

READING MICAH IN NIGERIA

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READING MICAH IN NIGERIA  
Ethics, Wealth, and Corruption

by  
Blessing Onoriode Boloje

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## FOREWORD

There is hardly a biblical prophet who calls for ethical action as directly as Micah, whose prophecy is dated to the eighth century BCE by the superscription in Mic 1:1. Micah's prophetic accusation is highly poetic and yet always very concrete. The announced punishments are repeatedly reciprocal: those who have caused injustice by exploiting the land will suffer injustice through redistribution of land without compensation; those who accumulated wealth in palace like houses will experience homelessness and loss; and those who squeezed the poor by seizure will become needy themselves. The ruthless greed of the possessing few could not be more violent: They "strip the robe from the peaceful," they "tear the skin off my people," and they "eat the flesh of God's people." It is a relentless reckoning with the institutions—prophets and priests have failed—that allowed it to come to this acutely immoral situation. A prophet in this situation does not have an easy task: he has to find solid, authoritative, yet also common ground. This challenge has driven the tradents of the book of Micah seriously, which is why they have supplemented, expanded, amended, and edited it over several centuries. On what basis can one condemn the behavior which is obviously damaging to the community? The theological tradents sought their way between natural law and revelation. They linked the argument of accusation to the torah and thus substantiated it. The intertextual entanglement with the social laws of the torah and the rereading of Micah's straightforward analysis allowed them to coin the simple yet enigmatic basic ethical principle: "He has told you, man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Mic 6:8).

Because the description of the wickedness is so dense and at the same time so immediately comprehensible, and because the necessity of a social change towards an economic and social order based on justice is so pressing, this prophetic book—like no other—seems to be suitable for a transfer to the unrighteousness of the present. The task of exegesis is not to simply skip the inconvenient (or problematic / awkward / bothersome / etc.) gap of historical distance, but to thoroughly unfold the discourses that have been reflected in the multi-layered book. Exegesis does not simply comprise a direct application of a

biblical text for one's own community or communities of readers, but rather the exposure of structural parallels, such as, for instance, accountability of leadership or morality as a base of convenience and economic development, the necessity of community building as a means of survival, et cetera. Here, exegesis of Micah has a great deal to offer, and the current book of Blessing Boloje does so. He argues carefully and applies masterfully the appropriate exegetical methods to the text, which unfolds its urgent relevance for today's readers. Although the author is as sensitive as possible to the parallels in African societies, especially to twenty-first century Nigeria, and although he is quite open to the necessary critical analysis of actual leadership, and although he is of the firm conviction that Micah is God's word, he does not simply read the current challenges into the text. Rather, he points out what the text in its historical context can mean for a community that is based on the Bible and finds hope and perspective in it. Hence, this balanced study becomes extremely valuable in two ways: for its exegetical discussion, because it offers further approaches to the explanation of Micah's prophecy, and for its social discussion regarding contemporary Africa-Nigerian context, because it shows structural parallels that make it possible to search for alternative courses of action.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, D. N., ed. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York, 1992.
AJBS	<i>African Journal of Biblical Studies</i>
AJET	<i>African Journal of Evangelical Theology</i>
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
ATR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	Brown, F. Driver, S. R. and Briggs, C. <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon.
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BT	<i>Bible Translator</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CPI	Corruption Perceptions Index
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
ECWA	Evangelical Church Winning All
EJT	<i>Evangelical Journal of Theology</i>
ESJ	<i>European Scientific Journal</i>
ExAud	<i>Ex auditu</i>
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GNB	Good News Bible
HALOT	Koehler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm, eds. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HvTSt	<i>Harvorme teologiese studies</i>
IJHSS	<i>International Journal of Humanities and Social Science</i>
IJSRSSMS	<i>International Journal of Scientific Research in Social Sciences and Management Studies</i>

<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JPC</i>	<i>Journal of Psychology and Christianity</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBT</i>	<i>Journal of Black Theology</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JORIND</i>	<i>Journal of Research in National Development</i>
<i>JP</i>	<i>Journal for Preachers</i>
<i>JPAPR</i>	<i>Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research</i>
<i>JPE</i>	<i>Journal of Political Economy</i>
<i>JRSSupp</i>	Journal of Religion and Society Supplement Series
<i>JSDA</i>	<i>Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa</i>
<i>JSem</i>	<i>Journal for Semitics</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSup</i>	Journal for the Study of Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSSS</i>	<i>Journal of Studies in Social Sciences</i>
<i>LHBOTS</i>	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text
<i>NASB</i>	New American Standard Bible
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIV</i>	New International Version
<i>NJB</i>	The New Jerusalem Bible
<i>NJPS</i>	New Jewish Population Society
<i>NRSV</i>	New Revised Standard Version
<i>OTE</i>	Old Testament Essays
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>PJ</i>	<i>Perkins Journal</i>
<i>PSt</i>	<i>Political Studies</i>
<i>REB</i>	Revised English Bible
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SemeiaSt</i>	Semeia Studies
<i>Scrip</i>	<i>Scriptura</i>
<i>SJER</i>	<i>Sky Journal of Educational Research</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SWJT</i>	<i>South-western Journal of Theology</i>
<i>StRel</i>	<i>Studies in Religion</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	Botterweck, G. Johannes, and Helmer Ringgren, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Translated by John T. Willis et al. 8 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006.

THOTC	Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary
TI	Transparency International
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TWOT</i>	Harris, R. L., and G. L. Archer Jr., eds. <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> . 2 Vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980.
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
<i>VE</i>	<i>Verbum et Ecclesia</i>
<i>VE</i>	<i>Vox Evangelica</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplement
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
WCC	World Council of Churches

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## INTRODUCTION

The effects of our actions may be postponed but they are never lost. There is an inevitable reward for good deeds and an inescapable punishment for bad.

—Wu Ming Fu

### 1.1. Background and General Orientation

This project developed from reflections on the perennial issues of injustice, poverty, wealth, and oppression especially of marginalized majority prevalent in many parts of the world but practically ubiquitous in Nigeria (and Africa in general).<sup>1</sup> In Nigeria, there is generally an obvious manifestation of socioeconomic and religious contrast between affluent lifestyle of leaders (and those connected to them) and the destitution of marginalized majority who have become perpetual economic hostages. Nigeria as a country is generally referred to as the “Giant of Africa” due essentially to its huge population and economy. But sadly, it remains a country with untapped and underdeveloped resources, neglected projects and shattered hopes. The situation is compounded largely by unproductive, greedy, irresponsible, and unaccountable leadership and citizens who are unpatriotic and/or corrupt.

A report by *The World Poverty Clock* noted that “Nigeria has become the poverty capital of the world.”<sup>2</sup> Samuel Abogunrin notes that poverty in Nigeria is “the inevitable consequence of a process in which a few economically powerful Nigerians wield political power to control institutions for their own private

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<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, the description of Nigeria bears the stamp of my personal experience. My description may not be entirely comprehensive but an obvious reflection of the day-to-day realities in the country. On the other hand, these descriptive realities also find expression in various narratives about Nigerians and Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup> Yomi Kazeem, “Nigeria has become the poverty capital of the world,” June 25, 2018, <https://qz.com/africa/1313380/nigerias-has-the-highest-rate-of-extreme-poverty-globally/>.

profit.”<sup>3</sup> The so far unsuccessful attempt to lift the country and her citizens out of the labyrinth of poverty has been attributed to the failure of the country’s leadership in managing her massive oil wealth and other resources because of corruption. According to Kazeem’s 2018 report, there are about 86.9 million Nigerians living in extreme poverty. This estimate represents approximately 50 percent of the country’s estimated population of 180 million people. While there is certainly no unanimous definition of poverty, Peter Townsend in relating poverty to income notes that “people can be said to be in poverty when they are deprived of income and other resources needed to obtain the conditions of life—the diets, material goods, amenities, standards and services—that enable them to play the roles, meet the obligations and participate in the relationships and customs of their society.”<sup>4</sup> The massive rate of poverty in the midst of the nation’s wealth has been linked to the scourge of corruption in the country. This description is however not different from the rest of Africa.<sup>5</sup> The report of *ActionAid Nigeria* on “corruption and poverty in Nigeria” associates corruption with “the massive stealing of public resources that would have been invested in providing wealth-creating infrastructure and social services for the citizenry, thus reducing poverty.”<sup>6</sup>

In their studies, Staffan Andersson and Paul M. Heywood analyze the pivotal role of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), made available by Transparency International (TI). From the TI report, a working definition of corruption is noted:

Corruption is operationally defined as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain. TI further differentiates between ‘according to rule’ corruption and ‘against the rule’ corruption. Facilitation payments, where a bribe is paid to receive preferential treatment for something that the bribe receiver is required to do by law, constitute the former. The latter, on the other hand, is a bribe paid to obtain services the bribe receiver is prohibited from providing.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel O. Abogunrin, “The Community of Goods in the Early Church and the Distribution of National Wealth,” *AJBS* 1.2 (1986): 85.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Townsend, “What Is Poverty? An Historical Perspective,” in *UNDP: What Is Poverty? Concepts and Measures* (Brasilia: International Poverty Center, 2006): 5. <http://www.ipc-undp.org/pub/IPCPovertyInFocus9.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Lual A. Deng, *Rethinking African Development: Towards a Framework for Social Integration and Ecological Harmony* (Asmara: Africa World, 1998), 141–46.

<sup>6</sup> ActionAid Nigeria, “Corruption and Poverty in Nigeria: A Report” (Abuja: Nigeria, 2015), 6. <http://www.actionaid.org/nigeria/publications/poverty-and-corruption-nigeria>.

<sup>7</sup> Staffan Andersson and Paul M. Heywood, “The Politics of Perception: Use and Abuse of Transparency International’s Approach to Measuring Corruption,” *PSt* 57.4 (2009): 748. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2008.00758.x>.



As an exploitation of entrusted privilege for personal advantage, corruption is seen almost everywhere and thrives in every society in different modes. It is manifested in a nation's politics, socioeconomic relations, and religious spaces with attitudes such as misappropriation of public assets for personal use, exploitation, extortion, bribery, cheating, favoritism, and embezzlement. It is regrettable to observe that those who are entrusted with the responsibility of making sure that equity and justice prevail at all levels of their national life have become increasingly indifferent to the perennial issues of injustice, poverty, and oppression. Exploitation and corruption are seen to be trivial matters and the order of justice is no longer regarded as an outstanding component for corporate regard, not even for self-regulation. Consequently, the nation's inner self is completely fragmented as it has negligibly and shamelessly accepted exploitation and corruption not simply as the standard of social relationships, but it's amplified consequent product, impunity, as a national symbol. As observed, the shadow of impunity is upon the nation; it is overwhelming every social space. Certainly, this situation has created a monumental tragedy in which there is an unimaginable scale of political, socioeconomic, and religious contradictions and transgressions that affect national security, unity, peace, progress and general well-being and prosperity for all citizens. In every department of national life are issues of exploitation and human oppression, hypocrisy, bribery and corruption and an overwhelmingly extravagant and extreme performance of rituals among religious—often Christians—communities, which as those of modern days are, were noticeably the characteristic trademark of Micah's era.<sup>8</sup> As it exists today in Nigeria, there is a growing evangelical quest about God and deep concern for equity and justice as the opulent wealth of the national leadership contrasts with the poverty of the marginalized majority. Micah's oracles present obvious infidelity to injustice in key quarters of his society which becomes a stimulating impetus for this current project. The literary text of Micah's oracles indicates how the less-privileged became victims of oppression (cf. Mic 2:1–11), how traditional moral and social solidarities resulting from the Old Testament Covenant were gradually disregarded or overlooked,<sup>9</sup> and how the authorized religion of the temple at Jerusalem seemed to lack the courage to challenge the blatant and deliberate scope of current injustices.

This project is driven by the moral sensitivity of the prophet Micah as it provides a germane and viable platform for evaluating contemporary ethical and religious issues of faith and life in the Nigerian society. The message of Micah's prophecies underscores the fact that the literary paradigm of preserving Micah's oracles of various forms for the benefit of later readers serves to situate the

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<sup>8</sup> For examples of religious overdoing in Micah's era see 2:1–5; 2:6–11; 3:1–12; 6:1–8.

<sup>9</sup> Juan I. Alfaro, *Justice and Loyalty: A Commentary on the Book of Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 6.

book's relevance beyond the original community or communities of readers to transhistorical readers with similar structural socioeconomic and religious ideologies and theology of resistance against oppression. The unfolding chapters and sections of this project will articulate the relevance of the literary text of Micah, of its rhetoric of stern condemnation of corruption and exploitation of the poor and powerless, for contemporary readers of faith communities and larger human society.

## 1.2. Driving Questions and Intended Orientation

Prophetic discourse responds to specific situations by highlighting the implications or consequences of the current line of action. It is meant to remove or revise the “‘actual or potential exigency’ by persuading others to modify circumstances and thus avert or minimize the catastrophic consequences foreseen as a result of the trend of events.”<sup>10</sup> Every prophetic discourse presents a matrix of factors to which it is providing a response and this, to some extent, is seen in the situation addressed by Micah's discourse. Specifically, this project will address the following fundamental questions as ways of analyzing and assessing Micah's ethos of justice as witness to Yahweh's healing agenda in a covenant community and, nowadays, in any human society:

- What sociopolitical economic and religious circumstances and events called forth Micah's prophetic discourse?
- How did Micah's prophetic discourse deal with socioeconomic injustice, worship, and false security within his community (that is, the relation of social and cult criticism: “Sozialkritik und Kultkritik”)?
- What are the essential ethical thrusts of Micah's prophetic discourse?
- Do Micah's prophetic discourse and its ethical concerns provide their readers with normative principles that are acceptable for understanding the Bible in theology and ethics? How can certain ethical principles be drawn from biblical texts?
- What ethical demands do Micah's prophetic discourses make upon an individual's life and ethical responsibility in his or her daily living and in the Christian community, in Nigeria or in wider human society?
- What ethical models and practical demands does reflection on Micah's prophetic discourse present to faith communities and to wider human society—their attitude toward, and use of, their possessions, administration of justice, and to the practice of Christian orthodoxy?

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<sup>10</sup> Charles S. Shaw, *The Speeches of Micah: A Rhetorical-Historical Analysis*, JSOTSup 145 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 22.

This project holds that the moral uncertainty in Nigeria and corrupt communities elsewhere in Africa and beyond, created by unprecedented problems of socioeconomic and religious contradictions, if honestly and directly faced as well as well-handled, generate practical resourcefulness that starts to make those desiring a more moral culture, more proficient to meet their challenges. The project will analyze how various features of socioeconomic and religious transgressions seem to overwhelm possibilities of moral agency. A biblical theological ethics such as this project proposes begin, then, by analyzing how the challenges of unprecedented socioeconomic relations, threaten to overwhelm people's capacities of theological response, and alienate the practice of Christian life from reality. If the practice of faith within Christian communities and wider human society must overcome unprecedented socioeconomic relations, then as a moral community, Christian believers must generate ways to sustain the meaning of their way of life in changing and challenging situations. What love and justice will come to imply for life in an era of socioeconomic inequalities, true worship and false security depends on the church's innovations that make these concepts work through any unanticipated anomalies and situations. These innovations will become authoritative in as much as adherents recognize them as coherent interpretations of traditions, and in as much as they adopt them as authentic ways of speaking faith and addressing the challenges posed by the sociocultural climate of her age.<sup>11</sup> This project will underscore Micah's ethical thrust for contemporary engagement in a socioeconomically and religiously challenging context of the Nigerian society.

The project will highlight the significance of a well-informed social solidarity for considerable appreciation of the biblical text of Micah and for modeling faith and commitment in one's contemporary world of socioeconomic and religious contradictions. It will clarify hermeneutically the relevance of Micah's critique for Christian communities in Nigeria and the Nigerian society, and consequently communicate a prophetic vision that can direct society toward a different kind of future. Since a moral society is that in which the rights of the poor, weak, vulnerable (such as widows and the fatherless) and powerless are protected, this project will stimulate stewardship of responsibility and accountability on God's—and the Earth's—available resources at the disposal of all by emphasizing Micah's ethos of justice. The theological nexus of socioeconomic and religious demands in Micah's oracles are paradoxically outstanding and elegant. The project will constantly emphasize the literary prophetic character of Micah along with various rhetorical ways of appropriating his rich theological traditions so as to accomplish his theological and ethical objective of inviting his audience to accede to the urgent and desperate demands for justice and the de-

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<sup>11</sup> Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 23.

velopment of an equitable society. Thus, the relevance of this project rests not only in the identification of the essential ethical drives of Micah's oracles, but more importantly in the relation and application of those theological and ethical thrusts to current and daily life situations of contemporary Nigerian society—in particular—and of other societies that are faced with similar socioeconomic and religious contradictions.

The outcomes of this project will benefit, first, theological and religious studies' students, irrespective of their context, as knowledge gained from it will enhance their teaching on the prophetic literature, as well as on the book of Micah. It will, furthermore, enhance pastors' and leaders' understanding of ethics, leadership and responsibility, and this will in turn contribute to their use of the book of Micah. Study of this book will offer valuable insights into prophetic protest against injustice in ancient Israelite society, but also in contemporary faith communities and human societies.

### 1.3. Methodology, Scope, and Structure

A multiplicity of methods dominates biblical scholarship and the study of Micah is no exception. The unique setting (historical context) in which a Biblical text was produced and in which it is situated (literary context) are of utmost significance. Since the eighteenth-century enlightenment rationalism, there has been a shift in the interpretive practices. As a period in which texts were interpreted just as secular classical texts, scriptural texts were seen as a response to the historical or social forces of the period. Anthony Mansueto quoted in Itumeleng J. Mosala notes:

The roots of both historical criticism and the sociological tradition can be traced to the crisis of 19th century liberalism. The tremendous development of the productive forces unleashed by modern industry and in particular steam power, and the great revolutions of the later eighteenth and the nineteenth century *undermined* the older, ideological theories of social life—e.g., natural law doctrines—and sparked a wave of historical studies and theoretical investigations struggling to come to terms with the diversity of human social existence, the dynamics of social change, conflict and integration: i.e. with the new world of bourgeois society, and its manifest difference from the old world of the ancient regime.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony Mansueto, "From Historical Criticism to Historical Materialism" (paper presented at Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA, 1983), 3, quoted in Itumeleng J. Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 44.

Arising from this development, certain obvious contradictions and difficult passages in the Biblical text were clarified by comparing their possible meanings in relation to the contemporary context. What is thus generally held is that people at different levels of development will have the privilege of textual interpretation in different ways, as there is no singular method to interpret Biblical texts. According to Mosala, “A new criticism has begun to operate that expresses itself in various ways.”<sup>13</sup> While ambiguities and doubts exist among majority of scholars regarding the identification and clarification of what constitutes the interpretative circle; that is, the hermeneutic principle or the interpreter, Grant R. Osborne imagines hermeneutics as a spiral from text to context.<sup>14</sup> In contemporary scholarship, W. Randolph Tate remarks that,

there are three different groups of theories regarding the locus and actualization of meaning: *author-centered* (with attention directed to the world behind the text), *text-centered* (with the focus on the world within the text, or the textual world), and *reader-centered* (where the spotlight is trained upon the world in front of the text, or the reader’s world).<sup>15</sup>

With respect to the world behind the text (author-centered theory), the interpreter would have to make a strong apology for historical research, recognize the significance of language, and establish the historical and ideological backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> Since exegetical questions are prerequisite, it is necessary according to Tate that the interpreter demonstrates, “a knowledge of background studies, which is an indispensable prerequisite for the explication of plausible textual meaning; that is, historical, cultural, generic, grammatical, ideological, and even geographical studies are prerequisites for a successful interpretation of a text.”<sup>17</sup> Tate continues with an impressive analysis of the author-centered theory when he remarks:

While an author may imagine a literary world with all sorts of new possibilities, the expression of such an imaginative world is impossible apart from the author’s real world. An author can imagine a world and express it textually only through the real historical, cultural, literary, and ideological setting. For this

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<sup>13</sup> Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 11–72.

<sup>17</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 11.

reason, historical considerations are at once validated as an important adjunct to hermeneutics.<sup>18</sup>

This kind of hermeneutical presupposition is supported by A. Berkeley Mickelsen who remarks that:

The interpreter ... must understand the particular biblical culture which influenced the original source, message, and receptors. He must note both how it differs and how it resembles his own. Only then can [s]he effectively communicate[s] the message from one culture pattern to another.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Hans Snoek remarks that, "context plays an important role in the reflection on exegesis and actualization. Indeed, explanation and interpretation of the Bible do not occur in a vacuum but are partially determined by tradition and culture."<sup>20</sup> However, the difficulty of associating with the social, economic, and cultural context when reading the Bible through the approach of the contextualization is reflected in Mosala's grand-breaking work, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Mosala argues that

An approach to the study or appropriation of the Bible that begins with the theological notion of the Bible as the Word of God, therefore, presupposes a hermeneutical epistemology for which truth is not historical, cultural, or economic. For such an epistemology the Word of God is pre-established. The political, cultural, economic, or historical relevance of this Word of God comes out of its capacity to be applied to the various facets of human life, and in this case of black human life. Its relevance does not issue out of its very character as a historical, cultural, political, or economic product.<sup>21</sup>

The world within the text approach sees the text as a literary creation. Accordingly, "this literary quality requires interpretation, and of central importance in interpretation are the concepts of genre and sub-genre."<sup>22</sup> The essential focus of a text-centered criticism is its spotlight on artistic strategies, literary forms, and textual coherence. Practitioners of methods that may be called text-centered assume that the text must be viewed spatially, as a whole.<sup>23</sup> Though these approaches, adopted by various interpreters of the biblical text, pose varied and

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<sup>18</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 15.

<sup>19</sup> A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 170.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Snoek, "Key Concepts in the Dialogue between African and European Biblical Scholars," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue*, Studies of Religion in Africa 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 86.

<sup>21</sup> Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 19–20.

<sup>22</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 90.

<sup>23</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 180.

complex questions, they are inextricably intertwined and linked to one another.<sup>24</sup> According to P. Chatelion Counet and Ulrich Berges, “one can speak either of synchronic oriented diachronics (question: how come the final text to its present form), or diachronic oriented synchronics (question: what is the meaning and function of the final text).”<sup>25</sup>

The world in front of the text approach (the world of the reader) reflects on the complex process of reading the text, by observing the role of the reader’s presuppositions and preunderstanding. Tate remarks that, “Without an author, there is no text; without a reader, a text does not communicate. In a real sense, an unread text carries no meaning, because it can mean nothing until there is a mutual engagement between reader and text. Meaning involves a process of signification in the act of reading.”<sup>26</sup> He notes further:

If written discourse is communication between author, text, and reader, then what role does the reader play in determining meaning at the receiving end of the process? Communication has not occurred until the message (text) has reached its final destination. For this reason, the reception of a text by the reader should be a primary consideration in any hermeneutic.<sup>27</sup>

A simple, illustrative, and straight-forward study approach to the world in front of the text would be the existential approach.<sup>28</sup> Existential methods are ‘instrumental methods’ that allow the text to be read as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. The goal of this kind of reading is often an encounter with reality beyond the text to which the text bears witness. It may be described as self-involving. Readers do not treat the text as a historical or literary artifact but as something to engage experientially, something that could or should affect their lives. As an embodiment or actualization technique of interpretation, it consists of advocacy criticism, liberation exegesis and ideological criticism, especially in the context of the struggle for justice or liberation.<sup>29</sup>

Since the Bible is accepted by Christians as “the word of God” (a basic and primary evangelical notion of this study), its interpretation is influenced by a variety of worldviews. In the global North the dominant tendency is a liberal and contemporaneous reading of the Bible (with the use of the historical-critical

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<sup>24</sup> Alphonso Groenewald, *Psalm 69: Its Structure, Redaction and Composition* (Munster: LIT Verlag, 2003), 9.

<sup>25</sup> P. Chatelion Counet and Ulrich Berges, *One Text, A Thousand Methods: Studies in Memory of Sjef van Tilborg*, BibInt 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 189.

<sup>27</sup> Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 190.

<sup>28</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 16.

<sup>29</sup> Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis*, 16–20.

method), but most churches in the global South are very conservative. Philip Jenkins makes a clear illustration of the difference in the reading of the Bible in Asia and Africa compared to reading it in Europe and North America, when he notes:

These include a much greater respect for the authority of scripture, especially in matter of morality; a willingness to the Bible as an inspired text and a tendency to literalism; a special interest in supernatural elements of scripture, such as miracles, vision and healings; a belief in the continuing power of prophecy; and a veneration of the Old Testament, which is considered as authoritative as the New.<sup>30</sup>

Given that this project is undertaken within an African context of socio-economic and religious contradictions, a description of African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) and models, and how certain models of ABH are related to this project, is vital in this methodology section. ABH is scholarship initiative that addresses methods of contextual interpretation of the Bible in such a way that is respectful of the various dimensions of African life and thought. To define and explain ABH, David T. Adamo says,

African Biblical Hermeneutics is vital to the wellbeing of African society. African Biblical Hermeneutics is a methodological resource that makes African social cultural contexts the subject of interpretation. This is a methodology that reappraises ancient biblical tradition and African world-views, cultures and life experiences, with the purpose of correcting the effect of the cultural, ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected in the business of biblical interpretation.<sup>31</sup>

In his stimulating work *The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutics*, Adamo defines African Biblical Hermeneutics as “the principle of interpretation of the Bible for transformation in Africa. It can also be called African cultural hermeneutics and African Biblical transformational hermeneutics.”<sup>32</sup> Similarly, regarding what constitute ABH, Gerald O. West remarks that, “African biblical hermeneutics is a reflective discipline, analysing what African biblical scholars do. Though often cast in a prescriptive mood, it is properly a descriptive project. Of course, identifying, describing and analysing what scholars are up to when they do their work can take on normative or even imperative

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<sup>30</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>31</sup> David T. Adamo, “What Is African Biblical Hermeneutics?,” *JBT* 13.1 (2015): 59.

<sup>32</sup> David T. Adamo, “The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutics,” *OJE* 28.1 (2015): 31. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2015/v28n1a4>.



force.”<sup>33</sup> The most significant factors in this reflective scholarship, is the contextual forms of biblical interpretation. West notes, “Whilst we have not always been as meticulous and rigorous in our use of social scientific forms of analysis with respect to context as we have with the textual forms of analysis, we aspire to a careful and critical analysis of context, moving beyond the anecdotal.”<sup>34</sup>

In a chapter on the use of the Bible in black theology, Mosala deduced certain features of black theology that represent an ideological captivity to the hermeneutical principles of a theology of oppression and advanced the urgent need for the Bible to “become a viable theoretical weapon of struggle in the hands of the exploited masses themselves.”<sup>35</sup> Mosala recognized as problematic the “contextualization approach” of the Bible that conceals hermeneutically important fact in spite of its crammed harmonizing perspectives. Stated more clearly, he remarks that the biblical texts “are products of complex and problematic histories and societies.” Consequently,

as products, records, and sites of social, historical, cultural, gender, racial, and ideological struggles, they radically and indelibly bear the marks of their origins and history. The ideological aura of the Bible as the Word of God conceals this reality. A black biblical hermeneutics of liberation must battle to recover precisely that history and those origins of struggle in the text and engage them anew in the service of ongoing human struggles.<sup>36</sup>

Although Mosala does accept with reservation “existentialist uses of the Bible in the struggle for liberation” as a substitute for a theoretically well-grounded biblical hermeneutics of liberation, he gave his reason for his reserved acceptance:

while texts that are against oppressed people may be coopted by the interlocutors of the liberation struggle, the fact that these texts have their ideological roots in oppressive practices means that the texts are capable of undergirding the interests of the oppressors even when used by the oppressed. In other words, oppressive texts cannot be totally tamed or subverted into liberating texts.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gerald O. West, “Exegesis Seeking Appropriation; Appropriation Seeking Exegesis: Re-reading 2 Samuel 13:1–22 in Search of Redemptive Masculinities,” *VE* 34.2 (2013):1, art. #761, 6 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i2.761>.

<sup>34</sup> West, “Exegesis Seeking Appropriation,” 2.

<sup>35</sup> Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 30.

He developed a materialist black biblical hermeneutics of liberation that takes its cue from an understanding of the existence of various ways of reading, with an initial criticism of recent sociological approaches that have not taken seriously the materialist framework of analysis. Although he appreciates the significant advancement sociological approach has brought to bear on biblical study based on its objects of analysis, his contrary objection is an apology,

for an open acknowledgment of the class interests that are being represented and thus an acknowledgment of at least the social limitation of the methods. More importantly, like the historical-critical methods before it, biblical sociology tries to be scientific by identifying with the intellectual projects of secular methods on the one side. On the other, it maintains the social and political agenda of the ruling class by not taking seriously the issues of class, ideology, and political economy of not only the societies of the Bible but the societies of the biblical sociologists themselves.<sup>38</sup>

In his South African black liberation, Mosala categorized the struggle into three stages: the communal, the tributary, and the capitalist. These modes of production formed a basis for his development of a biblical hermeneutics of liberation method that is grounded in his South African black struggle against oppression and exploitation. These materialist modes of reading of the biblical texts constitute an integral part of the process of using the Bible in the black struggle for liberation.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, Mosala's historical-materialist exegetical considerations of the text of Micah served his purpose of black liberation struggle in South Africa. However, the argument that "the social-ideological location and commitment of the reader must be accorded *methodological* priority"<sup>40</sup> provides my study with a hermeneutical lens that prioritizes the literary-theological analysis of the text of Micah for a community of readers with socioeconomic and religious ambiguities.

While different comparative approaches have been developed in ABH,<sup>41</sup> West's Contextual Bible Study approach—which depends on the Bible and thus

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<sup>38</sup> Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 69–99.

<sup>40</sup> Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, 123.

<sup>41</sup> Justin S. Ukpong analyses different stages of African Biblical interpretation and notes: first, a reactive and apologetic stage that focuses on the legitimization of African religion and culture and dominated by the comparative method; second, a reactive-proactive stage that uses African context as resource for biblical interpretation, and dominated by Africa-in-the Bible approach, inculturation-evaluative method and liberation hermeneutics; and third, a proactive stage that recognizes the ordinary reader, the African context as subject of biblical interpretation and its domination by liberation and holistic inculturation methodologies. Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Modern Africa:

provides a reflective surface of interpretation—is very stimulating for this project. According to West, “Contextual Bible Study is a South African contribution to the trajectory of biblical liberation hermeneutics.”<sup>42</sup> In an earlier write-up, West notes:

A Contextual Bible Study is an act of faith. So Contextual Bible Study is always immersed and saturated with prayer and singing; nothing happens among African Christians without spontaneous prayer and singing! Not only does every Bible study begin with prayer and singing, but nobody takes a position in the front of the group without being ‘escorted’ to the front with singing. Ordinary African Christians believe that God is with them, always, and that the Bible is a resource through which God speaks into their lives and contexts.<sup>43</sup>

Since the African context influences the African reading and application of the Bible, the essential commitment of Contextual Bible Study must be that of an acknowledgement and recognition of the environmental factors that have shaped and re-shapes development in Africa. Considered as one of the basic sources of African and black theology, a Contextual Bible Study according to West “belongs to the local community, and so this component is crucial, for the participants are asked to appropriate and act on what they have discerned from their re-reading of Scripture.”<sup>44</sup> It is within this kind of contextual reading that a hermeneutic of appropriation in which relative ethical questions and concerns are drawn for an African-Nigerian reading audience of the book of Micah in this study.

This study will provide a theological-ethical-interpretation of Micah’s oracles.<sup>45</sup> As a rhetorical-literary production, there are noteworthy ideological and theological intentions in the book of Micah that require cautious attention to presentation and style. As an ancient book, the production and subsequent transmission of Micah involved several activities, such as writing and composition, which in turn required social and economic resources.<sup>46</sup> While interpreters and readers pay attention and respond to the particular structures and techniques

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Historical and Hermeneutical Directions,” in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 12.

<sup>42</sup> Gerald O. West, “Locating ‘Contextual Bible Study’ within Biblical Liberation Hermeneutics and Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics,” *HvTSt* 70.1 (2014): 1, art. #2641, 10 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2641>.

<sup>43</sup> Gerald O. West, “Do Two Walk Together? Walking with the Other through Contextual Bible Study,” *Anglican Theological Review* 93.3 (2011): 434.

<sup>44</sup> West, “Do Two Walk Together?,” 448.

<sup>45</sup> Ehud Ben Zvi, *Micah*, FOTL 21B (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 4.

<sup>46</sup> I realize that this means the elite of that society, which had a significant role in the production of the text.

in a number of ways, the theological and aesthetic beauty of the text on pressing social and ethical issues are viable components of the process of conveying its life-giving and instructive power for contemporary reflection and application.

The chain of tradition from the eighth-century prophetic character (Micah) that is shaped, reflected and reinforced in the final form of the text situates the book as an important text for Christian and Jewish faith communities' self-understanding, their understanding of the divine economy and their place in it, their understanding of Yahweh's past and future actions and a hope of greater and glorious future in their resistance against oppression.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, these preserved ideological and theological socioeconomic situations and paradigms in the literary text of Micah constitute, in particular, a viable basis for mediating ethical relevance for contemporary readers who are confronted with socioeconomic and religious contradictions in multidirectional paths.

This project acknowledges the essential significance of the historical-critical methodology but focuses more on the synchronic and theological interpretations of Scripture with canonical connections that allow for theological-ethical implications for contemporary audiences and (re)readers of the book of Micah who are faced with pressing socioeconomic, religious and ethical issues. This synchronic and theological approach seeks to understand as much as possible the context of a given text, by attempting to focus on syntactical, stylistic, semantic components rather than determining specific historical situation or the different stages of the history and development of the text.<sup>48</sup> The primary objective of this model of analysis is to determine the structural relations and moral intentions that are found in the text.<sup>49</sup> The process for discovering as much as possible the anticipated meaning of the text is to study and assess its literary features, stylistic and semantic structure and coherence, as well as the canonical and/or theological meanings.<sup>50</sup> While the procedure attempts to distinguish the anticipated meaning from the importance of the text, the significance of the text is found only when its essential principles are appropriately applied or contextualised within a given context. To effect this outcome, the principal task of interpretation is to determine as much as possible the meaning of the text for

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<sup>47</sup> Ben Zvi, *Micah*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> It is important to note that there are distinctions between the oracles' historical context (*Sitz im Leben*) and their literary context (*Sitz im Buch*). The *Sitz im Buch* also needs to be extended to the larger literary context of the biblical canon (*Sitz im Kanon*). The exegetical approach seeks to locate the book of Micah in a broader theological context in view of the implications of the book's message for contemporary reflection.

<sup>49</sup> Groenewald, *Psalms* 69, 11–12.

<sup>50</sup> Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Academic, 1990), 35.

his/her community (of readers), thereby obtaining a message for contemporary reflection.

The scope of this project is limited to the distinctiveness of socioeconomic and religious transgressions in Micah's oracles and how these chains of preserved traditions equip contemporary readers and communities of readers in their struggle and resistance against socioeconomic and religious contradictions. Granted that the book of Micah is a literary document that was meant to be heard and reheard by an ancient audience, the project will begin by addressing the issues related to the book of Micah, the literary character of the prophet (Micah), location and context. While giving attention to contextual and historical matters, the project shall extensively focus on the textual subunits of oracles that deal with socioeconomic and religious matters. This exegetical procedure will help to place the message of the book in a larger theological context that allows contemporary readers glimpses of insights into the past, stimulating images of the future and instructive reflection on the applicability of both of those to the realities of contemporary audiences in their quests for justice and transformation.

The first chapter (introduction) begins with general orientation, driving questions and intended orientation, methodology, scope, and structure. The second chapter addresses the character of the prophet Micah, his location and context and preliminary exploration on the book of Micah as a literary document that presents Yahweh's word to a community or communities of readers. Consequently, attention is given to various studies that address the book of Micah as a prophetic book with significant literary and theological features.

In view of the fact that Micah's rhetoric challenges behaviour and attitudes of leaders and people on issues of oppression and justice, the third and fourth chapters focus on various units of socioeconomic transgressions, power relations, and religious unfaithfulness and community moral depravity in Micah's oracles. The following literary units and subunits, are selected for consideration: 2:1-5; 2:6-11; 3:1-4; 3:5-7; 3:9-12; 6:6-8; 6:9-16; and 7:1-6. The units address issues of greed and corruption of the influential, distorted theological justification and condemnation of social evils, leadership and ritual failure, cheating and violence, and societal disintegration on account of gross corruption. The exegetical process involves the translation of the verses from the MT, an explanation of the setting, literary contexts, form, and structure of the passage(s), as well as analysis of the basic ideas of such passages where necessary.

Canonical synthesis and theological analysis provides the platform and opportunity for assessing the experience and affirmation of the primary readership and community or communities of readers from one generation to the

other, within the overall context of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible canon.<sup>51</sup> From this insider Christian perspective, the fifth chapter examines the essential ethical burdens in the various exegetical units and subunits of Micah's oracles. This canonical synthesis demonstrates that Micah's oracles cohere with other Old Testament texts through intertextual connections.<sup>52</sup> Consequently, such coherence equips contemporary exegetes to give appropriate contextual interpretation of the texts. The exegetical foundations of the selected oracle units and their ethical concerns provide the opportunity for the contextual application of its message in the sixth chapter. As a biblical and theological interpretation, the application does not focus on any church or particular denomination or faith community in Nigeria since socioeconomic issues affect all Christians notwithstanding their denominations.

The project appeals to existing literatures that throw light on current socioeconomic and religious developments in Nigeria. Although contemporary Nigerian's socioeconomic and religious problems are distanced and separated by time from those of ancient Israelites' prophets like Micah (in terms of audience and other variables), the similarities (oppression and exploitation of the poor, injustice, leadership failure, economic abuse of the marginalized and underprivileged, unethical lifestyle and hypocritical worship) are painfully close to the realities of life for many today. While contextualizing or appropriating an ancient text like Micah may be subjectively challenging, the challenge is relatively minimized when the principle of contemporaneity of prophetic text is followed; that is when the biblical text is approached not only as God's Word, but as a single continuum.<sup>53</sup> By this understanding and approach, this project allows the message of Micah to enter and find expression in various socioeconomic and religious spheres in Nigeria. Thus, the ethical and theological traditions of Micah are interpreted and animated in a manner in which the prophetic concerns of the past are creatively linked with the present so that the word of God becomes relevant for today. The final chapter (7) brings the project to close with summaries and recommendations that reflect the potential relevance of the ethical message of Micah for a modern-day Nigerian context of diverse faith communities and societal orientation.

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<sup>51</sup> Although I write from the perspective of a Christian reader with the choice of the term Old Testament, I do not exclude Jewish faith community readership, and thus the term Hebrew Bible is used together here.

<sup>52</sup> Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 8.

<sup>53</sup> Michael U. Udoekpo, *Rethinking the Prophetic Critique of Amos 5 for Contemporary Nigeria and the USA* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), xxvi; cf. Roy L. Honeycutt, "Amos and Contemporary Issues," *RevExp* 63 (1966): 441.