Esther and African Biblical Hermeneutics: A Decolonial Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

In this essay the author looks at the decolonial critique on Western epistemology as presented within Western biblical hermeneutics in order to appreciate the focus on the geopolitical and the body political nature of knowledge. To this end, the author revisits an aspect of the book of Esther, namely the issue of Haman as perpetrator, not only to utilise decoloniality as a heuristic key to read the book, but to explore similarities with the current postapartheid context of race trouble. The discussion proceeds as follows: (a) an exploration of aspects of Haman's comportment in the story in terms of a colonial matrix of power and Mordecai in terms of a coloniality of being; (b) a discussion on decoloniality in terms of (i) the decolonial turn, (ii) coloniality, (iii) the three ego*'s, (iv) the non-ethics of war, (v) the zone of being and the zone of non-being and (vi) the objective of decoloniality; (c) a proposition to unthink race by taking seriously (i) race trouble as a direct consequence of the colonial matrix of power, (ii) and to take the geopolitical and body political location of knowledge production seriously.*[1]

Key words: Cain, decolonial turn, colonialism, Book of Esther, Haman, Mordecai.

A INTRODUCTION

1 Critique of Modernity

In his critique of modernity's narrative of difference created by the colonisation of space and time (that provided, amongst others, an elevated position to the Christian religion), Walter Mignolo alludes to Christianity's complicity with coloniality since the 16th century when he argues,

> Christian Theology (theo-politics) and secular philosophy (ego-politics) took over the concept and the rhetoric of modernity. As they became hegemonic, Theology and Secular Philosophy grounded by Christianity formed the Master Voice through which the people, regions of the world and other religions would be classified, described and ranked. Jews, Moors, Chinese Buddhists, Japanese Sintoists, Aymaras and Quechua Pachaists (. . .) were placed in subservient levels in those hierarchies. The re-

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> conceptualization of the "barbarians" in the sixteenth century gave to the spatial colonial difference its evil actor. The later translation of the "barbarians" into "primitives" in the eighteenth century would incorporate the temporal dimension in the pre-existing spatial colonial difference. Both underlying ideas continue to work in *contemporary discourse.* (My italics – GFS).[2]

Ramón Grosfoguel draws a link between the "God's-eye view" produced by Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* and the Christian God's universality. Not only does he depict a caricature of Christianity's perception of their deity,[3] but he also ascribes several genocides and epistemicides to Christianity in its guise as state religion, which he calls "Christendom."[4] He states the following:

> The entanglement between the religious Christian-centric global hierarchy and the racial/ethnic Western-Centric hierarchy of the "capitalist/patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world-system" created after 1492, identified the practitioners of a non-Christian spirituality with being racialized as an inferior being below the line of the human.[5]

Nelson Maldonado-Torres's critique relates to the superior nature the Christian religion ascribed to itself. One of the consequences was the notion of a just war against indigenous people in the Americas because they had no soul.[6] He argues as follows:

> When the conquerors came to the Americas they did not follow the code of ethics that regulated behaviour among subjects of the crown in their kingdom. . . . What happens in the Americas is a transformation and naturalization of the *non-ethics of war*, which represented a sort of exception to the ethics that regulate normal conduct in Christian countries, to a more stable and long-standing reality of *damnation*.[7] (italics – Maldonado-Torres)

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[2] Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *CSt* 21/2-3 (2007): 471.

[3] Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century," *HArc* 11/1 (2013): 76: "The image of God in Christendom is that of a White, old, bearded man with a cane sitting in a cloud, watching everybody and punishing anybody who misbehaves."

[4] Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge," 75.

[5] Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge," 84.

[6] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of the Concept," *CSt* 21/2-3(2007): 246.

[7] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 247. He explains damnation as follows: "Damnation, life in hell, refers here to modern forms of colonialism which constitute a reality characterized by the naturalization of war by means of the

Cheryl Anderson links up with Grosfoguel's description of entanglement above to argue the basis of Christian theology's complicity in applying what she calls a "mythical norm" to valid readings of the biblical text: a white, Eurocentric, male, heterosexual, wealthy, middle class, and Christian norm, creating in the process an "Other" who is black, African/Asian/Latin, female, homo-/bi-/transsexual, poor, working class, non-Christian.[8]

To be honest, all of this "leaves a moral remainder that threatens to crush anyone who finds himself or herself personally connected."[9] Katharina von Kellenbach utilises these words with reference to the Holocaust and the hidden damage it caused to the perpetrators.[10] She speaks of the enormous scale of the Holocaust in terms of the harm done - its magnitude "makes memory unbearable for both survivors and perpetrators as well as their families."[11] Whereas the survivors are committed to bear witness, the perpetrators are committed to "forgetting, erasing, and burying the guilt of the past."[12] Traumatic events decades and centuries ago hold societies captive with the events reverberating in cultures:

> Turkey, for instance, is still held hostage by its undigested history of genocide of the Armenians; white U.S. Americans continue to be in the grip of unresolved feelings over slavery and racism; and several European countries are paralyzed by conflicted emotions over the Holocaust and antisemitism.[13]

Neither forgiveness nor punishment in terms of Christian soteriology is able to remove the burden of guilt. In her own geopolitical context, Germany, she finds solace in the figure of Cain:

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

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naturalization of slavery, now justified in relation to the very physical and ontological constitution of people – by virtue of 'race' – and not to their faith or belief."

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

9 Katharina von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain: Guilt and Denial in the Post-war Lives of Nazi Perpetrators* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8.

10 Von Kellenbach, *Mark of Cain*, 206.

11 Von Kellenbach, *The Mark of Cain*, 8.

12 Von Kellenbach, *Mark of Cain*, 8. She refers to "[t]he wilful blindness required to ignore the suffering of the victims festers and grows over time." (p. 206).

13 Von Kellenbach, *Mark of Cain*8-9. Here I can add South Africa's apartheid system and the devastating effect of the Anglo-Boer War within the psyche of the group labelled *Afrikaner.*

> depends on his ability to respect the memory of his brother and to accept his responsibility.[14]

It is a process of a lifetime with no quick solutions. Cain's processing of his fratricide proceeds through many stages while being confronted with various peoples, places, and philosophies.[15] Moreover, his repentance is not an internal affair but a very public one in terms of behaviour, interaction, discourse and comportment. Von Kellenbach describes the mark of Cain as "a path of moral repair based on openness and transparency."[16] Von Kellenbach herself came to a consciousness about the Holocaust by looking into the eyes of its survivors and their children, or in the words of James Perkinson, "not denying the reflection."[17] Similarly, the task at hand in this essay is to hear and internalise the decolonial critique on the position from which I inevitable approaches the biblical text, and in the process being confronted "with the embarrassment of having already been 'found out' by one's (in this case) most frightening other."[18]

In this article I look at a decolonial critique on Western epistemology as presented within Western biblical hermeneutics in order to appreciate the focus on the geopolitical and the body political nature of knowledge. To this end, I will be revisiting[19] an aspect of the book of Esther, namely the issue of Haman as perpetrator, not only to utilise decoloniality as a heuristic key to understand the character, but to explore similarities with the current postapartheid context of race trouble.[20] The discussion will proceed as follows: (a) an exploration of aspects of Mordecai in terms of a coloniality of being and of Haman's comportment in the story in terms of a colonial matrix of power; (b) a discussion on decoloniality in terms of (i) the decolonial turn, (ii) coloniality, (iii) the three *ego*'s, (iv) the non-ethics of war, (v) the zone of being and the zone of non-being and (vi) the objective of decoloniality. Decoloniality

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14 Von Kellenbach, *Mark of Cain*, 15.

15 Von Kellenbach, *Mark of Cain*, 22.

16 Von Kellenbach, *Mark of Cain*, 208.

17 James W. Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 3.

18 Perkinson, *White Theology*, 3.

19 Gerrie F. Snyman, "'Ihlahle Elinothututhu?' The Lay Reader and / or the Critical Reader: Some Remarks on Africanisation," *R&T* 6/2 (1999): 140-167.

20 See for example Stephanie Feder, "Esther goes to Africa: Rezeptionen des Estherbuches in Südafrika," in *Esters unbekannte Seiten: Theologische Perspektiven auf ein vergessenes biblisches Buch: Festschrift für Marie-Theres Wacker* (ed. Aurica Nutt and Stephanie Feder; Ostfildern: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2012), 55. She refers to a South African reading of the book in which it becomes clear what "man an diesem Buch lernen kann – gerade deshalb, weil es nicht von der heilen Welt spricht und am Ende alles glatt gebügelt wird. Mit dem Esterbuch kann man lernen, sich konfrontieren oder sich von ihm herausfordern lassen."

implicates race. Its critique suggests then (c) a proposition to unthink race by taking seriously (i) race trouble as a direct consequence of the colonial matrix of power, (ii) and to take the geopolitical and body political location of knowledge production seriously. One can safely assume this essay is the result of being interpellated by African Biblical Hermeneutics.[21]

B HAMAN IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Cain's conduct stands in huge contrast to Haman's in the book of Esther. Haman is acted upon differently. When Haman is unmasked by Esther in ch. 7, and he begs for his life, the king thinks he is assaulting the queen. As the king speaks, Haman's face is covered and he is taken out of the queen's quarters directly to the gallows he erected for Mordecai. Subsequently, his ten sons are also killed (Esth 9:7-10). More often than not in the OT / HB, the perpetrator gets tied up in his or her own knots and succumbs to their fate of imminent execution.[22]

There is a problematic and troubling aspect in the book, namely the retaliatory violence of not only Haman but also of Esther and Mordecai. The planning of the genocide took place from a particular powerful position with all its ideological implications that was already present *before* Mordecai's disobedience. His actions raised the ire of his masters. The decree to have officials bow before Haman in Esth 3:2 was an apolitical command that had as its goal the showing of respect that Mordecai refused to heed - a royal decree "of a purely civic nature and devoid of all religious significance," argues Russell Edwards.[23] Mordecai's refusal was quite public. The gate is a place of public interest and Mordecai's action would have received the best possible publicity.[24] Moreover, he did not move his seat to a less conspicuous place where he would not have been spotted and he did not hide his identity. He divulged his name and ethnicity in Esth 3:4. Haman, in turn, reacted with so much anger that he started to conspire to destroy Mordecai as well as his people.[25]

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[21] For the idea of interpellation, see Gerrie F. Snyman, "African Hermeneutics' 'outing' of whiteness," *Neot* 42/1 (2008): 93-118.

[22] See Gerrie F. Snyman, "David and Shimei: Innocent Victim and Perpetrator?" *OTE* 21/2 (2008): 435-454. In the Samuel presentation Shimei receives a reprieve from David, but in the presentation of the story in the Book of Kings, David requests Solomon to deal with Shimei appropriately, implying that Shimei deserves to be killed for his transgression.

[23] Russel K. Edwards, "'Ahasuerus is the Villain'—A Reply," *JBQ* 19/1 (1990): 34.

[24] Edwards, "'Ahasuerus is the Villain'—a Reply," 35.

[25] Edwards, "'Ahasuerus is the Villain'—a Reply," 36-37. It is for this reason that some scholars think that Mordecai cannot be excused in this story. His refusal is regarded as an act of monumental political stupidity.

Towards the end of the story, it is as if justice is served when Haman is killed with his ten sons and a few Persians for good measure. It seems justice was delivered smoothly with an appropriate reversal of roles.[26] But Moore questions the nature of the justice here: he weighs whether Esther is vindictive and vengeful or simply realistic and pragmatic.[27]

In the book of Esther, the characters act their roles that have been preset by the structure of the story and the wisdom perspective of the author. Mordecai and Haman are typical stereotypes for wisdom literature. According to wisdom, there is an order of justice with a creator God who judges the wicked and saves the wise, but it is not an inflexible order of retributive justice in which each word or deed produced an inevitable result:

> There was the expectation that good works and wise thoughts led to well-being (understood in a variety of ways, from concrete rewards to less tangible blessings), and there was the expectation that evil and foolishness led to destruction (understood in specific as well as more general terms).[28]

Mordecai and Esther thus become an example of wisdom by being portrayed as religious people adhering to the order of God. Haman, in contrast, is portrayed as a foolish man creating chaos in the ordered world of God. He ends up with his demise, falls from grace and life. As stereotypes they are set in their ways and for Haman there is no redemption. Moreover, the conflict between Haman and Mordecai in Esther is rooted in an ancient tribal conflict, the Benjaminites versus the Amalekites. The reader gets the impression that it is tribal animosity that lies behind Mordecai's rebellion and that spurs Haman into action to incorporate all the Jews in his genocidal plans.[29] In other words, race trouble was brewing—a situation not that dissimilar from the debate between African Biblical Hermeneutics and Western Biblical Hermeneutics. In this debate, the hegemonic power of the latter is being questioned and critiqued from the position of the former. In particular, Western epistemology's role in genocides as well as epistemicides are put on the table. Bearing in mind the eventual fate of Haman, the question is whether there is redemption for Western hermeneutics in the face of the decolonial turn, or, put differently, is there redemption for the Western reader within an African context? Is the

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[26] Edward L. Greenstein, "A Jewish Reading of Esther," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine and Ernest S. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 237.

[27] Carey Moore, *Esther: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 7B; Doubleday: New York, 1988), 91.

[28] Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 328.

[29] Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 181.

Western reader not doomed to follow the Eurocentric path, risking marginalisation within this particular African context and eventual extermination? To add to the confusion, when Athalya Brenner reminds one that in Esther *nobody* is wholly evil or good,[30] one realises that Mordecai and Esther ended up doing what Haman and the Persians intended to do to them. Are they examples of a particular coloniality of being, that is, when the after effects of imperialism lingers on once the colonisers left? Only in their case they would live in the midst of the colonisers and not the colonised, being in Susa, the stronghold of the Persians.

Mordecai's refusal drew out Haman's fury and put in motion the machinations of imperial power in order to sustain that power at all costs, even if it meant genocide. Haman's position of power provided him with a position of superiority. In the exercise of that power he then revealed himself as a supremacist. His encounter with the king in order to solicit a decree for genocide in ch. 3 is here quite revealing. In order to get the confirmation of the king for this devious plan, Haman needed to other his adversary without really revealing their identity. He subsequently kept them masked. In contrast, Mordecai acted quite openly in his refusal to bow before Haman—he never masked his identity.

How did Haman achieve this? He started out by selectively feeding the king with facts in order to induce the desired conclusion.

- Haman started out to soften him: "There are a certain people scattered and separated among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom." (3:8a). And indeed, the Jews were strangers in the land and part of those groups that were sent into exile by the Babylonians earlier on. The reference to "separate" indicates their exclusiveness with which they have tried to preserve their traditions.[31] The king might have thought that this is not a problem.

- But then Haman came with his next salvo: "Their laws are different from those of every other people." (3:8b). Haman accurately described the Jews. Like any minority in the Persian Empire they were allowed to follow their own customs. Some of these were quite different from other groups, but there seems to have been laws quite similar to Persian laws.[32] It is not reason enough to suggest impropriety.

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[30] Athalya Brenner, "Looking at Esther through the Looking Glass," in *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna* (vol. 7; ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 79.

[31] Moore, *Esther*, 39.

[32] James A. Loader, *Esther* (POut; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1980), 57 suggests that Haman is telling here a half truth: the Torah differs from Persian laws but not all the

- However, when Haman suggested in 3:8c that they do not keep the king's laws, he seems to be pushing the truth.[33] It is true Mordecai did not keep the king's decree regarding the show of respect towards Haman. In this regard Haman is correct, but his totalising of this aspect to a group and to comprise "all" the laws of the king is not truthful. Haman was setting up a trap for the king, who has just expelled his queen for disobeying him. He is driven into a corner with his majesty and power seriously questioned. He accedes to Haman's devices and gives him a free hand, without knowing the identity of the group.

The Book of Esther confronts the reader with issues that are quite contemporary in a global order of an imperial control and marginalised powerless communities. In this context, Esther can be regarded as a model for empowerment, but not as a model to change structures that can stop the process of marginalisation. Despite Esther's success, the system remains the same. The book shows the harm done by, as Cheryl Anderson puts it, "volatile mixtures of colonialism and racial/ethnic/religious differences."[34] Wong Wai Ching Angela in her reading of Esther in the Global Bible Commentary argues as follows:

> Esther reminds modern readers of the ties between colonialism and violence and of how tension and hostility, when built up among different peoples brought together by imperialist powers, results in cycles of reciprocal revenge and persecution.[35]

Is it then possible, in the light of coloniality of being to attribute the danger of genocide to Mordecai's own intransigence and thereby risk making the victim responsible for his own calamity?[36] The book may be read as an anti-model for what happens when colonisation takes place, when race takes precedence, and racial qualities are allowed to define exclusivity and inclusivity. I would suggest that, in a way, the socio-political locations of the protagonist and the antagonist in the story correspond to the socio-political locations of the protagonists and antagonists within the hermeneutical debate, if it is portrayed along continental and cultural lines: Western hermeneutics and African hermeneutics. And one of the issues is masking: Haman masked before the king the true identity of the group he wants to destroy, yet Mordecai reveals

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laws under which they lived, differed. He does not argue his case further or illustrate with examples.

[33] Moore, *Esther*, 39, and Loader, *Esther*, 57, argue that his statement is an outright lie.

[34] Cheryl B. Anderson, *Ancient Laws & Contemporary Controversies: The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009), 70.

[35] Wong Wai Ching Angela, "Esther," in *Global Bible Commentary* (ed. Daniel Patte, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 137.

[36] Politically the question is whether it is justifiable to put Africa's woes in her own pipe and have her smoke it.

himself and masks nothing. He continues to act publicly by staying either at the palace gates or at the harem's quarters. Mordecai's staring down of Haman and the latter's subsequent othering of Mordecai's ethnic group illustrates what I would call "race trouble." His self-revelation and Haman's masking procedure reminds me of African Biblical Hermeneutics's programme of self-disclosure in terms of decoloniality's foregrounding of the geopolitical and body political context over against the masking of power within Western hermeneutics because of its zero point epistemology.

C DECOLONIALITY

Whereas Mordecai and the Jews constituted the subject of Haman's interpretation, they had no say over what was said about them. Through the decree that would destroy them they remain confronted by a view about them that was strange to them—a situation not dissimilar to colonial attitudes towards the colonised in Africa. It is from a similar context that African Biblical Hermeneutics arose, positioning itself in the aftermath of colonialism reading the text with what Musa Dube, Andrew Mbuvi, and Dora Mbuwayesango refer to as a postcolonial lens.[37] It is a reading of the biblical texts related to colonial history of Western powers' exploitation of Africa for their own purposes in order to construct a reading that reflects the needs of the African context. When juxtaposed with a Western hermeneutic, it interpellates the latter to unthink its own socio-political location.

1 The Decolonial "Turn"

I would like to introduce the notion of decoloniality. It is a notion that intends to change discourse and not merely the content, which have been changed already by liberalism, Marxism and Christianity—all constituting Western categories of thought that have been made universal through the logic of coloniality. For example, one of its main proponents, Walter Mignolo, suggests a change in terms and conversation, a de-naturalisation of concepts and conceptual fields that purport to totalise a single reality.[38] He specifically employs the word "delinking" which entails a fracturing with the "Eurocentered project of post-modernity and a project of post-coloniality dependent on post-structuralism."[39] Thus, decoloniality also constitutes a break

[37] Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi and Dora Mbuwayesango, *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations* (GPBS 13; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 2.

[38] Mignolo, "Delinking," 460. He refers here to "Theo-logy" and "ego-logy" from which the proposed delinking needs to take place.

[39] Mignolo, "Delinking," 452. Post-colonialism is seen as a project of scholarly transformation within the academy. Modernity is regarded as a European phenomenon with Europe confirming itself as the center of the world in relation to a non-European alterity.

from postcoloniality, liberation theology and Marxism. For this reason Mignolo refrains from using words such as "liberation" and "emancipation." They are regarded as products of modernity/coloniality. Delinking is the reverse of assimilation[40] and suggestive of a different epistemic grounding in terms of geo- and body politics of knowledge and understanding.[41] In short, decoloniality suggests a radical difference in the genealogy of thought.[42]

Ramón Grosfoguel argues that the term "postcolonial" is very much wrapped up in what he calls the "Western epistemic canon" that gives epistemic privilege to the likes of Foucault, Derrida, Gramsci and Guha.[43] The issue for him is not a Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism, but a critique of Eurocentrism from the position of the subaltern and the silenced. The latter boils down to a decolonisation of the Western canon and epistemology, because "[p]ostmodernism and poststructuralism as epistemological projects are caught within the Western canon reproducing within its domains of thought and practice a coloniality of power/knowledge."[44] It is for this reason that Grosfoguel talks of a "decolonial turn" in analogy to the "interpretive turn" where subjectivity becomes a crucial component in the interpretive process.[45]

The decolonial turn asks questions about the effect of colonisation in modern subjectivities and forms of life. The focus is on otherness, or, an other way of thinking that is contrastive to the modernist narratives within Christianity, liberalism, and Marxism.[46] Nelson Maldonado-Torres sees the decolonial turn as a confrontation with the racial, sexual and gender hierarchies

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40 Mignolo, "Delinking," 461.

41 Mignolo, "Delinking," 462.

42 Walter D. Mignolo, "Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-Colonial Thinking," *CSt* 21/2-3 (2007): 164. Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program," *CSt* 21/2-3 (2007): 179-180, refers to "*un paradigma otro*, the very possibility of talking about 'worlds and knowledges otherwise.'"

43 Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms," *CSt* 21/2-3(2007): 211: "Among the four main thinkers they privilege, three are Eurocentric thinkers while two of them (Derrida and Foucault) form part of the poststructuralist/post-modern Western canon." Mignolo, "Introduction," 163: "Post-coloniality emerged from the extension of Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida an [sic] Jacques Lacan to the colonization of Palestine by Israel, and its Oriental underpinning (Edward Said) and to the post-colonial situation of India as an ex-colony of the British Empire (Ranajit Guha, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak). De-colonial projects at its turn, emerged in the contemporary intellectual debates from the critical foundation established, in Latin America, by José Carlos Mariátegui, in Perú (in the 1920s), and by dependency theory and philosophy of liberation, in the 70s spread all over Latin America."

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

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

46 Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges," 180.

that were put in place by European modernity as it colonised the rest of the world.[47] He defines the decolonial turn as "making visible the invisible and about analysing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of the large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the 'invisible' people themselves."[48] The decolonial turn celebrates the arrival of the ontologically excluded's subjectivities in the realm of knowledge production in order to transform the colonial world into a transmodern world where war is the exception and not the rule.[49]

2 Coloniality

To understand the decolonial turn one needs to look at the concept of coloniality. The very first thing to remember is that coloniality is not the same as colonialism. Colonialism in the past concerned the action of an imperial power of invading another country with a concomitant administrative order as well as an economic system whereby the wealth of the colonised country is extracted for the benefit of the colonising metropolis.

Maldonado-Torres defines it as "a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation."[50] In the time span that one group of people's sovereignty rested upon another group, certain patterns of power were established that went beyond the limits of colonial administration: culture, economy, and knowledge became all affected/infected. Yet, when the centre of the empire crumbled and the colonisers left, these patterns of power often remain. Maldonado-Torres stresses that coloniality survives colonialism:

> It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of people, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience.[51]

What is important to note here is the geopolitical and body political context in which the colonial matrix of power plays out itself: the Western World, Western Christianity, and Western men.[52] The argument is that there is nothing wrong with a group of people putting forward their ideas.[53] The

47 Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 261.
48 Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 262.
49 Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 263.
50 Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 243.
51 Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 243.
52 Mignolo, "Delinking," 478.
53 Mignolo, "Delinking," 493.

problem arises when such a group disregards their own limitation in assuming a God's-eye view on reality, turning the provincial into the universal.[54]

3 The Three *Ego's*

Ramón Grosfoguel summarises the process of the provincial becoming the universal as follows: The *ego cogito* of Descartes challenged Christendom's authority of knowledge by replacing God with the "I" as the new foundation of knowledge. But to make the "I" equal to God in the production of knowledge, Descartes separated the mind from the body in order to make it undetermined and unconditioned by the body. Thus the mind can be like God floating around, not determined by anything terrestrial, and producing universal knowledge. If the mind was not divorced from the body, knowledge would be produced from a particular location and thus extremely human and not god-like.

According to Grosgoguel's argument, Descartes claims that certitude is achieved via solipsism, an internal monologue that stops when certainty is reached. If the "I" is situated within social relations, monological and unsituated knowledge would be impossible.[55] However, without social relations knowledge can be produced from nowhere while it assumes a point zero epistemology (a point of view that does not assume itself to have a point of view). Subsequently, any knowledge that takes note of body-politics or geopolitics is discarded as biased. Grosfoguel calls it an "idolatric universalism"[56] that creates epistemic privilege for itself and epistemic inferiority for anything different.

Grosfoguel draws a direct link between Descartes's *cogito ergo sum* and European expansion into the Americas, Africa and Asia since the 15th century. The expansion created a conquering mentality (*ego conquiro*) within those that set out into these new territories. The *ego conquiro*'s role in this setup is that Descartes's *ego cogito* that constitutes an "arrogant and idolatric God-like pretention of Cartesian philosophy" could only come from someone "who thinks himself as the center of the world because he has already conquered it."[57] It is an imperial being whose exploits started in 1492 with the European colonial expansion. It means that the foundation for the certainty about the self

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54 Mignolo, "Delinking," 493.

55 Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge," 75-77.

56 Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge," 76. He asks (74): "How is it possible that the canon of thought in all the disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities in the *Westernized University* (. . .) is based on the knowledge produced by a few men from five countries in Western Europe (Italy, Franxce, England, Germany and the USA)? How is it possible that men from these five countries achieved such an epistemic privilege to the point that their knowledge today is considered superior over the knowledge of the rest of the world?" Their theories are deemed sufficient to explain the social and historical realities of the *rest* of the world.

57 Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge," 77.

as a thinking subject can be found in the certainty of the self as a conqueror. What links the two is epistemic racism and sexism produced by yet another ego, the *ego extermino*.[58]

The conquered became the context for the articulation of the *ego cogito*. Grosfoguel argues that the context for Descartes' *ego cogito* was Western man, for the simple fact that this "I" could not have been an African, a Muslim, a Jew, a woman or an indigenous person, since they were all already considered inferior as a result of four epistemicides: "The only one left as epistemically superior was the Western man."[59] This superiority was based on the degree of humanity (*humanitas*) conferred on someone. *Humanitas*, in turn, was based on skin colour: the lighter the skin the more human one seemed to have been.[60]

Maldonado-Torres relates the framework for this racial schema to the *ego conquiro*.[61] The *ego conquiro* shares with the *ego cogito* doubt that is central to modernity, but it is a doubt about the humanity of the colonised other. Maldonado-Torres labels it as "racist/imperial Manichean misanthropic scepticism," or the "imperial attitude" that defines "modern Imperial Man."[62] Maldonado-Torres sees in the *ego cogito* two unrecognised dimensions: firstly, when one states "I think," there is an assumption that others do not think or think properly; and secondly, when one adds "therefore I am," there is an implication that others lack being, they are-not, or do not exist or are dispensable.[63]

4 The Non-Ethics of War

[58] Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge," 77: "The *ego extermino* is the socio-historical structural condition that makes possible the link of the *ego conquiro* with the *ego cogito*." Grosfoguel subsequently argues that four genocides (he also labels them as epistemicides) can be considered as the socio-historical condition for the transformation from *ego conquiro — ego extermino — ego cogito*: (a) the conquest of Al-Andalus with its "purity of blood" discourse regarding Jews and Muslims; (b) The conquest of the Americas in relation to the conquest of Al-Andalus generating a genocide / epistemicide against indigenous people, Marranos, Moriscos, moving the discourse from purity of blood to people without religion to soulless people; (c) the conquest of the Americas and the African slave trade, completing the process of viewing the Other as without humanity; and (d) the conquest of Indo-European women and the genocide against women transmitting Indo-European knowledge from generation to generation.

[59] Grosfoguel, "Structure of Knowledge," 86.

[60] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 244.

[61] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 244-5.

[62] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 245.

[63] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 252.

The *ego cogito* is built upon the anthropological colonial difference between the conqueror (as *ego conquistador*) and the conquered (as *ego conquistado*).[64] The misanthropic Manichean scepticism resulted into a genocidal attitude with regard to the colonised and a preferential option for the *ego conquiro*. Subsequently, the code of ethics that regulated behaviour among subjects in the coloniser's metropole did not apply in the conquest over the colonised since their humanity was open to question:

> That human beings become slaves when they are vanquished in a war translates in the Americas to the suspicion that the conquered people, and then non-European peoples in general, are *constitutively* inferior and that therefore they should assume a position of slavery and serfdom.[65]

Maldonado-Torres suggests that coloniality is a "radicalization and naturalization of the non-ethics of war."[66] He sees these non-ethics in terms of genocide, slavery, and rape that create a world in which the *ego cogito* exists alone. Once vanquished, the conquered become part of the economy of sexual abuse, exploitation, and control. The code of behaviour in the process of colonisation becomes naturalised.[67] Coloniality of being then refers to "the normalization of the extraordinary events that take place in war."[68] Whereas murder and rape are normalised in war, in the dreadful existence of the colonial world they too become, nonetheless, the order of the day.[69] Maldonado-Torres states it pungently:

> "Killability" and "rapeability" are inscribed into the images of the colonial bodies. . . . Black bodies are seeing [sic] as excessively violent and erotic, as well as the legitimate recipients of excessive violence, erotic and other wise. "Killability" and "rapeability" are part of their essence—understood in a phenomenological way. The "essence" of Blackness in a colonial anti-black world is part of a larger context of meaning in which the non-ethics of war gradually becomes a constitutive part of an alleged normal world.[70]

5 Zone of Being and Zone of Nonbeing and *Humanitas*

[64] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 245. The relationship between the conqueror and the conquered provided, according to Maldonado-Torres, the model to understand the relationship between the body and the mind. Articulations of the body and mind are used as models to conceive of the coloniser-colonised relationship that translated into the European and the non-European, lighter and darker people.

[65] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 247.

[66] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 247.

[67] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 248.

[68] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 255.

[69] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 255.

[70] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 255.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues that modern Western thinking operates through "abyssal lines that divide the human from the subhuman."[71] These abyssal lines are based on a colonial model of radical exclusion that De Sousa Santos believes is still operative today. Abyssal thinking "consists of a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones."[72] The invisible distinctions are created by radical lines that divided the society into a realm of *this side* of the line and a realm of *the other side* of the line. The other side of the line is nonreality, the non-existent, namely "not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being."[73] The non-existent is excluded since it lies beyond the "realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other."[74] Abyssal thinking suggests the impossibility of the simultaneous presence of both sides of the line at any stage. De Sousa Santos then utilises the notion of abyssal lines to argue for a metaphorical cartography that outlived the literal cartography of the amity lines that separated the Old from the New World.[75]

The lines of amity were cartographical lines upon which the peace negotiators between the landowning Catholics of Spain and the seafaring Protestants of France agreed, resulting in the Treaty of Peace at Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559. These lines were the Tropic of Cancer and the prime meridian passing through the Canary Islands. At this line Europe and its laws ended and the New World began where there was no law in force: "On this side of the line, truce, peace, and friendship apply; on the other side of the line, the law of the strongest, violence, and plunder."[76] The colonial presented the lawless (and notably not the legal or illegal), hence the maxim *Ultra equinoxialem non peccavi* (beyond the equator I have not sinned).

Walter Mignolo also draws inspiration from these lines for his interpretation of the decolonial turn. He brings the abyssal lines in connection with knowledge and coloniality:

> Now we have a system of sorts, an underlying structure that connects global linear thinking [Eurocentric thinking – GFS] with cartography and the world map, the idea of the human and humanitas, and a zero point of observation (the invisible knower,

[71] Boaventura Sousa de Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges," *Review* (Fernand Braudel Center) 30/1 (2007): 53.
[72] Sousa de Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking," 45.
[73] Sousa de Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking," 45.
[74] Sousa de Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking," 45.
[75] Sousa de Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking," 53: He explores postabyssal thinking where the struggle for global justice coincides with a struggle for cognitive justice.
[76] Sousa de Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking," 49, footnote 10.

> God or the transcendental secular subject), that not only observes but also divides the land and organizes the known.[77]

The amity lines that regulated the rest of the world between Spain and Portugal in the 16th century become the symbolic line of colonial difference with *humanitas* above the line and *anthropos* below the line. This distinction, says Mignolo, is epistemic and ontological: the ontological status is constructed by and from the *humanitas*, disabling anthropos epistemically as well as ontologically. *Anthropos* is not human enough and thus below the level of rational thinking.[78]

De Sousa Santos's abyssal line in his metaphorical cartography of the ecology of knowledges becomes in Grosfoguel a Fanonian[79] line of the human. He distinguishes those that live above the line as in the zone of being and those who live below the line as inhabiting the zone of nonbeing.[80] Conflicts above the line are regulated in a non-violent way. In contrast, conflicts below the line are regulated violently.[81] People below the line are regarded as non-human or subhuman. Subsequently acts of violence, rape, and appropriation are acceptable. To Grosfoguel, it makes a difference whether one is classified above or below the line. Above the line one finds that those being othered, nonetheless share in the privileges of the imperial codes of law and rights. In contrast, in the zone of nonbeing class, gender, and sexual oppression are aggravated because these oppressions go hand in hand with racial oppression. It is not the same to be an Other in the zone of being than to be a non-human Other in the zone of nonbeing. The zone of being is the imperial world and the zone of nonbeing is the colonial world.[82]

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[77] Walter D. Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think: Remapping the Order of Knowing," in *The Creolization of Theory* (ed. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih; Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 167.

[78] Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think," 168.

[79] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (trans. C. L. Markmann; London: Pluto Press, 2008), 2: "There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell."

[80] See Ramón Grosfoguel, Laura Oso, & Anastasia Christou, "'Racism', Intersectionality and Migration Studies: Framing Some Theoretical Reflections," in *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* (2014), 1-20. DOI:10.1080/1070289X.2014.950974.

[81] This differentiation relates to Maldonado-Torres's non-ethics of war in the previous section.

[82] Grosfoguel, "'Racism,'" 11-12: What makes the zone of nonbeing worse, is the stratification: "A non-western heterosexual man in the zone of non-being exercises some privileges oppressing non-Western heterosexual women and/or non-western gays/lesbians within the zone of non-being. Despite the fact that non-western

The different operations within the realms above and below the line have an impact on the geopolitics of knowledge. In the zone of being there is the pretension that the knowledge produced within the realm is automatically considered universally valid over-against the knowledge produced below the line that cannot be taken seriously because it emerged for particular socio-historical contexts.[83] Critical theory developed by the oppressed within the zone of being is constituted by "access to processes of regulation and emancipation where racial domination is lived as racial privilege instead of racial domination."[84] This kind of critical theory cannot be applied to the zone of nonbeing in order to understand the socio-historical experience of those who live in violence and racial oppression. Grosfoguel argues this will constitute colonialism in the social sciences and for those in the zone of nonbeing accepting the theories developed in the zone of being, albeit by similarly oppressed in that zone; it will be "mental colonization subordinated to the Westernized left and/or the Westernized Social Sciences."[85] If decoloniality implies a delinking from Eurocentrism, it also has to produce a decolonial theory that makes visible what is rendered invisible by the practices within the zone of being.[86]

6 Objective of Decoloniality

Maldonado-Torres observes a link between the coloniality of being and the coloniality of knowledge: "The Cartesian formulation privileges epistemology, which simultaneously hides both what could be regarded as the coloniality of knowledge (others do not think) and the coloniality of Being (others are not)."[87] The absence of rationality is defined in terms of absence of being. Thus, coloniality of knowledge creates ontological exclusion. He relates ontological exclusion to Fanon's description of the "damné": the subject who cannot give because what the subject had was taken away. The coloniality of being entails the obliteration of gift-giving and receiving as fundamental qualities for being-in-the-world.[88] Coloniality of being is the process whereby the forgetfulness of an ethics (the non-ethics of war) produces a world where the exception to ethical relationship becomes the norm, a world of lordship and supremacy in

heterosexual men are oppressed in the zone of non-being by the institutions of the zone of being, the social situation for non-Western women or gay/lesbian in the zone of non-being is still worse."

83 Grosfoguel, "'Racism,'" 25.

84 Grosfoguel, "'Racism,'" 26.

85 Grosfoguel, "'Racism,'" 26.

86 Grosfoguel, "'Racism,'" 27.

87 Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 252.

88 Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 258. Maldonado-Torres employs here a basic concept of Levinas to whom the gift and reception constitute fundamental traits of the self. They are metaphysical acts that enable communication between a self and an Other.

lieu of "generous interaction [that] define[s] social dynamics in society."[89] Decoloniality is the restoration of the ability to give and receive freely on the principle of receptive generosity.[90]

Decoloniality has the wretched of the earth in focus. The implication is if the colonisers are in need of decolonisation, the coloniser would not be the proper intrument of decolonisation if the wretched of the earth does not take part in that process.[91] Mignolo's fear is similar to that of Grosfoguel, namely the coloniser using decolonisation as a "tool for personal benefit while reproducing, in the 'decolonized' country, the same 'irrational myth that justifies genocidal violence.'"[92] Mignolo wants to break the myth that all knowledges need to originate in the "imperial form of consciousness" located in the West.[93]

The geo-political location of knowledge stands in contrast to the "zero point epistemology" associated with the West's imperial foundation of knowledge symbolised by the abovementioned abyssal line. The zero point epistemology hides the geopolitical and biographical politics of knowledge in its claim to universality.[94] It casts sensing and knowing that do not conform to its epistemology to the realm of myth, legend, folklore, or local knowledge. It hides the fact that its own local knowledge is universally projected. The veiling of its locality in pretending universality gives it the power of imperiality.[95] The hegemonic power Western epistemology has does not mean that those who do not think in those terms, do not think at all. For this reason Walter Mignolo utilises the maxim "I am where I think." He sees it as a "basic epistemic principle that legitimizes all ways of thinking and delegitimizes the pretense [sic] that a singular and particular epistemology, geohistorically and biographically located, is universal."[96]

Decoloniality entails stripping Western epistemology of the pretension "that it is the point of arrival and the guiding light of all kinds of knowledges."[97] It does not mean rejecting Western epistemology and its

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[89] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 259.

[90] Maldonado-Torres, "Coloniality of Being," 260. Receptive generosity is breaking away from racial dynamics and concepts of gender and sexuality.

[91] Mignolo, "Delinking," 458 refers here specifically to "the intellectual guidance of the *damnés*."

[92] Mignolo, "Delinking," 458.

[93] Mignolo, "Delinking," 462: not everything need to be thought out within the heart of the empire with everything else removed from the center waiting for emancipation.

[94] Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think," 161.

[95] Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think," 161.

[96] Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think," 162. The universal claim made here by Mignolo does not escape me. But I do not yet know what to do with its universality.

[97] Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think," 162.

contributions, but rather appropriating for its universal value yet rejecting the posturing that because it makes a global contribution it needs to be the totalitarian universal system ruling out any other possibility.[98] The function of decoloniality is to unmask the pretension of universality. Its purpose is to claim epistemic rights based on the interconnection between geopolitics and epistemology and between biography and epistemology: *I am where I think.*[99]

Decolonising is taking democracy seriously: it is not about advancing imperial designs but about pointing out the importance of geopolitics and body politics of knowledge.[100]

D COLONIALITY OF BEING AND THE UNTHINKING OF RACE

Mordecai's public refusal to obey the royal command to bow before Haman certainly makes visible the power hierarchy that is present in the story. It is a Persian hierarchy with a Persian official in command. Given Haman's focus on the Jews later on in the story, this hierarchy receives racial undertones with Mordecai simply making visible the excluded's own subjectivity. From Haman's perspective, the Jews are in the zone of nonbeing. One may assume that Haman operates from the position of conquest and thus the force of the decree to bow before him and his reaction to non-compliance. However, the context of Mordecai's refusal is not that of coloniality, but colonialism. Nonetheless, the effects of colonialism are quite obvious in the denouement of the story when he and Esther assume the position of imperiality towards the Persians in a reversal of roles. The non-ethics of war is also clear in the story and it is present on both sides. For the South African context the issue of race and the zones of being and nonbeing is here of importance.

1 Unthinking Race

Mordecai's staring down of Haman and the latter's subsequent othering of Mordecai's ethnic group illustrates what I would call "race trouble." His self-revelation and Haman's masking procedure reminds me of the self-disclosure within decoloniality in the sense of considering *I think where I am* and the masking of the geopolitical and body political location of the Cartesian *ego cogito.*

Race trouble means that life is structured in such a way that certain actions leave marks on other people because of race. We are twice told that Esther should not reveal her Jewish origins. The suggestion is that it may work against her in the palace and she may then not become queen. Mordecai's revelation of his identity is met with animosity. In fact, his identity gives Haman the ammunition to conspire to destroy his entire ethnic group. Mordecai

[98] Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think," 162.
[99] Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think," 168.
[100] Mignolo, "I Am Where I Think," 169.

may have sensed that Esther's identity could trouble in the harem, but his revealed identity caused race trouble in the palace with Haman who then sought to exterminate them. In ch. 7 when Haman's conspiracy is revealed, race trouble is yet again created when the name of the group Haman wanted to destroy, the Jews, is revealed.

Race trouble is an example of an effect that lingers on in the aftermath of colonialism. The crux of the argument is as follows:[101]

> The history of colonialism, slavery, segregation and apartheid finds purchase in the present as it continues to structure practices and to produce racial subjects that are profoundly troubling. This can happen [. . .] even when we participate in social life that is not explicitly racialised.[102]

Because of a racialised history an acceptance of non-racism does not guarantee the disappearance of situations that remains intensely racialised, such as entering a shop or going to the beach or taking a ride in a municipal bus.

It is this "positioning of subjects in racially aligned practices of engagement and conflict" that is called "race trouble": "All are produced as racial subjects by means of their participation in racialised forms of life."[103] Mordecai sent Esther to the harem where she would have had to pass as Persian. And she succeeded, given the positive reaction she received from the vizier first and later the king. Race trouble came to the fore once her identity is also revealed.

The point of departure for "race trouble" is the presupposition that because of the history of racism and apartheid, we continue to participate even today in forms of social life that is structured by race. Race trouble is the consequence of the colonial matrix of power. In the South African context there is the issue of black and white having different subjectivities because of the

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[101] Kevin Durrheim, Xoliswa Mtose and Lyndsay Brown, eds., *Race Trouble: Race, Identity and Inequality in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011), is instructive here. They argue that one needs to understand the value of a stereotype. Everybody utilises stereotypes because a stereotype services a way of life. "Stereotypes are beliefs that are materialised in social routines," (Durrheim, Mtose and Brown, *Race Trouble*, 205). If one changes practices and the way one treats others, different stereotypes are needed. For example, to change a white-black relationship from exploitation to care, both parties will need a new perspective on the other. They will need a new vocabulary that departs from one that rendered separation necessary. It requires the production of new subjects with new self- and other stereotypes that participate in new forms of social life (Durrheim, Mtose and Brown, *Race Trouble*, 205).

[102] Durrheim, Mtose and Brown, *Race Trouble*, 164.

[103] Durrheim, Mtose and Brown, *Race Trouble*, 200.

different kind of human practices, such as the arrangement of bodies, in which they participate. This makes race trouble inevitable. As long as one partakes of such a practice, the production of racial identities will continue with the necessary desires and skills to accomplish those acts participation requires. The question is how does one change those practices in order to escape race trouble?

What kind of life Esther and Mordecai would have lived after Mordecai was promoted in Haman's position is unknown. But what is common knowledge is that, in order to survive, she and Mordecai had to partake of those strategies employed by Haman. In other words, the structures in which they participated remained, even after Haman's removal. They would have been part of the different hierarchies of power in the Persian zone of being.

In his audience with the king, Haman creates the impression of a group of people (in the zone of nonbeing presumably) that poses a security risk to the empire. The fact that the Jewish exiles were well adapted within the imperial order, such as Mordecai being employed by the king as one of the king's servants, is ignored. At issue here is not the misrepresentation, but the perspective created that is presented as truth and the acceptance of that truth as the guiding perspective for everyone. Whereas Mordecai and the Jews constituted the subject of Haman's interpretation, they had no say over what is said about them. Through the decree that would destroy them they remain confronted by a view about them that is strange to them—a situation not dissimilar to colonial attitudes towards the colonised in Africa.

2 Unthinking the Colonial

The self-image of African interpretation of the Bible is that she sees herself as providing the critical resources for biblical interpretation as well as the subject of interpretation.[104] For example, African Biblical Hermeneutics sees itself framed by two elements. The one is to read the text read through a grid that is developed within an African socio-cultural context, making the context the subject of interpretation of the biblical text: "The goal of interpretation is the actualization of the theological meaning of the text in today's context so as to forge integration between faith and life, and engender commitment to personal and societal transformation."[105] The other is more political and defined in oppositional terms in order to confront the colonial master: "Biblical interpretation remains wedged between Western and African history of colonialism, struggle for independence, post-independence and the globali-

[104] Justin Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends* (ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 23.
[105] Ukpong, "Developments," 24.

zation era."[106] Whereas the colonial powers employed the biblical text in their exploits in Africa, the biblical texts similarly play a role in Africa's scramble to wrestle the continent back from neo-colonial powers.

The first element can be related to the decolonial turn's emphasis of the geopolitical and body political context of interpretation or knowledge production. The reader's context in terms of culture and life experience is used as complimentary to conventional critical tools of biblical exegesis. To Ukpong, "this recognition, by the academic community, of the place of the ordinary reader's in the scheme of things, regarding the appropriation of the biblical message, makes academic biblical scholarship relevant to the community of believers."[107] Biblical interpretation has recognised in some way or the other, the need to take into account the geopolitical and body political location of the reader. What it did not do, was to frame it in terms of decoloniality.

The second element links African Biblical Hermeneutics to its postcolonial agenda which is different from the agenda posed by the decolonial turn.[108] The postcolonial agenda is a reading of the biblical texts related to colonial history of Western powers' exploitation of Africa for their own purposes in order to construct a reading that reflects the needs of the African context. When juxtaposed with a Western hermeneutic, it interpellates the latter to unthink its own socio-political location. The focus in the decolonial turn is different: it is pointing out the provinciality of colonial thinking and positing new and other ways of thinking or reading biblical texts.

Musa Dube refers in the book *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations* to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media.*[109] The words "Unthinking Eurocentrism" have a double thrust: Unthinking Eurocentrism is, on the one hand, to expose the masking of Eurocentrism, "the taken-for-granted quality of Eurocentrism as an unacknowledged current, a kind of bad epistemic habit," and on the other hand, to move beyond Eurocentrism towards a relational theory and practice, an exposition of cognitive, political, and aesthetic alternatives to Eurocentric culture and philosophies.[110] The decolonial turn takes that step: in unthinking Eurocentrism it proposes a reading or understanding from the geopolitics and body politics of the wretched of the earth.

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[106] Dube, Mbuvi and Mbuwayesango, *Postcolonial*, 4.
[107] Ukpong, "Developments," 23.
[108] Dube, Mbuvi and Mbuwayesango, *Postcolonial*, 2.
[109] Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 10.
[110] Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 10.

It is here that my belonging to the mythical norm applied to biblical interpretation creates a stumbling block, as it situates me very far from the wretched of the earth in terms of the geopolitics and body politics of knowledge production. It is a cautionary note to what I can do and may say with regard to the wretched of the earth. Yet the words "unthinking Eurocentrism" have a certain appeal.

About 30 years ago, the South African NT scholar, Bernard Lategan, tried to find his way in the then hermeneutical debate.[111] Unthinking Eurocentrism (in 1984) was not on the cards for Lategan, but he remarked that the hermeneutical concepts employed are products of "post-Enlightenment Western thought."[112] And he took note that "the suitability of methods coming from this tradition for use in non-Western cultures, is under heavy attack from some quarters."[113] He acknowledged that there is a need to study the development of hermeneutics in a non-Western context, but he does not elaborate on the non-Western context. Instead he provides an extensive view on the issues that was deemed current in NT hermeneutical scholarship in 1984 in Europe and the USA, thus continuing to think Eurocentristically. A decolonial critique would put a limit to the validity of his arguments.

E CONCLUSION

A decolonial critique constitutes a radical critique that cuts deep into the heart of Christianity regarding its claims to universality. It problematises the zero point epistemology that lies behind Christianity's universal claim to salvation and the cause for what is called the colonial difference. Over-against the claim to universality within Christianity and Western culture, the decolonial turn affirms a different epistemic foundation on the basis of a very particular geo- and body politics of knowledge within the realm of those excluded because of the hegemony of the Western paradigm. A decolonial paradigm brings to attention what is relegated into the zone of nonbeing, the wretched of the earth. In the course of its unfolding it aims is to constitute a radically different paradigm that opens up towards the local and not the universal. It is a deliberate attempt to take subjectivity into account in the production of knowledge. In the process Western epistemology is taken to task for the marks it left and is still leaving in its wake, in terms of the power relations it created and sustains. The critique on Western epistemology forms part of the struggle against Western hegemony from the perspective of those who bear the brunt.

Decolonial critique outs me on several aspects in terms of gender, race, religion, wealth, and sexuality. These are identities over which I have no real

[111] Bernard C. Lategan, "Current Issues in the Hermeneutical Debate," *Neot* 18 (1984): 1.
[112] Lategan, "Current Issues," 1.
[113] Lategan, "Current Issues," 1.

choice, except perhaps for religion despite me being born into it. With these identities comes a particular epistemol-ogy that enables these identities to play a hegemonic role. A decolonial critique requires me to deconstruct that role in order to ensure the marks it would leave are not genocidal or epistemicidal.

Haman's masking of Jewish identity and Mordecai's flaunting of his own Jewishness are perhaps typical of Western epistemology's masking of and the decolonial turn's recognition of the importance of its own geo- and body political location. The point of comparison is coloniality that empowers one to do certain things and think in a certain way, namely categorising people in terms of being or nonbeing without taking into account one's own context. It is actually scary to realise how racial divisions get normalised by way of ancient cartographies and peace treaties. However, my identification with Haman is cathartic[114] in that his character succeeded in purging one's own role in the colonial matrix of power. The decolonial turn inevitably leaves a moral remainder.

The challenge is to respond credibly to the critique from the decolonial perspective. I cannot help feeling crushed under the charges, especially when labelled according to the geo- and body political context assumed by the mythical norm of what constitute valid readings of the biblical text. The question is whether one is carried out like Haman with the head covered or whether one stays and looks in the eyes of the damned and not denies the reflection. But what kind of engagement is required? Is something more than taking note of the critique required? If decolonial critique suggests a radical difference in the genealogy of thought, a new paradigm, it alludes to new role players with a new centre of power, the wretched of the earth. Does this mean that those within the colonial matrix of power retreat while provincializing their thoughts that had been bestowed for a long time with universal value?

Is it possible to construct something new when the critique destroys the integrity of the framework with which one works? What about the OT or HB? Will the study of Hebrew gain in significance in order to understand the original texts in their own geo- and body political contexts? Will there be space for reading the Hebrew text in the new paradigm? When I look what happens at my own institution, I am not optimistic, but then, the new paradigm enforced on us is very far removed for the decolonial one. It is a neo-liberal one firmly grounded in capitalism in which academia has become a mere commodity. And if it does not generate an income, it is shown the door.

Should one mourn the loss of the science of biblical interpretation in the wake of the construction of new knowledge based on a vastly different geo-

[114] Hans-Robert Jauβ, *Ästhetischer Erfahrung und literarische Hermeneutik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 277. Jauβ also distinguishes between associative, admirative, sympathetic and ironic identifications.

and body political framework? The construction of this essay in its entirety constitutes an act of reading whereby the reader rendered himself vulnerable to the demands of his socio-political/historical context, namely being white male middle class Christian.[115] It started off with a reading of the conflict between Mordecai and Haman with the underlying design that there is, out of necessity of virtually similar contexts, an emblematical parallel between the reader and Haman in terms of the notion of perpetrator. The conflict between Haman and Mordecai revealed what can be termed today as "race trouble." Race trouble reveals itself in those situations where parties participate in social life that remains structured by race. With Haman's supremacy and subsequent political power whereby he succeeds in othering Mordecai and his clan into oblivion, the power of Eurocentrism can be exposed in contemporary contexts where minority groups get a raw deal. The question is whether such a model is similar to the "direct approach" that allowed for the theological justification of apartheid. I would not say the processes are similar, because in the latter instance there was no ethics of interpretation involved, whereas in the former interpretation the reading and outing or interpellation of whiteness or Eurocentricity is the result of an ethics of interpretation.

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[115] See Anderson, *Ancient Laws*, 31.

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