in and of itself. For Ukpong historical analysis is important, but in his method it is relativized by being only a part of a larger process.

Ukpong's fourth step is "analysis of the text in the light of the already analysed contemporary context." If the goal of exegesis is "to actualize the theological meaning of the text in a contemporary context" then this step moves the reader toward that goal by putting questions to the text "arising from insights gained from the analysis of the context of interpretation in order to gain insight into the nature of the text in relation to the

context.” For example, if Nigeria’s ecological system is threatened by an inefficient political system which allows an oil pipe line to leak unchecked, one of the things the biblical scholar must do is bring the question of the care of the creation to the biblical text to see if there is insight to be gained for that current Nigerian situation. The final step of the procedure is not only to draw together the fruits of this analysis in a coherent fashion, but also to express “a commitment to actualizing the message of the text in concrete life situation.” In other words, engagement with the text alone is insufficient. The scholar must also be engaged with the community. This is because “the Bible is life-oriented” and consequently, exegesis must lead to the transformation of the scholar into an activist, as it were, and to the transformation of the community in the light of scripture.

Ukpong was not doctrinaire about the order of his procedures and steps. However, his method clearly exemplified the African demand that biblical scholarship intrude into areas of research that, in the North Atlantic world, are often left to scholars of other fields. For Ukpong, however, the integrity of the discipline of biblical studies demands more than the single focus of a narrow specialisation. The scholar must become involved in whatever area is demanded by the material of the text, precisely because the material he or she studies is “life-oriented.” Neither the text nor the context leaves the scholar with the option of delegation, compartmentalisation or narrow specialisation. This would be an abdication of responsibility.

After more than forty years of liberation theology and over twenty years of Contextual Bible Study, are we making a real difference in the lives of the oppressed, as Chung prompted us to ask. Or have the oppressed simply become “raw data” for us to write our papers - pretty lotuses to put into our vases? Have we simply placed them in our academic discourses to remind ourselves that we need to be mindful of the poor, while our hermeneutics of liberation have actually failed to become a hermeneutics of transformation and change in their lives? Who are the oppressed and the poor and marginalized? Can men and white, middle-class people be oppressed too? All of these questions need to be honestly addressed and engaged if we are serious about the end goal of Contextual Bible Study. This does not mean we have to polarize the debate and come up with an either/or answer. Perhaps, as Alissa Jones Nelson has recently argued, our

answer lies in “contrapuntal hermeneutics.” This she describes as a hermeneutics that “seeks to embrace outsider voices without falling prey to either assimilation or segregation. It points towards integration, which attempts to avoid both the elision and the overstatement of differences”

5.5 Exegetical exploration of selected passages in the works of Adamo and Masenya (ngwana’ Mphahlele)

African biblical scholars of Old Testament leaning have tried to interpret some biblical passages, bearing in mind the presence and contributions of people of African descent to the Bible narratives. In the light of this, some exegetical explorations are presented below.

5.5.1 Exegesis of Adamo’s references to Cush in his works

Adamo’s quest from the onset of his academic sojourn, especially in his doctoral thesis at Baylor University, USA, was to locate in the Old Testament canon the mention of “Cush” and its derivative, “Cushite.” More so, he was poised to challenge and replace appropriately the Western notions that Cush did not necessarily refer to Africa. There are 56 references to Cush and Cushites in the Old Testament. Whereas the term **שׁוֹ** Cush occurs 30 times, **שׁוֹי** Cushi or Cushite occurs 26 times and the 56 references are found in all three parts of the Hebrew canon – Torah (the Law), Nevi’im (the Prophets) and Kethuvim (the Writings).³³ Whether or not all 56 instances refer to an African location has been disputed³⁴ but Adamo identifies an African location for all references to Cush in the Old Testament. This is because, according to him, **שׁוֹ** refers to black or blackness, which was, and is still used in description of Africa as the continent of the black race. To Adamo, everywhere the word **שׁוֹ** “Cush” is used with a clear-cut identification, it refers to Africa.³⁵ Adamo asserts that the Hebrew word **שׁוֹ** be rendered Africa in modern translations of the Bible. This assertion has been contested by a number of biblical

³³ A. Even-Shoshan, 1983. *A New Concordance of the Bible*, Jerusalem: KiryatSepher Publishing House, 527

³⁴ S. Hidal, 1977. The land of Cush in the Old Testament, *Svensk exegetisk arsbok* 41-42, 97–106.

³⁵ D.T. Adamo, 1992. Ethiopia in the Bible, *African Christian Studies* 8..51

scholars of the Eurocentric tradition and some Africentric sympathizers.³⁶ The conviction that the Hebrew “Cush” and its derivative “Cushite” certainly refer to Africa and African respectively had spur Adamo into publishing many scholarly works making use of these terms in the description of some biblical figures and location of some places.³⁷

In the Law, there are six references to Cush, four of which appear in Genesis (Gen 2:13; 10:6, 7, 8) and two in Numbers (Num 12:1, 1). When the motif of Cush appears in the Pentateuch it has to do with either places or people. In the creation story, Cush is located as one of the countries around which the second river of Eden flows (Gen 2:13): “The name of the second river is Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush.” By mentioning Cush here, Africa is included in the world map reflected in Gen 2:13.¹⁵ In Gen 10:6, 7, 8 and in Num 12, the lens zooms in and refers to individuals. In the genealogy of Gen 10, Cush is used as a personal name together with Egypt, Put and Canaan in the list of the descendants of Ham. Cush is mentioned first in Gen 10:6 probably due to a geographical orientation starting from the far south.³⁸ One of Cush’s offspring is Nimrod who is described in Gen 10:8 as “the first on earth to become a mighty warrior.” His name is then related with Babylonia (v. 10) and Assyria (v. 11). It has been proposed that in the Table of Nations Cush is an eponym for the Kassites in Mesopotamia. Further, verses 10-12 list several places and cities that this son of Cush established. Num 12:1 says twice that Moses is married to a woman of Cush: “While they were at Hazeroth, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had indeed married a Cushite woman).” Explanations to why this choice is criticised by Miriam and Aaron have been offered by Adamo.³⁹ From the foregoing, it is evident that the references to Cush and Cushites in the Law function to place Cush on the ancient Israelites’ geographical understanding of the then known world.

³⁶ K. Holter, 2000. Should Old Testament Cush be rendered “Africa”? *Yahweh in Africa: Essays on Africa and the Old Testament*. K. Holter, Ed. New York: Peter Lang, 107 - 114; W.V Heerden, 2006. Finding Africa in the Old Testament: Some hermeneutical and methodological considerations. *Old Testament Essays* 19.2: 500-524

³⁷ D.T. Adamo, 1987. The Black Prophet in the Hebrew Bible. *Journal of Arabic and Religious Studies*. 4:1 - 8

³⁸ D.T. Adamo, 1993. The Table of Nations reconsidered in African Perspective (Genesis 10), *Journal of African Religion and Philosophy*. 2: 138 - 143.

³⁹ D. T. Adamo, 1989. The African wife of Moses: an examination of Numbers 12:1-9. *Africa Theological Journal*. 18: 230 – 237. Also D. J. Hays, 1996, The Cushites: a black nation in ancient history, *Bibliotheca sacra* 153: 270 - 280

In the Prophets⁴⁰, Cush is mentioned in relation to both its reputation as a powerful potential alliance partner and individuals playing a role in the history of the people of YHWH. The Former Prophets have eight references to Cush (2 Sam 18:21 (x2), 22, 23, 31, 32 (x2); 2 Kgs 19:9), whereas the Latter Prophets have twenty-five references (Isa 11:1; 18:1; 20:3, 4, 5; 37:9; 43:3; 45:14; Jer 13:23; 36:14; 38:7, 10, 12; 39:16; 46:9; Ezek 29:10; 30:4, 5, 9; 38:5; Amos 9:7; Nah 3:9; Zeph 1:1; 2:12; 3:10). The eight references in the Former Prophets are found in two different narratives, both alluding to the military capacity of the Cushites. The first narrative (2 Sam 18) depicts a Cushite officer in King David's army (vv. 21–33) who reports Absalom's death to the king (vv. 32-33): "The king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" The Cushite answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up to do you harm, be like that young man...." The other narrative (2 Kgs 19) gives the Cushite king Taharqo a supporting role in the deliverance of Jerusalem (v. 9). Both narratives portray the two individuals from Cush as having important roles in society and implicitly in relation to the people of YHWH. This is a conviction that the Cushite played very important roles in the monarchy of Israel in king David's time. This, the Eurocentric biblical scholars could not have denied.

In the Writings, Cush and Cushites are mentioned seventeen times. The Psalms have three references (7:1; 68:32; 87:4), the Book of Job has one (28:19), in Esther there are two (1:1; 8:9), in Daniel there is one (11:43), 1 Chronicles has three references (1:8, 9, 10) whereas there are seven in 2 Chronicles (12:3; 14:8, 11, 12 (x2); 16:8; 21:16). Psalm 68:32 probably alludes to bringing tribute to YHWH in Jerusalem: "Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will quickly stretch out her hands to God." Psalm 87:4 also connects Cush to Zion by saying: "I will mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me – along with Philistia, Tyre, and Cush – when I say, 'This one was born in Zion.'" Job 28:19 mentions the valuable chrysolite of Cush, and alludes in this way to the wealth of

⁴⁰ R.W. Anderson, 1995. Zephaniah ben Cushi and Cush of Benjamin. *The Pitcher is Broken. Memorial Essays for Gosta W. Ahlstrom*. S.W. Holloway and L.K. Handy. Eds. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 45 – 70. Also G. Rice, 2009. The African roots of the Prophet Zephaniah, *The Journal of Religious Thought* 36: 21 – 31

Cush. In Esth 1:1; 8:9, Cush is referred to as the south-western border of the known world: “This happened in the days of Ahasuerus, the same Ahasuerus who ruled over one hundred twenty-seven provinces from India to Cush” (Esth 1:1). In Dan 11:43, Cushites are mentioned in the context of wealth and riches of Egypt. The holy war rhetoric in the narrative of 2 Chron 14:9–15 also relates Cush to military abilities: “Now Zerah the Cushite came out against them with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and he came to Mareshah” (v. 9).

From the foregoing, it is an undeniable fact that Cush geographically referred to a location in Africa, between southern Egypt and northern Sudan. It also certainly referred to proper names of some individuals, as it was and it is still customary of people to bear the name of their places of origin. This is still a common practice among the Hausa-Fulani extraction of Northern Nigeria. In addition, the derivative, Cushite, was correctly used by the authors of the Hebrew canon to designate ancient people of African descent. This was what Adamo painstakingly projected in his several scholarly works. This research aligns with Adamo on this. However, it challenges Adamo’s works in the sense that mere identification of Cush as Africa and Africans is not enough in helping African readers of the Old Testament harness their potentials.

5.5.2 Exegesis of Masenya (ngwan’a Mphahlele) usage of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31:10-31

Masenya’s major work is premised on the virtuous woman in the biblical text of Proverbs 31: 10-31. It forms the crux of her Doctorate degree and a book titled: How worthy is the woman of worth? The central issue in the passage is the illustriousness of the woman:

- 10** אִשֶׁת-חַיִל, מִי יִמְצָא; וְרָחֵק מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָה.
11 יֵא בָטַח בָּהּ, לֵב בַּעֲלָהּ; וְשָׁלָל, לֹא יִחָסֵר.
12 יֵב גָּמְלָתָהּ טוֹב וְלֹא-רָע-- כֹּל, יָמֵי חַיֶּיהָ.
13 יֵג דָּרְשָׁה, צָמֹר וּפְשָׁתִים; וַתַּעַשׂ, בְּחִפְזָא כְּפִיָּהּ.
14 יֵד הִיָּתָה, כְּאֲנִיּוֹת סוּחָר; מְמַרְחֵק, תָּבִיא לַחֲמָה.

- 15 טו ותקם, בעוד לילה--ותמן טרף לביתה; וחק, לנערותיה.
- 16 טז זממה שדה, ותקחהו; מפרי כפיה, נטע (נטעה) פרום.
- 17 יז חגרה בעוז מתניה; ותאמץ, זרועותיה.
- 18 יח טעמה, כי טוב סחרה; לא יכבה בליל (בלילה) גרה.
- 19 יט ידיה, שלחה בפישור; וכפיה, תמכו פלד.
- 20 כ כפה, פרשה לעני; וידיה, שלחה לאביון.
- 21 כא לא תירא לביתה משלג: פי כל ביתה, לבש שנים.
- 22 כב מרבדים עשתה-לה; שש וארגמן לבושה.
- 23 כג נודע בפוערים בעלה; בשבתו, עם זקני-ארץ.
- 24 כד סדין עשתה, ותמפר; וחגור, נתנה לפנעני.
- 25 כה עז-והדר לבושה; ותשחק, ליום אחרון.
- 26 כו פיה, פתחה בחכמה; ותורת חסד, על-לשונה.
- 27 כז צופיה, הילכות (הליכות) ביתה; ולקחם עצלות, לא תאכל.
- 28 כח קמו בנייה, ויאשרוה; בעלה, ויהללה.
- 29 כט רבות בנות, עשו חיל; ואת, עלית על-פלנה.
- 30 ל שקר חסו, והכל היפי: אשה יראת-יהוה, היא תתהלל.
- 31 לא תנו-לה, מפרי ידיה; ויהלוה בשערים מעשיה. {ש}

^{RSV} **Proverbs 31:10**⁴¹ A good wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

¹² She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.

¹³ She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands.

¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar.

¹⁵ She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and tasks for her maidens.

¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.

¹⁷ She girds her loins with strength and makes her arms strong.

⁴¹BibleWorks 5 software

- ¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night.
- ¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.
- ²⁰ She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- ²¹ She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet.
- ²² She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- ²³ Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.
- ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers girdles to the merchant.
- ²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.
- ²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
- ²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- ²⁸ Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:
- ²⁹ "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all."
- ³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
- ³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

Some biblical scholars prefer to translate אִשְׁת־חַיִל (*heshet hayil*) as “woman”, while others prefer “wife” probably because the woman’s husband and children are mentioned in the passage. (Both “wife” and “woman” are possible translations of the Hebrew *ishshah*.) Indeed, she finds fulfilment in her family and ensures that “her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land” (Prov. 31:23). But the text focuses on the woman’s work as an entrepreneur with a cottage industry and its servants/workers to manage (Prov. 31:15). Proverbs 31:10-31 does not merely apply to the workplace; it takes place in a workplace.

Translators variously use the words “good” (RSV), “virtuous” (KJV), “capable” (NRSV), “excellent” (NASB), or “of noble character” (NIV) to describe this woman’s character in Prov. 31:10. But these terms fail to capture the element of strength or might present in the underlying Hebrew word (*hayil*). When applied to a man, this same term is translated “strength,” as in Prov. 31:3. In a great majority of its 246 appearances in the Old Testament, it applies to fighting men (e.g., David’s “mighty warriors,” 1 Chronicles 7:2). Translators tend to downplay the element of strength when the word is applied to a

woman, as with Ruth, whom English translations describe as “noble” (NIV, TNIV), “virtuous” (NRSV, KJV) or “excellent” (NASB). But the word is the same, whether applied to men or women. In describing the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31, its meaning is best understood as strong or valiant, as further indicated by Prov. 31:17, “She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong.” Al Wolters argues on account of such martial language that the most appropriate translation is “Valiant Woman.” Accordingly, we will refer to the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 as the “Valiant Woman,” which captures both the strength and the virtue carried by the Hebrew *hayil*

Proverbs 31:10-31 A virtuous woman.... The Revised Version follows the order of the Hebrew: A virtuous woman who can find? Giving emphasis by the arrangement of the words to the subject of the whole section, that is, from verses 10 to 31. It should be noted that the passage is termed acrostic because the beginning of each verse starts with successive letters in the Hebrew alphabet. This same acrostic and poetic device is found also in Psalm 119. Two points are to be noted:

- i. She is a *virtuous woman* - a woman of power and strength. *esheth hayil*, a strong or virtuous wife, full of mental energy.
- ii. She is *invaluable*; her *price is far above rubies*-no quantity of precious stones can be equal to her worth.

“Virtuous” literally a woman of might, or power, or capacity. The conditions of woman’s life and her social position in those times and countries must be borne in mind. The rendering, virtuous, is retained in Revised Standard Version, King James Version etc. Some other English versions have it as “excellent” or “noble”. However, it should be of note that it was the enterprising nature of the woman that qualified her as being virtuous and no better English representation of the Hebrew word could probably be found. But virtuous must here be understood, not in the restricted sense which, in this connection, it has come to have in our language (though in that sense the phrase appears to be used in Proverbs 12:4, and perhaps in Ruth 3:11), but in the wider sense of “all virtuous living” The idea of capacity, Genesis 47:6, where the Hebrew word is the same) is involved in the description which follows. The picture here drawn of woman in her proper sphere of home, as a wife and a mother and the mistress of a household, stands out

in bright relief against the dark sketches of woman degraded by impurity, or marred by imperfections, which are to be found in earlier chapters of this book (Proverbs 2:16-20; 5:1-23; 7; 22:14; 23:27-28, and Proverbs 11:22; Proverbs 19:13; Proverbs 21:19). We have here woman occupying and adorning her rightful place, elevated by anticipation to the high estate of power, influence and industriousness.

With respect to Masenya's interpretation of the passage, she did not consider the fact that in traditional Israelite's setting; a woman finds and establishes her virtue within the context of the home (marriage) and her relationship with others in the larger society. This seems to be the sense in which the writer described the woman as virtuous.

5.6 Repositioning Decolonisation in biblical scholarship in Africa

The Christian gospel cannot be seen apart from the socioeconomic status of the people. Thus, first of all, a cross-cultural methodology has to address the present status of poverty, hunger, disease, and political instability in the continent. In this sense, salvation for an African must no longer be approached as an issue of life after death but rather as lived-out experience. More so, a cross-cultural methodology must have a holistic and ethical agenda capable of bringing into being a new person and a qualitatively different society.⁴² Consequently, the socioeconomic reality of Africa can only be properly addressed by a methodology that takes the biblical text seriously, because the God of the exodus as well as the prophetic writings of the Old Testament was focused on overthrowing the oppressive status quo.

The Magna Carta of the historical Jesus is an example of liberation praxis, and the apologetic literature of the New Testament carries a message of practical life.⁴³ Thus, biblical interpretation in Africa needs to be politically and culturally relevant. The call for cross-cultural interpretation was first put forth by Richard Rohrbaugh, who, based on his study of the Bible as a product of the Mediterranean world, argued, "Cross-cultural reading of the Bible is not a matter of choice. This means that for all non-Mediterraneans, including all Americans and other Euro-centric scholars, reading the

⁴² M. Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), 2009. *The Bible and poverty in African Pentecostal Christianity*...27

⁴³ see, e.g., Luke 4:16-19).

Bible is always an exercise in cross-cultural communication. It is only a question of doing it poorly or doing it well” The truth of such a statement cannot be doubted, for it points to the ambivalent nature of the Bible as it crosses cultural and ethnic boundaries of the world. This truth needs to be received by African critics as prophetic words in the twenty-first century world. Since the Bible is not a product of ours, our approach is in many cases ideological, and, as such, the misunderstanding that results is enormous and pervasive. Thus, cross-cultural readings belong to a more comprehensive line of approach known as social-scientific criticism. Consequently, a cultural-sensitive reading is needed, especially in today’s Africa where the majority of people practice African-Christianity. The Euro-American readings need to be challenged because, despite their claim to superiority, such readings do not constitute a standard for all humanity. The Bible has crossed cultures, so it must be read through cultural lenses. A fundamental factor to be taken into account in this regard is that, before the 1890s, missionaries had scant respect for traditional African culture. Yet culture is the life-centre of meaning-making for tribal nations. However, missionary contact with African religion resulted in new perspectives among some missionaries, especially the Roman Catholics, who, after experiencing the healing power of African medicine, began to have a new understanding of African spiritual ways. A cross-cultural methodology must seek to bring traditional and ritual practices into African Christian worship. This is crucial, because Africans regard therapy as the means through which God speaks and meets their needs.

Today we experience African-Christianity as having embraced both Western and traditional healing methods. The way African converts to Christianity understand the new religion is conditioned by their long-established traditional beliefs and values. While a cross-cultural methodology can be given prominence, the historical-critical method need not be forgotten in light of its complementary role, since its focus is on the past character of the text as well as on illuminating the present.

Related to therapy is the notion of “causality” or power, which is believed by Africans to constitute an inherent aspect of the created universe and which is a vital energy that pervades the world and is responsible for everything that happens. Western biblical interpretation has never taken this concept into account, yet it forms part of an

African's relationship with God. African Christians have a deep thirst and hunger to understand ways through which they can encounter this power, not just in abstract terms but also in concrete ways. For an African, nothing happens without a cause, and therefore any form of good life as well as bad fortune has to be addressed on the basis of this power, believed to be God. This power is like electricity, in that it too is ubiquitous, occurring in some degree in all things, but unevenly.⁴⁴ This approach characterized as cross-cultural interpretation has uttermost value in allowing Africans to see themselves not as individuals but as community-oriented people. Historical criticism and its rival methods, as part of the project of the Enlightenment, are steeped in individualism and advocate for individual salvation. Thus, cross-cultural readings encounter the older methods with the question of community. In this sense, biblical interpretation is not the result of a stand-alone exercise; rather, it forms part and parcel of the social location of a people. It is a known fact that Africans are keen to know their past, their present, and their future. These three perspectives point to what Africans refer to as community. It is a community that brings together the "Living Dead," the physically living, and the unborn.⁴⁵ Africans are notoriously obsessed with the world of ancestors - a world that is still opaque to most Western biblical readers and interpreters. This world cannot be opened by the historical-critical method, but it can be accessed through the perspective of Africans. It must be added that decolonised cultural readings value pluralism and respect diversity. Our call for cross-cultural biblical criticism/hermeneutics is not an attack on other methods, and neither is it an attack on the Bible. Our aim is to remind twenty-first century readers about the ambivalent nature of the Bible, especially given its use by missionaries and colonizers to promote an ideology of power and dominance. A decolonised cultural hermeneutic has, among other things, the liberating effect of the word of Jesus. In other words, this methodology seeks to contextualize Jesus within the worldview of Africans. Theologically speaking, there will be no incarnation of Jesus in Africa unless scholars and clergy interpreters make an effort to read the Bible contextually. The words of Canaan Banana are relevant here: "Jesus Christ is not a product of the Bible. He existed

⁴⁴ S.S. Ndogo, 2014. The plausibility of Proverbs 31 as final parental (motherly) instruction, *Journal for Semitics*, 23:1, 172

⁴⁵ M.E. Baloyi, 2010. The Sustentatie problem in the Reformed churches of South Africa: Unmasking the dilemma facing black theologians, *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa*. 105: 421-433

before the Bible; the Bible is a product of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁶ In other words, what Banana is arguing for is a contextualization of Jesus among the liberated people of Africa - a notion that is pertinent to all African-Christians. A methodology that refuses to become indigenous runs the risk of being rejected by the people. For Africa, cross-cultural reading is not an option but a required practice. While Africans did not know Jesus prior to the coming of missionaries, their encounter with God cannot be doubted. The young African-Christian breeds are searching for a new image or a new face in consonance with their culture. They want to know how Christianity relates to Africa on matters of culture, religion, political and economic development, modern technology, business ethics, and many such other issues.⁴⁷ Young African Christians continue to dream of a contextualized church where the gospel will be authentically African. All that have been said so far leads to one fundamental question: Has the Gospel been truly contextualized in Africa, or does it continue to struggle? The answer to this question can be addressed on two fronts. First, African traditional religion responded well to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and credit for this should be given to the monotheistic nature of African faith. Second, it should also be mentioned that African religion prepared people to be receptive of Jesus Christ, without naming him in the way the writings of the New Testament do. Therefore, the African Jesus is known by a variety of names. Thus, African religion has certainly played a complementary role in the spread of the Jesus movement. At the same time, it has gone a step further by allowing Jesus to find home in the African worldview. Hence, we need a methodology that speaks to the way Jesus has been contextualized in Africa. It should be added that the world of the Bible and that of African Christianity have overlapped and dovetailed in many important aspects. Together the two have strongly affected the Christianity that is emerging today. In the same manner, the emerging Christology bears the marks of African religion, similar to those found in the New Testament writings. Biblical interpretation in Africa must assist Christians in restoring their self-esteem, so that their voices cease to be private and become public. At the same time, African Christians must take responsibility for deciding whether they want to adopt

⁴⁶ A.M. Okorie, 2000. Jesus and the eschatological Elijah. *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa* 73:189-192

⁴⁷ J.E. Botha, 2000. The (ir)relevancy of the academic study of the Bible, *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa*. 73:121-140

Western modes of Christianity or develop their own local interpretations. Here issues of sexuality, gender, and patriarchal modes of thinking, as well as socio-religious and socio-political happenings must be taken into account when reading the Bible. In effect, any meaningful and life-giving interpretation must be sensitive to local culture and foregrounding of biblical hermeneutics.

Nevertheless, the diversity of the African context calls for a reading strategy that is different from that of our former Euro-American masters. In the light of the appropriation of Christianity in Africa, indigenous faith practitioners need to ask themselves certain fundamental questions: Do we, as African Christians, understand who we are and where we are going in this increasingly globalized world, where conformity to technological pressures seems to be the norm? Africa is diverse ethnically and racially, and thus in matters of culture one cannot talk of a common language, a common race, or even a single nation. While the translation of the Bible into a multitude of African languages represents a major accomplishment, we still need a methodology that will respect and honour all these diverse languages. Within these cultures we find that the majority of people are controlled by those in power, especially the ones who succeeded the colonial masters. Thus our exegesis has to aim at elevating all marginalized voices - especially those of women, youth, and children. The rich diversity in Africa pushes all exegetes to think of an approach that is holistic, inclusive, ethical, and pluralistic. Holistic thinking means that we see every tribe and culture as of value in matters of biblical interpretation. Every interpretation must be ethically relevant so as to contextualize Jesus within the culture of a people. Failure to respect and value each culture will lead to failure in addressing the issues facing Africa today, and our interpretations will be rendered useless as a result. As Christians and as professional interpreters of the Bible, our readings must be part of our faith as well as our witness in the spread of the gospel. It must be added here that life-situation exegesis is a must for all biblical interpreters. Life-situation exegesis has the agenda of lifting up biblical themes such as the all-encompassing parenthood of God, the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind, peace and justice, reconciliation, and many other aspects that are part of our common bond as a human family. From this perspective, ideological readings must be challenged because they do not accord a safe platform to all cultures. African diversity

means that our exegetical practices must be African in nature and in approach. They must not be an imitation of Western readings but must endeavour to open new vistas in biblical interpretation. Rather than viewing the Bible as a site of struggle, the Bible should be approached as a tool that helps us value diversity and see a God who is genderless and impartial to all nations, peoples, and races. To borrow Gerald West's terminology, we must read "with" other cultures in mind. Reading "with" all cultures means creating critical readings for the masses and building communities of cross-cultural faith that find their ground of being in God's voice.⁴⁸

The issue of research in appropriating the gleanings of Decolonisation in biblical studies needs to receive special attention because by their very calling, African scholars should be agent of research that produce "new knowledge" based on their intellectual tradition.⁴⁹ Ideally, research should be socially relevant, that is, it should deal with issues of leadership, intercultural contexts and conflicts, values-based education at all levels, and especially inculturation. Cultural sensitivities, such as ethnicities, languages, religions, social classes, nationalities and daily problems, should motivate African exegetes to reshape and align their findings to the restoration of hope and a better life for all. This implies that contextualisation and experiential learning takes place. Central to this assertion is the fact that it allows people to 'choose' academic excellence without losing a sense of personal and cultural identity.⁵⁰ The aim is eventually to empower Africans to critically examine the society in which they live and to work for social change. This would assist them to understand their role in the community, the nation and the world. The purpose of biblical scholarship in Africa, and of life in general would have been achieved. This is what makes African biblical scholarship in Old Testament Studies relevant.

Africa has customs and traditions that need to be respected. In particular, some of these are closely linked to customs and traditions in the Old Testament, which should not

⁴⁸ G.O.West, 1999. Reading with the ordinary reader...45

⁴⁹ R. Powell, 1997. Then the beauty emerges: a longitudinal case study of culturally relevant teaching. *TTE* 13.5: 474.

⁵⁰ G. J. Ladson-Billings, 1992. Readings between the lines and beyond the pages: A culturally relevant approach to literacy teaching. *Theory-in-practice* 31: 314

be ignored in the teaching of Old Testament Studies.⁵¹ On the contrary, these need to be pointed out all the more clearly, and to be taken into consideration. Many comparative studies have already been carried out between the Old Testament and Africa. Living as we do in a multicultural society, we need every possible means to learn about and understand the rich rituals of those about us. In discovering parallels between the cultural worlds of the Bible and those of contemporary cultures, the ideal is to see one's own culture and that of others in a new light and to become aware of the need for cultural tolerance and sensitivity. These African groups with their values similar in what obtained in the Old Testament, have the capacity and commitment to be motivated future leaders who might participate in building a better society in Africa. The aim is to create an awareness of the relevance that African traditional cultures may have for the understanding (and teaching) of certain institutions and practices in the Bible.

There is yet another reason why the Old Testament plays an important role in Africa. Early missionaries first came to Africa with the message, and later with the translation of, the New Testament. Translations into numerous African languages of the bulkier and much older Old Testament followed, which was then perceived as the more important of the two Testaments. The Old Testament's relevance to their own life experience was found by grass-roots readers in the passages of the Old Testament. "The twentieth century made the Old Testament an African book".⁵² An increasing tendency to relate the texts of the Old Testament more systematically to the African religio-cultural and socio-cultural experience developed rapidly. The idea of the Africanisation of Old Testament Studies forms part of the more general search for the Africanisation of the humanities as a whole and is part of a process of rooting biblical studies in African soil. Since it is no longer possible to put questions relating to the ancient practices and institutions to the people of the Old Testament, there are many uncertainties about certain practices and the teaching employed and passed on during certain religious rituals. Certain cultural groups in Africa with similar practices and institutions (with an

⁵¹ G.O.West, 2018. *White men, Bibles and land: ingredients in biblical Interpretations in South African Black Theology*, Pretoria: UNISA

⁵² G. J. Ladson-Billings, 1992. *Readings between the lines and beyond the pages...*314

oral culture) could serve as additional sources – “living sources” – to help clarify certain aspects.

The challenges and suggestions outlined above challenge us on two fronts. First, we must endeavour to do our interpretation in full awareness of other cultures. In the case of Africa, we must realize that the days of demonizing the West are over and that it is time to redefine ourselves in relation with other global contexts. Africa must be relevant, first and foremost, to its own indigenized faith and practices, but also to the entire world. Second, Africa needs to make its contribution to the world by being a partner in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. This entails creativity and originality on the part of our reading and interpretive methods. In fact, what makes African Christianity distinctive is its existential approach to Christianity: a practice born out of years of oppression and dehumanization by colonizers. In the field of biblical hermeneutics, African biblical scholars run the risk of recycling Euro-Western ideas under their own new brand names. The branding can change to African without the content changing significantly. The content will not change if African biblical scholars do not take radical steps to rethink biblical hermeneutics from the underside of modernity or the underside of the colonial matrix of power.⁵³

5.6.1 Decolonisation as an instrument of cultural re-orientation and self-assertiveness

Within African scholarship, one sees a commitment to relate biblical scholarship to the realities of Africa, an oppositional stance towards the missionary-colonial enterprise which brought the Bible to Africa, a recognition that the Bible is an important text in the African context which must be engaged with and by critical scholarship, and a preference for socio-historical modes of analysis for both the biblical text and the African context. This reaction of the African academy to missionary-colonial imperialism does not appear to be particularly widespread beyond the academy and, for the most part, appears antithetical to the ordinary African believer and pastor who are gratefully

⁵³ H. Ramantswana, 2016. Decolonising biblical hermeneutics in the (South) African context, *Acta Theologica Suppl* 24:178-203. Retrieved October 30, 2017 from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v36i1.11S>

cognizant of the work of European missionaries, in particular, who introduced them to Christianity's book and taught them to read it

While for some the Bible “will always be linked to and remembered for its role in facilitating European imperialism,”⁵⁴ hopefully the recognition that the Bible is not a western book will ultimately provide grounds for opposing the present institutional need of reading the Bible for decolonization. Musa Dube has posed the question of “why the biblical text, its readers, and its institutions are instruments of imperialism”⁵⁵ as the first part of the task of postcolonial hermeneutics. However, if that becomes the first question to ask in the task of the understanding the text, then engagement with this very inquiry will surely lead to the excesses of a hermeneutic bereft of objectivity – an essential objectivity that lies at the heart of the inductive methodological approach to biblical study.

A very important question is raised here. Has the Gospel been truly contextualized in Africa, or does it continue to struggle? The answer to this question can be addressed on two fronts. First, African traditional religion responded well to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and credit for this should be given to the monotheistic nature of African faith. Second, it should also be mentioned that African religion prepared people to be receptive of Jesus Christ, without naming him in the way the writings of the New Testament do. Therefore, the African Jesus is known by a variety of names which of course is outside the scope of this research. Thus, African religion has certainly played a complementary role in the spread of the Jesus movement. At the same time, it has gone a step further by allowing Jesus to find home in the African worldview. Hence, we need a methodology that speaks to the way Jesus has been contextualised in Africa. It should be added that the world of the Bible and that of African Christianity have overlapped and dovetailed in many important aspects. Together the two have strongly affected the Christianity that is emerging today. In the same manner, the emerging Christianity bears the marks of African religion, similar to those found in the Old and New Testament writings. Biblical interpretation in Africa must assist Christians in restoring their self-esteem, political

⁵⁴ I. J. Mosala, 1989. *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 67.

⁵⁵ M. W. Dube, 2000. *Postcolonial Feminism Interpretation of the Bible*. St. Louis: Chalice, 3.

consciousness and advancement so that their voices cease to be private and become public. At the same time, African Christians must take responsibility for deciding whether they want to adopt Western modes of Christianity or develop their own local interpretations. Here issues of sexuality, gender, and patriarchal modes of thinking, as well as socio-religious and socio-political issues must be taken into account when reading the Bible. In effect, any meaningful and life-giving interpretation must be sensitive to local culture.

It is necessary to point out that “the African context” is complicated further by the parceling up of territory by denominations often in conjunction with the colonial enterprise. The result has been lasting missionary ecclesio-theological memories that continue to affect African biblical hermeneutics to the present time. In his detailed study of the role of religion in the making of the Yoruba people of West Africa, J.D.Y. Peel reminds us of the enduring impact of the missionary endeavour in African biblical interpretation, the clearest cases being those of the Catholic and the Evangelical missionary ecclesio-theological legacies and the more recent impact of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.⁵⁶ The problem facing the church in Africa today is a distinct lack of ability to hear the text, first in its original *Sitz im Leben*, its own sociohistorical context, and then second, in its consideration of the writer’s intent, and third, in its unbiased approach to the African context and, in a larger sphere, to the world. African scholars are often eclectic in their approach and the ideo-theological orientation of a particular biblical interpreter tends to define the focal point of analysis.

The idea that African interpreters often blur the original and present meaning of the text - what was meant with what is meant - may be indicative of a holistic worldview intrinsic to African thinking and symptomatic of Max Wertheimer’s understanding of Gestaltian theory: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.⁹ As best I understand philosophical and psychological holism, there appears to be two divergent views: that of Wertheimer, on the one hand, and that of Kurt Koffka on the other. The latter insists that

⁵⁶ J. D. Y. Peel, 2000. *Religious encounter and the making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

the Gestaltian approach might be better summed up in the statement the whole is different from the sum of its parts as opposed to the summation of the parts.

5.6.2 Decolonisation and women empowerment

The quest for gender emancipation and ideal womanhood championed by Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele)) in her researches make it apparently different from mainline feminism, as understood in the western world. Regarding feministic tendencies in the Euro-American world and its “unhealthy and incomprehensible” influence on African women, Peter Adegoke, a Humanist and Development Sociologist gave an insight into some extreme yet critical repudiations of feminism. He said that...before they popularise the “nonsense” going on now on twitter as facts, especially the ”BeingFemaleinNigeria hashtag”, we need to make certain that they do not bastardise our worldviews as they are rapidly doing theirs. Not everything from the West should be adopted at face value without putting them to some sane crucible tests of our traditional system and not everything African is evil as some would want us think. Africa women are not to be victimised. Granted, there are some of our traditions which still discriminate against women but truth be told, aside from the influence of Islam and Christianity, our traditional African values recognised women and empowered them. Queen Amina of Zazzau and Moremi of Ile Ife were all powerful women. Most people do not know the super roles played by Efunroye Tinubu who was the first woman to buy a car and who had so much power that the British became her adversary at a time because of her immense power. The Iyalode of Ibadan, Efunsetan Aniwura was a woman of substance in her own right. It is therefore misleading to paint African men as anti-women which is one of the tactics of radical feminists who will victimise women and blame everything on men. The agenda is not to fight for equal rights but anti-men with various obnoxious claims backed up with skewed science. They will never tell you the great support provided by the husband of the current richest black woman on earth, Mrs Folorunsho Alakija, or the roles played by the husbands of Okonjo Iweala, Late Dora Akuyili, and Obi Ezekwesili but they will trumpet to high heavens pockets of examples of insecure men who beat their wives and make it sound as if all Nigerian men do the same. We must fight for equal rights, but not by hiding the banner of those with ulterior motives whose aim is to destabilise family

values and paint everything African as evil. Their idea is to celebrate divorce and demonise marriage. Some of us as Africans might be anti-religious but we do not buy all the “bull-shit” of people with ulterior agenda. There are countless Nigerian men who are responsible and who support their wives to be the women they want to be. It is therefore instructive to tell these hardline Euro-American feminists: keep your warped idea of who an ideal woman should be to your continent; we are not buying your propaganda. A woman is not strong because of her pseudo-masculinity, but a strong woman is such who is not afraid of her femininity and who does not see womanhood and motherhood as weakness. Keep your issues off our land!⁵⁷

Arising from the submission above, there is the need for African biblical scholars to canvass for women empowerment. The biblical text and other contemporary emerging feminist perspectives and the empowerment of the Bible in Christianity influences today’s women who read the bible or listen to biblical narratives being explained. For example, cracked bones, a black eye and a bloody nose, due to aggression by men, in contrast with their perception of their circumstances, are not the only issues to be fought against in feministic quarters. Women are encouraged to speak and to voice the discriminations and exploitations against them, causing the walls of patriarchy in our societies to crumble down. Even if we cannot fight patriarchy in one day, women can still raise their voices higher and fight it. Here, the church and biblical scholars come in.

The church has a vital function to fulfil in the empowerment of women. The Bosadi theology raises its voice, this time not to stand against, but to applaud all the churches (in some where women are pastors) that encourage women to study theology and allow them to serve in leadership positions, not only as leaders of other women or as pastors to the children, but also as pastors to the church. The church must intensify efforts at raising voices along with many other voices in the churches that are united and encourage the churches' decision to empower women. The church could also sponsor women’s economic projects so that women can be economically viable. Many churches have preaching themes for a whole quarter or for a year; the church could deliberately choose a theme on women empowerment in order to address women’s issues in the

⁵⁷ P. Adegoke, 2010. Feminism in the African perspective. An unpublished Seminar paper

church. When this is done, then decolonization in biblical studies regarding womanhood would be seen as leaving the comforts of the academia, thereby connecting “town and gown.”

With respect to the current treatment of women and on the basis of women empowerment, including many other biblical texts that are read only with the intention to strengthen women's inferior position, not only in society but also in the church, the *bosadi* hermeneutics suggests the following to the church and its leadership as well as African biblical scholarship:

- Courses should be designed with women leadership in mind.
- Intentional pastoral and leadership trainings should be geared for women.
- As scriptures are used to strengthen women's inferior position, they should also be used to strengthen women's leadership roles in the church.
- the church should encourage more women to study, teach and do research in biblical studies/theology.
- Women should be exposed to different fields such as gender studies, human behavioural sciences, and ethical leadership that add value to their work in the family, church and the society at large.

5.6.3 Decolonisation and political liberation

It is a fact that Apartheid is no more in South Africa. The African National Congress (ANC) which is predominantly black dominated, as a political party now holds sway in the political arena. Political independence had been attained but liberation seems to still be a mirage. The ruling party had had issues of corruption levelled against some of its members, including former president, Jacob Zuma. One is then forced to ask: has ideal political liberation been attained? Some people are of the view that the governance of white South Africans brought infrastructural development while their black counterparts amassed wealth to the consternation and chagrin of the general populace! This is a sort of dilemma. So it behoves on African Old Testament scholars to ask whether it is better to align with the Euro-American tradition in biblical scholarship or continue to champion

the cause of decolonised biblical scholarship.⁵⁸ The second option ought to be the choice of any serious and concerned African biblical scholar. This is because it brings some sort of therapy to the soul.

Related to therapy is the notion of “causality” or power, which is believed by Africans to constitute an inherent aspect of the created universe and which is a vital energy that pervades the world and is responsible for everything that happens. Western biblical interpretation has never taken this concept into account, yet it forms part of an African’s relationship with God. African Christians have a deep thirst and hunger to understand ways through which they can encounter this power, not just in abstract terms but also in concrete ways. For an African, nothing happens without a cause, and therefore any form of good life as well as bad fortune has to be addressed on the basis of this power, believed to be God. This power is like electricity, in that it too is ubiquitous, occurring in some degree in all things, but unevenly. This approach has uttermost value in allowing Africans to see themselves not as individuals but as community-oriented people. Historical criticism and its rival methods, as part of the project of the Enlightenment, are steeped in individualism and advocate for individual salvation. Thus, political hermeneutical readings encounter the older methods with the question of community. In this sense, biblical interpretation is not the result of a stand-alone exercise; rather, it forms part and parcel of the social location of a people. It is a known fact that Africans are keen to know their past, their present, and their future. These three perspectives point to what Africans refer to as community. It is a community that brings together the “Living Dead,” the physically living, and the unborn, according to Mbiti. Africans are notoriously obsessed with the world of ancestors - a world that is still opaque to most Western biblical readers and interpreters. This world cannot be opened by the historical-critical method, but it can be accessed through the perspective of Africans. It must be added that political liberation hermeneutics value pluralism and respect diversity. The present call of political liberation hermeneutics is not an attack on other methods, and neither is it an attack on the Bible. The aim is to remind twenty-first century readers about the ambivalent nature of the Bible, especially given its use by missionaries and colonisers to promote an ideology

⁵⁸ P. O.Aigbekaen, 2018. Well-fed slaves, hungry free men (and women): a dilemma in African biblical scholarship. An unpublished paper presented at the Joint Staff/Students seminar at RCBC, Main Campus.

of power and dominance. It has, among other things, the liberation effect of the word of Jesus. In other words, this methodology seeks to contextualize Jesus within the worldview of Africans. Theologically speaking, there will be no incarnation of Jesus in Africa unless scholars and clergy interpreters make an effort to read the Bible contextually.

In our engagement with lay people, we must remember that we have been called to be a critical intelligentsia, individuals who are not comfortable with the status quo in our societies. Our call is to afflict the comfortable and transform the uncomfortable. The problem with African ecclesial leaders and biblical interpreters is that they have to some extent aligned themselves with the status quo and become comfortable in their individual settings. Ukpong, has argued that critical scholars must not be comfortable with the status quo of oppression and domination of the poor. While faith has played a major role in biblical studies, the world of the twenty-first century calls us to grow beyond the naive faith of the past - a faith that has proved to be an illusion.⁵⁹ Biblical interpretation in Africa must be done in the spirit of mutual respect, which means that all cultures must be allowed to define God in their own terms. The Old Testament is a record of peoples whose lives and faith responses to God provide a window of lessons for the present generation. All cultures have a record of such people or heroes. These heroes are similar to figures such as Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, and Isaac, insofar as they point people to ethical and spiritual ways of living; yet, they are not talked about in the field of biblical interpretation. This way of allowing religious and spiritual voices should shape the ethos of African cultural readings of the Bible.

5.6.4 Implications/deductions from Decolonisation in Old Testament Studies

The outcome of African biblical hermeneutics should not only be for academic purposes. Getting to know that Africa and Africans are mentioned or played vital roles in the Old Testament, does not in any way pay the bills for a typical African. They want to see positive changes in their socioeconomic indices. Put succinctly, Africa craves more

⁵⁹ J. S. Ukpong, 1995. Re-reading the Bible with African eyes. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91:314.

for sustenance of life than a barrage of academic nay biblical theories that may contribute little or nothing to their wellbeing. Hence, it becomes necessary that the gleanings from decolonized biblical studies should not be in abstract but in concrete terms. African Old Testament scholars can encourage the church that rather than continue in the rat-race and unhealthy competition of having the largest auditorium or prayer grounds, Christian bodies should be encouraged to diversify their funds into agricultural enterprises, involving large scale farming where numerous members will work and earn a living.

Scholars should increase the call for de-escalation of the quest to amass wealth by Christian leaders. This is becoming a big issue in Christianity. Instead of amassing wealth, several empowerment programmes and ventures should be established by the church. In so doing, biblical scholars would heave a sigh of relief that decolonisation in biblical studies has restored the long lost benefits of human capacity development.

Within these cultures we find that the majority of people are controlled by those in power, especially the ones who succeeded the colonial masters. Thus our exegesis has to aim at elevating all marginalised voices - especially those of women, youth, and children. The rich diversity in Africa pushes all exegetes to think of an approach that is holistic, inclusive, ethical, and pluralistic. Holistic thinking means that we see every tribe and culture as of value in matters of biblical interpretation. Every interpretation must be ethically relevant so as to contextualise Jesus within the culture of a people. Failure to respect and value each culture will lead to failure in addressing the issues facing Africa today, and our interpretations will be rendered useless as a result. As Christians and as professional interpreters of the Bible, our readings must be part of our faith as well as our witness in the spread of the gospel. It must be added that life-situation exegesis is a must for all biblical interpreters. Life-situation exegesis has the agenda of lifting up biblical themes such as the all-encompassing parenthood of God, the brotherhood and sisterhood of humankind, peace and justice, reconciliation, and many other aspects that are part of our common bond as a human family. From this perspective, ideological readings must be challenged because they do not accord a safe platform to all cultures. African diversity means that our exegetical practices must be African in nature and in approach. They must not be an imitation of Western readings but must endeavour to open new vistas in biblical

interpretation. Rather than viewing the Bible as a site of struggle, the Bible should be approached as a tool that helps us value diversity and see a God who is genderless and impartial to all nations, peoples, and races. To borrow Gerald West's terminology, we must read "with" other cultures in mind. Reading "with" all cultures means creating critical readings for the masses and building communities of cross-cultural faith that find their ground of being in God's voice. The challenges, methodology, and suggestions outlined above challenge us on two fronts. First, we must endeavour to do our interpretation in full awareness of other cultures. In the case of Africa, we must realize that the days of demonising the West are over and that it is time to redefine ourselves in relation with other global contexts. Africa must be relevant, first and foremost, to its own indigenized faith and practices, but also to the entire world. Second, Africa needs to make its contribution to the world by being a partner in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. This entails creativity and originality on the part of our reading methods. In fact, what makes African Christianity distinctive is its existential approach to Christianity - a practice born out of years of oppression and dehumanisation by colonisers.

5.7 Findings

A critical analysis of the selected works of the three scholars: David Adamo, Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) and Gerald West, shows that the initial reason for their decolonisation quest was reactionary in nature. Reactions to the prevailing Euro-American hegemony in biblical hermeneutics as well as the need to charting new course of action for the future relevance of biblical scholarship in Africa to Africans, prompted these scholars into their quests. Very important were the selected works that tried to trace the origin of biblical hermeneutics by the Early Church Fathers, the roles of the foreign missionaries as well as their colonial imports into African Christianity. Arising from this periscope, the trio sought to champion different but interwoven pathways in order to liberate biblical studies from Western hegemony. They also sought to make biblical hermeneutics more pragmatic and relevant to African context, though multi-faceted. Adamo championed cultural empowerment by identifying selected Old Testament texts that specifically mention the roles of Africa and Africans. Such texts had previously been distorted by Euro-American biblical scholars.

Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) on her part, deviated from the Western views on feminism and proposed *Bosadi* – a gender complimentary hermeneutical lens for viewing womanhood as understood in the Northern Sotho province in South Africa. This view included the dignity of womanhood and the girl-child as well as emancipation of the less privileged, using the virtuous woman story in Proverbs 31:10-31. Gerald West in his quest sought to restore human dignity by championing political liberation for the oppressed black South Africans during the apartheid regime. He drew inferences from the Exodus story of liberation and used it as a pivot in his research endeavours. These culminated in what is now known as contextual Bible study, domiciled at the Ujamaa Centre of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Arising from these, the following findings were made.

1. The fact that Decolonisation in the works of Adamo, Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and West is reactionary is obvious. The trio reacted to the various issues that plagued the society. Adamo's concern dealt on cultural and ideological representation of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament with his deployment of \sqrt{WK} "Cush" and its derivative $\sqrt{v} \dot{\iota}^2 Wk$ "Cushite in arguing for the presence and contribution of Africa/Africans to the evolution of the Hebrew text (TaNaKh) Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) focused on womanhood emancipation. Using the $\perp y \perp x; \hat{a} - tv, ae$ (virtuous woman) for gender emancipation, she attempts drawing a line between western understanding and application of the term: feminism and her usage of *bosadi* (womanhood). West, on his part aligned with political liberation, a veritably needed cause of his time during the apartheid regime in South Africa. He asserts that political liberation is epitomised in the Old Testament Exodus story, but the Apartheid regime uses the biblical hermeneutics of the Exodus story to justify suppression and dominance
2. Findings revealed that colonisation in biblical hermeneutics had held sway since the time of the Early African Church Fathers. This was because most of the Church Fathers were groomed in European traditions and were even thought by their contemporaries as Europeans and not Africans.

3. Very noteworthy too, the Euro-American traditions and approaches to biblical hermeneutics were transferred to the early missionaries to Africa. This in turn influenced the nature, scope and syllabi of theological trainings given to most African theologians at the early stage.
4. Some of the scholars who had the privilege of being trained in universities and theological institutions in the Western world were “Eurocentrically wired” and the few who tried raising voices of dissention were labelled as rebellious.
5. Findings also revealed that at the initial stage, some African biblical scholars (for example, Adamo), had his manuscripts rejected by many major publishers on the fictitious grounds that Africans do not buy books! Other publishers and Euro-American scholars were bold enough to accuse African biblical scholars of trying to “smuggle” Africa into the Bible.
6. This research also discovered the apparent disagreement among the three scholars on the issue of Africa and the identity of an African. While Adamo and West support the fact that any one of African descent or ancestry, irrespective of their skin colour, place of birth and present location, should be seen as African, Masenya avowedly disagrees with them on the ground that white South Africans during the apartheid regime in South Africa had so many privileges and were not made to experience the harsh realities of life and subjugations in the hands of the apartheid regime.
7. The problem facing the church in Africa today is a distinct lack of ability to hear the text, first in its original *Sitz im Leben*, its own socio-historical context, and then second, in its consideration of the writer’s intent, and third, in its unbiased approach to the African context and, in a larger sphere, to the world. African scholars are often eclectic in their approach and the ideo-theological orientation of a particular biblical interpreter tends to define the focal point of analysis.
8. The idea that African interpreters often blur the original and present meaning of the text - what was meant with what is meant - may be indicative of a holistic worldview intrinsic to African thinking and symptomatic of Max Wertheimer’s understanding of Gestaltian theory: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. At best, there appears to be two strands or divergent views: that of Wertheimer, on

the one hand, and that of Kurt Koffka on the other. The latter insists that the Gestaltian approach might be better summed up in the statement: the whole is different from the sum of its parts as opposed to the summation of the parts.

9. More so, holism may be disadvantageous to the African biblical scholar who insists on biblical comprehension within an ideo-theological orientation. But within the methodological approach of Inductive Biblical Studies, the holistic philosophy intrinsic to the African mind can have distinct advantages. Holism asserts that systems should be viewed as wholes not collection of parts. Indeed one could reasonably argue philosophically that any doctrine that emphasises the priority of a whole over its parts is holism. This holistic emphasis ought not to be mistaken for reductionism (that a system is nothing more than the sum of its parts) nor deny the usefulness of divisions between the function of separate parts and the workings of the 'whole.' understood in this way, one can recognize the ready grasp of biblical research methodology by the African mind. As such, it is imperative that the discipline of inductive study be vigorously promoted in Africa to combat the ideo-theological tendencies of the African academy, but also the uncritical embrace of the populist Western preacher-propagandist and scholars.
10. This research also brought to limelight the fact that the African church is humbly aware that the centre of Christendom is moving to the global south and perceives its role in twenty-first Christianity to be of immense leadership significance. It is incumbent, therefore, that those in the global West make a huge investment in the future of the global church that latent apostasy be avoided and that God's Word will be more fully understood and communicated effectively, as is being championed by African Christianity and invigorated by African biblical scholars.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, attempts had been made at highlighting the fundamental challenges facing contemporary Africa, challenges that face all biblical interpreters both within and outside of the continent. It has also been argued that a cross-cultural approach, given the ambivalence of the Bible and the fact that it is not a product of our culture, or of Western culture either, be applied in transiting from theory to praxis. What such an approach entails is, on the one hand, a view of the Bible as conditioned by the time and

place in which it was written and, on the other hand, a sense of great humility and curiosity in entering its world as Africans. Through such immersion in strange Mediterranean readings of the Bible, we risk cultural as well as theological and spiritual shock. While a variety of critical methods has been applied in the study of the Bible, the truth of the matter is that they are not enough; we need a new and creative ways of reading the text. Our cross-cultural methods must make a new contribution to a global world hungry and thirsty for practical Christianity. Africa, alongside other “Third World Christian Faiths,” has offered the world an example of practical and lived-out faith. It is further emphasized that Africa must endeavour to be in partnership with the rest of the globalized world or else the consequences will be regrettable.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary

The work premised on decolonisation in the works of selected African Old Testament scholars: David Adamo, Madipoane Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) and Gerald West, who have written extensively on African biblical hermeneutics from the cultural, gender (womanhood) and political liberation perspectives, respectively.

The first chapter highlighted the background to the research, highlighting the superintending hermeneutic hegemony enjoyed by Euro-American biblical scholarship, and the need to question the rationale behind such stance. This informed the quest for decolonisation of biblical hermeneutics by African scholars. The second chapter reviewed relevant literature in the field of biblical scholarship, with emphasis on origin and development of biblical hermeneutics, the roles of some African church fathers; and western missionary influence, effects of the missionary approaches to biblical hermeneutics on African biblical scholarship. It also carried out a critical review of works on colonisation and decolonisation in biblical scholarship. It was discovered that both camps had been subjected to scholarly scrutiny in the recent past. The third chapter focused on research methodology. It basically addressed the procedure adopted for collection of information and analysis. It consists of research design, study area and population, sampling techniques, method of data collection, and analysis of data

The fourth chapter took a look at the works of the selected scholars, bearing in mind what they sought to achieve. While Adamo focused on cultural empowerment, Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) dwelt on womanhood emancipation. West, on his part, channelled his academic enterprise towards political liberation. Within the same chapter, Adamo's African Cultural Hermeneutics, Masenya's Bosadi Hermeneutics and West's Liberation Hermeneutics were carefully scrutinised. These strands were discovered to be as a result of the prevailing circumstances that surrounded the respective scholars then. Adamo was concerned with "re-Africanising" the Old Testament, since, according to

him: "...the Euro-American biblical scholars had long "de-Africanised" and still keep "de-Africanising." Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) on her part was poised to break loose (along with all black South African women) from the patriarchal hegemony the local culture, apartheid regime, and more conspicuously the Bible had subjected women to in South Africa. West, on his part, chose the pathway of political hermeneutics of liberation, using contextual Bible study and reading with the "ordinary readers." The fifth chapter took up an assessment of decolonisation in the works of the trio: Adamo, Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and West. The points of interaction between biblical text and African contexts were examined, along with apparent weaknesses of African Cultural Hermeneutics (which is ideological), *Bosadi* Hermeneutics (somewhat feministic), and Liberation Hermeneutics (political). More so, ways of repositioning decolonisation in Africa biblical scholarship were discussed. The sixth and final chapter had the summary, drawing necessary conclusion after which some recommendations were given, as well as contributions to knowledge.

6.2 Conclusion

From the research, it could be concluded that Adamo, Masenya (ngwana' Mphahlele) and West had been in the forefront of championing a biblical interpretive mode that makes Africa and issues of Africa their standpoint. However, this present work had been able to contribute to the body of existing knowledge by taking a critical look at the works of the three renowned African Old Testament scholars and biblicists. It is a fact that while their efforts are been applauded, they tend to have done their works as products of reactions to the prevailing experiences they had, rather than a critical analyses of the issues relating to Africa and African. However, their works are commendable.

In Africa, practical issues and the personal involvement of biblical scholars in the production of meaning cannot be bracketed out of the exegetical process. Exegesis produced in situations which are often desperate consider the cultivation of an ethos of detached objectivity to be a luxury. Already in 1976, at the first meeting of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), scholars from Africa, Asia and Latin America joined in speaking against a form of theological (including biblical) scholarship that did not take seriously the realities of life in the Third World:

Theologies from Europe and North America must be understood to have arisen out of situations related to those countries, and therefore must not be uncritically adopted without our raising the question of their relevance in the context of our countries. Indeed, we must, in order to be faithful to the gospel and to our peoples, reflect on the realities of our own situations and interpret the word of God in relation to these realities. We reject as irrelevant an academic type of theology that is divorced from action. We must be prepared for a radical break in epistemology which makes commitment the first act of theology and engages in critical reflection on the praxis of the reality of the Third World.

6.3 Recommendations

Arising from the research, the following recommendations are made

- a. There is need for further researches and collaborations in the field of decolonisation in biblical studies by African and empathetic Euro-American biblical scholars. This synergy will help in bridging the gap between the two sides.
- b. In line with Adamo's stance, African biblical scholars should continue to write and publish their works in reputable journals, hoping that with time, the "voices from the margins" will not only be heard, attention will be paid and their "cry" attended to.
- c. Contextual hermeneutics should be pursued vigorously by African biblical scholars. In so doing, they will be able to do more in connecting "town" and "gown."
- d. African biblical hermeneutics should be a course of study that should be made compulsory/required in all theological institutions in Africa, and at undergraduate levels in the Religious Studies Departments in the universities.
- e. There is also the need for the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) to not only grant waivers to scholars from Africa (and other parts of the "third world") via the International Cooperation Initiative (ICI) but to look into the possibility of having the Annual Meeting held in Africa again, taking a cue from the International Organisation for the Study of the Old Testament (IOSOT, in Stellenbosch, 2016). This will go a long way in enabling many African biblical

scholars to participate in international academic discourses on the future of African biblical studies.

6.4 Contributions to knowledge

It is an incontrovertible fact that the Western or Euro-American modes of biblical hermeneutics has held sway for a very long time before the advent of dissenting voices from Africa and other parts of the third world. One apparent fact is that these Euro-American approaches were not able to address Africa in its myriads of cultural, gender and political challenges that daily buffet Africans. African biblical researchers rose to the task. Taking a critical look at the selected works of Adamo, Masenya (Ngwan'a Mphahlele) and West, it is obvious from their interpretive enterprises that much as they tried, they still were not able to translate from theory to praxis. Arising from the above submissions, this research has been able to contribute to knowledge in the following ways.

1. That Africa and Africans are directly and indirectly mentioned in the historiography of the Old Testament has been brought to the fore. This formed the crux of Adamo's researches.
2. The mention of Africa and Africans in the Old Testament, with its renditions as "Cush" and "Cushite" helps to give a sense of belonging to African readers of the Old Testament. This therefore counters the erroneous beliefs and thoughts that Africans had no contribution to the TaNaKh.
3. Very importantly is the unveiling of the fact that as against the thought of many Western biblical scholars, African Church Fathers: Athanasius, Tertullian, and Augustine contributed immensely to biblical hermeneutics, early church doctrines and liturgies. These fathers were of African descent
4. Another important contribution to knowledge from this research is that Masenya's *bosadi* hermeneutics is not entirely the same as the hardline Euro-American Feminist biblical hermeneutics.
5. While the Apartheid regime in South Africa appealed to Exodus story, especially, the Egyptian side of the saga, in enslaving and brutalising the blacks, coloured and Indians, Gerald West appealed to the same Exodus story: the side of the oppressed Israelites in championing political liberation hermeneutics.

6. A proper synergy between African biblical scholarship and churches in Africa is canvassed. This will help in institutionalising decolonisation of the Bible in Africa., and thus bridging the gap between “town” and “gown” with respect to the gleanings from African biblical studies.
7. Though politically weaned from colonial masters, there is still a struggle among African biblical scholars on the dilemma of being “well-fed slaves” in continuing in Euro-American biblical studies approaches and modes; or being “hungry free (wo)men” with respect to continuing in the tradition of Ukpong, Adamo, Masenya (ngwan’a Mphahlele) and West.

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