

Towards the Quest for Transforming Old Testament Scholarship: The Impact of Political and Socio-Economic Crises on Scholarship in Zimbabwe¹

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ABSTRACT

Political and socio-economic crises in Zimbabwe in recent years had a negative impact on the country's scholarship, forcing some scholars to relocate to other parts of the world, and others to utilise both domestic and regional platforms to voice their concerns. In spite of the relocation and the subsequent brain drain, publications in differing genres from Zimbabwean scholars became a force to reckon with. This essay argues, however, that Old Testament (hereafter OT) scholarship in itself has not been fully represented on both the domestic and regional platforms. This project poses and then responds to the following question: Who are the OT scholars in Zimbabwe and what do they write? First, this study examines both the "push" and the "pull" factors that caused the brain drain in Zimbabwe. Second, consequences that ensued as a result of the political and socio-economic crises are explored. Third, the essay engages the above question by analysing contributions of some Zimbabwean scholars in the last few years.² Fourth, some educational reforms³ are articulated towards transforming OT scholarship in Zimbabwe. Fifth, this treatise concludes by exploring the relevance of OT scholarship to society.

Key words: Zimbabwe, Old Testament scholarship, politics, education

A INTRODUCTION

An intriguing question which has neither been asked nor answered is: *Who are the OT scholars in Zimbabwe and what do they write?* The answer to the above

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² In this study, particular attention will be paid to contributions which focus on the relevance of OT scholarship to society.

³ See Gibbs Y. Kanyongo, "Zimbabwe's Public Education System Reforms: Successes and Challenges," *IEduJl* 6/1 (2005): 61-75.

question is not obvious; it will begin to unfold when we navigate through numerous critical works by Zimbabwean authors covering various themes. It is argued in this essay that scholarship in general has been adversely affected by political and socio-economic crises which devastated Zimbabwe for over a decade. An attempt is made to respond to the above question by exploring these political and socio-economic crises and to illustrate the extent to which they have impacted negatively on Scholarship in Zimbabwe.

Between 2000 and 2008, political and socio-economic challenges which bedevilled Zimbabwe⁴ have had a negative effect on scholarship in the country. These disturbances became push factors⁵ that forced some scholars to relocate to other parts of the world as the brain drain took an upward trend. Takupiwa Nyanga, Canaan Mpala and Ephraim Chafamba have admitted that the Sub-Saharan African region is characterised by high brain drain, mostly due to harsh socio-economic and political conditions.⁶ In spite of this scenario, some contributions by Zimbabwean scholars have featured on the international scene. However, this study has observed with regret that OT scholarship has not been fully represented on both the domestic and regional platforms. This "deficiency" stands out clearly when we explore some of the previous contributions by Zimbabwean scholars. Particular attention will be paid to scholars and their works which depict a thrust towards the relevance of OT scholarship to society. Authors and their contributions which are under scrutiny include the following representative examples irrespective of the journals in which the works appear: Temba Mafico, Dora Mbuwayesango, Robert Wafawanaka, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Ezra Chitando, Daniel Simango, Temba T. Rugwiji, Obvious Vengeyi, among many others.

In response to the contestations raised in this discourse, some *educational reforms*⁷ will be articulated in a quest to transform OT scholarship in Zimbabwe. In the final analysis, the conversation concludes by discussing the relevance of OT scholarship to society. In the next section, this article commences by highlighting the criteria used in developing this argument.

⁴ Fanuel Hazvina, Tichona Zivengwa and Albert Makochekanwa, "Zimbabwe: The 11th Province of South Africa – From One Form of Domination to Another: A Horse and a Rider Relationship," *JStSt* 1/1(2010): 86.

⁵ This study will discuss "push" factors as well as "pull" factors. Cf. Alex Nunn, *Academic and Skilled Migration to the UK and its Impact on Africa* (Leeds: Policy Research Institute, 2005), 8.

⁶ Takupiwa Nyanga, Canaan Mpala and Ephraim Chafamba, "Brain Drain: Implications for Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe," *JSDA* 14/8 (2012): 141.

⁷ Some *Educational Reforms* in Zimbabwe will be discussed under a separate heading.

B CRITERIA

1 Hermeneutical Persuasion of Author

Contributions that are discussed in this study are inclined towards the relevance of OTscholarship to society. This study has "randomly"—for lack of a better word—selected some scholars and their contributions without prejudicing or debasing contributions of other scholars who are not part of the present dialogue. This "random selection" has largely been influenced by my own hermeneutical persuasion which focuses on *appropriating* biblical themes in a post-biblical context. However, the present analysis is not in itself an appropriation exercise.

2 A Slant towards Old Testament Scholarship

When one examines biographies of contributors both electronically and in hard copies, a slant towards OTscholarship becomes apparent. Both biographical material and academic publications of the contributors identified above have modelled the disposition of the present discourse. They have also developed my own argument on the basis of their commitment to addressing OTthemes. If Zimbabwean OTscholars have written something on the relevance of OT to society, some acknowledgement would be made of such works. It is important to note that lack of reference to contributions by Zimbabwean OTscholars is due to the scarcity of such sources in the Zimbabwean context. Having discussed the criteria briefly, the next section examines political and socio-economic crises in Zimbabwe.

C POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISES

The political and socio-economic crises in Zimbabwe have caused a very serious brain drain in the country. Both push factors and pull factors have stimulated this brain drain.

1 Push Factors

Many push factors which cracked Zimbabwe's economy also affected scholarship in a negative way. Alex Nunn discerns on the following push factors:⁸

- (i) Lack of life chances,
- (ii) Low living conditions,
- (iii) Political and socio-economic instability or oppression,
- (iv) Lack of opportunities to utilise skills, and
- (v) Natural disasters and environmental or ecological deterioration.

The first four push factors above are relevant with the regards to the Zimbabwean crises. Natural disasters and environmental or ecological deterioration

⁸ Nunn, *Academic and Skilled Migration*, 8.

have never occurred in Zimbabwe on a large scale, except isolated cases of hail storm. Since independence from the British colony then known as "Rhodesia"⁹ in 1980, the Zimbabwean society had enjoyed only a short stint of democracy and freedom from colonialism. Within a few years after gaining independence, the Zimbabwean government was characterised by intimidation, violence and genocide.

Some critics have hailed Robert Mugabe's first ten years as leader to be superb. However, that period was marred by a genocide which was intended to suppress the uprising in Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces.¹⁰ In the early 1980s, Mugabe's army ransacked the Midlands and Matebeleland provinces in which over twenty thousand civilians were massacred in the Gukurahundi insurgency.¹¹ Most of the victims were the Ndebele people whom Mugabe accused of being dissidents.

Again, towards the end of 1999 and the beginning of 2000, Mugabe's war veterans embarked on the land invasions.¹² These land invasions were instigated after the formation of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (hereafter MDC) in September 1999.¹³ Widespread land resettlement and farm invasions motivated violence and deaths.¹⁴ Some white commercial farmers and their farm workers were killed, while others were brutally assaulted. These cases of violence, assault and death forced numerous commercial farmers to leave Zimbabwe for neighbouring countries such as: Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia. It is important to note that while it appeared that many countries in the Southern African region supported Mugabe's land reform, regional responses were far from uniform.¹⁵ The perceived regional support of land reform in Zimbabwe was a "mixed bag" of insincerity and hypocrisy. Grasian Mkodzongihas revealed that some countries while outwardly sup-

⁹ Present-day Zimbabwe was formally a British colony of Rhodesia. Zimbabwe became an independent state on 18 April 1980.

¹⁰ Michael Hartnack, "Mugabe's First Ten Years of Rulership," *SADes* (20 February 2001): n.p.

¹¹ Cf. Temba T. Rugwiji, *Reading the Exodus Liberation Motif in the Modern Post-Biblical World: The Zimbabwean Society and the Reality of Oppression* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012), 233.

¹² Cf. Wilbert Sadomba, "Peasant Occupations within War Veterans-led Land Occupations: Grassroots Conflicts and State Reaction in Zimbabwe," *JPSt* 36/2 (2009): 436.

¹³ Norma Kriger, "ZANU (PF) Strategies in General Elections 1980-2000: Discourse and Coercion," *African Affairs* 104/414 (2005): 26.

¹⁴ Kriger, "ZANU (PF) Strategies in General Elections 1980-2000: Discourse and Coercion," 1.

¹⁵ See Grasian Mkodzongi, "Land, Liberation and Compromise in Southern Africa," *Review of African Political Economy* 38/128 (2011): 346.

porting Zimbabwe's fast-track land reform (hereafter FTLR) model were also beneficiaries of "foreign direct investment" after offering evicted Zimbabwean commercial farmers incentives to invest in their respective countries.¹⁶ However, Mugabe's FTLR crippled the Zimbabwean economy because the country depended largely on commercial agriculture.

In yet another ordeal, in 2005, Mugabe's government demolished shacks and homes in the cities in the clean-up operation code-named *Operation Murambatsvina* (hereafter OM).¹⁷ OM hit the last nail on Zimbabwe's hemorrhaging economy.¹⁸ Economic turbulence in Zimbabwe began showing its mark at the emergence of the fast-track land reform programme FTLR¹⁹ towards the end of the 1990s. The actual manifestation of long-term economic consequences began to unravel at the "peak of the FTLR between 2000 and 2002."²⁰ During the 2000 and 2002 elections, many people had voted for the opposition MDC in the parliamentary and presidential elections, respectively. Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni affirms that Mugabe—after that shift on the political landscape—began dividing Zimbabweans into traitors, puppets, sell-outs, and enemies of the state versus patriots and authentic national subjects.²¹

Since the beginning of 2008, inflation had plunged the Zimbabwean dollar to one billionth of its value.²² Unemployment had risen up to 80%.²³ The

¹⁶ Mkodzongi, "Land, Liberation and Compromise in Southern Africa," 346.

¹⁷ *Operation Murambatsvina* (OM) is Shona that means "one who does not like dirt" or "clear out the rubbish" as Richard Saunders puts it. See Richard Saunders, "Zimbabwe: Liberation Nationalism – Old and Born-Again," *RAPE* 38/127 (2011): 126. OM was a clean-up exercise which was launched by the Government in May 2005 to demolish the informal businesses and illegal structures in all the country's urban centres. For more on OM, see also Temba T. Rugwiji, "Reading the Exodus Liberation Tradition from a Zimbabwean Perspective," (M.A.diss., University of South Africa, 2009), 144-146; Trynos Gumbo and Manie Geyer, "'Picking Up the Pieces': Reconstructing the Informal Economic Sector in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe," *Town and Regional Planning Journal* (2011): 54.

¹⁸ Rugwiji, "Reading the Exodus Liberation Tradition," 136.

¹⁹ Sam Moyo, "Land Concentration and Accumulation After Redistributive Reform in Post-Settler Zimbabwe," *RAPE* 38/128(2011): 257.

²⁰ Moyo, "Land Concentration," 265.

²¹ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Making Sense of Mugabeism in Local and Global Politics: 'So Blair, Keep Your England and Let me Keep my Zimbabwe,'" *TWQ* 30/6 (2009): 1140.

²² See No Author, "Zimbabwean Dollar has Plunged to one Billionth of its Value," *Business Day* (30 September 2008): n.p.; Mills Soko and Neil Balchin, "South Africa's Policy Towards Zimbabwe: A Nexus Between Foreign Policy and Commercial Interests?" *SAJIA* 16/1(2009): 37.

²³ Rugwiji, "Reading the Exodus Liberation Tradition," 135.

education system was paralysed,²⁴ and health service delivery crippled.²⁵ It became apparent that Mugabe's rule was characterised by various forms of oppression, from coercion to intimidation to hunger to corruption.²⁶ Human life became extremely worthless. Amidst all this, Mugabe continued to employ terror and intimidation as tools which inflicted shivers of fear in order to silence those critical of his policies.

Scholars at universities also differed ideologically and some clusters began to take shape among themselves. Some who supported Mugabe's policies (also known as *Mugabeism*), felt that FTLRP was noble. Others felt that there was need for a *heterodox economic plan*.²⁷ For example, Sam Moyo, Paris Yeros and Mahmood Mamdani who saw some sense in Mugabeism were heavily criticised by those who draw inspiration from human rights discourses.²⁸ On the one hand, Mamdani's article regarded Mugabeism as championing "mass justice" for those who were denied justice by the colonial system.²⁹ Horace Campbell, on the other hand, reacted to Mamdani's contribution by dismissing anything democratic and revolutionary about Mugabeism.³⁰ This explains that even the academic worldview of scholars was influenced by political developments in Zimbabwe.

The opposition MDC's support base comprised the learned populace—teachers, professors, academics, and other professionals, collectively defined as "rank-and-file members and supporters."³¹ These classes of citizens emerged as targets for politically-motivated violence. It was reported that since 2000 more than 15000 human rights abuses occurred, with more than 90% of these perpetrated by the ruling party and state officials against perceived Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front [hereafter ZANU (PF)] opponents.³² Richard Saunders also laments that murders, torture, rape, illegal detentions and destruction of property, among other forms of abuses, made state-enabled

²⁴ The Catholic Archbishop, Pius Ncube has decried the educational situation in the country, declaring, among other scathing indictments on Mugabe: "We Had the Best Education in Africa and Now our Schools are Closing." See Christina Lamb, "Zimbabwe's Top Cleric Urges Britain to Invade," *The Sunday Times*, UK (1 July 2007): n.p. [cited 26 March 2013]. Online: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/africa/article2010591>.

²⁵ Rugwiji, *Reading the Exodus Liberation Motif*, 225.

²⁶ Rugwiji, *Reading the Exodus Liberation Motif*, 14.

²⁷ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Making Sense," 1143.

²⁸ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Making Sense," 1143.

²⁹ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Making Sense," 1143.

³⁰ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Making Sense," 1143.

³¹ Cf. Saunders, "Zimbabwe," 126.

³² Cf. Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, "Political Violence Report," (December 2007): 1-29. [cited 26 March 2013]. Online: <http://www.hrfourumzim.org/>

political violence an established feature of the political landscape by the mid decade.³³

Beneath the spiral of the lucid push factors were the scholars' abstained moods to refrain from writing and criticising the prevailing system or engaging in public debates counteracting bureaucracy in Zimbabwe. Scholars, who regenerated the audacity to delineate these clearly discernable and empirical malpractices which had condensed Zimbabwean citizens to pariahs, would do so at their own risk. The excruciating nature of political and socio-economic crises naturally converted themselves into push factors which forced "all deeply wounded Zimbabweans"³⁴ in their numbers to cross borders in search of both safety and survival.

2 Pull Factors³⁵

Alex Nunn has advanced the following pull factors³⁶ which usually "pull" skilled people to other parts of the world:

- (i) Higher wages,
- (ii) Job opportunities,
- (iii) Relatively good working conditions,
- (iv) Freedom from political instability or oppression, and
- (v) Selective immigration policies which attract high skilled workers.

All the above pull factors could have motivated the skilled workforce in Zimbabwe to cross borders to Europe or neighbouring countries, as alluded to above. Mills Soko and Neil Balchin have confirmed that traditional trajectories between South Africa and Zimbabwe are analogous in the sense that both countries have endured a colonial history, minority rule and the struggle for liberation.³⁷ It is further lamented that due to the growing influence of South African business sector in Zimbabwe, there was clear evidence to suggest that South African businesses were benefitting from the commercial opportunities that emerged from the crises in Zimbabwe.³⁸ This assertion is also echoed by Fanuel Hazvina, Tichona Zivengwa and Albert Makochekanwa where they compared the relationship between Zimbabwe and South Africa as one "resem-

³³ Saunders, "Zimbabwe," 126.

³⁴ Francisca H. Chimhanda and Aletha Dube, "Post-Election Violence in Zimbabwe (2008-2010): The Agency of the Roman Catholic Church in National Healing and Democracy," *Missionalia* 39/3 (2011): 270.

³⁵ This section will just highlight these pull factors due to constraint of space. For more details on pull factors, see also Daniel S. Tevera and Jonathan Crush, *The New Brain Drain From Zimbabwe* (ed. by Jonathan Crush; Idasa: Cape Town, 2003).

³⁶ Nunn, *Academic and Skilled Migration*, 8.

³⁷ Soko and Balchin, "South Africa's Policy," 35.

³⁸ Soko and Balchin, "South Africa's Policy," 35.

bling that of the horse and the rider. . ."³⁹In other words, the collapse of every stratum of economic activity in Zimbabwe had commercial advantages for South Africa. In the literal sense, the deteriorating standards of education in Zimbabwe gave South Africa an impetus to attract Zimbabwean scholars. South Africa has traditionally emulated Zimbabwean standards of education. Given South Africa's proximity to Zimbabwe, the majority of Zimbabwean scholars found job opportunities in various South African universities and/or colleges.

Other scholars have been attached to universities abroad for some time before the crises in Zimbabwe. It is unlikely that they would entertain the thought of returning home as long as Zimbabwe's political stalemate remains unresolved. At the same time, those who were devastated by the crises while still in Zimbabwe also finally left the country to look for opportunities elsewhere. Those who endured and survived economic hardships and had reasons to stay in the country could not travel elsewhere to read papers. Collectively, these factors impacted negatively on OT scholarship because scholars who used to interact on academic businesses were now scattered far and wide. The following section converses on consequences that ensued as a result of political and socio-economic crises in Zimbabwe.

D CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISES IN ZIMBABWE

1 Absence from Old Testament Congresses

Most Zimbabwean OT scholars have become unpopular among delegates who attend annual international conferences in South Africa organised by societies such as: SASNES, OTSSA or Project Pentateuch (hereafter ProPent). This was largely due to political and socio-economic factors alluded to above. When I first attended ProPent and SASNES/OTSSA annual congresses⁴⁰ in 2008 and 2010 respectively, I did not know of any Zimbabwean OT scholar who either attended the conference or read a paper. In 2011, only Zimbabwean scholars who were currently residing in South Africa (e.g, Menard Musendekwa, Daniel Simango, Temba T. Rugwiji and a few others) were able to attend/read papers at the OTSSA/SASNESS conference.⁴¹

2 Absence of Old Testament Societies/Associations

At present, it seems there are no OT societies/associations in Zimbabwe such as OTSSA/SASNES in South Africa. This means that Zimbabwean OT scholars

³⁹ Hazvina, Zivengwa and Makochekanwa, "Zimbabwe," 82.

⁴⁰ The author attended the SASNES/OTSSA annual congress held at North-West University from 13 to 17 September 2010.

⁴¹ SASNES/OTSSA annual congress was held at the University of the Western Cape from 7 to 9 September 2011.

do not have a platform at which they would showcase their scholarly expertise through reading papers on OT deliberations. In order to launch an association or mobilising resources, funds are needed. With Zimbabwe's inflation having hit unprecedented levels, forming an association would not be possible. This means that Zimbabwean scholars cannot travel to OTSSA/SASNES annual congresses in South Africa. Their academic contributions can neither be known nor their expertise enhanced by modern trends in scholarship through interaction with other scholars.

3 Bogus Theological Colleges/Universities

When a crisis prevails in a society, it creates a state of vulnerability to scandalous activities such as corruption or other forms of criminality. In my view, critical OT scholarship in Zimbabwe has been "invaded" by the proliferation of *bogus* theological colleges or universities which offer so-called degrees (*madegree epasi pomuti*⁴²). These colleges/universities have continued to masquerade as institutions of higher learning operating under the auspices of tertiary education in Zimbabwe. Most of these Bible colleges/universities are church-oriented, making them centres of learning for prospective students whose main aim is to do "preaching." Quite often, no formal entry qualification is required, thereby reducing a degree to just a piece of paper. Some of the graduates from these colleges/universities are recycled into the system as part of the teaching staff. There is no emphasis on basic requirements for recruitment and appointment, such as sufficient evidence of teaching/research experience at a tertiary institution in their field of specialisation. Such malpractices are more prevalent in the field of Biblical Studies where it is taken for granted that almost everyone can read the Bible. It is reported that allegations of "mocking" other students within the discipline of Theology and Religious Studies by students from more "prestigious disciplines" unfolded at the University of Zimbabwe. Such contempt can be understood in light of the proliferation of theological colleges/universities whose members of staff are not sufficiently qualified. These inconsistencies collectively impact on OT scholarship.

4 Exclusion and Inclusion

Ideologies of "exclusion and inclusion,"⁴³ which I deliberately described as *politics of academia*,⁴⁴ have recently dissipated scholarship in some instances.

⁴² *Madegree epasi pomuti* is a Shona phrase which means "degrees which can be obtained anywhere, even under a tree in the bush." It is not an earned academic qualification.

⁴³ These *exclusion* and *inclusion* ideologies tend to infiltrate academia as strategies to counteract ideological differences in scholarship. For more on exclusion and inclusion ideologies, see Gal Ariely, "Exploring Citizenship Spheres of Inclusion/Exclusion: Rights as Potential Power," *PP* 45/3 (2011): 241-258; Sara R. Dorman, "NGOs and the Constitutional Debate in Zimbabwe: From Inclusion to

Some of these exclusion and inclusion ideologies become sopersonal, that they end up causing some unnecessary disharmony. It has been noted earlier in this article where some academics in Zimbabwe differed ideologically because of their different worldview in terms of politics. Such "fighting" also infiltrated their individual contributions. Sometimes this "politics" affects a peer-reviewing function as well. Having said that, peer reviewing should not compromise on quality. In my view, peer reviewing is a skill. Therefore, it should be conducted in such a way that both the author and the reader are not prejudiced because of ideological differences between the author and the peer reviewer.

5 Lack of Promotion of Old Testament

Political and socio-economic crises in Zimbabwe negatively affected the promotion of academia in general, and OT scholarship in particular. These crises militated against decent and dignified living conditions among communities. In addition, scholars had left the country for better and rewarding opportunities in the Diaspora. They were not prepared to be "sacrificial lambs" by staying behind to either promote or save the department or institution. Employment opportunities in the country as well as numbers of students had declined drastically because Biblical Studies/OT/Theology departments could not afford to recruit academic staff against dwindling numbers of students.⁴⁵ In Zimbabwe, Theology or Religious Studies as a discipline is largely studied by clerics.⁴⁶ Teachers and parents join the race in discouraging pupils who have successfully completed high school (e. g. Form VI) against taking Religious Studies as a field at University. Ezra Chitando has already shown how laughable it is when students go to University to learn Theology or Religious Studies

Exclusion," *JSAS* 29/4 (2003): 845-863; Norma Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in the Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 208.

⁴⁴ Sometimes, academia in general tends to portray a partisan political posture. In order for partisan politics to thrive, it practises the ideology of excluding some people, but include others depending on who is taking sides or agreeing with who.

⁴⁵ It has been observed that numbers of students in Theology/Religious Studies as a discipline at the University of Zimbabwe—as already noted by Ezra Chitando—have dropped significantly. The same observation has been revealed by my anonymous informant that numbers of students taking courses in Theology/Biblical Studies at the University of South Africa have also dropped drastically. This decline in numbers of students has affected the employment of new members of staff at these universities.

⁴⁶ Usually, Theology/Religious Studies is believed to be a field for practising pastors/bishops. For example, Temba T. Rugwiji, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Bishop Nolbert Kunonga, Ezra Chitando, Menard Musendekwa, Henry Mugabe, Munorwei Chirovamavi, Daniel Simango, Dudzai Chimeri, Simplicius Dube, Rabson Wuriga, Ray Motsi, Temba Mafico, and many others.

when they could choose from the so-called more "prestigious fields"⁴⁷ such as: Mathematics, Accounting, Medicine, Law, Engineering, Geography, Surveying, Political Science and many others. The choices students make in preferring other fields ahead of Theology/Biblical Studies might be valid because as the labour market stands at the moment, job opportunities for Theology/Biblical Studies graduates are scarce. Theology/Biblical Studies graduates may need to acquire a Master's or Doctorate degree to be considered for employment, whereas in some fields a graduate with a first degree may get a job.

6 Selective Citation of Works

The question of referencing/citing works is also contributing to the scarcity of OT scholarship in Zimbabwe (perhaps in South Africa as well). The majority of authors prefer to cite European/western scholars while sacrificing works on the same theme/s by scholars from Zimbabwe. In my opinion, because one's publication should reflect the so-called "global flair," contributions by local scholars are rarely cited. In South Africa, scholars are beginning to appreciate each other. An example is a recent joint publication⁴⁸ by Madipoane Masenya and Hulisani Ramantswana, in which they cited about 22 sources by South African contributors. In the Zimbabwean context, the absence of citations in recent publications by Mafico, Mbuwayesango, Wafawanaka, Simango, and Gunda, among others, might be attributed to the scarcity of Zimbabwean OT scholars which is the scope of this argument. Next, this article examines previous contributions by OT scholars.

E PREVIOUS CONTRIBUTIONS⁴⁹

The following contributors and their works will be explored: Temba L. J. Mafico, Dora R. Mbuwayesango, Robert Wafawanaka, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, Ezra Chitando, Daniel Simango, Temba T. Rugwiji, Obvious Vengeyi, among others.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See Ezra Chitando, "Equipped and Ready to Serve? Transforming Theology and Religious Studies in Africa," *Missionalia* 38/2 (2010): 197.

⁴⁸ The scholars cited by Masenya and Ramantswana include the following: Ferdinand Deist, Louis Jonker, Jurie, H. Le Roux, Christo Lombaard, Gerrie Snyman, and Gerald O. West, to name a few. See Madipoane Masenya and Hulisani Ramantswana, "Anything New Under the Sun of South African Old Testament Scholarship? African Qoheleths' Review of *OTE* 1994-2010," *OTE* 25/3 (2012): 599-637.

⁴⁹ The contributions discussed in this section of the essay are not exhaustible. All the scholars mentioned here have done extensive research works which need not be understated. However, discussing all their contributions is not possible in a single appraisal. Only a few contributions of the mentioned scholars are examined.

⁵⁰ Due to space constraints, this study examines only a few contributions by the above scholars.

Temba Mafico's contributions are not only illuminating, but also a truerelfectionof representation of Zimbabwean OTscholarship on the world stage. In his discussion on the Jewish tradition and African religion,⁵¹ Mafico examines the shortcomings which have affected the Christian missionary church. Mafico opines two main shortcomings that have adversely affected the missionaryenterprise in Africa, which are: (1) the rejection of the African religio-culture, and (2) the missionary church's inadequate knowledge of the OT which, according to Mafico, has striking similarities with African traditional culture. In my opinion, Mafico's assertion portraysthe missionary church's negative view of the African culture and its limited knowledge of the OT. These factors have in some way collectively contributed to lack of acceptance of the teachings of the Bible by Africans, which, in the final analysis, negatively contributed to inadequacy inOTscholarship in Zimbabwe.

In "The Old Testament and effective evangelism in Africa,"⁵² Mafico follows up on his earlier discussion in which he explored on the Missionary Church's rejection of African religio-culture. In the above investigation, Mafico says Christianity is regarded by the majority of indigenous Africans as a western religion with limited relevance to practical problems confronting Africans. Mafico ellaborates further that the majority of African Christians goes to church on Sunday and affirms the Christian God. However, most African Christians still believe that *n'angas* (Shona for witch doctors) or *vadzimu* (Shona for spirit mediums) can help solve their spiritual, social, and family problems, including illnesses.

In another treatise entitled: "Joshua," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*,⁵³ Mafico examines the story of Achan in the book of Joshua. Mafico compares African cultures and concepts to those of the Near Eastern world, and he regards the breaching of that which is banned as what happens in the African context. In his conclusions, Mafico sees Achan's breach as the consequence for Israel's downfall. Mafico maintains that "Achan alone breached the ban, and the whole nation-state lost the battle against the Canaanites."⁵⁴ "To Westerners," Mafico observes, "this does not make sense. To Africans this is easy to explain. In both Israel and in Africa, a banned object in the midst of Ancient Israel contaminated Achan and his family, who in turn, contaminated the whole assembly of

⁵¹ Temba L. J. Mafico, "Jewish Tradition and African Religion," *PP* 16/3 (1982): 17-26.

⁵² Temba L. J. Mafico, "The Old Testament and Effective Evangelism in Africa," *IRM* 75 (1986): 400-409.

⁵³ Temba L. J. Mafico, "Joshua," in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (ed. Hugh R. Page; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 115-119.

⁵⁴ Mafico, "Joshua," 118.

Israel."⁵⁵ Mafico's analysis is a typical example of a hermeneutical reading of the Bible in Africa in which every biblical theme—positive or negative—is appropriated in a post-biblical context.

Another OT scholar of note is Dora R. Mbuwayesango. In "How Local Divine Powers were Suppressed: A Case Study of the Mwari of the Shona,"⁵⁶ Mbuwayesango explains how the indigenous Shona people in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) believed in the Supreme Being whom they called Mwari in Shona. It is believed the Shona were united politically by this Mwari before the invasion of Rhodesia by the British in 1890. Mbuwayesango describes how the missionaries came to Rhodesia and evangelised the Shona and the Ndebele peoples. She explains the challenge they faced in order "to make the biblical deity relevant and acceptable to the Shona."⁵⁷ Although missionaries had initially disapproved of this Mwari, they "eventually adopted the name Mwari to designate the biblical God (i. e. Elohim or YHWH) in the Old Testament."⁵⁸ Mbuwayesango further explains "the similarities between the Shona culture and the culture depicted in the Old Testament,"⁵⁹ and hence the similarities between Mwari and Elohim/YHWH.

In her chapter on "Can daughters be sons? The daughters of Zelophehad in patriarchal and imperial society,"⁶⁰ Mbuwayesango discusses the exodus liberation tradition when Moses led the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. Mbuwayesango goes further to explore how women played a role in both the ancestral narratives and in ensuring the survival of Moses, who is portrayed as the "initiator of the move to dispossess the Canaanites" of their land. Mbuwayesango also laments how women were subsumed under men and were depicted as "secondary or insignificant" to the covenant after the liberation was achieved. However, the main thrust of Mbuwayesango's argument is to assert the notion of unfairness on the treatment between a girl child and boy child (or between men and women) in the biblical text which was the common practice by patriarchal and imperial societies in ancient Israel. In exploring this discussion, Mbuwayesango brings into perspective the story of the "daughters of Zelophehad in the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho" (Num 22:1). Mbuwayesango's overarching contestation sees the Israelite law as designed to

⁵⁵ Mafico, "Joshua," 118.

⁵⁶ Dora R. Mbuwayesango, "How Local Divine Powers were Suppressed: A Case Study of the Mwari of the Shona," in *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (ed. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 259-268.

⁵⁷ Mbuwayesango, "How Local Divine Powers," 261.

⁵⁸ Mbuwayesango, "How Local Divine Powers," 261.

⁵⁹ Mbuwayesango, "How Local Divine Powers," 262-265.

⁶⁰ Dora R. Mbuwayesango, "Can Daughters be Sons? The Daughters of Zelophehad in Patriarchal and Imperial Society," in *Relating to the Text: Interdisciplinary and Form-Critical Insights on the Bible* (ed. Timothy Sandoval and Carleen Mondolfo; London: T & T Clark International, 2003), 251-262.

maintain male possession of the tribal inheritance and the "sacred" boundaries of tribal lands.

Robert Wafawanaka's chapter on the "African perspectives on poverty in the Hebrew law codes,"⁶¹ compares the poor under the OTmonarchy to Africa's poor. He shows how for generations Africans have endured what he describes as "grinding poverty."⁶² Wafawanaka explains that poverty is real, materialistic and economic. Largely, Wafawanaka attributes the gravity of poverty among Africans as a result of scarcity of land deriving from colonialism when the land was expropriated from the Africans.

In his other work, namely: "In quest of survival: The implications of reconstruction theology of Ezra-Nehemiah," Wafawanaka explores on reconstruction in Zimbabwe.⁶³ Wafawanaka reads Ezra-Nehemiah narrative as reconstruction theology from a Zimbabwean perspective. According to Wafawanaka, Ezra-Nehemiah falls within the Deuteronomistic History (DH) which views Israel's subjugation as a result of sin. However, he argues against expelling of foreign wives by the exiles. In view of postcolonial reconstruction in Africa, Wafawanaka opines that it is usually characterised by postcolonial explosions and ethnic disruptions, citing as an example the genocide in Rwanda during the 1990s.⁶⁴

Masiwa Ragies Gunda's contributions to scholarship cannot be understated. In his "Reconsidering the relevance of the Prophet Amos in the quest for a just society in contemporary Zimbabwe,"⁶⁵ Gunda observes that the eighth century B.C.E. Israelite prophetic oracles including those by the Prophet Amos which condemned discrimination against as well as oppressing the poor of society by the ruling elite are relevant for contemporary societies, such as Zimbabwe. Gunda further explores that exploitation of the poor by the political leadership, the ruling elite, the judiciary as well as religious leaders in the modern post-biblical world remains a concern in our society today. Gunda examines the practice of justice or lack of it as the central issue.⁶⁶ Gunda chronicles

⁶¹ Robert Wafawanaka, "African Perspectives on Poverty in the Hebrew Law Codes," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube; Boston: Brill, 2000), 490-497.

⁶² Wafawanaka, "African Perspectives," 490.

⁶³ Robert Wafawanaka, "In Quest of Survival: The Implications of the Reconstruction Theology of Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations* (ed. Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvu and Dora R. Mbwayesango; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 349-358.

⁶⁴ Wafawanaka, "In Quest of Survival," 349-358.

⁶⁵ Masiwa Ragies Gunda, "Reconsidering the Relevance of the Prophet Amos in the Quest for a Just Society in Contemporary Zimbabwe," *BOTSA* (2010): n.p. [cited 10 March 2013]. Online: http://www.mhs.no/article_1109.shtml.

⁶⁶ Gunda, "Reconsidering the Relevance," http://www.mhs.no/article_1109.shtml.

that historically, the ruling elite in Zimbabwe has not taken the question of justice seriously. Gunda further discusses the prophetic insights of the biblical Amos⁶⁷ and appropriates these in the post-biblical societies, particularly Zimbabwe.

In "The reign of Bishop Nolbert Kunonga: Nationalist spirit or empire builder?",⁶⁸ Gunda explores on how Bishop Kunonga became obsessed with political power in order to build his own individual empire. It has also been observed that when Kunonga became a partisan politician, he broke away from the Anglican Church. It has been noted that one has to be militant and revolutionary to attract audience in ZANU (PF).⁶⁹ It is also reported that Bishop Kunonga joined the controversial land grab in Zimbabwe by seizing and occupying a farm about 10km away from Harare.⁷⁰ When Kunonga rebelled against the "Church of England," he aligned himself with the "deadwood in ZANU (PF)."⁷¹

Ezra Chitando has published numerous articles on the Bible and the African context. Among Chitando's contributions, one on the book of Proverbs and HIV/AIDS illuminates the present investigation. Chitando's "The Good Wife: A phenomenological re-reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 in the context of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe,"⁷² explores on HIV/AIDS and serious challenges it poses in Africa. In his appropriation of Prov 31:10-31 in a modern post-biblical context, Chitando explains the effects of HIV/AIDS which have been devastating, particularly for the disadvantaged members of society: women, children, orphans, displaced people, prisoners and many others.

In 2007, Ezra Chitando also cooperated with Masiwa Ragies Gunda in publishing another work which dealt with HIV/AIDS on the following title: "HIV and AIDS, stigma and liberation in the Old Testament."⁷³ Chitando and

⁶⁷ Gunda, "Reconsidering the Relevance," http://www.mhs.no/article_1109.shtml.

⁶⁸ The relevance of this particular work by Masiwa Ragies Gunda lies in the fact that he is critical of his fellow clergy man, Nolbert Kunonga, for joining the scramble for "land grab" in Zimbabwe. Previously in this discourse, I alluded to the notion that some scholars (including clerics such as Kunonga) became patriotic to ZANU (PF) and its land policy. *Land grab* was one of the major socio-political factors which negatively impacted on the Zimbabwean economy. For more information about Kunonga, see Masiwa Ragies Gunda, "The Reign of Bishop Nolbert Kunonga: Nationalist Spirit or Empire Builder?" *Missionalia* 36/2&3 (2008): 299-318.

⁶⁹ See Rugwiji, *Reading the Exodus Liberation Motif*, 136.

⁷⁰ Francisca H. Chimhanda, "Church Involvement in the Transition to Democracy in Postcolonial Zimbabwe (1980-2008)," *HEccl* 35/1 (2009): 103-119.

⁷¹ Gunda, "Reign of Bishop Nolbert Kunonga," 303.

⁷² Ezra Chitando, "'The Good Wife': A Phenomenological Re-reading of Proverbs 31:10-31 in the Context of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe," *Scriptura* 86 (2004): 151-159.

⁷³ Ezra Chitando and Masiwa R. Gunda, "HIV and AIDS, Stigma and Liberation in the Old Testament," *Exchange* 36 (2007): 184-197.

Gunda expound on HIV/AIDS which continues to affect most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, the above scholars have also highlighted how the stigma continues to challenge those affected by the epidemic. The church has been implicated in stigmatising such people. They also have exposed the double standards by some Christians who have used the Bible to justify their exclusion (*and inclusion*).⁷⁴ Chitando and Gunda have called for a rereading of the OT in the context of HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination.

Daniel Simango's research appeared in the third edition of *Old Testament Essays (OTE)* in 2012. On the one hand, Simango's genre is quite revealing where he argues that *Imago Dei* (the Image of God) "is both moral and relational in perspective: it involves a moral likeness of God and a relationship between God and humans like that between parent and child."⁷⁵ On the other hand, Simango's explanation did not articulate the hermeneutical part in the South African context, which he had stated he would in his abstract.⁷⁶ In my view, Simango should have further explored how South Africa is experiencing a moral decay.

Temba T. Rugwiji discusses *rape* in the Bible from a personal experience of a sister who allegedly died as a result of rape. Although Rugwiji explores his discussion commencing with Num 31:17-18⁷⁷ as his point of departure, he also examines rape in the biblical text with reference to other rape passages such as: the story of Abram and Hagar (Gen 16:1-2); Shechem raping Dinah (Gen 34); Amnon's rape of his sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:14); and David's alleged rape of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:11). He then appropriates these rape narratives to child sexual abuse in the modern post-biblical world which includes Zimbabwe. Rugwiji concludes by suggesting measures to mitigate child sexual abuse among modern societies.

In his other work, Rugwiji examines disability in the modern society from a pastoral hermeneutical perspective, in which he refers to the biblical story of David and Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9:1-13).⁷⁸ In his attempt to appropriate the biblical story in the modern post-biblical world in view of deformity, Rugwiji laments that members of society tend to discriminate against people with disabilities. He concludes by making recommendations towards emancipating people with disabilities in our modern society.

⁷⁴ The phrase italicised (*and inclusion*) is mine.

⁷⁵ Daniel Simango, "The Meaning of the *Imago Dei* (Gen 1:26-27) in Genesis 1-11," *OTE* 25/3 (2012): 638.

⁷⁶ See the abstract of Simango, "The Meaning," 638.

⁷⁷ Cf. Temba T. Rugwiji, "Confronted with a God who Sanctions the Rape of Minors: Reading Numbers 31:17-18 From a Pastoral Hermeneutical Perspective," *JSem* 21/2 (2012): 416-436.

⁷⁸ See Temba T. Rugwiji, "Reading the David-Mephibosheth Narrative From a Pastoral Hermeneutical Perspective: A Social Model," *Scriptura* 109 (2012): 82-95.

Francisca Chimhanda's and Obvious Vengeyi's publications appeared in *Scriptura* in 2010 and 2011, respectively. Mentioning Chimhanda⁷⁹ here is an attempt to show some of the contributions by Zimbabwean scholars in other fields other than OT as stated earlier that this discussion would. Chimhanda explores liberation as an ongoing historical process. Furthermore, the liberation paradigm is seen as multifaceted. She further remarks that liberation should engage in a dialogue with reconciliation, restitution and empowerment of the marginalised.⁸⁰

Obvious Vengeyi's contestation looks at poverty in the prophetic book of Amos.⁸¹ He critiques the notion of "prosperity Gospel"⁸² preached by Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe. According to Vengeyi, these Pentecostal movements seem to further impoverish the already poverty-stricken adherents who largely constitute the membership of the church. Vengeyi further elucidates that the prophetic book of Amos (Amos 3:9, 12; 4:1; 6:1) criticises the 8th century Jewish rulers for impoverishing poor members of society by dispossessing them of the most fertile pieces of land and demanding heavy taxes.

In another major work, namely: *Aluta Continua Biblical Hermeneutics for Liberation: Interpreting Biblical Texts on Slavery for Liberation of Zimbabwean Under Classes*,⁸³ Vengeyi cooperated with Ezra Chitando and Nesbert Taringa in which they detailed dynamics of liberation in the biblical text (both OT and NT). They covered almost every stratum of life in the Zimbabwean context. In this voluminous work, Vengeyi, Chitando and Taringa made reference to OT texts such as: Exod 21:2-6; 7-11; 20-21; 26-27; Deut 15:12-18; Lev 25:39-55; and Amos 2:7, among others. A variety of liberation themes were explored such as: domestic labour, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law, forced labour, domestic work for children, and impoverishment of the under classes,⁸⁴ among numerous others.

Lovemore Togarasei's contribution—though inclined towards the New Testament—also adds value to this exposition. Togarasei examines modern media technologies used by Pentecostal churches in Botswana and Zimbabwe

⁷⁹ Francisca H. Chimhanda is a Systematic Theologian.

⁸⁰ Francisca H. Chimhanda, "Black Theology of South Africa and the Liberation Paradigm," *Scriptura* 105 (2010): 434-445.

⁸¹ Obvious Vengeyi, "Zimbabwean Poverty is Man-Made! Demystifying Poverty by Appealing to the Prophetic Book of Amos," *Scriptura* 107 (2011): 223-237.

⁸² See Leonard P. Maré, "Psalm 44: When God is Responsible for Suffering," *JSem* 21/1 (2012): 52.

⁸³ Obvious Vengeyi, Ezra Chitando and Nesbert Taringa, *Aluta Continua Biblical Hermeneutics for Liberation: Interpreting Biblical Texts on Slavery for Liberation of Zimbabwean Under Classes* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013).

⁸⁴ Vengeyi, Chitando and Taringa, *Aluta Continua Biblical Hermeneutics for Liberation*, 159-160.

in propagating the Gospel.⁸⁵ In discussing media technologies such as print media (e. g. books, billboards, newspapers, etc.) and electronic media (e. g. radio, television, computer, etc.); Togarasei also addresses biblical and theological questions in his discussion. Although Togarasei's contribution⁸⁶ focuses on religion in general, his writing is highly commendable as it reflects a thrust towards relevance to society. In the following section, the discussion focuses on educational reforms in Zimbabwe.

F EDUCATIONAL REFORMS⁸⁷

1 Criterion for Awarding Operating Licenses

It is my personal proposal that the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education in Zimbabwe evaluates its criterion for issuing operating licenses to theological colleges/universities—whose formation and orientation are broad-based—so that only credible institutions of higher education can establish such centres in Zimbabwe. Emphasis on entry qualifications at these institutions as well as recruitment of teaching staff should meet such requirements as administered at public tertiary institutions, such as colleges and universities. In addition, colleges/universities should be managed by qualified personnel who are capable of contributing to OT scholarship in Zimbabwe.

2 Recruitment and Staffing

Institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe, should adopt a criterion as a policy which stipulates how an individual applicant for an employment opportunity is recruited and appointed. The University's Department of Religious Studies/Theology/OT should employ new staff on merit.⁸⁸ Those who do not qualify should not be given the job regardless of the fact that they are legitimate citizens of Zimbabwe. Citizens should compete with everybody else for a job. Preferential treatment may only be considered where a citizen has the same as or better qualifications than other applicants.

3 Supervision of Dissertations/Theses

It is proposed that credible Master's and Doctorate dissertations and theses can

⁸⁵ See Lovemore Togarasei, "Broadcasting the Word: Modern Pentecostal Churches' Use of Media Technologies," *JTSA* 129 (2007): 70-81. The inclusion of Lovemore Togarasei in this discourse on the OT could be considered by some to be amissplacement, since Togarasei is a New Testament scholar. However, his contribution is worth acknowledging.

⁸⁶ Togarasei, "Broadcasting the Word," 70-81.

⁸⁷ This idea of *educational reforms* was borrowed from Abby Rubin Riddel, "Reforms of Educational Efficiency and Quality in Developing Countries: An Overview," *Compare* 28/3 (1998): 277-291.

⁸⁸ For example, it has emerged that the University of Zimbabwe's new policy is to recruit and appoint lecturers with Ph.D.'s, and nothing less.

only be supervised by qualified and experienced practitioners in order to produce OT graduates capable of contributing towards critical biblical scholarship in Zimbabwe. In my view, excellence in OT scholarship can only prevail in the context of the credibility of the institution, entry requirements and the quality of staff. Therefore, only experienced OT practitioners at reputable colleges or universities can supervise dissertations or theses. Ezra Chitando's appeal that Theology and Religious Studies must produce competent graduates who can contribute to the process of addressing Africa's challenges⁸⁹ complements my position for the establishment of theological colleges or universities which will produce graduates capable of articulating an independent rationale towards contributing to critical OT scholarship in Zimbabwe.

4 Formation of Societies and Journal/s

First, formation of a local journal in the field of the OT is also critical. If the journal in the discipline of OT is launched, it will encourage scholars to make contributions in the journal. This will gradually elevate OT scholarship in Zimbabwe.

Second, Zimbabwean scholars should launch a national association or society such as OTSSA. In Zimbabwe, the body may be called: The Old Testament Society of Zimbabwe (OTSZ) or the Zimbabwe Society of Biblical Studies (ZSBS). Through this association, scholars in Biblical Studies will meet once a year to read papers and to discuss important topics pertaining to Biblical Studies or OT. This interaction and exchange of academic ideas will enhance OT scholarship in Zimbabwe.

5 Citing of Works

As already explained earlier on, one of the measures towards developing OT scholarship is citing of academic contributions by colleagues. This tends to promote and support careers of individual academics. When academics begin to support each other this way, it enhances their successful academic achievements, which in the end elevates the OT as a lucrative and competent discipline. This serves as one of the strategies aimed at promoting the OT as a field of relevance for study.

G THE RELEVANCE OF OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP TO THE ZIMBABWEAN SOCIETY

The relevance of OT scholarship to the community of readers needs to be prioritised. Many modern scholars have raised the same concern. For example, Madipoane Masenya and Hulisani Ramantswana have equally contested that reading the Bible in light of present day contexts both recognises and acknowl-

⁸⁹ Chitando, "Equipped and Ready," 197.

edges the reader and her/his context.⁹⁰ The above authors went on to refer to the South African context as the social location from which the Bible is read.⁹¹ In this regard, Masenya and Ramantswana have reaffirmed "a two-way process of reading: reading a text in terms of our experiences and reading our experiences in terms of the text."⁹²

Another scholar Walter Kaiser has also argued that the historical-critical approach has relegated the OT into a sphere which now addresses arcane historical questions.⁹³ In recent biblical interpretation, the OT scholarship has been criticised for deliberately ignoring to address contemporary issues such as political power, socio-economic situations, justice, poverty, the environment, and health which affect the everyday lives of communities. John Goldingay also subscribes to this notion where he argues that:

In principle I am not interested in the OT as a merely theoretical discipline. I am interested in it because I have found that the OT has a capacity to speak with illumination and power to the lives of communities and individuals. Yet, I also believe it has been ignored and/or emasculated and I want to see it let loose in the world of theology, in the church and in the world.⁹⁴

Concurring with Goldingay is Andrew Warmback who also opines that he has a strong interest in theology and the environment and the church's role in society.⁹⁵ Justin S. Upkong has also observed that since the 1990s a decidedly proactive stance is leading to the development of contextual Bible studies and enculturation approaches, which recognise the importance of the ordinary reader and make the African context the explicit subject of biblical interpretation.⁹⁶ Upkong has further stated that the importance of the ordinary reader will gradually come to the fore, because academic reading of the Bible in Africa will no longer afford to ignore the concerns and perspectives of the ordinary reader. Since African biblical scholarship focuses on the community that receives the text, any continued ignoring of the ordinary readers will lead to sterile scholarship.⁹⁷ Nancy Heisey's opinion that the "Africanness" of biblical literature is being acknowledged and that the newer methods used in the guild

⁹⁰ Masenya and Ramantswana, "Anything New," 599.

⁹¹ Masenya and Ramantswana, "Anything New," 599.

⁹² Masenya and Ramantswana, "Anything New," 600.

⁹³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jnr., *Towards Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 59-79.

⁹⁴ John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel* (vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology*; Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2003), 18.

⁹⁵ Andrew E. Warmback, "The Journey Continues: Oikotheology and Urban Ministry," *Missionalia* 36/2&3 (2008): 167.

⁹⁶ See Justin S. Upkong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: A Historical and Hermeneutical Perspective," *JTSA* 108 (2000): 3.

⁹⁷ Upkong, "Developments," 18.

are producing a fruitful intersection between biblical studies and African Studies,⁹⁸ is a depiction of a critique that Masenya and Ramantswana have also opined above. When Heisey insists that research should consider the "Africanness" of the data,⁹⁹ her contestation is in solidarity with both Masenya's and Ramantswana's ideas of: "a reading that recognises and acknowledges the reader's context,"¹⁰⁰ already stated above.

Old Testament research needs to focus on the reader as the end user (the consumer). In Africa, any biblical interpretation that does not put the reader into perspective faces the danger of being irrelevant, and risks being ignored by the very target audience for which it is intended. Ezra Chitando's investigation has clearly revealed this observation. According to Chitando, the question: "What can one do with Theology or Religious Studies?"¹⁰¹ is a question with which many people have grappled. The above question derives from the context of perception by the majority of people who regard the Bible as the "church book," and "theology" as a discipline is confined to the church. The same perception might have led other students in "more prestigious" disciplines at the University of Zimbabwe, as Chitando observes, to "mock" those in Theology and Religious Studies.¹⁰²

Molly Manyonganise and Chipo Chirimuuta have contested the ideology among some Zimbabwean Christians of hiding behind certain biblical texts for not participating in Zimbabwean politics.¹⁰³ Manyonganise and Chirimuuta have further argued that Christians are a critical part to the Zimbabwean society whose participation in politics may go a long way in establishing democracy in the country.

Manyonganise's and Chirimuuta's views are also affirmed by Francisca Chimhanda's and Aletha Dube's contributions which also explored the positive role played by the Roman Catholic Church in ensuring the existence of peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe.¹⁰⁴ Chimhanda and Dube further noted that the church which shares in the mission of Christ in bringing the good news of salvation to all people is a key player in mediating for peace and reconcilia-

⁹⁸ Nancy R. Heisey, "The Influence of African Scholars on Biblical Studies: An Evaluation," *JTSA* 101 (1998): 35.

⁹⁹ Heisey, "Influence of African Scholars," 36.

¹⁰⁰ Masenya and Ramantswana, "Anything New," 599.

¹⁰¹ Chitando, "Equipped and Ready," 197.

¹⁰² Chitando, "Equipped and Ready," 197.

¹⁰³ Molly Manyonganise and Chipo Chirimuuta, "Christians' Participation in Politics in Zimbabwe: A Privilege or Right?" *Missionalia* 39/3 (2011): 287-305.

¹⁰⁴ Francisca Chimhanda and Aletha Dube, "Post-Election Violence in Zimbabwe (2008-2010): The Agency of the Roman Catholic Church in National Healing and Democracy," *Missionalia* 39/3 (2011): 268-286.

tion.¹⁰⁵ Togarasei and Ezra Chitando also yearned for the church's role that focuses on healing and reconciliation.¹⁰⁶ Togarasei and Chitando have remarked that the previous era of the inclusive government served as a window of opportunity for the church to play a leading role in promoting healing and reconciliation. Togarasei and Chitando have referred to the biblical basis (e. g. Amos 5:24; Mic 6:8) in which the church has to promote justice, peace and reconciliation.¹⁰⁷

Richard Shadreck Maposa, Fortune Sibanda and Thompson Makahamadze have also emphasised on the role of the church in reconstructing the country as part of its historical divine mandate.¹⁰⁸ Maposa, Sibanda and Makahamadze further chronicled that in search of a new dispensation, churches as key stakeholders, have the potential to brave the challenges bedevilling Zimbabwe.¹⁰⁹

The question of relevance still remains unfinished business given the growing need for modern biblical interpreters to focus more on the aspect of addressing every day particularities of developing communities today.

H CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this contribution, I have articulated that political and socio-economic crises which bedevilled Zimbabwe at the beginning of 2000 and became severe during 2008, negatively impacted on academia in general and on OT scholarship in particular. Admittedly, a crisis affects every spectrum of life among societies. The Zimbabwean crises had become push factors which forced professionals, academics and scholars of repute to relocate to other parts of the world in search of both safety and survival. Until now, it is not an overstatement to say that many scholars have not returned home from Diaspora. Although the negative impact of political and socio-economic crises on OT scholarship precisely cannot be underestimated, contributions by Zimbabwean scholars in recent years on genres relevant to society have been acknowledged. Among the scholars whose scholarly contributions made a positive impact to society in general and to scholarship in particular include: Temba L. J. Mafico, Dora Mbuyesango, Robert Wafawanaka, Masiwiwa Ragies Gunda, Obvious Vengeyi, Ezra Chitando, Daniel Simango, Temba T. Rugwiji and many others.

¹⁰⁵ Chimhanda and Dube, "Post-Election Violence," 268.

¹⁰⁶ Lovemore Togarasei and Ezra Chitando, "Be Therefore Reconciled to One Another: The Church's Role in Justice, Healing and Reconciliation in Zimbabwe," *Missionalia* 39/3 (2011): 210-227.

¹⁰⁷ Togarasei and Chitando, "Be Therefore Reconciled," 210.

¹⁰⁸ Richard S. Maposa, Fortune Sibanda and Thompson Makahamadze, "African Theology and Identity: Reflections on Zion Christian Church Experiences and Responses to the Zimbabwean Crisis, 2000-2010," *Missionalia* 39/3 (2011): 248-267.

¹⁰⁹ Maposa, Sibanda and Makahamadze, "African Theology and Identity," 248-267.

Although I made an attempt to respond to the question: *Who are the OT scholars in Zimbabwe and what do they write?* I do not claim that the responses are entirely exhaustive. In my view, OT scholarship in Zimbabwe needs to improve, especially the task of appropriating biblical themes which are relevant to particularities of our modern post-biblical societies. The task that lies ahead for academia on government which deviates from its constitutional mandate is to write more about it regardless of the outcome. In the past, scholarship has always played a critical role by publishing on political turbulence and its negative effect on the economy in Zimbabwe. Although oppressive and corrupt governments will always prevail in our society, silence and the failure to challenge these systems tend to perpetuate them. The stimulus we can receive from the renewed study of the text of Scripture is a *powerful aid* to our being grasped by its message.¹¹⁰ In my view, this "powerful aid," as Kessler puts it, is the OT scholarship.

In conclusion, some kind of educational reforms are needed to improve OT scholarship in Zimbabwe. It is suggested that contributors may need to develop a culture of citing research works by local authors as it tends to promote contributions of emerging scholars. Scholars residing in Zimbabwe (and in dialogue with those in Diaspora) should reflect on forming a society, which, at present is not existent. Through a society as a platform, OT scholars will be able to interact with other practitioners in the discipline in order develop their research arguments in a critical and constructive way. In addition, it is important for scholars to participate in national, regional and international congresses for exchange of academic ideas. Recommendations should be made to the government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education to emphasise on rigorous recruitment procedure as a measure to hire qualified and competent professionals. *Bogus* colleges or universities should be denied operating licenses.

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¹¹⁰ Rainer Kessler, "The Threefold Image of Egypt in the Hebrew Bible," *Scriptura* 90 (2005): 881.

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