

“Looking into black eyes and feel the embarrassment.” A Selected and Selective Reading of *The Africana Bible*¹

ABSTRACT

Employing a hermeneutics of vulnerability to unmask privileged positions, this article intends to provide a reading from a white perspective of The Africana Bible. Reading Israel’s Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora. The hypothesis is that the book constitutes an exercise in reading the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible/First Testament in terms of a coloniality of being. Firstly, the socio-political relevance of an open discussion of racism will be illustrated by a recent example of a dispute that originated within racialized South African public discourse on the issue of white supremacy. Based on this example, the discussion will proceed to arguments regarding decoloniality after which a reading of selected chapters of The Africana Bible will be presented.

A INTRODUCTION

The issue of whiteness and white supremacy has reared its head viciously in South African public discourse when a radio DJ (Gareth Cliff) posted an “open letter” to President Jacob Zuma and his ANC led government.² Cliff took on the government on the issues of corruption, the proposed media tribunal, education, black economic empowerment, squabbles about power, and the renaming of towns, cities and streets. A critical reaction was then published in the *Mail&Guardian* by one of their journalists (Andile Mngxitama), labelling Cliff the poster boy of post-1994 racism. Cliff’s letter is despised as an anti-black manifesto normalising white supremacy.³ The latter is regarded as not being the

¹ This article is an edited version of a paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta 2010. A grant by the University of South Africa for Foreign Conference Attendance is hereby acknowledged.

² See Gareth Cliff’s blog “Dear Government,” n.p. [cited 9 November 2010]. Online: <http://www.garethcliff.com/chronicles.php?articleid=791>. Most of the reactions on his blog were supportive of his criticism. A surprising large number came from African South Africans!

³ See Andile Mngxitama, “The Face of White Supremacy,” [cited 9 November 2010]. Online: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2010-11-08-the-face-of-white-supremacy>: “Cliff is the new paternalistic white liberal Biko so despised.” The criticism is mainly based on Cliff’s rhetoric and the reality he constructed by way of his language. However, the epithets Mngxitama attributes to Cliff have themselves a racialised undertone. Much of the journalist’s criticism to the open letter is based on the very first reaction to the letter on the DJ’s website, a man called Len Anderson. Jacques Rousseau argues that the arguments against the DJ are based on him being white. He is

prerogative of rightwing elements, but rather a given amongst all whites with their unearned privileges that are never questioned. It is a reality that naturalises white privilege at the expense of blacks.

Whiteness itself became a topic in South African public discourse in June-July 2011 when Eusebius McKaiser responded in newspapers to an academic article written by Samantha Vice.⁴ Vice observed that white South Africans uncritically inhabit their white skins and fail to acknowledge that being white is still associated with social and economic capital. Against the shame and regret she wants to inculcate amongst white people, McKaiser suggests white people need to engage their whiteness publicly: "[B]e mindful of how your whiteness still benefits you and gives you unearned privileges. Engage black South Africans with humility, and be mindful of not reinforcing whiteness as normative [...]." The idea of shame and regret generated a heated debate in the press, indicating that the issue of whiteness is not only an emotional sensitive topic, but something that has by far not been worked through in post-apartheid society.⁵ From the debate, be it in terms of other articles or essays, or mere reactions written on the internet to these responses, it is clear to me that a large section of the white population are unable to look into black eyes, let alone feel and manage the embarrassment.

The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora constitutes a similar experience whereby whiteness as Western hermeneutics and Eurocentricity is interpellated. Reading *The Africana Bible* reminded me of James Perkinson's book *White Theology. Outing Supremacy in Modernity* in which he states:

being put in a tight spot: Everything he says is regarded as evidence of his alleged racism, but being not conscious of it, he can do nothing to counter the evidence. Cf. Jacques Rousseau, "White Supremacy Rant against Gareth Cliff Sullies Rational Political Debate," n.p. [cited 13 November 2010]. Online: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2010-11-12-white-supremacy-rant-against-gareth-cliff-sullies-rational-political-debate>.

⁴ 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>. Samantha Vice, "How Do I Live in This Strange Place?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41/3 (2010):323-342.

⁵ 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 kombes," n.p. [cited 29 June 2011], *Beeld* 28 Junie 2011. Online: <http://www.beeld.com/Rubrieke/Gasrubriekskrywers/Nee-vir-die-wit-kombes-20110628>.

Part of coming to consciousness of oneself as white, [...], involves daring to look into black eyes and not deny the reflection.

The first moment in elaborating a white theology is one of hearing and internalizing black critiques that are both overt and oblique. It entails confrontation with the embarrassment of having already been “found out” by one’s (in this case) most frightening other.⁶

The main title of this essay alludes to this paragraph and has become a mantra in my own theological enterprise, which has become more and more reflexive, crystallising into a hermeneutics of vulnerability. Perkinson, as well as *The Africana Bible* point to the vulnerability of those who bear the marks of whiteness in terms of its power. However, an interpellation of whiteness constructs an exigency of vulnerability amongst those who heed to the interpellation, that is, looking into black eyes and feel the embarrassment. After all, these black eyes “develop[ed] keen powers of perception and anticipation in order to avoid increased abuse.”⁷

The interpellation creates what Perkinson calls

the most challenging space of encounter necessary for white people to begin to confront the meaning of their own white embodiment, the task is then one of delineating and re-envisioning whiteness.⁸

It is a dance on a razor’s edge, since whiteness is urged to recognise its own complicity in the construction of oppressive structures as well as reveal the presumptions of white privilege as a choice and not as a condition. In South Africa, whiteness has lost its political dominance, but not its cultural and economic domination. The same seems to be true for Western dominance in the interpretation of the main sources of Christianity, the Old and New Testaments.⁹ Whiteness is in a precarious position and for this reason I developed the notion of a hermeneutics of vulnerability.

A hermeneutics of vulnerability suggests a reader awareness of what the effect of reading or interpretation will be on others and for which a reader need

⁶ Palgrave: New York, 2004, 3-4. The book challenges white theologians to learn how to confess and redress white power in their intellectual work. It is a continuous confrontation with white privilege in terms of socio-economic frameworks, personal power, cultural habit and erotic embodiment. Perkinson argues that whiteness functions as a “surrogate form of ‘salvation,’ a mythic presumption of wholeness.”

⁷ Perkinson, *White Theology*, 3.

⁸ Perkinson, *White Theology*, 4.

⁹ The dominance is explained by Knut Holter (“Introduction,” in *Global Hermeneutics? Reflections and Consequences*. International Voices in Biblical Studies, [eds. Louis Jonker and Knut Holter; Society of Biblical Literature: Atlanta, 2010]), 13-14: “Research is very much a question of funding, and funding agencies for this kind of research are often located in political or ecclesiastical structures.”

to take responsibility. In terms of whiteness, a hermeneutic of vulnerability entails recognising the rendering vulnerable of the subordinated other, as well as the rendering vulnerable of the white self in unmasking privileged positions that any political dispensation produces and which need to be fore-grounded for the sake of mutual understanding and social order.¹⁰ Ultimately, in South Africa the legacy of apartheid is still far reaching and it uncovers old wounds and exposes racial divisions.

In the encounters previously mentioned, whiteness seems to boil down to a failure to take into account other realities and presenting one's own as universal. There also seems to be a lack of historical consciousness in that white privilege is not questioned but taken for granted.¹¹ With whiteness as a power structure that needs to be exposed in mind, the challenge I have is how to respond to a book like *The Africana Bible*. How does one formulate a critique without being accused of propagating white supremacist views, or even racist views?¹² Is a reaction at all possible when one is constructed from the very start as a perpetrator of racism?

Perhaps the first step would be to allow the book to interpellate one's own whiteness, i.e. exploring and exposing the attributes of whiteness.¹³ When

¹⁰ Madipoane Masenya's reading of Job in *The Africana Bible* expresses such a set of vulnerabilities, one caused by the loss of her son, and another caused by the circumstances of that loss. Madipoane (ngwan'a Mphahlele) Masenya, "Job. An African Reading," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 237-241.

¹¹ A similar criticism is levelled by Randall C. Bailey on Shaun Kelley in his book *Racializing Jesus. Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (Routledge: New York, 2002). Bailey argues that Kelley is not aware "[t]hat the privileges he has experienced as a white male are integral to racism, such that receiving the privileges, which come from an oppressive order, is being a victim of racism" (Bailey, "Review Article: 'How Did We get Reduced to a Parenthesis?'" *Black Theology* 4/1 [2006], 109).

¹² John D. Foster's study regarding the defence of whiteness has revealed that white race talk testifies to a myriad of contradictions, enabling impression management of not being racist yet defending a white racial frame. Respondents were thus able to project blame for race problems on nonwhites and acknowledge difference only in contexts that put them at an advantage. Cf. John D. Foster, "Defending Whiteness Indirectly: A Synthetic Approach to Race Discourse Analysis," *Discourse & Society* 20/2 (2009), 685-703.

¹³ See Gerrie Snyman, "African Hermeneutics' 'outing' of Whiteness," *Neotestamentica* 42/1 (2008): 93-118. Interpellation is employed as a metaphor for commanding attention to something said. At the burning bush, YHWH interpellates Moses, who answers the call, and becomes the deity's focus. It is not something one can refuse, although one can refuse the label sometimes attached with it. One can undermine the interpellation by withdrawing from the construction (or label) and

whiteness dominates, it becomes culturally embedded and taken for granted as a racial yardstick to measure others. It then becomes invisible and employed without being conscious of it. The idea of interpellation as a metaphor serves to bring it to the surface and make it visible. A person is not white, but becomes white as certain power structures are maintained and enforced through language.¹⁴

This article intends to provide a reading from a white perspective of *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*.¹⁵ As a first step in terms of vulnerability it seeks to elucidate the projection of whiteness (as Western or Eurocentredness) in the mirror the black Other is holding up. The hypothesis is that the book constitutes an exercise in reading the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible/First Testament in terms of a coloniality of being and whiteness portrayed as a coloniality of power (as Westernness or Eurocentricity). Given the range of participants in this book, the essay will limit itself to the introductory chapters constituted by the section *Reading the Hebrew Bible* and to a selection of chapters by those from Africa who participated in the project.¹⁶ The reception of whiteness will take place within a postcolonial or decolonial framework¹⁷ that foregrounds coloniality of power and coloniality of being, two concepts apparently mutually exclusive. With globalisation, the uneven power structure created by imperialism remained with

present opposition to it. See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: NLB, 1971), 162-163.

¹⁴ Judith Butler argues that race, sex and gender have each their own specific history and do not constitute analogical relations. However, for the purposes of the discussion, the focus falls on race as a performative construct, an aspect shared with sexuality and gender. See Butler, *Bodies that matter. On the discursive limits of "sex"* (Routledge: New York, 1993), 123; 180.

¹⁵ Hugh R. Page, ed., *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009).

¹⁶ My choice for African participants is based on my own African identity and socio-geographical location. It is an opportunist choice enabling me to dialogue with other Africans. It is more difficult for me to relate to the Africana Diaspora given my Western cultural bias.

¹⁷ Ramón Grosfoguel, "The epistemic decolonial turn. Beyond political-economy paradigms," *Cultural Studies* 21/2&3(2007), 211 favours the term "decolonial" as more appropriate for the Latin-American context. "Postcolonial" suggests a period after the imperial colonialism that led to the "independence" of what used to be former colonies of some Western nations. The term "decolonial" is used as a perspective with which to break the grip of coloniality which is still felt under the effects of the much trumpeted globalisation or "Empire." Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 20 see "Empire" as "the center that supports the globalization of productive networks and casts its widely inclusive net to try to envelop all power relations within its world order—yet at the same time it deploys a powerful police function against the new barbarians and the rebellious slaves who threaten its order."

power merely shifting from the nation-state to large corporations within the former colonising countries. Colonialism is thus still rampant, just in another guise. Coloniality outlives colonialism.

For this reason the article starts with an explanation of the theoretical framework that is shaped by postcolonial theory in general and the Latin-American views on the decolonial turn. Then a reading of selected chapters in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* in terms of this framework will be presented.

B A POSTCOLONIAL OR DECOLONIAL FRAMEWORK

Daniel Patte has put forward since 1995 the idea that any critical exegesis is "interested," that is, practiced from very specific socio-political locations. In his case, he acknowledges his own interest, namely male and European-American.¹⁸ He calls it androcritical and states that the recognition of the male European-American context is in response to the challenge posed by feminist, womanist, *mujerista*, African-American, Hispanic-American, Native-American, and Third World liberation theologians and biblical scholars.¹⁹ His andro-critical approach then is practiced in a similar fashion: where the former follows the needs of women and other marginalised racial groups, Patte intends to criticize the lack of acknowledgement amongst male European-Americans regarding their own geopolitical and body-political location.

Cheryl Anderson links up with Patte's suggestion of "interestedness" of the male European-American exegete and refers to a mythical norm in biblical criticism that has created an "Other."²⁰ This mythical norm is defined as white, Eurocentric, male, heterosexual, wealthy, middle class, and Christian, creating an "Other" who is black, African/Asian/Latin, female, homo-/bi-/transsexual/intersexual, poor, working class, non-Christian:

Under a system of dominance and subordination, all who are different from that "ideal male" are marginalized. Accordingly, racism, sexism, and classism are related. Each implies the right of one group to dominate another. For racism, that right is grounded in "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others"; for sexism, in "the belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other"; for classism, in the belief in the inherent superiority of the rich over the

¹⁸ See Daniel Patte, "Acknowledging the Contextual Character of Male, European-American Critical Exegeses: An Androcritical Perspective," in *Reading from This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 36.

¹⁹ Patte, "Acknowledging the Contextual Character," 37.

²⁰ Cheryl B. Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies. The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009), 135.

poor.²¹

Anderson’s mythical norm relates to Ramon Grosfoguel’s understanding of the decolonial turn. His argument is that a “European/ capitalist/ military/ christian/ patriarchal/ white/ heterosexual/ male arrived in the Americas” while simultaneously establishing “several entangled global hierarchies.”²² They are:

- a) a particular *class formation* with a diversity of forms of labour organised by capital;
- b) a division of labour of core and periphery, the latter organised by way of coercion and authoritarianism;
- c) a state system in which European men in political and military organisations exercise control in colonial administrations;
- d) a global hierarchy in terms of racial or ethnic features whereby European people are privileged over non-European men and women;
- e) a similar global gender hierarchy that in general privileged males over females and more specifically a European patriarchy exercising control over other forms of gender relations;
- f) a sexual hierarchy that privileged heterosexuality over homosexuality, even in colonies where no such distinction was ever made;
- g) a spiritual hierarchy that privileged Christianity over non-Christian belief systems;
- h) an epistemic hierarchy that privileged Western forms of knowledge and cosmology over non-Western forms, in the process institutionalised in a global university system;
- i) a linguistic hierarchy in which European languages received a privileged position in theorising and generating of knowledge and non-European languages becoming the vehicle to discover folklore and culture.²³

In analogy with the concept of an interpretive turn, Ramón Grosfoguel suggests an epistemic decolonial turn. The voiceless subordinated colonised is no longer the subject of study, but provides the perspective from which academic work is being done. It is about transcending and decolonising what is believed to be the Western canon and epistemology.²⁴ The epistemic privilege lies with the experiences of the subordinated to which real cognitive content is ascribed.²⁵ The decolonial turn boils down to “a decisive intervention into the very discursivity of the modern sciences in order to craft another space for the

²¹ Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies*, 12.

²² Ramón Grosfoguel, “The epistemic decolonial turn. Beyond political-economy paradigms,” *Cultural Studies* 21/3(2007), 216.

²³ Grosfoguel, “The epistemic decolonial turn,” 217.

²⁴ Walter D. Mignolo, “Introduction. Coloniality of power and de-colonial thinking,” *Cultural Studies* 21/2&3 (2007), 164.

²⁵ José David Saldívar, “Unsettling Race, Coloniality, and Caste. Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Martínez’s *Parrot in the Oven*, and Roy’s *the God of Small Things*,” *Cultural Studies* 21/2&3 (2007), 343.

production of knowledge." It seeks an *other* thought, an *other* knowledge, namely "the very possibility of talking about 'worlds and knowledge otherwise'."²⁶ Ultimately, its purpose is to bring to the surface subaltern²⁷ knowledge of those exploited and oppressed by a coloniality of power, creating a narrative that may counter the modernist grand narrative of a great singularity of only one sole epistemic tradition from which truth and universal principles follow,²⁸ a narrative fed by Christianity, liberalism and Marxism.²⁹

In practice, it entails a decentering of Europe³⁰ and foregrounding those regions that have been marginalised by Europe, yet proved to be vital to European identity.³¹ It questions the "underside" of modernity: "the imputation of the superiority of European civilization, coupled with the assumption that Europe's development must be followed unilaterally by every other culture."³² It regards colonialism, racism and sexism not as mere by-products of Europe, but as an integral part of the conditions that made modernity (and Europe) possible.³³ Central to the decolonial turn is the deconstruction of racial and gender

²⁶ Escobar, Arturo. "Beyond the Third World: Imperial Globality, Global Coloniality and Anti-Globalisation Social Movements," *Third World Quarterly* 25/1 (2004), 179.

²⁷ The term "subaltern" is interpreted along the lines of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (eds. Cary Nelson, and Lawrence Grossberg; Urbana: University of Illinois, 1988): 271–313. Here subaltern means those who are without a voice and who one never hears to speak.

²⁸ Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn," 212.

²⁹ Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," 180. Catherine Walsh, "Shifting the Geopolitics of Critical Knowledge. Decolonial Thought and Cultural Studies 'Others' in the Andes," *Cultural Studies* 21/2&3 (2007), 231 defines "Other" as to bring "forward and relate histories, struggles, experiences, and knowledges lived and constructed within and marked by the context of colonialism and its processes of subalternization and racialization."

³⁰ Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," 184. See also Snyman's discussion of Bernal's deconstruction of the Aryan theory regarding the relationship between Greece and Egypt (in Egypt in "Is It not Sufficient to Be a Human Being? Memory, Christianity and White Identity in Africa," *Religion & Theology* 15/3&4 [2008]: 395–426). Bernal's dilemma is the perceived racism with which historical analyses have been done in the past, resulting in a model such as the Aryan Model which sees Greece in line with Indo-European ancestry over against the Ancient model that links Greece to Egypt and Phoenicia.

³¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, 149. It is a European identity that is defined by a colonial Other. The normal subject that capitalism needed was a white wealthy heterosexual male worker whose identity of civilisation was defined outside Europe by the savages in the Americas or the wild, primitive and barbaric people in Africa.

³² Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," 184.

³³ Catherine Walsh, "Shifting the Geopolitics of Critical Knowledge," 228.

discrimination as well as class exploitation³⁴ that came into being with the start of modernity.³⁵

With the advent of modernity, philosophically the focus fell on “Man” as the foundation of all knowledge and order in the world. The focus constituted a logocentric and phallogocentric structural order from the viewpoint of a masculinist Eurocentric consciousness.³⁶ Its success was to make subjects located in the oppressed side to think epistemically like the ones on the colonial side of the oppression.³⁷ In contrast, the subject behind the decolonial turn is not an “undifferentiated, gender-neutral subject (or differentiated only in terms of race and class).”³⁸ Decoloniality’s dealing with gender (and race) situates the discourse in a context of power relations between men and women, between white and black:

Contrary to the European perspective, race, gender, sexuality, spirituality, and epistemology are not additive elements to the economic and political structures of the capitalist world-system, but an integral, entangled and constitutive part of the broad entangled ‘package’ called the European modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system.³⁹

It exposes what is called a coloniality of power as a hierarchy based on the social classification of the population of the world around the idea of race.⁴⁰

With modernity came coloniality, causing modernity to become blind to colonial difference. With its narrative of singularity, it created an epistemic strategy that hid the locus of enunciation, i.e. context. The speaking subject in Western philosophy not only conjures up a myth of universal truths, or conceals who is speaking, but also the “geo-political and body-political epistemic location in the structures of colonial power/knowledge from which the subject speaks.”⁴¹

In the decolonial turn, the critique arising from the underside of modernity, that is, from the colonial difference, enters in dialogue with Western

³⁴ Mignolo, “Introduction,” 164: “In the colonies workers are colonial subjects of color. In the heart of the empire (Western Europe and the US), workers are the racialized minorities.”

³⁵ Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” *Cultural Studies* 21/2&3 (2007), 171. These are categories that did not exist prior to modernity. Cf. Saldívar, “Unsettling Race, Coloniality, and Caste,” 345.

³⁶ Escobar, “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise,” 183.

³⁷ Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,” 213.

³⁸ Escobar, “Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise,” 193.

³⁹ Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,” 217.

⁴⁰ Saldívar, “Unsettling Race, Coloniality, and Caste,” 346.

⁴¹ Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Decolonial Turn,” 213.

thinking itself, constituting in the process what is called "border thinking."⁴² It engages the concomitant universalising tendency and colonialism from the socio-political location of the voiceless colonised defined by "traditions, folklore, and religion."⁴³ In thinking from different spaces, it intends to break the monism of Eurocentrism by treating Eurocentered modernity as a particular local history. One can also call it "the provincialisation of Europe."

To "provincialize" Europe was precisely to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity.⁴⁴

In terms of the decolonial turn, a coloniality of power suggests that the combination of race, gender and sexual orientation turns the whiteness of a man into his ability to dominate. In turn, a coloniality of being, being dominated means one cannot be white and a man.⁴⁵ However, the disadvantages are not experienced in its totality.⁴⁶ For example, one may be advantaged in terms of gender and race, but disadvantaged in terms of other aspects. For example, I may be white, male, middle class and thus advantaged on an economical level. However, on a socio-political level, I am not, as I do not have political power any longer in terms of whiteness. Moreover, in terms of political transformation my whiteness and maleness pose obstacles to others who want to be advanced, thus pushing me down to the lower steps of the socio-political ladder. On the other hand, being black does not necessarily mean to be dominated. What it illustrates is that there is a peculiar dynamics of domination/subordination that are interlocking and multidimensional.⁴⁷

The decolonial turns out what Anderson labels as the mythical norm. Why the need to out the mythical norm? Because the application of the mythical norm is synonymous with what she believes to be faith and what is thought to be correct church practices, or orthodoxy:

⁴² Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," 195. Queer theory illustrates the idea of border thinking the best, by showing that gender and sexual identity is not monolithic, but that its borders (heteronormativity) can be redrawn to enable other identities and knowledge otherwise.

⁴³ Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," 187.

⁴⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial thought and Historical difference*. With a new preface by the author. (PUP: Princeton, 2000): x-xi.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies*, 15.

⁴⁶ The term "oppression olympics" comes to mind where people fight who are more oppressed than the others (cf. Andrea Smith, "Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy. Rethinking Women of Color Organizing," in *Color of Violence. The Incite! Anthology* (ed. Incite! Women of Color against Violence, South End Press: New York, 2006), 66.

⁴⁷ Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies*, 17.

Basically, the privileged position of the economically secure Israelite (heterosexual) male head of household became the privileged position of the economically secure white Christian (heterosexual) male head of household. As a result, there has been no recognition within the faith tradition that those who are "Other," nonwhite, female, homosexual, poor or non-Christian, might have different yet valid experiences of the divine or that they might have different perspectives about the meaning of particular texts. Furthermore, there is little recognition that these groups may be disadvantaged by traditional biblical interpretations simply because they are outside of the *mythical norm* – and not because it is God's will.⁴⁸

The dominant interpretations are the ones that represent the perspectives and interests of one particular group, those of the mythical norm: "The privileged perspective is so embedded in church systems and the national consciousness that being part of either system means upholding past traditions, and those traditions themselves are defined by exclusion."⁴⁹ Exclusion/suppression is linked to the dominant interpretation of the mythical norm. To counter such exclusion, it is necessary to unmask the particularity of the interpretation and to challenge its universalising trend. Particularity needs to be acknowledged and become part of the interpretative process. Particularity is not wrong, but it becomes problematical when the particularity of one group is enforced as the universality of all.⁵⁰

Reading *The Africana Bible* one becomes aware of a near omnipresence of a coloniality of power in the form of what is referred to as Eurocenteredness or Western hermeneutics, in other words, a coloniality of knowledge shaped by a coloniality of power. The book expresses the experience of those who still feel themselves shackled by a coloniality of power, that is, a coloniality of being.

C READING *THE AFRICANA BIBLE*

1 The words "Africana", "Bible" and "Diaspora"

The word "Africana" in the title immediately confronted the general understanding I had of the word. In the end, I had to admit that it confronted my whiteness. In fact, there is a measure of provincialising and particularising in the confrontation! I grew up with the word "Africana" referring to very old and very rare books, furniture, art and weapons (antiques) produced in Southern Africa. "Africana" means "from Africa" in this sense. But there is an ironic ethnocentric twist to it: although the label Africana is attached to these rare collectors' pieces, the appellation seems to be aimed at mostly pieces from

⁴⁸ Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies*, 32.

⁴⁹ Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies*, 137.

⁵⁰ Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies*, 146.

"white" hands. I say it is ironic, because these items claim Africa as its place of origin, yet it wants to attribute an exotic flavour to its existence by attaching the label "Africana" to it. The general definition though seems to be that of materials, such as books, documents, or art objects, relating to the history or culture of African peoples.⁵¹ This seems to be the definition behind the title of the book *The Africana Bible*. Africana refers to things pertaining to Africa and the African Diaspora.⁵² However, from a dominant Western perspective, the term was exclusionary of material in African hands.

But, as Hugh Page asks, why the name "Bible," and specifically, a descriptive with the Latin terminology: *The Africana Bible*? It is quite particularising. Page answers: "to bring to bear the intellectual riches of the peoples and cultures of Africa and the African Diaspora."⁵³ In other words, to affirm a particular coloniality of knowledge, that is, knowledge within African people and African Diaspora. It is knowledge formulated from a position of an Otherness to whiteness.

But the notion of a Bible is fraught with Western Christian doctrinal issues. Yet Page suggests what is presented is a mode of discourse that is not entirely associated with a commentary, but rather "textual interventions":

Throughout, it attempts to use an array of experiential, literary, artistic, and material resources hailing from African and African Diasporan peoples the world over as touchstones for reading, reacting to, querying, embracing, and – on occasion – looking both through and beyond the Bible at Africana life. [...]

Thus, the title encourages readers to consider the place that the Bible occupies in the lives of peoples of African descent. At the same time, it challenges them to think further about the meaning of such basic terms as *Bible*, *Africa*, *Diaspora*, and *Africana*. [...]

Thus, *The Africana Bible* is an invitation to critical reflection on Africana life and the role that the First Testament has played in it. It is also a guide for a more discerning exploration of a body of literature and a theological tradition whose canonical shape and content have been, and continue to be, variously configured and whose impact on Africa, the Black Diaspora, and the Atlantic world has been, and

⁵¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. Online: <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Africana>. Cited 12 November 2010.

⁵² Hugh R. Page, "The *Africana Bible*. A Rationale," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 5.

⁵³ Page, "A Rationale," 3.

remains, profound.⁵⁴

To Rodney Sadler, the word *Africana* affirms its referent, namely ideological and artistic products of "natives or diasporan peoples from Africa."⁵⁵ It is in contrast to the Western biblical canon of the European/ capitalist/ military/ christian/ patriarchal/ white/ heterosexual/ male that arrived in the Americas. The *Africana* context, however, is not singular, but includes competing ideas and people from several nations. However, the binding notion is "historical Western oppression." Kirk-Duggan puts it sharper: "As an African Diasporan biblical scholar, I work to expose white supremacist interpretation, debunk oppressive ideologies, and avoid romanticizing the text and its problems. [...] Careful to avoid bibliolatry, a wealth of imaginative discourses emerges when we engage ancient texts for contemporary use."⁵⁶ Over-against an epistemic hierarchy that privileged Western forms of knowledge and cosmology over non-Western forms, Duggan wants to privilege the local epistemic. It is thought to be a (re)inscription of the Black experience, embodying resistance to oppression and hope for inclusivity.⁵⁷ The book, in turn, by exploring an Other thought, very much looks into white eyes and expose the latter's own vulnerability.

Leslie R. James provides information on the use of the epithet *Diaspora* in terms of a coloniality of being.⁵⁸ I learnt the concept *Diaspora* as referring to the inhabitants of Northern Kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah who were taken into exile by the Assyrians and Babylonians. The term has never been personalised to mean people who have been displaced by recent colonial powers. Thus I encountered the term mostly with reference to Jewish settlements in Egypt and Northern Africa, like Alexandria and Carthago. They are not only far away geographically, but also in terms of history. When

⁵⁴ Page, "A Rationale," 4.

⁵⁵ Rodney S. Sadler Jr., "Reading *Africana*: Reading from 'my' Place," in "African and African Diasporan Hermeneutics. Reading the Hebrew Bible as Journey, Exile, and Life through my/our Place," written by Randall C. Bailey, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and Rodney S. Sadler Jr., in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 22.

⁵⁶ Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, "Life Reading Scripture, Scripture Reading Life: An African-American Biblical Hermeneutic," in "African and African Diasporan Hermeneutics. Reading the Hebrew Bible as Journey, Exile, and Life through my/our Place," written by Randall C. Bailey, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) and Rodney S. Sadler Jr., in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 23.

⁵⁷ Page, "A Rationale," 8.

⁵⁸ Leslie R. James, "The African Diaspora as Construct and Lived Experience," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 11-18.

capitalised, it is used with reference to the Jewish exile, and with small letter it refers to any other movement whereby a group of people has left their homeland for whatever reason. But the concept Diaspora always had a sense of connection between the group and the homeland left behind. After the exile, it was thought the inhabitants of Judah returned.

But it is exactly for this reason that I cannot use the word with regard to my own position as a white person residing in Africa, because I have no nostalgia for a lost country of origin. I simply fail to see myself as a European Diaspora. What I do have is a sense of connection to a culture that is much wider and encompassing than a single country. It is indeed based on the power of Western hegemony that, ironically, enabled hybrid identities, in my case, creating offspring between a German soldier and a slave from India, the offspring marrying into the French Huguenots.⁵⁹ Is my lack of nostalgia due to me being part of the coloniality of power and participation in a grand narrative of singularity with no need to reflect on African identity my non-African origins? Most probably, but the deconstruction of Western dominance, and concomitant whiteness, impresses upon me a typical decolonial hybrid identity of Euro-Asian Africanity!

But James' depiction of African Diaspora brought to mind an aspect that one should always bear in mind, namely the experience of forceful transportation from one continent to another "into the crucible of the modern Atlantic plantation economy as cheap labor" engaging "in a process of resistance and culture creation designed to transcend the limits of slavery."⁶⁰ The role of the Bible was pivotal, not only in structuring the master-slave relationship, but also as a text of hope and freedom. Yet the word connotes "[f]eelings of exile, slavery, disjunction, loss, alienation, social death, resistance, remembrance, and return accompanied the forced dispersion of Africans from their native homeland."⁶¹ Africa remains a vital source to the Diasporic Africans, conscious that slavery is no more, yet quite mindful they are not in the Land of Promise.⁶²

The notion of Diaspora suggests forceful removal, but in postcolonial studies the notion of Diaspora is sometimes used in the sense of permanent displacement, a way of life, of being postmodern and postcolonial.⁶³ It suggests a

⁵⁹ Gerrie Snyman, "Playing the role of perpetrator in the world of academia in South Africa," *Bulletin for Old Testament Studies in Africa* 12 (2002), 8-20.

⁶⁰ James, "Lived Experience," 11.

⁶¹ James, "Lived Experience," 12.

⁶² James, "Lived Experience," 17.

⁶³ Roland Boer, *Last Stop Antarctica. The Bible and Postcolonialism in Australia*, (Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield, 2001), 102-113. Boer (p. 113) levels three criticisms against postcolonial use of exile: (i) It is based on a nomadic-settlement opposition found in the biblical texts; (ii) it presupposes travel in a capitalist context, and (iii) it valorizes voluntary Diaspora, migrancy and itinerancy. To him, it is as if post-

coloniality of being where colonialism as a political instrument may have become extinct, but not its effects. Diaspora presupposes land from which one is diasporic, yet James seems to employ the concept also as an intellectual and philosophical alternative: "The religious, philosophical, cultural, and political reflections that emerged for the diasporic condition, despite its historical continuum, are massive."⁶⁴ He reflects on the geo-political and body-political epistemic location of the Diaspora with the purpose not of resettling in the country of origin, but of empowering them in the New World of residence the past 200 years: an empowerment "to name themselves as subjects," the creation of a Black presence, an African presence in the face of a European presence that excluded the Diasporic voice in the New World. African Diaspora is a heuristic key to denote a pedagogy of resistance to hegemony and notions of chosenness and ethnic purity.⁶⁵ It exposes the gender, sexual, spiritual, epistemic and linguistic hierarchies associated with a coloniality of power in the advent of modernity.

2 Diasporic Knowledge / Coloniality of Knowledge

Diasporic knowledge aims to expose the myth of universal truths that is central to a coloniality of power. James refers to diasporic knowledge as power to revise the First Testament; to remap, to re-narrate the environment and the world-as-we-know-it.⁶⁶ It is knowledge generated from the context of a coloniality of being. Diasporic knowledge looks at the impact of coloniality in lived experience and especially in the mind of those living with the effects of colonialism. If decolonisation means the confrontation of the racial, gender and sexual hierarchies that European modernity put in place to strengthen itself as it colonised and enslaved other peoples, knowledge generated from this opposition can be called a decoloniality of knowledge.⁶⁷

The decolonial turn implies a shift in the production of knowledge and introduce questions about the effects of European modernity's colonisation processes.⁶⁸ Turning to readings of the individual Old Testament books, it is important to keep the issue of provincialising in mind. In as much as the local epistemic location is explored in these readings, provincialisation takes place

colonial theory is constituted by Third World academics in First World institutions! Moreover, the ability and right to choose, is central to liberalism. The factors that en/disable such choices, remain masked.

⁶⁴ James, "Lived Experience," 12.

⁶⁵ James, "Lived Experience," 17.

⁶⁶ James, "Lived Experience," 17.

⁶⁷ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being. Contributions to the development of a concept," *Cultural Studies* 21/2&3 (2007), 261.

⁶⁸ Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being," 262: "The de-colonial turn marks the definitive entry of enslaved and colonized subjectivities into the realm of thought at before unknown institutional levels."

on two levels: on geopolitical and body political level for the African / Diasporic African reader as well as the Western reader of the book.

David Adamo's hermeneutics is an example of such a provincialisation. He situates the Bible within the realm of a coloniality of being in claiming that the Bible is no longer a European book, but an African book, a manual for African life.⁶⁹ Yet, from a Western perspective, it exerts a power very similar to that formulated from a coloniality of power: It is the rule of faith and present readers with God's self-disclosure. The Bible shares with non-African Christians too the notion of a manual for life consulted for advice.⁷⁰ The difference appears to be the way it functions as a manual. The Bible was employed by a coloniality of power as an instrument of oppression, but African readings within in a context of a coloniality of being arrived at new readings and new uses of the text.⁷¹ For example, in the Carribean, the Bible started to function as a talisman with numinous power or became engaged in religio-magical practices of divining, proving or curing.⁷² In Adamo's Nigerian context, the text received a magical character, with Psalms functioning as medicine for protection, success in life, success in examinations and securing the love of a man or a woman.⁷³

Adamo is very vocal about the inability of a coloniality of power to grasp indigenous knowledge: "Hospitals and Western medicine could not deal effectively with the role of belief in that aspect of African understandings of pathology." That kind of knowledge deals with the power in names and the power in the spoken and written word. Speaking from the peculiar dynamics of the dominated or subordinated, he calls it "the African genius of applying African spirituality and experience instead of depending on the poverty of Western spiritual experience, which indeed is very strange to Africans even though we can imitate it perfectly."⁷⁴

The goal of *The Africana Bible* is to increase awareness of a coloniality of being, that is, Black lived experience throughout the world, to promote con-

⁶⁹ David T. Adamo, "The Bible in Twenty-first-Century Africa," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 31.

⁷⁰ Adamo, "The Bible in Twenty-first-Century Africa," 26.

⁷¹ Steed Vernyl Davidson, Justin Ukpong and Gosnell Yorke, "The Bible and Africana Life. A Problematic Relationship," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 39-44.

⁷² Davidson, Ukpong & Yorke, "The Bible and Africana Life," 41.

⁷³ David T. Adamo, "Psalm 101-150 in African Context," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 229-236.

⁷⁴ Adamo, "Psalm 101-150 in African Context," 233.

versation about the history, current challenges, and future prospects of peoples of African descent internationally, to enable Black experience to be viewed from a global perspective and to be used as a literary medium promoting convergence and community building.⁷⁵

In Adamo's rendering of the Western spiritual experience as poor, the marks of the latter Adamo seems to bear is very clear to observe, namely a universal truth that has been imposed on different cultural contexts and a grand narrative that refused to allow differences. His construction is in reaction to a universalised Other, an other that is denied a particularity. But in his value judgment, is he not doing the same, denying the Western Other a particularity, creating a universalised Other?⁷⁶ Similarly Madipoane Masenya refers to her attempts to foreground her African context within Eurocentric epistemologies which still shape South African higher education that is regarded with suspicion.⁷⁷ What are these Eurocentric epistemologies? They are never mentioned. Positivism? Objectivism? Postmodernism? What exactly is the problem with South African Eurocentricity that disallows a particular Africanicity?

3 Colonialism's continuous impact

Masenya's reading of Jeremiah is one of those texts that forced me as a white reader to confront black eyes and feel the embarrassment down the spine!⁷⁸ Employing a Northern Sotho proverb about disobedient children who refuse to take advice from others, and making congruent with wisdom in the deuteronomistic history, she argues that the fall of the Afrikaner regime in 1994 illustrates the wisdom of the proverb: disobedience comes at a heavy price.⁷⁹ However, she does not express *Schadefreude*, as she also asks what is the price Black people will pay, for example acting as divine agents to punish apartheid's disobedient children. She finds the involvement of a deity in these arguments scary. Nevertheless, the fall of Jerusalem not only finds a similarity in the fall of apartheid, but it cautions the new regime to act responsibly, since no human leader is indispensable.⁸⁰ But it is not only the apartheid Afrikaner that plays the role of antagonist ("obsessed with election theology and a related biblical hermeneutics, most of them believed they were closer to God than

⁷⁵ Page, "A Rationale," 5.

⁷⁶ Bailey, "Review Article," 112.

⁷⁷ Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), "Women. Africana Reality, and the Bible," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 33-38.

⁷⁸ Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), "Jeremiah," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page, Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 147-156.

⁷⁹ Masenya, "Jeremiah," 150.

⁸⁰ Masenya, "Jeremiah," 151.

were all the other 'heathen' (Babylonian?) peoples").⁸¹ Masenya feels herself in exile at home as a woman. She ascribes this condition to slavery, racism and patriarchy.⁸² But here she asks questions to the new regime regarding the people who remained behind and were not in exile in the Northern hemisphere during the apartheid years. Her portrayal of the white antagonist has left me with a feeling of incredulity, but in terms of the coloniality of being white, her reading of Jeremiah brought home the marks white reading left on the racially subordinated Other. Correspondence with Afrikaner self-experience does then not matter. Masenya's reading exemplifies perhaps how coloniality still outlives colonialism, yet, given the reversal of roles she alludes to, her reading brings into question the role of privilege and the socio-political location of subordination.

Privilege plays a role in Andrew Mbuvi's reading of Daniel. He reads the book of Daniel "in tandem with his own experience as a postcolonial African who lives in the Diaspora."⁸³ He sees various parallels between Africana Diasporic life and Daniel. But his exile was not forced on him. His was a choice, leaving a privileged position in his home country to become a graduate student in the USA, yet comparable to Daniel and his friend who experienced a social dislocation and a loss of privilege. He left a different set of hierarchies and was forced to negotiate different sets of racial, religious, class, knowledge and language hierarchies peculiar to the West. He compares the name changes in Daniel with what the enslaved Africans experienced when their names were changed to that of their masters' choosing. A new name alluded to new ownership and a new destiny. But in the process they lost their African identity and heritage.⁸⁴ In other words, they accepted a coloniality of power and began to think like those in colonial power. Only, in the hierarchy that a coloniality of power created, they were inferior.

It is this suppression of the own history that Makhosazana Nzimande challenges in her reading of Isaiah. She laments the influence of the Western grand narrative of singularity that turned, in her view, her fellow people "into a hybrid people who unashamedly mimic the Western cultural ethos" and who "have sheepishly surrendered to colonial mimicry, relinquishing their African identity."⁸⁵ She argues that the continuing prevalence of Enlightenment paradigms of scientific racism and the supremacy of reason and logic marginalises

⁸¹ Masenya, "Jeremiah," 150.

⁸² Masenya, "Jeremiah," 153-54.

⁸³ Andrew M. Mbuvi, "Daniel," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 273-279.

⁸⁴ Mbuvi, "Daniel," 275.

⁸⁵ Makhosozana K. Nzimande, "Isaiah," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 140.

Africana people.⁸⁶ What she asks for is rediscovering and reappropriating what imperialism suppressed in the past, namely the own history. The Bible provides her with analogies in her own context, for example the exile in Isaiah. Although there is historical restitution, black South Africans are still thought to be in exile. It is an idea quite similar to white Afrikaans South Africans employed after their defeat at the hands of the British Empire in the Anglo-Boer/ South African War that ended in 1902. But to Nzimande it is especially women who suffer, trapped between a denigrated African identity and an imposed Western identity.⁸⁷ Her own reading strategy is to challenge the mythical norm with which the Bible is read in foregrounding division of labour, and racial, gender and epistemic hierarchies.

4 Linguistic hierarchy?

Wil Gafney's reflections on responsible reading takes on about all nine hierarchies mentioned via Grosfuguel in the previous section. She argues:

The reception of the scriptures of Israel into the Christian canon was and is marked by usurpation, colonization, anti-Judaism, and anti-Semitism. Specifically, in the West and in cultures colonized by the West, the scriptures of Israel have regularly been mediated through gentile culture and languages, particularly German, which is especially onerous in a post-Holocaust world.⁸⁸

Of particular interest is her presentation of the linguistic hierarchy and labour division.

She sees in translating biblical names a process of subjugating and colonising of scriptures with the translator re-creating the identity of the biblical characters in his own image.⁸⁹ She finds the Hebrew idiom to be suppressed in translations with names being Europeanised. Given the perception that most translations were done by white men, she argues that they not only introduced their own image into the translation but also imposed their Anglo-Germanic name-calling on subject African peoples. In terms of Patte's androcritical reading she may be right in principle, but her request to "an end to the mediation of the scriptures through gentile languages, especially German, in this

⁸⁶ Nzimande, "Isaiah," 138.

⁸⁷ Nzimande, "Isaiah," 144.

⁸⁸ Wil Gafney, "Reading the Hebrew Bible Responsibly," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 47. She has it especially about names that do not sound Hebrew anymore. According to her framework, the names of the biblical books in *The Africana Bible* will definitely be regarded as oppressive and based on irresponsible exegesis.

⁸⁹ Gafney, "Reading the Hebrew Bible Responsibly," 48.

post-Holocaust world"⁹⁰ is problematic. She argues correctly that "responsible exegesis of the scriptures of Israel requires respect for and fidelity towards the Semitic languages, peoples, and cultures of the scriptures of Israel,"⁹¹ but the geopolitical and body-political location of any interpreter cannot be denied, regardless of the interpreter subjugating the Hebrew idiom or not.

Regarding the division of labour organised by way of coercion and authoritarianism Gafney argues that the Israelite system of debt-slavery is distorted and exploited in order to legitimise the slavery of Africans and justify it theologically.⁹² She is contradicted in the very next chapter by Kimberly Ruffin who refers to Egyptian enslavement and the fact that Egyptians were Africans with the power to enslave the Israelites.⁹³

Although Gafney's statements are extremely problematical,⁹⁴ they confronted me with the issue of coloniality of knowledge, cultural relativism and ethnocentrism.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, looking into black eyes and feeling my own embarrassment, I cannot but help as to inquire into the role of Africa itself in the slave trade, finding support in the following argument of Henry Louis Gates:

Advocates [...] for the descendants of those slaves generally ignore this untidy problem of the significant role that Africans played in the trade, choosing to believe the romanticized version that our ancestors were all kidnapped unawares by evil white men, like Kunta Kinte was in "Roots." The truth, however, is much more complex:

⁹⁰ Gafney, "Reading the Hebrew Bible Responsibly," 48.

⁹¹ Gafney, "Reading the Hebrew Bible Responsibly," 48.

⁹² Gafney, "Reading the Hebrew Bible Responsibly," 49.

⁹³ Kimberly N. Ruffin, "The Hebrew Bible in Africana Art, Music, and Popular Culture," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 53.

⁹⁴ I am not sure I grasped Gafney's arguments correctly, because I find some of them disturbingly similar to the attitude that privileges the Hebrew biblical text and Hebrew names as expressed by far right wing groups in South Africa. Cf. www.stormfront.org or www.boerevryheid.co.za.

⁹⁵ The use of gentile languages instead of Hebrew smacks of cultural relativism on the one hand, whereby it becomes impossible to transfer meaning from one culture to the other, but on the other hand, it reeks of cultural superiority, favouring Hebrew as if God spoke in Hebrew. I cannot get away from a particular ethnocentrism towards the German culture in her anti-German statements. And I wonder about the denial of the context of the colonial "Other" and how language simply functions. Some sounds are peculiar to certain languages. Moreover, the expectation to mediate scriptures in Hebrew will make the biblical text unreadable to most communities, let alone Africana communities.

slavery was a business, highly organized and lucrative for European buyers and African sellers alike.⁹⁶

5 (Non-)Convergence of contexts

One of the hierarchies overturned with the decolonial turn, is the epistemic hierarchy with which certain Western forms of knowledge and cosmology is privileged over non-Western forms. Some commentaries in *The Africana Bible* thus privilege an Africana context in arguing that the latter provides an advantage over a Western context in the understanding of the Bible. It is argued that an Africana context puts Africana people in a better position to understand the First Testament over against the West whose context does not allow it to understand it. Regarding the book of Joshua, Mafico explains Israel's defeat against the Canaanites in the story of Achan as follows: "Achan alone breached the ban, and the whole nation-state lost the battle against the Canaanites. To Westerners, this does not make sense. To Africans, this is easy to explain. [...] According to African and ancient Near Eastern concepts of *pars pro toto* (a part represents the whole), a banned object in the midst of Ancient Israel contaminated Achan and his family, who, in, contaminated the whole of Israel."⁹⁷ Mafico's reading of the book is quite critical of the historical veracity of the events described in the book. He provides a reading from an African perspective on some aspects of the book: preparation for war and circumcision and Israelite social structure. Regarding circumcision he sees an analogy between circumcision in Joshua and circumcision in Africa. The ancient Israelite social structure is thought to be akin to African social stratification.⁹⁸

Dorothy Akoto finds a parallel between African royal settings and the Book of Esther.⁹⁹ In both patriarchy is entrenched through court and royal disputes. Royal consorts play the game because the male agenda needs to be achieved. She asks questions about Esther's morals, but realises that in the African context the inheritance of a wife and promiscuity is part of court life. However, such situations force young women into unhealthy marital relationships.¹⁰⁰ Regarding politics, Akoto argues that similar to the Esther story, royal

⁹⁶ Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Ending the Slavery Blame-Game," *New York Times* April 23, 2010. n.p. (cited 13 November 2010). Online: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/23/opinion/23gates.html?_r=1.

⁹⁷ Temba L. J. Mafico, "Joshua," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 118. The idea of collective punishment is not alien to the West, and definitely not in South Africa where the British sent the families of the Boer guerrillas into concentration camps in order to break the spirit of these men.

⁹⁸ Mafico, "Joshua," 117-118.

⁹⁹ Dorothy Bea Akoto (née Abutiante), "Esther," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 268-272.

¹⁰⁰ Akoto, "Esther," 270.

laws are supported by the king's ethnic group, but opposed by his rivals. African women are the ears of the court and reveal plots to kill the king and bringing the perpetrators to justice.¹⁰¹ The stuff the biblical stories are made of, appears in later contexts: "Ethnic feuds, extreme hatred, pride and minority/majority power conflicts, resulting in massive destructions of life and property, as mirrored by Esther, are prevalent in African contexts."¹⁰² Ultimately, she draws a very close link between Esther and her own African(a) context as the book is thought to address "issues that affect and have a lasting relevance for African peoples, albeit with only local/communal, regional, and ethnic specific interpretive differences."¹⁰³

Elelwani Farisani draws close parallels between his African context and Obadiah and Micah. Although he refrains from othering the West in his two essays, he implicates White culture in terms of South Africa's racial past. In his reading of Obadiah,¹⁰⁴ which he regards as speaking against pride and arrogance with relation to the Edomites' animosity towards Israel, he refers to the spate of xenophobic attacks on foreigners the country experienced in 2007. He says: "Biblical texts have been abused to foment ethnic segregation and conflict in Africa."¹⁰⁵ Here white culture's exploitation of ethnic diversity for its own political needs is instructive. In his reading of Micah, he employs the prophet's message of hope and deliverance to the construction of theologies of renewal, transformation, reconciliation, and reconstruction and grounds it in Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance.¹⁰⁶ The book transcends time and exhibits universal value and application, especially in terms of poverty, corruption, HIV/AIDS and moral decay on the African continent.¹⁰⁷ Micah serves as a new paradigm in a quest for an African theology of renewal.

Kenneth Ngwa similarly appeals to the African Renaissance in his reading of Haggai, which he claims challenges the reader not only in terms of what one believes but also how one believes, since a community that addresses poverty, lives under divine blessing.¹⁰⁸ According to him, the postexilic image

¹⁰¹ Akoto, "Esther," 271.

¹⁰² Akoto, "Esther," 271.

¹⁰³ Akoto, "Esther," 268.

¹⁰⁴ Elelwani Farisani, "Obadiah," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 180-182.

¹⁰⁵ Farisani, "Obadiah," 181.

¹⁰⁶ Elelwani Farisani, "Micah," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 189-193.

¹⁰⁷ Farisani, "Micah," 190.

¹⁰⁸ Kenneth N. Ngwa, "Haggai," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 204-205.

of God provides resources to African communities experiencing displacement by natural disasters and dehumanisation because of human conflict and exploitation.¹⁰⁹

Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance are political terms emphasising the need of Africans to stand together in addressing cultural and socio-economic challenges. However, Dora Mbuwayesango's reading of Zephaniah can be understood as criticism on these two concepts in her reference to ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and Sudan.¹¹⁰ In Rwanda surrounding African states aggravated the genocide and with regard to Sudan the African Union strengthened Sudan's leader's hand by refusing to deliver him to the war crimes court in The Hague. In fact, she is quite critical of Zephaniah's message, regarding its insistence of inclusivity for the new society as dangerous.¹¹¹ The implication of the Bible's message need to be assessed before it is embraced. To her, a close correspondence or analogy between an African context and the biblical context is dangerous. Mbuwayesango remains critical of both text and context. It is a position I can identify with, but me being implicated by a Western perspective, does my identifying with her means she is operating within a Western epistemological framework?

Madipoane Masenya asks herself a similar question in a heart rendering and sad reading of the book of Job, in which she narrates the struggle of Mmalehu who need to come to terms with the loss of her son in a motor vehicle accident. Job's question of why it all happened to him is answered for Mmalehu as follows:

Perhaps the ancestors are punishing her for being such an independent woman? A woman who chose to hold her own in the world; a woman whose thought patterns are still Eurocentric and patriarchal? [...] She might be reaping the consequences of her heretical, feminine/ist (demonic?) theologies!¹¹²

Masenya brings into play three hard-hitting issues: race, the role of ancestors and Eurocentric theologies. The issue of race is brought to a very personal level, directly affecting lives: her son's death was the result of reckless driving of a white boy, her education is based on Eurocentric theology and the calamity that befell her is linked to the ancestors. The introduction of ancestors in the debate is an indigenous epistemology with which she ultimately sets up a de-

¹⁰⁹ Ngwa, "Haggai," 205.

¹¹⁰ Dora R. Mbuwayesango, "Zephaniah," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2009), 202-203.

¹¹¹ She makes a similar point in her reading of Joshua in the *Global Bible Commentary*. See Dora R. Mbuwayesango, "Joshua," in *Global Bible Commentary* (ed. Daniel Patte, Abingdon Press: Nashville, 2004), 64-73.

¹¹² Masenya, "Job. An African Reading," 237-241.

coloniality of knowledge, but her internal deliberation still reflects the social and racial hierarchies imposed by a coloniality of power.

F CONCLUSION

There is a need to reflect on whiteness on a hermeneutical level. The socio-political discourse made it already a topic and within Old Testament Studies, within the realm of what is called African Hermeneutics, the particularisation of the Africana context brings Western hermeneutics and Eurocentricity into the debate. Whiteness is merely the other side of the proverbial coin. The socio-political debate is on amongst white people but the hermeneutical debate currently is very much between Africana people and those who ascribed to Western hermeneutics. What is happening on the socio-political level need to take place on a hermeneutical level. In other words, there is a need to take the debate between Africana and Western contexts to an inner Western debate, or, more specifically, there is a need to debate the way in which whiteness as a coloniality of power still rules the world of academia. The aim is not to disgrace such power, but to instil a particular consciousness regarding the marks others will bear (and is still bearing) in that power configuration.

The Africana Bible is not about whiteness, Western hermeneutics or Eurocentricity. It is about the particularisation or provincialisation of the Africana context with the aim of elucidating a coloniality of knowledge from the vantage point of a coloniality of being. It is about foregrounding the own context that provides an impetus for an understanding of the biblical text that differs from an understanding within what is known as the mythical norm.

Most of the readings discussed in this article have succeeded in rendering the position of power associated with the mythical norm vulnerable. In this way these readings served as a way of conscientising the white reader of the sentiments of those regarding themselves as having been colonised. There are some readings that did not fulfil that role, but rather became a coloniality of power in turn. In other cases, the othering of the western narrative remained too general while the particular was claimed for the own Africana context. Decolonial theory wants to incorporate lived experience. Would it be possible to look at the lived experience of the Western Other or is that the task of whiteness itself?

The decolonial turn suggests that coloniality outlives colonialism. The effects of racism such as apartheid linger on as its imprint on the South African psyche reveals itself every now and then. It is a lived experience that cannot be denied by whiteness. *The Africana Bible* puts context relative to the biblical text, finding in some instances a structural resonance with current contexts, but also warning where it is dangerous to abide by principles evoked in certain stories. It even ventures criticism on Western culture (non)understanding of particular texts. But how deep-seated is this discomfort with the West and its

version of Christianity? Is there a different message for Christianity than the one encountered the past 500 years? For example, in the texts I read I did not see real references to the fall (Genesis 3) or to St Augustine's work in this regard for that matter. He was an African bishop, yet his theology has been the matrix for Christianity since the Reformation! Has he become a [problematic figure in the Africana contexts?

In conclusion, *The Africana Bible* is not about whiteness, but about lived experience in relation to whiteness. The expression of the vulnerability within a coloniality of being ethically compels a coloniality of power, whiteness, to become accountable, that is, "responsible not only for the choice of theoretical interpretive models but also for the ethical consequences of the biblical text and its meanings."¹¹³

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