

# “Am I really part and owner of this story?”

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Musa W. Dube’s Postcolonial Feminist  
Hermeneutics of the Bible

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## Contents

I INTRODUCTION.....	5
1.1. The Bible and imperialist journeys.....	5
1.2. Musa W. Dube.....	7
1.3. Research question, sources, and previous studies.....	8
II POSTCOLONIALISM AND FEMINISM.....	12
2.1. History of the concept of ‘postcolonial’.....	12
2.2. Postcolonial criticism or theory?.....	13
2.3. Feminism.....	16
2.4. Feminist theology and African women’s theology.....	19
III POSTCOLONIALISM AND FEMINISM AS DUBE’S HERMENEUTICAL LENSES.....	23
3.1. Dube’s understanding of postcolonialism.....	23
3.2. Colonizing narratives.....	29
3.3. Decolonizing the mind.....	31
3.4. Dube’s feminism.....	34
3.5. Interconnectedness of postcolonialism and feminism.....	40
IV POSTCOLONIAL AND FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE.....	44
4.1.1. Imperial ideology in the Bible – context of origins.....	44
4.1.2. Exodus and conquest.....	45
4.1.3. The Gospels and imperial ideology.....	48
4.2.1. The Bible as a tool of imperialism.....	50
4.2.2. Bible translations as colonial practices.....	54
4.3. Traitor’s Bible – hermeneutics for identity.....	56
V POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST READING PRACTICES.....	63
5.1. Reading with African Independent Churches.....	63
5.2. Other stories and the Bible.....	67
5.3. Rahab’s reading prism.....	70
VI THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS.....	75
6.1. Christology.....	75
6.2. Mission.....	80
6.3. Theology of religions.....	83
VII CONCLUSIONS.....	89
VIII SOURCES AND LITERATURE.....	95
Sources.....	95
Literature.....	98



# I INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. *The Bible and imperialist journeys*

*The Lord is famous for his wonderful deeds, and he is kind and merciful. He has shown his mighty power to his people and has given them the lands of other nations. (Psalm 111: 4, 6)*

Traveling to new areas and lands is a continual element in the Bible as different journeys are an integral part of both Testaments. The patriarchs travel where God assigns them, later the people of Israel travel from Egypt to the Promised Land and, again, to the asylum and back home. In the New Testament, Jesus, the eternal Word travels from his Father to the world and sends his disciples to the ends of the earth. The journeys in the Bible have been imitated and they have offered a point of identification for many. While the biblical texts have inspired many, the travel story has duplicated itself and the Bible has been brought to new places. But where do the biblical travelers of past and present times arrive? Whose land do they approach? When God assigns a destination, is it always free for entering?<sup>1</sup>

Musa Dube's postcolonial and feminist interpretation of the Bible reviews the travels that well from the biblical stories. She reads the Bible as a collection of texts that take journeys in time and space and have had - and continue to have – a strong impact on cultures, social institutions, gender balance, and politics everywhere it is read. The Bible for her, is not a book about history, rather, it is a book that reshapes history. As an African woman theologian Dube reads the Bible with her eye on the patriarchal and colonial oppression in the texts. She enunciates:

[...]the Bible should be read as an imperialist text – a text that was used to subjugate other races and nations, men as well as women; a text that articulates an ideology of imperialism.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible has its roots in Africa as some of the biblical stories of both Testaments take place in the continent. It has been pointed out that the systematic interpretation of the Bible started in Africa by early church theologians such as Origen and Clement of Alexandria.<sup>3</sup> The massive coming of the Christian Bible to sub-Saharan Africa, however, took place at the same time with intensified

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Dube 2000a.

<sup>2</sup> Dube 1998a, 229.

<sup>3</sup> Ukpong 2000, 11, 14-15; Okure 2000, 15.

European colonial presence. Especially the protestant missionary movement was inspired by the idea of translating the Bible into the local languages. Missionaries held different positions in relation to the colonial powers, but all in all, they participated in the operation of making the “Dark continent” approachable and civilized. Musa Dube observes the link between the Bible and colonial power. She comes back to the often cited story about the coming of the Bible to the African continent: The white men came with the Bible and told the Africans to close their eyes for prayer. After the prayer the lands of the Africans belonged to the whites, and the Bible to the Africans. Dube asks, how can people who have suffered from colonialism and patriarchal domination read the Bible while its role in colonial conquest and its negative attitude towards women are acknowledged? <sup>4</sup> The same question is captured in the title of this study which is a citation from Dube: “Am I really part and owner of this story?” <sup>5</sup> This question pronounces the meaning of personal and global history in relation to the Bible.

Whenever the Bible is read it is always also interpreted. Hermeneutics as a field of study concerns the act of interpretation and presupposes that the interpretations are many. Finding the meaning of any given text means that choices have to be made. <sup>6</sup> Since the 1960’s contextual theology and contextual hermeneutics of the Bible have been challenging the historical critical exegesis that has dominated the academic interpretations of the Bible. Especially voices from the Two-Thirds World <sup>7</sup> have been active in situating the social location and context of the reader as the footing for interpreting the Bible. This reflects developments in the understanding of history: the rise of social history has promoted the history of marginalized groups and given space to, for instance, women’s histories, and the histories of indigenous peoples. This has resulted in a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of history. Contextual theology means bringing the previously ignored to the center; present human experience is

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<sup>4</sup> Kinoti & Waliggo 1997, 1; Dube 2000b, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Dube 2000a, 157.

<sup>6</sup> Davies 2007, 494.

<sup>7</sup> The concept Two-Thirds World is employed in this research for the sake of clarity as it is used by Dube. Also, the more commonly used term ‘Third World’ is much contested because it carries outdated political implications from the Cold War era where the term originally comes from marking the non-aligned countries of the South. It has also been seen as anti-Marxist, as Marxist states made up the ‘Second World’. It has been claimed that ‘Third World’ enhances a hierarchy in relation to the first and second worlds. It has also become associated with poverty, debt, famine, conflict, hence, contributing to the homogenized picture of the South. Young 2001, 4; Thomas 2000, 6-7.

a source of theology together with Scripture and the tradition of the Church.<sup>8</sup> Like contextual theology, contextual biblical hermeneutics as a term is problematic, for all interpretation is bound to be contextual. All interpretations are more or less affected by the interpreter and her/his context. Contextual interpretation of the Bible, however, goes a step further from admitting the contextual nature of all hermeneutical action: Contextual biblical hermeneutics means embracing and advocating the context in the process of interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

In biblical hermeneutics, applying postcolonial and feminist interpretations is part of movement that gives the reader and her/his context space in the process of interpretation. The original meaning of texts, as their authors or author communities intended, is given less attention.<sup>10</sup> In this kind of understanding of hermeneutics, meaning is a process that is constructed from the encounter of the text and the reader.<sup>11</sup>

## **1.2. Musa W. Dube**

Musa Wenkosi Dube was born in Botswana, then Bechuanaland, in 1964. Her mother tongue is Nbedele as the family migrated to Botswana from Zimbabwe in the 1950's. The land where they used to herd and cultivate was given to white settlers and inhabitants in the area were given two options: either to stay as servants of the new landowners, or to leave to infertile lands that were called "reserves". After working for the white settlers for a while the family migrated to Botswana.<sup>12</sup> Dube, however, constantly refers to her background as a Motswana and Setswana speaker and although her personal background is something she strongly emphasizes, in the majority of her texts she does not even mention the Nbedele background she also has.<sup>13</sup> Botswana was never directly colonized but was under British protectorate from the Berlin conference in 1885 until its independence in 1966. The role of Botswana in the European colonization was mainly to play part in building the railway across the African continent, as was the dream of Cecil Rhodes. Being mostly covered by desert, Botswana was left with less colonial control than most other British dependencies. The British influence was, however, present in the country in various ways. Dube constantly refers to

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<sup>8</sup> Lyman 2007, 483; Bevans 1992, 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> West 2000, 595. See Latvus 2002, 28-31 for conversation on the term 'contextual theology'.

<sup>10</sup> For instance Kevin Vanhoozer defends the search for the original meaning of the biblical texts. See his book 'Is There a Meaning in This Text?'. Vanhoozer 1998.

<sup>11</sup> West 1995, 23; Segovia 1995, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Dube 2001e, 149; Dube 1998a, 225.

<sup>13</sup> See Dube 2001e Dube 2000a.

her own experiences as a colonial subject whose life was moulded by the colonial power. For instance, Dube went through an English school system and attended church services in an English speaking Methodist congregation. Dube earned her Master's degree in New Testament studies from the University of Durham, United Kingdom, writing about Mary as an ancestor. Dube was introduced to postcolonial theories by Fernando Segovia during her post-graduate studies in the United States. She defended her doctoral dissertation in the University of Vanderbilt, in 1997. Currently she is an associate professor in the University of Gaborone, Botswana, teaching New Testament studies.<sup>14</sup>

For Dube an important scholarly network has been the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, known as the Circle. The network was launched in Accra, Ghana, in 1989 and it pulls together women of different professions across Africa and in diaspora in Europe, North America and the Caribbean. The Circle women are bound together by their understanding that religion is important to them personally, and it holds prospects for improvement in women's position in religious movements and in society at large. Most of the Circle members are Christians but the network is open to all religions and it recognizes the triple religious heritage of Africa. The Circle shares no other creed than the willingness to work for women's best in their interest groups.<sup>15</sup>

### **1.3. Research question, sources, and previous studies**

The aim of this study is to analyze Dube's postcolonial feminist hermeneutics of the Bible. It seeks to find out how she uses her theoretical framework, postcolonial criticism and feminism, for interpreting the Bible, and what the theological implications of her interpretations are. Systematic analysis is the method used in this study. Systematic analysis as a method seeks to explain both explicit and implicit basis of Dube's theological thought. Analyzing central concepts and themes in Dube's thought and situating them in correlation with each other helps to form a general view of her hermeneutics.<sup>16</sup>

In chapter two, an introduction to postcolonial criticism and feminism will be presented. Chapter three will discuss Dube's understanding of these schools of thought as her hermeneutical lenses. Chapter four will examine her understanding

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<sup>14</sup> Fawcus – Tilbury 2000, 19; Dube 1998a, 225; Dube 1999a, 39-40; Dube 2008, 44-45; Dube 2000b, ix.

<sup>15</sup> Pemberton 2003, 6-8; Oduyoye 2008, 105.

<sup>16</sup> For systematic analysis see Raunio 2007, 109-110. Raunio explains how systematic analysis as a method is understood in the Finnish theological discourse.



of the Bible as a colonial and patriarchal book from the perspective of its origins and its use in history. Reading practices that Dube employs are introduced in chapter five. In chapter six, the theological implications of Dube's hermeneutics are analyzed as her understanding of mission, Christology, and theology of religions are under examination. These themes were chosen since Dube's hermeneutics have serious consequences on them. Christology, mission, and theology of religions are emphasized in her biblical interpretation and they visibly reflect her theoretical frameworks as well as her personal background. It is not the aim of this study to comment on Dube's reading models for their methodological accuracy, nor to evaluate her exegetical enquiry, but they are covered only as they shed light on her hermeneutics.

The sources of this study are published between 1996 and 2007. They represent Dube's hermeneutics of the Bible, but all her publications during this period are not included. Dube is an HIV/AIDS activist and scholar, and her work contains an extensive amount of publications on the topic. From 2002 to 2004 Dube worked as a regional HIV/AIDS consultant for Southern Africa employed by the World Council of Churches. In this study her HIV/AIDS related articles are considered only as they clearly reflect postcolonial and feminist approaches. It is, however, true that all of her work is based on the analysis of present context, and questions and concerns of gender as well as postcolonial position are found in the HIV/AIDS texts as well. For the sake of delimiting the amount of sources, these have been left out of the analysis of this study. The delimiting of sources that is done in this study has impacts on the conclusions. Including HIV/AIDS texts would have directed the study into a more practical line. It is possible, also, that they represent another kind of approach towards the Bible and biblical hermeneutics than the material chosen as the sources of this study. That will remain for future research to cover.<sup>17</sup>

The sources of this study contain remarkably diverse material. The publication of Dube's doctoral dissertation, 'Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible', is the most extensive source used. Other sources contain articles that differ both in length and theoretical depth. Most of them are academic articles and some come closer to creative literature in their approach, even containing poems and dramatic retellings of biblical stories. The great variety among the sources

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<sup>17</sup> Dube 2008, 31. For Dube's HIV/AIDS texts see for instance 'The HIV & AIDS Bible'. Dube 2008.

was a challenge in the research process as different weight had to be given to texts that were unlike in nature. It is, however, justifiable that different texts are included in the sources as they all reflect Dube's hermeneutics and varied reading practices.

Although showing connections between Christianity, colonialism, and patriarchy is not new, postcolonial feminist studies of the Bible is a young but growing field in theological hermeneutics. To mention a few important scholars in the field, for instance, Laura Donaldson from Canada deals with biblical narrative from the perspective of a Cherokee woman, and Kwok Pui-lan from the viewpoint of a Chinese feminist. Sri Lankan R. S. Sugirtharajah is one of the key characters in postcolonial biblical criticism. Although he does not identify himself as a feminist scholar, he sees feminism as an inseparable and all permeable concern in postcolonial studies, not as an adjunct to it.<sup>18</sup> Musa Dube is an active writer and academic, and her work has attracted visibility. For instance, Letty M. Russell refers to Dube in her articles, and Auli Vähäkangas situates Dube among the younger generation of African women theologians pointing out that Dube numbers among those African female theologians who identify themselves as feminists without hesitations.<sup>19</sup> Carrie Pemberton's study on the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians comes close to the topic of this study, although she does not deal with Dube's works, because the research concentrates on time previous to Dube's active publishing.<sup>20</sup> Although helpful in the process, these works do not chart Dube's theology in depth and previous studies of her thought do not exist. The aim of this study is to fill this gap on the part of Dube's hermeneutics.

African women's theology has been commented on a lot by European counterparts and this has led to conversation on the issue of entitlement to speak about the matters of African women. This question is an inseparable part of all contextual theology. Can an outsider of a context take part in the conversation concerning matters of reality she/he does not know?<sup>21</sup> This study advocates a positive answer. While an outsider cannot speak for a group she/he is not a member of, she/he can counterpoint and question the prevailing situation in a context that is foreign to hers/his.

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<sup>18</sup> Sugirtharajah 2006b, 76; Sugirtharajah 2006a, 20.

<sup>19</sup> Russell 2004; Russell 2007; Vähäkangas 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Pemberton 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Bevans 1992, 14.

In this study the reflection of my own position as researcher is not in target. However, I also write from a location, as a young woman brought up in a religious home in the Finnish countryside. This reflects on who I am and on my position in undertaking this study. Although European, white, and educated, I do not feel personally connected to or responsible for colonialist endeavors. However, in my religious framework mission has been placed at the center of the life of the Church and an individual Christian. From that perspective I do recognize the colonizing attitude and ideology in mission activity. Also spending one academic year as a student in Makumira University College in Tanzania has evoked my interest towards the questions of global Christianity. For me, the Bible has been a source of comfort as well as distress, in face of a loving and violent God who hides his face as he pleases and sears hearts as he pleases, and instigates both love for one's neighbor and war between brothers. I do acknowledge that my position towards postcolonial African theology is that of an outsider, but I am confident that different locations can and should interact.

## II POSTCOLONIALISM AND FEMINISM

### ***2.1. History of the concept of 'postcolonial'***

Postcolonial criticism has its roots in the anti-colonial resistance movements that arose as a response to the colonial presence in the former colonies of the Western empires. In the beginning it was not formulated as a theory, but rather, it took forms of creative literature and various other modes of resisting the cultural, political, and economic consequences that the colonial rule had on its subject areas. From the end of the Second World War voices pushing for independence of the former colonies grew stronger. Nationalist movements, for example the *négritude* movement that came about in Francophone Africa in the 1940's and 1950's, are considered to be one of the influential factors behind what was later called postcolonialism. *Négritude* belongs to the stream of nationalist movements, and its philosophical body was formed in the writings of Léopold Senghor, a poet, scholar, and former president of Senegal. The ideology in *négritude* stresses black consciousness, a distinctive black identity.<sup>22</sup> *Négritude* and various other political liberationist movements aiming for independence for former colonies are generally seen as the early forms of the postcolonial approach, although the label 'postcolonial' was attached to them afterwards. From the early postcolonial writers, the works of Franz Fanon have been fundamental as they deal with racism and colonialism. Fanon's work "Black Skin, White Masks" introduced the psychological dimension of racism and colonial domination.<sup>23</sup> Also, the work of many creative writers such as Ngũgi wa Thiong'o has had a great influence on the birth process of postcolonial discourse. Ngũgi has in his creative literature dealt with and otherwise participated in the discussion on the impact of colonial presence on African realities.<sup>24</sup> It is only later that postcolonial criticism became a methodological category that provides insights to at least two different questions: It seeks to describe how the colonizers created images of the people they dominated and, on the other hand it provides perspectives to the ways that the colonized made use of and transgressed these images in order to attain self-worth and empowerment.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Young 2001, 10; Wiredu 2005, 647.

<sup>23</sup> Moore-Gilbert 1997, 5; Fanon 1967.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance Ngũgi 1987 & 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Sugirtharajah 2002, 11; Moore-Gilbert 1997, 5.

Postcolonial criticism came to exist in the Western academic world quite late compared to the urgency its thematic concerns have had for a long time at the more informal level. Edward Said's book "Orientalism" was published in 1978 and the conversation it created brought postcolonial theory into the field of literary criticism in the Western academy. Said was the first one to clearly point out the connection between colonialism and academic knowledge, although his works are indebted to poststructuralist philosophy. Said employed Michel Foucault's concept of discourse to describe and analyze colonial practices.<sup>26</sup> For Foucault, discourse is a set of statements within which the world can be known and by which the truth in a certain setting is constructed. Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, is controlled by the dominant groups of society; it is a tool that enables them to impose their knowledges, values, and disciplines upon dominated groups, gives them power and thus builds up and strengthens the position they hold in society.<sup>27</sup> In the 1980's colonial discourse theory was developed further, apart from Said one of the important theorists was Homi Bhabha, who, through his concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry pointed out the fragility in colonial relationships.<sup>28</sup>

Postcolonial criticism started in the first place as a literary practice that seeks to understand and analyze texts that are considered to reflect colonial domination. Nowadays it is a genuinely multidisciplinary discourse, and as it has been applied to almost anything from feminism to psychoanalysis, it has been influenced by various disciplines other than literary criticism.<sup>29</sup>

## **2.2. Postcolonial criticism or theory?**

Postcolonialism has been much contested from the beginning of its existence and cannot be seen as a uniform field of study. Even the written form of the term 'postcolonial' has been under discussion, the use of the hyphen or its absence. Some critics have suggested that the hyphen could be used in order to distinguish postcolonial studies as a field of study from colonial discourse theory. Nowadays

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<sup>26</sup> Ashcroft – Griffiths – Tiffin 1998, 41-43; Said 1978, 3. In 'Orientalism' Said deals with the travel accounts but also with creative literature that depicts the East from the Western perspective. He points out that "such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it." (Said 1978, 94.)

<sup>27</sup> Foucault 1990, 100. "Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable."

<sup>28</sup> Ashcroft – Griffiths – Tiffin 1998, 118, 140; Bhabha 1994.

<sup>29</sup> Moore-Gilbert 1997, 6, 9; Sugirtharajah 2002, 15.

both forms of spelling are seen and used in various ways. In this study the form 'postcolonial' is used, as Dube has made the choice of leaving out the hyphen in the majority of her works.<sup>30</sup>

Apart from the spelling and its implications, the discussion on postcolonialism has focused on the various contexts it has been used for. First of all, the term postcolonial refers to a historical period of modern Western, if not European, colonialism and its aftermath. When using postcolonial as a chronological term marking one historical period, there is a danger of losing its dimension as an analytical tool that can be applied to the time prior to formal colonialism as well. 'Post' in postcolonial does not contest that the colonial condition is over in a sense that it is left behind. On the contrary it seeks to highlight the various consequences of colonialism and still ongoing metamorphoses it has in the postcolonial realities. Postcolonial is constantly applied to present contexts, and to the current situations of so called internally colonized groups, also inside the First World, such as the Sámi peoples of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, term postcolonial is often given to various groups of people, more or less infected by colonial conditions. Postcolonial subjects are people whose personal history, economy, politics and culture are interwoven with imperialism.<sup>32</sup> This has brought about the question whether postcolonial criticism should only concentrate on the experiences and point of views of the colonized, or also take into account the impact colonialism has had, and its aftermath still has, on the colonizers' realities.<sup>33</sup>

Yet another question much contested in the field of postcolonialism is whether the analytical and methodological use of postcolonialism should be called postcolonial theory or postcolonial criticism. It has been said that by referring to the inquiry as a theory, postcolonial studies draws nearer to the legacy of Enlightenment than necessary, when at the same time, it seeks to confront the West-focused understanding of knowledge as a pure and impersonal category, this

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<sup>30</sup> Ashcroft – Griffiths – Tiffin 1998, 186-187. In some of her earlier articles Dube uses the hyphen. Later on she drops it out but does not articulate this change any further.

<sup>31</sup> Moore-Gilbert 1997, 9. About applying the postcolonial theory in the situation of the Sámi in Finland see Kuokkanen 2007.

<sup>32</sup> Dube 1998a, 225. Also 'colonial' has been used as a denominator for victims in the time of colonialism. For example Ngũgi writes about colonial children in his analyses of education during the high era of colonialism. Calling a group of children 'colonial' suggests that colonialism has had a strong impact on their identities. See Ngũgi 1987.

<sup>33</sup> Moore-Gilbert 1997, 9, 12; Sugirtharajah 2002, 12-13; Sugirtharajah 2003b, 4.

indeed being a result of Enlightenment.<sup>34</sup> Also, according to Sugirtharajah, postcolonial approach is not a theory in a strict sense, for it contains a strong element of personal commitment that cannot be reduced into a theory. Following Sugirtharajah, postcolonialism should be called criticism:

It is a mental attitude rather than a method, more a subversive stance towards the dominant knowledge than a school of thought. It is not about periodization. It is a reading posture. It is a critical enterprise aimed at unmasking the link between idea and power, which lies behind Western theories and learning. It is a discursive resistance to imperialism, imperial ideologies, imperial attitudes and their continued incarnations in such wide ranging fields as politics, economics, history and theological and biblical studies.<sup>35</sup>

Dube's understanding of postcolonialism comes close to Sugirtharajah's in this sense. She sees it as a commitment to a struggle and is by no means trying to hide her own personal attachment to it. Nevertheless, she chooses to call it both theory and criticism, and her terminological solution, of not choosing at all, is followed in this study. In Dube's work the multiform nature of postcolonial criticism is acknowledged also in the use of terminology; she talks about postcolonial theories in plural.<sup>36</sup> Postcolonialism is born out interaction between colonizing countries and the colonized. Its origins are in the reciprocation between the First World and the Two-Thirds World.<sup>37</sup>

In the field of theology postcolonial criticism has slowly gained ground from the 1990's. As elsewhere in the theological sector it has been applied mostly to the textual world, and especially to the interpretation of the Bible. In exegesis postcolonialist scholars have criticized the predominant historical criticism. Where the historical critical method insists on objectivity, postcolonial biblical studies set another kind of goal for their hermeneutical project, namely commitment to eradicate oppression. As a result of this, objectivity, as proposed by the Enlightenment, is discouraged.<sup>38</sup> Postcolonial biblical criticism seeks to place colonialism to the center of biblical interpretation. Whereas the historical critical studies of the Bible hold the context of origins as the field of its study, in postcolonial biblical studies, the Bible is examined also through the impact it has had in the history of the colonized peoples. Postcolonial biblical criticism aims at exploring imperialism both in the original context of the biblical narrative and in

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<sup>34</sup> Kwok 2001, 46; Sugirtharajah 2006a, 9.

<sup>35</sup> Sugirtharajah 2003b, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Sugirtharajah 2002, 13-14; Dube 2000b, 47.

<sup>37</sup> Sugirtharajah 2002, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Sugirtharajah 2003a, 14.

the history of biblical interpretation. Also re-readings of the Bible in the light of postcolonial concerns, such as hybridity, diaspora, and plurality, are part of employing postcolonial criticism with regard to the Bible.<sup>39</sup>

### **2.3. Feminism**

In the popular sense feminism has been described as a movement aiming for women's liberation in society. There is no one comprehensive definition of feminism but various meanings have been given to it during the history of the movement. The term "feminism" originates from 1880's France where it was for the first time used by those who defended women's rights.<sup>40</sup> Nowadays feminism is both an academic discipline that theorizes gender and a political movement aiming for gender equality. The history of feminism is usually divided into two waves. The first wave covers the period from the 1830's to the 1920's, which mainly concentrated on demanding civil rights for women. Women's rights for education and work outside the household were among the demands of the movement that was active both in Europe and the United States. One important cause of the movement was won as women got franchise in most of the European countries before the Second World War. The first wave of feminism was based in the classical liberal rights perspective and did not question the concept of gender as such.<sup>41</sup>

The decades from the 1920's to the 1960's are generally seen as a rather inactive time in feminism. The second wave of feminism is considered to span from the 1960's to the end of the 1980's. Wider educational opportunities for women and women's entry into professions formerly occupied by males, together with improvements in reproductive rights and sexual health, prepared the way for a new era in feminist activism. In the 1960's and the 1970's feminism was especially generated in the networks of informal women's groups. The popular motto of this movement<sup>42</sup> was "Personal is political". It underlined women's experience and distinctiveness in relation to men. Whereas the first wave feminism was constructed on the liberal rights perspective, the second wave feminism produced radical feminism that pronounced women's oppression as a universal system of power and named men as their oppressors; women's

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<sup>39</sup> Sugirtharajah 2006b, 67.

<sup>40</sup> McCann & Kim 2003, 1.

<sup>41</sup> McPherson 2000, 208-209; Andermahr & Lovell & Wolkowitz 1997, 238.

<sup>42</sup> Speaking in singular form is again deceptive, because grass roots movements both in Northern America and Europe were not strictly uniform in their goals, practice or theory. To approach them as a group is still warranted for their ideological resemblance.



circumstances can only be improved by eradicating patriarchy, male hegemony in the culture, and male power should not be confused with any other form of oppression such as the power over capital or labor.<sup>43</sup> In radical feminism gender order is seen as a social construct that has no basis in biological difference. From the 1980's the feminist theories started to develop and are nowadays holding a place in academic institutions. Even as an academic discipline, feminism has been political by its nature and the aim of feminist theorizing has been praxis oriented.<sup>44</sup>

The basic paradigm in feminist thought has been to question the alleged naturalness of sex and dividing humanity into two categories of sex, where one can only be of one gender and never the other.<sup>45</sup> One central starting point for many feminists is that 'sex' refers to biological facts and 'gender' as a concept shows how feminine and masculine are constructed and produced in social relations and in culture. What follows is, understanding gender as an outcome of social activity, not part of any natural order of things. Being a 'woman' or a 'man' is seen as a relational and unstable process that is constructed by gender relations.<sup>46</sup> Gender relations in a particular context also hold estimations of human capacities; they suggest things that women or men are supposed to do and be. Although the rigidity of gender roles is variable in different cultures and changing in time, feminist theorists hold that gender relations have generally given women inferior status in relation to men; 'Woman' is defined as 'sex' or as 'other' whereby 'man' has been used as a synonym for universal human being.<sup>47</sup> Patriarchy, male domination over women, or literally 'father's power', has traditionally been one fundamental tool for feminist understanding of history. Feminist theories have sought to answer how patriarchy is constituted and preserved and in what way women are oppressed.<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza points out how patriarchy extends to the area of language as well. Many language systems are grammatically androcentric and when masculine terms are used as generic terms for human beings women are presumed to be included. She enunciates:

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<sup>43</sup> McPherson 2000, 208-209; Andermahr & Lovell & Wolkowitz 1997, 222-223.

<sup>44</sup> Kemp & Squires 1997, 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> Flax 1997, 175.

<sup>46</sup> Flax 1997, 174. According to Flax 'gender relations' as an analytical tool mark a fundamental transformation in the social theory.

<sup>47</sup> Owen 2000, 220-221.

<sup>48</sup> Flax 1997, 175.

Simply by learning to speak, men experience themselves as central and important whereas wo/men learn that we are not directly addressed but subsumed under male terms.<sup>49</sup>

The relation between “cultural” gender and “biological” sex has been a central question, as well. Usually sex has been understood as a natural and fixed container, and gender the content that is variable. Analyzing the relation between sex and gender has led to calling into question the chronological order between these two; why is it that sex explains gender? Many theorists claim independence between gender and sex.<sup>50</sup> The naturalness of biological sex has been denied, for instance by Judith Butler, who questions the basis of the biological division into two categories on the grounds of reproductive activities. According to Butler, assuming that natural sciences are neutral in this question is not well advised. Butler encourages asking who is producing ostensibly natural facts of scientific discourses and whether these discourses are in service of other political and social interests.<sup>51</sup> As Butler questions the sex/gender categorization she introduces concept of performative gender. Feminism in the academy has by large moved away from analyzing ‘woman’ to analyzing the concept of gender. Although gender relations are generally dominated by men and produced on terms of privileging men, it is argued that gender relations and rules of gender restrict not only women, but also men.<sup>52</sup>

In the 1970’s and in the beginning of the 1980’s the feminist discourse was mainly Western, white and heterosexual. From the 1990’s also the questions of sexual orientation started to gain attention and were theorized. Both women of color and lesbians have called into question the universality of gender. Also the critique of Western feminists by the Two-Thirds World feminists has been massive: It has been pointed out that in order to be valid feminist theory must engage not only with the agency of women of color and women of sexual minorities in the West, but it must also include women of the Two-Thirds World. Western feminism has been criticized for barricading itself in the academy and thus, becoming an elitist enterprise that is open only for privileged women. Also stricture from the Two-Thirds World women has entailed pointing out how overtly individualistic the Western perspective on feminism has been. The most focal point of criticism has been, however, pointing out, that the category of

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<sup>49</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza 2005, 45.

<sup>50</sup> Delphy 2003, 59-61.

<sup>51</sup> Butler 1990, 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> Flax 1997, 175.

women as proposed by white, heterosexual, bourgeois feminists, is narrow and does not take into account the questions of poverty, race, class, sexual orientation, and the diverse realities that women in the world live in.<sup>53</sup>

Black feminist bell hooks defines her understanding of feminism as “a struggle to end sexist oppression.”<sup>54</sup> hooks’ definition is inclusive to all kind of sexism and other group discrimination. Butler has suggested that what is served by the production of discrete and asymmetrical opposition between ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ is heterosexualization of sexual desire.<sup>55</sup>

According to Chandra Talpande Mohanty assuming that the Two-Thirds World feminists form a singular entity is generalizing. Mohanty also points out that the assumption of universal womanhood or ‘sisterhood’ as the basis of solidarity is not realistic or even necessary, and it actually imposes West-centered categories on Two-Thirds World women. Mohanty points out that solidarity does not presuppose similarity or sameness but the ability to take sides with someone. It is in the first hand a political commitment.<sup>56</sup>

The absence of any generally received definition of feminism is viewed as various contexts coming together. Thus, it has been criticized, as well, for instance by hooks who points out that the inability to agree on what feminism is actually shows disinterest to see feminism as a radical political movement. According to hooks this also sadly proves the suspicion that solidarity between women of different races, classes and economic statuses is impossible. hooks underlines that defining the goal of feminism as making women socially equal to men is not sufficient, because it raises problematic questions in a world where even men are not equals but divided by capitalist world order and white supremacy. With whom should women seek to be equal?<sup>57</sup>

#### ***2.4. Feminist theology and African women’s theology***

In the field of theology feminism has raised questions about oppression in religion. Can a male God be affirmative for women? Is Christianity a male religion where women can only have a role of subordinate followers? Feminist theology has analyzed androcentric and patriarchal elements in the Bible, in theology, and in church practices. Feminist approaches to the Bible can be divided

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<sup>53</sup> Bhavnani 2001, 3-4; Mohanty 2006, 48-49.

<sup>54</sup> hooks 1997, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Butler 1990, 17.

<sup>56</sup> Mohanty 2006, 3, 48.

<sup>57</sup> hooks 1997, 23, 25.

to the following interpretative methods: Post-Christian radical feminists abandon the Bible completely because, according to this view, its theological essence and patriarchal structures cannot be separated. The biblical religions are replaced by women's spiritual experiences of various kinds.<sup>58</sup> On the contrary, reformist approaches generally acknowledge that biblical material can be used and reinterpreted despite its gender bias. Moderate reformism holds the Bible as the foundation of theology, although the conception of authority and inalienable nature of all biblical passages vary. Moderate reformism is in a way an apologetic and corrective project, which aims to add women's experience to biblical interpretation. This is done by concentrating on texts that are found to involve positive attitudes towards women. These texts, for instance Gal. 3:28<sup>59</sup>, are promoted whereas texts that are found patriarchal are reinterpreted with the tendency to dissolve oppressive elements in them. Radical reformism completely repudiates some parts of the Bible as irretrievably oppressive. In this method, the liberation and full humanness of women and all oppressed groups are the starting points of interpretation. The special female experiences, which are bound to both women's biological distinctiveness, for instance bodily experiences like menstruation and pregnancy, and to their marginalization in society are taken seriously in the process of interpretation.<sup>60</sup>

In feminist hermeneutics of the Bible the question of authority is salient. When some biblical stories are preferred and others discarded this question becomes of great importance; what are the criteria used for this choosing of texts? When the Bible is not perfectly mediating the message from God, it cannot be used as a handbook for its own interpretation. Also, as the tradition of the church and most of theological thought are part of a male dominated system, they cannot be the primary sources of interpretation. Feminist hermeneutics of the Bible employ an inner authority to replace the biased ones.<sup>61</sup>

Most African women theologians do not identify themselves as feminists, but call their work African women's theology. Mercy Amba Oduyoye<sup>62</sup> describes

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<sup>58</sup> Mattila 1997, 196-197. For instance Mary Daly is proponent of this trend of ideas. See for instance Daly 1975, 15-51.

<sup>59</sup> "There is neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Jesus Christ." (Galatians 3:28.)

<sup>60</sup> Mattila 1997, 197-199.

<sup>61</sup> Mattila 1997, 202.

<sup>62</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye from Ghana is a pioneer in African women's theology. Oduyoye was co-founder of the Circle and has served in various ecumenical duties, for instance as a president of Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians. Kwok 2010, 274.

this option of words as remaining neutral and not subscribing to Euro-American feminism or womanism<sup>63</sup> for the sake of securing credibility in the African continent. It also wells from a need to define basic concerns of African women independently.<sup>64</sup> Among the younger generation of African women theologians there is greater easiness to identify with the feminist movement. Musimbi Kanyoro points out that despite the option of words, African women who resist gender inequality in the past and present church practices are often accused of imitating Western ideals of women's liberation rather than favouring African and Christian ideals.<sup>65</sup>

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, known as the Circle, is a multi-religious network of women theologians. Coming from various countries and ethnicities in Africa, the members of the Circle search for liberative ways of doing women-centered theology. The Circle members employ narrative theology as a tool of theological reflection. In different forms of storytelling it highlights the life-experiences of African women. The Circle theology seeks to be praxis oriented and to co-operate in the communal level in order to work for transformation in the faith-communities and societies.<sup>66</sup>

African theology has mostly concentrated on inculturation, in other words attempts to "Africanize" the gospel and affirming the importance of African culture for developing African liberation theology. For African women theologians, however, inculturation theology is not sufficient. According to Kanyoro, the value of African culture as the basis of liberation theology must be evaluated through analyzing how it supports life and promotes justice. African women theologians are critical towards cultural practices that oppress women, for instance bride price, genital mutilation, and polygamy. There is no unified consensus on cultural customs among African women theologians, since some cultural practices that others find harmful and oppressive, according to some others are in the essence of African culture and basis for communal identity. Despite the lack of a uniform stance towards African culture, the discussion is

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<sup>63</sup> Term 'womanism' was first used by Alice Walker to describe the experiences of African American women and their struggle against discrimination. African American women theologians adopted this term to mark their search for theology that affirms their right to be heard as they are, not only by being silently included to liberation theology by white feminists of black men. Womanist theology seeks for liberation of all people and this requires taking into account multiple oppressions based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation. Hayes 2003, 221-222.

<sup>64</sup> Oduyoye 2008, 101.

<sup>65</sup> Vähäkangas 2008, 137; Kanyoro 2010, 21-22.

<sup>66</sup> Oduyoye 2003, 219-220.

open and it gives volume to the voice of African women's thought on cultural matters.<sup>67</sup>

Among African women those who are concerned with women's cause and have means for promoting it are usually educated. As they act as spokeswomen of non-educated, extremely poor women, they speak from a privileged situation in relation to them. This is a problem of the Circle as well. Although all the Circle members do not hold academic degrees, their over-all standard of education is high above the average level of women in Africa. Still they claim to speak for African women and about their context of suffering. Pemberton has pointed out that the Circle members are part of an educated élite. While they critique mission history they cannot escape the fact that they also benefit from the Western education that was introduced to Africa in the first place via missionary enterprise. Furthermore, as publication, writing, and academic research are central goals for the Circle theologians the distance from the often illiterate ordinary African women and their daily lives grows. These notions by no means seek to dispute the right of Circle theologians to speak about African women's experience.<sup>68</sup> Rather, they underline how salient the concerns of representation and ownership are.

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<sup>67</sup> Kanyoro 2010, 22, 26.

<sup>68</sup> Pemberton 2003, 4, 14.

## III POSTCOLONIALISM AND FEMINISM AS DUBE'S HERMENEUTICAL LENSES

### **3.1. Dube's understanding of postcolonialism**

Postcolonialism, for Dube, means the search for a change in international relations. It is not only dealing with history, but rather looking at the connection and continuance between past and present situations. According to Dube, “postcolonial is not about dwelling in the crimes of the past and their continuation, but about seeking transformation for liberation.”<sup>69</sup> Although Dube uses postcolonial criticism mostly for dissecting the textual embodiments of imperialism, colonialism and globalization, it is for her fundamentally about striving for more equal power distribution among different groups and peoples.<sup>70</sup> Resistance to an unjust world order, however, calls for understanding the reasons for oppression.

Dube sees imperialism as an ancient practice of domination and subjugation that has had its manifestations in various societies and historical periods. However, she mostly concentrates on the European and Western domination over other places and names the West as the most massive imperial power.<sup>71</sup> This highlights the importance of location in her thought system and in postcolonial criticism generally: Dube herself is a survivor of modern Western imperialism and, hence, concentrates on it. Also, her analyses of colonial discourse and examples she uses spring from the African realities. When Dube speaks about Africa, she points to the sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>72</sup>

I do not consent to the use of "Africa" insofar as it implies a uniform people. My reading is representative of neither Africa nor of Botswana, my country. Africa is too large and diverse to be represented by one person's view. I am using this category insofar as I find it heavily imposed on me by the First World and because it has come to be representative of our common oppression.<sup>73</sup>

Dube acknowledges the problems of ‘Africa’ as a category and her own restrictions for speaking on behalf of the entire continent. However, being an African is her reality, like being part of an even larger community, the Two-

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<sup>69</sup> Dube 2002a, 3; Dube 2000b, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Dube 2002a, 3. “Put differently, post-colonial is not a discourse of historical accusations, but a committed search and struggle for decolonization and liberation of the oppressed.” (Dube 1997a, 15.)

<sup>71</sup> Dube 2006d, 298-299; Dube 2000b, 48.

<sup>72</sup> See Dube 2000b, 3, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Dube 1997a, 11, n.1.

Thirds World. Dube's option to use the term Two-Thirds World instead of the more commonly used 'Third World' is a conscious decision: She wants to point out that those living in the so called Third World are actually the majority in the world.<sup>74</sup>

In her definitions of imperialism Dube underlines the *idea of Empire* which is central to the ideology. The idea of Empire is the motivating force; all the actions are taken in the name of the Empire, which can be imaginary and only exist at the level of mental impressions, as well as being a concrete and organized unit. Empire as a mental construct does not necessarily have anything to do with actual nation states, but the idea of Empire can sanctify all claims to power for any group of people or reference group.<sup>75</sup>

According to Dube imperialism is an ideology of expansion where colonizers impose their values, religious and political systems educational practices, and means of trade to the people they seek to control.<sup>76</sup> In Dube's view imperialism as an ideology

[...] is characterized above all by its imposition of a few standards on a universal scale. This kind of universalism does not meet the other as an equal subject, with dialogue and free exchange as a result. On the contrary, this imposition rests on a view of "the other" as a blank slate to be filled, whereby the rights of the other are structurally derogated [...].<sup>77</sup>

Colonialism, according to Dube is "a political manifestation of imperialism when it includes geographical control"<sup>78</sup>. It is instituted as cultural and economic structures that persist after the actual geographical control has ended and, thus, the term postcolonial does not suggest that colonialism is over.<sup>79</sup> Colonization, the process of gaining control over other nations or group of people contains much more than just political and geographical control. Dube underlines colonization as a multifaceted and mental process.<sup>80</sup>

In Dube's view, imperialism as an ideology is prevalent in our times as well. By its nature, imperialism constantly finds new modes of influence and is all

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<sup>74</sup> Dube 2000b, 15, n. 2. Problems of the term 'Third World' are briefly discussed in chapter 1.1.

<sup>75</sup> Dube 2000b, 47.

<sup>76</sup> Dube 2006d, 310.

<sup>77</sup> Dube 1998a, 233. "Imperialism is, therefore, about controlling foreign geographical spaces and their inhabitants. By its practice and goals, imperialism is a relationship of subordination and domination between different nations and lands, which actively suppresses diversity and promotes a few universal standards for the benefit of those in power." (Dube 2006d, 297-298.)

<sup>78</sup> Dube 1997a, 15.

<sup>79</sup> Dube 2003, 64.

<sup>80</sup> Dube 2000b, 101.



the time developing new dimensions leading to the exploitation of cultural, economical and political resources. Globalization and neocolonialism are nothing more than contemporary manifestations of imperial ideology.<sup>81</sup> Dube sees that globalization has hardly any positive impacts; this becomes evident when she discusses economic globalization:

...[Globalization] is in fact a relationship of dependence, and interdependence, of exploitation and exponential profit, of economic giants and dwarfs, indeed, of masters and servants[ ---]. In other words, globalization is an economic system that has turned the world into a small village – for a handful of people to run and benefit from.<sup>82</sup>

Dube describes both globalization and imperialism with the same denominators; both of these are systems of domination and dependence. This is to say that imperialism is a wider umbrella term under which other related conventions or ideas can be situated. However, Dube sometimes uses these terms in an interchangeable manner, and does not strictly follow her own choices of terminology, as she often uses colonialism, or even more the attribute ‘colonial’ in a similar way to imperialism.<sup>83</sup>

Dube describes the ideology of imperialism as serving to

[...] justify the invasion and destruction of different cultures in order to save them from their own shortcomings. This approach maintains West as the center of all cultural good, one with a supposedly redemptive impulse, but one that always proceeds by placing all other cultures at the periphery.<sup>84</sup>

The above quotation demonstrates how the sense of superiority in relation to other characterizes imperialism. It results in suggesting values of the colonizing culture to all people. The colonizers good becomes the good for all, and, thus, it becomes the universal norm. This kind of universalism is a profoundly problematic feature in imperialism as it is deeply paternalistic:

Imperialism proclaims its salvation as progress, civilization, development, democracy, and freedom to the oppressed who need to be saved from their own savage/evil systems, even if it takes invading and killing them.<sup>85</sup>

Universalism is one of the key concepts that in Dube’s thought binds together Christianity and colonialism. For Dube the universalism means that the West

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<sup>81</sup>Dube 2000b, 48; Dube 1997a, 15.

<sup>82</sup> Dube 1997b, 440.

<sup>83</sup> Dube 2000b, 48. For interchangeable use of terms see for example Dube 1997a, 15.

<sup>84</sup> Dube 2000b, 25.

<sup>85</sup> Dube 2005, 181.

represents itself as the answer and final end to all people, ignoring their questions and aims. Ideologically this means

[...]portraying the West as the center of all cultural good, a center with a supposedly redemptive impulse, while it relegates all other cultures to the project of civilizing, Christianizing, assimilating, and developing.<sup>86</sup>

In other words, universalism proposes that Christianity and Western culture are the salvation of other cultural and religious spaces.

Imperialism as an ideology leads to various social rearrangements that Dube names as '*colonizing the mind*'.<sup>87</sup> It re-defines the social location of the people affected by it. Dube describes this process as creating new identities for the colonized and the colonizers. This process is not mutual but happens on the terms of the colonizers. They aim to define the people they are about to colonize, and give them attributes that support their act of colonizing:

The ideology of the colonizer constructed the colonized as pagans, heathen, exotic, devilish, uncivilised, lazy, immature children, who needed to be converted, civilized, ruled and guided.<sup>88</sup>

In other words, the identity given to colonized objects attributes them as inferior. They are marked by their lack. They are taught to see themselves as less than human and subordinate next to the colonizers.<sup>89</sup> According to Dube, colonial contact was far from being simply a geographical control over lands. It was "[...]a complex network of the molding of black African minds and spaces according to and for the material benefit of the West [...]."<sup>90</sup> Dube also points out that the colonizers were not merely implementing identities for the people they were about to colonize, but, also, for themselves: "The very act of colonizing other nations is an eloquent attestation of the colonizers' need to depend on and to have a relationship with the very people they victimize."<sup>91</sup> Similar point is made by Stuart Hall who analyses the birth of the concept 'West':

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<sup>86</sup> Dube 2002b, 104.

<sup>87</sup> Dube 1997a, 14-15; Dube 2006d, 301. This expression Dube employs is originally from Ngũgi wa Thiongo. See '*Colonization of Mind*' 1987.

<sup>88</sup> Dube 2000b, 64; Dube 2001e, 150.

<sup>89</sup> Dube 2000b, 64-65.

<sup>90</sup> Dube 2000b, 19.

<sup>91</sup> Dube 2000b, 185. "The identity of the colonized assures the colonizer of his own humanity." (Dube 2000b, 91.)

The West and the Rest became two sides of a single coin. What each now is, and what the terms we use to describe them mean, depend on the relations which were established between them long ago. The so-called uniqueness of the West was, in part, produced by Europe's contact and self-comparison with other, non-western, societies (the Rest), very different in their histories ecologies, patterns of development and cultures from the European model. The difference of these other societies and cultures from the West was the standard against which the West's achievements were measured. It is within the context of these relationships that the idea of 'the West' took on shape and meaning.<sup>92</sup>

International relations to other nations and lands made Western culture to possess the self-understanding of a superior. Colonization is a process that influences both the metropolis and the colonies. In colonial contact identities of both parties are interwoven.

At the pragmatic level, for instance, Western style school systems and missionary practices were part of the colonization of mind. Western practices came to replace and eventually demolish local practices. During colonialism the existence of health care and education in the pre-colonial societies were denied. Dube points out that "with colonization the diviner-healers were named as witches and structurally marginalized in both their public and political status."<sup>93</sup> Another area of radical mutations in social life was language. Local languages were often formulated into a written form for the first time during modern colonialism. This was often done by missionaries for the sake of spreading Christianity. Dube maintains that written Setswana was "employed to suppress its own cultural institutions".<sup>94</sup>

Also, colonial languages became the languages of civilization as formal education was given in European languages. Dube names the areas of mental colonization in similar way as Ngũgi. Both Ngũgi and Dube describe how Western education and the dominance of European languages at the expense of local education systems and vernacular languages were most of all tools of colonial alienation; distancing oneself from the reality around and encouraging identification with something external to one's own environment.<sup>95</sup> Colonial identities made the colonized eccentric to their own culture but also to look down on it. Laura Donaldson brings out that mission schools have been frequently defended by highlighting the benefits of Western education: Many students used English to create counter-hegemonic discourse that in some cases resulted to

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<sup>92</sup> Hall 1992, 278.

<sup>93</sup> Dube 2006a, 147.

<sup>94</sup> Dube 1999a, 35. "Written Setswana form was an instrument for of disseminating a worldwide Christian commonwealth, European trade systems, European medical and educational practices; by extension it was employed to suppress its own cultural institutions." Dube 1999a, 49-50.

<sup>95</sup> Ngũgi 1987, 16, 28; Dube 1999a, 35, 45.

movements striving for decolonization. For Donaldson this is not a positive outcome of mission schools, but rather features the fact that the students used some of the colonial instruments for at least partially deconstructing colonial practices. The evils of colonial school systems were severe, since in the worst cases children lost their ability to speak their indigenous languages and thus to communicate with their parents.<sup>96</sup>

According to Dube drawing distinctions between the missionaries and colonialists is superficial, for they were “informed and inspired by the same culture, which includes the biblical faith.”<sup>97</sup> She sees the modern missionary movement as inspired and fertilized by the imperialist ideology:

I know that many<sup>98</sup> have defended and still vigorously defend, missionaries of colonial times, separating them from other colonizing agents and showing how they built schools, churches and hospitals for the natives; how they were often spokespersons for the natives against other colonizing agents of their time. Missionaries were certainly different from other colonial agents such as traders and politicians. This difference, however, does not exempt most, if any, missionaries of the colonial times from the game of colonizing.— Missionaries of colonial times were inevitably colonizing agents.<sup>99</sup>

Dube’s understanding of mission as a colonial practice and of missionaries as colonizing agents, goes beyond stating that they were products of their time. Her criticism is not directed solely to the realization of missionary activities, but towards presuming that Christianity is universally superior and the local beliefs should be replaced by it. Dube’s understanding of mission is crucial in gaining a full picture of her biblical interpretation. Dube’s view on mission and her interpretation of some central mission texts shall be under closer examination in chapter 6.2.

What Dube calls *colonizing the mind* and *creating new identities* is profoundly central in her understanding of imperialism. In postcolonial criticism relation between the colonized and the colonizers, and the way especially the latter construct their image of the colonized is often called *othering*, a term first used in postcolonial discourse by Gayatri Spivak. Othering refers to the process by which the imperial contact creates its others. Others are excluded from the discourse of power. Othering as a term describes the various ways in which the colonial discourse produces its subjects. Although Dube does not in the first place

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<sup>96</sup> Donaldson 1996, 4.

<sup>97</sup> Dube 2000b, 4.

<sup>98</sup> Here Dube refers to Kwame Bediako, Lamin Sanneh and John Mbiti, who have underlined the positive, culture preserving outcome of using vernacular languages in Christian mission to Africa. See for example Sanneh 1991.

<sup>99</sup> Dube 1999a, 43-44.

name this process as othering, her understanding of identity building in colonial contact resembles the concept of othering. The colonizer gains her/his new identity or self at the same time as the colonized is produced as subject. Seeing the other contributes profoundly to the image of self.<sup>100</sup>

Although imperialism is for Dube a central tool in understanding cultural contacts and international relations, she sees other ways of cross-cultural contacts as well:

[...] I am not denying that cross-cultural exchanges between races and nations has gone on, still goes on, and must continue to go on outside imperialist contexts. Neither am I equating with imperialism every attempt to spread one's influence to other cultures and lands.<sup>101</sup>

Dube agrees that clean and static cultures do not exist, but her interest is mostly drawn to the violation of cultural borders. She sees cultures as all the time updating themselves in contact with other cultures. The right of any culture, however, must be to stay intact of violence in contact with others.<sup>102</sup>

To conclude, Dube views imperialism and its manifestations mostly as ideological processes. Apart from actual colonizing practices they take the form of a narrative and place themselves in the center of identity building. For Dube, postcolonial analysis is most of all done in the sphere of narratives that are formed by and carry on the colonial ideology.

### **3.2. Colonizing narratives**

As imperialism is “an unequal relationship of different lands and people, written on both paper and human bodies”<sup>103</sup> Dube highlights the importance of the narrative world. She applies postcolonial criticism to analyze the *colonizing literature* that is written in support of imperial power and reflects its ideology of subjugation.<sup>104</sup>

Creating new identities extends to the area of the narrative world and in her postcolonial reading Dube seeks to expose the ways in which the colonizer and colonized are presented. Colonizing literature often makes a sharp contrast between the colonized and the colonizer, depicting the former as inferior,

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<sup>100</sup> Ashcroft – Griffiths – Tiffin 1998, 171-172.

<sup>101</sup> Dube 2006d, 303.

<sup>102</sup> Dube 2000b, 51.

<sup>103</sup> Dube 2000b, 70.

<sup>104</sup> Dube 2000b, 49.

childlike, exotic and in need of being influenced by the colonizer who in turn is described as able, civilized, Christian, and cultivated.<sup>105</sup>

Dube pays special attention to the symbolic function given to land. One frequently recurrent textual strategy in colonizing literature is to depict the colonies as dark, savage, gloomy lands; these features given to land refer to the qualities that are applied to the people. Land is often identified with its people and the other way around. For example, the images of Africa in imperializing literature are authorizing the subjugation of the land. When portraying Africa as a heart of darkness, the implicit message is that light and civilization, characteristics of all things European in these texts, are needed. The image given of Africans affirms their need to be colonized; as inhabitants of the Dark Continent they lack qualities that Europeans on the contrary have. The colonizers and their land are given positive characteristics, where as the colonized embody deficiency. The depiction of the colonized actually suggests that they are looking forward to the civilizing impact of the colonizers.<sup>106</sup>

Another common textual strategy in colonizing literature is some sort of denial of the imperial invasion. This is what Dube calls *anti-conquest ideology*, a term she borrows from Mary Louise Pratt.<sup>107</sup> Anti-conquest ideology refers to the set of strategies that colonizers use in order to retain their innocence in the face of invasion and conquest. It is a practice of ethical excuses to legitimize the conquest, and to show that the conquest as such did not actually take place at all but was something welcome, something that was backed with good moral principles, for instance bringing Western values or development to a particular area. Anti-conquest strategies often underline that people who are about to be colonized, actually benefit from the presence of external powers.<sup>108</sup>

Colonizing literature, like other colonial practices, always has powerful implications on the identities of the colonized. As Dube puts it:

[...] to read, as a colonial subject of Africa, can be painful alienation from oneself. For here one reads books that are written about her, but not for her. It is a reading experience that

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<sup>105</sup> Dube 2000b, 49, 53; Dube 1997a 15-16.

<sup>106</sup> Dube 2000b, 86, 88-89. That the depiction of the land is part of constructing colonial identities becomes apparent from the angle of Dube's personal experience when she describes her amazement in the beginning of her studies in England: "...I kept thinking that Britain should be the heart of darkness, given that it is so gloomy, that its people hardly smile and that its sun hardly ever goes across the wide sky. [...]Indeed, I found it difficult to understand why little Britain was called Great Britain, for it made more sense to describe it as a little island." (Dube 1998b, 120.)

<sup>107</sup> Pratt 1992, 6-9.

<sup>108</sup> Dube 2006b, 199; Dube 2000b, 57-58; Dube 2006d, 307.

becomes a nightmare, for one discovers that colonial writers depicted us, our cultures and our lands as less than human and despicable.<sup>109</sup>

Dube describes her personal memories of growing up in postcolonial Botswana as a walk in a hall of mirrors where all the images are distorted, because they show the reflection created by the colonizer for the purpose of attaining power.<sup>110</sup> In colonizing literature only the voices of the colonizers are heard. The fact that Dube links reading experience closely to one's construction of self enunciates her understanding of a text or a story as elements that build and rebuild identities. Cultural texts do not ask permission for defining people and that is why it is crucial to reveal the hidden identities in these texts.

The goal of decolonizing reading is to make the hidden colonizing strategies visible. It aims at decolonization by becoming aware of the various ways the colonizer uses narratives for validating an imperial world-view and her/his superiority. Decolonizing reading posture is a form of resistance.<sup>111</sup>

### **3.3. Decolonizing the mind**

Resistance is an age-old practice as much as imperial invasion and rule. Dube describes the presence of resistance as an instant reaction to colonial rule:

From the day in which the colonized met their colonizers, they have always assumed some different forms of resistance, even when they were collaborating.<sup>112</sup>

Opposition to the imperial power is a sign of unequal power balance.

Dube points out how resistance, like colonizing, happened, and continues to happen, in the narrative world. During colonial times the African stories of resistance appeared in the form of oral stories, songs, dances et cetera. Resistance also took place as the colonized asserted their distinctive identities and constructed them as essential identities.<sup>113</sup> Essentialism is generally the assumption that certain groups or categories share common features that are considered exclusive to that particular group. These features are seen as dividing lines between different groups. In postcolonial theory essentialism has been subject to vigorous debate as it may suppress differences in the process of

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<sup>109</sup> Dube 1999b, 224.

<sup>110</sup> Dube 1996a, 10.

<sup>111</sup> Dube 2000b, 50-51.

<sup>112</sup> Dube 2001e, 151.

<sup>113</sup> Dube 1999b, 216.

strengthening communality.<sup>114</sup> Creating essential communal identities was a common strategy employed in the nationalistic movements of the former colonies during the independence era. Dube points out how in the resistance struggle differences in the uprising nations were suppressed in order to promote the idea of a strong national identity. In some cases this led to ignoring the ethnic and religious pluralities in some as the solidarity to the pending nation states was considered more important. For example gender inequalities were forgotten while the enemy was the colonial master.<sup>115</sup>

In the African context, women who participated in the independence struggle were out of solidarity subscribing to an identity of a strong African woman, who had never been oppressed in her own culture. Women's quests for liberation were put aside, because the fight for independence seemed more urgent at the time. They were encouraged to fight imperialism but not patriarchy.<sup>116</sup>

Essentialism as a practice of resistance may turn against its own strivings for freedom. Dube points out that while sheltering essential communal identities aim to decolonize and to "heal wounded identities" they suppress differences. The essentialist counter identities "run the risk of freezing and distorting their own cultures to something static, sacred, and unquestionable."<sup>117</sup> Dube argues:

Powerless groups such as blacks, homosexuals, low class, indigenous women and people etc. have no doubt suffered most from the imposed essentialisms. However, as a member of these powerless groups, I do not believe that liberation is always served by discarding 'essentialism' but by redefining it.<sup>118</sup>

Building strong and homogenous counter identities as an act of resistance is according to Dube dangerous, but also, necessary; she sees essentialism as useful if its limitations to represent all members of a given group are acknowledged. This is actually the way Dube speaks of Africa. She talks about African realities and cultures as sharing some essential or typical common features, but she also recognizes the limits of such generalizations. Dube is very much aware of the problems of the content of 'Africa' or 'African women' as categories:

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<sup>114</sup> Ashcroft – Griffiths – Tiffin 1998, 77.

<sup>115</sup> Dube 1999b, 216-217.

<sup>116</sup> Dube 1999b, 217; Dube 2000b, 112.

"Culturally, in imperialized places where national cultures are invaded by a foreign one, the tendency is to insist on nativism, which, more often than not leads to increased subordination of women." (Dube 2003, 67.)

<sup>117</sup> Dube 1999b, 217.

<sup>118</sup> Dube 1999b, 219.



The use of such categories as Africa or African women is open to question, because it suggests uniformity where there is enormous diversity. [...] It is also a colonial and colonizing category, and one that is more often than not racist. It is racist because it does not give proper regard to for the great differences in and among African people. Nonetheless it is used in this volume as a category since it enables our discussion to address issues of concern that cut across the continent and, commands solidarity in the quest of liberation.<sup>119</sup>

Africa as a category has been used by colonial powers in order to validate their rule, and its contents have been imposed from outside. Dube is careful in redefining the content of 'Africa', because essential identities, when used in a liberating manner, are always something particular, fluid and temporary.<sup>120</sup>

As she defends essentialism, Dube differs from the present trends in feminism and from postcolonial criticism where anti-essentialism, generally speaking, is promoted. Dube, however, argues that essentialism as a redefined and constantly reviewed project can help to rectify historical mistakes. It can serve to counteract the West-centered world view that is proposed as a universal standard by imperialism. Dube enunciates: "The essentialisms which I espouse cannot be fixed nor absolute, but they are nevertheless a necessary part of the struggle for liberation."<sup>121</sup> What is fundamental in Dube's understanding of useful essentialism is the possibility to freely choose and reject across and within groups and cultures. It seems that Dube's ambivalent attitude towards essentialism comes close to that of Gayatri Spivak's. Spivak states that it is necessary to employ strategic essentialism, because of its usefulness in the fight against colonial and postcolonial oppression.<sup>122</sup>

Dube's redefined essentialism means choosing freely from different traditions. It is, however, relevant to ask, how can this kind of freedom be attained? Dube promotes a sense of community as the basis of African cosmology: "While I do not want to romanticize and generalize African cultures, in many the individual and the community are not defined separately."<sup>123</sup> Choosing freely in a strongly communal culture where rights and preferences of an individual are subordinate to that of a community can be an oxymoron.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Dube 2001d, 10.

<sup>120</sup> Dube 1999b, 217-218.

<sup>121</sup> Dube 1999b, 220.

<sup>122</sup> "I think it's absolutely on target... to stand against the discourses of essentialism, ... [but] strategically we cannot." Spivak is quoted in Ashcroft – Griffiths – Tiffin 1998, 79.

<sup>123</sup> Dube 2006a, 135.

<sup>124</sup> Kanyoro makes similar point about sense of communality: "Not all factors considered to be good by the community benefit all members of the community. Some members suffer and are marginalized under these systems." (Kanyoro 2002 ,66.)

The aim of postcolonial analysis is *decolonizing knowledge* that seeks to reveal and confront the power struggle that is hidden in cultural practices and in the textual world. Decolonizing knowledge is also a tool for claiming one's identity as it deconstructs the hurtful or forced images of self created by an unequal colonial context. It is the effort that postcolonial criticism seeks to undertake. Dube describes postcolonialism as a commitment to a struggle for liberation. It seeks to establish *liberating interdependence*, a new way to co-exist globally without the need to oppress others. As the imperialist ideology divided the world into colonizers and colonized, powerful and powerless, liberating interdependence proposes a world of equality where diversities are accepted and valued. It underlines the interconnectedness of all cultures and groups of people, and the dignity of all things and people involved.<sup>125</sup>

Dube highlights yet another form of resistance postcolonialism seeks to undertake: Hybridity. In a world connected in various ways, not least by the imperialist journeys, no person is representative of one culture or tradition only. For Dube enunciates:

Hybridity becomes a form of resistance, for it dispenses with dualistic and hierarchical constructions of cultures, which are used to claim the superiority of colonizing cultures, and shows that cultures grow and are dependent on borrowing from each other.<sup>126</sup>

### **3.4. Dube's feminism**

Dube perceives feminism most of all as a liberation movement. She describes her commitment to the feminist movement as a theological call for international gender justice: "Our different religions, cultures, classes, races, ethnicities would not take priority over any woman's liberation."<sup>127</sup> Dube, however, recalls her disappointment with the global feminist movement, as she came to realize that experiences and problems of Two-Thirds World women were ignored.<sup>128</sup> Dube enunciates:

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<sup>125</sup> Dube 2000b, 186.

<sup>126</sup> Dube 2000b, 51.

<sup>127</sup> Dube 2005, 183.

<sup>128</sup> Dube 2005, 183.

"While sweet was the call for feminist liberation agenda to and for all women, along the way I became aware that my questions as a Two-Thirds World woman were not addressed." (Dube 2005, 183.)

The failure of Western feminists to recognize and to subvert imperialist cultural strategies of subjugation means that their advocacy for women's liberation has firmly retained the right of the West to dominate and exploit non-Western nations.<sup>129</sup>

As Western feminists ignore or fail to address the ongoing and historical implications of colonialism, they actually, according to Dube, maintain the hegemony of the West. The feminist movement has been racist, exclusive, and imposing sameness as it has been trying to name liberation on behalf of Two-Thirds World women. Dube criticizes the notion of universal womanhood because it tends to homogenize all women ignoring the various contexts and experiences of Two-Thirds World women. Despite her disillusion with First World feminism Dube, unlike some African women scholars, does not hesitate to use the term feminism and identify herself as a feminist.<sup>130</sup> Reasons for the reluctance of many African women to call themselves feminists have been various. Feminism, at the level of terminology, has been rejected because it has been understood as an attempt to impose Western hegemonic values on African women. By some feminist ethos has been understood in terms of individualism and ultimate hostility to all men, and both have been considered not fitting into African worldview.<sup>131</sup> In knowledge of this Dube's commitment to feminism can be seen as an attempt to redefine the content of 'feminist' to direction that is open for variety of contexts.

According to Dube women of the Two-Thirds World are doubly oppressed; they live with imperial and patriarchal subjugation. Both of these need to be analyzed in the narratives and in the real world.<sup>132</sup> Dube sees patriarchal oppression as a universal phenomenon in the sense that in some form or degree it can be found in all societies.<sup>133</sup> Basically, Dube understands patriarchy as male domination, but claims that it cannot be universally defined, as there are too many different patriarchal systems in the world. It is a system of unequal power distribution where dominating men are given priority in relation to marginalized groups, not only women but also homosexuals, blacks, youth, and lower classes.<sup>134</sup> Seeing patriarchy in a broad sense as she does, as subordination of groups other than women only, should lead Dube to articulate who are the men

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<sup>129</sup> Dube 2000b, 26.

<sup>130</sup> Dube 2000b, 21; Dube 1997a, 20.

<sup>131</sup> Mikell 2003, 103-104, 107.

<sup>132</sup> Dube 2005, 179.

<sup>133</sup> Dube 2003, 69.

<sup>134</sup> Dube 2003, 62.

who hold powerful positions. As black men, men of sexual minorities and lower classes are relegated from the domains of power are they not men?

Dube employs the concept of gender to explain the cultural expectations in a particular context. Gender constructions influence both men and women, but they “socialize most men to see women as objects of their interest and desire, who must submit, serve and obey them.”<sup>135</sup> Dube does not question the existence of gender as such, not to speak of biological difference. The category of women does not seem to be problematic to her, as long as the diverse contexts and worlds women live in are taken into account.

In her gender analyses of postcolonial realities Dube points out that colonialism intensifies women’s subordination; in addition to the colonial rule which is imposed on them, the patriarchy of their own culture tightens its grip. As colonized men are disempowered they begin to control women’s position and insist on the most patriarchal values of their pre-colonial culture.<sup>136</sup>

To some extent Dube seems to be reluctant in addressing patriarchy in pre-colonial African cultures. She maintains that although the pre-colonial societies were not egalitarian “pre-colonial African women may not have understood themselves as secondary citizens to their male counterparts.”<sup>137</sup> According to Dube, in pre-colonial African societies women were not denied access to the sources of livelihood. They were appreciated not only because of their reproductive activities and childbearing but also as active participants in the economy. In pre-colonial African cultures women also held important positions as healers and diviners. During colonialism they were usually denied this status.<sup>138</sup>

Dube’s understanding of the gender equality in her own cultural background seems to be ambivalent. On the one hand she considers her Southern African cultural context as patriarchal. Yet, it seems that she feels the need to defend it, possibly against Western generalizations that tend to paint a biased picture of non-Western women.<sup>139</sup> As Dube describes pre-colonial African societies non-egalitarian, on the other hand she claims that:

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<sup>135</sup> Dube 2007, 355.

<sup>136</sup> Dube 2003, 67.

<sup>137</sup> Dube 1999b, 222.

<sup>138</sup> Dube 1999b, 222.

<sup>139</sup> Actually, Dube brings up several cases where Western perceptions of African women have been homogenizing. See Dube 2000b, 24-25.

In my view, the position of women in African societies, which can neither be defined as inferior to men, superior, nor equal, reflects its world view, which was /defined as more wholistic than dualistic.<sup>140</sup>

The above quotation indicates Dube's reluctance for naming pre-colonial African societies as oppressive towards women. For some reason Dube seems to assume that societies that are based on a holistic world view cannot foster hierarchy. By pairing a dualistic world view with hierarchy, and depicting pre-colonial African societies as opposite to these, Dube actually denies the possibility of any estimation of equality in pre-colonial Africa. It is possible that Dube's reasons for belittling gender inequalities in pre-colonial Africa are part of her identity politics, restoring African identity. Although Dube points out that she does not want to romanticize traditional African culture<sup>141</sup>, in this question she seems to do so. Is this interpretation of pre-colonial realities in service of underlining the evils of colonialism? It could be asked how she chooses her sources that bear evidence of equality in pre-colonial African societies. Dube refers to some creative writers, to African folktales, and a few academic studies done on particular cultures.<sup>142</sup> There are, however, several possibly illuminating cultural features that she ignores in her analyses. For instance, the prevalence of polygamy in pre-colonial Africa would be one issue to reflect on women's position.<sup>143</sup> On the other hand it should be noted that Dube's own cultural background is not pre-colonial but postcolonial Southern African context. Generations after colonial conquest do not have direct entry to their cultural heritage through experience. But the same implies to all cultural contexts. Change comes and desolates the intactness of any culture.

Colonial rule, as pointed out earlier, made things worse for women. According to Dube the adoption of Western values meant that women were defined to be subject to men. While colonial rule affected both men and women, women in colonized societies had the burden of patriarchal rule from both the colonial culture and their indigenous culture. The colonizing Western culture enforced its own gender construction on the colonized women. This resulted in

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<sup>140</sup> Dube 1999b, 222.

<sup>141</sup> Dube 2006a, 147.

<sup>142</sup> Dube 1999b, 213, 220-228.

<sup>143</sup> The link between polygamy and patriarchy has been discussed by many African women theologians. See, for instance Kanyoro 2002, 86; Kanyoro 2010, 30.

the impairing of women's position.<sup>144</sup> Formal education in colonial times is one example Dube gives:

[...]since formal education favored the training of males for the church and colonial offices, the exclusion of females meant that written literature would become the domain of males, relegating the role of women as storytellers to the private space of the home.<sup>145</sup>

The world of story-telling, that had been part of women's life in pre-colonial Southern Africa, became textualized for colonizing purposes, and women's role diminished. Oral stories were still the women's domain, but oral narratives were dominated by the textual world and texts from the colonizing culture, such as the Bible.<sup>146</sup>

In Dube's analysis of African women writers of creative literature, she points out that they have mostly concentrated on racial discrimination, as has been the case in the works of many South African writers, and on colonial oppression, and left gender oppression aside. According to Dube this is due to what she calls the '*first things first approach*' that was employed during the struggle for independence. Because colonial oppression touched both women and men, it was a common cause and priority was given to it at the expense of gender equality. 'First things first' approach was encouraged by men, and women's cause was relegated.<sup>147</sup> During the decades of independence struggle, essentialist strategies of national and ethnic identities were used in order to unite against the colonial rule. Women were encouraged to play the role of strong African women and the questions of gender equality were put aside.<sup>148</sup> According to Kanyoro, it is still usual in Africa that gender justice is trivialized and put on a secondary place when compared to other issues like national liberation, famine, disease poverty, and war.<sup>149</sup>

Colonial oppression affects both men and women of a certain society. However, it does not treat men and women equally. According to Dube,

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<sup>144</sup> Dube 1999b, 223. "In colonial times, African women were systematically marginalized from education, church roles and clerical jobs, and, like the whole continent, they were dispossessed and denied their basic human rights." (Dube 2001e, 42.)

<sup>145</sup> Dube 1998a, 226.

<sup>146</sup> On the importance of story-telling for Southern African women Dube enunciates: "Storytelling has always been our language. We have always told stories by the fireside to pass wisdom and express ethics of living." (Dube 2001e, 48.)

<sup>147</sup> Dube 2003, 66.

<sup>148</sup> Dube 1999b, 217; Dube 2000b, 112.

<sup>149</sup> Kanyoro 2010, 21.

colonialism exposes women, more than men, to poverty and violence, because under normal circumstances women are likely to have less power over their daily lives.<sup>150</sup> The doubly oppressed colonized women are subjugated not only by the men of their own societies and of the colonizing nation, but also by women of the colonizing nation. In imperial settings women can be divided into two groups: The colonized and colonizing women. Both groups experience patriarchal rule, but as Dube points out, they have drastically different positions in relation to colonial power. Dube enunciates: “The colonized woman’s oppression is greater and the colonizing woman has a hand in this.”<sup>151</sup>

As Dube analyses the motivation and rhetoric of imperialism, she employs three concepts: God, gold, and glory. These are named as forces that motivate and justify conquest and colonial rule by Ali A. Mazrui. Dube adds a fourth ‘G’ to the list as she employs gender as a tool of analysis. She examines how gender is used in the colonizing narratives and what kind of implications it holds for women’s position in colonial zones. Female characters are often chosen to represent the land that is to be conquered. This is a common textual strategy in colonizing literature. According to Dube the fact that women are used in these narratives to articulate subordination and domination fuels women’s oppression wherever these texts have influence.<sup>152</sup>

Dube’s feminism becomes audible in her eagerness to choose biblical stories that have women in them for her interpretation. In the Old Testament, Rahab from the book of Joshua is an important character she constantly comes back to. In the New Testament, Dube reads for instance the story of a Canaanite woman at the well (John 4: 1-42). Her interest in the female characters who posit a marginal identity and role in relation to the powerful in the story implies that she seeks to interpret from the location of doubly oppressed women.<sup>153</sup> Dube’s option to concentrate on marginalized women who are not part of the chosen people is interesting that Dube wrote her master’s thesis about Mary as an ancestor, but in her later works she never revisits Mary.<sup>154</sup> This reflects her option for the marginalized and doubly oppressed women. Mary, however poor and down-trodden she might be economically and as a woman, is part of the Jewish people and thus an insider of the biblical story. Choosing texts that have women in them

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<sup>150</sup> Dube 2003, 67.

<sup>151</sup> Dube 2000b, 73; Dube 2006c, 150.

<sup>152</sup> Dube 2000b, 11; Dube 2006d, 301, 311. See Mazrui 1990.

<sup>153</sup> Dube 2005; Dube 2001e.

<sup>154</sup> Dube 2008, 44-45.

does not as such make any interpretation feministic, but Dube's angle to the stories is to ask, how these women are used in the narration to serve their oppressors. Dube herself makes the notion that electing texts with women in them can actually suggest that patriarchy is present in the Bible only where women have roles in the stories. The absence of female characters from the biblical stories, however, underlines the pervasiveness of patriarchy.<sup>155</sup>

Compared to the centrality of postcolonialism in Dube's work feminism has a slightly lighter importance in her analyses. For example she gives more attention to the definitions of postcolonial condition than to the analysis of gender.<sup>156</sup> This, however, does not suggest that feminism is not an important hermeneutical tool for Dube. Rather, it may be that she considers feminist thought to be more familiar, maybe even axiomatic to the imagined audience she writes to. Dube defines her hermeneutics as both feminist and postcolonial, in order to work for justice and gender equality and for resisting both patriarchy and imperialism.

### **3.5. *Interconnectedness of postcolonialism and feminism***

For Dube the interconnectedness of feminism and postcolonialism is fundamental. Women's oppression and colonial condition belong together in her analyses. She underlines the importance of taking into account both of these viewpoints; when feminist discourse ignores colonialism it becomes part of the imperializing zone and enters into an alliance with the oppressive forces that deny the rights of Two-Thirds World women.<sup>157</sup> Also, women's position and liberation in the Two-Thirds World cannot be discerned without taking into account the postcolonial reality and their double oppression. She aims to read the Bible from the position of a woman and postcolonial subject.<sup>158</sup> Following from this, postcolonialism and feminism are the interpretative lenses for Dube's hermeneutics of the Bible.

Dube examines both colonialism and women's oppression from a position of an activist. These phenomena are not dissected calmly and out of intellectual interest only, but Dube sees them as sites of struggle; the colonial aftermath and women's subordination are analyzed, in order to be fought against. Dube names

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<sup>155</sup> Dube 2005, 189; Dube 2006c, 147. Similar point about selecting texts with women is made by Mattila: Mattila 1997, 197.

<sup>156</sup> See for instance Dube 2000a where definitions of postcolonialism are given much space compared to feminism.

<sup>157</sup> "Unless feminist biblical readers make deliberate efforts also to become decolonizing readers, their feminist discourse of liberation will be found subscribing to the cultural, economic and political oppression of Two-Thirds World women and men." (Dube 2003, 71.)

<sup>158</sup> Dube 2006d, 311-312; Dube 1997a, 14; Dube 1998a, 225.



feminism and postcolonialism as strategies of resistance and liberation, and by doing so underlines similarities in them.<sup>159</sup>

Imperialism and patriarchy are not identical but they overlap. According to Dube almost every society is patriarchal, but all societies are not imperialistic. Different contexts need to be examined and analyzed in order to eradicate patriarchal and colonial oppression. Dube points out the importance of discerning “what differentiates patriarchy from imperialism and what transforms patriarchy into imperialism”.<sup>160</sup> In her interpretation of the book of Judith in the Apocrypha, Dube analyses how Judith is presented as a female heroine who saves Israel from the hands of Assyrian army by charming their leader Holofernes with her beauty and killing him in a banquet in the enemy camp. Judith is a character who fights against colonial rule and preserves the independence of her nation, and, thus, as Dube points out saves her nation from dispossession. She is praised for her courage and beauty. Dube, however, points out that while Judith opposes imperialism she does not go against patriarchy. She does not claim for herself position as a leader of her nation, but accepts the prevailing leadership that is restricted to males only. Furthermore, she retires to her late husband’s house and wishes to be buried with him. For Dube, Judith is an example of a woman who subscribes to a ‘first things first’ approach. She fights colonialism but leaves patriarchy intact.<sup>161</sup>

Dube’s perception of postcolonialism and feminism also have similar epistemological premises. Dube’s starting point is her personal experience and she refers to it constantly. Epistemologies that lay their foundation on personal experience strongly question the Western conception of scientific knowledge as something pure and objective. This is where Dube’s epistemological premises meet the epistemological basis of both feminism and postcolonialism. The role of the one who knows is not eradicated but admitted and even stressed on. This is particularly pronounced in certain feminist epistemologies; the experiences, even the bodily essence of the one who knows are important. The dominant epistemologies of modernity carry on the legacy of the Enlightenment, perceiving that it is possible to attain objective and universal knowledge.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Dube 2000b, 111-112.

<sup>160</sup> Dube 2003, 69. “To confront imperialism as a postcolonial feminist, one must, first, recognize that patriarchal oppression overlaps with but is not identical to imperialism[...].” (Dube 2000b, 43.)

<sup>161</sup> Dube 2006c, 151-152; Dube 2003, 66.

<sup>162</sup> Code 1993, 16.

Dube defines herself as a black African woman, as a Two-Thirds World citizen and as a survivor of colonialism. She does not hesitate to use personal experiences as sources of knowledge and, indeed, as her arguments. In places she even uses displays such as: "As a woman, I know... [---] As an African, I know..."<sup>163</sup> Arguments of this type, however, are not credible, as they seem to delimit the possibility of knowing only to women or Africans. Personal experience as the starting point for analysis is both the strength of Dube's work and perhaps its greatest weakness. It is true that ignoring the subject of knowledge can become an intellectual trap. All knowledge however objective it seeks and claims to be is affected by the one who knows, and her/his context. The same applies to biblical hermeneutics. The role of the one who interprets cannot be ignored since all interpretation is contextual – there is no meaning that is constructed in a vacuum. Underlining the personal experiences of Two-Thirds World women and postcolonial subjects means giving voice to the previously bypassed. It contributes to a more democratic understanding of history.

In feminism and postcolonialism subjectivity of knowledge should create space for all possible positions, for colonized as well as for colonizers, for women but also for men, not limiting the right to speak only to the oppressed. If the "truth from below"<sup>164</sup>, namely what is said from the subaltern position, becomes the only truth accepted, is there really space for dialogue? When argumentation is based on personal experiences like in Dube's understanding of postcolonialism and feminism, there lies a danger that the one who is speaking is more important than what is said, and meaningful conversation comes to an end. The experiences of the Two-Thirds World inhabitants rightfully demand to be heard, but how does one create a space of mutual interdependence where different and even confronting experiences are valued? When experiences and following from it, knowledges differ, how does one discern whose experience is valued, whose ignored? If a subaltern position gives credence for argumentation, the most credible debater would be the most oppressed. How does one measure the weight of different oppressions? A person who is oppressed in one thing may be privileged in another. Another problem is that different times label very different groups as oppressed.

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<sup>163</sup> See, for instance Dube 1998a, 236-237.

<sup>164</sup> "Truth from below" is a term used by Carrie Pemberton. See Pemberton 2003, 165.

In his analysis on liberation theology J. Philip Wogaman has observed one central problem in liberationist perspective, namely how it relates to its adversaries. Wogaman elaborates:

The concluding question is whether the liberationist perspective is willing to *listen* to its adversaries. It is one thing to acknowledge the humanity of the adversary and to insist on that the overcoming of oppression is as important for the oppressors as for the oppressed – on this, the best forms of liberationist perspective have truly opted for moral high ground. But is it quite another to acknowledge the humanity of the adversary by taking seriously the possibility that even the oppressor may have some part of the deeper human truth to share. [...] when human beings are fundamentally and persistently defined as allies or adversaries, as oppressors or oppressed, the tendency is to lose sight of their humanity.<sup>165</sup>

Wogaman's criticism is apt for postcolonialism and feminism as well, as both promote the cause of less powerful groups and highlight the experience of oppression. The problem of ignoring the adversary and the difficulty of mutual hearing holds true for Dube's work. As she dreams of a space of liberating interdependence where differences are mutually shared, she proposes a world where distinct positions could interact. However, in Dube's analysis of historical and present time colonialism, there is a danger of freezing positions into the roles of the victims and the guilty. Like the colonial contact, also the postcolonial interaction redefines identities, and to the previously colonizing party they are not flattering or easy to accept. The labels of colonizer and oppressor, as valid as they are in the light of colonial aftermath, are rather silencing. Mutual hearing becomes impossible from these positions, unless other ways of interaction are sought after. Could there be a postcolonial theology of forgiveness that would not ignore the unequal power relations between different nations and groups of people but would nevertheless open a way for new beginnings? Forgiveness, in order to be authentic, should avoid the pitfalls of easy excuses and bypassing the injustices of past and present.

Postcolonialism and feminism are Dube's hermeneutical lenses that direct her to ask existential questions of belonging and ownership. Both of these theoretical frameworks also underline the value of personal experience and hence, deal with identity. Dube's interpretation of the Bible starts from her context as a postcolonial subject and a woman. Her hermeneutics seek to define, how to relate to the Bible given its role in the subordination of women and Two-Thirds World citizens.

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<sup>165</sup> Wogaman 1988, 71.

## IV POSTCOLONIAL AND FEMINIST INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

### ***4.1.1. Imperial ideology in the Bible – context of origins***

For Dube the Bible is an imperialist book in two ways: First of all, imperial ideology is present in the biblical texts. Secondly, the Bible has been used in order to promote colonial conquest in various eras in history. The use of the Bible as the motivating force in imperialistic processes will be examined in chapter 4.2.

According to Dube the Bible is a text that was born in various colonial contexts, and as a result has imperial ideology as an in-built characteristic. The biblical texts were born in a historical situation where imperial ideology was experienced in everyday life. The colonial conditions as the background of biblical material are in many ways seen in the texts, both in friendly and non-friendly ways.<sup>166</sup>

Dube enunciates:

[...] biblical literature was shaped by a constant struggle with imperial phenomena; that is, it was born from the relationships of endorsing, resisting, or living with imperial powers.<sup>167</sup>

Dube analyses the colonial origins of the Bible by looking at the international relationships in biblical texts. She pays attention to the contact zones, the meeting and clashing points of two cultures previously separated. Biblical narrative was born within a context where Israel struggled for its sovereignty under the shadow of mighty empires, such as Egypt, Babylonia and Rome. Dube points out that the imperial ideology of expansion was regarded as natural at the time when biblical texts were written, and this is why “imperialism lies at the bedrock of biblical thinking [...]”.<sup>168</sup>

Since Dube perceives imperialism in the first place as an ideology, in her analysis she also concentrates on finding contours of imperial ideology in the Bible. For this aim, Dube employs the following questions in order to trace anti-conquest ideology: First, how is traveling from one land to another authorized. Second, how are the targeted land and its people depicted in order to redefine their identities. Third, how are the colonizers and their identities constructed. Fourth,

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<sup>166</sup> Dube 1998a, 229, 232; Dube 2000b, 7.

<sup>167</sup> Dube 2000b, 48.

<sup>168</sup> Dube 2000b, 67; Dube 1998a, 232.

how is female gender adopted and used in order to profess the new intended relations of domination and subjugation.<sup>169</sup>

One central feature of biblical texts is that they encourage people to travel to foreign lands and to cross boundaries. Dube describes traveling to foreign lands as a journey, not only to different geographical places but first of all to meeting the other. Meeting the other always contains a reaction to the difference between the traveler and the visited. Every traveler must take an attitude towards this difference, whether it is seen as a threat or a possibility. This is seen in the Old Testament as Israel travels in search of the Promised Land, and in the mission stories of the Gospels, where Jesus sends his disciples to preach the message of the kingdom. Dube seeks to discern how a particular text encourages traveling and crossing boundaries that are cultural, ethnic, or geographical. How does a particular biblical text look at difference? What kind of stand does a certain biblical passage take towards the visited whom it encourages to meet?<sup>170</sup>

#### **4.1.2. Exodus and conquest**

In many liberationist readings identification with the biblical characters is considered natural. For instance, in the liberationist readings of the Old Testament the oppressed usually identify with the Israelites, though the question has been raised whether they are the only possible point of identification.<sup>171</sup> Dube identifies with the colonized, the outsiders in the text, and reads the biblical narrative from their point of view. In her interpretation of Exodus Dube points out that the Israelites experience both sides of colonial contact: After being freed from slavery in Egypt they become oppressors themselves as the liberated people enter into the conquest of inhabited land. The story of Exodus, so often quoted as a text of liberation turns into a story of conquest in the book Joshua, and the Israelites, formerly oppressed, become colonial conquerors that occupy the land of Canaan, devote the city of Jericho to the Lord, and eventually kill all human beings and even animals. For Dube, this story is far from liberationist.<sup>172</sup>

Dube sees Exodus as a prologue for what happens afterwards: The suffering of the Israelites in the slavery of Egypt persuades the reader to accept their later land possession of an inhabited land. The story of Exodus concludes in the book

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<sup>169</sup> Dube 2000b, 60-61, 70.

<sup>170</sup> Dube 2000b, 57.

<sup>171</sup> The Bible and Culture Collective 1995, 282-283; Warrior 2006, 236.

<sup>172</sup> Dube 2000b, 60-61, 68; Dube 1998a, 232.

of Joshua, as God's promise is fulfilled. However, the land that God promised to give to Israel is not empty.<sup>173</sup> Dube formulates:

God's promise of a gift and the subsequent redemption from slavery become the narrative's literary-rhetorical strategy for justifying Israel's act of traveling to the land of the Canaanites and taking it for a possession.<sup>174</sup>

As an imperializing text the book of Joshua was written with the aim to justify colonial conquest. The fact that the Israelites were victims of slavery is used in the narrative to win over the reader's empathy. Also, the justification of a violent invasion was done with the help of the Divine: Entering the land of Canaan is done in the name of the God of Israel, and according to his will and promise. Dube points out that using God as the hero of the story of conquest echoes anti-conquest ideology. The presence and promise of God is legitimizing the conquest and masking it as something else. By invoking to the will of God the Israelites retain their innocence.<sup>175</sup> The fact that Dube sees God as a part of the anti-conquest strategy in the Exodus-Joshua narrative reflects her understanding of biblical story as a struggle for earthly powers. God, who is used in this story to validate human endeavors for oppressing others, is not to be taken as a Divine actor, but rather, as a textual construction playing a role for the benefit of the powerful, which they themselves have invented.

Dube draws attention to the meeting of the other in Exodus where "cultural contact is described with verbs that wholly shout "destroy"."<sup>176</sup> God refers to the Canaanites with violent terms: "I will blot them out" (Exodus 23:23) and "I will drive them out" (Exodus 23:30). The land of Canaan is described with positive features, as a land flowing with milk and honey, but the depiction of the Canaanites becomes more negative, the closer the Israelites get to the targeted land.<sup>177</sup> The Canaanites are depicted as people who are inferior and their religion is idolatrous. God actually warns the Israelites of making a covenant with these people, because they would "be a snare" (Exodus 23:33) to the Israelites who are proclaimed as God's chosen and holy nation.<sup>178</sup>

For Dube, the narrative of Exodus-Joshua is a colonizing narrative, since it uses rhetoric that focuses on assuming power over foreign, inhabited land. She

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<sup>173</sup> Dube 2000b, 60-61; Dube 1998a, 232.

<sup>174</sup> Dube 2000b, 63.

<sup>175</sup> Dube 2000b, 60-64.

<sup>176</sup> Dube 2000b, 67-68.

<sup>177</sup> Dube 2000b, 65.

<sup>178</sup> Dube 2000b, 65.

underlines how the Israelites construct their own identity as they “narrativize themselves as exceptional chosen beings”.<sup>179</sup> At the same time the role this story gives to the Canaanites is that of others who “deserve to be invaded, dispossessed, subjugated, and annihilated if need be.”<sup>180</sup> The identities of both parties are remade in the process of conquest. Dube refuses to read the Exodus narrative as a story of deliverance and liberation only, but sees the conquest of Canaan as an irremovable part of the Exodus. For Dube, Exodus is a story that authorizes and encourages traveling to another country, and, eventually, validates conquest.

Dube’s interpretation of Exodus finds an interesting parallel interpretation from a Native American perspective. Robert Allen Warrior, a member of the Osage Nation of American Indians, underlines the conquest as a part of the deliverance of Israel. Like Dube, Warrior concentrates on the Canaanites’ viewpoint. In accordance with Dube, Warrior sees the storming of Jericho as an inseparable part of Exodus. For him God’s covenant with Israel has two parts: deliverance and conquest. The promise of deliverance contains the promise of land that has to be taken, since it is not empty.<sup>181</sup> Warrior points out that: “Yahwe the deliverer became Yahwe the conqueror”<sup>182</sup>. Both Dube and Warrior underline that liberation theological readings of Exodus have ignored the Canaanites’ side of the story. Dube points out that the Canaanites appear in a story that is not about them. The biblical narrative bypasses their side of the events. Warrior argues that the Canaanites are present in the story only “as the people that Yahwe removes from the land in order to bring the chosen people in.”<sup>183</sup>

Both Dube and Warrior choose to read from the perspective of the Canaanites, the outsiders of the text. For Dube identification with the Canaanites becomes especially clear as she deals with Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute.<sup>184</sup> (See chapter 5.3.) Warrior also identifies with the Canaanites and claims that they should be relocated and put at the center of Christian theological reflection.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Dube 2000b, 70.

<sup>180</sup> Dube 2000b, 70.

<sup>181</sup> Warrior 2006, 238.

<sup>182</sup> Warrior 2006, 237.

<sup>183</sup> Warrior 2006, 239.

<sup>184</sup> Dube 2005.

<sup>185</sup> Warrior 2006, 240. According to Sugirtharajah it is potentially dangerous to identify with biblical events and characters since it easily produces self-righteousness, seeing oneself and one’s enemy in biblical stereotype. The Zionist movement and the Afrikaners in South Africa are examples of this. Instead of easy identification Sugirtharajah promotes a hermeneutics of distance: Admitting that the biblical stories are not about us, since there are enormous differences between present and biblical times. Sugirtharajah 2000, 51.

For Dube, Exodus is a text that encourages oppressive and unequal relationships. It has elements of a colonizing text as it promotes values that support crossing boundaries and demolishing all things that are foreign and different. In the New Testament Dube concentrates on the travels of Jesus.

### **4.1.3. The Gospels and imperial ideology**

The New Testament was also written in an imperial setting, in the situation where the Jews, like many other nations, were under the rule of the Roman Empire. This resulted in different reactions towards the foreign rule. In the New Testament, Dube finds different reactions to colonial rule from total rejection to collaboration and resistance movements. Knowing that the New Testament is written among the colonized Jews, Dube finds it surprising that it is not entirely a text of resistance. On the contrary, the New Testament mainly “espouses an ideology that promotes and legitimates imperialism”.<sup>186</sup>

In the Gospel of Matthew the colonizing presence of the Romans is evident for instance as Jesus is asked whether it is right to pay taxes to the Emperor. According to Dube, Jesus’ answer to the inquiry reflects the model of collaboration: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” (Matt. 22:21) The answer echoes a submissive stance towards the colonial rule. Dube also points out, how the arrest, trial, and death of Jesus also show the fragmentation of the local authorities and their submission to the foreign rule; the high priest, chief priests and elders make their judgment, but are bound to turn to Pilate for making it legally valid.<sup>187</sup>

Also imitation of the imperial ideology is present in the Matthean text, especially in the passage known as the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), where Jesus sends disciples to all nations and argues that all authority in heaven and earth is given to him. Dube finds this stand echoing imperialistic ideology, the age-old tradition of subjugation. Implicitly this brings new features to the role of Jesus depicted through Dube's interpretation: He claims power and authority over geographical places and other traditions, which makes him a colonialist rather than a liberator.<sup>188</sup> Dube argues: “The Matthean text, therefore, is one of those

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<sup>186</sup> Dube 1998a, 230.

<sup>187</sup> Dube 2000b, 130-131.

<sup>188</sup> Dube 1996a, 49-50; Dube 2000b, 160. "Yet, Matthew was written among colonized Jews, suffering under the exploitation of the Roman Empire. Logically, therefore, one would expect it to be a text of resistance, aiming not only to preserve the autonomy of Jewish culture, including the right to worship God according to their own ways in their own land, but also to secure political and economic independence. However, by propounding the universal imperative of going forth



postcolonial texts written by the subjugated that nevertheless certifies imperialism.”<sup>189</sup>

Dube analyses the Gospel of John from the angle of collaboration. In her opinion the Johannine community, in order to cope with colonial occupation, adopted the colonial ideology of the ruling power, and this influenced its understanding of mission. The Gospel of John illustrates the role of Jesus as the one who came to this world but was not of this world, but from above. According to Dube this leaves the readers of the text, those who are visited by the Word, in a position of defendants: The Word is above all and from the beginning the Word, later identified as Jesus, demands for himself a superior role. Dube finds the Johannine Jesus to be authoritative, and claims that by depicting Jesus as powerful and being above all, the Johannine community actually claimed power for itself. Johannine Jesus sends his followers to proclaim the kingdom of heaven with divine authority: “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” (John 20:21) Like Jesus, his followers are, according to the Johannine vision, authorized “to go, to enter, and to teach other nations”<sup>190</sup>.

In her interpretation of the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well in Sychar, in John 4:1-42, Dube concentrates on showing how imperial domination is present in the narrative in various ways. John 4:1-42 is a mission story that encourages for going forth for evangelizing purposes. It is characteristic for imperial ideology that it conceals its real intentions. Jesus and his disciples also show no intentions of evangelizing Samaria; they are only passing through on their way to Galilee. According to Dube their disinterest actually suggests that the Samaritans need and ask for the missionary work of Jesus. This underlines the need and desire of the Samaritans to convert and put aside their local religious beliefs. It also underlines their identification as people who lack something compared to the travelers from outside.<sup>191</sup>

Dube also pays attention to the construction of the Samaritans and Samaria in the story. First of all, the woman is chosen to represent her people and land. The narrative points out that Samaritans are considered as spiritually impure. The fact that the woman is portrayed as immoral and ignorant further underlines the need of Samaria to be saved. Dube enunciates: “The ideology of this story is that

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unto all nations and teaching all nations, Matthew sets forth an agenda of disavowing borders not at all unlike that of imperial Rome.”(Dube 1998a, 230.)

<sup>189</sup> Dube 2000b, 135.

<sup>190</sup> Dube 2006d, 306.

<sup>191</sup> Dube 2006d, 303, 306.

foreign lands are immoral women who await taming by foreign saviours.”<sup>192</sup> The negative depiction of Samaritans provides Jesus and his disciples with a chance to show their superiority in relation to them.

As Jesus and the woman enter into discussion on spiritual matters, Jesus claims that the Samaritan community worships in a wrong way. He has come to show that previous centers of worship, Jerusalem and Gerizim, are inadequate and they shall be replaced by new ways: Spirit and truth. Woman converts, announces Jesus as a Saviour of the world and never speaks again. Dube sees in this story both patriarchal and colonial subjugation.<sup>193</sup>

Dube points out that Jesus is actually presented as an imperial traveler as he claims unrestricted power through his “pre-existent creator status”. Jesus/ the Word is at the same time vulnerable as he “comes to his own” who rejected him. The story invites the reader to identify with the Word, with the light, and with the truth present in the character of Jesus and to “distance themselves from the ignorant who do not believe.”<sup>194</sup> By taking up the attitude of the Johannine community towards non-believers she points to the question of exclusion in the Bible and its centrality to Christianity. In her reading of John 1: 1-8 Dube positions herself as a reluctant reader of John who questions the subordination of John the Baptist and Moses. Why could they not build the reign of God together without hierarchy? According to her describing them as being less than Jesus/the Word means their subordination.<sup>195</sup> It seems that for Dube, hierarchy is one of the signs of imperial ideology in the Bible. Her opposition to hierarchy in the Bible and in Christianity becomes visible for instance in Dube’s understanding of Christology and theology of religions. These topics will be dealt with in chapters 6.1. and 6.2.

#### **4.2.1. The Bible as a tool of imperialism**

The Bible is a colonizing text not only by its origins but also because of the role it has had in facilitating the Western imperialism. Dube considers that the Bible had a central role in colonial conquest of the West. The Bible is a text that has authorized imposition of foreign power on one nation by another.<sup>196</sup> She states that

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<sup>192</sup> Dube 2006d, 311.

<sup>193</sup> Dube 2006d, 310

<sup>194</sup> Dube 2002a, 10.

<sup>195</sup> Dube 2000a, 160.

<sup>196</sup> Dube 2000b, 7, 129.

[...] the Bible should be read as an imperialist text – a text that was used to subjugate other races and nations, men as well as women; a text that articulates an ideology of imperialism.<sup>197</sup>

Dube strongly emphasizes the present day situation in biblical hermeneutics, for it is unethical to concentrate on one historical period in history and ignore the later implications of a particular text. Dube points out that her "analysis focuses on the narrative world of the text, its ideology, and the history of the text in the world."<sup>198</sup> The possible historicity of the text is not at the center of Dube's interpretation, for suspect historicity of a particular text does not exterminate the power of the myth it carries. The ideology of a text remains. While Dube is interested in the context of origins in the formation of biblical text, she sees that it is only one side of the continuing story: Despite the original environment, the text "travels in the world and participates in the history, continuing to write its story far beyond its original context and readers."<sup>199</sup>

According to Dube the world view of Western imperialism derives from the Bible, and from its negative models of meeting the other. The Bible is a tool of colonization, as it has been used to alienate the colonized from their own cultures and religions. It has been part of the colonization of the mind as it has replaced the indigenous stories of the colonized, distancing them from their own cultural stories. For Dube, the Bible is a colonizing text, as it has authorized the subjugation of foreign lands and nations.<sup>200</sup>

As Dube underlines the link between colonialism and the coming of the Bible to the African continent, she often borrows the popular African story where the Bible holds a central role in the colonial conquest and, indeed, of taking the land. It tells how the white men came to Africa and told the Africans to close their eyes for prayer. After the prayer, the white men had the land and the Africans had the Bible. In the story the Bible becomes a commodity in an unfair exchange that was dictated by the Europeans; no room was left for bargaining.<sup>201</sup> The story ends without showing the reactions of the Africans, either their resistance or their possible acceptance of the situation. In reality, the resistance and negotiation with the Bible and Christian faith has been intense and manifold. For instance, Gerald

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<sup>197</sup> Dube 1998a, 229.

<sup>198</sup> Dube 2000b, 59.

<sup>199</sup> Dube 2000b, 17.

<sup>200</sup> Dube 2006d, 303; Dube 1998a, 230; Dube 1997a, 15.

<sup>201</sup> Dube 2000b, 3; Dube 1998a, 227.

West points out that the Africans have always had their own ways of combating the master's text. According to West

[...]ordinary Africans have at a deeper level negotiated and transacted with the Bible and partially appropriated the Bible, - by relativising it, resisting it, and modifying it with uncanny creativity.<sup>202</sup>

But also, the Bible has been embraced in the African continent: the Bible has, according to the views of many, become an African book, because of its significance to African realities.<sup>203</sup>

As Dube takes up this story she does not ask why the Africans stayed with the book. Why did they not throw it away and begin insisting on the restoration of their property, both their land and their cultural and religious possessions? What did they find in the book worth keeping? Dube remarks that this story, while it underlines the connection between the Bible and colonialism, evokes a deep sense of betrayal among many Africans. They have chosen to read a book that has been used against them, a book that is originally external to their indigenous context.<sup>204</sup>

Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu discusses the possibility of Africans being Christians in a non-colonized manner. Wiredu argues:

An African is not to be debited with the colonial mentality merely because she/he espouses Christianity or Islam or any other foreign religion. It just might be that salvation lies elsewhere than in African religions. But an African should not take it for granted that this is the case simply form having been brought up in a foreign religion. The issue in other words, needs to be confronted in the spirit of due reflection.<sup>205</sup>

As long as choosing Christianity, or any other foreign religion, is a conscious decision made with awareness of its imported nature, it does not have to mean being colonized. Unlike Wiredu, Dube seems to assume that being a Christian, as such contains an act of betrayal. At least it provokes the feeling of turning ones back at the original world-view of a certain context. This, however, implicates problematic conception of originality or cultural or religious integrity. Since intercultural contact has always been reality clean cultures do not exist.

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<sup>202</sup> While the Bible has been implicated in oppression and imperialism, both because of the ideologies of those who have used it and because of the ideologies intrinsic to it, ordinary Africans have at a deeper level negotiated and transacted with the Bible and partially appropriated the Bible, - by relativising it, resisting it, and modifying it with uncanny creativity." (West 2000, 29, 30.)

<sup>203</sup> See for instance Atta-Akosah 2005, 4.

<sup>204</sup> Dube 2000b, 4, 6-7.

<sup>205</sup> Wiredu 2006, 296. "On the other hand, if one goes along with the Christian package after due reflection, then one is entitled to be exempted from the colonized description." (Wiredu 2006, 296.)

The Bible has also been used against colonialism. There are several groups of people – Southern African blacks, Latin Americans, African Americans – who have in their struggles for freedom and from oppressive situations turned to the Bible and found as their affirmation a God who sides with the poor. However, this is according to Dube, “a political strategy whereby the oppressed can talk back to the hegemonic powers in the latter’s own language, that is, in the language of the Bible”.<sup>206</sup> This strategy is employed by the oppressed with full awareness that it is a game plan. According to Dube “it should be seen as a part of their strategy for survival (...)”.<sup>207</sup> Dube underlines that this adoption of the Bible for resistance via interpreting it as a text of liberation is done consciously:

The subjugated are very much aware that such a strategy not only has limited results but also constitutes a double-edged sword, since it can be readily used by the oppressors to justify their belief that they have given the uncivilized a language, an education, and a civilization without which the latter would not be able to talk back to them.<sup>208</sup>

Dube seems to imply that reading the biblical narrative as a text of liberation is a sign of the pervasiveness of the imperial ideology. The oppressed are disarmed of their own stories and means of resistance. They are truly colonized, as they have no other way than taking the masters’ language and stories in order to talk back. Dube cites Audrey Lorde: “Master tools can never dismantle his house.”<sup>209</sup> By reducing liberation hermeneutics to a tool of struggle Dube bypasses the self-understanding of those who practice it. Considering liberation hermeneutics as a political tool only, does not do justice to the self-perception of the people in question. For her, interpreting the Bible as a text of liberation is evidence that imperialist ideology, which is embedded in the biblical text, endures. Her argumentation, however, stays feeble, as it is not backed with arguments from concerned faith communities or theologians. How can Dube tell the level of awareness among the oppressed that employ this method?

Dube’s view on liberation hermeneutics in general reflects the relation between postcolonial hermeneutics of the Bible and liberation hermeneutics. As these two methods of interpretation have many similarities, such as daring to take a political side and making ethical commitments, they part company in various points, the most burning issue being the authority of the Bible. When liberation

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<sup>206</sup> Dube 1998a, 232.

<sup>207</sup> Dube 1998a, 233.

<sup>208</sup> Dube 1998a, 233.

<sup>209</sup> Lorde 1984, 112.

hermeneutics see the oppressive and biased interpretations of the Bible as the major problem, postcolonial hermeneutics find discomfort in the authority given to the Bible.<sup>210</sup> Sugirtharajah explains:

While liberation hermeneutics have successfully called into question some of the male-centered, ideologically biased, and anti-poor interpretations of Western biblical scholarship, it has been reluctant to question the authority of the biblical texts themselves. Postcolonial biblical criticism, on the other hand, challenges not only hegemonic biblical interpretations but also the position and prerogative given to the biblical texts themselves.<sup>211</sup>

While Dube considers the Bible as an instrument of oppression, and denies the possibility of reading it as a story of liberation she still decides to keep reading it, even dedicating her career to biblical studies. Is that not for its part giving more space and attention to the Bible? Reading the Bible from the angle of its vices and its connection with subordination and oppression, Dube could draw a conclusion that since the Bible does not host balanced and equal relations between different groups, it should not be read. She does not formulate this question at all. For Dube, the Bible is a site of struggle. It is probably a text of too powerful implications on postcolonial realities to be ignored and left without critical attention. It seems that with the Bible the harm has already been done: It has become part of cultural Canon in many postcolonial realities. The conscious interpreter has only one option left: To alleviate the damage done. Dube seems undertake this task by revealing the oppression intrinsic to the biblical text and the oppressive practices in the use of the Bible, as in the case of Bible translations.

#### **4.2.2. Bible translations as colonial practices**

In her essay “Consuming a Colonial Cultural Bomb” Dube deals with Bible translations and their meaning in the process of colonizing. Dube has concern for losing one’s mother tongue, and it being replaced by the colonial language. Language being the mediator of a certain culture, the dominance of colonial language makes the colonized adopt the colonizers’ culture resulting in alienation from one’s own culture.<sup>212</sup> In the Western protestant missionary movement, providing each culture with a translation of the Bible in the native language was

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<sup>210</sup> Sugirtharajah 2006b, 77-78. “Postcolonialism, on the other hand, sees the Bible as both a problem and a solution and its message of liberation is seen far more indeterminate and complicated. It is seen as a text of both emancipation and enervation. Postcolonial reading advocates the emancipation of the Bible from its implication in dominant ideologies at the level both of the text and of interpretation.” (Sugirtharajah 2002, 117, 118.)

<sup>211</sup> Sugirtharajah 2006b, 78.

<sup>212</sup> Dube 1999a, 33-36.

imperative. For the missionaries, the motivation for creating written forms of vernacular languages was to serve this purpose, which was founded in the reformation: For every nation to read the word of God in their own language. Dube, however, sees the Bible translations as problematic because their translators, usually missionaries, were blind to their own connection with the colonial ideology. For example the Setswana Bible that was translated in 1857 and used for the next 150 years, employed language from the traditional world view in a violating way: Demons in the New Testament were translated into Setswana by using the word *Badimo*, which means ancestral spirits, the Ones who are departed and who are with the High One.<sup>213</sup> Dube describes her own shock as she was reading the Setswana translation for the first time in her life after returning to Botswana from her studies in the USA:

My reading moment itself was a violent experience... --- It [text] invited me to see myself and my society as people who believed in and depended on the demons and devils before the coming of Christianity. Could there be any more evidence for the dark and lost continent of Africa than the one I was reading in this Setswana Bible?<sup>214</sup>

People who came to church and read the Christian Bible, probably their first book ever, were informed through the translation that their ancestors whom they remembered and venerated were demons and that Jesus wanted to chase them away. The Setswana Bible thus suggested that the traditional world view was to be totally rejected. It suggested that the traditional world view was demonic. Many African theologians have praised the European missionaries for their translations to the indigenous languages, underlining the culture preserving service they have done. Dube, however, raises the question, why there was the need to preserve and protect cultures that had been there for hundreds of years? Was it not because of the colonial intervention that the missionaries participated in? Dube asks, why did the missionaries, generally speaking, use the colonial languages in their schools when they so much wanted to preserve the native cultures. Her answer is that this action served the missionary agenda of Christianizing the world.<sup>215</sup> According to Dube it is unlikely that the *Badimo* were translated as evil spirits due to an errand or mistake. She sees it as a deliberate act of distancing the Batswana Christians from their cultural background, “a cultural

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<sup>213</sup> Dube 1999a, 33, 36-41, 45.

<sup>214</sup> Dube 1999a, 41.

<sup>215</sup> Dube 2001e, 155-156.

landmine”, showing their pre-Christian traditions as something demonic and dangerous.<sup>216</sup>

The translations of colonial times were undoubtedly impregnated by imperial ideology. But then, what if the early translations were culturally sensitive? To what extent can a translation save a text that, according to Dube, has imperial and patriarchal ideology rooted in it? As subjugation of other cultural and religious groups and exclusion are at the heart of biblical religion, is it even ethical to translate these into a more clement expression?

### **4.3. Traitor’s Bible – hermeneutics for identity**

Personal background and experiences form an important source of knowledge for Dube, as already analyzed. She underlines her personal history as a black African woman, as a postcolonial subject, and takes up the memories from the independence struggle in which she participated as an activist.<sup>217</sup> Her personal quest with the Bible also dates back to the days of the independence movement. She recalls how those committed to Christian faith were constantly asked for arguments and explanations for professing what was understood as the religion of the enemy. Dube expresses her position towards the Bible from her personal history: “In these questions and motions lies the foundation of my quest; that is, given the role of the Bible in facilitating imperialism, how should we read the Bible as postcolonial subjects?”<sup>218</sup> This question is the actual starting point of her work with the Bible. The Bible for her, from the angle of personal commitment is first of all a book that constantly makes her wrestle with testing questions. As a biblical scholar, postcolonial subject, and a Christian, Dube identifies herself as a traitor, referring to the story of Rahab in the Book of Joshua:

Those of us who come from non-Christian traditions, who are now Christians, are best seen, as who we are: Rahabs, who bear the wounds of collaborating with the enemy, making love with the enemy, hanging out red ribbons, to be identified and saved from the invaders might, crossing over to the enemy camp and betraying our people, cultures, and economies – I, for one, am still trying to discover how this adoption of the masters’ tools can subvert the masters’ house, if at all.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Dube 1999a, 49.

<sup>217</sup> Independence struggle here does not refer to the independence of the state of Botswana, but to the independence struggle of the whole continent of Africa. For Dube the birth of new South Africa after elections in 1994 was the end of Africa’s “armed struggle for liberation”, although she remains critical to the level of freedom and independence that was actually achieved. (Dube 2000b, 3). Dube was active in Writers’ Association of Botswana, WABO. “We wrote poetry of resistance.” (Dube 2002c, 62.)

<sup>218</sup> Dube 2000b, 3-4, 199.

<sup>219</sup> Dube 2005, 191.



As Dube defines herself as a traitor she points out her position in two camps, in what could be called in-between terrain of two Worlds. On the other hand she is a professional biblical scholar, trained in the Western academy. On the other hand, her personal context is a context of oppression. These create a tension in her hermeneutical process.

Dube is a biblical scholar and apart from her own country Botswana she studied in Great Britain and in the USA. Her formal education, thus, is tied to the Western academic discipline of biblical criticism. Although trained in the field of biblical criticism, Dube does not in the first hand follow the tradition of exegetical analyses, but like other postcolonial biblical scholars, remains critical towards biblical criticism. Dube is at the same time a fruit of the Western tradition of biblical criticism and on the other hand its fond critic.<sup>220</sup>

It is often assumed that Western ways of teaching and theorizing, are familiar, meaningful, acceptable, and relevant for all. The Western historical, cultural, political and mythological world-view is thus predominantly used for biblical studies, an approach that not only suppresses other histories of the biblical text in the world, but one that is also colonial and colonizing.<sup>221</sup>

For her, the methodological resolutions are matters of ethical commitment, for if biblical criticism concentrates only on the historical origins of the Bible, it belittles the implications biblical texts have had in the course of history. By doing so, according to Dube, biblical criticism itself becomes a part of the structures sustaining imperial ideology.<sup>222</sup>

At present, the continued prioritization of early church history over all other church histories not only serves to shelter Western critics from confronting the imperialism of their own countries but also to silence the questions of the victims of imperialism.<sup>223</sup>

Elsewhere she states that concentrating on the original historical context of the Bible and “ignoring the continuing character of the story, is to do injustice to that very text.”<sup>224</sup> Dube points out that

[...] to divorce biblical interpretation from current international relations, or to discuss it primarily as an ancient text, becomes another Western ideological stance that hides its

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<sup>220</sup> Dube 2000a, 156.

<sup>221</sup> Dube 2005, 189-190.

<sup>222</sup> Dube's stricture to biblical criticism is in line with the rest of postcolonial biblical scholars. See Sugirtharajah 2003b, 86-96.

<sup>223</sup> Dube 1998a, 236.

<sup>224</sup> Dube 1997a, 13.

direct impact on the postcolonial world and maintains its imperial domination of Two-Thirds World countries.<sup>225</sup>

Dube criticizes the Western academic discourse for being overtly text oriented at the expense of other narrative realities, like oral stories, dance, symbols and drama. This is, according to her, a problem of biblical criticism too. It seems that Dube wants to expand the area where biblical studies operate; in her view it should not be limited to the Bible alone. Biblical criticism should take into account the challenge from the oral communities and from the canons of other religions and non-Christian cultures. It should agree to dialogue with other forms that articulate reality, namely dance, symbols, music, and oral stories.<sup>226</sup> On other words, Dube wants to widen the boarders of biblical studies to contain extra-biblical and non-textual material. This insistence is familiar from literature studies, where postcolonial criticism has pushed the conventional borders of the discipline by concentrating on the travel accounts of the colonialists and the oral stories of resistance not only to literature in a strict sense.<sup>227</sup> With storytelling method Dube realizes this challenge on her own part. Dube's storytelling method will be presented in chapter 5.2.

Dube also wants to challenge biblical criticism to be a transformative actor. Especially feminist biblical scholarship must become empowering. Dube finds it "still a long way from changing the world."<sup>228</sup> She considers the purpose of any scientific research to be the following:

[...]despite the difficulty and the need to maintain the academic freedom<sup>229</sup>, academic research is meant to help the world and its society to be a better place to live in – that is, if we are involved in a justice-seeking and socially engaged scholarship.<sup>230</sup>

In a world of pluralistic values it is, however, far from simple to say what kind of findings will make the world a better place. Dube approaches the process of interpretation with values that direct her reading of the Bible; she promotes a reading that creates the possibility for multicultural and multi-religious space. The problem is that a pluralistic world view and the absolute truth claims of traditional

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<sup>225</sup> Dube 2000b, 20.

<sup>226</sup> Dube 1998a, 234.

<sup>227</sup> See for instance Pratt 1992.

<sup>228</sup> Dube 2005, 187.

<sup>229</sup> Note that she does not speak of objectivity.

<sup>230</sup> Dube 2005, 187.

Christianity<sup>231</sup> are mutually exclusive. The insistence on a pluralistic world view has no room for any absolute truth claims, and the other way around. This tension remains whenever world views of absolute truth claims and pluralism meet. Sugirtharajah points out that postcolonialism proposes another understanding of truth:

The colonialist mode of interpretation offered a simple choice between truth and truth. If one is right, the other is invariably wrong. (...)What postcoloniality makes us realize is that the divine has made an impact on people in diverse ways.<sup>232</sup>

Dube's hermeneutical principles do not propose objectivity but commitment for justice seeking. Her biblical interpretation has strong ethical premises.

Dube's understanding of text is informed by her theoretical framework of postcolonial criticism and her cultural context. Dube sees text as a constantly living event, and according to her view the birth context of any text is not a sufficient starting point for hermeneutics. In Dube's understanding any text or story is essentially open, because any reader or recipient is part of the process of creating or at least reinterpreting the story. Dube holds that in some cultures, especially in cultures of strong oral tradition, like in her own Motswana background, the storyteller often waits for the audience to make interjections in order to make her or him continue the story. This practice transforms the role of passive listeners into active or participant listeners, even co-storytellers.<sup>233</sup> Dube's perception of text is interesting, because she seems to portray text as a non-static force; to her, text is an event, text is an open-ended drama that takes place between various actors in different times. She describes the nature of text and story in a rather similar way, and actually does not draw sharp lines between textual and oral stories; both are events, and both tend to cause a process in the receiver.

As any listener of an oral story becomes the owner of the story she or he is about to hear, the same applies to written texts: "My experience has taught me that a written book does not only belong to its authors – it also belongs to its readers and users."<sup>234</sup> However, when an oral story and textual story are equated,

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<sup>231</sup> By traditional Christianity I refer to the teaching of most Christian churches, and those theologians with similar understanding of the Christian faith. I acknowledge the problems of such term.

<sup>232</sup> Sugirtharajah 2003b, 124.

<sup>233</sup> Dube 2003, 60.

<sup>234</sup> Dube 1997a, 12. Dube's understanding of the communal ownership of narratives comes close to Ngūgi's: "Over the years I have come to realize that more and more work, even literary creative

as Dube does, it is relevant to ask, which one leaves a more permanent mark on the receiver? Oral stories seem to be more flexible, and they easily become communal property.

According to Dube, the oral stories are in danger of vanishing as the modern time prefers and facilitates textual forms of describing reality.<sup>235</sup> Although Dube underlines the subject and location of the reader, the one who interprets the text, she does not extract the role of the writer, or in the case of biblical material the community of writers. The authors' motives, both subliminal and open, are the focus of Dube's dissection. Text, for Dube is first of all a reciprocal event. The same applies to biblical narrative. It is written with an intention and agenda, and it calls for reaction:

The biblical story itself invites its readers to identify with it and also act it out in history.[...] the biblical story is an unfinished story: it invites its own continuation in history; it resists the covers of our Bibles and writes itself on the pages of the earth.<sup>236</sup>

Dube's understanding of text as an event comes close to the reader-response criticism, a trend in literary criticism that seeks to concentrate on the reader, the reading process, and her or his response to the text. Although reader-response is not a conceptually unified set of criticism, its proponents seem to have at least one common feature: they seek to destroy the objectivity of the text.<sup>237</sup> This is strongly on Dube's agenda as well. She denies the holiness and neutrality of any text. She points out how narratives always carry intentions and persuade their receivers to join the world view of the story. Following Said, Dube points out how texts are worldly, even as they seem to deny it. Also the spiritual texts that claim to be holy, and that are considered to be holy, contain elements of political, economic and gendered power.<sup>238</sup>

In Dube's reluctance to treat any question as purely religious or spiritual there are both advantages and dangers, for, on the other hand, this starting point reveals the using of religion as a tool for social or economic power struggles or

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work is not the result of an individual genius but the result of a collective effort. There are so many inputs in the actual formation of an image, an idea, a line of argument and even sometimes the formal arrangement. The very words we use are a product of a collective history. (Ngũgi 1986, x-xi.)

<sup>235</sup> "The fact that our pre-colonial African societies were oral, with no prior written records of their own, makes this concern significant. I am concerned that when our children approach the library for research they will have nothing but self-hatred thrown back to their faces." (Dube 1999b, 219.)

<sup>236</sup> Dube 1997a, 12.

<sup>237</sup> Tompkins 1980, ix-x.

<sup>238</sup> Dube 2008, 79; Dube 2000b, 160.

exploitation. Awareness of the interconnectedness of religion, world economy, and politics can prevent misusing religion for other purposes. Dube claims that religion is not innocent and it does not exist in a vacuum. However, there lies a danger of promoting the political dimensions at the expense of other dimensions of the text.

Dube sees that “there can be little doubt that the Bible offers support for as well as resistance against imperialism, from both a textual and historical perspective.”<sup>239</sup> However, she concentrates on the repressive sides of the Bible. As she reads the Bible as a site of struggle she also chooses biblical passages that to her understanding host negative presentation of the other, and especially feature exclusivism and hierarchy. Dube’s reading of the Bible is to a great extent selective. She leaves untouched the biblical passages that have traditionally been seen in defense of equality, or reads them from another perspective. This follows from personal experiences and discomfort of living as a postcolonial subject. Mary Ann Tolbert enunciates: “[...]from our fluid set of identities we usually choose the marginalized ones. [---] We do not protest our privileges, we protest our pain.”<sup>240</sup> In other words, while Dube concentrates on the repressive sides of the Bible, she chooses to read in light of her marginal identity. Reading from the location of a postcolonial African woman means asking “Am I really part and owner of this story?”<sup>241</sup> Can the Bible, with imperial and patriarchal ideology intrinsic to it, be a positive affirmation of one’s dignity and value? Dube’s interpretation should be described as identity-hermeneutics, as it seeks to answer to questions of belonging and ownership. Identity building is an important motif not only for Dube but also for various other theologians in the context of injustice. Identity violated by oppression, chauvinism, or like in the postcolonial framework, colonialism, must be deconstructed in order to be rebuilt.

According to Sugirtharajah identity-hermeneutics in theological articulations has meant “attempts to grapple with subaltern status and to recover identity and authenticity”<sup>242</sup>. Sugirtharajah, however, points out that these identity-hermeneutical processes that have been rife in theological discourse of Two-Thirds World, run the risk of reifying their own subjecthood and contexts. There lies a danger that these once original discourses turn into clichés that parrot

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<sup>239</sup> Dube 1998a, 232.

<sup>240</sup> Tolbert 1995, 265-266.

<sup>241</sup> Dube 2000a, 157.

<sup>242</sup> Sugirtharajah 2003b, 3.

the old catchphrases. Sugirtharajah reminds that identities and contexts change.<sup>243</sup> In her hermeneutics Dube takes into account the constant change of contexts as she emphasizes the hybridity of identities and their interconnectedness.

In her hermeneutics Dube gives employs narrative interpretation based on personal experience and story-telling that wells from her cultural background. Here Dube resembles with many other African women theologians, as narrative theology is common among them, especially many Circle members.<sup>244</sup> Dube's various reading methods are dealt with in chapter 5.

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<sup>243</sup> Sugirtharajah 2003b, 3.

<sup>244</sup> Oduyoye 2003, 219.

## V POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST READING PRACTICES

### **5.1. Reading with African Independent Churches**

Dube promotes a reading method that she calls *reading with*. It gives space and relevance to the ordinary readers of the Bible and their interpretations of biblical texts. Regardless of the fact that some of these readers may be illiterate, they are people that listen, discuss, and also, in various ways retell the Bible. Many of the illiterate ordinary readers have oral versions of the Bible, as they know large numbers of biblical passages by heart. By supporting the reading with method Dube criticizes the power of the Western academic sphere. According to Dube this reading practice takes part in a more equal power distribution between the trained and untrained readers.<sup>245</sup> Neglecting the views of ordinary readers is a common critique to mainstream biblical studies from postcolonial biblical scholars and proponents of liberation hermeneutics. According to Sugirtharajah, the Western academic world, and biblical studies as part of it are obsessed with professionalism and specialization. This is a serious complication as it is likely to detach biblical interpretation from real life and problems of the contemporary world.<sup>246</sup> Reading with is a reconstructive method that seeks to create an interaction between ordinary and professional readers. Dube's understanding of reading with takes in the notion that her own biblical interpretation is informed and shaped by Western academic communities. She is aware that it distances her from the ordinary readers, and their ways of reading. Dube underlines that in order to enrich and even challenge Western biblical scholarship with the reading with findings the trained reader must go to the ordinary readers as a learner, ready to be taught by them.<sup>247</sup> According to Dube there are at least two reasons for promoting the readings of ordinary women of the Two-Thirds World: First, as mentioned earlier, the need to correct biblical criticism and the hegemony of the Western academy; second, the lack of trained readers, especially women, in the Two-Thirds World.<sup>248</sup>

In her fieldwork that is described in her dissertation Dube was reading with female leaders of African Independent Churches, henceforth AIC. Dube names

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<sup>245</sup> Dube 1996a, 7. Dube wrote this article together with Gerald West as they co-edited an issue of *Semeia* with theme of 'Reading with'. West has dealt with the role of an ordinary reader in biblical hermeneutics in South African context. See, for instance West 1995.

<sup>246</sup> Sugirtharajah 2006a, 17-18.

<sup>247</sup> Dube 2000b, 186.

<sup>248</sup> Dube 2005, 183.

the AIC's as exemplary communities from a gender perspective and underlines their importance in the fight against colonialism. She points out that AICs were first founded by a woman, Kimpa Vita of Congo, in order to confront and protest the colonial Churches and their chauvinist spirit that suppressed the local religious practices. Women's role has generally been prominent in the AICs, although, some of the AICs are patriarchal.<sup>249</sup>

As Dube describes the hermeneutical practice of AIC women, she points out that Spirit, Moya, has a central role. The Spirit, Moya, leads the process of interpretation for liberation:

The AICs readers recognize but override biblical oppressive claims by insisting on listening to what the Spirit says and holding that "God never opened the Bible to me". Thus Semoya space reserves a critical and liberative reading of texts that have been instrumental in the colonization of Africa and oppression of women. It insists on hearing God afresh, in a new space – one that operates outside the oppressive structures and their symbols.<sup>250</sup>

The Spirit, Moya, guides the readers to ignore the oppressive parts in the Bible. As Dube underlines the importance of Moya in the AIC interpretations, she actually describes intentional selection which is one hallmark of contextual biblical hermeneutics. The oppressive elements and passages in biblical texts are denied and ignored, because the context and reality of life is the starting point for interpretation.<sup>251</sup> The women that Dube was reading with recognized the Spirit as the ultimate authority instead of the written Canon or the tradition. In feminist biblical interpretation this is called inner authority: The knowledge of God's love precedes and surmounts the oppressive words of the Bible.<sup>252</sup>

Dube's decision to denote to the Spirit without the biblical adjective 'Holy' is based on the manner of speaking of the women she encountered during her fieldwork. Their choice of words pronounces the understanding that the same Spirit, Moya, that leads the interpretation of the Bible, was and is present in the African traditional religion, henceforth ATR. Moya. Spirit, is not limited to one religious tradition. For Dube this "perfect example of the integration of two religious traditions" is both resistance against imperial ideology and healing from imperial cultural impositions that deny difference.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Dube 2000b, 186, 41 n.1.

<sup>250</sup> Dube 2000b, 116.

<sup>251</sup> Tamez 2002, 7-8.

<sup>252</sup> Mattila 1997, 202.

<sup>253</sup> Dube 1996b, 125.



The importance of healing that according to Dube takes place in integrating two religious traditions is definitely a matter of an undivided spiritual identity. Dual religious identities have been reality in Africa since the coming of mission Christianity. Persons with two separate religions had to keep another one as a secret. Usually Christianity was chosen as the visibly practiced religion and the practices and spirituality of ATR were hidden.<sup>254</sup> Kanyoro points out that African Christians still face the dilemma of inhabiting two worlds: One is the African religions and culture and the other is the church and Western culture. African Christians live in a continual collision between the varying demands of the gospel and culture.<sup>255</sup> It seems that Dube's answer to this tension is to openly integrate two different religious and cultural traditions.

Dube further pronounces the role of AICs:

[...] their approach exhibits the wisdom, the courage, and the creativity of integrating different religious faiths in the service of life and difference. Historically born within the imperial times, which proceeded by dispossessing people of their cultural and religious integrity through promoting Christianity as the universal religion, the AICs subvert this imperial strategy. They reject the imposition of Christianity as the one and only valid religion and they freely cull from both religious cultures whatever wisdom these traditions offer in the enhancement of life and nurturing difference.<sup>256</sup>

For Dube, the AIC women she encountered represent a model for an inclusive approach to religions. They go against the universalism in Christianity and they claim the right to their twofold religious tradition. They seek to be both Christian and belong to their indigenous African traditions.

In the reading with practice, Dube points out the importance of specifying the reading subjects and the location of interpretation, namely by whom and where the reading takes place.<sup>257</sup> In light of this the way Dube portrays AICs is problematic. She seems to treat the AICs as a monolith, for instance as she talks about them as a somehow unified movement. To some extent she dismisses the scale and variety that is presented in this phenomenon. It is in order to ask whether Dube has an overtly positive picture of AICs, as a whole. The equality between two religious practices that Dube claims to meet in AIC practices is debatable; most AIC's perceive themselves as Christian Churches, and according to that self-understanding, it is unlikely that ATR elements and Christian elements

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<sup>254</sup> Schreiter 2004, 147.

<sup>255</sup> Kanyoro 2010, 19.

<sup>256</sup> Dube 1996b, 125.

<sup>257</sup> Dube 1996a, 7-8.

are given equal value and relevance in their practice. It is safer to assume that Dube's generalization on AIC readers only implies a particular group of people she has encountered and are not meant to be a general description of the wider phenomenon.

According to Dube biblical scholars who seek to read for liberation should interact and collaborate with communities of faith.<sup>258</sup> However, Dube's own postcolonial and feminist interpretation of biblical texts is radical and concentrates greatly on the political, economic, and cultural oppression. Ironically, most churches and communities of faith would without a doubt repudiate many of her interpretations of the biblical texts. For most of its African readers, the Bible is in the end considered to be the Word of God.<sup>259</sup> What if the faith-communities are conservative and for instance want to preserve aspects of mission Christianity and remain disapproving, for instance, towards elements of traditional African spirituality? If communities of faith are seen helpful only as far as they are useful in decolonizing and seeking gender equality, another problem is faced. Hearing the faith-communities only partially is problematic, as it may lead into misusing their views in propagating something they do not stand for. Giving priority to the grassroots level and doing genuinely pluralistic theology are possibly in contradiction with each other.

In her insistence of hearing the ordinary readers of the Bible, Dube calls for more democratic interpretations of the Bible. This, again, points to her demand for equality. Dube's option of reading with also reflects her understanding of text. (See chapter 4.3) As Dube underlines that any text is communal and belongs to its readers, this also holds true for the Bible. The immense impact the Bible has had and continues to have for its literate and illiterate readers, and their identities, makes this concern salient: Those whose voice has been silenced in biblical interpretation should be granted a place to speak. However, giving genuine voice to the ordinary readers is difficult. Scholar who promotes the readings of the ordinary readers easily becomes patronizing or selective in relation to them.

Gerald West formulates a delicate statement about the relation of the Bible and Africa: "Further developments in African Christianity will test the depth of the impact Africa has made upon the Bible."<sup>260</sup> Reading with ordinary readers of

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<sup>258</sup> Dube 2005, 185.

<sup>259</sup> Okure 2003, 15.

<sup>260</sup> West 2000, 29.

different African realities is a hermeneutical scheme that helps to establish the African impact upon the Bible.

## **5.2. Other stories and the Bible**

For Dube the Bible is a book that is “bound to its imperialist history and subjugation. This imperialist story has made all of us.”<sup>261</sup> Following on from this, reading the Bible as the only meaningful text above other stories means maintaining its position as a “First World’s instrument of power”.<sup>262</sup> Dube enunciates: “[...] for me to read the biblical texts alone is not only to be caught circling around the patriarchal orbit, it is also to circle around the imperialist web.”<sup>263</sup> Therefore, one of Dube’s methods for postcolonial feminist interpretation of the Bible is reading the biblical text with other stories.

From Dube’s reading practices where she brings other narratives alongside the Bible, three different types of stories can be discerned: To begin with, she blends them with other cultural texts, as in “Jumping the Fire with Judith” where she tells the story of Judith alongside a Southern African folktale from her childhood. In this practice the aim is to give space to the unwritten cultural Canon of her own context.<sup>264</sup> Second, Dube tells her own life story alongside the biblical text. She explains this practice as a refusal to give the biblical text too much attention. Dube enunciates that her personal narrative is a way of contesting and subverting the biblical story that has been used to overcome other stories.<sup>265</sup> It is a reading practice of resistance as Dube expresses:

The scenes of my life (---) serve as another text and another book to be in writing, precisely because I wish to resist focusing on canons that were given to the colonized by the empire.<sup>266</sup>

Third type of narrative that Dube places alongside the Bible is Southern African history. This reading practice differs slightly from the first two, as in this method the non-biblical narrative is embedded in to the biblical story by the use of

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<sup>261</sup> Dube 1997a, 23.

<sup>262</sup> Dube 2003, 73.

<sup>263</sup> Dube 2003, 64.

<sup>264</sup> Dube 2003, 60-76. The story was originally told by Dube’s grandmother. “[...] I narrate this Southern African tale not only in memory of my grandmother, not only out of desperate need to read from the canon of black Southern African cultures, but also to make statement that for me to read the biblical texts alone is not only to be caught circling around the patriarchal orbit, it is also to circle around the imperialist web.” (Dube 2003, 64.) Also Mmadipoane (Ngwana ’Mphahlele) Masenya reads a Northern Sotho story together with the biblical story of Esther. See Masenya 2001.

<sup>265</sup> Dube 1998b, 119; Dube 2000a.

<sup>266</sup> Dube 1998b, 114.

dramatic retelling. This is done by including historical characters into the biblical story and placing the biblical events to another historical time. Dube describes the method of dramatic retelling as “a critical assessment of yesterday’s world systems and expression of our dreams and prayers for the present and the future.”<sup>267</sup> Among the sources of this study there are two retellings from the Gospels: From Mark 5:24-43 and from John 4:1-42.<sup>268</sup> In the latter Dube brings various historical characters to discuss at the well with African women of different times in seven scenes. Each of these conversations marks different stages in the history of Southern Africa, ending with a vision for the future. In the last conversation, the woman at the well, this time identified loosely as a “Southern African woman”, is no longer talking to a man, but to a female, who is named Justine. She represents the time of justice that waits ahead for the continent. The person of Jesus is removed from the story and replaced by various historical characters, from David Livingstone to the first president of Zimbabwe, Canaan Banana.<sup>269</sup> Some of these characters are given a messianic role in a very ironic way: They declare themselves as saviors who bring living water to the region, but the history of Southern Africa conveys another version of the reality. The women at the well experience how historical change comes but oppression either multiples or converts to another form.

In her retelling Dube uses the biblical storyline to comment on the social and political situation. In this particular retelling the biblical story is used not for spiritual but for social and political means, for dealing with what happened in the colonial and neo-colonial history and in the present time of globalization. To some extent, given that Dube sees the Bible as an instrument of Western imperialism, it is hard to see why the biblical story has been chosen for alleviating and coping with the wounds created by colonial rule. Is it because the biblical story, despite its connection with colonialism, holds great meaning in the lives of many African women?

The fact that Jesus is removed from the story and replaced by either imaginary (Justine) or historical persons (Cecil Rhodes) is telling. It seems to suggest that next to its spiritual meaning the Bible has a human story to tell, and underlines the strong impact the book has for individual human beings, their identities and everyday lives, and for societies at large. Reading the Bible in the

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<sup>267</sup> Dube 2001e, 48.

<sup>268</sup> Dube 2001a ; Dube 2001e.

<sup>269</sup> Dube 2001e, 49-65.

first hand as a political book and more or less bypassing its spiritual dimensions is one of the pervasive elements in Dube's interpretation. However, this can be defended by pointing out the counteractive nature her hermeneutics hold; Dube's assessment can be seen as an attempt to balance the majority of interpretations that have ignored the political implications they carry.

As Dube demands space for stories and texts other than the Bible, she declares the need for equality between different cultural and also religious traditions:

[...] we are here as women in biblical religion together *with* our Other canons, written and unwritten, and they demand to be heard on their own right. I emphasize "other canons" because imperialism proceeds by denying the validity of the narratives and values of its victims, while it imposes its own "master narratives" on them.<sup>270</sup>

Dube points to the existence of other canons, both cultural and religious, as narratives that contain meaning, truth, and relevance.

In African theology the importance of culture has generally speaking been of immense importance. According to Dube the inculturation biblical reading in Africa has been based on the notion that African culture is not savage or ungodly, but the biblical text could and should be read through African cultures.<sup>271</sup> Dube, however, seems to consider religions in a similar way to cultures, as something negotiable and equally valuable:

There is no need to claim that these 'other' cultures/religions constitute perfect entities or alternatives. There is also no need to claim that the non-biblical cultures are savage, exotic, static cultures of pagans.<sup>272</sup>

Dube seems to oppose placing one religion above others. She implies that the Christian canon and following on from this, Christian religion does not contain a message that needs to be proclaimed to the whole world. On the other hand, the non-Christian religions or cultures are also flawed. The Christian Church, however, claims to be Catholic in the sense that its message contains a truth crosses borders and is translatable to any culture. Most of contextual theology has suggested some sort of translation of the Christian message into different cultural surroundings.<sup>273</sup> This feature, however, seems to be what Dube opposes.

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<sup>270</sup> Dube 1997a, 21.

<sup>271</sup> Dube 2002c, 58.

<sup>272</sup> Dube 2003, 73.

<sup>273</sup> Dube 1998b, 133. For translation model of the Christian message see Bevans 1992, 30-46.

It seems that according to Dube there is no point in translating the message as the message is not needed. Implicitly she seems to claim that Christianity compared to other religions has nothing unique to offer. It is unique only in its immense support of imperialism. Dube's understanding of theology of religions will be dealt with in chapter 6.3.

How Dube promotes what she calls other stories, cultural and religious, written and unwritten, should be seen as identity hermeneutics. She views cultural and religious narratives not in the first place through the truth-value they embody but from the perspective of identity, the power of a narrative to define oneself and another. But are we to choose the stories we are made of? Can we choose the stories that define us? Gabriel Setiloane, also from Botswana, was wrestling with the same problem. For being a Christian, although it is manifested as a Western religion, Setiloane gives following explanation:

[...] I am like someone who has been bewitched, and I find it difficult to shake off the Christian witchcraft with which I have been captivated. I cannot say I necessarily like where I am.<sup>274</sup>

Sometimes stories take us where we do not want to go.

### **5.3. Rahab's reading prism**

One of Dube's most central hermeneutical questions seems to deal with belonging to the biblical story. She asks whether a postcolonial feminist reader can find a point of identification from the biblical story knowing it as a story of conquest and oppression. In many liberationist readings identification with the biblical characters is considered as natural. For instance in the liberationist readings of the Old Testament the oppressed usually identify with the Israelites, though the question has been raised whether they are the only possible point of identification.<sup>275</sup> Identifying with the people of Israel is strongly contested by Dube as she reads the book of Joshua which is also the starting point for Rahab's reading prism, her reading model that seeks to be both feminist and decolonizing.<sup>276</sup> Rahab has attracted also other postcolonial readers of the Bible. Laura Donaldson has dealt with the story of storming of Jericho, not from the point of view of the Israelites, but reading it as a story of Rahab whom she names "a Canaanite Other". For Donaldson the story of Rahab is a story of conversion as

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<sup>274</sup> Setiloane 1979, 64.

<sup>275</sup> The Bible and Culture Collective 1995, 282-283.

<sup>276</sup> Dube 2005, 179-180.

Rahab turns from paganism to monotheism and is rewarded by being affiliated to the Israelites.<sup>277</sup>

Postcolonial scholars, in their reading employ a way of approaching texts from both sides, the colonizers but as well from the colonized, with special attention drawn to the colonial impact on them. Postcolonial readings seek to reread the text in order to reveal colonialist ideology and processes.<sup>278</sup> In Dube's case it contains reading the story from the point of view of the colonized, the outsiders in the text. The text is not written from their point of view but they appear in the text as textual constructions to serve the imperialist ideology.<sup>279</sup>

Dube identifies not with the Israelites but with Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute who accommodates and hides two Israeli spies sent to secretly observe conditions in the city of Jericho and in the land of Canaan. Rahab takes the spies in and in turn asks them to save her family when the Israelites come to take their land. Dube points out that Rahab does not trust her life in the hands of her countrymen but betrays them and seeks for protection from outsiders, and actually enemies of her people. According to Dube, Rahab in the text is not a historical person but rather a textual creation who superimposes the conquerors' aspirations; Rahab speaks about the God of Israel and the superiority of the Israelites as if she had been reading the Deuteronomy: "Rahab's words are almost a replica of the words, agenda and ideology of her invaders."<sup>280</sup> The character of Rahab appears in the story to justify the conquest, and she exemplifies her alleged desire to be colonized. This is using the anti-conquest method, legitimizing the conquest. Dube notes that for ordinary, unresisting reader of the text using God as the hero of the story means authorizing the conquest in an ultimately effective way: "If God gives the land, then, regardless of whether it is inhabited, the whole act is just."<sup>281</sup>

Rahab appears in the story also as a symbol of the land. This is, according to Dube, a common feature in colonizing literature; the female body represents the country that is to be taken over. In colonizing literature colonized women are often portrayed as the earliest contact with the locals. Also a love affair between the colonizer and the local woman is a common textual effect to point out how the colonized actually is inviting the colonizer and desires him. Dube names the

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<sup>277</sup> Donaldson 2006, 165.

<sup>278</sup> Ashcroft – Griffiths - Tiffin 1998, 192.

<sup>279</sup> Dube 2000b, 60-61.

<sup>280</sup> Dube 2005, 179.

<sup>281</sup> Dube 2000b, 59-61, 64, 170.

North American story of Pocahontas as another example of this. Pocahontas falls in love with an invader and leaves her country, deserting her indigenous culture and community. Dube sees this as an act of betrayal and gauges Pocahontas as a textual construction of the colonizer:

The white British settlers arrive, pronounce everyone an ignorant savage, pitch the Union Jack flag, claiming the land, but Pocahontas falls in love with John Smith. She defies her father and everyone else to take the side of the enemy. Pocahontas undoubtedly belongs to the creative pen of the colonizer.<sup>282</sup>

Dube goes on showing that choosing a body of a prostitute to represent the land of Canaan underlines the inferiority and inadequacy of its people compared to the masters to be.<sup>283</sup> The fact that Rahab a sex-worker is sexually available for the spies indicates that the country can be conquered as well:

[...] Jericho itself has been portrayed as the body of a sex worker, which easily changes hands from one master to another. The story tells us, that Jericho must be entered and taken and indeed Jericho is entered and taken.<sup>284</sup>

Rahab is an outsider in the story of Israel and Dube's decision to read the text from her angle demonstrates one of the ultimate goals of her hermeneutics concerning biblical texts: She seeks to bring into the text those who have been excluded from it, but whose lives have been heavily imposed on by the text. Her reading position and the angle for interpretation is that of the outsiders, not the chosen ones of the biblical stories.<sup>285</sup>

Out of the story of Rahab Dube constructs a reading model for liberating interdependence: Rahab's reading prism.

Reading through Rahab's reading prism, therefore means that I keenly seek to understand the construction of men and women; of international relations of the past and present; of black and white differences, ethnicity and sexual orientation, indeed, of how our identities are constructed and the power relations they produce and perpetuate. Reading through Rahab's reading prism also means that I underline our inevitable hybrid identities, our contact zones, even as they are still characterized by unjust power relations.<sup>286</sup>

Dube points out, that reading through Rahab's reading prism means first of all highlighting the historical fact of imperialism. It seeks to reveal how also

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<sup>282</sup> Dube 2000b, 73.

<sup>283</sup> Dube 2000b, 77. Also Sara Mills makes the notion that colonized women are often described as sexually available. Mills 1991, 61.

<sup>284</sup> Dube 2005, 179.

<sup>285</sup> Dube 2000b, 80.

<sup>286</sup> Dube 2005, 180.



communities that strive for liberation - like the Israelites as they desire to the Promised Land - might be part of colonizing process. Rahab's reading prism means both decolonizing and feminist interpretation that invites readers from various interest groups to build political coalitions across their differences. Second, Rahab's reading prism postulates hybrid identities as a form of resistance. According to Dube Rahab who parrots her invaders religious text is culturally and politically death. She is a construction of the colonizers needs and aspirations. Rahab's reading prism resurrects the Rahabs from their tombs to subvert the colonizing ideology in many ways, but above all by using their own voice to tell their own stories, and by creating narratives that are genuinely hybrid. The third principle of Rahab's reading prism insists on creating new spaces for hearing God anew. This space reaches for liberating interdependence and justice for international relations. It refuses to accept the patriarchal and imperial values.<sup>287</sup> Instead, this space of liberating interdependence, which is an arena for dialogue and mutuality, becomes an authority that replaces the oppressive authorities.

Rahab's reading prism is actually not a unified reading practice, but a set of principles that guide analysis. In the location of in-between it proposes hybridity as an answer: One does not have to be an inheritor of one story only. By reaching over to the other and her/his narrative something new can come up. Dube seems to propose that meaningful identities are possible on in the in-between. As Tolbert puts it: "[...] whatever truth there is in this world, it is not forged in me or in another but somewhere between us."<sup>288</sup>

Dube does not offer a distinctively new model for hermeneutics, but rather employs various reading practices that all feature her principle of revealing the imperialistic and patriarchal ideology in the Bible. While her reading practices unveil the power claims in the Bible and its use in history, they also challenge the Western understanding of objective knowledge. By promoting different non-scholarly reading methods, like reading with and re-telling the biblical story in various ways Dube gives space to the biblical interpretation outside the academia. Dube's hermeneutics in general, has strong ethical premises. It is in the search for justice and life. All Dube's reading practices pay attention to the outsiders in the story, those present in the story as textual creations of their subjugators or those completely missing. They should be given a place to tell their own side of the

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<sup>287</sup> Dube 2000b, 80, 121-123; Dube 2005, 179.

<sup>288</sup> Tolbert 1995, 361.

story: How they were violated and subjugated in the name of foreign God. In Dube's hermeneutics the chosen point of view is the one of violated, fragmented identity.

## **VI THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1. Christology**

Dube's understanding of Jesus is in parts ambivalent and even inwardly contradictory. Mostly her interpretations of Jesus present him as an actor who reflects the imperial situation of the origin of the Gospels. As already mentioned in chapter 4.1.3. Dube sees that the person of Jesus mirrors the colonial conflict of the surrounding society. Her interpretations, however, also present a Jesus who is a liberator and suggests equality. He is both seen as a colonialist whose behavior and words show his superiority and the one who challenges Scriptures as they override women's right to speak.<sup>289</sup>

When discussing Dube's Christology one must remember that her hermeneutics do not aim at constructing a systematic panorama on dogma of the person of Jesus. Dube does not wield the Bible from a dogmatic point of view, and constructing her understanding of Christology, then, is collecting pieces that do not form a whole picture. Dube's hermeneutics, however, contain a lot of implications for Christian dogma and her Christology is although cryptic, is especially interesting in its radical interpretations when compared to the Christological understanding of classical Christian theology. It also sheds light on her understanding of mission and theology of religions that will be dealt with later on. The way she interprets the person of Jesus in the Gospels is also where she wavers between postcolonial hermeneutics and hermeneutics of liberation theology.

As already mentioned Dube sees in the person of Jesus the colonial conflict of the surrounding society. The Jesus community tried to cope with the colonial rule by portraying a Jesus who is strong and omnipotent as the colonial masters of the Roman Empire. Dube even shows how the names given to Jesus resemble the honorary titles of Alexander the Great. For Dube, the way the Gospels present Jesus as the Light, the Word, and the Wisdom are problematic, for she opposes the hierarchy proposed by this installation of Jesus as ultimate and absolute.<sup>290</sup>

In reading the Gospel of John, Dube describes herself as a "reluctant traveler", who questions the role given to Jesus and refuses to travel according to the map suggested by the Gospel. According to her reading, the story of Jesus

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<sup>289</sup> Dube 1998b, 132; Dube 2007, 365.

<sup>290</sup> Dube 2006d, 307-308 ; Dube 2000b, 130-132.

invites one to take side with the powerful Word that is the beginning and end of everything:

[...] the narrator introduced the Word as the Creator of all and everything, whose status, therefore, should be self-evident, who should unconditionally guarantee the birth-right of all as children. When the reluctant traveler realizes that, on the contrary, the travelling Word only confers power and birth-rights on those who belief in his name and that there is resistance from the hosts/hostesses of the travelling Word, she or he begins to question a number of things. First the reluctant traveller begins to problematise a creator, a parent of all, who is selective and who confers power conditionally. Second the reluctant traveller immediately discovers that to accompany the travelling Word is to subscribe to world view that baptizes an ideology of “selective and exclusive empowering” or “conditional empowering” or “chosenness” of particular creatures of God.<sup>291</sup>

Dube sees the person of Jesus as a condition for belonging and “birth right” and opposes this. The creator of all should self-evidently include everybody as children and not bring about conditions. Seeing the story of Jesus and the invitation to identify with him as an invitation to ally oneself with the powers that suppress difference is a dominant feature in Dube’s theology.

Dube, who distances herself from these claims by naming herself a reluctant traveler, cannot identify with the story of Jesus. It seems that to form an alliance with Jesus would mean accepting the ideology of chosenness and exclusivism that he embodies. Dube’s interpretation of Jesus opposes selection theology. All should be welcome without conditions, even “the disbelieving worlds” that do not embrace the Word.<sup>292</sup>

On the other hand the inclusion of “all people” in the Bible is a red cloth for Dube, as it espouses to universalism. The installation of Jesus as the light of all people is an imperialist declaration as it proclaims everything else as darkness. Dube describes what this kind of universalism means for identity:

The all knowledgeable voice of John that takes me to the beginning, which tells me of the creator of all things, who lights “all” people, makes me very reluctant traveller. Its road signs resonate with colonial narrative plots whose aim is to take me in, subsume me, impose themselves on me and then relegate me to a permanently inferior position. And which even invite me to accept and proclaim my inferiority.<sup>293</sup>

This underlines how Dube’s demand for equality and mutuality extends to Jesus as well. The picture of Jesus as the absolute authority corresponds with the understanding of most of Christian theology. The Lordship of Jesus has even been

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<sup>291</sup> Dube 2000a, 160.

<sup>292</sup> Dube 2000a, 160.

<sup>293</sup> Dube 2000a, 157.

considered to be in the very essence of Christian faith. Dube, however, implicitly denies this universal Lordship and sees it as a part of colonial ideology. Seeing Jesus as the Lord, the God, and above all, would, it seems, deprive the value of everything else. Dube's radical interpretation of Jesus opposes most of Christian theology and presumably would not be accepted by many communities of faith and ordinary readers. Another question is that while hierarchy seems to be what Dube goes against, are there religions that are totally free from it? Subsuming oneself to the hand of something greater than oneself is a common feature in many religious traditions.

Postcolonial feminist hermeneutics condenses in showing unfair, unbalanced power distributions. The unjust sharing of power and suppressing difference needs to be combated. In this struggle Dube takes the Divine claims for power as her targets as well. If the Son of God who is with the Father and who is God, claims to be above all, he makes himself a colonial master:

Jesus's relationship – and by extension Christianity's relationship to foreign people and lands – is, unfortunately, grounded on a very unequal foundation, as attested by the portrayals of race, gender, and geography in the Gospel of John. Accordingly, what seems to be an inclusive gospel of Spirit and Truth is the reverse. It reflects the installation of Christianity as a universal religion: an installation that proceeds by disavowing all geographical boundaries in order to claim power over the 'world' and relegate all other religions and cultures to inadequacy.<sup>294</sup>

How Dube sees Jesus reflects her theoretical framework that considers reality as a power struggle. This is probably why she looks at the biblical story of Jesus from a very political perspective and names him as dominating and powerful.

However, by revealing the earthly power discourse in the character of Jesus, Dube does not divest Jesus from the spiritual dimension he also holds. Dube does not directly deny the Divinity of Jesus but disputes its monotheistic basis as she maintains that elevating Jesus above for instance Moses or John the Baptist echoes imperialistic hierarchy.<sup>295</sup>

Dube also points out that the story and person of Jesus have been made an instrument of the colonization of the mind:

The image of Jesus was, and still is a blue-eyed, blonde, white male, whose benevolent face, along with the likewise white faces of his disciples, still graces our churches today.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Dube 2006d, 311.

<sup>295</sup> Dube 2000a, 158; Dube 1998b, 125,127.

<sup>296</sup> Dube 1997a, 11-12.

She links the coming of the Bible and its story of Jesus Christ together with the coming of other cultural canons of the West. Dube equates the role of Jesus to that of Shakespeare and other Western cultural texts that were assigned to the colonized as ultimate salvation, either in the cultural or religious sphere. According to her, Jesus, as well as Shakespeare, serves as an “imperial and patriarchal symbol” in postcolonial Africa. Dube insists on finding a new space, which operates outside these oppressive structures and their symbols.<sup>297</sup> With her interpretation of the person of Jesus Dube seems to invoke several questions. Is the story of Jesus useless as it has become a symbol of imperialism and patriarchy? Has the Christian tradition mistaken the true being of its central character? Is it possible to read the story of Jesus with conviction of his divinity without subscribing to imperial ideology? Dube seems to suggest that postcolonial Christology is needed but does not go further from the phase of deconstruction of the imperial Jesus.

In light of these very critical interpretations it is surprising that in some of her articles Dube employs Christological attributes that echo liberation hermeneutics. As mentioned earlier in chapter 4.2.1 Dube seems to consider reading the Bible as a text of liberation as a calculated strategy that aims to deconstruct oppression with the means of that very same oppression. In her articles “Who do you say that I am?” and “Praying Lord’s Prayer in Global Economic Era” Dube clearly uses liberation hermeneutics and treats the Bible as a text of liberation.<sup>298</sup> Traces of liberation hermeneutics are seen in other texts as well, as postcolonial hermeneutics also seek to read for liberation, but in these articles mentioned the basic orientation towards the Bible and the role of Jesus is fundamentally different than the rest of Dube’s writing. The role that she gives to Jesus becomes controversial when these texts are compared to her other interpretations that are explicitly postcolonial. Where Jesus is elsewhere described as a superior traveler, who claims his power over the ends of the earth, in these interpretations he is depicted as the one who stands against oppression in the social context of the story and even opposes the discriminating use of the Bible,

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<sup>297</sup> Dube 2000b, 115-116.

<sup>298</sup> “Who do you say that I am?” is an amalgam of four talks given during several days in a Mission Conference. It was published in *Feminist Theology* in 2007. “Praying the Lord’s Prayer” in was published in 1997. Thus, the time of their writing does not explain the change in Dube’s interpretative key or suggest it to be permanent change, but rather she seems to be in circulation in her interpretative schemes. Dube 2007; Dube 1997b.

even before the Biblical Canon was established. In these diverging texts Dube portrays Jesus as a radical who fights the oppression in his own context and actually paves the way for women's liberation and empowerment for both men and women.<sup>299</sup> In "Who do you say that I am?" Jesus is both healer and shows solidarity to the poor and homeless. In this text Dube announces: "Jesus is our liberator and he insists that our liberation is inseparable from all factors of our social lives."<sup>300</sup> Dube even calls Jesus "Christ the liberator".<sup>301</sup> This is radically different from the majority of her interpretations of Jesus.

One possible explanation for this ambivalence towards liberation in the Bible and in the person of Jesus could be that Dube's interpretation of Jesus as a liberator is done on purpose for combating the patriarchy in the text. It is possible that here she employs the colonial book to read for liberation with full awareness. Her stricture to the liberation hermeneutics, namely that reading the Bible as a text of liberation is done consciously and it is a strategy, could be a reading instruction for her own texts that employ the person of Jesus to work for equality. However, the almost opposing hermeneutical schemes seem to be tied to certain circumstances and certain audiences. "Who Do You Say that I Am?" is a bulk of talks that were given in a mission conference.<sup>302</sup> It does not reflect the interpretative lines that Dube has set for re-reading biblical material in for example Rahab's reading prism or directly address to the Bible as an oppressive book that reflects colonial ideology. In the postcolonial feminist readings she seems to read a hopelessly corrupted and ungodly book, but in her liberation readings she subscribes to a different scheme of interpretation: Showing how the oppressed become liberated in the biblical stories despite the social and cultural environment that is hostile to them.

On the other hand, Dube herself points out that hermeneutics in search of social justice should not in the first place be guided by theories, and fidelity to them, but by commitment to "read both the text and society". New reading strategies must be employed in order to respond to the challenges that arise from the context. Dube describes herself as a nomadic scholar who never stops finding

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<sup>299</sup> "[...] Christ has no room for scriptures that are used to suppress women and men from living out their freedom in Christ. So, it is well and good that it is written that women must be silent in church but I say to you the Gospel of Christ the liberator sets us free, his Spirit of fire lights us all and gives both men and women the right to speak." (Dube 2007, 365.)

<sup>300</sup> Dube 2007, 350.

<sup>301</sup> Dube 2007, 365.

<sup>302</sup> Dube 2007, 346.

new ways.<sup>303</sup> The two different ways of interpreting the meaning of Jesus are not explained by context alone, or with flexibility in the use of theory. Rather, Dube's diverging interpretations leave the question open and the paradox remains: Jesus is a liberator and healer of broken relationships as he suggests equality.<sup>304</sup> Also, he is the embodiment of imperial ideology, as he sends disciples to cross borders and teach his kingdom with power that has no end. In the sources of this study one can find very diverging portraits of Jesus.

Kwok Pui-lan has pointed out that Jesus/Christ is the most hybridized concept in Christian tradition. Kwok enunciates: "The space between Jesus and Christ is unsettling and fluid, resisting easy characterization and disclosure. It is the "contact zone" or "borderland" between the human and the divine, the one and the many, [...]the God of conquerors and the God of the meek and the lowly."<sup>305</sup> Kwok argues that in the New Testament the images of Jesus are pluralistic and hybrid as they grow out of meeting of several cultures, Jewish and Hellenistic.<sup>306</sup>

As Dube deals with the biblical narrative of Jesus, she leaves out the cross and self-emptying love of God. She is a selective reader, like all biblical readers are bound to be. However, postcolonial interpretation and theology of the cross remain non-existent in Dube's thought. She does not cover the humble servant, Jesus who becomes divested of all power. Taking this side of the story into account would probably change Dube's image of Jesus again. Then it would be truly hybrid. Her postcolonial interpretations of Jesus remain rather one-sided.

Seeing the story of Jesus and the invitation to identify with him as an invitation to ally with the powers that suppress difference is a dominant feature in Dube's theology. Dube questions the power of Jesus, probably because power for her is always dubious. The suspicious attitude towards power and hierarchy are also shown in her interpretation of mission texts in the Bible.

## **6.2. Mission**

Dube's understanding of mission as a part of colonizing process is her starting point for interpreting the mission texts in the New Testament. She describes:

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<sup>303</sup> "Since the society is dynamic, a reader for social justice never arrives. One cannot say, I am a narrative critic, a feminist reader, a postcolonial reader, period. One is constantly forced to delve into completely new reading strategies in search for social justice. One who reads the text and the society will just have to reread as new challenges arise." (Dube 2002c, 65.)

<sup>304</sup> Dube 2007, 350.

<sup>305</sup> Kwok 2005, 171.

<sup>306</sup> Kwok 2005, 171.



To bring Christ and civilization to these nations, the Christian churches worked hand in glove with the imperialist and colonialist movements of their nations and continents.<sup>307</sup>

Dube sees that mission was culturally corroding to the African societies; it was part of the colonization of mind as it persuaded the Africans to believe in the superiority of the colonial masters' religion. Also, it was a patriarchal project, as the Western instituted churches implemented patriarchal Western values on their followers. As shown earlier, Dube views many of the missionary practices as colonizing: The written forms of indigenous languages served as an alienation from own oral stories, the formal education, often conducted by the Western instituted churches, resulted in the extinction of the traditional systems of education. The coming of Christianity, commerce and civilization happened together and was one totalizing project.<sup>308</sup> Dube describes:

[...] most of us experienced the Christian mission not as liberating egalitarian movement, but as divinely authorized patriarchal program that subjugates all those who are not Christian.<sup>309</sup>

Dube's understanding of mission is based on own experience that she extends to a larger community. Again, as Dube refers to "most of us" the problem of entitlement to speak for a rather unlimited group of people comes up. Although Dube's experience of mission as cultural and religious subjugation is indisputably shared by many, the experience of Christian mission in Africa is more multifaceted. The Bible and Christianity have been embraced in Africa, if the number of Christians can tell anything about it.

Dube's understanding of mission as a part of the colonizing process influences her interpretation of mission texts in the New Testament. Dube interprets the so called Great Commission of the Gospel of Matthew, one of the key texts of 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary movement. Dube enunciates:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18b). In other words, Christian readers have been issued an unrestricted passport to enter all nations in obedience to their Lord, without any consultation whatsoever with any of the nations in question.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Dube 1997b, 449.

<sup>308</sup> "[...] the line between religion, commerce, and civilization is quite thin, if not altogether non-existent." (Dube 1998a, 231. )

<sup>309</sup> Dube 1997a, 21. Again, as Dube refers to "most of us, the problem of presentability....

<sup>310</sup> Dube 1998a, 224.

Dube directs the attention to the objects of mission, to the people who will be visited by the disciples, or as she points out, all the Christian readers of the text. Again, it is noteworthy that Dube focuses on those who are outsiders from the story, but whose lives the text will affect exceedingly. They are not asked if they want to be part of this story of authoritarian Christ, who has unlimited power over all possible places, both in heaven and on earth.

Dube reads the Matthean commission from the perspective of meeting the other. What kind of meeting of the other is encouraged in the text? She points out that the commission to disciple nations contains no mutuality at all:

The words “all”, “obey”, “command,” and “everything” are absolute terms that leave little or no room for negotiations. Nothing suggests that the disciples of Christ will also need to be disciplined by other nations.<sup>311</sup>

Dube points out that by dividing the people who shall meet to teachers and those who need to be taught, Matthean text is not proposing liberating interdependence, that would “affirm the dignity of all things and peoples involved”<sup>312</sup>, but constructs a hierarchical approach to the visited. According to Dube, the Matthean mission to the nations is built on subjugation of the other and creates “relationship of unequals”.<sup>313</sup> Dube sees that the Great Commission implies an understanding of other cultures as “empty vessels that wait to be filled by the divinely commissioned disciples.”<sup>314</sup> Dube underlines that the text supports the imposition of Christian canon to other nations. This results in universalizing the Christian canon and undermining other traditions.<sup>315</sup> For Dube to consider Christian faith unique and superior next to any other faith is part of imperial ideology. She says:

Nothing suggests that they will need to recognize the existence of other powers of the earth and heaven, outside the Matthean vision of the Divine. Rather, it posits a universally available world, and it advances the right to expand to other nations, to teach them, and to include them without necessarily embracing equality.<sup>316</sup>

It seems that according to Dube, taking the Christian story to the nations means at least an attempt of depriving them from their own stories.

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<sup>311</sup> Dube 2000b, 137.

<sup>312</sup> Dube 2000b, 186.

<sup>313</sup> Dube 2000b, 148.

<sup>314</sup> Dube 2000b, 137-138.

<sup>315</sup> Dube 1998a, 236.

<sup>316</sup> Dube 2000b, 137.

Dube's interpretation of the Matthean commission evokes a question of postcolonial mission. Put in other words, is there a possibility of Christian mission that is not imperialist? Is there a possibility for postcolonial mission that is not oppressive but acknowledges the value of the others, in Dube's words "the visited"? In order to be genuinely postcolonial, in other words non-oppressive, culturally inclusive process, it seems that the content of mission, if not the Christian gospel, has to be radically redefined.

In fact, since Christianity is primarily a mission-oriented religion with a claim to absolute and universal truth, there lies at its very heart an ideology of imperialism that seeks to subjugate others and that creates in the process a relationship of dependency between the tutors and the untutored.<sup>317</sup>

Although Dube is critical towards the missionary practices her understanding of mission as subjugation goes deeper than that. According to Dube the missionary orientation and absolute truth claims makes Christianity oppressive.

Fundamentally, her opposition to the mission is opposition to the idea that there is a unique message in the Christian story, and that it would be better or more advisable than other stories.

Is there a chance for postcolonial mission that takes into account the value of the other including her/his religious and cultural tradition? Dube would deny this possibility since already the concept of defining God in another way and claiming that to be truth that is universally needed, is colonial. Mission echoes imperial ideology as it postulates the idea that other religious traditions lack something. Instead of seeing Christianity as the final truth Dube proposes seeing Christianity and other religions not as "competing oppositions but as mutual traditions that enrich each other."<sup>318</sup> Dube opposes placing the Christian faith in the centre of universe. She denies that the monopoly of truth and meaning would be in the Christian faith alone.

### **6.3. Theology of religions**

The question of revelation in the Bible does not hold a central place in Dube's thought. It is seldom that she refers to the Bible by calling it the word of God. This is, of course in line with her belonging to the field of biblical criticism, as in the academic biblical studies being disinterested in divine revelation in biblical

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<sup>317</sup> Dube 1998a, 233.

<sup>318</sup> Dube 2002b, 117.

material is not unusual. In spite of the minor role Dube gives to this question, her hermeneutics take in an implicit conception of it. This is apparent as she announces the aim of her biblical interpretation as "to create new spaces to hear God anew"<sup>319</sup>. This statement gives the impression that according to Dube there is at least a chance that God speaks through biblical material. Dube has the conception of the Bible as the word of God, although it seems to differ radically from the conception of biblical revelation in traditional theology, where there has been a strong tendency to secure the uniqueness of the Bible in relation to other texts. The Bible has been considered as unique both in its message and in its origins and the reformation reasserted the meaning and authority of the Bible against tradition.<sup>320</sup>

The terms that Dube uses of the Bible in relation to other canons are telling. She describes the role of biblical stories in the African continent as an "additional body of wisdom"<sup>321</sup>. This is to say she sees them as adding something to the wisdom that was already present in African stories, but she also seems to draw a parallel between African stories of wisdom and the biblical stories of wisdom. Dube does not differentiate between what was new or specific in biblical wisdom compared to African wisdom. Because the question of salvation in the afterworld is not central to Dube, she does not refer to the Bible as a guide book to redemptive faith. However, she touches on the once so popular conversation in African theology, namely the question whether African traditional religions and their stories are in line with the message of the biblical stories, and to what extent they bring salvation. The need to re-examine African traditional religions and their relation to Christian concepts of salvation and revelation started as counteract towards the foreign missionaries' condemning attitude to the local religious traditions. As a result many African theologians took the position that the African traditional religions should be understood as *praeparatio evangelica* that has spiritual value as it paves the way for the Christian truth. However, they are not enough to bring salvific faith but need to be fulfilled by the gospel of Christ.<sup>322</sup> According to Dube, this view reflects the colonial proclamation of Christianity. She enunciates:

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<sup>319</sup> Dube 2000b, 115.

<sup>320</sup> See McGrath 1993, 140-144.

<sup>321</sup>"With the coming of Christianity, sub-Saharan Africa received an additional body of wisdom, namely, the biblical stories." (Dube 2001d, 4.)

<sup>322</sup>Concerning this conversation see Ukpong 2000, 12-14.

For me, the story of John the Baptist reminds me of the colonial proclamation of Christianity, which held that African religious traditions, or all other world cultures for that matter, were an imperfect revelation of the same God of Christianity – they had been waiting for the Christian story to fulfill them.<sup>323</sup>

Dube argues that all religious traditions and texts should be read on their own right, not from the point of view of the Christian Canon or its interpretations.<sup>324</sup>

Dube suggests reading the Bible together with other texts and stories outside the Christian canon and the Western cultural canon. For Dube this reading practice is essential, for she wants to give space and significance to the canon of black Southern African cultures. This reason seems to be founded on the search for balanced identity, finding value in one's own stories. Another, even more important reason is deeply ideological: According to her it is impossible to "privilege the Christian stories over the religious stories of Others without subscribing to imperialism."<sup>325</sup> Dube's methodological decision of reading biblical texts alongside other texts not only has ideological premises but also theological implications: in order to avoid promoting one cultural text and denying the value of other texts she resigns from the traditional theological understanding of seeing the Bible as the unique revelation from God.

Dube refers to the words of a female leader of an African Independent Church: "When God spoke to us, he never opened the Bible."<sup>326</sup> The Bible not being the last word of God opens the possibility of also giving value to the other texts, the texts of others. This opens an important view to Dube's understanding of revelation: God's words cannot be restricted to the Bible alone and, thus, revelation can be found elsewhere as well. Dube's understanding of revelation is broad since all the sacred texts of any tradition hold the possibility of hearing

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<sup>323</sup> "For me, the story of John the Baptist reminds me of the colonial proclamation of Christianity, which held that African religious traditions, or all other world cultures for that matter, were an imperfect revelation of the same God of Christianity – they had been waiting for the Christian story to fulfill them." Dube 2000a, 158.

<sup>324</sup> "This requires recognizing that many women in biblical religions also belong to Native American religions, African religions, and Asian religions; that this position does is not only intricately related to imperialism, but must also inform our practice. This recognition implies that we are here as women in biblical religion together *with* our Other canons, written and unwritten, and they demand to be heard and read in their own right." (Dube 1997a, 21.)

<sup>325</sup> Dube 2000b, 108; Also Dube 2003, 64. "[...] but also to make the statement that for me to read biblical texts alone is not only to be caught circling around the patriarchal orbit, it is also to circle around the imperialistic web."<sup>325</sup>

<sup>326</sup> This was the answer when Bishop Victoria Lucas, one of the founders of the Glory Healing Church in Gaborone, was asked why does she operate as a church leader while the Bible seems to be against it. Dube 2000, 42. 116; Dube 1996b, 126. This quotation holds an important place in Dube's interpretation as she refers to it frequently.

God. God speaks in the Bible, but not there alone.<sup>327</sup> By bringing other texts and stories next to biblical stories Dube seems to suggest that the Bible alone is not enough: Looking only at the biblical text is insufficient in order to hear God and “embraces the dignity of God’s creation.”<sup>328</sup> Other stories and texts need to accompany the Christian canon. By leaving the question of mutually excluding truths in different religions untouched Dube seems to postulate that all religious traditions speak about the same God. In the same time she seems to assume God who is personal and has good will to creation, which is actually God’s creation.

As Dube disclaims the understanding of the Bible as the word of God, in the meaning that God especially speaks in the Bible and not in other texts, and underlines the meaning of other sacred texts, she engages herself in a pluralistic understanding of revelation and, actually, of nature of Christianity, as whole. Dube promotes multi-faith and multi-cultural global village where understanding Christianity as “a one and only valid religion” is rejected.<sup>329</sup> Pluralist theology of religions, among which Dube numbers, has been heavily challenged by proposing that while it opposes exclusivism and universalism in Christianity it actually transposes it to liberalism. The insistence for multi-religious sphere becomes the new absolute.<sup>330</sup>

Dube does not only opt for pluralism, but goes a step further; Dube’s vision of situation where choosing and rejecting from various cultural and religious traditions is possible, is syncretistic. It is not merely a vision for future but a description of already existing situation as religious and cultural identities have never, anywhere, been purely of one thing. Religions, Christianity included, are born out of various influences and traditions.<sup>331</sup>

In Christian tradition syncretism has been treated with condemnation. It has been seen as a threat to the Christian message and in relation to issue there has been an urgent need to keep the message pure.<sup>332</sup> In the case of Dube, who seems to think that all possible sacred texts speak of the same God, keeping Christianity clean or pure is meaningless. Dube does not differentiate between God in the Bible and God/s speaking in other texts. This is a very tacit but to my

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<sup>327</sup> ...”God need not open the Bible to speak and to be heard.” Dube 2000b, 200.

<sup>328</sup> Dube 2000b, 116.

<sup>329</sup> Dube 2000b, 193.

<sup>330</sup>”A number of critics have argued that pluralism has by no means escaped an exclusivistic attitude but merely transposed it from Christianity to modern Western liberalism.” (Vanhooser 2002, 57.)

<sup>331</sup> Dube 1999b, 225-226; Vähäkangas 2010, 7-8, 12.

<sup>332</sup> Schreiter 2004, 144.

understanding clear feature in her theology. Dube's positive conception of syncretism echoes a trend among Two-Thirds World theologians. In theologies born out of postcolonial framework syncretism is not viewed as a pejorative label for proceedings where two incompatible religions are absorbed. Rather, it is seen as an inevitable part of religious life in the realities of Two-Thirds World; it is a process where gospel is integrated into cultural codes.<sup>333</sup>

In her objections to Christianity perceiving itself as the absolute truth Dube actually comes close to the problematic that lies in the Christian monotheism, about God who announces himself as jealous God and the only one. Achille Mbembe, Cameroonian postcolonial theorist analyses monotheism as the basis of universal truth claims, and basically, of domination of the world:

[...] there is no monotheism except in relation to producing a truth that not only determines the foundations and goals of the world but provides the origin of all meaning. [...] By firmly rejecting any notion of the relativism of truth, monotheism postulates the existence of a universe with a single meaning. In such a universe, a space left for dissent is, in theory, very small.<sup>334</sup>

Mbembe sees that monotheism as a metaphor contains the idea of totalization, and is based on exclusivity. As monotheism denies the existence of other gods, it holds itself a sovereign place, monopoly to truth. Mbembe actually considers monotheism as a source of universalism and suppressing differences.<sup>335</sup> As Dube does not actually go this far, as she does not touch monotheism as a subject, she, however, by denying absolute truth claims of Christianity and its position as the only religion or ultimate truth, has a conception not so different from Mbembe's.

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<sup>333</sup> Duraisingh 2003, 193.

<sup>334</sup> Mbembe 2001, 215.

<sup>335</sup> Mbembe's analysis of monotheism and its implications at length: "(...)monotheism has at least five important implications for our theme. The first is *primacy* – the fact that god signifies only himself. (...) From relational point of view, from the point of view of law and necessity, a god that is One absorbs and subsumes everything. Nothing can be substituted for him. He is his own genesis. Time is his property; rather, he is time; he is what is beyond time. Second the metaphor of monotheism entails the idea of *totalization*. Every monotheistic system is based on a notion of exclusivity and condensation of sovereignty, in contrast to a plurality of gods, as well as their dispersion into a multiplicity of forms. The third implication is *monopoly*. Belief in a single god distinct from the world is possible only if accompanied by suppression of other forms of worship. This radicality is what gives the single god part of his jealous, possessive, wrathful, violent, and unconditional character. It presupposes that the unique god, precisely because unique, is incompatible with worship of other gods. (...) The notion of monotheism also implies that of omnipotence. (...) This absence of constraints constitutes the divinity's power and its supreme essentiality. (...) The one god's omnipotence allows him to produce the world out of nothing. His providence allows him to save the world in exchange for nothing, in a supreme gift of himself, whose sacrificial character ultimately refers to the origin and end of all things. Finally, the metaphor of monotheism is inseparable from the notion of the *ultimate*(...). Speaking of the ultimate is another way of speaking of the truth." (Mbembe 2001, 214-215.)

Inclusiveness and equality are inalienable bases for Dube and this explains her inconvenience with drawing lines or borders in the matter of revelation in different religions. Although this approach may not do full justice to the self-image of religions, it has its benefits. In the case of Christianity, pluralism challenges to rethink what is the kernel and what are circular matters.

Clearly the Bible for Dube is not a collection of absolute doctrinal statements. Also, it seems that her reasons for pluralistic understanding of sacred texts are not found in the area of dogmatic reasoning but rather in the area reclaiming identities. As Dube's asks, if the biblical story can be her own story, her questions are existential and deal with identity. Thus, the criticisms from the conservative theologians to pluralistic theology of religions miss the point in the case of Dube. They simply speak from different motifs and ask different questions, giving rather disparate answers to what is essential for Christian identity. Dube's hermeneutics and theology search for ways of integrating the Christian story to the reality of postcolonial subject. She calls for "the right to reap from both fields", different cultural and religious traditions and make use of whatever is found to be life-affirming.<sup>336</sup> It is however relevant to ask what is left of Christian identity when it becomes disengaged from dogma, church traditions, and creeds. What is the content of 'Christian' in a pluralistic multi-faith space that Dube suggests? Does it become a cultural signifier or a matter of personal emotion of belonging? In Dube's vision these questions are not answered, and not even asked.

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<sup>336</sup> Dube 2002b, 117.



## **VII CONCLUSIONS**

Dube's postcolonial feminist hermeneutics of the Bible rise from a personal distress with the Christian Canon. Her experiences as a postcolonial subject and as a woman of Southern Africa, inform her process of interpretation as well as her understanding of the Bible. Christian tradition and the Holy Book of Christians are troublesome from this perspective. They always imply intrusion and oppression, because the Bible has been the motivating force behind Western imperialism. Dube's hermeneutics of the Bible aim to reveal the connections between the biblical text and the imperialist narrative that still continues to suppress the rights of Two-Thirds World people and especially women. To carry out this task Dube employs postcolonialism and feminism as her hermeneutical lenses that direct her interpretation of the Bible.

Dube sees imperialism as an ancient practice that takes different forms in different times. Colonialism, neo-colonialism, and globalization are all embodiments of imperial ideology. Imperialism is founded on unequal relationships, subjugating the other and taking control over the geographical, cultural and religious spaces of the other. Dube views imperialism as a multifaceted phenomenon. She concentrates on its impact on identities. Colonial contact always results in redefining the identities of the colonizers and the colonized. The colonizers narrate themselves as superior while the colonized are depicted as inferior, lacking, and dependent on their benevolent masters. Colonial contact means very unequal distribution of power.

Dube points out that women in colonial zones are doubly oppressed for they face both patriarchy and colonialism. In addition, colonialism usually intensifies gender oppression, because when encountered colonial conquest the indigenous culture insists on its most traditional values. Patriarchy and imperialism are not identical but they do overlap. According to Dube, both need to be addressed. Postcolonialism and feminism are interconnected sites of struggle for liberation; both are needed in order to liberate people. They also share a rather similar epistemological basis: both postcolonialism and feminism underline the meaning of context and experience. However, when personal experiences are valued in interpretation, whose particular experience is heard? Whose experience is chosen as valid? Dube's hermeneutical project promotes the experience of the colonized, and especially the doubly colonized women of the Two-Thirds World. There lies a danger that all parties are not heard and, thus, a creative space for liberating

interdependence is impossible. Also, speaking about colonizers and colonized and about oppressed women and men who hold powerful positions can become a trap where human beings are only seen through their roles of the victims and the guilty. Dube does not comment on the issue of forgiveness, although it is a deeply biblical concept. What would postcolonial theology of forgiveness be like? It should not shy away from addressing problems of past and current contexts. It could, however, be part of the solution when non-oppressive ways of interaction are sought for.

Dube sees that the Bible encompasses patriarchal and colonial values, as the biblical texts originate from various colonial contexts and patriarchal cultures. As a result patriarchy and imperialism lie at the heart of the biblical worldview. The reason why the Bible has been useful in colonizing processes is in the Bible itself. It contains the ideology of expansion.

Dube points out that the Bible played a major role in the Western colonial project of subjugating the Two-Thirds World. The Bible replaced the canons and stories of the colonized by declaring Christianity, together with Western civilization, as the final end and salvation for these societies. By replacing the indigenous stories the Bible played a part in alienating people from their own culture and religion. Thus, it became a tool of imperialism and the colonization of mind. Translating the Bible to indigenous languages did not make this less harmful; translations of the colonial times took in the colonial ideology. For Dube, being a postcolonial subject indicates that one's understanding of the Bible is inseparable from the experience of colonial oppression. The fundamental question is, how to read the Bible with the knowledge of its role in the colonial conquest.

The Bible has been read as a book of liberation as various liberationist interpretations of the Bible have emerged in the Two-Thirds World. Dube, however, underlines that reading the Bible as a text of liberation is a sign of its tight grip over the colonized: they seek to dismantle their oppression with the language of the Bible. Dube's negative stance towards liberationist readings of the Bible is in line with most postcolonial biblical scholars. They criticize theology of liberation for its reluctance to question the authority given to the Bible.

In her analysis of past and present contexts Dube highlights the importance of narratives. They hold powerful implications for one's self-understanding; they can be used for constructing identities. Texts and stories have been used for colonization and for resistance alike. Dube sees that texts are not innocent, but

often much involved in political, economic, and cultural exploitation. The biblical text, for instance, has been part of the colonization of mind, alienating the colonized from their own cultural canons.

Although Dube has been trained in the Western academic sphere, she remains critical towards biblical criticism. Biblical criticism has ignored the connection between colonialism and the Bible, and, thus, become part of the structures that preserve oppression. Dube's reading methods suggest more democratic ways of interpretation. She highlights the importance of ordinary readers and communities of faith. The reading with method means cooperation between the faith community and the scholar. Dube employs reading practices that also give space to stories other than the biblical text. She reads the Bible alongside narratives of African tradition and her personal life. She also retells biblical events intertwined with the history of Southern Africa. Dube points out that she wants to limit the space given to biblical texts. This seems to declare that there are narratives of meaning and truth, other than the Bible.

Dube's hermeneutics contain a great deal of theological implications, although she does not read the Bible from the point of view of Christian dogma. The following theological areas were discerned in this study: Christology, mission, and theology of religions. Dube views Jesus as a character who reflects the colonial conditions of his surrounding culture. The Jews were colonized under the Roman Empire and, in order to cope with this superpower, they adopted its imperial ideology. Jesus received features of an Emperor. He was depicted as the one who has all authority and as the saviour of this world, who came from above. Jesus, according to Dube's interpretation, was textualized in a very colonial manner as the one who claims power over other people and lands. Because Jesus is presented as being above everything and having divine authority over all nations, he is a colonialist. Christology, however, is an area where she especially wavers between postcolonial and liberation hermeneutics. In two of the sources of this study Dube portrays Jesus as a liberator. These exceptions make the image of Jesus ambivalent. He is both the liberator and the colonial master.

As Jesus sends his disciples to the ends of the earth to proclaim his kingdom, he is according to Dube a very colonial character. Dube's interpretations of mission texts create a very challenging theology of mission. The mission orientation, the desire to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth, is what makes Christianity imperialist. The Great commission echoes an ideology of

subjugation and has no space for mutual hearing and learning. The targets of missionary work are presented as empty vessels that have nothing to contribute. She especially opposes the values of universalism and hierarchy, both of which she finds intrinsic to biblical stories. Dube's premises for biblical interpretation are multi-cultural and multi-religious values: all religious traditions are equal. There should be freedom and possibility to choose, and furthermore, not to choose one's religion; Dube underlines the right to ripe from both fields, namely from any religious tradition. By doing so she subscribes to positive syncretism.

For Dube, the Bible remains a paradox. It is an ungodly book that contains advice to destroy all things foreign and strange to one's own experience of life. The Bible is unsupportive for women, as it has extracted their role and visibility, and it has served as encouragement for conquering geographical, cultural, and religious spaces of others. At the same time, Dube's interpretation seems to have an implicit understanding that God speaks through biblical material despite all its flaws: God does not necessarily need the Bible for revealing herself/himself, but Dube considers the Bible as a sacred text that should be read alongside other sacred texts, of other faiths and cultures. Dube reads the Bible like the serpent in the story of the Fall, asking in her way: "Did God really say?" As the Bible is full of hatred and discrimination, these cannot be of God, who is justice and the creator of all. Dube seems to have a conception of God that precedes the reading of the Bible.

Dube does not offer a distinctively new model for hermeneutics, but rather highlights the historical context of colonial subjugation and its present continuations as valid starting points for interpretation. Thus, Dube's hermeneutics belong to the stream of contextual hermeneutics of the Bible. The connections between oppressive practices and biblical values need to be revealed. The aim for reading the Bible is to bring about change: reading must be for life, as opposed to reading for death and suppressing diversity. Biblical interpretation must also be committed to the struggle for a better world where justice and equality prevail.

Dube's theology is postmodern in the sense that the truth is put in a secondary place in relation to meaning. She, like many other postmodern theologians, has given up the hound for the absolute truth and instead seeks for a balanced identity. In Dube's case this does not mean an identity with clear borderlines or being of one thing alone, but rather, she calls for a self-

understanding that is a mixture of different traditions. Dube describes her position in relation to the Bible as that of a traitor's: she reads the Bible although it reminds her of the colonial oppression. This self-perception underlines Dube's position of being in-between. She is herself a good example of what it means to be hybrid: born in Botswana to a family that has migrated from Zimbabwe, being a Methodist Christian and at the same time a very critical, even liberal, biblical scholar. Dube's position as a scholar is also a postcolonial paradox: she is trained in the Western academy but criticizes its hegemony. Is she not using the master's tools to dismantle his house? Postcolonial theory, however, escapes the accusation of being a product of Western thought. It is a hybrid, born out of the interaction between the First and the Two-Thirds World.

Dube's search for co-existence without suppressing other cultures or religions means standing on a rather uncertain terrain. Her hermeneutical project, that aims to hear God anew, seeks to be all-inclusive and as such contains elements of an oxymoron. According to the western academic understanding absolute truth claims are by their nature to some extent mutually exclusive. The value of Dube's hermeneutics does not lie in the area of logic or truth, but rather in its meaning for identity. In relation to the Bible this means asking whether the biblical story can be a positive affirmation of one's human dignity and whether it can assist in seeing oneself as valuable. Dube's hermeneutics can be seen as a challenge for re-evaluating Christian anthropology and the understanding of human culture in the light of the creation instead of the Fall. Instead of condemning foreign cultural or religious elements, Dube challenges Christianity to employ an attitude towards other and others that "all is good".

Dube promotes a multi-cultural and multi-faith interpretation that seeks a liberating interdependence, a situation that guarantees dignity for all things and people involved. In a world where violence and oppression prevail, hybridity becomes a tool of resistance. It resists the values of hierarchy and universalism. It emphasizes that all places and cultural spheres are interconnected by narratives that have made us all. The Bible continues to be read in various places and it is already part of the cultural Canon in Africa. It is a book of many journeys and it has been an inspiration for travelers. Traveling will not come to an end. Dube's theology proposes transformation in encountering the other:

While imperialist journeys only served to create wounds and alienation, new and different journeys of the mind, the spirit, the heart, and the body are needed, this time to

touch and to be touched, to heal and to be healed. The journeys of the past involved travelers who went forth to discover places that had already been discovered and to name rivers, mountains, and falls that had already been named. Such journeys involved those who taught but would not be taught and those who were listened to but would not listen. Such journeys involved those who truly traveled to a “dark continent”, for they saw nothing except darkness there. Yet, it is not too late, if one is willing, to take new and different journeys: to listen, to hear to see, to dialogue; to be taught, to be healed, and to be touched by those who have always been by-passed.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Dube 1998a, 229.

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