HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies
ISSN: (Online) 2072-8050, (Print) 0259-9422

Welile Mazamisa in Gadamer's *Geisteswissenschaften*

Author:
Mzukisi W. Faleni[1]

Affiliation:
[1]Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Mzukisi Faleni,
2215973@myuwc.ac.za

Dates:
Received: 28 Mar. 2025
Accepted: 21 May 2025
Published: 11 Nov. 2025

How to cite this article:
Faleni M.W., 2025, 'Welile Mazamisa in Gadamer's *Geisteswissenschaften*', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 81(2), a10701. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v81i2.10701

Copyright:
© 2025. The Author. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Read online:
Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

The aim of this article is to locate the connections between Welile Mazamisa's hermeneutics and Gadamer's hermeneutics of tradition. It will investigate Mazamisa as a dialectical thinker within the *Geisteswissenschaften* of Gadamer. Mazamisa is viewed as a Gadamerian in the sense he subscribed to the hermeneutics of tradition which is sourced from ontology of Gadamer's *Geisteswissenschaften*. The contribution will consider how Mazamisa applied and interpreted Gadamer's *Geisteswissenschaften*, in his philological *Horizontverschmelzung* and how this makes him a Gadamerian. For both Gadamer and Mazamisa, hermeneutics is not only a method to do philology but a necessary backdrop in any exercise of hermeneutics that is not avertable. Finally, I wish to examine Mazamisa's hermeneutics of *ubuntu* through the thoughts and annotations of *Geisteswissenschaften*. I will consider whether the pillars of Gadamer's *Geisteswissenschaften* can be seen through the eyes of Mazamisa's hermeneutics of *ubuntu* or Gadamer could be found residing in the *Geisteswissenschaften* of Mazamisa.

Contribution: The article contributes to resuscitation of philosophical hermeneutics in South African's academic institutions. Furthermore, it tries to re-wed the two crucial cohorts: theology and philosophical hermeneutics. Philosophy is not theology, but theology without philosophical hermeneutics deteriorates philology.

Keywords:. tradition; *Geisteswissenschaften*; Gadamer; Mazamisa; hermeneutics; ontology; *bildung*; *Zwei Horizonte*.

Introduction

Momentary origin of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), German philosopher in the continental tradition, was a significant exponent of the phenomenology of interpretation. The 20th century witnessed the expansion of philosophical hermeneutics. That era is known for its linguistic turn and the continental philosophy[1] associates this with the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Habermas and many others, especially Gadamer's work, *Truth and method*, which is his *magnum opus* where he developed his understanding of philosophical hermeneutics (published in 1960 in German as *Wahrheit und Methode*).

Gadamer (1975:90) argues that the significance of the text does not rest with the individual reader and author. To him, all readers are the adversaries of the text because the reader is not in control of his or her presuppositions, pre-judgements, prejudices, and preconceptions. The meaning of the text lies somewhere in a universal tradition and ontology, which form the reader. Gadamer (1975:109) argues differently in the sense that what is before us is the product of what is not before us, and all the answers could be found in what is not before us. The individual reader is not that crucial in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics but rather is the ontology, the lived experience, historical consciousness, the life that joins humanity together and the form the text takes. The text is not only static and dead waiting to be given life by the interpreter or the reader; the text, according to Gadamer (2007:234), provokes the presuppositions and historical pre-judgements of the reader and influences the *horizonte* of the reader. It activates preconceptions and has been there before the reader and the author and will be there even after them (Thiselton 1980:108).

1.The term is basically used to define and describe philosophical tradition throughout the linguistic engagement of 19th and 20th centuries. These are the centuries of total paradigm shift in hermeneutics. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and Gadamer (1900–2002) were among the key role players. The linguistic turn is associated with these aforesaid philosophers.

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Honouring Prof. Welile Mazamisa: The Reader, the Text, and Two Horizons', under the expert guidance of guest editors Dr Mphumezi Hombana, Mr Otto Makalima, Prof. Dion Forster and Dr Mzukisi Faleni.

Some authors (e.g. Buber 1923:67) argue that reading is finding oneself in the text through those presuppositions, whereas Gadamer talks about the fusion of horizons.[2] Gadamer (2007:243) also claims that history is critical in any interpretation but he also does not see how the interpreter could access that needed history by suspending his or her preconceptions and prejudices which are a foremost challenge to historical interpretation. Rather, one should just be aware of his or her own shortfalls and limitations, one of which is the presupposition with which one approaches interpretation. Gadamer (1960:90) does not claim that his ontological hermeneutics is free of prejudices. Rather, he states that no history could be interpreted outside prejudices, as both history and text are products of peripatetic prejudices. It does not seem that Gadamer (2007:249) disregards the importance of the text in finding the meaning but he suggests it as the route, the initial stage to locating where the meaning is that it should serve as the pointer to ontology. The author should not be perceived as the absolute philologist of the text; the text existed before the author and will exist even after the author is gone. Therefore, answers regarding the text cannot be found in what is not perpetual, which is the text, for it is not permanent in the sense that its image represents its historicity and according to Derrida (1976:89), it is always deconstructed in the mind of the reader. Gadamer (1960:98) further argues that the interpreter or the reader is not central to the answers and implication of the text; what is or could be central is where the text emanated from, that is, ontology or *Bildung*. However, he acknowledges the person who values the text and places emphasis on certain points of the text that was already there before the so-called author arrived in the space (Thiselton 1992:60).

Gadamer (1960:78) further argues that a text has no present or past and no author but is a textile of grafts that is always already a fountain of connotations and meanings which are never contemporary but whose significance is always reconstructed by rescheduling. The construction of the text including the meaning is also not fixed and could be reconstructed to mean something absolutely different. All constructed meanings of the texts are violently imposed and can be reconstructed or replaced (Derrida 1976:89). Gadamer warns readers of the danger of falling into the trap of what they see, what they hear and what they perceive to be the case in the text – what the text does to them as the readers. Gadamer (1975:89) agrees that the text has power to leave its traces in the reader and that language is a vehicle that helps understanding and improves the *horizonte* of the reader. Gadamer (1975:90) reckons that understanding of philosophical hermeneutics belongs to a broader, unending conversational scope of hermeneutics and this is better witnessed in his metaphor of play. The elements of understanding include the gist or core of philosophical hermeneutics of what understanding is, how to understand and why we need to understand. Interpreting any text without uncovering the ontological basics of philosophical hermeneutics is not helpful and it limits the chances of correct understanding (Thiselton 1980:89). Ontology is divorced from classical hermeneutics and this makes that part of hermeneutics shallow and founded on assumptions. Gadamer (1975:123) has applied all these elements in order to uncover the truth and ontological hermeneutics does consider these as crucial to interpretation. We have already reiterated that what we have, including the text, should always be used as a methodology to take us to where we cannot see (Gadamer 1975:76). The text points us to its source and not the author who is regarded as the compiler. To Gadamer, the author is a focus of ontology and phenomenology, and one would have to seek understanding to come closer to the meaning. In most cases, one would notice that the meaning extracted from the text is fully clouded by prejudice, but whether that is legitimate prejudice or not matters not (Gadamer 2007:234).

A brief chronicle of Welile Mazamisa: The anti-clockwise trialogue[3] of the South

Llewellyn Welile Mazamisa (1942–2015) is one of the South African philologists who explored continental hermeneutics and executed it as the armament against the prejudicial academic context of South Africa's white apartheid biblical hermeneutics. Hombana (2024) views Mazamisa as one of those who interpreted the biblical text against the prejudicial traditional norms and values of the then pro-apartheid Stellenbosch University. Mazamisa repudiated to accept that the Western reader has the inimitable power to influence the text and that the text agrees only to be influenced by the West. According to Mazamisa (1987), understanding the text is a fundamental battle between understanding, pre-understanding and fusion of those *Zwei Horizonte* of which the reader cannot be reassigned and this has nothing to do with the truth and meaning, but only understanding (1987:64). It is Mazamisa's submission in his dissertation titled *Beatific Comradeship* (1987:67) that the text is a speaks-only when there is a familiar inter-connection or *Zusammenschaltung* between the reader's historical consciousness which is large and continuously widening, and the envisaged textual understanding. To Mazamisa, his black skin and *ubuntu* serves as his immovable *horizonte* into the text in order for meaning and understanding to originate. He captures this view in his concept of *Dialectica Reconciliae* (Dialectic of reconciliation).

Hombana (2024) notes that Mazamisa's contribution to philosophical hermeneutics has never been well received nor has it excited his generation and those after him. This could be associated with the death of refined philosophical hermeneutics in South African universities and the rise of indigenous contextual and biblical hermeneutics. Mazamisa is standing between the two unfused hermeneutical *horizonte* in South African hermeneutics, which is not black and white hermeneutics, but more of *Geisteswissenschaften*:

2.Gadamer (1960:78) argues that understanding cannot be realised without the fusion of horizons – from what an interpreter is aware of and familiar with to the unknown, that is, foreign.

3.Mazamisa read the text from his historical consciousness, the unique anti-clockwise reader of the South and the author *of The Beatific Comradeship (1987).* Mazamisa was undoubtedly the comrade of God within his people.

'the science of the mind of her two nations'. His trialogue hermeneutics should be seen as rehabilitation and restorative biblical hermeneutics from the South. The South according to Mazamisa is not purely the geographical location, but more of a source of hermeneutical presupposition which is dissimilar from the reader emanated from the North (Hombana 2024). Mazamisa was indeed a great unpretentious philologist of New Testament who was never enthusiastic about titles; we were astonished to discover long after his death that he got his PhD with cum laude and that is evident in his 1987 dissertation.

Mazamisa critiqued many textual approaches including historical methodology which was mainly used by white apartheid South African readers. Mazamisa (1987:234) states that structural analysis recognises discrepancies in historical criticism and also in existentialism. As the white South African reader is not miscellaneous enough in reading the text and this is evident in the first chapters of Mazamisa's work (1987), the question raised is, which textual and historical methodology are white South African readers certainly claiming to be dictating?

Mazamisa in Gadamer's *Geisteswissenschaften*

The stimulus of Gadamer on Mazamisa is noticeable predominantly where the notion of fusion of the past and present is designated and through that Mazamisa traces his reading umbilical cord to *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* to him is the connection between the reader and literature (*Zwei Horizonte* [Two Horizons]) through dialogical and conversional engagement, and this process influences the experiential horizon of the reader and changes it drastically (Mazamisa 1987:15).

All individuals and nations including those regarded as sophisticated in hermeneutics source their interpretation from their historical consciousness, which is *Bildung* (Gadamer 1970:67). For Gadamer, 'tradition' signifies both the coherent concretisation and the fulfilment of the historical progression in a specific period. He notes the difference between historical foundations as that is central to matters of historical study (thus fragments of the history) and the materials of historical inquiry in the present (1975:341). In Gadamer's view, tradition encompasses the continuity of the past in the present. He emphasises that the contents of tradition cannot be objectified within a single consciousness but it involves a whole soul of the community and is expanding continually through language (Gadamer 1975:123).

Mazamisa (1991) defines oral tradition, which also falls within the genre of *Geisteswissenschaften*, such that the communication is verbal testimony, depending on historical experiences. The information is not tested with modern scientific methodology because such traditions are viewed as above any scientific methodology, as Gadamer would argue. Mazamisa does not indicate in the article how the authenticity of these oral traditions is tested, except to put his trust on the soul of the community which is tradition in the context. Tradition, even in the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer, is free of prejudice and the truth of interpretation is found in tradition. We already stated earlier on that prejudice is in the interpretation, execution and implementation of tradition which is pure. Mazamisa qualifies his definition of tradition by stating that orality and tradition exist in the soul of all communities, where a human being's prejudice cannot influence but can be influenced. The orality serves as construction, deconstruction and modernisation of the past. Whereas Gadamer sees tradition as the influencer and source of interpretation for the individual interpreter, Mazamisa looks at it as the soul of the entire community from where things are sourced and distributed. Mazamisa is known as one of the philosophers who drank from the stream of continental hermeneutics and strongly subscribed to the philosophy of *ubuntu* which is mostly communal and opposed to the individualisation of people and is the soul of the community.

Gadamer (2007:90) disregards the importance of the text in finding the meaning and sees the text as only a pointer to where tradition could be found. His hermeneutics is sourced from phenomenology and ontology of Husserl and Heidegger. Hence, he argues that the text was born before the author and the reader; it has been there before and will be there even after the author and the reader (1975:128). This is surely the depth and ontology of tradition of the concept of the soul of the community. The assertion we wish to make in this discussion is that Mazamisa's historical consciousness (*ubuntu*) and source of tradition could be seen as having adequate muscle to do its own proper, authentic ontological and traditional hermeneutics, instead of being forced to believe that Western hermeneutics in rigorous as Jonker states (2010:48).

Gadamer (1975:43) states that there should be no criterion for interpretation outside historicity; hence, his idea of doing hermeneutics is through human beings in *Bildung*. Gadamer's hermeneutics seeks to create a new bridge with human tradition. His emphasis starts with the notion of human culture, *Bildung.* Thus, many Gadamerians strongly believe that Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot be understood outside *Bildung* and ontology, which is the basis of culture and where ontology is contained (1975:34). Here, I show that Gadamer views the text from an unfathomable philosophical level which is the historical consciousness of the reader, author and the text. Both Heidegger and Gadamer offer a new alternative to interpretation based on an ontological existential understanding of tradition in hermeneutics.

On the other hand, Mazamisa (1987) is introduced into the thick tradition of South African hermeneutics that was brewed and produced by the biggest academic apartheid institution in South Africa, Stellenbosch University. Viewing Mazamisa as a Gadamerian is directly linked to how Gadamer sees the influence of tradition in all we do including in academic institutions. According to the notion of

Gadamer's tradition and how Mazamisa understood it, the problem was not in the institution but in the deleterious traditions of those who led and established the institution as traditional owners, as they used their tradition and their tradition used them to operate the institution (1987:64). According to Gadamer, and this is also Mazamisa's understanding, it is not possible for anyone to think and operate outside prejudicial tradition. Mazamisa, as a Gadamerian, considers critically not only prejudicial biblical hermeneutics but also the role of tradition in executing prejudicial traditional hermeneutics as it happened in Stellenbosch University. Hombana (2024) calls the reaction of Mazamisa, the clashing trajectories of hermeneutics of traditions between Stellenbosch prejudicial tradition and Mazamisa.

Mazamisa in Gadamer's *Horizontverschmelzung*

Gadamer's hermeneutics of tradition is a very imperative and central element in understanding what is processed through conversation and accessed through language. Gadamer sees it as 'the authority of what is being passed on', meaning, it is hereditary. Gadamer regards tradition as playing a part in determining our behaviour – how we respond and relate to others (Gadamer 1975:264). To Gadamer (1975:9), tradition refers to the communal, cultural, historical and social context that profiles our understanding of the world and is entrenched in the past, but it is not fixed – a frozen static or a frozen entity. Rather, it is a dynamic and developing progression that figures out our contemporary understanding. It is continuously and permanently located in the past, but perpetually influencing the future of humanity. Tradition is interpreted through language which is not possessed or controlled by us. Gadamer (2000:231) states that tradition does not belong to us, we belong to it; we find ourselves participating in it and through it; we have access to our historical consciousness through it; we are not non-linguistic or pre-linguistic given. When we deal with tradition through language, we respond to our current situation through what is already experienced. In Gadamer's view, tradition is not necessarily something one can remove from how one looks at things as it is not escapable.

Those who read both Mazamisa and Gadamer strongly feel that tradition, as the source of all interpretations, is the point that makes Mazamisa a Gadamerian (Hombana 2024). The point of this essay is not to compare traditions per se but to argue that Mazamisa's tradition is the source of his interpretation, in line with Gadamer's view that there is nothing outside tradition and its context for that matter. Gadamer (1975:45) sees tradition as a fixed normal condition for reflecting who we are as humans. We are permanently located and positioned within our tradition and it is not perceived as something outside, but 'us in us'. This is clearly observed in how Mazamisa treats the concept of *ubuntu* as a valid hermeneutical theory – that is, *ubuntu* is 'us in us' and is inescapable and it serves as the only internal historical source of consciousness and interpretation which is inherited from our tradition (1987:67).

Hombana (2024) sees Mazamisa's traditional hermeneutics as being rooted in the torture of Steve Biko and the brutal killings of June 1976 and other similar atrocities which made him to be the unique anti-clockwise reader of the South which contradicted apartheid theology. In other words, the back and forth conversation, which is traditional and fore-worded, could be the dialogue between two or more traditions rather than individuals trying to find understanding and meaning. Mazamisa (1991) states that the interpretation of the Bible in South Africa is in the hands of white males, meaning, the stronger the tradition the sturdier the hermeneutics. The tradition of white males in South Africa has been made robust in all sectors of life including the economy and that dominated the hermeneutics of other groups including black people in South Africa. This power of tradition in hermeneutics has been observed by Jonker who claims that Western biblical hermeneutics is more rigorous than African hermeneutics, which is considered emotional (Jonker 2010:47). This proves Mazamisa's point that the nation that is most favoured economically is often the nation that dominates in biblical hermeneutics because of its tradition.

Gadamer and Mazamisa on prejudicial tradition

All traditions are free from prejudice but emanate and are interpreted from and by prejudice that dominates hermeneutics of tradition (Thiselton 1992:69). We are all involuntary positioned in tradition and through it, we are able to sense our environment; in the world, we adjust, work and establish our progress in spaces that fit us well (Gadamer 1976:123). The point of tradition is not to remove prejudice but to search for truth and knowledge within our world. Tradition is free from any prejudice of any particular nation but the interpretation of all traditions comes with prejudice. In the case of South Africa, Mazamisa (1991) argues that prejudicial tradition of intellectual white people in South Africa sustained white domination and used it to shape hermeneutics and other academic processes. Their tradition and prejudice are the accepted and adequate method of interpretation and they were also made to believe that the text itself accepts and agrees with the theory of hermeneutics that emanates from their traditional consciousness (Heidegger 1963:71).

Mazamisa (1987:81) agrees with Gadamer (1975:269) that because tradition is always accurate but, its hermeneutics not absolute because of prejudice, it should be clearly open to correction. This is the point Mazamisa (1991) is trying to highlight when he says that philology is in the control of white people in South Africa and it emanates from prejudicial hermeneutics which interpreted tradition. White people who dominated philology failed to correct their initial prejudicial tradition by reworking their preconceptions and work on that unending circle as Gadamer would suggest in his metaphor of play (1975:234). According to both Gadamer and

Mazamisa, there is one prejudice and that is the one that denies prejudice itself and denies tradition's power and authority in hermeneutics. Gadamer states that it is through tradition that we can understand our environment and our world (1975:314), and it is through prejudice that we are able to interpret the same world we live in. The initial point, according to Gadamer, is to accept that tradition is prejudicial, meaning, doing things the way things were always done and that is the only legitimate authority and power in tradition. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics of prejudice confronts and it is the reversal of Enlightenment of awareness that achieving objectivity is thinkable by putting aside all prejudices. Enlightenment considered prejudice as an authority and product of misjudgement, and this is what strengthened apartheid hermeneutics in the hands of white males, to deny prejudice in their interpretation of biblical text (Mazamisa 1991).

It is within the territory and parameters of conversation and understanding that one's prejudices surface. This is the advantage highlighted by Mazamisa in many of his writings especially in his article published in 1991, *Reading from this Place,* which is cited extensively in this article.

In my opinion, eliminating prejudice is both unnecessary and impossible. It is a kind of war that cannot be won as it emanates from tradition and I suppose this is one of Gadamer's goals–to rehabilitate the term prejudice so that it does not carry a negative stigma (Gadamer 1975:369). It seems the best remedy for dealing with prejudice is to be aware of it, which those who were identified by Mazamisa as having dominated hermeneutics failed to acknowledge but called rigorous hermeneutics. If anyone imagines that they are uninfluenced by prejudice in their conversations but argues that knowledge is based on the objectivity of their processes and rejects the role of historical prejudice, which influences experience, then the authority of prejudices that unconsciously dominate them as a dynamism acting behind that person has the chances of causing irreversible atrocities (Gadamer 1975:356). It is impossible, in Gadamer's view, to escape historical prejudice but that does not imply that prejudices already discovered, like hermeneutical prejudice, should not be challenged and replaced by new prejudices that influence and change understanding. In Mazamisa's words, white men in South Africa should understand and be conscious of the fact that they read the biblical text and implemented it, having been influenced by their superiority prejudice. They read themselves in the text, which is what Buber calls 'I in Thou' (Buber 1923:24).

Gadamer offers a fresh view of understanding the text which should cause a reaction in conservative subscribers of spontaneous hermeneutics (Gadamer 1975:78). According to Gadamer (1960:123), human beings have modes and angles that are fully connected to their lived experiences and cannot be demarcated by science; their thinking is restricted within those boundaries. The idea of understanding and of all its elements transcend the ideal of scientific methodology in doing hermeneutics. Gadamer (1960:125) argues that those who interpret the text and expect to understand its context away from its tradition are unlikely to win. In fact, Gadamer follows Heidegger and Heidegger draws from Husserl in making hermeneutics an ontology of understanding such that hermeneutics of phenomenology, ontology and understanding are all intertwined. To highlight ontology is to avoid making interpretation only a psycho-social process. Gadamer (1975:79) notes that many things are not in the text that are connected to the text through ontology, which should be considered in interpreting a text, as those things are the core of the meaning of any text and are rooted in tradition.

Metaphor and *Zwei Horizonte* in Gadamer and Mazamisa

Metaphor is an essential linguistic phenomenon; it is the transference of the name of one thing to another. It employs and forms experience to define unformed experience systematically, expressing the meaning of the world and associating meanings with the world in the process of revealing truth (Gadamer 1998:123). Studies of how metaphors work may date back to Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*. Although Gadamer does not define metaphors in his book, metaphors have been used vastly in his book to indicate the role of language in hermeneutics, emphasising that language is the fundamental aspect of interpretation in creating meaning, which operates from the known to the unknown, as Schleiermacher would say. For instance, fusion of horizon and play are significant metaphors in the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer and that represent Mazamisa's *Dialectica Reconciliae.*

Fusion of horizon

It is Gadamer (1975:176) who argues that in hermeneutics it is crucial to distinguish the distinctiveness on the one hand, and determinacy and indeterminacy on the other hand, of both horizons, namely, the *horizonte* of the hermeneutic and the *horizonte* of the text.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's metaphor of fusion of horizons (German: *Horizontverschmelzung*) is the technique through which the parties in a hermeneutical discourse and conversation establish the comprehensive context within which they come to a communal and shared understanding (Faleni 2020). The fusion of horizons is one of Gadamer's (1975:172) core concepts. He employs this to explain how different perspectives become integrated in order to find a more comprehensive understanding and meaning. For meaning to emerge and for understanding to transpire, a historical fusion of present and past is therefore required.

In Gadamer's view, conversation (German: *Gespräch)* is a crucial aspect of being itself; it closes the distance between people and helps to overcome solipsism in epistemology. The objective of dialogue is to unveil the truth through mutual contributions (Gadamer 1975:169). For Gadamer (1975:245), the mediation of meaning through dialogue

serves as a hermeneutical model for understanding what understanding entails. His conception of familiarity as an open practice paves the approach for the idea that meaning cannot be resolute through propositional lucidity, but through the robust rationality of questioning and answering. Gadamer (1975:123) insists that the experience of truth cannot be captured by any scientific methodology.

Gadamer emphasises the openness of experience and an unending process of dialogue. The nature of experience therefore cannot be explained through a theoretical fixation on the object of experience (1975:167). Dialogue is not solitary but rather emerges through a conversation between the interpreter and the text so that different opinions are brought together into play. Gadamer (1975:89) rejects the idea of a fixed, objective truth that can be uncovered through a methodical process. Instead, he argues for a more dynamic understanding of truth led by dialogue as something that emerges through the interpretative process itself.

Mazamisa's *Zwei Horizonte*

A person who interprets without horizon cannot see far enough; to obtain a *horizonte* means that the reader acquires skills to look yonder what is near at hand in order to find better perception. According to Mazamisa (1987:234), *Zwei Horizonte* leads us to an open point where others can sincerely contest our own viewpoints and we are able to distinguish the specification of our horizon and that of the others in relation to larger community.

All textual interpretations are about the lived experiences of the people in that particular context of the reader. Those experiences are used in interpretation and they constitute cultures and are viewed later as historical consciousness (Mazamisa 1987:98). On Mazamisa's emphasis on the philosophy of *ubuntu* (*buntufication*), he always looks at this concept as the starting point of the reader's horizon to share understanding – the philosophy for which Mazamisa is best known to those who knew him in person (Hombana 2024). This emanates from his point that no interpreter has the power to interpret outside himself or herself as we all move horizons, cultures and ontological knowledge to interpret. Hermeneutics of *ubuntu* does not see the other as a means to an end. Instead, the other and otherness are founded in the moral earnestness of a person, which is an end in itself.

Mazamisa (1991) states that textual interpretation is in the hands of white males in South Africa and that means they legitimise their horizon as the only universal and standard way of doing philology As Gadamer (1975:123) defines understanding as self, why not then look into Mazamisa's idea of the *ubuntu* as self? This implies that the African self or horizon as the starting point of understanding others including the biblical text is not good enough (Pobee 1979:67). This could be the reason that biblical interpretations are always seen as contrary to African ontology because of the foreign self. According to Buber (1923:78), reading is finding or searching for self in all texts ('I in thou') and once that is achieved, fusion of horizon will occur, then, will also understanding take place. The self, according to Gadamer and Buber, is fixed in the historical consciousness, no one speaks, thinks and interprets outside the historicity of which Gadamer named it *Bildung*. The location of horizon should be seen as an open textbook that sources its power from the experiences of the people who are reading and interpreting the texts (Pobee 1979:98). Mazamisa's submission is that Africans should understand self, which is their legitimate *horizonte* that should connect with the text in order for reading and understanding to take place. Thiselton (2009:178) notes that colonisation and apartheid are the context and horizon of doing hermeneutics in South Africa. Thiselton speaks as if it were possible for a person to interpret outside himself or herself. In the South African context, interpretation of *ubuntu* has been oppressed socially and economically; and those who were burdened, subscribed to the interpretation of oppressors which was meant to degrade their own ontology. This is clearly canvassed by Mazamisa (1991) under the heading *Orality and Tradition*.

According to Mazamisa (1987:107), the biblical text has been interpreted for Africans through Western hermeneutical lens and this has created tension between the biblical text and African hermeneutics. It is true that the world of the reader is attached to the reader's psyche which is informed by his or her lived experiences, then, why should Africans adopt the Western psyche in order to interpret the biblical text which is not a Western text. When we read closely using the lens of Mazamisa of *buntufication*, one would notice that the main elements which constitute Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics are not new in the African context, like historical consciousness, conversation and understanding (Gadamer 1960:98). *Ubuntu* as the source of horizon for interpretation has all those Gadamer's elements and makes us believe that Mazamisa was indeed a Gadamerian. Mazamisa's approach to biblical hermeneutics could be used to understand and liberate the text from the hands of white males of South Africa.

Gadamer on Mazamisa's *Buntufication*

Ubuntu methodology in the context of Mazamisa (1987:234) serves as diachronic approach which emphasises that the meaning and understanding of the text is embedded in the socio-historical context far behind the text rather than in the text itself. Both Mazamisa on *ubuntu* and Gadamer on tradition asserts that the interpreting subject can never be accurately free from its historicity and to advocate otherwise would be a cheating.

Tsenay Serequebehan affirms that the ontological hermeneutics of Gadamer may serve as the basis for an adequate African hermeneutics given that Gadamer (1994:34) sees tradition as the groundwork for understanding. Ubuntu hermeneutics discourse consists of an interplay between

tradition and the lived experiences of Africans, including culture and traditions (Serequebehan 1994:79).

We already stated earlier that any indigenous hermeneutics could draw on Gadamer's concepts which are also embedded in Mazamisa's hermeneutics of *ubuntu* and in his emphasis on traditional historicity, which is the basis of his textual reading. Likewise, Samuel Okere suggests that the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer (1983:68) may serve as a conceptual vehicle that allows African traditions to move forward amid changing circumstances. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is not aimed at creating new knowledge in the way science does. Instead, the *Geisteswissenschaften* reflects on existential experiences of human finitude. For Gadamer (1975:123), historicity as the starting point of hermeneutics thus implies firstly a role in the arts and secondly in the humanities. For Okere (1983:115), Gadamer's emphasis on tradition may help Africans to reflect on their own traditions as the context within which hermeneutical reflection takes place. Peter Mtuze (2004:234) indicates that the tradition of all interpreters encompasses the history of the belongings and traditions of that interpreter. Through those traditions, pre-judgements are formed of the interpreter's culture which also creates the context of argument. For Mtuze and Okere, the hermeneutics of tradition of Gadamer is therefore a familiar method for African hermeneutics.

In Gadamer's (1975:213) view, there is no single correct interpretation; interpretation involves a recurring mediation of the present and past, to a point that the sense of the text cannot be narrowed to the meaning of the author or be regarded as an objectivity of the author, this is best narrated in Gadamer's metaphor of play. Instead, the text only becomes active in the to and fro dialogue between the text and the *Vorverstehen* of the reader. For Gadamer, this yields a fusion of horizons. In the case of biblical hermeneutics, this implies the possibility of blending the historical context of the Bible with the contextual realities of the interpreter (Okere 1983:123). This is within Gadamer's (1975:178) position that no one has the ability to interpret something outside his or her indigenous tradition without being influenced by a particular historical consciousness. The major tension in the horizon trajectories is that those who dominated biblical interpretation wants to force their historical consciousness as the only legitimate reading horizon to others (Adamo 2001:23).

Mazamisa, the *Geisteswissenschaften* reader

In his article published on Scriptura 1991 titled: '*Reading from this place: From orality to literacy/textuality and back'*, the question raised by Mazamisa is why are white people in South Africa allowed to dominate the text which has the power to liberate the oppressed the same way it is used to dominate them? Mazamisa reads quite a number of texts to liberate others including his 1987 dissertation on Luke titled, 'Beatific comradeship'. Mazamisa moves from the premise that no single author can claim the sole authorship and meaning of the text as the text has the potentiality of self-production.

It is Mazamisa's views that effective interpretation is a dialectical happening categorised by the progression of the hermeneutical circle or went through the spiral movement. Exegesis starved of hermeneutics, or vice versa, leads to alienating one-sidedness. In dialectical process, the text is aligning the horizon of the reader as they need each other just as much as form and content do, and they imagine each other. Ancient texts should be defied by the data of the horizon of the contemporary reader to make them effective and relevant (Mazamisa 1987:167).

According to Mazamisa (1987:22), semantic indeterminacy of specific text could easily interpret the text differently, and this is almost the answer of how Mazamisa interpreted the text from the concept of *ubuntu*. The text is autonomous, each text functions within a particular communicative framework out of which there is a position to decode and decipher the multivalent meaning in conjunction with *Wirkungsgeschichte* (Mazamisa 1987:20).

The text evokes and transforms incipiently the horizon of anticipation of the reader. Impartiality in this perspective could mean being not inside the understanding of the interpreter and anything external from the scope of the interpreter's mind shuts the door for the interpreter to enter the text (Faleni 2020).

The interpreter is the earpiece of the impartial text but what motivates the reader to the text is confidential and in the *Geisteswissenschaften*. The significance of the text, such as any texts, also possesses historical background, which is absolutely out of the influence of the interpreter and even the author. In Mazamisa's view, the background *ubuntu* is the fixed reading and interpretative background which *Bildung.*

In this situation, one also needs to be conscious of the contextual settings of the interpreter, which is central in the elucidation of the text, not the author (Smit 2015:67). The reading of text is the manufacturing or deconstruction by the reader and the power of the fusion of horizon will show that whenever you read a text, you will be transformed and be not the person you were before engaging the text, and this places Mazamisa as a dialectical reader.

The interpretation of the reader, therefore, involves the construction, reconstruction and deconstruction of the text (Fish 1989:57). This confirms that one cannot read without using resources from one's context. The initial authoritative resource is oneself and what moulded the person (*ubuntu* in the case of Mazamisa), and these things avoid the interpreter from being unbiased and one of those is tradition, which leads to being *Dialectica Reconciliae.*

In the process of the reader trying to find meaning, 'one should be careful not to confuse the impression that the text has on the reader with the meaning of the text' (Smit 2015:67). The truth and the meaning are located in the tradition which can only be accessed through the fusion of horizons.

The impression of the text has to do with the sensation and feeling of the interpreter and that is the environment of the interpreter that is stimulated by reading the text. This world of the reader is something that is necessary and unavoidable, hence, Mazamisa (1991) suggests the refined philosophy of *ubuntu* as the world of African reader as opposed to the forced world from the hands of white males.

Conclusion

Mazamisa was indeed a Gadamerian but this is not influenced by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics but by the fact that Mazamisa could see himself in *Geisteswissenschaften* of Gadamer. The same could be said about Gadamer, that he is Mazamisarian, as the hermeneutics of *ubuntu* is older than Gadamer. In engaging with Gadamer's *philosophische hermeneutic,* one who knows Mazamisa will find him in the tradition [*Überlieferung*] of Gadamer.

This strongly suggests that Gadamer's hermeneutics may serve as the basis for an adequate *ubuntu* hermeneutics given that Gadamer sees tradition as the groundwork for understanding, conversation and the foundation of doing philosophical hermeneutics.

Acknowledgements

Sections of the article stem from the author's (M.W.F.) degree of Doctor of Theology (Old Testament) at the University of the Western Cape, Department of Religion and Theology, South Africa. Please refer to: https://uwcscholar.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11394/8286/faleni_phd_arts_2020.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1.

Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

Author's contribution

M.W.F. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

The author declares that all data that support this research article and findings are available in the article and its references.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author, and is the product of professional research. The views do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

Adamo, D., 2001, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament*, Wipf & Stock, Eugene, OR.

Buber, M., 1923, *I and Thou*, Simon and Schuster, New York, NY.

Derrida, J., 1976, *Of grammatology*, transl. G. Chakravorty Spivak, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Faleni, M.W., 2020, 'Patriarchy in the House of Jacob and the House of Phalo: Contribution to Contextual Hermeneutics: Old Testament', PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, Bellville.

Fish, S., 1989, *Doing what comes naturally: Change, rhetoric, and the practice of theory in literary and legal studies*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Gadamer, H.C., 1998, 'The universality of the meaning and scope', *Western Journal of Nursing Research, Hermeneutical Problem*, transl. D. Linge, 12(2):241–253, Hermeneutic tradition from Ast to Ricoeur.

Gadamer, H.G., [1960] 2000, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. edn., transl. J. Weinsheimer & D. Marshall, Continuum, New York, NY.

Gadamer, H.G., [1970] 2000, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. edn., transl. J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall, Continuum, New York.

Gadamer, H.G., [1975] 1985, *Truth and Method* [Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik], transl. D. Linge, Crossroad Publishing, New York.

Gadamer, H.G., 1976, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, transl. D. Linge, University of California Press, Los Angeles, CA.

Gadamer, H.G., 1983, *Truth and Method*. [Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzügeeiner philosophischen Hermeneutik], transl. D. Linge, Sheed &Ward, London.

Gadamer, H.G., 1994, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, transl. D.E. Linge (ed.), 2nd edn. vols. 1–3, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Gadamer, H.G., 2007, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, transl. D. Linge, University of California, Los Angeles, CA.

Heidegger, M., 1963, *Being and Time*, transl. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, SCM Press, London.

Hombana, M., 2024, 'Dialectica reconciliae: Mazamisa's contribution to the historical development of New Testament interpretation in South Africa', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45(1), a3000. https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3000

Jonker, L., 2010, 'The global context and its consequences for Old Testament interpretation', in L.C. Jonker & M.J. Melanchthon (eds.), *Global hermeneutics reflection and consequences*, pp. 47–57, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, GA.

Mazamisa, L.W., 1987, *Beatific comradeship: An exegetical-hermeneutical study of luke 10:25–37*, Kok, Kampen.

Mazamisa, L.W., 1991, *Reading from this place: From orality to literacy: Textuality and back*, pp. 67–72, University of Cape Town, Cape Town.

Mtuze, P.T., 2004, *Introduction to Xhosa culture: Celebrating ten years of democracy*, Lovedale Press, Alice.

Okere, T., 1983, *African philosophy: A historico-hermeneutical investigation of conditions of its possibility*, University Press of America, Lanham, MD.

Pobee, J.S., 1979, *Towards an African theology*, Abingdon, Nashville, TN.

Schleiermacher, F.D.E., 1977, *Hermeneutics: The handwritten manuscripts*, transl. J. Duke, J. Forstman & H. Kimmerle, Scholars Press, Missoula.

Serequebehan, T., 1994, *The hermeneutics of African philosophy*, Routledge, London.

Smit, D., 2015, 'Reading the Bible through the ages?', *Historical and hermeneutical perspectives Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1(2), 175–194.

Thiselton, A.C., 1980, *The two horizons: New Testament hermeneutics and philosophical description with special reference to heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Thiselton, A.C., 1992, *New horizons in hermeneutics*, Harper Collins, London.

Thiselton, A.C., 2009, *Hermeneutics: An introduction*, W.B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.