

Accountable African Biblical Scholarship: Post-colonial and Tri-polar

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Introduction

The “time of African existence,” argues Achille Mbembe, can be characterised as “the *time of entanglement*,” for, “this time of African existence is neither a linear time nor a simple sequence in which each moment effaces, annuls, and replaces those that preceded it, to the point where a single age exists within a society. This time is not a series but an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures, each age bearing, altering, and maintaining the previous ones.”¹⁾

Entangled time is evident everywhere within African existence, including biblical interpretation. Though organic to Mediterranean North Africa, the Bible for much of Sub-Saharan Africa was part of the European imperial project of resource extraction. The Bible circumnavigated the African coastline from Europe to ‘the East’, steadily settling along the periphery of the African continent as the desire for resources escalated. And when colonial forces moved into the African ‘interior’, missionaries most often moved with them. From the late 1400s

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1) Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 16.

to the present, European colonial and neo-colonial economies of extraction have shaped what we call ‘Africa’, and the Bible is implicated in this long history.²⁾

1. Post-colonial

In this first part of the article we analyse the necessity of post-colonial engagement in a responsible African biblical scholarship. The Bible is entangled in interlocking ‘periods’ (Indigenous - Indigenous pre-colonial - Colonial neo-indigenous - Post-colonial/Neo-colonial) and trajectories of post-colonial Sub-Saharan Africa.

1.1. Southern African settler-colonialism

In Southern Africa, for example, the Bible ‘comforted’³⁾ the Dutch settlers of the *De Vereenichde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) (Dutch East India Company) who established a refreshment station at the Cape, inexorably encroaching on and seizing African land and cattle.⁴⁾ As Dutch settler-colonialism took hold of the Cape from 1652-1794, the Bible baptised, married, buried, and generated the myths that sustained European conquest.⁵⁾

2) Gerald O. West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 14-18.

3) One of the tasks of the ‘*sieketrooster*’ (sick-comforter), assigned to most VOC ships, was to be responsible for the public reading of the Bible; West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 44-48; Johannes Petrus Claasen, *Die Sieketroosters in Suid-Afrika, 1652-1866* (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1977), 31-32.

4) West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 19-84.

5) Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*

Another strand of empire became entangled with Dutch colonialism in 1795 when the British took control of the Cape, with the Bible once again playing a settler-colonial role, first in the hands of British military and colonial chaplains, and then in the hands of the Nonconformist London Missionary Society (LMS) missionaries.⁶⁾

While the Bible was used by the VOC, the early Dutch ‘free *burghers*’ (settlers), and the British military-colonial and ecclesiastical forces primarily for the ‘internal’ maintenance of the colonists, the LMS forged into the African interior in the quest for African souls. Though there was always some entanglement between the Bible and indigenous Africans on the colonial coastal periphery,⁷⁾ the LMS missionaries deliberately targeted the Africans of the interior with “the blessed message of Salvation”.⁸⁾ LMS missionaries sought to entangle Africans in the biblical message directly. And though they hoped their proclamation of the biblical message would find receptive souls,⁹⁾ the translation of the biblical message was their ultimate hope in the salvation of the Africans.¹⁰⁾

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 328-30.

- 6) Sundkler and Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa*, 328-39; Gerald O. West, “(Southern) African Anglican Biblical Interpretation: A Postcolonial Project,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 8 (2010).
- 7) See for example West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 76-80.
- 8) These are the words of the missionary Robert Hamilton, cited in West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 124.
- 9) West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 141.
- 10) John Campbell, *Travels in South Africa: Undertaken at the Request of the Missionary Society* (London: Black, Parry, & Co., 1815), 209; West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*.

1.2. Translating the message

Proclaiming the message of the Bible, as conceived by the LMS missionaries in the Southern African interior, was predicated on a translated Bible. So, entangled with the missionary oral proclamation was a protracted process of producing a translated text. In the Southern African interior this task was undertaken by the LMS missionary Robert Moffat. Moffat is remembered as the translator of the first Bible in a Southern African indigenous language.¹¹⁾ However, what is not remembered is that Moffat's translation of the Bible was preceded by translation of various catechetical materials.¹²⁾ Indeed, Moffat's process of translation is an extended form of catechesis; Moffat is translating 'the' biblical message, as he understands it, rather than translating the Bible.¹³⁾ The translation of the Bible is a by-product of the intention to translate 'the gospel' message.

Moffat seeks to integrate the indigenous Africans of the Southern African interior into the entanglements of his European time. But the Bible, once translated by Moffat - however ideological and theological his translation process was - offers indigenous Africans another, interlocking, trajectory. As Mbembe reminds us, this is the paradoxical nature of entangled time: that present, the present of the Africans in the interior engaging for the first time and a half with the biblical text in their own language, "is precisely that moment when different forms of absence become mixed together: absence of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers

11) J. J. Lubbe, "By Patience, Labour and Prayer. The Voice of the Unseen God in the Language of Bechuana Nation," A Reflection on the History of Robert Moffat's Setswana Bible (1857)," *Acta Theologica* Supplementum 12 (2009).

12) West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 167-221.

13) West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 201-21.

(the past), and absence of those others that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future)".¹⁴⁾

Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako reflect extensively on these entangled and interlocking dimensions of vernacular African translation.¹⁵⁾ Because missionaries like Moffat, the translator of the first full Bible into a Southern African language, believed that "the simple reading and study of the Bible alone will convert the world" and that the task of the missionary therefore was "to gain for it [the Bible] admission and attention, and then let it speak for itself",¹⁶⁾ the missionary's 'subordinate' position was "necessary and inevitable", says Sanneh.¹⁷⁾ While the missionary controlled the Bible through oral proclamation, they occupied the dominant position; however, once the Bible was translated, African agency (via African literacy) asserted itself, pushing the missionary into the subordinate position. Another, albeit interlocking, trajectory became evident. What the missionaries had denigrated in African religion and culture was, Bediako argues, now affirmed (and so recovered) by the resonances between the biblical 'primal' world-view and the African primal world-view.¹⁸⁾ The present of the translated Bible re-membered the African past. And the present of the translated Bible also imagined an African future not anticipated by the missionaries.

Echoing Mbembe, Sanneh claims that, "We may characterize the . . . [interlocking] interrelationship between missionaries and Africans as reciprocity". By translating the Bible into African

14) Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 16.

15) West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 238-43.

16) Robert Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London: John Snow, 1842; repr., 1969), 618.

17) Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 162.

18) Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh and Maryknoll: Edinburgh University and Orbis, 1995), 91-108.

languages, continues Sanneh, missionaries “paid huge ‘vernacular’ compliments to Africans, enabling many peoples to acquire pride and dignity about themselves in the modern world, and thus opening up the whole social system to equal access. For their part Africans returned the compliment by coupling a faith forged in the Scriptures with a commitment to social and political issues. Missionaries as vernacular agents thus helped Africans to become modernizing agents.”¹⁹⁾

John and Jean Comaroff make a similar, but more nuanced, argument. In their analysis of the entangled “dialectics of modernity” in South Africa, colonialism “is always to be understood, *at once*, as economic and cultural, political and symbolic, general and particular”. “Indeed”, they go on immediately to argue, “colonialism was intrinsic to the rise of modernity in Europe, itself a historical movement whose universalizing ethos was indissolubly material and moral, secular and spiritual”.²⁰⁾ And with particular reference to industrial capitalism in South Africa, “[w]ithout the civilizing mission”, they argue, “it would not have existed in the way we know it; just as the mission, and the humane imperialism that propelled it, could not have taken the shape it did without the rise of [European] industrial capitalism in its modern, bourgeois form”.²¹⁾

Echoing both Mbembe and Sanneh, “in treating the connections between the Protestant mission and colonial capitalism - as in dealing with the impact on each other of Africa and

19) Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 172-73. See also Lamin Sanneh, “Translations of the Bible and the Cultural Impulse,” *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: From 1750 to the Present*, ed., John Riches (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 98, 111.

20) John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 409.

21) Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Two, 409.

Europe — ... [the Comaroffs] stress the analytic salience of dialectical processes, processes of reciprocal determination.”²²⁾ Colonialism and post-colonialism are inherently entangled, and the Bible is a significant factor in their entanglement. Indeed, in the case of South Africa’s “colonialism of a special type,”²³⁾ the racial capitalism of apartheid²⁴⁾ was built on biblical foundations, and so was anti-apartheid resistance.²⁵⁾

1.3. The Bible as a site of struggle

The Bible was entangled in the construction of African modernity, but always with a post-colonial orientation, with interlocking looks to the past and the future. Isaiah Shembe, representing the non-missionary trajectory of neo-indigenous African biblical appropriation and interpretation, steals the Bible from the colonisers who used the Bible to steal African cattle, re-using it to build a neo-indigenous community in the midst of massive cultural and political upheaval that characterised South Africa in the early 1900s.²⁶⁾ Some years later, Shembe would be followed by another trajectory of neo-indigenous African biblical appropriation and interpretation, that of the ‘more modern’ missionary educated African Christians, who would turn their mas-

22) Comaroff and Comaroff, *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier*, Two, 409.

23) Gillian Hart, *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism, Hegemony* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2013), 175; West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 458-59.

24) Sampie Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652-2002* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002), 422-23.

25) Robert Vosloo, “The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid in Reformed Circles in the 1940s in South Africa: Some Historical, Hermeneutical and Theological Remarks,” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1:2 (2015).

26) West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 248-52.

ters' biblical and theological training against them, using the Bible, albeit a post-colonial problematic Bible, as "a formidable weapon in the hands of the oppressed" against apartheid settler colonialism,²⁷⁾ using the Bible "to get the land back and to get the land back without losing the Bible",²⁸⁾

And even after liberation in South Africa (in 1994) Africans of all kinds, in private and public spheres, continue their entanglement with the Bible.²⁹⁾

1.4. Post-colonial responsibility

Given the entangled history of the Bible's presence in Southern Africa, African biblical scholarship, an heir, at once, of indigenous African pre-colonial identity, the missionary-colonial project, and post-colonial African resistance, must engage the post-colonial, in which the hyphen serves to remind us of the long, protracted, time of African entanglement. Not to be overt about the post-colonial reality of the Bible's presence in Sub-Saharan Africa would be irresponsible.

2. Tri-polar

In this second part of the article we analyse *how* African biblical scholarship remains responsible to the Bible in Africa's

27) Takatso Mofokeng, "Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation," *Journal of Black Theology* 2 (1988), 40.

28) Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 153; West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 318-48.

29) West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 363-542.

entangled reality. There are three intersecting poles in this analysis: the African context, the biblical text, and the ideo-theological forms of dialogue between African context and biblical text. While most characterisations of African biblical hermeneutics tend to portray a bi-polar approach, referring for example to “the comparative method,”³⁰ in which African context and biblical text interpret each other, it would be more accurate to describe African biblical hermeneutics as tri-polar.

Implicit in bi-polar-like formulations are aspects of a third pole mediating between the African context and the biblical text – the pole of appropriation. Knut Holter, for example, refers to the ways in which biblical text and African context “illuminate one another,” and Justin Ukpong, a key commentator on the comparative method, refers overtly to the goal of comparative interpretation as “the actualization of the theological meaning of the text in today’s context so as to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation.”³¹ What connects or entangles text and context, then, is a form of dialogical appropriation that has a theological and a praxiological dimension.³² This ideo-theological third pole can take various forms, resulting

30) Eric Anum, “Comparative Readings of the Bible in Africa: Some Concerns,” *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 468; Justin S. Ukpong, “Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa Dube (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000), 12; Knut Holter, *Old Testament Research for Africa: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography of African Old Testament Dissertations, 1967-2000* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 88-89.

31) Ukpong, “Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa,” 24.

32) Jonathan A. Draper, “African Contextual Hermeneutics: Readers, Reading Communities, and Their Options between Text and Context,” *Religion & Theology* 22 (2015).

in at least six intersecting yet different emphases in African biblical interpretation: inculturation, liberation, feminist, psychological, postcolonial, and queer biblical hermeneutics.

The third pole offers an important starting point in understanding the different emphases in African biblical hermeneutics. The other two poles, the biblical text and the African context, are no less important, but an examination of the third pole clarifies *how* these two fundamental poles are brought into dialogue. That there is engagement between biblical text and African context is fundamental to African biblical scholarship. While Euro-American forms of biblical interpretation have been reluctant, until recently,³³⁾ to acknowledge that text and context are always, at least implicitly, in conversation, the dialogical dimension of biblical interpretation has always been an explicit feature of African biblical hermeneutics. This is readily apparent from even a cursory survey of the published work of African biblical scholarship.³⁴⁾ Interpreting the biblical text is never, in African biblical hermeneutics, an end in itself. Biblical interpretation is always about changing the African context. This is what links ordinary African biblical interpretation and African biblical scholarship, a common commitment to interpret for contextual transformation.

The kind of contextual change and transformation envisaged in particular African contexts shapes *how* biblical text and African context are brought into dialogue. The two most estab-

33) Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds., *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

34) Grant LeMarquand, "A Bibliography of the Bible in Africa," *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends*, ed., Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2000).

lished forms of appropriation in African biblical scholarship have been inculturation and liberation hermeneutics, dating back to the 1970s. In the last two decades, however, two other forms of appropriation have emerged, African feminist and postcolonial hermeneutics. Most recently, in the past few years, African forms of queer hermeneutics have begun to emerge from the scholarly closet, called out by the realities of HIV and AIDS. Hovering in the background, but most closely related to African feminist work is another, though less evident form of appropriation, psychological hermeneutics. Each of these forms of appropriation has their own particular post-colonial ‘ideo-theological’ orientation.³⁵⁾

2.1. Inculturation hermeneutics

The historically earliest and most common African form of ideo-theological orientation is inculturation biblical hermeneutics. Like other forms of African biblical interpretation inculturation hermeneutics takes its cue from life outside the academy. The general experience of African Christians was that African social and cultural concerns were not reflected in missionary and Euro-American academic forms of biblical interpretation. Inculturation hermeneutics arose as a response, “paying attention to the African socio-cultural context and the questions that arise therefrom”.³⁶⁾ Inculturation hermeneutics, Ukpong explains, “designates an approach to biblical interpretation which seeks to make the African ... context the *subject* of interpretation”; which means that every dimension of the

35) See also West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 348-62.

36) Justin S. Ukpong, “Rereading the Bible with African Eyes,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 91 (1995), 4.

interpretive process is “consciously informed by the world-view of, and the life experience within that culture”.³⁷⁾ While Ukpong himself includes the historical, social, economic, political, and religious as interlocking dimensions of inculturation hermeneutics,³⁸⁾ the tendency of most African inculturation hermeneutics is to concentrate on the cultural and religious dimensions of African life.

Alongside, but in tension with, the post-colonial oppositional aspect of inculturation hermeneutics is another of its significant features. As Ukpong says, “[t]he focus of [African] interpretation is on the theological meaning of the text within a contemporary context”.³⁹⁾ This formulation recognises that the Bible is a significant sacred text with a message for African socio-cultural contexts. As Ukpong goes on to say, “This involves interactive engagement between the biblical text and a particular contemporary socio-cultural issue such that the gospel message serves as a critique of the culture, and/or the cultural perspective enlarges and enriches the understanding of the text”.⁴⁰⁾ Here he captures succinctly the two-way engagement between text and context; what he also captures here is the predominant orientation of confidence in the Bible as ‘good news’ within inculturation hermeneutics. Though the Bible has come to Africa as part of the missionary-colonial imperialistic project, the Bible itself has ‘good news’ for Africa, and by engaging this ‘gospel’ African biblical scholarship makes its own contribution to global biblical scholarship. So a ‘hermeneutic of trust’ towards the Bible is a feature of inculturation hermeneutics, looking along a forward trajectory, even as it is entangled and interlocks with a past-oriented post-colonial trajectory.

37) Ukpong, “Rereading the Bible with African Eyes,” 5.

38) Ukpong, “Rereading the Bible with African Eyes,” 6.

39) Ukpong, “Rereading the Bible with African Eyes,” 6.

40) Ukpong, “Rereading the Bible with African Eyes,” 6.

2.2. Liberation hermeneutics

Almost all of the above features are also constitutive of liberation hermeneutics, though the mix is somewhat different. Like inculturation hermeneutics, African liberation biblical hermeneutics has its starting point with the experience of the masses. In the words of the South African biblical scholar Itumeleng Mosala, the hermeneutical starting point of liberation hermeneutics is the “social and material life” of “the black struggle for liberation.”⁴¹⁾

However, while African liberation hermeneutics acknowledges the importance of both the spiritual and the material,⁴²⁾ like inculturation hermeneutics, the emphasis in liberation hermeneutics is on the economic and the political dimensions of African life. Race and class, not religion and culture, are the critical categories of South African Black liberation hermeneutics. And while inculturation hermeneutics is quite eclectic in the kinds of sociological conceptual frameworks it draws on, liberation hermeneutics is more specific, drawing deeply on Marxist conceptual frameworks.⁴³⁾

African liberation hermeneutics also clearly shares the post-colonial oppositional stance of inculturation hermeneutics to the missionary-colonial project, though its sociological categories of contestation are economically oriented. Its most distinctive feature, however, is that liberation hermeneutics raises questions about the Bible itself, with a clarity not found in inculturation hermeneutics. The Bible is a resource for liberation, but it is also a source of oppression and domination, and not just in the way it has been used by the missionary-colonial project;

41) Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 67.

42) Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 67.

43) Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988).

the Bible is, in part, intrinsically oppressive.⁴⁴⁾ An ambiguous Bible requires, asserts African liberation hermeneutics, a hermeneutic of suspicion.

The recognition that the Bible is itself, intrinsically, a site of struggle has also had methodological consequences for some. The predominant interpretive methodologies for engaging with both the African context and the biblical text in inculturation hermeneutics have been historical and sociological forms of analysis. With respect to the biblical text, historical-critical and an eclectic range of sociological methods are used. With respect to the African context, an eclectic range of religio-cultural forms of analysis within African theology and anthropology are used.⁴⁵⁾ African liberation hermeneutics inherits but then rejects this eclectic assortment of socio-historical analytical resources,⁴⁶⁾ arguing instead for a more structured and systemic analysis of both the biblical text (within its sites of production) and the African context, using historical-materialist categories of analysis. According to Mosala, the biblical text and African context should not only be brought into dialogue in terms of content, they should also be brought into dialogue in terms of methodology. Both the Bible and the black experience and struggle must be analysed structurally using historical-materialist categories; in other words, African interpreters must recognize that the biblical texts are rooted in the struggles of their material sites of production, just as the life of black South Africans is rooted in particular socio-historical modes of production.⁴⁷⁾ An “unstruc-

44) Mofokeng, “Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation,” 34; Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 41.

45) Ukpong, “Rereading the Bible with African Eyes.”; Justin S. Ukpong, “The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Lk 16:1-13): An Essay in the Inculturation of Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 73 (1996).

46) Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 43-66.

47) Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 31-32.

tural understanding of the Bible may simply reinforce and confirm unstructural understanding of the present.”⁴⁸⁾

2.3. Feminist hermeneutics

African feminist hermeneutics - and the designation ‘feminist’ is problematic, with some preferring to borrow the African-American term ‘womanist’,⁴⁹⁾ some adopting an African indigenous designation, such as *bosadi*,⁵⁰⁾ and others using the general phrase ‘African women’s hermeneutics’⁵¹⁾ - emerges from within African inculturation and African liberation hermeneutics, and so shares features with each. African feminist biblical hermeneutics has been in dialogue with both the religio-cultural emphasis of inculturation hermeneutics⁵²⁾ and the racial-economic-political emphasis of liberation hermeneutics,⁵³⁾ though

48) Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology*, 32.

49) Sarojini Nadar, “A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth,” *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed., Musa W. Dube (Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC Publications, 2001).

50) Madipoane (ngwana’ Mphahlele) Masenya, “A *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31,” in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed., Musa W. Dube (Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC Publications, 2001).

51) Beverley G. Haddad, “African Women’s Theologies of Survival: Intersecting Faith, Feminisms, and Development,” Diss., PhD (University of Natal, 2000).

52) Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango, “Childlessness and Women-to-Women Relationships in Genesis and in African Patriarchal Society: Sarah and Hagar from a Zimbabwean Woman’s Perspective (Gen 16:1-16; 21:8-21),” *Semeia* 78 (1997).

53) Bernard Sr. Mncube, “Biblical Problems and the Struggle of Women,” (paper presented at the Women’s struggle in South Africa: feminist theology conference, Hammanskraal, 1984); Bernadette I. Mosala, “Biblical Hermeneutics and the Struggle of Women,” (paper presented at the Women’s struggle in South Africa: feminist theology conference, Hammanskraal, 1984); Gloria Kehilwe Plaatjie,

religio-cultural concerns tend to be predominant. Because of the predominance of a religio-cultural emphasis in African feminist hermeneutics, it could be argued that much of this work is really a form of (feminist) inculturation hermeneutics. However, African feminist hermeneutics usually shares the attitude of suspicion towards the biblical text of African liberation hermeneutics. Most importantly, African feminist hermeneutics, like African liberation hermeneutics, insists on a structured and systematic analysis of both the African context and the biblical text; its distinctive feature is that the focus is on the gendered systemic nature of patriarchy.⁵⁴⁾

A methodological innovation in some African feminist hermeneutics has been its use of literary exegetical modes of analysis of the biblical text. While the predominant exegetical modes of analysis of both African inculturation and liberation hermeneutics have been socio-historical, with only a few voices advocating and using literary modes of exegesis,⁵⁵⁾ African feminist hermeneutics has been quite receptive to literary modes of interpretation.⁵⁶⁾

“Toward a Post-Apartheid Black Feminist Reading of the Bible: A Case of Luke 2:36-38,” *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed., Musa W. Dube (Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC Publications, 2001).

54) Teresa Okure, “Feminist Interpretation in Africa,” *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Introduction*, ed., Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroads, 1993).

55) Allan Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1984); Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Second Edition ed. (Maryknoll and Pietermaritzburg: Orbis Books and Cluster Publications, 1995).

56) Nadar, “A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth.”; Sarojini Nadar, ““Texts of Terror”, the Conspiracy of Rape in the Bible, Church, and Society: The Case of Esther 2:1-18,” *African Women, Religion, and Health: Essays in Honor of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Odoyoye*, ed., Isabel Apawo Phiri and

2.4. Postcolonial hermeneutics

African biblical hermeneutics, whether tending towards inculturation or liberation or feminist trajectories, has always been resolutely post-colonial. So it is strange that African biblical scholarship has been slow to engage, explicitly,⁵⁷⁾ with the forms of postcolonial theory that have characterised Euro-American biblical hermeneutics.⁵⁸⁾ Perhaps the ways in which Euro-American biblical scholarship have commodified⁵⁹⁾ Asian forms of postcolonial discourse has rendered the theory unpalatable for African consumption.

It is from within African feminist hermeneutics that the most sustained engagement with postcolonial hermeneutics has come.⁶⁰⁾ As with the other forms of African biblical hermeneutics,

Sarojini Nadar (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006).

- 57) Jeremy Punt, "Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in South Africa: Some Mind and Road Mapping," *Neotestamentica* 37:1 (2003); Jeremy Punt, "Why Not Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in (South) Africa: Stating the Obvious or Looking for the Impossible?," *Scriptura* 91 (2006); Gerald O. West, "Finding a Place among the Posts for Post-Colonial Criticism in Biblical Studies in South Africa," *Old Testament Essays* 10 (1997); Gerald O. West, "Doing Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation @Home: Ten Years of (South) African Ambivalence," *Neotestamentica* 42:1 (2008).
- 58) R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *The Postcolonial Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998). I have reserved the hyphenated form 'post-colonial' for particularly African forms of 'postcolonial' theory.
- 59) Roland Boer, "Marx, Postcolonialism, and the Bible," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed., Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005).
- 60) Musa W. Dube, "Toward a Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible," *Semeia* 78 (1997); Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000); Musa W. Dube, "Looking Back and Forward: Postcolonialism, Globalization, God and Gender," *Scriptura* 92 (2006); Makhosazana K. Nzimande, "Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The *Gebirah* in the Hebrew Bible in the Light

postcolonial biblical hermeneutics has its starting point in the realities of ordinary Africans, for whom the Bible has become an African book, but an African book “that will always be linked to and remembered for its role in facilitating European imperialism”.⁶¹⁾ The complicity of the Bible with European imperialism is explicit and central to the ideo-theological orientation of African postcolonial biblical hermeneutics. What the other forms of African biblical hermeneutics do not address in sufficient detail is the question “why the biblical text, its readers, and its institutions are instruments of imperialism”;⁶²⁾ this is the first part of the task of African postcolonial hermeneutics.

Together with African liberation and feminist hermeneutics, postcolonial hermeneutics is deeply suspicious of the Bible’s own imperial charter.⁶³⁾ In other words, the kinds of imperial attitudes and practices performed by missionaries and colonial forces is related to the imperial tendencies of the biblical texts themselves.⁶⁴⁾ The next crucial question, therefore, is how postcolonial African subjects should read the texts which have been instrumental to the establishment of colonialism in their contexts.⁶⁵⁾ So the second part of the task of postcolonial hermeneutics is to read the Bible for decolonisation. Reading for decolonisation must analyse, Musa Dube argues, the logic of imperialism, understanding its grammar and then read decon-

of Queen Jezebel and the Queen Mother of Lemuel,” Diss., PhD (Texas Christian University, 2005); Makhosazana K. Nzimande, “Reconfiguring Jezebel: A Postcolonial *Imbokodo* Reading of the Story of Naboth’s Vineyard (1 Kings 21:1-16),” in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning*, ed. Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West (Leiden: EJ Brill, 2008).

61) Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 3.

62) Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 6.

63) Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 10.

64) Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 15.

65) Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 16.

structively against it.⁶⁶

While the Bible can and must be read for decolonisation, it is not the only resource that Africans have access to in this task. Among the resources for reading for decolonisation are the very languages and literatures (including the oral) denigrated and supplanted by the Bible and European imperialism.⁶⁷ However, African postcolonial hermeneutics recognises that the vast literature “born from the encounter with imperialist forces” is itself “partly shaped by the textual forms of their imperial counterparts”.⁶⁸ Yet, African resources, particularly those forged in resistance to imperialism, partake in a form of hybridity,⁶⁹ in which something new and vital is constructed from the encounter with colonialism.⁷⁰

One of the most significant contributions of African postcolonial hermeneutics is this recognition that African postcolonial interpretation (like African postcolonial identity) is itself partially constituted by colonialism.⁷¹ Instead of denying this by claiming an ‘authentic’ African interpretation, postcolonial interpretation embraces the multiplicity of identities and differences that constitute the postcolonial African context, but always with a view to harnessing these hybrid resources for decolonisation.

While all forms of African biblical hermeneutics, whether inculturation, liberation, feminist, or postcolonial, are committed to identifying and recovering African the African ‘indigenous’ past, they also engage critically with the pre-colonial

66) Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 16-21.

67) Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 49.

68) Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 50-51.

69) Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 122.

70) R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 126.

71) R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 249.

African heritage. African postcolonial hermeneutics is no exception, recovering but also questioning, for example, the power of pre-colonial African queens.⁷²⁾ African postcolonial hermeneutics shares much in common with the ideo-theological orientations of liberation and feminist hermeneutics, but also shares a concern for culture-related notions of identity found in inculturation hermeneutics.

2.5. Queer hermeneutics

HIV and AIDS have wrought devastation across Sub-Saharan Africa, infecting millions and affecting millions more.⁷³⁾ But the advent of HIV and AIDS also generated otherwise taboo space to intersect religion and sexuality.⁷⁴⁾ Euro-American strands of queer theory and queer biblical hermeneutics have added their resources to African biblical scholarship,⁷⁵⁾ and though located largely within Southern African biblical scholarship,⁷⁶⁾ African

72) Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel."

73) Tony Barnett and Alan Whiteside, *AIDS in the Twenty-First Century: Disease and Globalization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

74) Gerald O. West, "Sacred Texts, Particularly the Bible and the Qur'an, and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Textual Territory," in *Religion and HIV and AIDS: Charting the Terrain*, ed., Beverley G. Haddad (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011); Gerald O. West, "Reconfiguring a Biblical Story (Genesis 19) in the Context of South African Discussions About Homosexuality," *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, ed., Ezra Chitando and Adriaan van Klinken (Oxford: Routledge, 2016).

75) Jeremy Punt, "Queer Theory, Postcolonial Theory, and Biblical Interpretation," in *Bible Trouble: Queer Reading at the Boundaries of Biblical Scholarship*, ed., Teresa J. Hornsby and Ken Stone, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

76) Masiwa Ragies Gunda, *The Bible and Homosexuality in Zimbabwe: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Political, Cultural and Christian Arguments in the*

queer hermeneutics has added its intersecting and interlocking voice to Africa's other ideo-theological hermeneutical orientations.

2.6. Psychological hermeneutics

Though not as prominent as its sister ideo-theological hermeneutical orientations, psychological biblical hermeneutics offers another potential African post-colonial biblical hermeneutical trajectory, particularly as trauma studies begin to intersect with biblical scholarship.⁷⁷⁾ There has been steady African work in the field of psychological readings of the Bible,⁷⁸⁾ and African contexts summon this work to become more engaged with the many sites of African trauma. Crossing the psychological boundary between the personal and communal is one of the challenges African contexts pose to psychological biblical hermeneutics.⁷⁹⁾

Homosexual Public Debate with Special Reference to the Use of the Bible (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2010); Robert W. Kuloba, "Homosexuality Is Unafican and Unbiblical': Examining the Ideological Motivations to Homophobia in Sub-Saharan Africa – the Case Study of Uganda," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 154 (2016); Gerald O. West, "Towards an African Liberationist Queer Theological Pedagogy," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 155 (2016).

77) Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds., *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*, vol. 86, Semeia Studies (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016).

78) Helen Efthimiadis-Keith, "Genealogy, Retribution and Identity: Re-Interpreting the Cause of Suffering in the Book of Judith," *Old Testament Essays* 27:3 (2014); Helen Efthimiadis-Keith, "Women, Jung and the Hebrew Bible: An Evaluation of Jungian Interpretation of Hebrew Bible Texts by Way of the Book of Ruth," *Biblical Interpretation* 23 (2015).

79) Philippe Denis, ed., *Never Too Small to Remember: Memory Work and Resilience in Times of Aids* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2005); Philippe Denis, Scott Houser, and Radikobo Ntsimane, eds., *A Journey Towards Healing: Stories*

2.7. Tri-polar responsibility

Each of the elements in the tri-polar approach requires responsibility from African biblical scholars. By being overt about these intersecting elements in our methodology we are responsible to the interdisciplinary fields that constitute each. This is most obvious with respect to the biblical text, where African biblical scholars have a responsibility to the 'Biblical Studies' heritage, notwithstanding the Euro-American 'colonial' dimensions of this heritage. Significantly, the dominant methods of the international Biblical Studies guild are the same as those of most forms of African biblical scholarship. Historical and sociological methods characterise the dominant trajectories of both. It is somewhat surprising that given Africa's oral legacy that literary methods are not more prevalent, but this is probably because our Euro-American 'masters' have disciplined us too well.

Though the Euro-American Biblical Studies guild frowns, publically, on theological interpretive interests contaminating its 'exegetical' work, there is a growing awareness that ideological interpretive interests cannot be ignored.⁸⁰) African biblical scholarship takes responsibility for both the theological and ideological dimensions of our theoretical orientations to the dialogue between biblical text and African context. Indeed, our African contexts demand this kind of accountability.

So, the 'ultimate' responsibility, and here the word 'accountability' is more appropriate,⁸¹⁾ is to our African contexts. Our

of People with Multiple Woundedness in Kwazulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2011).

80) Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, Second ed., Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

81) West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, 83-102.

primary accountability is not to the Biblical Studies guild but to our African contexts.⁸²⁾

Conclusion

African entangled time includes the Bible, ‘re-membering’⁸³⁾ it but also being configured by it.⁸⁴⁾ Whether African biblical scholars approve or not of why and how the Bible is present in African contexts, those of us “who are committed to the struggle for liberation and are organically connected to the struggling Christian people” have to engage, Takatso Mofoleng contends, this present reality—and its interlocking past and future trajectories—and so must “do their best to shape the Bible into a formidable weapon in the hands of the oppressed instead of leaving it to confuse, frustrate or even destroy our people.”⁸⁵⁾

Doing this responsibly requires African biblical scholarship to be responsible to the post-colonial and tri-polar realities of African biblical scholarship.

82) See a nuanced criticism of this position in Alissa Jones Nelson, *Power and Responsibility in Biblical Interpretation: Reading the Book of Job with Edward Said* (Sheffield: Equinox 2012), 101-7; see a response to this criticism in Gerald O. West, “Juxtaposing “Many Cattle” in Biblical Narrative (Jonah 4:11), Imperial Narrative, Neo-Indigenous Narrative,” *Old Testament Essays* 27:2 (2014), 725-29.

83) West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 364-65.

84) J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 9; West, *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon*, 7-8.

85) Mofokeng, “Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation,” 40.

<주요어>

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<Abstract>

Accountable African Biblical Scholarship: Post-colonial and Tri-polar

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Using the notion of ‘entanglement’ this article analyses two distinctive features of African biblical scholarship. The first form of entanglement is African biblical scholarship’s entanglement with the colonial realities that brought the Bible to Sub-Saharan Africa. The second form of entanglement is an intentional ideo-theological dialogue between African contexts and biblical texts. African biblical scholarship is only accountable, this article argues, in so far as it engages directly with these forms of entanglement.

<초록>

책임지는 아프리카 성경해석학

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이 논문은 ‘뒤엉킴’(entanglement)이란 개념을 사용하여, 아프리카 성경 해석학의 두 가지 독특한 특징을 분석하고자 한다. 첫째로, 아프리카 성경 해석학은 성경을 사하라 남부 아프리카에 가져온 식민주의의 실제와 뒤엉킨 형태를 취하고 있다. 둘째로, 아프리카 성경해석학은 아프리카의 상황 (context)과 성경의 본문(text) 사이에 의도적인 이념적-신학적 대화를 하는 것으로 뒤엉킨 형태를 취하고 있다. 이 논문은 아프리카의 성경해석학이 이 두 가지의 뒤엉킴 형태 속에 직접적으로 참여할 때 비로소 책임 있는 해석학이 된다는 점을 논증하고 있다.

