

## Towards an Indigenous (Xhosa) South African Biblical Scholarship

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### ABSTRACT

*Whiteness that continues to influence indigenous biblical interpretation is problematic in South African biblical scholarship. The purpose of this article is to further the debate on whiteness that results into a paradigm shift from an interpretation influenced by whiteness to an indigenous (Xhosa) biblical interpretation, blackness.<sup>1</sup> While whiteness is explored in this article, a process of reading the Bible from an indigenous (Xhosa) perspective is advocated for, tested and illustrated by utilizing a Xhosa-constructed song to unlock and reconstruct a meaning of an ancient text (Mark 9:4). The findings presented in this article demonstrate that historical and literary criticisms are problematic, that they express impediments to the emancipation of blackness and shows how the usage of European church songs that supposedly unlock the meaning of ancient texts reveals whiteness's continuing influence in current South African biblical scholarship. A reconfiguration of the Hebrew Bible's Moses and Elijah with the help of an indigenous (Xhosa) song, demonstrates how blackness similarly unlocks the meaning of an ancient text, which is not shaded by whiteness.*

### A INTRODUCTION

Should South Africans move from *whiteness* to *blackness* in biblical interpretation? *Whiteness*, for Samantha Vice, is implicated in the injustice that the black majority continue to experience 17 years later into the democratic dispensation.<sup>2</sup> The recent discussion of white privilege by Vice has stimulated a de-

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<sup>1</sup> This article does not intend to argue that *blackness* is to be preferred over *whiteness*; neither does it suggest that there should be an end to *whiteness*, as Andile Mngxitama argues (cf. Andile Mngxitama, "End to *Whiteness* a Black Issue," *Mail & Guardian* [October 21, 2011], 38). Both *whiteness* and *blackness* need to grasp their distinct context without one dominating and influencing the other.

<sup>2</sup> Samantha Vice, "How Do I Live in This Strange Place?" *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41/3 (2010): 323-342. Eusebuis McKaiser, "Confronting Whiteness," n.p. [cited 1 July 2011]. Online: <http://mg.co.za/printformat/single/2011-07-01-confronting-whiteness/>. The very moment McKaiser responded to an academic article written by Vice *whiteness* became a topic in the South African public discourse. One of the arguments presented by McKaiser is that of the need to be careful not to reinforce *whiteness* as normative. Various authors contributed to the *whiteness* debate: Jakes Gerwel, "Anti-Rassism Verg Aktiewe Optrede," *Rapport* (10 Julie 2011), 2; Sally Matthews, "Inherited or Earned Advantage," n.p. [cited 19 October 2011]. Online:

bate on *whiteness* in the context of post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>3</sup> However, in the current discussion of *whiteness* there is very little focus on what *whiteness* means when seen in an inclusive context of South African biblical scholarship.

Nevertheless, some South African biblical scholars<sup>4</sup> have substantially contributed to the debate on postcolonial biblical criticism and African biblical hermeneutics.<sup>5</sup> West acknowledges that "the trained South African biblical scholars have been trained in the academies of the west and that much of their reading continues to come from this site of biblical interpretation."<sup>6</sup> In engaging the academies of the west, Shome explores *whiteness* in terms of its definition as constituting those discursive practices of colonialism and neo-colonialism, that privilege and sustain global dominance of white imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, it seems as if *whiteness* operates from a position of invisible power where it remains an unreflected norm.<sup>8</sup> Problematic as it is, along with the view that, in the process of colonisation, *whiteness* and *Europeanness* were universalised as a norm, interpretation of the Bible was legitimised and imposed on the South African scholarship.

A question remains unanswered in the discussion of "*whiteness*" and "postcolonial biblical discourse" though. On which grounds can historical and literary criticism be labelled as "European" compared to "African"? Should there be a dialogue between *whiteness*, *Europeanness* and *blackness*? The

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<http://mg.co.za/article/2011-09-12-Inherited-or-earned-advantage>; and Mngxitama, "End to *Whiteness*," 38.

<sup>3</sup> Samantha Vice, "Why My Opinions on Whiteness Touched a Nerve," n.p. [cited 2 September 2011]. Online: <http://mg.co.za/printformat/single/2011-09-02-why-my-opinions-on-whiteness-touched-a-nerve>.

<sup>4</sup> For further reading, see Stephen Moore, "Doing Gospel Criticism as/with a 'Reader,'" *BTB* 19 (1989): 85-93; Mark Brett, "The Ethics of Postcolonial Criticism," *Semeia* 75 (1996): 219-228; and Musa Dube, "Toward a Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible," *Semeia* 78 (1997): 11-26.

<sup>5</sup> There seems to be less interest (mostly among South African white scholars) in post-colonial criticism, the debate on *whiteness* and *blackness* as well as the usage of African hermeneutics in reading ancient texts.

<sup>6</sup> Gerald West, "Indigenous Exegesis: Exploring the Interface between Missionary Methods and the Rhetorical Rhythms of Africa: Locating Local Reading Resources in the Academy," *Neot* 36 (2002): 150-151. Holter also makes this point. See Knut Holter, "When Biblical Scholars talk About 'Global' Biblical Interpretation," in *Global Hermeneutics: Reflections and Consequences* (ed. Knut Holter and Louis C. Jonker; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 87-92.

<sup>7</sup> Raka Shome, "Whiteness and the Politics of Location," in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* (ed. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1999), 108.

<sup>8</sup> Gerrie Snyman, "African Hermeneutics' 'Outing' of Whiteness," *Neot* 42/1 (2008): 100.

problem with this collaborative interpretive process is that a meaning derived from the interpretive tools (historical and literary criticisms) is used to construct the meaning of the text in today's context.<sup>9</sup> This process does not do justice to the emancipation of black South African biblical scholarship in addressing imperialistic tendencies in biblical scholarship. However, the problem is not the opposition between *whiteness* and *blackness*, but the recognition of each in a manner that one does not influence and dominate the other. "Emancipation" alludes to liberation from a form of suppression. In the context of South African biblical scholarship the word "emancipation" is used in this article to refer to the liberation of indigenous voices which were suppressed in the colonial and apartheid era. Jeremy Punt emphasises that there are vested institutional, ecclesial, scholastic, economic and power interests in the South African biblical scholarship<sup>10</sup> which, in my opinion, seem to shed light to the seeming reluctance to move from *whiteness* to the emancipation of *blackness*. Has there been a movement towards an indigenous interpretation of the Bible and therefore *blackness* in South African biblical scholarship?

Drawing on Duncan Brown's work on the rhetorical rhythms of Africa with a focus on South African oral poetry and performances<sup>11</sup> and Musa Dube's work on readings of *Semoya*,<sup>12</sup> Gerald West coins an argument on how the ordinary South African bible readers indigenously interpret the text.<sup>13</sup> The songs referred to by Dube and Christian hymns referred to by Brown are church songs the missionaries introduced into Africa. It is worth noting how problematical a European-produced song introduced into a South African context can become when the song is offered as an interpretation of Scripture. The problem is that a particular interpretation is embedded already in the song in a Western context. Subsequently, particular theological ideologies once formed in Europe is forced upon a South African-Xhosa audience. If true, the following question can be entertained: What constitutes *whiteness* for it to emerge as a problem in the understanding of scripture as embedded in this song, more importantly in the Xhosa version?

The article will explore the question below. It will offer a movement from an interpretation shaped by *whiteness* to indigenous (Xhosa) biblical in-

<sup>9</sup> Justin Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (ed. Gerald O. West and Musa Dube; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 24.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Punt, "Why not Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in South Africa: Stating the Obvious or Looking for the Impossible?" *Scriptura* 91 (2006), 68-69.

<sup>11</sup> Duncan Brown, *Voicing the Text: South African Oral Poetry and Performance* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Musa Dube, "Readings of *Semoya*: Batswana Women's Interpretations of Matt. 15:21-28," *Semeia* 73 (1996): 111-129.

<sup>13</sup> West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 157-160.

terpretation.<sup>14</sup> In scrutinizing *whiteness* the article hopes to put forward a case for reading the Bible from an indigenous (Xhosa) perspective.

## **B PROBLEMATIC WHITENESS AND EUROPEANNESS IN SOUTH AFRICAN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP**

### **1 Continuing influence of *whiteness* and *Europeanness* in South African biblical scholarship**

According to Shome, *whiteness* is about the discursive practices of colonialism and neo-colonialism, that privileges and sustains global dominance of white American and European imperial subjects and Eurocentric worldviews.<sup>15</sup> Such maintenance of global dominance of white privilege seems to show a continuing influence of *whiteness* in South African biblical scholarship. Frankenberg defines *whiteness* as a location of structural advantage of race privilege; a vantage point from which white people not only look at themselves or others, but also at the society; and a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed.<sup>16</sup> She regards *whiteness* as a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced and linked to unfolding relations of domination.<sup>17</sup> In a South African context, this kind of production can be linked to the history of colonisation, imperialism and racism.

*Whiteness* operates from a position of invisible power whereby it remains an unreflected norm.<sup>18</sup> A conscious and / or subconscious perception of *whiteness* as normative and natural then becomes self-protective. Such a perception invalidates any challenges to its authority, as rightfully articulated by Projanski and Ono.<sup>19</sup> In the process of colonisation, *whiteness* and *Europeanness* were universalised as a norm, legitimising a particular form of biblical interpretation that has been imposed on African scholarship. This tendency of normalising and prescribing a reading is also acknowledged by Jurie le Roux.

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<sup>14</sup> Indigenous (Xhosa) biblical interpretation is an approach to ancient texts which is underpinned in Xhosa perspectives. It is an approach that problematises the dominance and influence of *whiteness* and *Europeanness* in reading of Scripture in a context of indigenous biblical scholarship. However, this approach is not in pursuit to end *whiteness* and *Europeanness* in their context but to avoid their dominance and influence in *blackness*. Xhosa presuppositions, ideologies and worldviews as embedded in Xhosa narratives, idioms, proverbs and songs are employed as a point of reference in interpreting ancient texts.

<sup>15</sup> Shome, "Whiteness and the Politics," 108.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Frankenberg, "White Women," 6.

<sup>18</sup> Snyman, "African Hermeneutics," 100.

<sup>19</sup> Sarah Projanski and Kent A. Ono, "Strategic Whiteness as Cinematic Racial Politics," in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* (ed. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith Martin; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1999), 152.

In such acknowledgement it is observed that once the guild of scholars decides on one approach which they regard as normative and prescriptive, any other type of interpretation or reading is rejected.<sup>20</sup> In the context of the above assertions, a conscious perception of *whiteness* as normative and natural becomes self-protective. West articulates that "some African biblical scholars have been bewitched by the west" and to some extent, an interaction with the western scholarship has been preferred and perceived as a norm.<sup>21</sup> When a perception is normalized and is perceived to be absolute, any other perceptions to the contrary are rejected. Hence, influence of *whiteness* in *blackness* and explicitly in indigenous South African biblical scholarship is still evident and not avoided.

On *Europeanness*, Snyman envisages that historical and literary criticisms are influenced by Eurocentric worldviews and reflects a Eurocentric reading.<sup>22</sup> Snyman's conclusion that "the consequence of European normativity was that a western interpretation of Christ was imposed on the missionary subjects inhabiting a world outside of Europe"<sup>23</sup> further shed light into the observed and continuing influence. It then seems that *whiteness* is detectable in historical and literary criticisms. Furthermore, the influence of race and therefore *whiteness* is suspected to be detectable in dogmatic constructions such as predestination<sup>24</sup> as cited by Snyman, and therefore in biblical interpretation. Alternatively, in his article titled: "Postcolonial anxieties and biblical criticism in South Africa," England draws the reader's attention by making it clear that the individual and collective practices of readers are no less restricted by their world views, their perspectival grids, through which they view their environments and through which they view the Bible.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, taking into account West's contention that South African biblical scholars have been trained by the west,<sup>26</sup> one would then be inclined to deduce that South African biblical scholars have been indoctrinated by the Eurocentric worldviews and paradigms of reading the Bible. Not critically looking at the approach advocated for in this

<sup>20</sup> Jurie Le Roux, "Africa and the Future of our Scholarly Past," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning* (ed. Hans De Wit and Gerald O. West, Leiden: EJ Brill, 2008), 308.

<sup>21</sup> Gerald West, "Doing Postcolonial Biblical Criticism @Home: Ten Years of South African Ambivalence." *Neot* 42 (2008a/1): 150-151.

<sup>22</sup> Snyman, "African Hermeneutics," 115.

<sup>23</sup> Snyman, "African Hermeneutics," 114.

<sup>24</sup> Snyman, "African Hermeneutics," 115.

<sup>25</sup> Frank England, "Postcolonial Anxiety and Biblical Criticism in South Africa," *Neot* 43 (2009/1): 32.

<sup>26</sup> West acknowledges in his citation that the African biblical scholarship has strongly been shaped by the historical-critical interest of western biblical scholarship and this includes the full array of historical-critical methodology: text criticism, form criticism, source criticism and redaction criticism. See West, "Doing Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," 39.

article could result to the continuing dominance and influence of *whiteness* in *blackness* in the context of South African biblical interpretation.

Samantha Vice in her contribution on *whiteness* that has triggered outrage in the academic South African circles, comments:

It is appropriate for whites to feel shame at their white identity, given its destructive legacy and the way it continues to shape us. Of course, we did not choose to be born white but that does not stop us benefiting from it still – in ways that are subtler than merely social and economic. We move easily about a world made in our own image, validating our own values and beliefs and sustaining our own comfort, unimpeded by the kinds of structural and systematic challenges black people face daily. That is something to feel ashamed about.<sup>27</sup>

Vice's argument alludes to the continuing trends that are still shaped by whites, including the socio-economic context. Her awareness of *whiteness* in other contexts merits the debate of *whiteness* in the context of South African biblical scholarship. Even though the focus is on *whiteness* as deduced and embedded in white people's ideologies and behaviour, she draws the reader's attention to the detected impact of the destructive legacy on *blackness*, black people and the South African democratic dispensation. In her discussion on inherited or earned advantage with specific focus on white privilege Matthews seem to be of the opinion that *whiteness*, white privileges and legacy of *whiteness* are passed down generationally.<sup>28</sup> Historical and literary criticisms which reflect a Eurocentric reading could be deemed to be inherently imperialistic. However, redress in the context of South African biblical scholarship should not be equated to an "end to *whiteness*"<sup>29</sup> as Mngxitama generally argues. Redress necessitates affirmation of *whiteness* and ending of dominance and influence of *whiteness* in *blackness*.

## 2 Problematisation of *whiteness* in South Africa

Why is *whiteness* problematic in the South African democratic context? Snyman, drawing from the contributions by Hardt and Negri reiterates that "*whiteness*, so it seems, given the economic powers of the United States of America and Europe and the emergence of a new 'empire,' remains an exponent of co-

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<sup>27</sup> Vice, "Opinions on Whiteness," <http://mg.co.za/printformat/single/2011-09-02-why-my-opinions-on-whiteness-touched-a-nerve>.

<sup>28</sup> Matthews, "Inherited or Earned Advantage," <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-09-12-inherited-or-earned-advantage>.

<sup>29</sup> Mngxitama, "End to *Whiteness*," 38.

lonialism and imperialism."<sup>30</sup> There appears to be a continuing manifestation of colonialism and imperialism in the current post-apartheid South African democratic dispensation.

Snyman seem to regard the conceptualisation of an ideal humanity as being a construction of the west.<sup>31</sup> Perceptions of Christian white men characterises such constructions in biblical interpretation. It is in this understanding that the perception of indigenous biblical interpretation as being shaded with *whiteness* can be based and problematised. Snyman further sees the production of white identity or *whiteness* that is taken as natural, as problematic in South African biblical scholarship.<sup>32</sup>

However, a reader of Snyman<sup>33</sup> cannot escape the feeling that despite Snyman's effort to come to terms with his own whiteness, *whiteness* is still being embedded in the current indigenous biblical interpretation trends in South African biblical scholarship. Perhaps this is so because of his interest in the acceptance of a white Africanness in the African continent and less interest in emancipation of *blackness* from *whiteness*.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the conclusion that "apartheid history, like the holocaust, ties two racial group identities to a common history of colonialism"<sup>35</sup> seems to suggest *blackness* or africanicity finds its point of reference in colonialism and therefore in *whiteness*.

<sup>30</sup> Gerrie Snyman, "Is it Not Sufficient to Be a Human Being? Memory, Christianity and White Identity in Africa," *R&T* 15 (2008): 398; cf. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Snyman, "Is it Not Sufficient," 403-404. An element of destructiveness within *whiteness* itself can be detected and explored in a further discussion of *whiteness*.

<sup>32</sup> Snyman, "Is it Not Sufficient," 421.

<sup>33</sup> Snyman, "Is it Not Sufficient," 395-426.

<sup>34</sup> Snyman, "Is it Not Sufficient," 421.

<sup>35</sup> Gerrie Snyman, "The Rhetoric of Shame in Religious and Political Discourses: Constructing the Perpetrator in South African Academic Discourse," *OTE* 19 (2006/1): 201. However, there seems to be a consensus among South African biblical scholars that an indigenous culture was condemned by the missionaries during the colonial era. As a reaction to the condemnation of indigenous culture by the missionaries during the colonial era, there arose a vernacular hermeneutic. See Jeremy Punt, "Current Debates on Biblical Hermeneutics in South Africa and Postcolonial Matrix," *R&T* 11/2 (2004): 143. In the vernacular hermeneutic, critiquing the missionary for condemning the indigenous culture and the religious truths and values among the Africans which existed before the advent of Christianity, is essential. Such a critique, if perceived and received to be judgmental, could possibly result to less interest in post-colonial discourse. Sugirtharajah also alludes to the missionary condemnation of indigenous culture. See Rasiah Sugirtharajah, "Thinking about Vernacular Hermeneutics Sitting in a Metropolitan Study," in *Vernacular hermeneutics* (ed. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah; Sheffield: Sheffield academic Press, 1999), 106.

A suspicion, alluded to by Snyman, that "not even African hermeneutics would be able to escape the extent of the permeation if one bears in mind that Christianity came to Africa via an imperial mindset which is infused with racial contaminants"<sup>36</sup> is worth noting. Hence, Snyman in discussing how western hermeneutic remains tainted by imperialism, colonialism and racism, contends that missionaries who were white men brought to Africa biblical interpretation that was enfolded in European Enlightenment clothing.<sup>37</sup> Rightly so, Holter interprets this process as being a "deliberate de-Africanisation in Western biblical scholarship."<sup>38</sup> Deconstruction of this continuing process is fundamental in the emancipation of *blackness* in South African biblical scholarship. The problematisation of *whiteness* can be explored in the suggested dialogue between European produced paradigms and African indigenous paradigms.

## C PROBLEMATIC DIALOGUE IN SOUTH AFRICAN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP

### 1 Problematic dialogue

Melissa Steyn observes that for *whiteness* the challenge is to find a new relationship to Africa, to its people and to their cultures.<sup>39</sup> Such a new relationship "invites" a dialogue on *whiteness* and *blackness* in South African biblical scholarship. A dialogue between proponents of the European paradigms on one hand, and African indigenous paradigms on the other, is paramount for South African biblical scholars' co-existence. For now, it remains unclear how this dialogue should take place and it seems problematic.

Punt agrees that a dialogue between both the colonial and postcolonial readings of the biblical text is possible.<sup>40</sup> This dialogue in essence is paramount in establishing an interaction between *whiteness* and *blackness* in South Afri-

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<sup>36</sup> Snyman, "The Rhetoric of Shame," 185.

<sup>37</sup> Snyman, "The Rhetoric of Shame," 183-204.

<sup>38</sup> Knut Holter, "Africa in the Old Testament," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (ed. Gerald O. West and Dube Musa; Leiden: EJ Brill, 2000), 570.

<sup>39</sup> Melissa Steyn, "White Identity in Context," in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity* (ed. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith Martin; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1999), 264-278.

<sup>40</sup> Brett remarks that; "emerging from the debates along the lines of vernacular hermeneutics and the politics of identity and exclusion, strong, postmodern sentiments were in the past expressed against the notion of representing mothers and their particular identities." See Brett, "Postcolonial Criticism," 222. Punt, engaging Brett, offers a sound and significant contribution in contending that; "in the framing and incorporation of marginalised voices and following on the earlier discussion of hybridised readings, an ethics of interpretation in this context is concerned about the promotion of dialogical identities as much as it is about the recuperation of subjugated voices." See Punt, "Postcolonial Matrix," 151.

can biblical scholarship. Worth noting in such interaction is the contribution by Gandhi, in which he suggests a willingness to critique, ameliorate and build upon the compositions of the colonial aftermath.<sup>41</sup> However, Gandhi does not in detail explain how this process of rereading ancient texts in the context of South African biblical scholarship should take place.

On the same note, Le Roux argues that it is unwise and unhelpful to reject western OT scholarship and he further disputes that such scholarship is unsuitable for Africa because it is western in orientation.<sup>42</sup> A dialogue between *whiteness* and *blackness* is affirmed. Le Roux further suggests what he terms "a critical intellectual tradition" in South Africa for the purpose of understanding the text and South African context.<sup>43</sup> In my view, this "critical intellectual tradition" which aims to create a dialogue still allows *whiteness* to influence indigenous biblical interpretation in a dispensation where emancipation of *blackness* in South African biblical scholarship needs to be advanced.

Interestingly, Le Roux further remarks that "exegesis is not a methodological power game but an endless play of rereading and rediscovering new, different and diverse forms of meaning."<sup>44</sup> Such a remark presupposes that he is aware of the debate on imperialism and on contestations that during colonisation, the Bible was also read by missionaries, according to their interpretation, with the purpose of Christianising and civilising black South Africans. However, the above observations demonstrate a seeming deliberate digression on the topic of postcolonial biblical criticism as well as imperialism and its consequences. Could this digression translate to reluctance to move towards indigenous South African biblical scholarship? Moreover, could a possible reluctance be an impediment to the emancipation of *blackness* in South African biblical scholarship?

## 2 Possible reluctance in the dialogue

It is important to further explore other biblical scholars'<sup>45</sup> substantial contribution to the debate on postcolonial biblical criticism and African biblical hermeneutics, to comprehend *whiteness* and possible reluctance to move from *whiteness* to *blackness* in entrenching indigenous (Xhosa) biblical scholarship.<sup>46</sup> A

<sup>41</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). 166.

<sup>42</sup> Le Roux, "Africa and the Future," 307-308.

<sup>43</sup> Le Roux, "Africa and the Future," 309-311.

<sup>44</sup> Le Roux, "Africa and the Future," 309-311.

<sup>45</sup> For further reading, Moore, "Doing Gospel Criticism," 85-93; Brett, "Postcolonial Criticism," 219-228; and Dube, "Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation," 11-26.

<sup>46</sup> There seems to be less interest (mostly among South African white scholars) in post-colonial criticism, debate on whiteness and blackness and usage of African hermeneutics in reading ancient texts.

seeming reluctance in the recommended dialogue between *whiteness* and *blackness* or the west and Africa could possibly be an impediment to the emancipation of *blackness* in South African biblical scholarship.

In moving towards South African biblical scholarship, Gosnell Yorke employs the concept Afrocentrism as a deliberate attempt to break the hermeneutical hegemony and ideological stranglehold that white western biblical scholars have long enjoyed in relation to the Bible.<sup>47</sup> The term "Afrocentrism" is problematic. Some biblical scholars, like Snyman, uses the term Africanicity so as to avoid "Afro" which is deemed to be based on "Euro" due to assonance. As a matter of justice if one uses the first part, "Euro," then the first part of Africa is "Afri," turning the term Afrocentrism problematic and to be avoided.<sup>48</sup> Some English- and Afrikaans-speaking South African biblical scholars are of the opinion that the text should be reread from a South African perspective, with a condition that the western OT scholarship should to some extent be the point of reference.<sup>49</sup> Reluctance to break the hermeneutical hegemony and western ideological strangleholds seem to be evident in Le Roux's opinion. Such reluctance to let go of western hegemony is also observed in a contribution where England echoes West's question: "Why has South African biblical scholarship shown so little interest in postcolonial discourse?"<sup>50</sup> Along the same lines, in his analysis of the postcolonial biblical criticism in South Africa, Punt emphasises that there are vested institutional, ecclesial, scholastic, economic and power interests in the South African biblical scholarship<sup>51</sup> which, in my opinion, seem to shed light to the seeming reluctance to move from *whiteness* to the emancipation of *blackness*. In discussing imperial power relations in biblical interpretation, he draws his reader's attention to postcolonialism's ability to loosen the grip by which western cultural disciplines control intellectual practices in South Africa, so as to conform to their endorsed designs.<sup>52</sup> Owning and acknowledging the vested interest of *whiteness*, which seems to be problematic is fundamental in outing *whiteness* in *blackness* and therefore moving towards indigenous (Xhosa) South African biblical interpretation.

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<sup>47</sup> Gosnell Yorke, "Biblical Hermeneutics: An Afrocentric Perspective," *JRT* 52 (2001): 8.

<sup>48</sup> Snyman, "Is it Not Sufficient," 396.

<sup>49</sup> Le Roux, "Africa and the Future," 311.

<sup>50</sup> West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 148; England, "Postcolonial Anxiety," 27.

<sup>51</sup> Punt, "Why Not Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," 68-69.

<sup>52</sup> Punt, "Why Not Postcolonial Biblical Criticism," 69.

## **D TOWARDS INDIGENOUS (XHOSA) SOUTH AFRICAN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP.**

### **1 Moving from *whiteness* to *blackness* in indigenous (Xhosa) South African biblical scholarship.**

A question remains unanswered in the discussion of "*whiteness*" and "post-colonial biblical discourse": On which grounds can historical and literary criticisms be labelled as "European" compared to "African"? A distinction between African and European paradigms needs to be made. What is significantly unique in the paradigm with which South African biblical scholars interpret the Bible is the reference to and therefore usage of African idioms, symbols, ceremonies, rites of passages and indigenous languages. The utilisation of these elements in an indigenous (Xhosa) South African context can possibly be a movement towards an African interpretation. Such a movement is to be illustrated.

West describes his understanding of "African biblical scholarship" as a missionary and colonial encounter and its unique close association with ordinary African readers (whether literate or not) of the Bible.<sup>53</sup> In this unique characteristic of African biblical scholarship, the ordinary reader is represented by trained African biblical scholars and further, to some extent is partially constitutive of African biblical scholarship.<sup>54</sup> African biblical interpretation, just like Euro-American scholarship, embraces sociological forms of analysis, the reason being that this form gives attention to religious and cultural contexts and social and political contexts.<sup>55</sup>

But what about reader-response criticism? Could reader-response criticism not have created space for the ordinary readers within European biblical scholarship? In concurring with Moore, West contends that "we are misled if we imagine that the advent of reader-response criticism has created a place for the ordinary readers of the Bible within the western form of biblical scholarship."<sup>56</sup> While being inclined to accept the argument that the participation of the ordinary reader is distinct in South African biblical scholarship, my reser-

<sup>53</sup> West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 149.

<sup>54</sup> Justin Ukpong, "Bible Reading With a Community of Ordinary Readers" in *Interpreting the New testament in Africa* (ed. Mary N. Getui, Samuel T. Maluleke and Justin S. Ukpong; Nairobi: Acton, 2001), 188-212; Gerald O. West, "Unpacking the Package that is Bible in African Biblical Scholarship" in *Reading the Bible in the Global Village: Cape Town*. (ed. Kent H. Richards; Atlanta: Society of Biblical literature, 2002b), 65-94.

<sup>55</sup> Gerald West, "Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning* (ed. Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West. Leiden: EJ Brill, 2008b), 39.

<sup>56</sup> Moore, "Doing Gospel Criticism," 90; West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 150.

vations are on the level of the involvement and helpfulness of such participation in the emancipation of *blackness* in South African biblical scholarship.

In developing the argument that an ordinary African reader constitutes the process and the product of African biblical scholarship, West begins by suggesting that ordinary readers serve as receptors of biblical scholarship.<sup>57</sup> West, Ukpong and Holter share the same sentiments in that ordinary African readers are involved in African biblical scholarship and that the ordinary readers and the context within which they exist, are made the subject of interpretation of the Bible.<sup>58</sup> In this process the Bible is read collaboratively "with" the ordinary, in which the aim, according to Ukpong is the actualisation of the theological meaning of the text in today's context.<sup>59</sup> My problem in this collaborative interpretive process is that a meaning derived from the interpretive tools (mostly the historical and literary criticisms) is used to actualise the meaning of the text in today's South African context.<sup>60</sup> To some extent the actualised meaning is read into the context and the departure point is the usage of the argued European paradigms which are historical and literary criticisms. *Whiteness* therefore, as a departure point influences the actualised meaning. This process does not do justice, in particular, to the emancipation of *blackness* in South African biblical scholarship.

However, following the argument of Smith-Christopher that the poor have a unique insight into the Bible and based upon the similarity of the socio-economical circumstances between the authors of the Bible and the poor,<sup>61</sup> West contends that the ordinary reader can be construed to be included in African biblical studies as informers for biblical scholarship.<sup>62</sup> What needs to be noted regarding the contribution of the ordinary people is that the reading of the Bible departs from the context of the ordinary and moves to a reconstruction of the historical meaning of ancient texts. Such a reconstruction can also be made in respect to literary modes of reading the text.<sup>63</sup> Mosala and Nzimande embrace this movement in reading the Bible.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 151.

<sup>58</sup> West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 153; Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation," 23; Holter, "When Biblical Scholars Talk," 87-92.

<sup>59</sup> Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation," 24

<sup>60</sup> Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation," 24

<sup>61</sup> Daniel Smith-Christopher, "Introduction," in *Text and Experience: Towards a Cultural Exegesis of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 11-22.

<sup>62</sup> West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 151.

<sup>63</sup> West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 152.

<sup>64</sup> Itumeleng Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1989); Makhosazana Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel: a Postcolonial *Imbokodo* Reading of the Story of Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21:116)," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest*

Nzimande's postcolonial *imbokodo* reading of 1 Kgs 21:1-16, with reference to narratives and values of the ordinary South African readers, departs from the context of such readers and then moves to a reconstruction of a meaning. This reading does not allow a European reading, and therefore for *whiteness* to be imposed on the ordinary South African reader. In the appropriation of the Bible the question: "Does a reconstructed meaning oppress or liberate, empower or disempowering the ordinary South African reader," is posed and engaged. Nzimande draws her reader's attention to Dube's observation that "imperialism denies the validity of the narrative and values of its victims, while imposes its own master narratives on them."<sup>65</sup> In moving from *whiteness* to *blackness* in indigenous (Xhosa) African biblical scholarship a critical analysis of European and American imperialistic elements is necessary.

Drawing on Brown's work on the rhetorical rhythms of Africa,<sup>66</sup> with a focus on South African oral poetry and performances<sup>67</sup> and Dube's work on readings of Semoya,<sup>68</sup> West coins an argument on how the ordinary South African biblical readers indigenously interpret the Bible.<sup>69</sup> West embraces Brown's hermeneutic analysis in which he identifies a communal and cyclical interpretative process, founded on rhythmic African oral forms of songs and stories, for example, the Xam "bushmen," praise-poems of the Zulu people, Christian hymns of prophet Isaiah Shembe, black consciousness poetry of Ingoapele Madingoane and the political poetry of Mzwakhe Mbuli and Alfred Qabula.<sup>70</sup> Dube adds flesh and light to this communal and cyclical interpretive process in what she terms a "Semoya" (of the Spirit) reading, in citing that a biblical text becomes a subject of interpretation, during a worship service. The meaning of a particular text is expressed by and through a song, dramatised narration and repetition of the biblical story and phrase. West agrees with both Brown and Dube and self-articulates that particular songs and repetitions constitute and contribute to the communal and cyclical interpretation.<sup>71</sup>

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*of a Shared Meaning* (ed. Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West; Leiden: EJ Brill, 2008), 223-258.

<sup>65</sup> Nzimande, "Reconfiguring Jezebel," 225; Dube, "Toward a Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation," 21.

<sup>66</sup> In biblical interpretation literary and historical methods are used to analyse prose and rhetorical rhythms to exegete poetic texts. However, connections of some rhetorical rhythms in Africa to prose seem to indicate that such rhythms are an interpretation of both the prose and poetic texts of the Bible. This observation remains to be illustrated in this article.

<sup>67</sup> Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 66-229.

<sup>68</sup> Dube, "Readings of Semoya," 111-129.

<sup>69</sup> West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 157-160.

<sup>70</sup> See West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 157-158; Brown, *Voicing the Text*, 66.

<sup>71</sup> West further claims space for this indigenous form of exegesis in biblical scholarship. See West, "Indigenous Exegesis," 158-160.

While valuing the contribution of Brown, Dube and West in this form of indigenous South African interpretation, a healthy skepticism remains. The songs referred to by Dube and the Christian hymns referred to by Brown are church songs that came to Africa and were introduced by the missionaries. The fact that such songs, borrowed from and being a property of the Europeans, is problematic. For example, the Xhosa song "Ndikhokele O Yehova,"<sup>72</sup> is a translation and a reconstruction of the song "Guide me O thou great Jehovah."<sup>73</sup> A communal and cyclical interpretative process cannot be validated to be indigenous (Xhosa) South African if songs borrowed from the European religious discourse are used or alluded to in the process. Using European church songs to unlock the meaning of ancient texts shows how *whiteness* continues to be influential in indigenous (Xhosa) South African biblical scholarship. An alternative, i.e. using indigenous (Xhosa) rhetorical rhythms, will enable South African biblical scholarship to move from *whiteness* towards the emancipation and advancement of *blackness* in indigenous (Xhosa) South African biblical scholarship.

In this regard Brown's contribution is helpful. He refers to the communal and cyclical interpretive process that is based on the indigenous African oral form of songs and poetry. Similarly, Masenya's work on what she terms *bosadi* approach or hermeneutic,<sup>74</sup> which is classifiable to be a dimension of African biblical scholarship, sheds light on how the Bible can be read from an African perspective. Indigenous, Sotho proverbs are used in the *bosadi* approach to interpret the ancient texts.<sup>75</sup> Such an approach depicts a movement

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<sup>72</sup> Davis, W. S., "Ndikhokele O Yehova," in *Incwadi Yombedesho Kunye Neminye Imibedesho Namaculo Emiselwe Ibandla Lamawesile Ase South Africa: Ibhahwe NgesiXhosa* (ed. T. R. Curnick; Cape Town: Methodist Book Depot and Publishing House, 1926), 197.

<sup>73</sup> Williams, William. "Guide Me Oh Thou Great Jehovah," in *Hymns and Psalms: a Methodist and Ecumenical Hymn Book*. (ed. Representatives from the British Methodist Conference, Baptist Union, Churches of Christ, Church of England, Congregational Federation, Methodist Church in Island, United Reformed Church and Wesleyan Reformed Union; London: Methodist Publishing House, 1983), 437.

<sup>74</sup> Madipoane J. (ngwana' Mphahlele) Masenya, "Between Unjust Suffering and the 'Silent' God: Job and HIV/AIDS Sufferers in South Africa," *Missionalia* 29 (2001): 186-199; Madipoane J. (ngwana' Mphahlele) Masenya, "A Bosadi (Womanhood) Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31," in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (ed. Musa W. Dube; Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC Publications, 2001), 145-157.

<sup>75</sup> Sugirtharajah also agrees with the utilisation of folk tales, riddles, plays, proverbs and poems that are part of the common heritage of the people by placing them vividly alongside biblical material. See Sugirtharajah, "Vernacular Hermeneutics," 100. In this argument, the intention is to draw out hermeneutical implications of indigenous forms of literature.

towards indigenous South African biblical scholarship. However, is indigenous South African biblical scholarship free of *whiteness*?

## 2 An illustration of problematic *whiteness* over *blackness* biblical interpretation

An illustration of how a European produced church song imported to a South African context and which constitutes an interpretation of Scripture, is in fact a depiction of dominance and influence of *whiteness* over *blackness* is worth observing. It can be argued that the context of a church song does not suit an African context, yet it is offered as if it should fit. The theological interpretation embedded in the selected song becomes problematic because it forces particular theological ideologies which were formed in Europe in a particular historical context on an (South) African-Xhosa audience that does not share that context at all. Here I would like to explore the question of what constitutes the problem of *whiteness* in an interpretation of Scripture embedded in this song, more importantly in the Xhosa version. Furthermore, a sentiment that the entire Christian theology that came via the missionaries is problematic per se in Africa can be tabulated, but this is not the concern of this article here.

### Xhosa version

*Ndikhokele, O Yehova!*  
*NdingumhambinKosi yam;*  
*Unamandla: andinawo,*  
*Onobuthathakandim.*  
*O mSindisi!*  
*NguWeolikhaka lam*

*Lowomthombowosindiso*  
*Owavulwangenxa yam;*  
*Ma uveleumpompoze*  
*Uzihlamb'izoonozam.*  
*O mSindisi!*  
*NguWeoluncedolwam*

*NdifikileeJordane,*  
*Susa izoyikozam;*  
*Zundikhaphe, se ndiwela:*  
*YibaungumNcediwam.*  
*O mSindisi!*  
*Nguweolithemba lam*

### English version

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,  
 Pilgrim through this barren land;  
 I am weak, but thou art mighty;  
 Hold me with thy powerful hand:  
 Bread of heaven,  
 Feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain,  
 whence the healing stream shall flow;  
 Let the fiery, cloudy pillar  
 Lead me all my journey through:  
 Strong Deliverer,  
 Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
 Bid my anxious fears subside;  
 Death of death, and hell's destruction,  
 Land me safe on Canaan's side:  
 Song of Praises  
 I will ever give to thee.

The lines "bread of heaven, feed me now and evermore" can be linked to the scarcity of something to eat in the wilderness, when the manna from heaven was then provided as reflected in Exod 16:4-21. The line "Guide me, o thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land" seem to be alluding to the

Israelites' wilderness journey, led by Moses accounted for in the book of Exodus. However, Moses and his role in this journey are of no significance in this song and interpretation. The song in this discussion bears resemblance to the text of the Hebrew Bible and it could be construed to be an interpretation of OT ancient texts.

It is worth noting that the name "Jehovah" that had been borrowed from the English version is foreign within Xhosa culture. A Xhosa name referring to a Supreme Being (God) is *Qamata*. Such a name was mostly used prior to the advent of Christianity in South Africa.<sup>76</sup> Pauw stipulates that the word *Qamata* was sacred in that it was the name of the "One who was construed to be the Giver of blessings, the Protector and the Receiver of offerings."<sup>77</sup> The usage of the name "Jehovah," imported through *whiteness* denies, demeans and overshadows the significance behind the Xhosa name *Qamata*, which constitutes *blackness* in a South African-Xhosa context. The song is problematic in that a name for a God that Xhosas identify with is not reflected in the interpretation as embedded in the Xhosa version.

The verb "*ndikhokele*" (guide me) is in a singular form. This form depicts an individualistic approach to God and is strange to the communal Xhosa emphasised approach to God. Individualism is in contrast to the highly regarded communalism that constitutes *blackness*. Shutte in depicting an element of communalism that is emphasised in South Africa, cites the Xhosa proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through persons) and concludes that this proverb is a depiction of interdependence of persons on others.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, Lassiter problematises individualism in the citation that "the imposition of European values on African people and their descendants have created both conflict and opportunity for cultural evolution."<sup>79</sup> He further notes the current conflict between African communalism in contrast to European competitive individualism. Individualism as an element that seems to constitute *whiteness* and *Europeaness* is problematic in this song and in the South African-Xhosa context.

A depiction of humanity's direct communication to God can be observed in the interpretation embedded in the song. Such a direct communication

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<sup>76</sup> Janet Hodgson, *The God of the Xhosa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1982), 41; Berthold A. Pauw, *Christianity and Xhosa Tradition* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1975), 76; Peter Mtuze, *The Essence of Xhosa Spirituality and the Nuisance of Cultural Imperialism* (Florida Hills: Vivlia Publishers, 2003), 112.

<sup>77</sup> Pauw, *Christianity*, 66.

<sup>78</sup> Augustine Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa*, (Rodenbosch: University of Cape Town Press, 1993), 46-47.

<sup>79</sup> James Lassiter, "African Culture and Personality: Bad Social Science, Effective Social Activism, or a Call to Reinvent Ethnology?" n.p. [cited 24 October 2011]. Online: <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v3/v3i2a1.htm>.

is in contrast with the Xhosa understanding of humanity's communication to God as being through the ancestors. The latter understanding constitutes *blackness*. Hodgson notes that ancestors have a mediatory role within the Xhosa community based on the traditional ideology that *Qamata* is approached through the ancestors.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, the role and the significance of the ancestors in the communication to God and the salvation of humanity are not featured in the song. The interpretation embedded in this song becomes a problem within Xhosa culture because the fundamental aspect and regard for the ancestor is not observed and, subsequently, a crucial element of Xhosa cultural identity is not recognised. Hence, the song reveals a particular dominance and influence of *whiteness* and *Europeanness* in *blackness*.

### 3 An illustration of an indigenous (Xhosa) biblical interpretation

Prior to moving towards an illustration of indigenous (Xhosa) biblical interpretation it is essential to note some configurations of Moses and Elijah by a few European scholars. An illustration of a contrast between such European interpretations and indigenous (Xhosa) interpretation is worth noting. Bernardin depicts the configuration of Moses and Elijah in Mark 9 as an appearance of two figures in the vision as the representatives of Law and the Prophet respectively and as being there to symbolise that the account not only testifies of Jesus as the Messiah, but more of his passion and his death.<sup>81</sup> On the one hand, Moses and Elijah in the Mark 9 narrative are depicted as deathless people.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, based on the argument of Moses and Elijah as appearing to portray "glory" in this account, Stein configures them as an embodiment of glory.<sup>83</sup> Different from both Bernardin and Stein, Elijah and Moses have also been deemed to have prefigured the rejection and suffering of the Messiah: Elijah is a model for suffering and Moses a model for a rejected leader.<sup>84</sup> If these configurations can be deemed to have been produced in Europe and have been influenced by *whiteness*, what is an alternative configuration that Xhosas can identify with, using an indigenous biblical interpretation approach?

Moving from *whiteness* to *blackness* and therefore towards an indigenous (Xhosa) South African biblical scholarship can be tested and illustrated in a reference made to Xhosa presuppositions, ideologies and worldviews that are

<sup>80</sup> Hodgson, *The God*, 86.

<sup>81</sup> Joseph Bernardin, "The Transfiguration," *JBL* 52/3 (1933): 181.

<sup>82</sup> David Wenham, and A. D. A. Moses, "There Are Some Standing Here...': Did They Become the 'Reputed Pillars' of the Jerusalem Church? Some Reflections on Mark 9:1, Galatians 2:9 and the Transfiguration," *NovT* 36/2 (1994): 149.

<sup>83</sup> Robert H. Stein, "Is the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8) a Misplaced Resurrection-Account?" *JBL* 95/1 (1976): 88.

<sup>84</sup> Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Bm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2002), 352.

embedded in a Xhosa constructed song to unlock and reconstruct a meaning of an ancient text (Mark 9:4).

**Xhosa version**

*Khanibuyenizindlondlo,  
buyanizindlondlo.  
Khanibuyeni,  
khanibuyeniezintabeni,  
buyanizindlondlo.*

*Khanibuyenibalele,  
buyanibalele.  
Khanibuyeni,  
khanibuyeniezintabeni,  
buyanibalele.*

**English translation**

Come back ancestors,  
come back ancestors.

Come back,  
come back from the mountains,  
come back ancestors.

Come back you who are asleep,  
come back you who are asleep.

Come back,  
come back from the mountains,  
come back you who are asleep.

The song cited above is a Xhosa communal-constructed traditional song that emanates from a ritual which pertains to the veneration of ancestors. The mountains are depicted as being a place where the ancestors reside. Most importantly this song displays an invocation of ancestors, when the Xhosa community is faced with social ills. It is clear this song is embedded in Xhosa cultural belief system where ancestors play a large role.

Pieres studied beliefs and practices that existed among Xhosas and colonists in South Africa. He suggested that these beliefs and practices must have seemed bizarre and irrational to white colonists but natural and logical to the Xhosa of the 1850s.<sup>85</sup> Veneration of ancestors, the living-dead, is one of the features that defined the worldview of Xhosas which is also embedded in the song under discussion. From a perspective of *whiteness*, a conceptualisation of ancestors among the Xhosas was irrationalised. Pieres argued for the Xhosa belief that the dead do not really die or depart from the world of the living.<sup>86</sup> This song testifies to such a belief, namely a perception of family members who have passed away yet present, asleep, is evident in the song.

It is of no surprise that Xhosas, in the light of the ideologies and world-views embedded in the song, can easily identify with Jesus in the text of Mark 9:4. Moses and Elijah can be construed to be a resemblance of ancestors, making it easier for the Xhosa community to identify with the ritual, from which this song emanates, namely the interaction of Jesus with Moses and Elijah—Jesus Christ receiving encouragement through the interaction with his ancestors, Moses and Elijah.

<sup>85</sup> Jeffrey Pieres, "The Central Beliefs of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing." *Journal of African History* 28 (1987): 45.

<sup>86</sup> Pieres, "The Central Beliefs," 63.

With this indigenous (Xhosa) approach to ancient texts, Moses and Elijah of the Hebrew Bible are reconfigured into ancestors of Jesus Christ. Such a reconfiguration enables Xhosas to identify with the Bible, a document perceived to have been brought to South Africa by the missionaries in the regime characterised by colonialism, imperialism and racism. This reconfiguration, using an indigenous (Xhosa) song, shows how *blackness* can unlock the meaning of an ancient text, which is not shaded by *whiteness*.

It is worth noting that in this proposed interpretation, a Xhosa departs from an indigenously (Xhosa) constructed song which shapes ideologies and preconceived ideas and with which the biblical text is approached. What is unique to this interpretation is that it does not depart from a meaning constructed using historical and literary criticism and then moving on to an application of such meaning to the South African context under concepts of contextualization and appropriation. An attempt to eliminate *whiteness* and its influence in *blackness* is evidently embarked upon. Furthermore, as an advantage and the reason this approach is advocated for, Xhosas are enabled to identify with the Bible and God from and in their context. *Blackness* is also explored without dominance and influence of *whiteness* in indigenous (Xhosa) South African biblical scholarship.

## E CONCLUSION

The aims of this article have been to further the debate on *whiteness* that, as has deliberately been argued, necessitates a shift from an interpretation shaped by *whiteness* to an indigenous biblical interpretation. While the author of this article is keenly aware of and sensitive towards the proposed appropriation of the ancient text to the South African context and a collaborative interpretive process, skepticism remained. It had been suggested that the problem with a collaborative interpretive process is that a meaning derived from the interpretive tools (historical and literary criticism as construed to be European and resembling *whiteness*) is used to construct the meaning of the text in today's context. As argued, this process does not do justice to the emancipation of black South African biblical scholarship in addressing imperialistic characterised interpretation that can still be detected in the South African biblical scholarship.

It has been argued and illustrated that the influence of *whiteness* in *blackness* and explicitly in indigenous (Xhosa) South African biblical scholarship is still evident and not avoided. A dialogue between proponents of the European paradigms on the one hand, and African indigenous paradigms on the other, has been iterated to be paramount for South African biblical scholars' co-existence. However, how such a dialogue has transpired was questioned in this article.

It is hoped that this article will trigger a progressive discussion among South African biblical scholars and clergy so as to advance a movement to-

wards an indigenous South African biblical scholarship. However, it is imperative for South Africans to be aware and disclose self-presuppositions that are embedded in the interpretation process of ancient texts. None the less, the usage of the approach to Scripture advocated for in this article is most importantly recommended to the clergy guild in South Africa.

This article contributed to the debate on *whiteness* and South African biblical scholarship. In the proposed approach to Scripture, a Xhosa departs from an indigenous (Xhosa) constructed song, literature, which reflects world-views, ideologies and preconceived ideas, with which the text is approached, to a reconstructed meaning of the ancient texts. A reconfiguration of the Hebrew Bible Moses and Elijah, using an indigenous (Xhosa) song, demonstrated how *blackness* can unlock the meaning of an ancient text, which is not shaded by *whiteness* and still enable Xhosa to identify with the Bible and God.

I think one might safely predict that if this indigenous (Xhosa) interpretation of the Bible is neglected by South Africans or continue to be neglected, the status of the *whiteness* and *blackness* debate in the context of South African biblical scholarship will increasingly be questioned. South Africans should not move from *whiteness* to *blackness* in biblical interpretation in the context of indigenous South African biblical scholarship. However, dominance and continuing influence of *whiteness* in the context of *blackness* needs to be avoided.

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