

POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES
IN AFRICAN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS

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Edited by

Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango

Society of Biblical Literature
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This volume is dedicated to the memory of Rev. Dr. Justin Ukpong, (b. Dec. 26, 1940–d. Dec. 16, 2011). Eminent New Testament scholar, first Vice Chancellor of Veritas University, Nigeria, and a pioneering member of the African Biblical Hermeneutics Section in SBL.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
AJB	<i>American Journal of Bioethics</i>
AJBS	<i>African Journal of Biblical Studies</i>
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentary
AS	<i>African Studies</i>
ATJ	<i>African Theological Journal</i>
ATS	Acta Theologica Supplementum
BAS	Biblical Archaeology Society
BCTSAA	<i>Bulletin for Contextual Theology in Southern Africa and Africa</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BNHS	<i>Bulletin: News for the Human Sciences</i>
BOTSA	<i>Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa</i>
BR	<i>Biblical Research</i>
BSASAW	Bible Studies for African-South African Women
BT	<i>The Bible Translator</i>
BTh	<i>Black Theology</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
CASAS	Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CC	<i>Cross Currents</i>
ChCr	<i>Christianity and Crisis</i>
CHSHMC	Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture
CH	<i>Church History</i>
CI	<i>Critical Inquiry</i>
CL	<i>Christianity and Literature</i>
CM	<i>Challenge Magazine</i>
CSJLCS	Critical Studies in Jewish Literature, Culture, and Society
EAEP	East African Education Publishers
ECS	<i>Eighteenth-Century Studies</i>
ExpTim	<i>Expository Times</i>
FFNT	<i>Foundations and Facets: New Testament</i>
FT	<i>Feminist Theology</i>

FTS	Feminist Theology Series
GBOT	<i>Ghana Bulletin of Theology</i>
GPBS	Global Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship
GT	<i>Grace and Truth</i>
HRRC	<i>Human Resource Research Centre</i>
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IBMR	<i>The International Bulletin of Missionary Research</i>
ILJ	<i>Indiana Law Journal</i>
Int	<i>Interpretation</i>
IRM	<i>International Review of Mission</i>
JAAS	<i>Journal of Asian and African Studies</i>
JACT	<i>Journal of African Christian Theology</i>
JAH	<i>Journal of African History</i>
JAPS	<i>Journal of African Policy Studies</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JCPS	<i>Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies</i>
JCT	<i>Journal of Constructive Theology</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JFM	<i>Journal of Family Ministry</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Religion in Africa</i>
JRE	<i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i>
JRT	<i>Journal of Religious Thought</i>
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTSA	<i>Journal of Theology for Southern Africa</i>
LT	<i>Living Tradition</i>
MF	<i>Ministerial Formation</i>
MFS	<i>Modern Fiction Studies</i>
MJT	<i>Melanesian Journal of Theology</i>
NCR	<i>The New Centennial Review</i>
NedGTT	<i>Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif</i>
Neot	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NAOTS	<i>Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship</i>
NovR	<i>Nova Religio</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	<i>Notes on Translation</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OTE	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
PL J.	<i>Migne, Patrologia latina</i>

PMLA	<i>Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
RAL	<i>Research in African Literatures</i>
RB	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
ResQ	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RevExp	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
RIL	<i>Religion and Intellectual Life</i>
RL	<i>Religion and Literature</i>
RT	<i>Religion and Theology</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLASP	Society of Biblical Literature Abstracts and Seminar Papers
SBLDS SBL	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SC	<i>Social Compass</i>
SCP	Studies in Classical Philology
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SHE	<i>Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SPS	Sacra Pagina Series
SWC	<i>Studies in World Christianity</i>
SZBUI	Studien Zur Befreiung Und Interkulturalitat
TCCE	<i>Theologies and Cultures: Church and Empire</i>
TCS	<i>Theory, Culture, and Society</i>
TPI	Trinity Press International
TTran	<i>The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication</i>
TSe	<i>Theology and Sexuality</i>
ThViat	<i>Theologia Viatorum</i>
USQR	<i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>

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INTRODUCTION

THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA AS THE BIBLICAL SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA: POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

Musa W. Dube

Space, whether one refers to a geographical terrain, a physical abode, a body, or an imagined place or community, is a site for the interrogation of geometries of power, of how these relations of power are secured, and also of how they may be unmasked. How then might biblical scholars take *our spaces* seriously?¹

CENTURIES OF THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

Recent research indicates that 470 million Christians live in sub-Saharan Africa and that one in every five Christians in the world lives in Africa.² The same research indicates that biblical faith is expressed alongside other faiths—alongside four hundred million Muslims, mostly in upper Africa, though not exclusively so, and the uncounted number of adherents to African Indigenous Religions, who, more often than not, subscribe to both Christian and Islamic faith. North African Christianity can be linked to the biblical myth of Mary and Joseph's sojourn to Egypt, where baby Jesus finds security against Herod's unwelcoming designs (Matt 2). It could also be linked to the Lukan theological history of the early church, which records the story of an Ethiopian who was converted and baptized by Peter (Acts 8:26–40). Historically, Christianity in North Africa is as old as the early church. The latter gave us the prevailing Egyptian Coptic church and the Ethiopian Orthodox church and a whole line of celebrated church fathers such as Origen of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Augustine of Hippo. While North African Christianity was the earliest, sub-Saharan Christianity is now the most thriving. The history of the latter covers five centuries. The Bible has been read within pre-colonial, colonial, struggle-for-independence, postindependence, neocolonial and

1. Abraham Smith, "Taking Spaces Seriously: The Politics of Space and the Future of Western Biblical Studies," in *Transforming Graduate Biblical Studies*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Kent Harold Richards (Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 64.

2. See The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's Web site report, "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa," April 15, 2010.

globalization contexts. The articles in this volume interpret the Bible through and with this postcolonial history. Through critical evaluations of previously offered theories and themes and through the introduction of new themes, this volume presents African biblical interpretation through a postcolonial lens. As used here, *African Christianity* refers to multiple and various practices, movements, and interpretations of biblical texts across the massive continent and also through various times, denominations, countries, genders, races, classes, ethnic groups, cultural beliefs, and interest groups.

The history of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa can be traced to the earliest traders with Africa in such areas as the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana), Central Africa, the Monomotapa Empire, through contacts with Portuguese and Dutch traders in the Cape of Good Hope. This particular stage did not necessarily include colonization of lands but was characterized by its slave trade, which has given us the current African diaspora communities in the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe. It was not until the modern European imperial movements of the eighteenth to nineteenth century that a more forceful agenda was undertaken to Christianize sub-Saharan Africa. One thinks here of legendary figures such as David Livingstone (1813–73), a missionary who set out to “open” the continent to the three Cs: Christianity, commerce, and civilization.³ To be specific, “to open up” the continent for Western Christianity, commerce, and civilization.

In this extremely gendered colonial language, the African continent was being penetrated by the West, its male subjugator, and inseminated with Western seed to give birth to the Westernized African. David Livingstone died in the African continent in a relentless pursuit of this agenda. He was buried with the kings of England—in Westminster Abbey—in recognition of his service to the mother of all empires—the British Empire. But African people supposedly insisted that David Livingstone’s heart should be buried in the continent. One cannot help but wonder if the heart of Livingstone, buried in the African soil, is the little leaven that leavens the whole flour, or is it an incurable virus that wreaks havoc in our bodies? Was this wrench bloody heart, disembodied and buried in African soil, perhaps, an attempt to arrest Livingstone’s reckless agenda of the three Cs?

David Livingstone’s dream to open Africa for Western Christianity, commerce, and civilization did not die with him. Henry M. Stanley, a naturalized American, who was commissioned to find David Livingstone and who was inspired by Livingstone, returned to the continent to “explore the rivers and lakes of central Africa.” He recorded his exploration in a book, *Through the Dark Continent*, published in 1877. He published another volume in 1890 entitled *In Darkest Africa: Quest, Rescue, and Retreat of Emin Governor of Equitima*. His agenda was a continuation of David Livingstone’s. Nonetheless, these two men were but a drop in the ocean compared to the many Western missionaries and traders who worked in various

3. See J. H. Worcester Jr., *David Livingstone: First to Cross Africa with the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody, 1990).

African sites, often preceding the colonization of the native people they served or following colonization. It was not unusual, however, for missionaries such as John Mackenzie to call for the colonization of native people.⁴

While the likes of Livingstone, Stanley, and Mackenzie worked at a period when colonization was random, irregular, and often had disinterested mother countries, the end of the nineteenth century was a colonial “climax.” Each Western colonial power was poised to grab and own every available piece of Africa. There was such high competition and tension between colonial powers that it necessitated regulation to avoid a war. The situation led to the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884–85, which sought a more agreeable way of partitioning the African continent among Western colonial powers. This was the so-called Scramble for Africa.

African communities and their lands were, of course, neither consulted nor invited to the Berlin Conference. The participants were Western European powers, traders, and their missionaries. Africa, surrounded by numerous suitors, did not have the choice to choose a suitor nor to refuse one. This was not a love story. The history speaks for itself. The modern history of the Western colonization of Africa was a violent process of taking Africa by force. It was indeed a gang rape, so to speak. The essays in this volume amply demonstrate that the trauma of this history is not just an archive of the past, but a continuing story. We bear the wounds of the “Scramble for Africa” upon our bodies and lands.

In just about two centuries, Christianity has assumed a stronghold in the African continent while coexisting with African Indigenous Religions, Islam, and other religions. Has the heart of David Livingstone become a mustard seed? The throbbing and boisterous pulse of contemporary African Christianity/ies is seemingly causing discomfort in the Western world, which finds African Christianity conservative, perhaps mirroring the missionary teachings that sought to uproot African people completely from their religious beliefs by teaching the strictest biblical adherence, or reflecting the contemporary charismatic/Pentecostal movements, or both. Tinyiko Maluleke asks if this was perhaps an experiment that went wrong. Could it be a historical backfire?⁵ Perhaps! But the perceived conservative character of African Christianity depends on reducing diversity into sameness, as depicted by Western scholars and researchers, mirroring the colonial habit of refusing Others their own voices as well as the tendency to characterize the Other as an uncivilized savage.⁶

4. See Anthony Dachs, *Papers of John Mackenzie* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1975). John Mackenzie, a missionary who served in southern Africa over a long time, openly advocated the colonization of natives, as his letters amply demonstrate.

5. Tinyiko Maluleke, “Of Africanised Bees and Africanised Churches: Ten Theses on African Christianity,” *Missionalia* 38, no. 3 (2010): 369–79.

6. See Phillip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), who sets out to prove the conservativeness of global south Christianities. In the process we are all lumped into one category of sameness, namely that of conservative Bible readers and Christians.

The writing is on the wall. In sub-Saharan Africa, biblical interpretation, its institutions, and readers will always be related to modern colonial history, for *the Scramble for Africa was the Scramble for Africa through the Bible*. As we shall observe, the scramble to get Africa back from the colonial clutches was and still is waged through the Bible (yet the Bible is not the only viable weapon).⁷ That the Scramble for Africa was a scramble through the Bible is therefore an interpretation crux.

The interpretation of the Bible, as attested by the chapters in this volume, is firmly framed within the African historical context. This scramble did not end with Westerners' sharing of the body of Africa among themselves. It was followed by Africans' scramble to get Africa back from the colonizers in a history that is known as the struggle for independence, which ranged from after World War II to the recent postapartheid era. The Scramble for Africa continues today in the post-independence era. The neoliberal economy known as globalization is the scramble of former colonial powers, in the company of new rising global powers, to have free access to global markets and cheap labor, without necessarily granting the same rights to all countries. In short, biblical interpretation in the sub-Saharan Africa cannot be separated from politics, economics and cultural identity, of the past and present. Biblical interpretation in the African continent is thus intimately locked in the framework of scramble for land, struggle for economic justice and struggle for cultural survival. Biblical interpretation remains wedged between Western and African history of colonialism, struggle for independence, post-independence and the globalization era. Biblical interpretation in Africa is the site of struggle as the essays in this volume amply demonstrate.

While modern Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa can be held to be two to five centuries old academic biblical interpretation does not have a longer history. Ironically, the colonial missionary agenda was thoroughly educational. Schools were introduced to educate and bring up Bible readers—literacy itself was introduced to promote bible translation, interpretation, conversion and training of preachers. One would expect that African biblical scholars in the sub-Saharan region would be numerous, but history is unfortunately not generous. To my knowledge black sub-Saharan biblical scholars constitute a handful of individuals, just slightly above thirty. An earlier generation also constitutes a handful of individuals, who were often oscillated between church leadership, ecumenical movements, and the academy, in the likes of Kwesi Dickson, John Mbiti, John Pobee, and Mercy Oduyoye.

This ironic situation may be attributed to the fact that initial colonial churches anticipated a relationship of dependence or one that was informed by colonial racism, where African believers were not expected to do their own thinking or to

7. See Diane M. Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), who documents how enslaved Africans in Jamaica used African Indigenous Religions as part of their resistance.

provide independent leadership. The immense volume of African Christians (470 million) is thus adversely correlated to its biblical scholars and theologians. This phenomenon in itself risks maintaining colonial relations, where research, thinking and theories of interpretation of the Bible remain generated by the former colonial “mother countries” while formerly colonized Christian countries, like children, continue to eat from their mother’s hand. Nowhere is this more evident than in the wholesale transfer of popular American evangelicalism into African via TV programming, whose producers do not even make the effort to erase the locally irrelevant 800 numbers from the screens. Hearing and nurturing the voices of African biblical scholars, both sub-Saharan and North African, is thus imperative.

This volume of academic writers thus follows upon the earlier generation of scholars such as John Mbiti, a New Testament scholar (*New Testament Eschatology in an African Background*), who ended up working primarily in African Indigenous Religions; Kwesi Dickson, whose books include *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (1969); *Uncompleted Mission: Christianity and Exclusivism* (1984) and John Pobee whose books included, *Towards an African Theology* (1979) and *Persecution and Martyrdom in the Theology of Paul* (1985). These scholars were trained mostly to serve in the church, used their training for academic ends and made it their agenda to bring in African Indigenous Religions, which were (and still are) often excluded from the colonially-founded academic programs. It goes without saying that the church being patriarchal, the voices of trained African women biblical scholars would even be scarcer. It was thus quite ground breaking when Mercy A. Oduyoye published her *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (1986) and set on the road to find and nurture other African women studying religion, thereby launching the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in 1989. Some of biblical interpretation books that came from the Circle include: *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (2001); *Grant Me Justice: HIV/AIDS and Gender Readings of the Bible* (2004). In recent time, a second generation of African Biblical scholars has attempted to register their presence in collective volumes such as *Semeia 73: Reading With: An Exploration of the Interface between Critical and Ordinary Readings of the Bible* (1996); *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends* (2000); *Reading the Bible in the Global Village* (2001); *Bible Translation and African Languages* (2004). In addition many contributors have individually published a number of books and numerous articles in various journals and books. One consistent factor is that all writers engage with the empire in their own different ways: in specific times, forms and geography, as the eight sections of this book ably demonstrate. This volume builds upon these efforts and takes the African history of colonial contact into consideration, beginning with North-Atlantic slavery to the Post-Apartheid and globalisation era. It embraces the multifaceted contexts of “reading,” the prolonged context of struggle for justice and the hybridity of biblical interpretation in Africa, for the Bible coexists with African Indigenous Religions, Islam and other religions.

From the recent academic history, this volume comes out of papers that were presented in the “African Biblical Hermeneutics” Sections at the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) Annual Meetings. The African Biblical Hermeneutics sessions were a product of an earlier bigger group on “The Bible in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America,” which ran during the 1990s to the early 2000s. Gradually the group had mobilized more scholars from these various regions. It also became clear that the group straddled too many worlds, hence, when its lifespan came to an end, various groups were formed to continue to investigate independently biblical interpretation in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. Because during this time there was also an organised movement for encouraging minorities in biblical studies, the newly formed groups collaborated with their diaspora communities and investigated biblical interpretations among African Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanics. As Two-Thirds World scholars of the Bible interacted and collaborated in these spaces, the centrality of the modern empire to their work became evident, ushering the postcolonial framework of reading the Bible. The gurus of this movement include, among others, Fernando F. Segovia, R. S. Sugirtharajah, Vincent Wimbush, Gale Yee, Gerald West, Justin Ukpong and Kwok Pui Lan. The founding members of the African Biblical Hermeneutics Section were Dora Mubwayesango, Justin Ukpong, Musa W. Dube and Gerald O. West. This particular volume comes from this history. With few exceptions, it presents papers that were first presented in SBL in the African Biblical Hermeneutics, between 2004 and 2010.

EVALUATIONS OF AFRICAN FEMINIST/GENDER-BASED BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS

To begin with the cover, it features two *adinkra* symbols from Ghana: *sankofa* (meaning “go back and take it”) and *Nyamedua* (“the tree of God”). According to Mercy A. Oduyoye *Sankofa* is a symbol that encourages “a critical appropriation of one’s heritage,” while *Nyamedua* is a symbol that represents the “traditional altar to the Supreme Being, the constant presence of God.”⁸ The combination of these symbols on the cover communicates the agenda of this volume; namely; to critically examine the interaction of biblical texts with African people and their cultures, within the postcolonial framework. It also highlights that biblical texts are read with and through frameworks of African Indigenous Religions in various countries and contexts. At the same time, as this volume amply demonstrates, the *sankofa* act is a critical appropriation of history and all traditions.

Accordingly, the first section, featuring feminist/gender-based biblical interpretations begins with my article “*Talitha Cum* Hermeneutics of Liberation” which takes us right back to the heritage of Kimpa Vita of 1684–1706. Kimpa Vita, a

8. See Elisabeth Amoah, ed., *Poems of Mercy Amba Oduyoye* (Accra: Sam-Woode, 2001) 47, 68.

former indigenous doctor (*nganga*) converted to Catholic Christianity, later proclaimed that she was a spirit medium, possessed by the spirit of Saint Anthony. On this state, she began to propound a decolonizing perspective about the Bible. She contextualized biblical places to her land (Bethlehem was in Sao Salvador) and biblical characters as black (Jesus, Mary and his disciples were black). In an outright rejection of colonizing Christian symbols she called for the de-installation of white portraits of Jesus, Mary and the disciples, while insisting that God shall restore the colonially disgraced land of Congo. Although just twenty years of age, when she began her proclamation, she received a massive following, for she spoke to the concerns of her people. This caused panic among the powers that be, who decided to silence her by burning her, together with her child, on a stake for allegedly preaching heresy. Hers was a typical example of a discourse of resistance, a decolonizing reading of the Bible, and a scramble to regain her land by re-reading the text for decolonisation. Reviewing the biblical interpretations of contemporary African women readers, M. A. Oduyoye, M. Masenya, M. W. Dube and T. Okure, within the story of Kimpa Vita, the chapter highlights that their reading practices continue her legacy, for *sankofa* acts involved going forth between African Indigenous Religions and Biblical religion to propound an oppositional postcolonial feminist reading of both faith traditions. The struggle continues.

Elivered Nasambu-Mulongo's chapter is a very close analysis of Madipoane (Ngwana' Mphahlele) Masenya's African biblical scholarship. Born and raised in apartheid South Africa, where black people were structurally reduced to nothing, Masenya has distinguished herself as one of the very few African women who have written widely on African woman's interpretation of the Bible. Her published works have appeared in numerous journals, commentaries, books and edited volumes, covering several books of the Hebrew Bible such as Proverbs, Job, Esther, Ruth and the Prophets. Nasambu-Mulongo's evaluation highlights that Masenya has not only contributed to biblical interpretation, she has also significantly contributed by formulating a theory of reading; namely, *Bosadi* (womanhood) hermeneutics, drawn from Northern Sotho and the post-apartheid context. In a world where most methods and theories of reading the Bible are Eurocentric, Masenya's formulation of *Bosadi* hermeneutics are a significant way of decolonizing biblical scholarship. By drawing on her *Bosadi* hermeneutics from Northern Sotho cultures, Masenya performs a critical *sankofa* act; namely, that in the African continent the Bible exists with and through African cultures, a position that is subversive to the colonial Christianity's attempt to annihilate the later.

In her chapter, "Hanging Out With Rahab," Lynne Darden highlights that African postcolonial history and biblical interpretation have diaspora communities. Part of the Scramble for Africa included enslavement that constitutes most of people of African descent outside the continent. Naming Dube's interpretive lens as "Rahab's Hermeneutic," Darden holds that Rahab, the sex worker was virtually located in the borderland of her city, living in the middle; in between continuity and discontinuity, which allowed her to skillfully negotiate with the invaders of her

land. Darden brings Dube's Rahab's hermeneutic to dialogue with womanist biblical reading, using the case of Cheryl Kirk Duggan. In so doing, Darden becomes the go between, who calls for a conversation between postcolonial hermeneutic in the continent and people of African descent in the diaspora. Undoubtedly more conversations and bridges are critically needed between African scholars of the Bible on the continent and the diaspora. The importance of Darden article therefore cannot be overemphasised.⁹

DECOLONIZING BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN AND WITH CREATIVE WRITING

The second section of this volume is on reading postcolonial biblical interpretations in and with creative writing. The families of creative literature examined for biblical interpretation stretches from earliest contact zones to current global contexts. Biblical interpretations are drawn from colonial anti-slavery diasporic narratives (Sylvester Johnson); missionary travel narratives (Gerald West); letters of the first 'literate' sub-Saharan African Christians (Sam Tshehla); the earliest African novels written during the organized struggle for liberation and in the post-independence era (Andrew Mbuvi) and historical novels that recapture the historical colonial contact zone (Hans van Deventer). In all the categories of literature investigated in this section, more work still needs to be done. As pointed above, African academic biblical scholars have been hard to come by, but this section underlines that when investigated from other sources of literature, African biblical interpretations have been abundant from the very earliest colonial contact zones.

Johnson's chapter represents an analysis of diasporic writing from people of African descent who had been subjected to slavery. Equiano (1745–1797) captured in West Africa as a small boy and sold into slavery, renamed Gustavus Vassa, bought his freedom and became central to the abolitionist movement in the UK. His autobiography, *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, played a crucial role in the abolitionist movement. Johnson's analysis of Equiano's biography finds an intense decolonizing engagement with biblical texts. Equiano reads the Biblical tradition in comparison with his Igbo traditional religions showing many similarities; re-reads racist biblical commentaries; and constructs a re-reading that traces and links his Igbo origins with biblical Jewish ancestors. Given that enslavement of African people was often based on colonial discourse that constructed African people as ahistorical and godless, Equiano's *sankofa* act is a decolonizing reading which sets out to dispute the colonial discourse by claiming divinity and history from both his Igbo and biblical traditions. Equiano's oppositional reading of the Bible thus assumes a stance of hybridity; uses the master's

9. See Hugh R. Page, ed., *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), which represents an encouraging collaboration between African American and African biblical scholars.

tools to bring down his house and demonstrates how all interpretations are rhetorical constructions for particular ends.

Gerald West takes us back to one of the earliest missionary travel narratives in South Africa, recounting their encounters with indigenous black South Africans. The case study he uses is represented by Queen Mmahutu of the Batlhaping. Biblical interpretation between the colonial missionaries and the indigenous early readers is radically different. While colonial missionaries opened and read the Bible, the indigenous people brought their own questions to the Bible and engaged it in their own terms, from the very beginning. This leads West to point out that, “the Bible would not always speak as the ones who carried it anticipated.” Since colonial context was a writing moment, for an essential part of colonizing the Other included describing them in detail in endless letters, reports, documentations, travel narratives and diaries, African scholars in different countries need to begin to investigate indigenous biblical interpretation in the earliest contact-zone encounters.

Sam Tshelha’s chapter gives us a third level of colonial encounter and the voices of the colonized. He analyses letters from educated Basotho, which means they were mostly Christians who were educated in mission schools, but because their cultural worlds were still intact, they maintained a critical posture towards biblical texts. In Botswana P. Mgadla and S. C. Volz collection of *Words of Batswana: Letters to Mahoko a Becwana 1883–1896* has been recently published in 2006. My reading of the latter resonates with West’s findings; namely, that earliest sub-Saharan Christian readers of the Bible in colonial contexts brought their own questions and were quite oppositional to missionary teaching.¹⁰ It suffices to say more research is needed in this type of literature from various countries and ethnic groups, where missionaries pitched their tents. Further, in both collections, the missionary writing and native letters, a conscious decolonising and suspicious reading is needed, for the missionary had significant control on presenting issues from their perspective and controlling the native voices that got heard, since the publishing houses and papers belonged to the mission centers. Tshelha’s chapter is particularly significant in pointing us to a research archive that is yet to be sufficiently investigated by African biblical and literary scholars.

Mbuvi’s chapter gives us a fourth level of native biblical interpretations in a postcolonial history of the continent. This level represents a generation of those who were more educated thus writing longer works, novels. In this category there is, perhaps, a latitude of freedom to speak more oppositional than we might find from earlier letters sent to missionary newspapers, for their writing and interpretations are informed by a particular historical context in the postcolonial plot; namely, the struggle for independence. Be that as it may, most creative writers of this time were largely graduates of mission schools, who could embrace, reject or collaborate with missionary biblical teaching. Mbuvi’s chapter investigates the case

10. See my unpublished paper “Exegeting the Darkness: Reading the Botswana Colonial Bible,” presented in Atlanta, SBL Annual Meeting, 2010.

of Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, one of the scholars whose name stands high among post-colonial theorists in the world; and Bessie Head (1937–1986) a renowned South African woman writer in exile, who lived and died in Botswana. A child of a bi-racial couple, Bessie's mother, who lived in Apartheid South Africa, was sent to a mental hospital for her liaison with a black man to give birth secretly. Bessie's background makes her writing sensitive to all forms of ethnic discriminations that she observes among Botswana and constructs a narrative of ethnic-coexistence than discrimination.

Baptized and educated in Christian mission schools, like Kimpa Vita, Ngũgĩ was renamed James—a name that he discarded as his thinking became decolonialist. Similarly, while he first wrote in English at a later stage as part of decolonizing his own thinking and practice grew—Ngũgĩ stopped writing in English and started writing in his native language, Gikuyu. Needless to say, this was a radical *sankofa* act! In his earliest novels Ngũgĩ explicitly uses biblical stories, to critically engage the empire during the colonial times. Later, writing in the post-independence time, dealing with independence disappointments, Ngũgĩ remained with biblical texts and themes as part of his language. Mbuvi's analysis of Ngũgĩ biblical interpretations highlights that his perspective was changing, just as he was changing from Western Christian names and languages, to a more radicalized view of the Bible. This is captured by the titles of his novels such as *A Grain of Wheat* and *The Devil of the Cross*. Mbuvi's chapter has taken a big bite by analyzing the works of these two authors, for each of them has produced a literary canon. Nonetheless the analysis of Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's work provides an evident case of using the Bible in the scramble to get African lands from colonizers as well as insisting on African Indigenous Religions. In the work of these authors, engaging the empire and the Bible is not peripheral, but central to the agenda of their writing.

The last chapter in this section, features (Hans) van Deventer's analysis of a South African novel published in 2005. The novel's setting is in the late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Cape Colony South Africa, featuring well known historical missionaries of the time (James Read, Van der Kemp and Moffat). It features a Khoi-Khoi man, whose indigenous beliefs attach a significant religious meaning to the Praying Mantis. The main character of the novel, Cupido Cockroach, is perhaps by indication of his last name destined to be something we wish to doom away; but something which has the tenacity to come back, by its tendency of ensuring that at its death it leaves behind a batch of eggs to re-hatch and thus resurrect against what seems to be its final decimation. Cupido's journey from his Khoi-Khoi traditional beliefs to embracing the biblical religion would entail continuous experiences of dying to his culture, which is required by his new biblical faith, and the simultaneous tenacity of his indigenous religious beliefs' refusal to disappear. The three women in his life—his mother, first wife (Anna), and the second wife (Kartyn)—become the continual reminder of his indigenous faith and voice of reason in analyzing the racial disempowerment that he faces as a black indigenous missionary.

Cockroach is finally dismissed from his missionary job for supposedly failing to do his work, but this act in itself is a mark of victory for his indigenous faith given that the death of a cockroach is accompanied by birth of other cockroaches in bigger numbers. Indeed the natural sciences place the praying mantis and the cockroach in the same family, which puts a major twist on how we should read the protagonist's journey. It also makes Deventer title for this chapter, "God in Africa: lost and found; lost again and found anew" the most appropriate in describing the tenacity of indigenous cultures even as they embrace and intermingle with the death-dealing colonial biblical religions. Cockroach's journey into biblical faith would, like in the Kimpa Vita story, entail moving back and forth between the two belief systems. Deventer's chapter also connects with Gerald West's chapter, not only for addressing the same historical colonial context and analyzing the introduction of the Bible in colonial settings, but also in the role of native women characters. Both chapters are noted for featuring native women as the oppositional characters who even if they accept the Bible and its Christian faith, do so critically, in their own terms and without forgoing their indigenous beliefs.

COLONIZED BIBLES: RE-READING THE COLONIAL BIBLE AND CONSTRUCTING DECOLONIZING TRANSLATION PRACTICES

Section four features re-readings of colonial translations and discusses what could constitute decolonized biblical translations. As these chapters amply demonstrate, not only was colonial ideology packed in colonial travel narratives, missionary reports, letters and other descriptions of the Other, it also found its way to the colonial Bible translations. I accidentally came upon this phenomenon in 1995 when I discovered that in the Setswana Wookey Bible of 1908 the word *Badimo* (ancestors) was used to translate demons! So literally Jesus in the colonial Setswana Bible goes around casting out Ancestors instead of demons. I was shocked to the bones: not only were we a colonized people, even our divine powers had been subjugated to the same. Yet missionary translations were not only colonizing Bibles that sought to dispense with African indigenous beliefs, they were also patriarchalizing discourse, for the gender neutral African names of God took on a full patriarchal garment. These discoveries led me towards investigating the Setswana colonial Bible translations and to attempt an Africa-wide project of re-reading of colonial Bible translations with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. This effort was frustrated by lack of sufficiently trained biblical scholars, leading to only two articles, where a continent wide volume was originally sought.¹¹ Consequently, in

11. See Musa W. Dube, *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (Atlanta: SBL, 2001). Dora Mbuwayesango, "How Local Divine Powers Were Suppressed: A Case of Mwari of the Shona," 63–77, and Seratwa Ntloedibe-Kuswani, "Translating the Divine: The Case of Modimo in the Setswana Bible," 78–100, were the only papers that were submitted.

one of the African Biblical Hermeneutics SBL sessions we featured the question of re-reading colonial Bibles, which gave birth to the chapters in this section.

Gosnell Yorke, a Caribbean person of African descent from St. Kitts-Nevis, opens this section. Yorke is not only a biblical scholar but has actually served as a translation consultant in the region of Southern Africa and writes from experience. His article lays a broad history of Bible translation in the African continent into three stages: First, the north African translations that included the Septuagint in Alexandria, the Coptic and Ethiopian Ge'ez translations, which occurred centuries earlier, but did not have much impact on sub-Saharan Africa; Second, missionary translations that occurred in the context of the modern imperial context in the pre-independence era. Yorke pays much attention to missionary translations, highlighting how they were informed by the colonial context. Bible translation was a mission-driven agenda in an imperial age, which was often carried out according to various competing mission bodies. Third, the contemporary (modern) translations that begins to involve African people as Bible scholars, translators and consultants.

Yorke discusses the structures and translation houses that were established to control and facilitate translation according to Western established theories of the likes of Eugene Nida. Although the third stage supposedly features native translators, the latter operate within the established structures, theories and patronage of the former colonial masters. Indeed Yorke points out that there are some sites where translation is still largely in the hands of outsiders, despite the active involvement of indigenous mother-tongues speakers. Yorke calls for Afrocentric translations, which would, among other things, highlight African presence within the Bible, decolonize the available colonial Bibles that are still in use; equalize the power relations of native translators and consultants who are, more often than not, outsiders; and, in my view, depatriarchalize the translations by being faithful to gender-neutral African languages. However, Yorke acknowledges that economic power; the politics of gate-keeping; the lack of sufficiently trained biblical and linguistic native scholars; and the Western hermeneutical hegemony will continue to be a challenge in the quest for an Afrocentric approach to biblical translations. Realizing these challenges, in the days when Yorke was a translation consultant in Botswana, he ensured that he invited University of Botswana based mother-tongue biblical and linguistics scholars to be actively involved in the ongoing translation project. Yorke's approach indicates that it is not always about lack of trained scholars, but rather there is an agenda to control translation for particular ends.

Enerst M. Ezeogu's chapter perhaps best illustrates most of the challenges discussed by Yorke in contemporary bible translation projects. Using the case study of the Igbo Catholic Bible in Nigeria, Ezeogu outlines factors that impact a biblical translation in contemporary African settings under three categories. First, there are

This was followed up by Gosnell Yorke and Peter M. Renju, eds., *Bible Translation and African Languages* (Nairobi: Acton, 2004), written by translation consultants.

extra-textual issues which include administrative and monetary matters. Second, there are source-textual matters, which include deciding on source texts used for translation, translating gender, number and race. Third, there are receptor-textual factors, which include the various dialects in most African languages and reviewing colonial translations that tended to use loan words as well as confronting the multi-layered colonial legacy of being caught in between Latinized (following the Catholic tradition) and anglicized words (following the British colonial language). The last category illustrates the challenges confronted by contemporary natives in reviewing colonial bible traditions that have more than a century among faith communities. How should decolonizing reviews proceed without raising objections from attached receptor communities? How can completely new translations be undertaken where economic constraints are a factor? Due to lack of biblical scholars, Ezeogu highlights that contemporary translations that depend on English biblical translations, instead of Greek and Hebrew, end up importing embedded Western cultural assumptions.

Lovemore Togarasei's chapter presents a re-reading of the Shona colonial Bible translations and an investigation on "subsequent improvements" for possible decolonizing practices. Building on Dora Mubwayesango's earlier analysis of the Shona Bible, which focused on gender and the naming of God, Togarasei's re-reading of the Shona colonial Bible for imperial ideology asks how the various Shona dialects, were handled and how the Shona cosmology and spirituality was handled, using the case study of 1 Pet 4:3. According to Togarasei, the Shona missionary translators were incompetent in both languages—biblical and native languages. Togarasei places his discussion of the Shona Bible in the colonial context. He highlights that following Cecil John Rhodes in 1890, various missionary bodies divided the country among themselves (the scramble for Zimbabwe) and often gave themselves huge tracts of land. These included London Missionary Society, Apostolic Faith Mission, Catholic Church, Methodist Church, Anglican Church, Dutch Reformed Church and the Lutheran Evangelical Church. Zimbabwe has long been a highly colonized land. Indeed the scramble for Zimbabwe continues! Accordingly the Shona Bible translation was a process that was negotiated between the different mission bodies over time given that Shona language had five dialects, occupied by different missionary bodies. Togarasei focuses his investigation of colonial ideology on the translation of the word, "banqueting" in 1 Pet 4:3, which is listed among the vices to be avoided by readers. In the Shona colonial Bible translation the word was rendered *mabira*. Amongst the Shona, *mabira* is a central ritual used to communicate with ancestors on all issues affecting the family and community. Much like the Setswana colonial Bible translation that rendered ancestors as demons, the translation of *mabira* into a vice that must be avoided, demonized Shona culture and sought to distance indigenous readers from their own beliefs system. Togarasei's investigation of contemporary native speaker translators indicates that efforts were made to decolonize the Shona Bible through a review. Contemporary native translators have replaced *mabira* with *kuraradza*,

which means a drinking party, not an ancestor veneration ritual. They have also made attempts to avoid loaned words (anglicised Shona words). But, as other cases have attested, readers, however, remain attached to the colonial Shona Bible, for they “still believe that the Union Shona Bible is *the Bible*.”¹²

Elelwani B. Farisani’s essay gives us a window into the history of Bible translation into Tshivenda, one of the eleven languages of South Africa. Discussing translation ideology, he quotes that at the 1998 launch of a revised version it was held that the translation “will empower the church of Christ to conquer the country for Christ,” thereby highlighting that translation is still carried out under colonising ideology of conquest. Yet as Farisani underlines the translated Bible also empowers indigenous people to make their own interpretations, which may be different from the conquest agenda propounded by translation houses. In various stages, Farisani evaluates the history of TshiVenda, discusses some translation theories and revisits the colonial translation of 1936, using the case of 1 Kings 21:1–16. Like Yorke and Ezeogu, Farisani highlights challenges that face Bible translations projects in the African continent.

Overall, this section highlights significant research areas for African biblical scholarship, which current and future biblical students, must seriously consider. First, the reading of colonial biblical translations and their ideologies needs to be investigated and exposed. These chapters and the few published elsewhere, indicate that we have barely begun. Second, since these colonial translations have been read from the colonial times for more than a century, the impact on specific cultures needs to be studied and evaluated. One good example here is the gendering of African names of God into male gender, where they were largely neutral. Third, the new revised versions also need to be studied for the changes they make and what they maintain. Fourth, the study of colonial Bibles and their revised versions should contribute to new theories of translation. Data from the colonial translations indicates that theoretical claims of faithfulness to the original texts are not only untrue, they are also outright colonizing practices. New theories that will seek to respect both the so-called “source text” and the “receptor cultures” are imperative. The current claim of preserving the source text, a posture that is often used to annihilate Other cultures, is a perfect colonizing tool. Fifth, African biblical scholarship needs to commit itself to producing more biblical scholars, to be able to carry out translations and revisions from their very own mother tongue speakers.

Lastly, this section has major pedagogical implications for biblical studies as a whole. It is a standard practice to subject postgraduate students to learning two

12. I had the same findings with Batswana readings just as Aloo Mojola had similar findings with the Swahili readers. See Musa W. Dube, “Consuming a Cultural Bomb: Translating Badimo into Demons in the Setswana Bible,” *JSNT* 73 (1999): 33–59; and Aloo O. Mojola, “Postcolonial Translation Theory and the Swahili Bible,” in *Bible Translation and African Languages*, ed. Gosnell Yorke and Peter Renju (Nairobi: Acton, 2004), 77–104.

other European languages such as French, German and Spanish. For African students, who through colonization have already been instructed in languages of their former colonizers, this practice is often just another painful layer of colonization, for it serves to drive us even away from our languages and cultures and adds nothing to our scholarship. The pedagogical implications of this section are that African biblical students need to study, instead their own languages as part of doing biblical studies. African biblical students should be able to choose two African languages that were first used to translate the Bible in their regions. This shift will not only serve well in the re-reading of colonial Bibles, it will also build a significant profile of scholars who are equipped to assist with current biblical translations and revisions in their countries.

SCRAMBLING FOR THE LAND: READING THE LAND AND THE BIBLE

The three chapters in this section focus on land in the text and in the postcolonial contexts. Although colonialism which involved geographical spaces has largely subsided worldwide, land remains central to the postcolonial discourse. This is primary because the former colonized lands bear the marks and scars of this history, and many times the wounds are still bleeding, physically and psychologically. And so are its inhabitants. The Scramble for Africa continues as a historical reality and interpretation crux for African biblical scholars. While wars of independence were fought and won, it was mostly the political leadership that changed while economic and cultural power remained in the hands of the former colonizer. Just how the struggle for economic liberation must be wedged in the postcolonial era is a vital question. Land ownership, in many former colonies, best represents the *a luta continua* of this unfinished agenda in the postcolonial historical archives of resistance.

As the chapters of Robert Wafawanaka and Themba Mafico highlight, examining the acquisition, characterisation, use, and ownership of land in the text and history is thus central. Their focus underlines the unfinished business of economic independence from former colonizers. Both authors are natives of Zimbabwe, a country which in recent decades has highlighted how the struggle for independence continues because the empowerment of the dispossessed indigenous people remains an outstanding agenda. I am closely intertwined with the colonial story of Zimbabwe, since my parents were forced to move to Botswana after their land was declared a white man's farm. My parents had two choices: to move to dry, arid reserves designated for natives, or remain and become servants of their new land owner. Perhaps in resistance, or disbelief, my parents chose to remain, but the consequences of their new servanthood status soon became evident when their private property ownership was restricted. My parents then chose to move to Botswana, where we still live in the land-related series of Zimbabwean dispersion. While it is more than a half century since my parents moved, Zimbabwean natives face the same dilemma today, since the struggle for independence did not deliver

the land back to the hands of the dispossessed people. My father, at 90, still yearns to find the grave of his mother.

As Wafanaka points out, "At independence in 1980, 97% of Black Zimbabweans owned 45million acres of poor land while 3% of whites owned 51million acres of mostly fertile land, more than half of the country." Where must the disposed indigenous people of settler colonies go? And what court of justice will hear their cases? The question of how was land acquired, used, owned and characterised in both biblical and African cultures, is thus a reading that these chapters investigate as they confront the colonial history that marks both the land of Zimbabwe and its people.¹³ This indeed is linked to the historical fact that biblical stories were central to modern colonisation in Zimbabwe and many other areas. As Togarasei's chapter on biblical translation in Zimbabwe highlights, not only were native Zimbabweans moved into particular reserves, they were also given various missionaries to accompany their land and cultural dispossession. Just how one should re-read the biblical text for economic empowerment of the dispossessed is the focus of Wafanaka and Mafico as they point us to the postcolonial history of Zimbabwe.

Robert Wafula's follows closely on this land quest, by examining the Abraham and Lot stories, concerning movement in search for land and settlement. Wafula's chapter proceeds by exploring the recently published *African Biblical Commentary* (henceforth *ABC*), an evangelical/charismatic sponsored work, whose contributors had "to sign an Association of Evangelicals in Africa statement of faith." This underscores that *ABC* contents had to comply to the demands of its sponsors. Wafula, frames his analysis within a postcolonial framework by discussing Edward Said's research on Orientalism as a colonial discourse of subordinating the Other through consistent binary oppositions that represent the other as lacking. Wafula further discusses postcolonial frameworks provided by Homi Bhabha and Spivack, which point to the colonial contact zone as also characterised by gendered discourse and fluidity, which goes beyond the binary oppositions to include a third space of hybridity. Wafula then draws from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's call for ethics of reading and Musa W. Dube's postcolonial feminist reading of the text. Applying these frameworks to the *ABC* reading of the Abraham-Lot circle of

13. Although Stephen Moore in his chapter "A Modest Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies Field That Is Postliterary, Post-theoretical, and Postmethodological," featured in his book *The Bible in Theory and Postcritical Essays* (Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 368–69, says "postcolonial studies has yielded remarkable little in the way of readily identifiable methodologies" and while he cites Edward Said for "only" yielding the overly general strategy of "contrapuntal reading," I believe the latter holds the potential to open the Pandora's box in biblical studies that Moore has long yearned for. When applied, as attested by Wafawanka article on land, biblical studies will hardly be recognizable from its neat antiquarian boundaries. Rather, contrapuntal biblical studies will be read with thousands of world histories, untouched archives, cultures, structures, and contemporary contexts. If biblical studies applies contrapuntal reading, the Pandora's box would be nothing less than a tsunami on the current form of naïveté of biblical studies.

stories, Wafula finds the *ABC* commentator oblivious of the ideologies peddled by the text. According to Wafula, the *ABC* fails to read Abraham's story within its larger ideological agenda that had already assigned his "seed" to Canaan, a land with indigenous natives.¹⁴

AFROCENTRIC BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS: "UNTHINKING EUROCENTRISM"

In their book *Unthinking Eurocentricism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam highlight that colonial discourse has thoroughly informed academic paradigms, by situating the West (Europe, North America) as the center 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,"¹⁵ 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 US. . . . 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 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.¹⁶

Obviously mainstream academic biblical studies and theology is steeped in Eurocentric perspectives. It wades deep in the oceans of Eurocentricism, far from the shores of redemption and unashamedly so. As attested by its terms of analysis and knowledge production, they are primarily drawn from Greek culture, hence the discipline speaks of "exegesis," "eisegesis," "hermeneutics," "ekklesia," "soteriology," "kyriarchy," "democratic," "theology," "androcentric," "rhetoric," and the Greco-Roman context as the privileged history upon which academic biblical interpre-

14. See Randall C. Bailey, "They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality," in *Reading from This Place*, vol. 1: *Social Location in the US*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 121–38.

15. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 15.

16. *Ibid.*, 2–3.

tation must occur. Every time we say hermeneutics, we are evoking Hermes the messenger to the Greek gods.¹⁷

Take these Eurocentric paradigms away, biblical scholars will not know what to do. Give biblical scholars a reading from Other worldviews, they dismiss it as unscholarly. Myopia reigns! In addition to requiring postgraduate students to learn two more European languages, for philosophy and theory, biblical studies draws from its Western thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger,¹⁸ Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, French Feminists to mention a few. A few other non-Western thinkers, such as Edward Said, Gaytri Spivack, Homi Bhabha and Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo, have recently made entrance in Biblical studies. But they are only a drop in the ocean, paddled by a few scholars, who are swimming against the tide. Biblical studies is still largely steeped in Eurocentrism, projecting Greece as “where it all started.”¹⁹ Those of us who come from former colonies drink our fill, as we inevitably become colonized by the terms of the discipline. I confess I have taken a full baptism and I am still drowning in the Eurocentric epistemologies, although not without a struggle.

The three essays in this section make efforts to displace the Eurocentric biblical studies, by positing other ways and places of reading. African Americans, living in the belly of Eurocentrism, have long strived to highlight other ways of producing knowledge, by highlighting Egypt as another place instead of a singular focus on Greece. According to Shohat and Stam, “Afrocentric discourse posits Africa, and especially Egypt, as a site of origins.”²⁰ Ezeogu’s chapter is an exercise in Afrocentric interpretation in which standard tools of biblical “exegesis” are used to highlight aspects of the text that are of special interest to people of African descent. The chapter submits the thesis available in Matthew 1 in which Mary and her son Jesus, were known to be Africans of Egyptian origin resident in Galilee. According to Ezeogu, this tradition created difficulties for Jews of Matthew’s time in accepting Jesus as their Messiah, since a Messiah was expected to be a Hebrew of Davidic line. Matthew, therefore, retells the story in such a way as to portray Jesus as a son of Abraham of the bloodline of David. Ezeogu holds that Matthew’s makeover leaves many gaps. The chapter thus identifies these historical and narrative gaps and shows how the thesis of the African origin of Mary and Jesus fills them.

David Adamo’s Chapter offers a critique of Eurocentric engagement with the Psalms. The chapter summarizes main methodological approaches used, high-

17. Henry L. Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), has posited another messenger of Gods, Eshu, instead of the usual culprit, Hermes.

18. See Shawn Kelley, *Racialising Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (Routledge: New York, 2002), whose book traces racism among the foremost thinkers of European philosophy and how it has influenced biblical scholarship.

19. Shohat and Stam, *Eurocentricism*, 55–58.

20. *Ibid.*, 56.

lighting that they are predominantly Eurocentric. Arguing that the dominant models of reading Psalms in the scholarship at large and among African scholars are Eurocentric, Adamo seeks to shift the centre and point to multiple Other centres. He challenges the existing Eurocentric dominance and provides a number of alternative approaches that have emerged from and are consonant with African cultures and traditions, especially from Nigeria.

Madipoane Masenya's article is another example of reading from many other centres and worldviews in knowledge production. Using her *Bosadi* perspective, Masenya performs a critical *sankofa* act. Masenya calls on both Badimo (Ancestors) and Modimo (God) and draws from the Northern Sotho storytelling traditions, proverbial philosophy, sayings and worldview to read Job's Lament. Masenya situates her reading in Sepedi language, given that the language itself is the cradle of a cultural worldview. Instead of just Greek and Hebrew centred worldviews and Eurocentric philosophies and theories, Masenya's article has many italicised Sotho-Pedi words, phrases, sayings and proverbs, immediately sending the message to the reader that she reads from many Other centres as well. Using the character of Mmanape, a woman who carried a child in her womb for nine months, successfully delivered and raised a boy-child for twenty-six years and even gained patriarchal approval for mothering a boy child, she experiences a tragedy: her son dies in a car accident. In this storytelling, Masenya takes us deep into the worldview of mothering, birthing and burying. It is the art of going deep into the waters of Mother Earth and only to return the child back into deep soils of Mother Earth.

How does a grieved mother find healing? And here comes Job: a man who experienced massive loss of all his daughters, property and health. Mmanape a Northern Sotho woman comes to journey with Job, in search for healing. Surely Job has seen the worst, he did not only loose one child, he lost all of them. Here in Job's story a grieved mother must indeed find the road towards healing. But what does Mmanape find in Job's lament? Job curses the day he was born and blames his mother's womb that brought him to this life. This is shocking for Mmanape. Mothers are blamed for pain and death. What about mothers who are grieved: Do they only have themselves to blame? In short, Mmanape finds no comfort in Job's misogynist lament. In this chapter, Masenya has given us one of the most intense and original reading of Job's lament from a Bosadi perspective, using the worldview of Northern Sotho and her biblical training.

John David Ekem investigates the European and Ghanaian translations and interpretations of the phrase "*ton arton hemon ton epiousion*," which is located within the Matthean and Lucan versions of "The Lord's Prayer." He argues that from a Ghanaian hermeneutical perspective, the question of 'economic survival' and the need to strive for moral and economic excellence should play a crucial role in the interpretation of the text. Ekem's chapter evaluates all the possible interpretational options and argues that it would be most appropriate to interpret, "*ton arton hemon ton epiousion*" as a reference to the supply of "needs necessary for

our existence.” This interpretation is not only supported by some Early Church Fathers, it is also meaningful to Ghanaian target audiences. In making this argument, namely, that meaning should be driven by the context and needs of the readers; Ekem is challenging the fiercely guarded translation theories that privilege the original text over against the so-called receptor communities, their languages and their needs.

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION FOR RECONSTRUCTION

The colonial times were characterised by the re-reading the Exodus narrative for liberation in the struggle for independence. The colonized’s reading sought to take away Exodus from the colonizers, who regarded themselves as divinely chosen races that had the right to dispossess the indigenous people of their lands. Instead they re-read Exodus for their liberation, positioning themselves as the oppressed, exploited and enslaved, whose cry has reached God’s ear and eye.²¹ But in the 1980s and early 1990s most wars for liberation in the continent ended characterised by the arrival of new nations such as Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. Apartheid had finally crumbled, somewhat. Moreover, the global context was also characterised by the end of the cold war. It was a time of great hope, just before the disappointments became evident.

A theology of reconstruction and its reading of Ezra–Nehemiah emerged from this context: gone, it was assumed, are the revolutionary wars and now was the time to rebuild from the colonial devastation. But much as this textual shift is proposed, both books feature the coming in of some groups into a land that is already occupied by others. The crux of the matter is how to share the economic cake, the land, and to coexist with each other and the land in a relationship of liberating interdependence. In reconstruction reading as well, it is clear that the historical Scramble for Africa was not only the Scramble for Africa through the Bible, but also that the scramble to get back some pieces of Africa, by those who lost it, is still wedged through the Bible.

Ellelwani B. Farisani’s chapter gives us highlights of the earliest proponents of reconstruction theology by evaluating the works of Charles Villa-Vicencio, Jesse Mugambi and Andre Karamanga. Given the new context of post-independence, the proponents underlined the need to shift from liberation metaphors and scriptures, such as Exodus, to a new language of thinking and working through

21. See Robert A. Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians: Conquest, and Liberation Theology Today,” *ChrCr* 49 (1989): 261–65, who has highlighted that for dispossessed natives of settler colonies the Exodus narrative is historically and ideologically oppressive and does not work for liberation purposes. Indeed as the attempt to employ Ezra–Nehemiah for postliberation context points to the same challenge, we need to take Warrior’s suggestion that we must look elsewhere, instead of confining ourselves to the same biblical texts that legitimized our oppression.

the Ezra–Nehemiah paradigm of rebuilding. A new day had dawned and hope reigned. Farisani interrogates these scholars' reading of the Ezra–Nehemiah and finds insufficient engagement with the chosen scriptures and lack of problematizing its ideology. In particular, their reading of Ezra–Nehemiah does not sufficiently problematize how the text empowers the returning exiles over the *am haaretz* and its exclusivist ideology, which required the divorce of foreign wives. For Farisani, Ezra–Nehemiah text must be read against the grain, fully identifying its oppressive ideology.

Coming from Zimbabwe, a country that fully embodies the hopes and disappointments of post-independence, Wafawanaka revisits the interpretation of Ezra–Nehemiah for reconstruction. In the colonial Zimbabwe, the indigenous were exiled within their own country by being moved to some reserves, which were arid, crowded and infertile areas. Independence should have meant returning to their lands and beginning the process of reconstruction. But as Wafawanaka's earlier chapter points out, when the Lancaster Conference of 1980 was signed the country was given political independence while land remained in the hands of settler colonizers. The Zimbabwean government, with the help of former colonizer, was supposed to buy the land and redistribute it, a process that was only partially fulfilled, leading to the ceasing of the land by force and further devastation of people and the land. Getting back the land, has been a long protracted and devastating struggle, for those who took the land, although initially foreigners are now Zimbabweans and they are not volunteering to share it.

The Scramble for Africa is thus not just history, it is a living story that continues to play itself out on our lives. A reading of Ezra–Nehemiah for reconstruction from a Zimbabwean perspective is complicated but necessary. Clearly, it would challenge Farisani's position that those who remained in the land were necessarily oppressed by the returning exiles. Wafawanaka proceeds by placing Ezra–Nehemiah within the Deuteronomic history that associated Israel's subjugation by foreign nations with sin. He argues that the returning exiles adopted a survival posture, which involved expelling foreign wives. While Wafawanaka underlines that reconstruction is vital, he problematizes the identity politics of the Ezra–Nehemiah, pointing out that colonial ideology thrives by strategies that divides and stratifies people, leading to postcolonial explosions such as the Rwanda genocide of the 1990s.

Gerrie Snyman's chapter uses collective memory of South Africa as a hermeneutical framework to read Ezra–Nehemiah. One particular collective memory in South Africa is the theological justification of apartheid. The collective memories of the 'victims' of apartheid have drawn attention to the issue of subjectivity, urging the perpetrators to take stock of their own reading practices. Ezra's sending away of the strange women and children and Nehemiah's separation of the people from strangers echo the apartheid regime's policy of separate development. Snyman's chapter strives to elucidate the role of collective memory as a hermeneutical framework for a bible-reading community struggling to come to terms with its

perpetrator legacy and seeking to participate in constructing a new social order guided by a human rights framework. It asks the following question: In what way does an apartheid collective memory allow a perpetrator community to employ Ezra and Nehemiah in his or her own everyday reconstruction of society? In problematizing the ideology of Ezra–Nehemiah of resettlement, Synman is consistent with both Farisani and Wafawanaka. In short, these chapters amply demonstrate that given that the Scramble for Africa was a scramble through the Bible, this history will always remain an interpretation crux in reading biblical texts in the African contexts.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATIONS

In the African continent where the struggle for justice and empowerment still continues, the role and place of scholars becomes an ethical issue. Should a scholar ignore the struggles of the communities and maintain conversation only with other scholars? How should one situate their scholarship in the community for social transformation? The three chapters in this section give us three case studies. The first chapter, by Sarojini Nadar, investigates the work of Gerald O. West, who for over two decades has promoted socially-engaged scholarship. Her chapter critically explores the ideological, academic and socio-political implications of the model of social engagement developed by West. Nadar's analysis examines three focus areas: motivation, method and representation. She explores and interrogates West's methods by asking vital questions concerning the functions and responsibilities of both the faith communities and intellectual engagements. She questions how the communities are subsequently represented by the intellectuals. In conclusion, Nadar holds that collaboration between scholars and community is vital, however, the challenge which remains for organic intellectuals is to use the opportunities, which they have been given through their privileged access to education, to empower those in the community who have been structurally denied opportunities.

Emmanuel Katongole examines Musa W. Dube's work with HIV&AIDS as one example of a social-engaged scholarship. Because HIV&AIDS has interrupted our world and our lives in such radical ways, Katongole holds that we must allow it to interrupt our scholarship radically as well. For Katongole, allowing this interruption leads us to question our existing paradigms, it calls for the adoption of new methodologies and approaches. Even more importantly, it calls us back to the discipline of dreaming news visions in relation to our bodies, sexuality, family life, the church, and the world. HIV&AIDS an epidemic that was scientifically discovered in the early 1980s, has in just three decades, claimed more thirty million people worldwide, two-thirds of those in Africa. Dube who describes HIV&AIDS as an epidemic within other social epidemics, named this tragedy as a context of doing scholarship under a paradigm of shattered dreams. For Katongole, the challenge is how to embrace HIV&AIDS not only as threat, but to see it as a *kairos*, that is, as

a moment of truth and a unique opportunity that forces us to dream and inhabit dreams of God's new creation. Katongole sees Dube's work with HIV&AIDS as a positive challenge, for it presents a model of embodied and embodying hermeneutics of life within the academy. However, Katongole suggests that Dube needs to pay more attention to the notion and practice of lament in the Bible. Biblical lament is not a mode of wading in one's own helplessness, but a posture of naming prevailing social injustice and protesting its unacceptability, thereby calling for transformation and living hope.

While Nadar and Katongole examine scholars' social-engagement with their communities, Alice Yafeh-Deigh's reading of Luke 10:38–42 seeks to highlight the liberative power of silent agency for Cameroonian women. The chapter seeks to offer *one* of the many potential readings of the story within the context of a postcolonial Afro-feminist-womanist biblical hermeneutics. Yafeh-Deigh's postcolonial Afro-feminist-womanist approach takes the concerns of disadvantaged, marginalized grassroots women as the starting point of analysis and seeks to discern ways in which this story, that is not written with contemporary Cameroonian women's experience in mind, can be critically recontextualized and hermeneutically appropriated within the context of their own lived experiences. Yafeh-Deigh's working premise is that the passage is about Mary's subversive choice and the evaluation of that choice by Martha and Jesus. She holds that Mary creates and enables a unique kind of agency, namely silent resistance. For Yafeh-Deigh, Jesus' consent to and his affirmation of Mary's subversive decision in Luke 10:42 forces the reader to reassess the meaning of agency, especially in contemporary contexts where silence, influenced by Eurocentric ideals, is often seen as a symbol of passivity and disempowerment. This space that Mary silently intrudes and creates is, according to Yafeh-Deigh, a space that is pregnant with possibilities for Cameroonian women's struggle for liberation and empowerment. Mary's silent agency, she argues, could not only be an empowering strategy for contemporary women in rural communities, it could also be a tool for liberation that effectively challenges established gender roles assigned to men and women.

EMBODIMENT AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE HIV&AIDS CONTEXT

The last section focuses on embodiment, HIV&AIDS and biblical interpretation. In the colonial discourse and postcolonial contexts the body is a central ideological construct. Enslaved, racialised, gendered, sexualised, violated, lynched, starving, dead, unburied, ghosts and resurrection bodies of resistance characterise the postcolonial history. Malebogo Kgalemang's reading of Mark's passion narrative, from a postcolonial feminist perspective, begins with the gruesome bloody body of the crucified Jesus and its function in modern colonial contexts. The colonial discourse through a hymn teaches the colonized Other to accept their suffering, by displaying the violated body of Jesus as salvific. Kgalemang's chapter gives a close reading of Mark 14–16. The first section examines the scope of postcolonial femi-

nist criticism of the Bible while the second part is the application. Kgalemang's postcolonial feminist interpretation of Mark's passion narrative takes into full cognizance the patriarchal and the imperial context that produced the crucifixion, the role of local politics, its collusion with empire, and the role of women in the narrative. Holding that Markan resistance does not make sense outside the imperial context and outside the politics of gender, Kgalemang concludes that Mark is a colonized patriarchal writer, one who is constituted by the very same ideological principles he calls into critical questioning.

Jeremy Punt's chapter focuses on Pauline bodies and South African bodies. He highlights the intersection of power, body and biblical interpretation, arguing that a focus on the body in contexts of vulnerability foregrounds its interplay with power. Punt holds that while in South Africa there is a pronounced awareness of the material body and its needs, this contrasts with Christian theological tendency of undermining the body. Consequently, Punt interrogates the characterisation of the body in the New Testament, focusing on Pauline letters. Punt finds that in the Pauline traditions the body is central, for Paul frequently invoked the body, using it as the leading metaphor in his letters.

Thus Punt argues that Paul's theological approach and perception was informed by his engagement with bodiliness. Holding that the wide-ranging Pauline discourse on the body is imbued with power concerns, Punt shows the link between body and power in different configurations of various kinds in Paul's letters. For Punt, this reading has three advantages: it allows for rehabilitation of an important concept in Pauline thought; it signals a new epistemology of the body in which contextual nature of the body is taken seriously and the body is understood as a site of revelation. Obviously the centering of the body is vital given the recent wars on sexual orientation debates, characterised by the Anglican communion and among some African governments, and the HIV&AIDS context that has ravaged the continent in the past three decades.

The last chapter in the book highlights African biblical interpretations in the HIV&AIDS context.²² In this article, I outline several frameworks that informed response to HIV&AIDS: These included the medical, religio-moral, human-rights psychological and social justice perspectives. The question in such contexts for biblical scholars is: How can our reading participate in the healing of communities and relationships in social-injustice driven epidemic? As used here, social injustice refers to a whole range of structural oppressions (e.g., poverty, gender oppression, homophobia, racism, age-based discrimination, exploitative capitalist neo-liberal economic structures etc) covering various marginalized groups such People Living With HIV&AIDS, blacks, women, widows, children, gay people, sex workers, drug addicts, the physically challenged, among others. The chapter gives a rough sketch of some emerging biblical interpretations on reading the Bible in the HIV&AIDS

22. This paper was first presented as a keynote address for the Southeastern Commission on the Study of Religion (SECSOR), Atlanta, 2008.

context. In conclusion, I highlight some of the methodological issues raised by HIV&AIDS for biblical studies; namely, that biblical studies should also utilize social-science based fieldwork methods given that it is a text that is read in the social contexts and informs attitudes and practices of individuals and communities.

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