

Responding to the decolonial turn: Epistemic Vulnerability

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Abstract

The question this essay asks is how does one respond in a credible way (from a position of whiteness) to the decolonial turn when that turn radically interrogates (to the point of shaming) one's being by questioning the morality of the cultural and social structures of whiteness and the zone of being in which one finds oneself. The essay proposes a hermeneutic of vulnerability as a response which is based on a mindfulness for the vulnerability of those who still bear the brunt of the aftermath of apartheid and a mindfulness for the vulnerability of the self as perpetrating agent. The essay proceeds as follows: (a) an introduction to the notion of the decolonial turn; (b) a decolonial critique of racialised discourse in a decolonial reality; and (c) a discussion of a hermeneutics of vulnerability with which exploitation of the other creates a vulnerability in the perpetrating self in order to discontinue the effects of coloniality.

Key concepts: Decoloniality, coloniality, vulnerability, colonization, ethics of biblical interpretation.

1. Introduction

In an essay that received quite a bit of media attention in South African,² Samantha Vice (2010) deliberated on the issue of being in the country after apartheid and colonialism. She asks (2010:323) how can white people, specifically in the light of the legacy of privilege, “be and live well in such a land. . . . What is the morally appropriate reaction to one's situation of privilege? Is it possible to live well?” She acknowledges (2010:325) that under conditions of oppression the oppressed and oppressor alike are morally damaged, albeit in different ways. With regard to the

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² Eusebius McKaiser, “Confronting Whiteness,” n.p. [cited 2 July 2011.] *Mail&Guardianonline*, July 1, 2011. Online: <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-07-01-confronting-whiteness>. Various authors responded to McKaiser's article that also appeared in the Afrikaans press: Anton van Niekerk, “Wittes hét baie skuld. Gesprek en nederigheid is nodig vir aanvaarding,” *Beeld* 5 Julie 2011, 13; Willem Landman, “Pasop vir die strooipoppe,” *Burger* 26 Julie 2011, 15; Jakes Gerwel, “Anti-rassisme verg aktiewe optrede,” *Rapport* 10 Julie 2011, 2. Max du Preez, “Dié Skaamte verlam bloot,” *Rapport* 3 Julie 2011, 6; Charl-Pierre Naudé, “Nee vir dié wit kombers,” n.p. [cited 29 June 2011], *Beeld* 28 Junie 2011. Online: <http://www.beeld.com/Rubrieke/Gasrubriekskrywers/Nee-vir-die-wit-kombers-20110628>.

oppressor, in her (our) case, whiteness, she argues that there is moral damage by way of “habitual white privilege” for which white people need to take responsibility. These privileges are, however, non-voluntary and entrenched, thus making their eradication all the more difficult.³

In the media discussion that followed, and especially in the comments section of the media reports on the Afrikaans newspapers’ websites, an inability to handle the stress of the conversations about race is very clear. In fact, there is a definite level of intolerance towards any challenge to the racial reality with some commentators (or internet trolls?) spewing racist diatribe. Robin DiAngello (2011:54) calls this “white fragility”:

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.

With the demise of apartheid racism has become a sign of being someone that failed to transform him or herself, someone that still clings to the “good old days” where everyone of the racial other knew his or her place. To call out one’s racism after 1994 radically challenges that person’s identity as a good and moral human being.

The decolonial turn challenges the white community’s sense of racial identity (Snyman 2014): it challenges the supremacy with which our framework fundamentally embeds our lives by contradicting the masking that goes with it by socialising us into the belief that race is meaningless. The decolonial turn, according to Grosfoguel (2007:211) is a project that aims to “epistemologically transcend, decolonize the Western canon and epistemology.” The argument is that there is no single epistemic tradition from which to arrive at truth or universality (Grosfoguel 2007:212). A decolonisation of knowledge is needed whereby the epistemic perspective, cosmologies, and insights of critical thinking from the “subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies” of what is termed “the Global South” are taken seriously (Grosfoguel 2007:212). Such a decolonisation is visible in South Africa when particular names for towns, streets and public spaces are challenged; when cases of racism are dealt with publicly and in court; when students protest visible reminders of the colonial past such as happened with the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the campus of the University of Cape Town (cf. Farber 2015).

³ This article builds on what I have already written with regard to whiteness and perpetrators from a position of whiteness itself, thereby implicating myself: 2007a; 2007b; 2008; and 2011. In the latter I particularly subscribe to Ruth Frankenberg’s definition of whiteness (1993:1).

The decolonial turn asks questions about the effect of colonisation in modern subjectivities and forms of life. Maldonado-Torres (2007:343) describes it as follows: Whereas colonialism constituted an act of violence whereby an imperial power invaded another country and imposed an economic and administrative order on the invaded group in order to extract wealth from them for the benefit of the invading group's power base in the colonising metropole—an act closely associated with the advent and development of modernity—coloniality suggests that after the removal of this invading power, the power structures they put in place still have an influence on the invaded subjects. In other words, coloniality outlives colonialism.

Coloniality is a form of violence. Mbembe (2015:181-189) describes the experience of this violence through the eyes of the colonised. The coloniser turned the colony into a space of terror filled with demonic spirits creating “around the colonized a world of prohibitions and inhibitions far more terrifying than any world of the colonizer” (2015:182). Mbembe sees two sorts of violence: “the violence that the Other inflicts, the violence of being reduced to nothingness,” and “the violence that one inflicts on Oneself: self-exhaustion, self-crucifixion” (2015:182). To him the colony is a place where the rights and customs of the indigenous are overridden by the coloniser (2015:183), turning the colonised subject into an embodiment (2015:187):

Only the human exists, since the human alone can represent the self as existent, and have a consciousness of what is so represented. From the standpoint of colonialism, the colonized does not truly exist, as person or as subject. . . . The colonized is in no way someone who accomplishes intentional acts related by unity of meaning. The colonized cannot be defined either as a living being endowed with reason, or as someone aspiring to transcendence. The colonized does not exist as a self; the colonized *is*, but in the same was as a rock *is*—that is, as nothing more. . . . The colonized belongs to the *universe of immediate things*—useful things when needed, things that can be molded and are mortal, futile and superfluous things, if need be.

The colonizer thus creates the colonized as nothing, a thing, and as an animal (Mbembe 2015:188). To colonize is to destroy and to create, a gratuitous act and an expression of an arbitrariness and terror of whim and desire (2015:189): “as a miraculous act, colonialism frees the conqueror's desires from the prison of law, reason, doubt, time, measure. Thus, to have been colonized is, somehow, to have dwelt close to death.” Fanon (1986[1952]:2) gave this nothingness a name, the *zone of nonbeing*: “an extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity . . . [a] descent into real hell.”

In the words of Judith Butler (2003:18) this violence described by Mbembe is “a way a primary human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way” death and nonbeing. Butler (2003:18) calls it “a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, a vulnerability to a sudden address from elsewhere that we cannot pre-empt.” It is a vulnerability everyone lives with, but in terms of colonialism and colonality this vulnerability is still exacerbated.

From a position of whiteness (which would be the zone of being [cf. Grosfoguel 2014] in Fanonian terms, although he never labelled it as such,) how does one then respond in a credible way to colonality? Butler (2003:18) promotes mindfulness for this vulnerability as a basis for “non-military political solutions.” Her point of departure is that vulnerability cannot be ignored: “We must attend to it, even abide by it, as we begin to think about what politics might be implied by staying with the thought of corporeal vulnerability itself, a situation in which we can be vanquished or lose others.” She (2003:19) then asks the following question, which is pertinent when thinking about whiteness and its loss of power in the South African context:

Could the experience of a dislocation of first-world safety not condition the insight into the radically inequitable ways that corporeal vulnerability is distributed globally? To foreclose that vulnerability, to banish it, to make ourselves secure at the expense of every other human consideration is to eradicate one of the most important resources from which we must take our bearings and find our way.

The description Mbembe gives of the coloniser reveals the measures the coloniser went through to foreclose on their vulnerability. The decolonial turn renders this coloniser vulnerable by dislocating him or her from the safety of its European or Western centeredness. A decolonial critique constitutes a radical critique that cuts deep into the heart of Christianity and Western hermeneutics regarding its claims to universality (cf. Snyman 2014). It problematizes the zero point epistemology that lies behind Christianity’s universal claim to salvation and the cause for what is called the colonial difference. Over-against the claim to universality within Christianity and Western culture, the decolonial turn affirms the possibility of different epistemic foundations on the basis of a very particular geo- and body politics of knowledge within the realm of those excluded because of the hegemony of the Western paradigm. In the course of its unfolding it aims to constitute a radically different paradigm that opens up towards the local and not the universal. It is a deliberate attempt to take subjectivity into account in the production of knowledge. In the process Western epistemology is taken to task for the marks it left and is still leaving in its wake, in terms of the power relations it created and sustains.

The critique on Western epistemology forms part of the struggle against Western hegemony from the perspective of those who bear the brunt. To these epistemic challenges I want to propose the notion of *epistemic vulnerability* (cf. Gilson 2011), an openness to be affected and shaped by others. It means that our epistemology of ignorance needs to be broken down. It is within this context that I want to take decoloniality seriously and start to work out a response to that challenge by deliberately trying to unthink my own Eurocentricity. Yet I realise very well that I cannot uproot myself from that tradition. My framework remains informed by Western culture, but in some way or the other I intend to heed to the impetus of decoloniality's problematisation of the Western or Eurocentric paradigm.

The essay will proceed as follows: (a) an illustration of the need for the Western reader to take vulnerability seriously in analysing two examples of racialised discourse as an expression of decolonial reality; and (b) a discussion of a hermeneutics of vulnerability with which to pick up the challenge of decolonial criticism in order to avert the exploitation of the colonial other.

2. Decolonial reality

2.1 Persistence of colonial discourse after apartheid

The Reformed Churches of South Africa (*Gereformeerde Kerke van Suid-Afrika*) is a small group of churches in the Calvinist Reformed tradition (members do not amount to more than 100 000) that splinted off from the main branch of the Dutch Reformed tradition in 1859. The RCSA made some critical noises about apartheid during the apartheid years, but according to Irving Hexham (1981:196) they never discarded the myth of apartheid. For example, the RCSA-synod in 1991 refused to make a presentation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, on the basis that they were critical enough about apartheid for the past 30 years at their synods and conveniently forgetting that their members voted in droves for the National Party, and later for the Conservative Party. Moreover, since 1948, some members of the church were actively involved in national politics and the setting up of racially biased and offensive laws.

But before 1994 members of the church were quite active in politics ever since the church's establishment in 1859. Some played leading roles on the political scene. The first is Paul Kruger, the president of the old ZAR and who fought against the British in the South African War or Anglo-Boer War between 1899 and 1902. In his own particular way, Paul Kruger resisted British Colonialism and became the last President of the ZAR.⁴ The second is former President F. W. de Klerk, the last white president and the last

⁴ His statue on Church Square in Pretoria is a symbol to the Afrikaner's own failed struggle against imperial hegemony. Yet, irony doubled in the aftermath of this "liberation war": not only did the Afrikaner succeed in obtaining power soon afterwards (albeit as subjects of the British monarchy), they also maintained a similar hegemony by excluding the first nations from the power grabbed. The latter

president of the apartheid regime, who saw the writing on the wall and decided to put the process in motion to hand over power to the majority of the citizens of the country. Both were forced to hand over power, the former to the colonial masters, the latter as a colonial master to all the inhabitants of the country. De Klerk's father was also active in politics and became the president of the Senate during the apartheid years. A third prominent member was Connie Mulder who bore the blame for the Information scandal. When suspended from the National Party he formed the Action Front for National Priorities. His Action Front later merged with the Conservative Party of Andries Treurnicht.

In the September 2010 issue of *Die Kerkblad*, the monthly magazine of the RCSA, an article appeared by PJ (Flip) Buys (2010:28-29) with the title "The regenerating power of the gospel in dark Africa." (*Die vernuwendende krag van die evangelie in donker Afrika*). The article narrates the story of the conversion of a traditional healer (called a "witch doctor" in the text and expounded as the sin that darkened her understanding) to Christianity in which her son, a Christian theologian (who achieved intellectual attainment), played a significant role.

What is of concern here is the reference to Africa as "dark" in the heading of the article. I am not certain who provided the heading of the article. Journalist practice would suggest the editor decided upon the heading. Within a church denomination whose synod in 1991 voted against going to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the nineties because, as they put it, their critical stance on apartheid is visible in the decisions taken by the Synod the previous 30 years, the question is how it is possible to have a heading like this in post-apartheid society? In my view, it reflects what was happening on grass roots level in this period up to now, namely despite critical views on apartheid, its members individually voted for apartheid (see Vorster 2009:66). Not only does this heading reveal how whiteness is part of the make-up of the interpreter and his tradition, but it also illustrates the inability of this tradition to recognise the hurtful marks descriptions like these leave behind on the African other. A critical stance on apartheid evidently does not mean the epistemologies employed sustained that criticism. Within the context of the magazine and its audience, it is a feel good story in which someone's conversion from paganism is highlighted. But it is framed in a particular way that makes one wonder if any epistemic changes took place since 1994.

James Perkinson (2005:53) argues that rhetorical situations like this can be traced back to the origins of the Christian tradition and pre-modern Europe when Europeans tried to

discern cross-cultural meanings in encounters with other peoples around the globe after 1492 [issuing] in perceptions that increasingly connect immediate ap-

caused the formation of the ANC early in the previous century.

pearance with ultimate destiny. But this ready conflation of salvation and racialization does not begin *de novo* in that early hour of confrontation. It has its precursors in a whole set of categories within Hebrew, Christian, and Greek thought that inform older European attempts to deal with difference prior to the radically new experiences of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In other words, the discourse in the story and with which it comes to the reader are deeply embedded in Western hermeneutics. Here it invokes the colonial contrast where whiteness embodies humanity and blackness becomes suggestive of wildness (cf. White 1985:158-160). Africa is perceived here in very much the same way as it was understood during the heydays of colonialism and apartheid. In a way the rhetoric of the story illustrates the need Tshaka (2014:6) expressed for Africans to refuse perpetual infantilism and to take up the theological reflection of their own challenges. Tshaka (2014:2) pleads for a theological reflection that takes seriously its African heritage, a reflection that comes from below, from the context of the faith communities in Africa, from the most vulnerable of society, yet people who possess indigenous knowledge that is needed to question Western hegemony.

Nonetheless, the heading of the article with its reference to “dark Africa” sustains that vulnerability. In fact, its utilisation in a heading renders Africa’s inhabitants not truly human. The story illustrates the dichotomy and internal conflict the Reformed Christian in Africa has to deal with, namely that of being African and rooted faithfully within the Reformed tradition (Tshaka 2014:3). The article expresses a superiority towards the condition of the traditional healer before her conversion whereas the son’s intellectual achievement and own conversion is seen as a victory in Christian terms but in fact masking the superiority of the Western way of doing. In terms of Tshaka’s argument (2014:3) the son’s migration from his African black self “is a direct result of European hubris, of which the Reformed faith was and remains a significant element of.”

Here, a particular soteriology informed by a certain brand of the Reformed tradition, Calvinism, constitutes the prime category of salvation. The reference “dark Africa” poses the question of salvation unambiguously. To quote Perkinson (2004:59) “pigmentation [is] made to conflate with Calvinist notions of predestination” and “dark skin was made to prefigure a destiny of perdition.” The term functions here as a defence mechanism within a Calvinist framework whereby the Calvinist settler⁵ as God’s elect shields themselves from perversion and pollution. In “dark” Africa black skin is recognised as diabolical and associated with pagan

⁵ My reference here to settler is deliberate: someone calling Africa “dark” 16 years after the official demise of apartheid and still making a living in South Africa has not yet come to terms with the political, economic and social realities of being in Africa.

traditions. Divine grace is seen in white economic success, or rather, with ‘dark’ Africa’s subordination seen as divine rejection (Bastide 1967:321).

With *Die Kerkblad* as a publication of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA), a predominantly white tradition, the rhetorical situation that comes into being with the reference to “dark Africa” immediately calls up an image of white supremacy. It is as if European light skin colour provides a marker for being Christian over against Africa’s paganism as suggested by the traditional healer’s conversion (cf. Perkinson, 2004:157). In this context the Reformed tradition is associated with goodness and purity and darkness with evil and sin. The European and white origins of the Reformed tradition are not dispelled by labelling Africa “dark”. With rhetoric of innocence a particular symbolic reality of black embodying evil and whiteness suggesting purity is constructed. In fact, there is a Christian presumption of access to a superior truth in comparison with other religions and cultural traditions. This truth can only be attained when the African other crosses over, which the traditional healer’s son did in studying in the USA. Tshaka (2014:5) accuses the Reformed tradition of imposing its methodologies indiscriminately and subsequently, of failing to learn from the African context: “[I]t was thought that it is more worthwhile to lose one’s identity in an attempt to be welcomed into this faith.” (Tshaka 2014:5).

It is the insistence on African identity that forms the distinguishing trait between the African theologian and the Western theologian. The former argues from the political praxis whereas the latter provides systematic reflections while nested in their cocoons (Tshaka 2014:4). The colonial enterprise with its concomitant exploitation of Africa interrupted African identity. Hence the insistence of African identity “because it speaks to a flight from the black or African self”—an abandonment of African institutions (traditional healers? – GFS) and a preoccupation with European intellectual products (2015:3). But the result is as follows (Tshaka 2014:4):

To suggest a conversation on the subject of being African and Reformed or to insist on the continued relevance of African philosophy... seem to somehow invariably elude a response from those who continue to hold uncritically that the Occidental tradition need not explain itself. In other words, those within the Occidental tradition listen to our suggestions in the examples of what Paulo Freire calls a bad parent patronising a child: *Oh yes, lets listen to what little John can tells us ...*

The decolonial turn enables little John to have his voice heard and counted. In 2013 Elelwani Farisani gave his inaugural lecture in which he took his Old Testament colleague Christo Lombaard to task for his view (in 2006) on contextualisation. At issue is the claim for a distinctive African approach (similar to the one pleaded for by Tshaka) over against what is believed to be the Western approach with regard

to reading the biblical text. Within decolonial discourse it is setting up one's own epistemological parameters over against those set by the westernised university in a discipline called Biblical or Old/New Testament Studies.

2.2 Eurocentric discourse in the encyclopaedia of Old Testament as a discipline

Of concern to Farisani, amongst others, is the following conclusion by Lombaard (Lombaard, 2006:150):

I therefore do not believe there is or can be such a thing as “contextual” Old Testament science in the sense that the scholarship would then be distinctively African. Old Testament studies are in no way unique among the academic disciplines in this respect; it applies to all forms of intellectual activity

In 2015 Lombaard (2015:3) clarifies his position in stating that he is in favour of a project of contextualisation but he is critical towards it in its claim to alter “the litany of tragedies still befalling the African continent and its marginalised.” He regards this as intellectually dishonest because no biblical text can alter someone else's misery, nor are biblical scholars trained as political scientists, development economists, social workers or possess sufficient background that is required for direct assistance to the marginalised. Moreover, “there is no straightforward link between understanding a biblical text anew and lessening misery.” (2015:4).

His aim of clarification is to provide the project of Africanisation in South African Biblical scholarship with greater intellectual integrity “when measured against the interdisciplinary protocols of our time” (2015:5). And with integrity he (2015:6) means the realisation that

There is no *deus ex machina* process by means of which Bible analyses automatically solve societal problems as would a mechanical arm in a staged play in ancient Greece. A more realistic, contextually sensitive view of the relationship between research and society is required.

What would a more realistic contextually sensitive view between research and society be? The decolonial project accuses the West of an epistemology that denies contextual sensitivity in universalising its own system of thought. When I read Lombaard's 2006 essay, the geo- and body political position from which he argues, is that of the colonial matrix of power which is then superimposed on everyone. That position enables him to proclaim without evidence in 2015 (2015:4) that

if the whole of the South African academic Bible scholarship over the past half a century had to be painted with one broad stroke, it could generally speaking best be pictured against the backdrop of Liberation Theology. We are all liberation theologians. Moreover, all of South African biblical interpretation is hermeneutically, ideologically and sociologically extremely aware.

One only has to read Masenya and Ramantswana's essay of 2014 to realise this statement is not entirely true. But Lombaard sees something that is not apparent to those who claim contextual studies as their marker of African identity within the field of Old Testament Studies. Lombaard claims for himself a Eurocentric bias. One sees that clearly in the 2015 article with his references to typical philosophers, streams of thoughts and art with stature in the West. The Eurocentric bias is not the problem, but its effects in terms of an ethics of interpretation (for example, exclusion of the other, or its impulse of universality) are open to question.

In his earlier essay Lombaard (2006:144) observed that the call to be more relevant to Africa, and thus to take the African context seriously, has fallen into two traps: firstly that the awareness for context takes precedence over exegetical endeavours, and secondly, the conviction that Old Testament Studies (and by implication, Biblical Studies) should be inherently African, contextual and relevant. He (2006:146) is of the opinion that contextual studies is afforded a priority to exegetical studies, so much so that he (2006:145) laments the situation that the South African theological scene has had less impact on Old Testament Studies worldwide, i.e. IOSOT in Europe.

That it could be a particular racial attitude towards non-Europeans is not discussed, as he ascribes the lack of impact to contextual studies with an underlying belief that exegesis is somehow of provincial interest, i.e. Eurocentric. He (2006:146) does not believe that exegesis is of provincial interest and argues for the stance that "[e]xegesis must retain its place as the queen of the theological disciplines." To him (2006:151) exegesis is the heart of South African Old Testament science. He (2006:152) concluded his study with the following words:

Our subject is the Old Testament – its text, theology, languages, history, cultural background and related matters. Exegesis is our strength. By pursuing precisely that strength in a focused way, all the constituencies involved – university, church and society are best served.

I cannot differ here from Lombaard, except to add that this definition is indeed provincial, namely particular to those spheres where the Reformed tradition played a huge role. Moore and Sherwood (2011:123) frame it wider (provincial nonethe-

less because it is delimited to a specific region and power hegemony) namely the secular Western mindset:

After all, biblical studies was a discipline whose eponymous object, the Bible, epitomized for the secular Western mindset, more than any other single cultural emblem, the irrational, the delusional, the medieval, the morally questionable, and much else of that unsavory ilk . . . Biblical scholarship itself ceaselessly fed and fattened this conception of the Bible by analyzing it primarily as an ancient document, through methods of analysis that worked hard to be credibly modern, but had the effect of making the Bible the product of a world alien and antithetical to the modern world. Incessant critical labor and the objectivity of the scientific methodology set biblical scholarship apart from devotional Bible study.

Moore and Sherwood (2011:126) says while biblical scholars were busy demystifying and secularizing the reading of the Bible, non-professional biblical scholars (to name a few: Derrida, Fish, Irigaray, Levinas, Kristeva, Cixous) started to read the biblical text in terms of “big bad old-fashioned words, among them universalism, Saint Paul, truth, justice, forgiveness, friendship, the kingdom, the neighbor, hospitality, and even, for God’s sake, evil.” (2011:127). Exegesis as queen of Old Testament scholarship stands in stark contrast with what is currently happening within biblical scholarship, namely investigating the process by which the critical discourse on the Bible played a formative role in modernity.

2.3 A decolonial turn?

There are three issues that Lombaard raises in his 2006 essay: the lack of impact South African Old Testament scholarship has in the international scene, his fear to be provincial and his relegation of contextual studies to reception criticism.

He expresses a concern on the lack of impact South African Old Testament scholarship has internationally. He ascribes it to the preponderance of contextual studies over against exegetical studies. From a decolonial perspective though, two questions need to be asked: firstly, how does the international community define itself, and secondly, is the acceptance of a particular model not linked to certain ideological factors and thus not neutral? It is ten years after Lombaard made his remarks on impact, he himself the recipient in the meantime of an international award. Impact received a distinctive neo-liberal taint whereby an article’s impact is measured in order to reward or punish.

Add to this that since the 15th century Europe’s position of power has become entrenched more and more as the different countries expanded their economic enterprises by invading other countries and subjugate them. It enabled them, espe-

cially in the Near East, to gather textual evidence related to the Christian tradition. The fact that exegesis is the queen of Old Testament science is no accident, but can be traced to European control of knowledge. To participate in this scenario, one needs financial resources, which are severely lacking in Africa. And to play this game, means to subscribe to the rules of the game which have been laid down elsewhere.

A decolonial critique endeavours to construct a new discourse with the colonized excluded in focus (cf. Snyman 2014:1052; Mignolo 2007b: 460): it is a delinking from Eurocentric discourse and the construction of a different epistemic grounding. It is a radically different genealogy of thought (Mignolo 2007a: 161). And a radically different genealogy of thought might introduce new disciplines when existing ones no longer provide a service. In other words, Old Testament Studies will survive as long as it is supported by a Eurocentric bias. A deliberate African hermeneutic may develop a different discipline, and thus have a different impact on the discipline's definition.

The negative reference to "provincial" is suggestive of an emphasis on the universal. But thinking in terms of provinciality is a necessary step within the decolonial turn to link the Eurocentric view to its own geo- and body political framework. It seems difficult if not impossible to contemplate in those terms after thinking in universalistic terms for so long, but it has become necessary to put the construction of modernity in a European socio-historical context. These ideas and frameworks that are deemed universal once upon a time were drawn from very specific intellectual and historical traditions (Chakrabarty 2000:xi). To be "provincial" is just part of the ethics of interpretation in taking responsibility for the epistemology and methodology utilised in the interpretive process (Snyman 2007b:62-65).

An ethics of interpretation interrogate claims to universality. A claim to an African context is a claim to validate a particular interpretation over against an interpretation with a claim to universal validity because the latter claim fails to take responsibility of its interpretative frameworks. The latter claim has a particular unreflectiveness to it, a problem Lombaard diagnosed within the hermeneutical-theological approaches. It is necessary to understand the context of his unease within what he calls a "direct approach": the history of the theological justification of apartheid. The latter is based on a literal interpretation of the biblical text in which a racist bias remains unacknowledged. This methodology also gave rise to theologies that justifies the subjugation of women and the rejection of homosexuality as a deviant practice.

But contra Lombaard's association of direct application with the hermeneutical-theological approach, there is also a definite unreflectiveness associated within the

exegetical-theological approach to which he subscribes and which Schüssler Fiorenza laid bare in her 1987 SBL Presidential address (see Schüssler Fiorenza 1988): a historical criticism within an ethos of scientist positivism that fails to recognise, *inter alia*, a masculine perspective. The biblical text is not an unbiased book propagating value-neutrality, but reflects relations and structures of gender, race and class, which end up empowering some and marginalizing others in the reading process. Anderson (2009:6) says “the exclusion of certain groups and perspectives has become equated with the church’s concept of the right doctrine (orthodoxy).” Biasedness only comes forward when the readers unravel their own bias. That bias is put on the table when one delves into one’s own context. Anderson (2009:7-8) refers to a particular process of conscientization that strives for making the biblical interpreter “aware of the values of hierarchical systems in both written texts and the world around them that privilege some over others and that they have subsequently internalized.”

Lombaard makes one aware of one such hierarchy, namely exegesis as queen of Old Testament scholarship. That hierarchy, in as much as it relates to literacy and textuality within the Western paradigm in excluding others, is contested from the point of view of a decolonial turn. The textual nature of Lombaard’s claim of exegesis as the queen of Old Testament scholarship relates to a particular tradition within Christianity, namely the Reformed tradition with its emphasis on the centrality of Scripture (cf. Tshaka 2014:2) as well as the West’s view of the Bible as a cultural artefact (cf. Moore and Sherwood 2011:128).

A similar hierarchy lies behind *Die Kerkblad*’s labeling of Africa as “dark”, but in the latter instance it is deliberately supremacist. The title of the article underscores a particular white supremacy that brings to mind the colonial era where appearance was linked to salvation. The way in which the title of this article identifies Africa as dark, indicates how an interpretation from a position of whiteness renders Africa vulnerable as a dangerous place (cf. Snyman 2011:2-3).

The question I wrestle with is how a reformed theological tradition as an implant of Europe can make sense within an African context. It is a question Tshaka (2014) wrestles with, but from the side of an African identity. My reference to Europe and Africa in this statement goes much deeper than the reference to a particular geographical landmass. The reference incorporates socio-cultural considerations as well as particular epistemological perspectives, bearing in mind the colonial matrix of power still prevalent. Quijano (2007:169) refers to the continuous colonization of the imagination of the dominated, a continuous “repression over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images, and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual.”

Subsequently, from the perspective of Africa, there is more and more the conviction that the current norm of biblical interpretation excludes them (cf. Anderson 2009:135), a belief that is strengthened by the appearance of the *Kerkblad* article referring to Africa as dark.

It is not merely an ideological issue that needs to be foregrounded. My guess is that a much more profound analysis needs to be done when one looks at the radical criticism from a decolonial framework. One of the issues is the embeddedness of supremacy that is experienced when Eurocentric epistemology rears its head. The background to this supremacy can be found in the notion of “I think, therefore I am”, which in the decolonial framework is thought to have only become possible after several conquests where the idea of “I conquered, therefore I am” became possible. After the conquest, all resistance was removed and it became easier to enable the “provincial” to become universal (cf. Grosfoguel 2013:75-77). Similarly, is there not a logical link between claiming textual supremacy—the claim that exegesis is the queen of Old Testament scholarship is founded upon the availability of sufficient textual evidence—and the process of colonisation that went before it whereby Europe was able to collect important texts related to the biblical text and its transmission? A decolonial position poses questions about the imposing nature behind this claim in order to render it as a European perspective vulnerable and modifiable.

3. Hermeneutics of vulnerability

A hermeneutics of vulnerability takes the vulnerability of the (colonized) other seriously in terms of the marks left by the interpretation (and actions) of the (colonising) interpreter in realising the vulnerability of the (colonizing) self. With the term hermeneutic I no longer tap into the classic definition of “rules of interpretation” to which the term usually refers to. Instead, I use it as a term for what I call “the problem of understanding itself.” The concept of vulnerability relates to the one who want to understand. It can be anyone, but in the context of decoloniality the focus falls on the one failing to understand that ethical moment when two persons meet face to face, i.e. the perpetrator of racism.

In rendering oneself vulnerable, especially while in a position of power, an understanding of the effects of coloniality will become possible. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1987:88) in his book *Decolonising the mind* points out that the way one sees oneself is quite dependent on one's location in the relationship to imperial power. He says: “[I]f we are to do anything about our individual and collective being today, then we have to coldly and consciously look at – what imperialism has been doing to us and to our view of ourselves in the universe.” His audience are those who bore the brunt of British colonialism, but the agent is affected too in this relationship.

Within the agent's mind certain thought structures were laid down that enabled him or her to become the agent of imperial power. This look in the mirror creates a certain vulnerability.

3.1 Understanding the concept

The word vulnerability stems from the Late Latin word *vulnerabilis*, which comes from the verb *vulnerare* and the noun *vulnus*, which means to wound. In common parlance the word is used mostly in a negative sense, meaning to be “exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally.” More specifically, the word is utilised to indicate a group of person or an individual “in need of special care, support, or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect.” (OED)

It is this negative definition that gave rise to concerns about ethics in biomedicine research which culminated into the 2005 UNESCO Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights.⁶ Article 8 of the declaration reads as follows:

Article 8 – Respect for human vulnerability and personal integrity. In applying and advancing scientific knowledge, medical practice and associated technologies, human vulnerability should be taken into account. Individuals and groups of special vulnerability should be protected and the personal integrity of such individuals respected.

Vulnerability here does not only apply to individuals, but to any stigmatized group, community or population. In this definition vulnerability is defined according to the needs of science, and more specifically, the needs of the medical sciences where trials with human subjects are of utmost importance. But the term can be expanded to various spheres, such as biology, the social, and culture (cf. Tham 2014b: 220). When someone is physically vulnerable because of being born that way, or being fragile, then one can speak of a biological vulnerability. Social vulnerability arises from a state of war, crimes, prejudice, hospitalisation, or poverty, creating vulnerable subjects. Cultural vulnerability originates when traditions and conceptions in certain cultures are categorised in such a way that its followers are rendered vulnerable.

The above definition does not concern justice and it makes women a special case (Rawlinson 2012:178). But women are not special when one regards them as integral to the structure of society. There is thus a definite masculine bias in the UNESCO definition of vulnerability. And despite UNESCO being a representative organisation of

⁶ See <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001428/142825e.pdf#page=80>.

global proportions, the concept of vulnerability can be taken back to a Western concept. Anderson and Honneth (2015:129) connect vulnerability to the liberal notion of autonomy: the latter can only exist in a context of social relations that support it. Vulnerability enters the scene when a person is denied the social standing in instances of subordination, marginalization and exclusion that reduce autonomy (Anderson and Honneth 2015:132). Autonomy is understood as the capacity to develop and pursue one's own conception of a worthwhile life that is facilitated by self-respect, self-trust, and self-esteem (Anderson & Honneth 2015:137). These are, however, vulnerable to injury, violation, and denigration, and thus in need of social justice.

Tham (2014), however, makes one aware of the paradox between the acceptance of a universal declaration on vulnerability and the recognition of the rights of particular cultural attitudes that may clash with the declaration's definition. For example, in the Judeo-Christian tradition imperfection is seen as the result of sin (2014:221), but disability, suffering, and sin are part of the human condition—imperfection is a fact of life. Vulnerability is not evil or something to be suppressed in Buddhism, for example (2014:222). Over against the issue of individual autonomy Confucianism puts forward the role of the family who will make decisions on behalf of the vulnerable. But what appears to be a common ground regarding vulnerability in most religions, according to Tham (2014:222-23), is the face of the Other, as formulated by Levinas:

In confronting the naked face of the other, different from me and yet vulnerable like me, an ethical demand of response is elicited. One cannot ignore the plea of the Other who challenges us face to face. The Other, a stranger who shares my humanity, exacts from me a certain responsibility to respect his dignity once I am aware of our interconnectedness. This is the core of all religious commitment to the vulnerable, with different names of *agape* or charity, neighborly love, solidarity, *visheshdharma*, *ren*, *karun* or compassion, and mercy or *besed*.

The concept of vulnerability centres on the notions of injury and violation of the other experiences that cry out for justice: social, judicious, epistemological or otherwise. One of the ways to achieve social justice is to render the perpetrator vulnerable.

3.2 Vulnerability of the perpetrating agent

The above discussion relates vulnerability strongly to people and groups whose status makes them vulnerable in one way or the other. As injury and violence it is a negative term. The vulnerability on which I want to ground a hermeneutic of vulnerability relates more to vulnerability as a common human condition, a condition shared by perpetrator and victim alike in a condition of confrontation: a hu-

man condition of imperfection, frailty, contingency that cannot escape suffering and death (cf. Tham 2014:221).

Although vulnerability indicates the precariousness of the human condition and the fragility of the human species (Henk ten Have 2014:91), it is neither an individual attribute nor a negative condition that one needs to overcome. Mostly, it is not even inability or deficiency but rather ability and opportunity (Ten Have 2014:91). Ten Have (2014:89) says:

Vulnerability means that we are open to the world; that we can engage in relationships with other persons; that we can interact with the world. It is not a deficit but a positive phenomenon; it is the basis for exchange and reciprocity between human beings. We cannot come into being, flourish and survive if our existence is not connected to the existence of others. The notion of vulnerability therefore refers to solidarity and mutuality, the needs of groups and communities, not just those of individuals.

When I refer to a hermeneutic of vulnerability, I allude to its links with social and cultural vulnerability as well as social justice. What happens in the decolonial turn, is that through a different interpretation of history the underbelly of modernity (and apartheid for that matter) is shown, for which a particular group is asked to take responsibility. But to take responsibility is a process in which the particular group becomes vulnerable on various levels, morally, financially, socially.

Here the biblical story of Cain in Genesis 4 may be instructive. Upon the murder of his brother Cain receives the following judgment: He is cursed from the ground: it will no longer yield its strength and Cain himself will be a fugitive and a wanderer on earth (v. 12). But Cain raises his own vulnerability in v. 14: "Today you have driven me away from the soil and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on earth, and *anyone who meets me may kill me*. [my italics-GFS]" The Lord however protects him and gives him a sign. And from vv. 16-25 one reads about Cain's successful life he conducted: his offspring built cities and generated culture: one became the ancestor of nomadic life while herding cattle; his brother became the master of musical instruments. Over-against the nomad-herdsman and music comes the offspring that produced technology: the maker of bronze and iron tools introduces the reader to metallurgy, of which the process was of utmost importance in the history of humankind.⁷

Katharina von Kellenbach (2013:15) interprets Cain as follows:

⁷ Westermann (1984:333) states: "The intention of Gen 4:22 is that progress in technology as such, as illustrated by the possibilities which metallurgy opens up, facilitates progress in human living and life in community."

In my reading, the mark of Cain encapsulates the task incumbent upon perpetrators. Cain's success as a human being is measured by his ability to resist the impulse to bury, forget, and cut off the past. Cain's crime does not end his life. He lives on and gets a second chance, but only because he does not erase the guilt of his past. His life as city builder and father of toolmakers, artistic, and musicians depends on his ability to respect the memory of his brother and to accept his responsibility.

Von Kellenbach is here processing the Holocaust and direct involvement of some of her family members as Nazi collaborators, of which she (2013:22) says it is a process of a lifetime with no quick solutions. She sees in Cain a processing of his fratricide that proceeds through many stages while he is confronted with various peoples, places, and philosophies. Cain's repentance is not an internal affair but very public in terms of behaviour, interaction, discourse and comportment (Von Kellenbach 2013:22). Von Kellenbach (2013:208) describes the mark of Cain as "a path of moral repair based on openness and transparency." Von Kellenbach as the third generation after the Holocaust came to a consciousness about it by looking into the eyes of its survivors and their children, and in the words of James Perkinson (2004:3), "not denying the reflection."

The task at hand here is then to hear and internalise the decolonial critique, and being confronted "with the embarrassment of having already been 'found out' by one's (in this case) most frightening other." (cf. Perkinson 2004:3). Within the decolonial debate, the agent perpetrator is represented by the various aspects of coloniality – in other words, the entire aftermath of colonialism's effect on the colonised even after the demise of colonialism. It also comprises currents power structures by which the global north receives economic benefits in the exploitation of the global south.

3.3 Epistemic vulnerability

The aim of justice towards the perpetrator is to render him or her vulnerable. In other words, in terms of a decolonial framework, where the effects of colonialism lingers on long after the demise of colonialism itself, the colonisers' offspring who remains in the colonised territory after the demise of the coloniser and colonisation, is confronted with these effects. They become tainted with colonial perpetration and they are in need of instruments to deal with it. Colonialism exploited the vulnerability of the colonised other and the continuous presence of the coloniser creates a particular vulnerability of its own kind in the face of the execution of justice and restoration.

But the problem is the issue of shame in being rendered vulnerable. For example, in J. M. Coetzee's book, *Disgrace*, whiteness becomes a shamed body, resulting

into a desire to hide oneself. It leaves one feeling exiled, unworthy and deficient (cf. Manion 2002:78). It is not a welcome experience and results into a feeling of misery and anger. Shame is a master emotion of everyday life and the leading cause for emotional distress (cf. Brené Brown 2006:43). But shame is only part of a series of contrasting emotions which Brown puts into the framework of vulnerability: on the one hand people experience shame, fear and a struggle for worthiness; and on the other hand they take delight in joy, creativity, belonging, and love. Vulnerability is a necessary emotion that should not be numbed, but acknowledged and accounted for.

When an ethics of interpretation exposes various vulnerabilities of an interpreter— as epistemology, socio-historical location, ideologies, and prejudices these vulnerabilities should be acknowledged. The decolonial turn pushes the envelope with regard to the ethics of interpretation much further by inquiring into the power relationships constructed by socio-political realities. It forces the question of race and the role of Western epistemologies in the construction and maintenance in a politics of exclusion. Cheryl Anderson's (2009:137) construction of the mythical norm of biblical interpretation—white, masculine, heterosexual, Christian and wealthy man—comes under scrutiny. The task is to determine in what way being white, having a particular sexual orientation and religious inclination as well as economic situation determines how one understand.

Critical awareness largely determines the way one reacts with or without shame (Brown 2006:47): There is a direct relation between one's critical awareness of vulnerability and shame. When there is little or no critical awareness, the situation is individualised with a concomitant feeling of unworthiness and being flawed, of feeling trapped, powerless and isolated. Critical awareness allows one to situate the feelings of shame in a larger collective context whereas those who fail to recognise their vulnerability react differently: with anger, rage and blame which are directed inwards and outwards.

What causes a failure to recognise vulnerability? One answer may lie in the common sense definition of vulnerability which ties vulnerability to harm. The traditional definition sees vulnerability as a negative state. This perception of vulnerability is most probably constitutive to the maintenance of ignorance of vulnerability in a very profound way (Gilson 2011:311). One deals here not with a conscious rejection of vulnerability, but with a form of cultivated ignorance—a substantive epistemic practice (Gilson 2011:311). The decolonial turn aims at deconstructing this epistemic practice as a subjectivity that is privileged by the current capitalist socioeconomic systems and the liberal socio-political order in its practice of coloniality. Gilson (2011:312) calls it “the prototypical, arrogantly self-sufficient, independent, invulnerable master subject [of which i]

nvulnerability is a central feature. . . because it solidifies a sense of control, indeed, an illusion of control.” Invulnerability enables one to ignore those elements that are inconvenient to the interpreter, with wilful ignorance as a result. Such ignorance leads, in turn, to other ignorances, which underlie according to Gilson (2011:201)

other types of ignorance, such as the ignorance of one’s complicity in racial oppression, because to admit such complicity is to open oneself to features of one’s social world and one’s way of inhabiting that world that are discomfiting and thus to make oneself vulnerable.

There is a need to create room for someone coming to terms with his or her complicity. For example, Georg Yancy, an African-American scholar focussing on critical philosophy of race, critical whiteness studies, and philosophy of the Black experience, creates a space for his white students (thus examples of white embodiment that links them to privilege) to become vulnerable. He exposes them to those meta-narratives that undergirds white privilege and supremacy (as seen by blackness). But in rendering his students vulnerable, he recognises the loss they experience and the need to grieve for that loss. He does not leave them exposed. He (2014:14-15) argues as follows:

What we need are critical spaces where vulnerability can be nurtured in White students who find themselves faced with critical questions about race that mark their bodies as problem bodies. Creating moments of “trauma” (etimologically, to wound) within the context of classrooms, forms of trauma that unsettle various meta-narratives that ground and underwrite White privilege and superiority, is necessary for White students in order to begin to disarticulate various mythopoetic constructions of whiteness that have reinforced their ‘naturalized’ place of dominance in the world. We need a form of *Bildung* or *paideia* that actually cultivates vulnerability in White students, a cultural space where they are wounded, undergo moments of trauma and narrative disorganization in terms of their whiteness. To tarry within this space is about being reborn, which is always a painful process. Given that our White students have lived with a multitude of lies about their “natural supremacy” and “entitlement” for such a long time, they will also need to grieve: to grieve the loss of the imperial self, and to grieve in the form of *gravitas* /*heaviness*, which on the flip side, may lead to a form of ethical responsibility or maturity, requiring constant ontological renewal.”

The creation of vulnerability within those embedded in a power structure that has been created in their favour since the 15th century, happens here through the exposure to the

effects of or marks left by coloniality. This exposure creates a wound that needs to be attended to by the injured themselves. Without such exposure there can be no wounding. There is a necessity to this vulnerability, as explained by Judith Butler (2003:10) who ties vulnerability to loss. This loss constitutes a common ground with all other human beings. To have lost someone or something means that there was affection and desire. In the case of the decolonial turn, there was commitment and/or embeddedness in a particular power relationship which is revealed and which causes a sense of loss of control, of privilege, of autonomy. Regarding the latter, Butler (2003:16) argues that the demand for autonomy is countered by the demands imposed by living in a world of beings physically dependent on one another and physically vulnerable to one another. The decolonial turn renders autonomy (in the sense of a colonially constituted power relation) as a politically constituted body socially and politically vulnerable: "Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure," says Butler (2003:10).

Similar to Yancy Butler (2003:19) acknowledges the necessity of grief. To her the mourning of loss constitutes grief of which does not leave one with a sense of passivity, powerlessness or fear. It urges the self to recognise his or her own human vulnerability and recognise collective responsibility for the physical lives of the other. To Yancy loss is an important feature of the act of being rendered vulnerable, but it does not lead to victimhood. Victimhood is a negative state and ties in with the traditional understanding of vulnerability. Gilson (2011:310) sees vulnerability here as "a basic kind of openness to being affected and affecting in both positive and negative ways." She (2011:310) calls it "a condition of potential that makes possible other conditions." Vulnerability is an enabling condition (2011:310):

Being vulnerable makes it possible for us to suffer, to fall prey to violence and be harmed, but also to fall in love, to learn, to take pleasure and find comfort in the presence of others, and to experience the simultaneity of these feelings. *Vulnerability* is not just a condition that limits us but one that can *enable* us. As potential, vulnerability is a condition of openness, openness to being affected and affecting in turn.

The prerequisite for epistemic vulnerability is an openness to not knowing, a willingness to concede being in the wrong and a preparedness to be affected. Epistemic vulnerability is not merely openness to new ideas, but a readiness to put oneself in a situation in which one is not knowledgeable, becoming the Other (Gilson 2011:325). Furthermore, it is becoming aware of the ambivalence of emotional and bodily responses in the process of being rendered vulnerable. For example, knowledge of racial discrimination and the continuing after effects of colonial-

ism as reflected in a coloniality of being, coloniality of power and a coloniality of knowledge need to sink into our bodies, into our emotional responses, into a more basic interpretation of the world and ourselves. It is far more than simply altering a belief system (Gilson 2011:326). Epistemic vulnerability is the revelation of the underbelly of an operation system with which one holds certain beliefs and values.

4. Conclusion

This essay asked in what way can one from a position of whiteness respond credibly to questions posed from those generated by a decolonial turn. The arguments set out to demonstrate the need for such vulnerability on the side of those associated with Western power and apartheid. To deny vulnerability is to shut out an important resource with which one enters into relationships with others. Vulnerability is part of the human condition that allows us to have emotions. It is an enabling attribute we all share in the face of our fragility and precarious condition. But is asking vulnerability, for example, from the perpetrator of apartheid or in a wider sense, of colonialism, not a bit too much? Coloniality refers to the continuous rendering vulnerable of the people or groups bearing the brunt of colonialism of the past? In rendering the colonial or apartheid agent vulnerable, one creates openness to acknowledge a lack of knowledge, a discomfort yet an affirmation to being touched by the vulnerability of others and becoming affecting in relation to others. Epistemic vulnerability is evident when one reconsiders the own epistemic roots with which one constructs reality.

In the “dark” Africa article referred to above, it is necessary to create a vulnerability in terms of racial perceptions that remained unchallenged by indicating the incongruence between an audience’s lack of concession of complicity in apartheid (in hiding behind critical noises made at synod meetings on the issue of racism) and the persisting framework of exclusion and epistemicide (cf. Grosfoguel 2013:80) whilst peddling the conversion of a traditional healer to Christianity as a major achievement and the work of the Holy Spirit. Frankly, a decolonial point of view underlines the fact that the traditional healer had to commit epistemicide to become a Christian in denouncing her indigenous knowledge and the link between traditional healing and the darkness of Africa is racist. The decolonial option does not ease but rather aggravate fragility, especially when one needs to juggle an African identity as well as adhering to a particular religious tradition with its roots in Western Europe. Membership of the latter implies a rejection of traditions in the former. Without putting race on the table, and the role of coloniality, any discussion remains futile and impotent.

In the guild of Old Testament Studies (the Old Testament Society of South Africa) this juggling between an African identity and the demands of critical scholarship has

become noticeable. The issue is no longer reading the biblical text within or without a particular reader context, but the reclaiming of epistemologies with which to approach a text which claims to be authoritative in some way. It is no longer a juxtaposition of exegesis as the queen of Old Testament scholarship and contextual reading as mere reception criticism. Such juxtaposition constructs behind the force of a universalising methodology a nasty supremacy that relegates everything else as mere reception. It is a dangerous construction because one cannot leave race out of it. The decolonial turn emphasises a program of de-linking, and it can also very much mean that alongside Old Testament Studies with exegesis as its queen something else is developed that honours indigenous knowledge in the reading of the biblical text.

The questioning of an interpreter's methodology, presumptions and prejudices is part of the programme of an ethics of interpretation whereby the interpreter is expected to take responsibility for the methodology with which the text is considered as well as the marks the interpretation will leave on others. The reason for the norm that makes exegesis the queen of Old Testament Studies resides in the emphasis on literacy and textuality that became normative since the Reformation and the focus on the biblical text itself. 500 years later that insistence within a context where literacy and textuality play a different role needs to be critically evaluated. Moreover, from a decolonial point of view the power that is created by an insistence on this norm need to be analyzed in the light of Europe's ability the past 500 years to collect texts related to the Judeo-Christian tradition in North Africa and the Near Middle East that were colonized.

Putting it differently, what violence lays behind the claim that exegesis is the queen of Old Testament scholarship? The reality is that most textual resources reside in Europe and the USA. Participating in this game entails finding economic resources that will enable one to exploit the textual resources. This implies access to economic means, and with it privilege. This privilege brings into play a certain kind of supremacy that declares any effort at understanding the biblical text without textual resources inadequate and of little value. What made it possible for these textual resources to end up in places far from their origins? Moreover, is there a link between the process of colonialism and the emphasis on the texts of the Bible?

My submission is that a hermeneutic of vulnerability provides a mechanism to deal with the critique of Eurocentric frameworks and epistemologies expressed by decolonial positionalities. Vulnerability enables one to work with the critique and construct a credible framework with which one can deal with the critique and respond responsibly. I do not suggest the demise of any Eurocentric point of view, but provincialisation of what is thought to be Eurocentric becomes necessary in order to take one's own geo and body political location seriously. It is indeed a process of

unmasking the Eurocentric values and rendering them without their universal significance. It is no easy task when a visible link lacks between a value and its locality.

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