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The Bible in African Hands: a “Contrapuntal Perspective”

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Abstract

Mercy Amba Oduyoye suggests a thorough examination of how the Bible, a triple religious heritage of Africa, has become our good news. ‘How do faith communities use these scriptures to orientate and regulate their lives together? Who are the recognised interpreters of these scriptures? How does the concept of authority operate in this regard?’¹ It is no accident that the emergence of black resistance to ‘colonial rule’ was often accompanied by the emergence of ‘indigenous readings’ of the scriptures. This article seeks to heighten awareness of the African theological reflection currently taking shape in indigenous biblical studies. It emphasises the use of indigenous religious knowledge in the design and implementation of research, particularly within African contextual biblical methods. It affirms the suitability of indigenous motif paradigms for African research within the field that affects Africans and their culture. In this article it is argued that there is a necessity for an emancipatory and participatory type of research which values and includes African cultural knowledge and peoples in reading the Bible. The aim is to arouse a voice in the predominantly Western-oriented theological academic circles and investigations where African voices are more often than not either sidelined or suppressed in biblical studies. An old woman reading the scriptures in Africa uses indigenous knowledge and methods to interpret the text, but she is often ignored or not taken seriously at the

¹ See Mercy Amba Oduyoye. 2007. ‘Re-reading the Bible From Where We Have Been Placed: African Women’s Voices on Some Biblical Texts’, *Journal of African Christian Thought* 10(2), 3-7.

expense of Greek and Hebrew textual analysis methods. This article posits that to be meaningful and empowering, African theological research must, of necessity, include African religious thought and ideas from inception through completion to the implementation of readings of the Bible arising from the research. This article argues that African religious knowledge is an alternative approach of investigating, exploring, evaluating, and acquiring new knowledge from the Bible. This article is of the opinion that any means of investigation, particularly in the use of African indigenous knowledge, could enrich a creation of new breakthroughs in the interpretation of biblical texts. Hence this article is primarily advocating African religious indigenous methods as key in Bible reading within an African worldview. In this way the work of interpreting the Bible in Africa is both empowering and meaningful through indigenous research methods which are context-specific readings.

Introduction

The article was provoked by TARA.² Its thrust is to heighten awareness, stimulate new thoughts, and generate discussion on the wealth of African religious indigenous knowledge already taking place in the field of African Biblical studies. For the purposes of clarity this article will specifically deal with African interpretive methods.³ African biblical scholars have to persist in developing and using alternative methods of reading the Bible.

Africans have received the text and it is here to stay (Dickson 1979: 106). Hence Africans have to study the Bible using indigenous knowledge in order to discover the African reality, and refrain from sticking to the research pathways

² On 2nd May 2017 a consultation was held at the University of Stellenbosch bringing together representatives of 5 African Faculties of Theology or Departments of Religious Studies that have existing bilateral agreements with Stellenbosch University which made a resolution to create an umbrella organization for the coordination of research on religion and theology in Africa, provisionally called TARA (Theology and Religion in Africa).

³ JNK Mugambi (2001:11) says that the meaning of the words Africa and Africans affirms the identity of the continent that transcends race and religion.

mapped out by the Western research methodologies⁴ within which many have been trained. Whilst this article neither seeks to negate nor denigrate known Western research methods of investigation, it intends to challenge African biblical scholars in particular to venture more into alternative methods of reading. As far as the investigation and preservation of the rich diversity of African culture and identity is concerned, such must be done through indigenous methods of interpretation, in order to develop and empower African Biblical scholarship. As Magesa (2004) puts it: “Africans are now writing about, investigating, and shaping a relevant Christian theology for the continent.” Such is possible through the use of the African languages in research and communicating the truth of African life.⁵

It is good to note the genesis of this article. On 2nd May 2017 a consultation was organised to bring together representatives of five African Faculties of Theology or Departments of Religious Studies that have existing bilateral agreements with Stellenbosch University and who were visited in 2016. However for certain reasons the University of Malawi and the University of Nairobi were missing during the said consultation. The purpose of the meeting was to explore opportunities for closer cooperation amongst the participants and Stellenbosch University. During the consultation other researchers from other Stellenbosch faculties such as the Faculties of Arts and Education which were working on specific research themes connected with any aspect of religion were also invited to attend. In a similar vein, researchers from Theology and/or Religious Studies from the University of Cape Town, the University of the Western Cape and Kenyatta University were also invited. By the end of the two days consultation, several resolutions were made:

⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2009:3) argues that for the past four decades or so, the attention of the Christian world has been drawn to the fact that the axis of Christianity has shifted South making Africa the epicenter of expansion of Christianity.

⁵ See <https://en.iyil2019.org/> where the importance of indigenous language has been emphasized as a means of communicating with the world. Indigenous language defines the people’s identity, express their history and culture, helps them learn and defend their human rights as well as participate in all aspects of society. It is through language that people preserve their community’s history, customs and traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking, meaning, and expression. In research it is used to construct the people's future.

- i) That the Faculty of Theology would continue to engage in further dialogue with Prof Bagele Chilisa on the topics of indigenous research methodologies and research within African contexts.
- ii) That Prof Hendrik Bosman, Dr Ntozakhe Cezula, Len Hansen, John Klaassen (UWC) and Dr Alex Nkabahona (Makerere University) were mandated with the responsibility for establishing an umbrella organisation for the coordination of research on religion and theology in Africa, provisionally called TARA (Theology and Religion in Africa). The team would equally promote the development of the following databases:
 - (a) Database of academics interested in the study and research of religion and theology in Stellenbosch University as well as database of academics interested in the study and research of religion and theology at other partner universities in Africa. In regard to this resolution a template was to be developed by Ms Magriet de Villiers to establish an internet portal with different databases, as well as the annual research reports of the participating institutions.
 - (b) Database of research on religion and theology accomplished at institutions in Africa – this can link up with the existing database “The Bible in Africa” developed in Old and New Testament (ca 600 entries) and dovetails with the previous recommendation (a).
- iii) Discussions during the collaboration indicated further needs that can be addressed by closer academic co-operation and in most cases it was noted that they are already addressed by the existing MOUs:
 - Postgraduate student and lecturer exchange.
 - Identifying academic expertise on different campuses to allow the appointment of competent examiners and co-supervisors.
 - Access to SU electronic academic resources and library facilities.

This article is a follow up to one of the three resolutions of the 2017 consultation at Stellenbosch University where Dr. Humphrey Waweru was

requested to offer an introduction to the proposed topic of Indigenous Research Methodologies and Research within African Biblical Contexts. This was to be done during our 2021 annual conference.

The initiative for organising the consultation on African Indigenous Research Methodologies and Research within African Biblical Contexts was taken by Prof Hendrik Bosman when he served as the head of the Faculty of Theology. The consultation noted that methods of investigation cannot be divorced from a people's cultural context and worldview, which shapes consciousness and forms the theoretical framework within which indigenous knowledge is sought, critiqued, and/or understood. It was well understood that all knowledge has cultural relevance and must be examined for its particular focus.⁶ This means that no single method of research could be hailed as universal, but as Mugambi (2001:17) opines, methodologically, one can start with contextual experience and proceed to draw universal principles out of that experience. Equally one can also start with universal principles and then discern their applications in particular contexts, meaning that if the first approach is inductive and very akin to research in empirical science, the second is deductive and very identifiable with religious dogma of Africa. This makes one seek an understanding of the Bible in Africa in a contrapuntal perspective.

Bible in Africa: A contrapuntal perspective

When I was doing my PhD in New Testament at KwaZulu Natal University, I had no idea of Contrapuntalism as a reading methodology. But entering my supervisor's office for consultation, one morning, Prof Jonathan Draper looked at me and said 'Do you want to go back to your African culture and walk without shoes? Do you want to abandon your culture and become a scholar enslaved by modern thinking? Or do you want to become a Christian and fly to heaven?' I had no answer, but then he said 'Contrapuntal perspective is the

⁶ Paul asks in 2 Cor. 2:16, 'Who is equal to such a task?' Perhaps we can answer with him 'We are not competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves; our competence come from God' (2Cor. 3:5). In African research in biblical studies we agree with the Pauline understanding that 'God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant' (2 Cor. 3:6). Such a competence is found in African indigenous knowledge for the interpretation of scripture.

way to go.’⁷ Since then my eyes have been opened to a different world. Borrowing from the wisdom of Edward Said (1993:62-80), who suggested that the nineteenth century novel played a major role in legitimating the Western imperialism, I suggested that the Bible constructed a ‘self-validating’ world in which domination appeared normative and permanent through the spread of Christianity in Africa. The Bible became ‘a sociological current’ that affected African lives in every corner of the continent. Hence it was important to recognize that it cannot be read in isolation from the African indigenous contexts. The ‘contrapuntal perspective’ reading became the way. It has introduced a new way of reading in order to understand different texts being read together.

Therefore, before we concentrate on the Bible in Africa perhaps we need to understand Africans themselves. Africa is home to the African race or people who were born and grew up within the continent. Defining Africa as home for the Africans is an uphill task. For Mazrui (1986), knowing Africa as home for Africans is not a mere intellectual exercise or a root for the idle mind. Africa is both cartographically and philosophically warped. Its area is disputed and even its name is problematic, where a small portion of the land mass has become the name of the whole continent. Some scholars like Ali Mazrui would even include the Arabian Peninsula into Africa and claim Islam to be an African religion. But unlike the Quran, the Bible has within a very short time plotted a world of its own by constructing ‘essentialist’ readings of the marginalised Africans.

No wonder scholars like Oden (2007:146) would equally want Christianity to be seen as a ‘Traditional African Religion’, arguing that the oral Gospel transmission occurred in Africa as early as 33-65 CE, even before the first Gospel was published. For such a reasoning Adeyemo (2001:31) argues that Africa is enigmatic, richest in trained scholars, natural resources, and languages among the seven continents, yet the poorest. The very first home of the human race yet the least developed. Africa has enriched many nations and peoples in the world yet its own vineyards are unkempt. This is probably why

⁷ The Contrapuntal perspective is a methodology that can critique, but also affirm ‘our intertwined and overlapping histories’ in Africa (Said 1993:18). It is a reading, a listening, and a dialoguing at the same time for rhythm that produces a counter-point (Waweru 2007; 2011; 2020).

Africa was treated by Europe as its subject for a long time and finally as a property to be divided amongst the European powers. Perhaps this explains why Africa has been wooed by both Christianity and Islam endangering and threatening its primal religious imagination. This could be the reason why Waweru (2011, 2020) has been interested with the dialogue between the Bible and African culture in order to investigate this assumed threat from a postcolonial perspective. It is proper to argue that the Bible should be read 'contrapuntally' in the modern postcolonial Africa. Regardless of the cultural rejuvenations that have often emerged within African circles, the Bible has positioned itself as a document that will continue dominating Africa in many more centuries to come.

The Bible arrived in Africa and has been planted and is growing strong within the African soil.⁸ The Bible has remained resilient in Africa having been translated into Mother-tongue languages more than any other Book.⁹ It has become a resource for African knowledge and spirituality. The Bible has equally become a reuniting factor for Africa which has remained divided along colonial boundaries during the colonial and postcolonial periods. During the colonial period, Africa was scrambled, and during postcolonial period Africa has remained divided as the 'Africa South of Sahara', 'North Africa which has remained Arabic' and the rest as 'Black Africa'. If Africa has remained imperialistically divided, then the question arises, how we could come up with one Africa of one people with a single destiny. This remains a challenge. Perhaps the presence of the Bible in Africa can be the uniting factor among Africans playing a positive role in acquiring our dream of unity. Thus the Bible is read on its own terms, with an appreciation of its cultural contribution, but in intimate connection with an understanding and critique of the social world which it propounds and equally legitimates.

⁸ For Africans to understand the new religions that have sprung in the continent like wild weeds, they have to remember that African culture is a fertile soil not only for Christianity but also for the Bible (Waweru 2020:2).

⁹ The major question that every African should answer is, what has Africa done with the Bible? Have Africans trusted the Bible as the word of God, carrying the truth of life? Such invites dialogue between the Bible and the African culture (Waweru 2011:5).

Developing a contrapuntal Reading of the Bible

Africans are said to be incurably religious. Others have termed them notoriously religious, a concept that made them wholly embrace the Bible. In this study we term them chronically religious for having embraced Christianity as a new religion in their midst.¹⁰ A people of a religion without a book have become *Athomi*.¹¹ It is in the same spirit of *Athomi* that African scholars have emphasised the significance of reading the Bible. The Bible has played an ambivalent but key role in both the construction and deconstruction of modern society in Africa. For Draper (1997:3), the Bible had already entered the popular culture and repertoire of the African people, surprisingly and constantly emerging within indigenous forms and traditions.

In recent decades African theologians have expressed their desire to revitalise African contextual methods of reading the Bible. According to Emmanuel Obeng (2001:35), the concern of African Christianity has been the contextualisation of the Bible in Africa. This implies that the existing popular concepts and research methods propagated by Western scholarship are inadequate to explain all of the ways of knowing in African context. Hence Africans have used their own ways of reading, investigating, and interpreting the Bible. Such a re-reading has resulted in African cultures being respected and valued in their uniqueness. Such readings have stamped Africa's profile on global Christianity, whether in evangelical, ecumenical, or academic circles.¹² The language of the Bible, with its symbols and narratives has supplied a rich vein for creative re-formation, especially by African novelists, even when they are stridently hostile to the Christian church (Draper 1997:1-3).

¹⁰ Africans are now realising the mistake they made by embracing the statement 'You don't need to interpret the Bible, it is already translated for you; just read it and do what it says'. This may now be the major cause for a recession of Christianity in Africa today (a Kenyatta University student in a class discussion in February 2022).

¹¹ A term that was popular in the Mt. Kenya region referring to new converts as the educated. It simply meant that the presence of a religion of the book had made people readers. We should note categorically that up to date the most common mother tongue literature in Kikuyuland is the Bible.

¹² Within Africa, see for example Bediako (1995), Oduyoye (2002), and Waweru (2011, 2020).

Therefore, although still inchoate, it is obviously gratifying to see how fathers of African theology such as Mbiti (1968), Idowu (1973), Mugambi (1995), Adeyemo (2001), Bediako (2006), Bujo (1992), Oduyoye (1992), Musa (2001), Kato (1985), Chipenda, Karamanga, Mugambi, and Omari (1991), Setiloane (1979), Waweru (2011, 2020), and West and Musa (2000) among others have prioritised reading the Bible through African indigenous knowledge methods. Such ways of reading has offered an analysis and interpretation of the Bible in relation to African culture through a dialogue with Christian faith. They have taken on the important yet daunting task of making the Bible relevant to the African reality. These African scholars realised that African indigenous knowledge has much to enrich existing Western knowledge and methodologies in reading the text. African methodologies of reading as well as investigating have yielded results and contributions that have been discounted by many, sometimes even by African scholars themselves. It is notable that contributions made by African scholars in Bible interpretation are conspicuously absent from biblical commentaries and dictionaries for formal Religious Education and generally remain unknown to many. Such a system has subliminally perpetuated the myth that Africa and/or traditional African societies are incapable of developing rigorous indigenous interpretive methodologies within their own African contexts to make scientific inquiry in biblical texts. Knowingly or unknowingly African scholars have transacted with the Bible contrapuntally.¹³ Reading the Bible in Africa remained mythical.

To counter such a myth, Getui, Maluleke, and Ukpong (2001) issued a groundbreaking publication entitled *Interpreting the New Testament in Africa*, featuring a number of scholars such as JNK Mugambi, Emmanuel Obeng, Teresa Okure, Benjamin Ntneh, Gerald West, Hilary Mijoga, Musa Dube, Chris Manus, and Emmanuel Katongole among others - all of them coming up with African indigenous reading methods as an attempt to fill the noticeable gap and facilitate systematic interpretations to scriptures. This is mainly an expression of an existing desire among Africans to further the development of African indigenous reading methods. By so doing African interpretive methodologies have acquired their unique nature.

¹³ Some scholars struggle with terms such as enculturation, indigenization, comparative studies and many others, but they were simply looking for counter between the Bible and the African culture.

The Nature of Biblical Studies in Africa

Indigenous reading methods or African contextual methods of interpretation have been used interchangeably by various African scholars as systems of enquiry which are experiential by nature.¹⁴ Such motifs are usually based on a cultural primal worldview that remains relational, where the reader and the text being interpreted have a common context. The phenomenon of this reading method is a cultural value of wholeness, both communal and contextual.¹⁵ The major task of the methodologies of this nature is to locate the reader of the Bible within the African context. The harmony of the study and the reader creates a unique knowledge which is collective and contextual. Indigenous reading methods are also naturally rooted in a common background that has a contextual sense of responsibility (ethic fibre) that retains one in a worldview of interdependence and interconnectedness. For Mugambi (2001:11), ideologically Africa's cultural diversity has been exaggerated at the expense of its cultural unity. It is time for reading the Bible in Africa to be seen as one entity. David Jobling (1999) was struck by Africa, as a place where the Bible has been uniquely influential in the formation of identity.

A good example of the nature of African reading has been proposed by Gerald West (1995) through the method of the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) applied by the Ujamaa Centre at KwaZulu Natal University. The centre has engaged the CBS method as an indigenous reading method that has its 'origins in the interface between socially engaged biblical scholars, organic intellectuals, and ordinary Christian "readers" of the Bible' (Manual of CBS 2015:3).¹⁶ The nature of this method is a see-judge-act method. People start reading the Bible from their own local context experiences (see). They then proceed to read a biblical text in their circumstances (judge), and, after hearing the message of God, they act. This is the best way to explain what Edward Said (1993) had in mind when he talked of colonial and post-colonial being offered together in the interests of a Contrapuntal perspective. The social analysis engaged here allows the community to understand its reality. When the community re-reads the Bible,

¹⁴ See a resource manual for Contextual Bible Study developed by Gerald West and Ujamaa Centre Staff in 2006. The Ujamaa Centre is an organized

¹⁵ See for example Waweru (2007).

¹⁶ See also West (2001).

it is able to judge if their experiences are as God intended them to be. Such provokes a counterpoint and an action that enables them to change the status quo. Although West (1996) may not be aware, and may not be thinking contrapuntally, his reading method once repeated is able to produce a rhythm resulting to the contrapuntal style of analysis.

Mapping the growth of African Contrapuntal Reading

African contrapuntal reading methods are practical, communal, and contextual, impacting personal traits of knowledge. John Mbiti (1968) argued that when you walk through the Bible you hardly reach the middle before you realise that you are walking on familiar ground. This means that any African reading the Bible will quickly discover themselves. Bediako (1994) demonstrates the significance of indigenous ways of transaction once the Bible is read in an African way. Equally West and Dube (1996) develop an argument on the importance of involving the ordinary context in reading the Bible in Africa. Another indigenous reading of the Bible has been promoted by Justin Upkong in a paper read at a conference at Stellenbosch University on 14th-15th May 1999. Upkong emphasised the need for Africans to transcend the boundaries of enculturation and liberation in biblical interpretation.

The above readings were preceded by Teresa Okure's (1993) arguments that African women have to do their own hermeneutics. She was quickly followed by Mercy Oduyoye (1994) who equally urged African women to take up the challenge of an African woman's theological hermeneutics. Mugambi in his keynote address to a consultation for African theologians at Hammanskraal, South Africa urged African theologians to take up reconstruction theology motifs in doing readings in African contexts. Waweru (2011) also offers a contrapuntal reading of scripture. All of these African readings among others show that indigenous reading methods allow conceptions of intelligence to shape the results of biblical scholarship in African studies. One common feature of all these scholars is that they all want the Bible and African culture to dialogue in a contrapuntal style.¹⁷

¹⁷ Edward Said (1993:51-52) proposes that the great works of literature, whether novels,

Therefore, these African readings make us realise that the use of the context, the people, and worldview domains in the interpretation of scripture offers a different approach from the common cognitive academic intelligence that has long dominated Western concepts of reading the Bible.¹⁸ Africans have often gained their knowledge through community life, which is participatory in a self-concept orientation. Such methods of reading the Bible have elevated the Africans to assume their place among biblical scholars within the Christian nations of the world (Waweru 2011). African biblical interpretations rely heavily on an indigenous cultural system of an oral heritage inherited from the forefathers and foremothers. Such literature had symbols, images, and narratives with a rich vein used in creative readings of the Bible by the indigenous people. Through contrapuntalism Africans were able to read the text for themselves, even when the missionaries were hostile to such readings.

Contrapuntal reading has the liberating potential to provide an intertextual reading of the Bible and African culture (Waweru 2007, 2011, 2020). Such a culture perceives, interprets, and makes sense of reality in biblical texts. This method is an examination of African reality from the perspective of Africans rather than Africans from the periphery perspective. African contrapuntal readings are erroneously looked down upon when compared with the written theories of research. For Draper (1997:3), the central Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the author and interpreter of the Bible makes every attempt to stop African readings null and void. The reason for this is that indigenous methods are usually people-centred and, on many occasions, may appear immeasurable. Hence they could be mistaken for a simplistic, non-scientific investigative sense of inquiry. Nevertheless African contrapuntal readings are full of rich complexities engrained in community ceremonies and practices such as narratives that are full of proverbs, folktales, riddles, songs, music,

the Quran, or the Bible, should be read contrapuntally in the modern post-colonial world, such that the literature is read on its own terms, with an appreciation of its cultural contribution, but in intimate connection with an understanding and critique of the social world which it legitimates.

¹⁸ Waweru (2008:139) argues that it is time for critical thinkers to apply new models or paradigms that are emerging in almost every discipline from sociology and economics to theology and religion.

dance, and other common knowledge-centred activities of education. This has continued in African thought, though not without shortcomings.

Therefore it is intelligent to say that African contrapuntal readings of the Bible are not without limitations by nature (Waweru 2020). This is because all readings - Western, Asian, and African - derive their strength from practices and beliefs that have lacked transparency for a long time and appears to avoid flexibility and constructive change (Waweru 2011). African cultural practices claim to be static and keep on rejuvenating forgetting that they are subject to change due to economic, environmental, and social circumstances that cannot be avoided (Waweru 2007). Nevertheless such limitations have not stopped contrapuntal readings of the scriptures from providing results that have helped communities acquire knowledge and information in various theological reflections (Waweru 2007).

African Contrapuntal Reading is the Way

From the ongoing above, it is clear that the encounter between the African biblical research methods and Western methods of reading is usually an experience African researchers are often shy to discuss. The majority of African researchers are trained in Western theories of research and are usually supervised by intellectuals of other cultures. Such an experience makes African researchers mimic Western methodologies in biblical studies in order for their publications to be given a space, and as a result, they find themselves between a rock and a hard place. Western intellectuals have their research methods on one hand and their domination enterprise on the other hand. Africans have their cultures to be investigated and studied on one hand and the Western demand that their tools be applied on the other hand. To balance these two scenarios has been a nightmare in our research in biblical studies in Africa in the twenty-first Century. For Oduyoye (2007:3), both men and women should think together, dialogue, come to decisions, and then act for the common good, as well as for the wellbeing of all of us.

It is common to find African postgraduate students quoting theories and methods that make no sense at all in African contexts, yet supervisors will insist on those methods, even though the results will not tally with the expectations of the students. Remember what I said earlier about an examiner of my PhD

thesis who doubted that Edward Said's model of Contrapuntalism could be applied in New Testament Studies. This is the quagmire and the ambiguity research in African universities is facing today. Hence without blinking an eye, Africans have to demand that research on African issues be done purely through contextual research methods for better results.

The ambiguity of research in Africa has been expressed by Itumeleng Mosala (1986). Mosala unequivocally questions the status of the Bible in Black Theology as a revealed 'word of God'. For Mosala the Bible is an absolute, non-ideological 'word of God'. This simply means that many African researchers are still enslaved in their ways of research as far as their hermeneutical starting points are concerned. For Mosala, the Bible does not necessarily offer any certain starting point for a liberation theology in Africa, but this does not mean it cannot be used. However Mosala was critical of African researchers who do not realise that the Bible acted as a document for the ruling class, representing the ideological and political interests of the ruling class. Waweru (2011) opines that Africans have come to recognise their specific position in dispossession and cultural and economic exploitation at the end of a long history of colonial domination. Currently the problem in Africa is neo-colonialism, which is continued by the children of the haves, while the have-nots continue to struggle to make ends meet.

Hence the Bible must be de-ideologised before it can hermeneutically offer a straightforward motif for any liberation in Africa. On the same footing, Tinyiko Maluleke (1996) has extended this critique of African research by African theologians such as Lamin Sanneh, John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Byang Kato, and Jesse Mugambi for more-often-than-not ignoring the history, culture, and ideologies of the oppressors as they transacted their theology. This simply means that we must wrestle African research methods from the domination of Western research methods in order to allow them to stand free from any encumbrances.

Conclusion

As we conclude this discussion, it is good to remind ourselves that the Bible had played a key role in the construction of the African as a benighted heathen, lost in idolatry, superstition, depravity and vice, and in need of the gospel. Such

a view reiterates earlier observations proposing that African contrapuntal readings be fully embraced in our research circles. Contrapuntalism is participatory and emancipatory, which is not against Western methods in anyway. Its application in biblical research carried out within African contexts is highly productive. African contrapuntal readings of the text are more realistic and complete in making our world more known. Such methods ought to be a key hermeneutical starting point in opening the African world of intellect and imagination that finally allows indigenous African-centred research to emerge. This is because, as Mji (2009:7) argues, research is part and parcel of our creation that helps us think and feel. It guides, protects, and makes us move to the next level of creation.

The point expressed here is that as African researchers we need to embrace a culturally balanced research method, because the majority of us have been trained outside our cultural orientations. This training underpinned and legitimated the imperial assumption of control and the colonial theft of intellectualism. In such a scenario, we must find creative ways of using the research methods developed in our cultural heritage, which is full of multi-layered knowledge systems that could help us understand our own reality in order to encourage and empower our people. African researchers need to revise their thinking that one can only be a good researcher if one applies foreign research techniques. In such a scenario contrapuntalism becomes an option since it will produce a counterpoint.

As our African knowledge system custodians continue to diminish, indigenous African knowledge becomes vulnerable. African indigenous scholars must arise to the task of documentation of indigenous African knowledge in order to preserve it for future generations. It is for such a reason that TARA has been formed to chart new ways to document our research and create a paradigm shift, which is imperative. In contrapuntalism African researchers will be required not to negate the already existing Western research methods of evaluation of biblical text nor undermine them, but will enhance their own in order to create and generate new knowledge, while respecting all existing sources of knowledge. A contrapuntal perspective is the way.

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