

Female and Royal Humanity? One African Woman's Meditation on Psalm 8

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ABSTRACT

In 2008, the legal case of the now Hosi (chief) N'wamitwa II made headlines in South Africa. Although a legitimate heir to her father's throne, N'wamitwa's gender posed the main hindrance to her assuming the royal position.¹ The preceding scenario reveals that even fourteen years into the non-racist, non-sexist post-apartheid South Africa, there was still opposition among many Africans to women leading communities as traditional leaders; that is, a belief that women lacked the capacity to rule. Dare one say this remains so even today? A rereading of Ps 8 reveals the equality and royalty of all human beings irrespective of their gender, among others. The main question the present article seeks to investigate concerns what it means to be a human being both in an African-South African context as well as in the meditation presented by Ps 8. In particular, if Ps 8 is re-read from the perspective of a context in which female humanity (read: women) must at times go through a legal process in order to rule, one in which female humanity seems to be contested, which insights might emerge from such a reading?

A INTRODUCTION

Psalm 8 as a whole is regarded by some, for instance Nancy L. Declaissé² as a creation psalm. Although the psalm focuses on Yahweh and the works of Yahweh's fingers, the question of who a human being is appears to occupy centre stage among the works of God's creation in the meditation by the psalmist. It will thus not be an exaggeration to argue that one of the themes which are foregrounded by Ps 8 is one on the qualities which typify a human being. In the present article, I am thus drawn to the psalm mainly by a curiosity to check what the psalmist's notion of a human being is. Within a context such as N'wamitwa's, where the affirmation of women's capacities and full humanity are still contested, how may the psalmist's notion of a human being be received? Or in other words, how may what it means to be a human being as it

¹ See Valoyi Traditional Authority, "Profile of Hosi T.L.P Nwamitwa II," n.p. [cited 16 March 2014]. Online: http://nwamitwa.org.za/?page_id=8 for a profile of Hosi T.L.P. N'wamitwa II.

² Nancy L. Declaissé-Walford, "Psalms," in *Women's Bible Commentary* (20th cent., rev. and exp. ed.; ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville: Kentucky, 2012), 221–231.

is revealed in Ps 8 be understood in a context where female leadership (read: rulership) remains contested?

Concerning the position of Queens in African contexts, Nzimande holds a different view. In her doctoral dissertation entitled, "Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The *Gebirah* in the HB in the Light of Queen Jezebel and the Queen Mother of Lemuel," she argues that Africa as a continent has always had many Queens and Queen Mothers. The roles of the Queens and Queen Mothers were however not acknowledged by the colonialists. Instead, they are depicted as a disturbing presence. Says Nzimande:

Africa is replete with innumerable women of power who played significant roles in different socio-cultural and socio-political contexts. Although in colonial depictions, African Queens and Queen Mothers are portrayed as a disturbing presence to the colonial enterprise, cultural anthropologists and historians have added much substance to our understanding of their roles and positions both before and after the advent of the colonizers.³

Nzimande uses as cases in point, the Asante Queens/Queen Mothers of Ghana, the Zulu Queen Mother Mkabayi kaJama of the amaZulu nation in South Africa as well as the legendary Queen/Queen Mother of the amaSwazi, Labotsibeni Gwamile Mdhluli. Although she must be lauded for such an important historical restitution, one which dares to revive the historically marginalised in our contexts, one could add that at least within the African-South African patriarchal context (cf. in particular, the Northern Sotho/Pedi context) traditional leadership has always been *predominantly* in the hands of men. Women came into the picture, and still do, basically as Queen Mothers, until such time that a legitimate male heir is born and would be able to assume rulership. It would thus not be an exaggeration to argue that female rulership in many an African context has been an exception rather than the norm. Hence the struggle that Hosi N'wamitwa encountered before assuming power as a female Hosi! Within the Northern Sotho/Pedi context, the only exception to the rule, that of a Queen, is that within the Modjadji Lovedu context. In the latter context, in which such Queens were and are still believed to have powers to make rain, rulership is indeed in the hands of a female.⁴

³ Makhosazana K. Nzimande, "Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The *Gebirah* in the Hebrew Bible in the Light of Queen Jezebel and the Queen Mother of Lemuel," (Ph.D diss., Brite Divinity School, 2005), 107.

⁴ Elsewhere Nzimande (referring to Eileen Jensen and Jacob D. Krige, *The Realm of the Rain-Queen: A Study of the Pattern of Lovedu Society* [London: Oxford University Press, 1956]) writes about the Lovedu Rain-Queen: "She participates in the magico-religious world of her tribe and is imbued with extraordinary powers to make

The African–South African context into which I was born and nurtured is a patriarchal Northern Sotho/Pedi context. In fact, at some point, my grandfather was a *kgoši* (traditional leader) of the Mphahlele clan. In a sense, royal blood runs through my veins. Within the patriarchal context in which I was born, one that seemed, and even today still seems, to dictate that *tša etwa ke ye tshadi pele, di wela ka leope*, namely literally, if they are led by a female one (cow), they will fall into a donga, the story of Hosi N’wamitwa, a story which made headlines between 2002 and 2008, does not come as a surprise to me. Before she could assume power, N’wamitwa, had to seek the intervention of a court of law to claim what she knew was her legitimate position as a child of her father, a *hosi*, irrespective of her gender. To use the terminology of the psalmist in Ps 8, N’wamitwa dared to affirm her position as *ben-’ādām*, child of a human being and fought until she was granted an opportunity to rule. The main challenge against her leadership was her female gender

Customarily it was taboo for a female to rule a clan. Court cases ensued and culminated at the constitutional court in 2008 where the principles of human rights enshrined in the Constitution were observed and the rule of democracy was fulfilled. She became the first woman of the Vatsonga nation to become a ruler. A historic event indeed.⁵

Questions worth asking before we engage the notion of what it means to be a human being in Ps 8 are, what exactly lies behind African people’s challenge to female leadership? Is it solely connected to the belief that once females took leadership, they would definitely be like the proverbial cow which would lead its followers into a donga? Could it be that the matter is deeper than that which meets the eye? Could it be that what is actually at stake is the contestation regarding the full humanity of female human beings? What does it mean to be a human being in an African–South African context such as the Northern Sotho/Pedi context for example?

B THE NOTION OF “HUMAN BEING” IN AFRICAN–SOUTH AFRICA

Although Dwight Hopkins’s engagement with what it means to be a human being is informed by his social location as an African–American living in the US, one would agree with him that our definition of what it means to be human cannot be answered as though those interrogating it were in a vacuum.⁶ For Hopkins, the question of what a human being is is informed by the social location (which for him as a US citizen is constituted by race, culture, and religion)

rain and renowned as the greatest rain maker in SA, hence the appellation ‘Transformer of the Clouds.’” See Nzimande, “Postcolonial Biblical Interpretation,” 110.

⁵ Valoyi Traditional Authority, “Profile,” http://nwamitwa.org.za/?page_id=8.

⁶ Dwight Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 15–30.

and the main agenda of one who asks it. Hence different responses will emerge consequent to the interrogation. Although his impressive analysis of a variety of voices and their different responses are cast within his discussion of theological anthropology, as well as his situated-ness as a person of colour within the US context, his discussion of what it is that constitutes humanity according to the progressive liberal, the post-liberal, the feminist, liberation (Black, Womanist, Hispanic/Latino, *Mujerista*, Asian-American and native American perspectives) is worth noting.

Although scholars attest to the generic nature of humanity as it can be gleaned from a reading of Ps 8, it may be argued that its author wrote not in a vacuum, but from a particular historical (liturgical) context. According to Mays, "Psalm 8 speaks about the human, the species in general, *and about God, a particular god*. The way in which both subjects are held together furnishes a kind of paradigm that instructs our time as well as that of the psalmist" (italics mine).⁷ The discussion that ensues of what it means to be a human being within an African-South African context such as the Northern Sotho/Pedi one will be shaped in one way or other by my identity within such a social location.

I was born and nurtured in a complex context. Mine was a context which was and still is, characterised by inequities. As already noted in the introductory section of the present text, I was born into and nurtured by a patriarchal African culture. The broader national *apartheid* culture was equally patriarchal, although I was kind of detached from it, particularly as I grew up. The Northern Sotho/Pedi word *motho* basically means a human being. The word thus denotes all human beings irrespective of their ethnicity, gender, religion and social class among others. At another level though, the word can be used to denote "kindness." I think it is fitting to apply such a notion of being human to the honoree, that is Professor Herrie van Rooy, as in Herrie *ke motho*, literally "Herrie is a human being." Such a designation can be heard in contexts where someone's kindness is being commended. In a way, being human in this culture seems to be linked to kindness, goodness, one which has to happen within human relationships,⁸ not necessarily between human beings and other ele-

⁷ James L. Mays, *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms* (ed. Patrick D. Miller and Gene M. Tucker, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 98; cf. also Declaissé-Walford who is bothered by the limitations brought by the superscriptions towards the readers' "hearing" of the multiple voices within the psalms. What she says is particularly relevant to Ps 8, one ascribed to David: "Thus the superscriptions present us with two barriers to 'hearing' the voice of all humanity in the psalms: David is a man; and David is royalty." Declaissé-Walford, "Psalms," 224.

⁸ The expression, *motho ke motho ka batho*, a human being is a human being through other human beings, makes sense within such a setting.

ments of creation such as animals.⁹ So, one’s humanness/humanity seems to be linked to how positively one acts towards fellow human beings. The counterpart of *ke motho* is *selo se ga se motho*. The literal meaning of the latter phrase is “this thing is not a human being.” The preceding phrase is said when the object of scorn, who is also a human being, behaves in an unkind way, that is in an inhuman way towards another/other human beings. In the latter textual context, the prefix *se*, which depicts the noun class for objects, replaces the personal noun class *mo / o*. Noteworthy is the observation that a human being depicted in the latter sense, is “demoted” to the level of non-living things such as objects or things.

In another sense, the notion of a human being can be gendered as in the following usage, *motho wa Kgobe*, literally “a human being who belongs to *Kgobe* (the deity).” The expression is used in a euphemistic way to refer to a pregnant woman. Not unrelated to the preceding gendered notion of being human is the observation I made of the preferential treatment accorded the male gender as I grew up. It appeared as though one’s *full* humanity was also determined by one’s gender. In her attempt to affirm the full humanity of women, the feminist theologian Rosemary R. Ruether argues, “Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine.”¹⁰

Similarly, within patriarchal biblical cultures, a boy child was more esteemed than a girl child. Although the latter is not categorised as non-human, the kind of treatment she would get by virtue of her gender would persuade a politically conscious observer to conclude that a male child seems to have been viewed as being more human than a female one. Such a view would impact and still impacts the treatment which each child would get. In terms of provisions for education, a boy child was given priority over a girl child. Such a gendered provision of education in its Western mould was based on the understanding that a girl child would eventually get married. Within traditional African communities, each human being, irrespective of his/her gender, is expected to marry. The category of heterosexual marriage is one of the prerequisites for the full humanity of human beings. In order for one to be viewed as fully human, one had/has to marry.¹¹

⁹ Unlike in Ps 8 where the psalmist seems to see an interconnection between a human being and other elements and members of Yahweh’s creation, although a human being is portrayed as higher than them, such a notion of the unity between humans and other members of God’s household, seems to be absent within the Northern Sotho/Pedi context.

¹⁰ Rosemary R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), 13.

¹¹ Oduyoye is thus on target when she says: “The language of marriage proverbs indicates that a wife only reflects the stage of the marriage and a man’s competence as

It is then no surprise when we learn that earlier on, when the issue of the birth of twins was viewed as taboo within our African contexts, if it was a boy and a girl, the girl would be killed! We are therefore, also not surprised that even today, twenty years into the democratic dispensation, the notion of female leadership is still contested (cf. the case of N'wamitwa as was related in the introductory section of the present text).

At a broader national level, another notion of what being human entailed was brought by the policy of *apartheid*. In *apartheid* South Africa, normative humanity was a male white person. Within the carefully racially-segregated South African context, African-descended people came to be regarded as the least human compared to white, Indian and coloured people. The legacies of such problematic definitions of humanity continue to impact on us even to this day.

The last level could be taken further within the context of neo-colonialism and globalisation and the place of African peoples within the geopolitical landscape. Usually, human beings who are regarded as being less human will feel the pinch of such degradation on the "disposability" of their bodies (cf. the systems of colonialism and slavery).

With the preceding glimpse of what it means to be human within an African-South African context such as the Northern Sotho/Pedi context, one in which the full humanity of women still seems to remain contested, we now investigate what it means to be human according to Ps 8.

C WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING IN PSALM 8?

In the view of Mays, the question which has preoccupied the modern day human being is one about humanity, not about God. That was however, not the case in the world of the psalmist. Mays reasons: "In the culture of the psalmist's era, the dominant question of human consciousness was 'Who is God?' In our culture, the question . . . as it has been traditionally put/posed is 'What is man?'"¹²

a husband. . . *Society demands that she stays married, because a woman has no dignity outside marriage.*" See Mercy A. Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 68 (italics mine).

John Mbiti also foregrounds the significance of marriage within African contexts: "To die without getting married and without children, is to be completely cut off from the human community. . . to become an outcast and to lose all links with mankind (*sic*). Everybody therefore must get married and bear children: that is the greatest hope of the individual for himself (*sic*) and of the community for the individual." See John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), 131.

¹² Mays, James L. *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms*. Edited by Patrick D. Miller and Gene M. Tucker (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 98.

Also,

It is the king who is the image of God; in virtue of his being the image of God he is ruler. Likewise in Genesis 1 the concept of man's (*sic*) rulership is connected in the strongest possible way with the idea of the image. . . . Again in Psalm 8, which has been aptly termed the best commentary on Genesis 1:26, man's (*sic*) status is linked with kingship and dominion: Thou has made him a little less than God. . .¹³

As already noted, our definitions of humanity are informed by a particular social location from which we make such definitions. Hence my argument that even the definition of humanity as it is revealed in Ps 8, has been shaped in one way or other by the context from which it emerged. Although we might posit an exilic and/or post-exilic setting for the final production of the psalm, the setting in which the Hebrew scriptures took shape, if we take cognisance of the fact that in the Hebrew text, the superscriptions are part and parcel of the text, and not headings as in the English translations of the Psalter, it may not be far-fetched to argue that it comes from a pre-exilic liturgical setting. Artur Weiser reasons that the song is to be understood as a response of the congregation to God's revelation as Creator, one that took place during the festival cult when Yahweh was believed to reveal his "name" and his "nature."¹⁴ According to the ascription of the "Psalm of David" the setting privileged male figures such as kings and priests.¹⁵ As we will later argue, the language in which the definition of humanity is coached, also points to such a royal male setting.

Apart from the ascription of the psalm to a royal male figure, the following observations also bring to light the patriarchal context in which the psalm initially emerged:

- (i) The main content of the psalm is enveloped in the language that celebrates the *sovereignty* of Yahweh, the male Israelite deity (Ps 8:1 and 8:9). As already noted with Mays, Ps 8 is about God, a specific god.¹⁶ In his view, even though it is particularistic in terms of the faith language ". . . with and through it the psalm speaks with and for humanity in general."¹⁷ If the latter argument is something to go by, it means that modern readers of Ps 8 within a context such as N'wamitwa's, one in which female leadership is contested, could still make sense of the psalm. In

¹³ David J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man: Tyndale Old Testament Lecture, 1967," *TynBul* 19/1 (1968): 95.

¹⁴ Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (London: SCM, 1959), 140; See also W. Dow Edgerton, "Asking about Who We Are," *ThTo* 50/4 (1994): 562 for the liturgical setting of the psalm.

¹⁵ Declaissé-Walford, "Psalms," 224.

¹⁶ Mays, *Preaching and Teaching?*, 98.

¹⁷ Mays, *Preaching and Teaching?*, 99.

fact the latter may be empowered by Declaissé–Walford’s words where she argues, “The words of the psalmists are genderless and timeless, the words of every person in every time and space.”¹⁸

Within that particular faith setting, and Israel’s covenantal history, the mention that the deity in question remembers or is mindful of a human being, makes sense. The act of remembering happens in a context where there was a prior connection. Also, in a typical hierarchical style, the deity’s name, which also reveals something of his nature as one with magnificent power, is depicted in kingly language; the deity has a name which is exalted above all in the earth.¹⁹

- (ii) The definition of what a human being is is coached in male language as it will be argued later in the present section. It is noteworthy here the mention of what might be regarded as “minute” human beings in v. 2: “Out of the mouths of babes and infants; you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger” (NRSV). What has bothered commentators through the years about the preceding verse is neither the humanity of the minute human beings nor their gender. Verse 2 has basically been viewed as misplaced in relation to the main theme of the psalm, that is, that of a human being’s kingship within the context of God’s major works of creation among others. Some commentators like Martin Luther have allegorised the verse to argue that it points to meekness and simplicity on the part of believers. The view which takes the preceding verse literally²⁰ to affirm the humanity of children seems to make sense to me, particularly given the observation that Ps 8 points to the reversals within the household of God. A human being, the image of God, one who is so minute compared to the other major works of God’s creation such as the heavens, the moon and the stars, is raised to a higher level within God’s administra-

¹⁸ Declaissé–Walford, “Psalms,” 224.

¹⁹ The *Webster Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* defines the word “sovereign” as “of the most exalted kind” – “supreme,” *Webster Ninth Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam–Webster Inc., 1986), 1128.

²⁰ See also Weiser who argues: “Even the adversaries (sceptics and atheists) cannot disregard the fact that the child utterly and completely surrenders to the impression produced by things which are great and glorious, and does so in an unaffected and direct manner. . . .” See Weiser, *The Psalms*, 141. Also, Oswald Bayer sees a connection between v. 2 and vv. 4ff. about human beings where he points to the true source of our amazement as we read about humanity in Ps 8: “The fact that precisely *this deeply dependent human being*, permanently threatened by enemies (Ps 8:2b) and not able to exist self-sufficiently even for one instant, is *granted the highest dignity to rule*. The fact that humans are simultaneously children and kings, kings and children in personal union – this is the reason to be truly amazed!” See Oswald Bayer, “Self-Creation? On the Dignity of Human Beings,” *MTh* 20/2 (2004): 282.

tion. Mays argues, "*Ben-adam* has been given a rank within the administrative system of God's sovereignty just below that of the divine court, crowned with glory and set up as a king over the other creatures."²¹ In my view, the questions which are raised by Pitkin thus make sense,

What if, however, the psalmist is saying that out of the mouths of real, earthly children comes praise or defence of God? What if these children are no prologue to but rather are explicitly included in the later pronouncements about human frailty and dignity? In this case, perhaps we have in Psalm 8 a wonderful text for proclaiming the fundamental humanity of children.²²

The discussion can be taken further regarding the probable gender of the small human beings in question. Given the military and aggressive language in which the verse is cast (cf. also v. 6b), it can be argued that the psalmist had in mind male babies and sucklings. Spoer alludes to the military tone when he asks:

Why this clamor of war? Who are the enemy and the avenger? Is Yahweh oppressed? Scarcely would a man who concedes a moral and spiritual affinity between mankind and the Deity fall back into such a coarse anthropomorphism. Nor is the poet one who revels in descriptions of bloodshed and horror.²³

The female gender remains implicit in terms of the biological role of those who enable the male babies to be breastfed and nursed.

- (iii) Even more significant for the present discussion, the notion of what a human being is, is also cast in what could traditionally both within the ancient Israelite context and present day African contexts, be referred to as basically a male prerogative, that of royalty, one vested with the authority to rule over others:

³ When I look at your heavens,
The work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars that you have established;
⁴ What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
Mortals that you care for them?
⁵ Yet you have *made them a little*
lower than God

²¹ James L. Mays, "What Is a Human Being? Reflections on Psalm 8," *ThTo* 50 (1994): 518. At the same time, to be human, to be *'enôš*, a mortal is to stir the reality of one's insufficiency in the eye. To be human, argues Mays, is to be constantly reminded about our insufficiency, particularly in the context of the vast cosmos. See Mays, "*Preaching and Teaching*?" 99.

²² Barbara Pitkin, "Between Text and Sermon: Psalm 8:1-2," *Int* 55/2 (2001): 178.

²³ Hans S. Spoer, "The Reconstruction of Psalm viii," *JBL* 22/1 (1903): 75-84.

and crowned them with honor and glory

⁶ *You have given them dominion*

over the works of your hands;

you have put all things under

their feet. . . (NRSV, italics mine)

The links between Ps 8 and Gen 1 are attested to by many scholars.²⁴ A human being who occupies centre stage in Ps 8 has close connections with Yahweh, s/he has been created in such a way that he/she is a little lower than God, crowned with honour and glory. He/she is created in the image of God (cf. 1:26). Already in the late sixties, Clines had vividly revealed that the notion of man (a human being) as created in the image of God was not supposed to be viewed as referring to male humanity only. Female humanity is also created in the same image. He argued that there is, however, one phenomenal distinction between man and man which the text of Gen1:27 particularly denies to be ultimate, namely, the distinction between male and female:

. . . The image of God does not subsist in the male but in mankind, within which woman belongs. Thus the most basic statement about man according to Genesis 1, that he is the image of God, does not find its full meaning in man alone, but in man and woman.²⁵

The Hebrew word *'enôš* as it appears mostly in the poetic sections of the HB, refers to "men"/"male human beings" or generic "men" in the plural. The word is also used to designate the male human being in the singular form *ben-'enôš*, literally, son of *'enôš*.²⁶ The word *'enôš* has the connotation of "weakness," "wretchedness" and "mortality" which are the results of sin.²⁷ On the basis of the former observation, Honsey objects to those who would offer a primordial interpretation of the psalm. A human being as s/he is portrayed in the present text is both strong and weak.

Mays argues:

So the psalmist does speak of the human species in its frailty and finitude, in its power and purpose to control the world, and in its sense of dependence and destiny. The danger of vigorous theology

²⁴ James Limburg, *Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 26; Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) 16-240; Edgerton, "Asking," 562; Clines, "Image of God," 95.

²⁵ Clines, "Image of God," 95.

²⁶ William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 22.

²⁷ Rudolph E. Honsey, "Exegesis of Psalm 8:3-6 (4-7 in Hebrew)," 19 pages [cited 13 March 2013]. Online: <http://www.wlsessays.net/files/HonseyPsalm.pdf>.

does not arise from what is known about humankind in our era but rather from the failure to look hard and long and whole.²⁸

Utilising the word *'enôš* in Ps 8:5 appears to depict a singular form as it appears in a synonymous pair with *ben-'ādām*, literally, son of man. In line with the grain of the text of Ps 8, with its portrayal of humanity in the generic sense, the word will be translated in the present essay to refer to a human being with no appendages. Also, as the interconnectedness between Ps 8 and the text of Gen 1:26–27 has already been noted, and the psalmist’s use of the designation *ben-'ādām*, I prefer to use the designation *'ādām* in the present article, to designate a human being irrespective of his/her gender.²⁹

As the image of God, a human being, both male and female has been endowed with the capacity to rule. In both texts, the notion of humanity as the image of God (cf. Gen 1:26) or one who has been created or put in the level just lower than God (cf. Ps 8:5), is immediately followed by the authority that he/she has been given over other members of God’s creation, in particular those belonging to the animal kingdom. It is noteworthy that in both texts, members of the plant kingdom and the human family do not feature as the objects of humanity’s dominion. In Ps 8 though, v. 6, a verse that opens the sphere of dominion for humanity, is all inclusive. A human being has been given dominion “over all the works of your (God’s) hands.” The imagery depicted in both texts is that of a human being as a king, a member of royalty. The latter is constituted by both male and female royalty. In line with the preceding argument, the notion of the proverbial cow that leads others into a donga becomes problematized, if not nullified.

According to Clines:

Man (*sic*) is here (in Genesis 1) described in royal terms, not only in the command to have dominion, but in the image of God phrase itself. The term “image of God” in itself indicates the regal character of man (*sic*), it seems to us, just as it does in Egypt, where only the king is the image of God, and where his rulership is often specifically associated with his being the image. . . he has dominion only because he is the image, and his being the image means, without any further addition, that he is already ruler.³⁰

By virtue of her/his connection with God as the righteous and just Ruler, a human being has been endowed with kingly authority. A human being’s delegated authority as king/queen should not happen in the context of tyranny as it has become common place today. The subjects of his/her authority (cf both the

²⁸ Mays, *Preaching and Teaching*, 102.

²⁹ Mays, “What Is a Human Being?” 511.

³⁰ Clines, “Image of God,” 97–98.

other members of God’s household (cf. vv. 7–8 as examples) and fellow human beings (cf. Ps 72:1–4) have to be given priority³¹ Waltke and Houston reason,

Without revelation, *homo sapiens* knows neither its identity nor its rightful place in the scheme of things. That revelation crowns humankind as God’s delegated authority over all the earth and instructs the deputy to rule in meekness and dependence upon God.³²

Cast in the African–South African jargon, the vassal queen/king has to act in a kind (human) way this time not only to fellow human beings delegated under her/his authority, but also to animals, both domestic and wild, fish, birds, and all the other members of the created order. Viewed in that sense, the notion of human being as responsible vassal queen/king over all of creation is a call particularly to the powerful human beings of our day, ones who bear the brunt of a high carbon print to remember that the exercise of their queenship / kingship has to happen in the context of humility, concern and care.

D CONCLUSION

The depiction of a human being in Ps 8 as not only the apple of God’s eye, but one created in God’s image, one positioned just a little lower than God, is a cause for celebration, particularly in contexts like the African–South African context (cf. the vhaTsonga and Northern Sotho/Pedi settings) in which the humanity of female human beings still seems to be contested. *Hosi N’wamitwa*, and those African female human beings who are aspiring for rulership as female heirs to their fathers’ thrones might be affirmed by the fact that a human royal vassal according to Ps 8 is not depicted as male, but as human, that is, as both male and female. If the psalm is re–read from the perspective of all human beings whose humanity has been contested, the notion of the connection between the human creature to the Creator as well as her/his royal status, will be found to be affirming. The possibility of a deconstruction of androcentric texts such as Ps 8 for the affirmation of female humanity might encourage present day readers in patriarchal contexts in their continued struggle, also taking their cue from *Hosi N’wamitwa* in challenging patriarchal structures in

³¹ Mays says, “We are likely to think of the Oriental king as a symbol of tyrannical and arbitrary power. But, in fact, from all we know from the literature of the period, the ideal king was one who was expected to rule for the sake of his subjects. Power was given to him to provide protection, administer justice, and plan for the prosperity of the people. This idea is implicit in the images of the psalm. Humankind is called by God to use the power given it in obedience to the reign of God and for the sake of all the other creatures that its power affects.” See Mays, *Preaching and Teaching*, 104.

³² Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 273.

their commitment to the affirmation not only of female humanity, but also of female royal humanity.

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