

Disenfranchisement and blessedness:

A reading of the Hagar and Ishmael story in the context of the Shona and Muslim communities of Zimbabwe, a liberation approach

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In as much as people are getting fed up with old linguistic or scientific theories and try to replace them with new ones, so also in the field of Biblical hermeneutics. A lot of changes are taking place in this field as it undergoes revision and expansion. Much seems to be coming from "a growing dissatisfaction with 'standardized' or 'prescribed' readings that do not fit the specific circumstances of the contemporary reader." [1] In the attempts to sideline historical-critical methods as 'ineffective' or 'irrelevant', there appears to be a growing insistence that hermeneutics should produce tangible results and the situation of the reader acting as a co-determinant factor. Such a kind of hermeneutics is generally known as 'reading in front of the text'. According to this new approach, the Bible should not be allowed to be relegated to a thing of the past, as a text no longer able to speak to the present circumstances. Highlighting on the urgency of coming up with a method that will save the Bible from being a deactualised text, J.S Croatto says that it is "a matter of urgency to acquire a theoretical instrumentation that will enable us to read the Bible in such a way as to tap its 'reservoir of meaning'" so that it "speaks to us in the present". [2] In Croatto's understanding, when an author 'dies' or is 'erased' he/she leaves behind what he/she would have written. That which he/she leaves behind or the text contains a surplus-of-meaning which wells up and spills over in every situation in which it is read. He explains the 'autonomy' of the text as follows,

The author's finite horizon is replaced by a textual infinitude. The account opens up again to a polysemy, and not only a potential polysemy, as on the level of 'language', but a potential polysemy, made possible by the network of significates or meanings that constitute a work. This textual openness awaits new addresses, with their own 'world' [3]

While not trying to be a jurist between the historical-critical methods and this new approach of reading in front of the text, this paper seeks to apply the latter to the story of Hagar and Ishmael against the background of an ill-treatment of either second wives or

first wives and their children in both the Shona[4] and Muslim communities of Zimbabwe. The choice of these communities as a case study in this paper stems from the fact that both communities allow for polygamy not only as a type of marriage but also as a value system. Due to the influence of Christianity, however, and the shift of the economy from land cultivation which often was an incentive to marry multiple wives as cheap labor force to other industrial sectors, the institution of polygamy as a type of marriage can be said to have generally declined substantially in sub-Saharan Africa. As a value system, polygamy can be seen to have survived the Western ideology of monogamy. Despite the abhorrence of it by outsiders as a highly undesirable social system and its being castigated by some Christianised African elites as 'backward' or 'bush' behaviour,[5] it cannot be denied that polygamy has generally remained an acceptable way of life for many sub-Saharan Africans since pre-colonial times. A reflection of the persistence of this value system even among monogamous unions themselves is that there has been a notable growth especially in urban areas of sub-Saharan Africa of "various forms of multiple and/or serial informal marriages which involve rather irregular 'girl friends' and somewhat regular 'outside wives'".[6]

The Hagar and Ishmael story from a biblical perspective

The Hagar and Ishmael story is told mainly in Genesis Chapters 16 and 21. In the New Testament, one finds Paul in Galatians 4:21-31 making reference to the story also but this time as an allegory for the slavery to the Mosaic Law.

At the beginning of it all one finds that Hagar enters the spotlight in the Biblical narratives as Sarah's Egyptian slave girl. Due to Sarah's barrenness, Hagar, however, is given to Abraham as a wife so as to produce an heir for Abraham. What is interesting to note in the narrative is that the narrator repeatedly underlines that Hagar was Egyptian. Thus the narrator implicitly wants to point out that despite the fact that Hagar is a foreigner, the role she plays in the life of the proto-ancestor of the Israelites, Abraham, is not to be overlooked. With the twist of events, however, Hagar finds that she has been "used, abused and then cast out of the family when, after the birth of Isaac to Sarah, it was deemed she had outlived her usefulness".[7]

While in the eyes of both Abraham and Sarah it appears a justified move to send Hagar away, the two cannot be exonerated for the crime they have done. Sarah commits sin in afflicting her own slave girl, someone who possibly had served her for quite a long period and proved to be such a nice, trustworthy and obedient person as shown in her accepting to save Abraham's name from sinking into oblivion by begetting an heir to him. Surely if Sarah had found Hagar not to be a nice and trustworthy person, it would be hard to imagine her giving Hagar to Abraham as wife. Abraham too cannot be left off the hook. His crime in the first place is that he permits Sarah to afflict Hagar, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her as you please" (Gen.16:6). Worse, he appears less concerned about the welfare of Hagar and the boy as he sends them away with just a piece of bread and a skin of water. His move constitutes an act of murder to his second wife and son. Hammering on the gravity of the offense Martin Luther says,

Abraham sends away his beloved spouse, she who first made him a father, along with his firstborn son, giving them only a sack of bread and a skin of water [...] But does it not seem cruel that a mother burdened with offspring should be dismissed so miserably, and that, to an unknown destination, indeed, into a vast and arid desert? [...] If someone wants to rant against Abraham at this point, he could make him the murderer of his son and wife [...].[8]

Though Hagar falls a victim to an ill-advised scheme to beget an heir to Abraham and is subsequently shoved off, the passage indirectly shows that she is a blessed woman meriting heavenly visitations on at least two occasions. As she flees from her mistress,

the angel of the Lord catches up with her and admonishes her to return for the Lord has taken heed of her afflictions and is promised that her son will always be a conqueror. Finding herself having been worth to see God face to face and remain alive, she gives an eulogized name to God: "Thou art a God of seeing" (Gen.16:7-14). The privilege she enjoys here of seeing God face to face was unusual for women. She appears to share the privilege of the patriarchs who on different occasions met God and would shower Him with a new praise name. On the second occasion while she feels her world as having collapsed before her eyes as she is sent away, no sooner than later she realizes that the heavens have not abandoned her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not; for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation" (Gen.21:17-18). In promising a great nation to Ishmael her son, God thereby injects life into the almost dead figure of Hagar.

Hagar and Ishmael in Islamic Traditions

When it comes to Islamic traditions one finds that not only is the story of Hagar and Ishmael told a bit differently from the Biblical story, but also that neither Sarah nor Hagar is mentioned by name in the Qur'an. Attested explicitly in the Qur'an are the figures Abraham and Ishmael. Ishmael's name appears almost twelve times in it but mostly in lists. One such list is the formula: "Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes" (Qur'an 2:36; 3:84) and in other instances the name is listed as "Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac" (Qur'an 2:133). Together with his father Abraham, Ishmael is said to have built foundations of the Kaaba (House) (Qur'an 2:127). The Kaaba, as is believed in Islam, was first built by Adam the first man and so Abraham and Ishmael are believed to have rebuilt it on the old foundations.[9]

The Hagar and Ishmael story is basically understood from Abraham's prayer in Sura Ibrahim (14: 37). Hagar is also frequently mentioned in the books of Hadith. Though the story is found in the mentioned sources, it partly bears a similarity to the Biblical story in that the Pentateuch shares much with the Qur'an. Just as in the Biblical narration, Abraham's wife, Sarah, who is a barren woman, suggests for Abraham to take Hagar (who is given to Sarah as a slave girl) as a wife in order to produce offspring which was a common practice of that time. Hagar gives birth to a son, Ishmael. Sarah, however, becomes so sad about her barrenness and wants Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. Till this part of the story, almost everything looks the same as recorded in the Bible but the rest of it, which is also a crucial point under discussion in this paper, is told differently.

By the command of Allah, Abraham takes Hagar and Ishmael to a barren valley of Bakka 700 miles southeast of Hebron (later here is called as Mecca) and leaves them there with a skin of water and leather bag full of dates. The reality lying behind this journey was to 'resettle' rather than 'displace' Hagar. While Abraham is walking away, Hagar becomes anxious and asks:

'O Abraham, where are you going, leaving us in this valley where there is no person whose company we can enjoy, nor is there anything here?' Abraham does not answer. Finally, Hagar asks, 'Has God asked you to do so?' Suddenly, Abraham stops, turns back and says 'Yes!...' Feeling a degree of comfort in this answer, Hagar asks, 'O Abraham, to whom are you leaving us?' 'I am leaving you to God's care,' Abraham replies. Hagar submits to her Lord, 'I am satisfied to be with God!' [10]

While she traces her way back to little Ishmael, Abraham proceeds until he reaches a narrow pass in the mountain where they will

not be able to see him. He stops there and invokes God in prayer:

Our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a valley barren from any cultivation, by your Sacred House, our Lord, so they may establish the prayer. So make the hearts of people yearn towards them, and provide them with all types of fruits that they may be grateful. (Qur'an, 14:37)

When the water in the water-skin had all been used up, she became thirsty and her child also became thirsty. She started looking at him tossing in agony. She left him, for she could not endure looking at him [...] she tucked up her robe and ran in the valley like a person in distress and trouble, till she crossed the valley and reached the Marwa mountain where she stood and started looking, expecting to see somebody, but she could not see anybody. She repeated running between Safa and Marwa seven times. When she reached the Marwa for the last time she heard a voice and she asked herself to be quiet and listened attentively. She heard the voice again and said, 'O, (whoever you may be)! You have made me hear your voice; have you got something to help me?' And behold! She saw an angel at the place of Zam-zam, digging the earth with his heel till water flowed from that place. She started to make something like a basin around it, using her hand in this way, and started filling her water-skin with water with her hands, and the water was flowing out after she had scooped some of it. Then she drank the water and suckled her child. The angel said to her, 'Don't be afraid of being neglected, for this is the House of Allah which will be built by this boy and his father, and Allah never neglects His people.' She lived in that place till some people from the tribe of Jurhum or a family from Jurhum passed by her and her child. When they saw water these peoples settled there, and later on they sent for their families who came and settled with them so that some families became permanent residents there.[11]

While the Bible has been made open to criticism, the Qur'an is not, and this may account for the positive light in which Sarah's jealousy is viewed in Islamic tradition for Sarah's behaviour is not interpreted as an act of cruelty but is rather tolerated as the nature of women. Islam goes further to underline the fact that Abraham's act was not a result of Sarah's rage but rather a result of Allah's command to Abraham in order to test his beloved prophet's faith. Prophet Abraham is thus regarded as one who was sincere with Allah in leaving his wife and son in a deserted area as Allah had commanded him. When, however, a critical mind is allowed to a free range in this Islamic narration of the Hagar and Ishmael story it would be hard to exonerate Sarah for her behaviour. Under no ways should the feelings of jealousy be condoned as if they were a virtue. Though coloured with obedience to God's will, Abraham's act also can hardly be termed as innocent. A reality which stands out clear is that Hagar and Ishmael's plight was that of outcasts from Abraham's inheritance, thanks be to Allah that He stood by them and saved them from perishing.

Before one applies this Hagar and Ishmael story to the Shona and Muslim communities of Zimbabwe it would be imperative to make a brief overview of some of those experiences that wives and children from polygamous unions in these communities under study undergo.

Shona community^[12]

Shona culture while prescribing a strict sexual ethics, it tends to be stricter with females than with males. While a boy still at the age of infancy can be allowed to walk naked around the courtyard, the same cannot be permitted for a girl of the same age. Elders will quickly command the young girl to be properly dressed. As children grow up, girls are constantly reminded to pay attention to how they sit, bent, dress and interact with males. This finds echo in M. Gelfand who summarises part of the teaching for girls in Shona society as follows:

1. To use clean language
2. To sit in a modest way
3. When to keep aloof from males
4. What to say and what not to say in the presence of the opposite sex
5. How to react to courting proposals
6. How to behave towards a boyfriend
7. How to behave when married
8. To avoid annoying her husband and to control her temper in general
9. To avoid sexual intercourse until married and to avoid adultery.[13]

While boys are instructed also to take control of themselves there is always a laxity of some nature shown towards them. Part of it is generated by a popular opinion that males are 'bulls' and such a mentality is kept on even when one enters into marriage. Girls who want to appear as 'heifers' are criticized heavily for those acts and may never find someone to marry them. In the past, some in Shona culture used to liken men to a cock which has unbarred access to almost every hen and therefore would criticize a woman who tries to control her husband's sexual advances to other women. L.M. Hatugari captures well some of those incidences when elderly women would try to reprimand a young woman's jealous for her husband saying:

A, Shamurai anopenga chose. Ngaarege murume aroore uyo. Iye ndiye akachenjera anofunga kuti varume ungavakwanisa nhai. Munhu rudzii chaizvo asingazivi kuti murume ijongwe.[14] (Ah, Shamurai is crazy. She should leave that husband marry. Does she think she is the clever one who can control men? What kind of person is she really who doesn't know that a man is a cock?)

When it comes to Shona marriages, one finds that while at most they tend to be monogamous, polygamy also is tolerated at certain times. Resulting in polygamous marriages are a number of push factors. As indicated earlier on, in the bygone days when the sub-Saharan economy was based more on production in the fields, taking a second or third wife was viewed as the best means to boost the production. Now with the economy having shifted from just production in the fields, less and less view that as a reason for marrying a second wife. Usually, the failure to have children in the first marriage brings a lot of tension in the family and in most cases results in Shona men contracting a second marriage. Attesting to the tension that often results from being childless J.M. Gombe writes:

Imwe nyaya yaiunza kusagadzikana mukati memba inyaya yekushaya mbereko. Nyaya iyi ihuru zvikuru kuvaShona zvokuti vakuru vedu vaiiti ishamhu inorova zvisingaburitsi misodzi.[15] (Another issue which brought tension in the family is that of being childless. This issue is a matter of great concern to the Shona and our elders used to liken it to a beating stick which strikes but

without causing visible tears).

Dying childless is viewed by many in Shona culture as a shame. Not only does it hamper a man from feeling that he is a man among men but it is coupled also by the fear that one's name will be forgotten once one dies without leaving behind offsprings. In another case, it may be that the first couple may be begetting children but unfortunate enough every child of theirs passes away either during infancy or in early young adulthood. The fear again of dying without leaving behind a child who would carry forward one's name drives certain men to try out with a second wife. Childlessness is thus shunned as a threat to the survival of not only an individual's name but even the whole clan hence the frantic effort to get a child through contracting a polygamous marriage. The threat to the survival of a person's name or even the whole clan that is caused by childlessness and the effort by Shona men to mitigate it through polygamous unions find echo in an observation made by John C. Caldwell and Pat Caldwell when they noted that polygamy in sub-Saharan Africa exists under the auspices of the cult of ancestry and gerontocracy.[16] In such a set up the old patriarch of a family has authority over all of his descendants and this entails the arrangement and timing of marriages, all with the goal to have as many descendants as possible since this would ensure the survival of the family line. Polygamy therefore:

[...] serves as a means to maintain the endless line of births and rebirths and to strengthen the power of the family as well as the status of the old patriarch through the growth in family size and the expansion of the conjugal linkages to other clans.[17]

Yet another push factor could just be a failure of getting satisfied with one wife. Believing that men are 'bulls' one goes out therefore in search of a second wife to bring home or just find pleasure with whilst leaving her where he would have found her and the pleasure may result also in the begetting of children who usually show up upon the death of the their father. Such cases are common with Shona men who work far away from their families. In most cases many of these men find themselves living with 'concubines' of some sort whilst the first wife unknowingly at first may be busy thinking that her husband will remain committed to her alone wherever he would be only to be shocked later when she discovers the truth that would be going on behind the scenes. If a man is living in his rural village, close kin may be able to apply considerable pressure on his behaviour. With towns, however, the situation looks a bit different. As noted by M. Bourdillon, the social control of kinsmen maintaining customary standards of behaviour is absent in such places.[18] In some cases also, a man may come to discover that his first wife is a terrible witch feared in the whole village and its neighbourhood and so in the attempt to distance himself from her one chooses for himself a second wife. On the part of women themselves, there are some who are ever ready to be fished into polygamous arrangements due to the low esteem with which unmarried are perceived generally in Shona society.

Relationship between the first and second wife

Just as in the days of old, the most senior wife (*vahosi*) in a polygamous set up is usually put in charge of the other wife/wives. This, however, as pointed out by L. Hatugari, does not mean that *vahosi* is the most loved one but it would be more a matter of respect being accorded her.[19] As further attested by M. Gelfand also, if there happens to be a misunderstanding being one wife and the other in multiple marriages, the matter is brought before the *vahosi* to settle and:

In the husband's absence from the village the vahosi is responsible for the day to day decisions in the homes, and on his return the wives gather in her home while she relates all the happenings to the husband.[20]

While the set-up in one family may tend to differ from that of the other family, there always appears to be to be some kind of tensions in these polygamous arrangements. There is a general belief among the Shona that *vakadzi vaviri havabikirani* (two wives cannot cook together. Even if the first wife may have given a green light to his husband to search for a second wife after realizing, for example, that she cannot bear children to her husband, the very fact of using the same kitchen and the same cooking utensils will in the long run spark tensions between the two wives. To avoid such instances, some men build another kitchen for the second wife or may marry as co-wife the sister of the existing first wife. It is not enough for the husband just to build a kitchen for the second wife but he should actually treat each of his wives with utmost fairness and see to it that property is allocated to them fairly. Building a kitchen for the second wife is actually in accord with the general understanding of the Shona whereby,

[...] each marriage is seen as establishing the house of the woman concerned. She must be provided eventually with dwellings for herself and her children and with fields, munda/tseu, a kitchen and a granary, dura/hozi for the provision of food for the unit.[21]

Be that as it may that they would be staying separately, a certain kind of mistrust always exists between the *vahosi* and the *mashipiri* (second wife). Since the general tendency is for the husband to prefer *mashipiri* more than *vahosi*, such actions by the husband usually heighten the tension between the two wives and this may actually result in the two sides looking for *mupfuwira* (love portion) so as to win the love of the husband at the expense of the other. When, for example, *mashipiri* is the one to have started in giving the *mupfuwira* to the husband and the *vahosi* realizes that the husband cares less for her she too may go and look for a stronger *mupfuwira* so as to win back love from the husband and the competition for the man through the dosage with more and more powerful *mupfuwira* can escalate to such a point that the man can end up being a *mbeveve* (mentally confused) of some sort. When such a thing happens, the man can hardly leave his homestead and would hardly be seen socializing with other men. If invited for a beer drinking, for example, after a short period of time he would always find an excuse to go back to his house and usually such a man becomes the laughing stock of other men as they always say among themselves *akadyiswa* (fed with love portion) in reference to him.

On very rare occasions, however, one would find the *vahosi* and the *mashipiri* being so friendly to each other. If the *vahosi* had no children, some *mashipiris* can ask one of their children to stay with the first wife. Both wives can be so united in such a manner that it becomes difficult for the husband to prefer one at the expense of the other and they can actually agree to fix the husband if he is not behaving well, for example, by both denying him sexual favours. In such cases, the husband would have no option except to dance according to the tune of his wives. For those, however, who have a care free attitude, they may actually use this as an opportunity to search for a third wife so as to in turn fix the two stubborn wives.

Relationship between the children of the two wives

Once there is animosity between the mothers, the animosity spreads also to the children. If it happens that the family would be

going through hard times economically, it is easy for the children from the *vahosi* to point a finger at the children of *mashipiri*, accusing them of being the culprits behind the situation the family would be in. Their existence in the family, in other words, is interpreted as the cause behind *vahosi's* children getting deprived of essential needs.

If *mashipiri* happens to have a girl among her children and the girl finds a man who proposes marriage to her, the children from the *vahosi* may actually boycott the traditional marriage ceremony. Though it is traditionally the case that when a traditional marriage is taking place in the family almost all the senior children from the family gather to assist in the proceedings, *vahosi's* children may feel that the marriage is not really in their family. Only the mother perhaps would attend but more as a result of shyness of her neighbours were she to boycott also. Though she may attend, she may at times find it hard to conceal her jealousy. It would be worse when *vahosi* has a much more senior daughter who has not yet been married or whose prospects of getting married are almost nil. She may refuse to contribute anything towards the proceedings or may do certain things so as to frustrate the would-be son-in-law. The same happens when death strikes in *mashipiri's* family, members from *vahosi's* family may not really feel that the funeral is in their family. They always have a feeling that they are 'the' family and would view *mashipiri's* family more as parasites. Being in a disadvantaged position, *mashipiri's* children may feel obliged to attend whatever that goes on in the family of *vahosi*. Affirming the primacy that is usually given to *vahosi's* children M. Gelfand noted that if, for example, *vahosi* has three daughters and the second wife has four boys and much later *vahosi* gives birth to a son, then that son becomes the senior child.[22]

Quite rarely also, chances of one finding children from the two camps being in good books, may be found. At most children in their early ages are innocent and they would find no problem in playing with each other. It is only when they are grown up a bit that they begin to be fed the poison of hate by their mothers and may thus begin to turn against each other. Some who may be seniors in both camps may actually begin to see the evil effects of the bickering in their family and may thus unite or even help youngsters in either camp if they would be employed already.

Relationship with neighbours

Once a raging hatred is going on between the *vahosi* and the *mashipiri*, the neighbourhood is more often engulfed also in the fires of these tensions. Due to the fact that the neighbourhood knew the *vahosi* first, the *mashipiri* at times finds that she has a limited choice of friends. If, however, she happens to come across someone in the neighbourhood who for long has always been critical of the *vahosi*, the two easily become friends. At least she would have found someone who would sympathize with her and to do *makuhwa* (back-biting) with as regards the failures and any evil traits that may be found in the *vahosi*. It is such friends who usually advise *mashipiri* to try *mupfuwira* on her husband and the two can actually be a formidable force against the *vahosi*.

With the generality in the neighbourhood, however, *mashipiri* is continuously viewed lowly. Quite a number in Shona society, due to Christian influence in particular, view being a *mashipiri* as a negative development since it involves poaching into someone's marriage, hence, people would not like to promote such a base thing in the society. Elders would usually wish to refer to tradition in their judgment of someone who would have proposed to take a second wife. If such a thing never occurred in the history of the family they would often ask: *Unoda kutodza ani?* Whom do you intend to imitate? Though some may choose to ignore the wisdom of the elders and thus go ahead with their plans, they automatically know from that day that they should always be on the defense of the second wife since her position in the family community would be less recognized. Whatever little blunder she makes people would always go back to the husband to remind him of their word against bringing such a person into the family.

It would even be worse if someone in the neighbourhood allegedly accuses *mashipiri* of practicing witchcraft. Whether true or not, almost the whole village would be up in arms with the *mashipiri* and as someone already at the disadvantage of having less friends in the community she is done what the Shona idiomatically call *kudyiswa sadza* (a person on the lips of people at almost every occasion) in the whole neighbourhood. Succumbing to pressure from other family members instigated especially by the *vahosi* and other members of the society, a man may be forced to send *mashipiri* away. If the children are still young she may be asked to go with them to her paternal home but if they are grown up she may be forced to separate with them. Once left behind the kids live at the fluctuating mercy of the *vahosi* who may toss them up in such a manner that they stay almost always in tears. They are made to feel that they are second class to the children of the *vahosi*. If the father does not from time to time check for himself the welfare of these children and at times control the excesses of his wife, the children may likely spent some of the nights without food in their stomachs.

Death of the husband

The real Hagariness of *mashipiri* becomes more pronounced once the shared husband passes away. While during the life time of the husband she could have survived the hostile environment due to the protection and love she would from time to time receive from the husband, this time around there would be nowhere to take refuge and all who were opposed to her would sure seize this opportunity to show her that all is over with her. Thus the death of the husband signals the end of almost everything for *mashipiri*. While also she could have been used to benefiting from the income of *vahosi's* working children on the directive of the father, she is tormented for that once the husband is gone.

The very day the husband is declared no more, if she used to be a decision maker also in some of the things in the family, her role from that day is almost forgotten as she is not consulted on where, when and how the husband would be buried. While also before the husband's death key issues first passed through *mashipiri* before they reached *vahosi*, such a protocol breaks off with the death. From that very day everything begins to be addressed directly to the *vahosi* and only if the *vahosi* wishes she may pass it to *mashipiri* but just as a formality which entails no expectation of a decision from her. She may not even be allowed to sit beside the coffin of the late husband, a custom in Shona tradition which symbolizes the unity between the deceased and the wife.

Traditionally, while the wife of a late husband may be asked to tie or wear a shirt of the late husband so as for her not to faint or get too overwhelmed by sorrow due to the loss, *mashipiri* is not given anything to tie or to wear, only the *vahosi* receives that attention. Being a disenfranchised griever, *mashipiri's* need to mourn and helped control her grief remains overlooked. Relatives who come to pay condolences may by-pass *mashipiri* and comfort only the *vahosi*. The same happens with those who through one reason or the other may have failed to attend the funeral but come later, very few would be prepared to visit *mashipiri's* kitchen as a gesture of saying sorry for the loss.

Suspicion abounds also of her being conceived as the cause behind the death of the husband and such a suspicion becomes stronger once *mashipiri* was once seen at the door of a traditional healer or is known to associate with someone in the village whose acts are associated with witchcraft. Once such a suspicion grows loud in the family *mashipiri* may be left out when people go for the *gata* consultations which are done to establish the cause of death. Her presence is feared to interfere with this process as the traditional

healer may be thought to shy from accusing her publicly. If the traditional healer happens to confirm the family's suspicion, there would be at most no other solution reserved for *mashipiri* except to be asked to pack off.

Even if there are no suspicions being leveled against *mashipiri*, she is indirectly shown the door out from the family when it comes to inheriting the deceased's property. If *vahosi* was the court wedded wife *mashipiri* stands to lose almost everything. The customary practice noted by A. Masasire that the house property which is allocated to the wives whilst the husband is still alive is inviolable and should be used only for the benefit of the children born to that house and to be inherited by them alone[23] could possibly have been observed in the past but the present day generation of the Shona hardly follows that any more. Even if *mashipiri* was the one staying in the house which was bought in town whilst the husband was still alive, she is told to pack out only what belongs to her as the *vahosi* takes the legal possession of that house. The same goes with the other property, for example, a piece of land, furniture, bank account, a car if the husband had any, a shop or any other business which was formerly run by the husband, they are all taken over by the *vahosi*. *Mashipiri* is, in other words, stripped of everything. It is in such scenarios as these that one needs perhaps to listen to the voice of Lovemore Madhuku who advocates a uniform law where all widows left by the deceased man are treated equally. He argues "There are only two extremes available: either outlaw customary law for all purposes (which is unacceptable) or treat widows equally (which is better!)." [24] Of course in certain instances one may find the property being shared almost equally among the two wives and them enjoying widowhood together but such instances are very rare in Shona society.

Death of either *mashipiri* or the *vahosi*

If it happens that *vahosi* passes away during the life time of the husband and leaves behind small kids, such kids are likely to find hard times with the *mashipiri*. The seniors among *vahosi's* children knowing in advance the trouble their siblings may face usually come to the rescue of these minors from the abuse by the *mashipiri*. When, however, the father eventually dies also, *mashipiri* loses control over *vahosi's* children and may actually be kicked out from the family as the seniors among *vahosi's* children claim the right to their father's property. While *mashipiri* cannot be exonerated if she ill-treats *vahosi's* children, she, in most cases stands to be the looser as she may easily face ejection from the family at any time. Though her hay days may appear to be guaranteed as long as the husband lives, once the husband is gone she becomes more vulnerable.

When it happens, however, that *mashipiri* is the first to die before the *vahosi*, her children too more like the children of a chased away mother, have their world collapse before their eyes as they face the double tragedy of losing a mother as well as entering the 'frying pan' of the *vahosi*. What it helps show is that women are generally less prepared to look after the kids of another woman. Some sure have a motherly heart which embraces all but the generality feels blood is thicker than water.

While Shona society tends to tolerate the children of *mashipiri*, seeing the blood of the father in the kids, their growing up is always different from *vahosi's* kids since theirs is a hostile environment that they have to fight their way through. If for one reason or the other they are chased away together with their mother to go and live among their mother's relations, they grow up as children without an identity. Quite a number of children born from *mashipiri* marriage unions end up in the hands of their grandfathers, from the mother's side.

Muslim community in Zimbabwe

The Muslim community in Zimbabwe is a composition of South Asian immigrants (Indian and Pakistani), migrants from other southern and eastern African countries (Mozambique and Malawi), and a very small number of North African and Middle Eastern immigrants. According to a survey carried out by the U.S. Department of State,

There are mosques located in nearly all of the larger towns, and there are a number of mosques in rural areas. There are 18 mosques in the capital Harare and 8 in Bulawayo. The Muslim community generally has been somewhat insular; however, in the past several years, the Islamic community has expanded its outreach efforts, and is having increasing success proselytizing among the majority black indigenous population.[25]

An updated version of the same report brings to light that the Kuwait-sponsored African Muslim Agency (AMA) has been a source of great help to the Zimbabwean Muslim community in its outreach programmes. Partly because of its humanitarian projects in rural areas, the Harare AMA office has made some successful proselytizing in-roads among the black indigenous community that even some chiefs and headmen are reportedly said to have converted from Christianity to Islam.[26]

While the institution of polygamy cannot be considered as something which is legal wherever Muslims find themselves, the Muslims of Zimbabwe have not been subjected to unnecessary worries since polygamous marriages in Zimbabwe may be performed under the nation's customary law, which the government officially recognizes in compliance with the Customary Marriage Act [Chapter 5:07].[27] Before, however, one explains the practice of polygamy among Muslims of Zimbabwe, there is need perhaps to examine first the legal status of such an institution from the perspective of Islam.

Generally, marriage in Islam holds a special place in the maintenance of social order and peace. What does marriage mean in Islam?

Marriage (nikah) in Islam is recognized as a highly religious sacred covenant. However, it is not religious in the sense of a sacrament, but rather in the sense of realizing the essence of Islam. In Islamic law, marriage is a civil contract legalizing intercourse and procreation. Marriage, reflecting the practical bent of Islam, combines the nature of both ibadat (worship) and muamalat (social relations).[28]

As for polygamy, it is generally known that it is an ancient institution. What it means is that Islam did not initiate it. Polygamy was a necessity due to the harsh conditions of those times. Islam actually tried even to limit the number of wives. A Muslim man may have up to four wives. This law includes a reform which tries to raise the status of women who had been subjected to unlimited polygamy in pre-Islamic times. Social circumstances during the period when this law was instituted must not be forgotten, for example, the common practice of polygamy itself and the existence of many orphans and widows of those men who had died in battle and now needed protection through marriage. The Qur'anic verse which controls polygamy should actually be perceived in the context of troubles resulting from the battle of Uhud (625), which had caused the deaths of a considerable number of Muslim

men:

And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hands possess; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course. (Qur'an 4:3)

An interpretation of this verse from the Qur'an shows that it would be quite unlikely for an orthodox Muslim man to marry more than one wife unless he has the means to support the wives he may desire. In sub-Saharan Africa, however, where most women are traditionally expected to look after themselves to large extent, it is almost natural to see some Muslim men taking advantage of the traditional set up and thus contract easily polygamous unions.[29] In Islamic system, Allah allowed men to have multiple wives under specific circumstances such as war, gender imbalance in certain regions, women's preference, the desire of a man to have children of his own (if the wife is unable to bear him children), if his wife is critically ill and therefore she is unable to perform her duties as a wife. What is evident in the recently cited Qur'anic verse is that men are prohibited from engaging in polygamy unless it is absolutely necessary. Polygamy is not compulsory but just permitted. The permission to practice polygamy cannot be explained as a satisfaction of passion. As noted by Gamal A. Badawi:

It is rather associated with compassion toward widows and orphans, a matter that is confirmed by the atmosphere in which the verse was revealed. That even in such a situation, the permission is far more restricted than the normal practice which existed among the Arabs and other people at that time when many married as many as ten or more wives. [30]

As with the first wife, she can be barren or ill and choose polygamy as a better solution than divorce. She may divorce him if he is married to a second wife because of the right of unilateral divorce (Ismah). She can go to court and ask for a divorce if there is evidence of mistreatment or injustice upon her.[31]

The first wife and the second wife

In those cases where a man marries a second wife it is quite natural to expect that the first wife will react in various ways. Some are quite genuinely welcoming of the newcomer; regarding her as a sister and a valuable help and company in the house. While it is possible for two women to share a husband and live next to each, the nature of women as women often stands out as a great challenge and therefore results in clashes. Besides this innate characteristic, it stems from the social, psychological, and economical reasons. If the first wife cannot accept the situation she may hate the uninvited guest fiercely and this can cause considerable trouble in the house which leads often to a divorce. She may ignore her duties in the house; try to take revenge of her husband by straining the family budget, make gossips among the neighbors and the relatives and so on. All her actions therefore may be driven by the emotions of jealousy, hatred, and revenge. On the other hand, these can be taken as tolerable behaviors without any damage. At times, she can play some tricks to have the husband alone. She, for example, cares for her appearance more than as usual, wears very attractive and gorgeous dresses or tries to attract her husband by applying perfume. She also may cook very delicious meals and invite the husband for romantic dinners on regular basis. This can lead to a competition between the wives. The husband can actually guard against the possibility of clashes by making no difference in his treatment of the two women, spending a rotational time with each of them, and showing no favoritism in any way. The Qur'an, as we saw, overtly instructs Muslim men that if they are afraid that they cannot be just between their wives then they should marry only one woman. This justice is attained as long as the man can provide the same amount of time to each of his wives and the same material lifestyle. For example, the wives must live in

similar places; have a similar amount of financial support, and the same level of material possessions. If a man cannot achieve this, or even if he fears that he will not be able to achieve this, Islam does not allow polygamy. While this is strictly underlined in the Qur'an, it is not always observed.

In polygamous families stress, quarrels and negligence are an inevitable reality. These impact negatively especially on children. Children of the first wife are very likely to be neglected by their father, particularly if he has more than two wives or more than 10 children. Their father can hardly recognize them and scarcely know their names. There are even some children who leave the home due to their father's negligence. Children, however, may tend to hate their mother because she would not be preventing them from their father's negligence and so she becomes depressed and may neglect the children also herself. This negative impact tends to bear mostly on the children of first wives because as grown ups they would be aware of everything that would be taking place. The children can also feel guilty of this situation themselves hence, may lack confidence in their own capability to shape a stable and happy family. Besides all these troubles, children are likely to have problems with the other wives of their father. The mothers may want their own children to have more opportunities than the other's. Maybe due to the mothers' hatred for each other, children may feel the same hostility for other children. As a result of this, the mothers will protect only their own children and will not show kindness and affection to the other ones. In such a situation whomever the father supports will live in comfort. If a mother dies, the children's survival will lie with the father's or the step mother's mercy. It cannot be confidently assumed that the step-mother will handle the children with velvet gloves because the children themselves may refuse to take her as their overseer or she herself may not want to assume that responsibility and thus treat them in a brutal way. At this point, the father is called upon to take seriously his duty of looking after the children and protect them against the feeling of being helpless and alone at home. According to Islamic teachings, the father shoulders the responsibility of the following class of children:

1. His infant children, regardless of whether or not he has custody of them.
2. The infant children of a son who is unable to do so.
3. His disabled son or student son.
4. His unmarried daughter of any age.
5. His widowed or divorced daughter if she is ill.[32]

In the light of all these explanations it can be seen that while Islam permits polygamy it does in actual fact encourage monogamy unless there are certain circumstances and needs. Polygamy is permitted as a better option to decrease the number of secret affairs and illicit relationships and becomes legitimate if justice is provided and all rights are taken onboard. Thus, although polygamy is not a preferred system of marriage and may even be harmful if not practiced as it must be, Islam allows it so as to prevent more harmful relationships which are secret and illegitimate. While a secret "mistress" who is in an affair with a man has no rights, she becomes an honored wife with all the rights and privileges of being a wife once she gets married. Also her children will no longer be regarded as "illegitimate". They will not suffer a shameful feeling in their social environment and will mature in favourable conditions of life since all these rights and privileges are protected by the institution of marriage. Be that as it may, as long as people abuse this permission, women will always suffer from such marriages. Wives will live an unhappy life under the black shadow of polygamy being abused by men. Generally, in many Muslim communities an accusation against a woman is rarely questioned and a woman who is blamed rarely finds a chance to express herself in a fair way. This is often as a result of the local cultural customs; not because of true Islamic teaching. Recalling Prophet Muhammad's words in the Hadith narrated by Abu Huraira and transmitted by Tirmidhi: "Among the Muslims the most perfect, as regards his faith, is the one whose character is excellent, and the best among you are those who treat their wives well." [33] He also described the high status of mothers in the

following famous account narrated by Abu Huraira:

A man came to Allah's Apostle and said, "O Allah's Apostle! Who is more entitled to be treated with the best companionship by me?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man said, "Who is next?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man further said, "Who is next?" The Prophet said, "Your mother." The man asked for the fourth time, "Who is next?" The Prophet said, "Your father." [34]

As it is understood from the Hadith, in Islam, the mothers play the primary role, and they are considered the most important part of the family.

The liberating nature of the Hagar and Ishmael story

While it must be admitted that the context of the Hagar and Ishmael story does not fit one hundred percent the context of polygamous unions in Shona and Muslim communities of Zimbabwe, it is worth to note that the story has indelible liberating lessons for gloomy situations including those which are a result of dysfunctional polygamous unions in the named communities. The story demonstrates that:

1. No matter the situation, God knows the plans he has for every person, plans for welfare and not evil.
2. Foreign peoples are just as much objects of God's solicitude as the presumed 'selected' peoples.
3. In trust shall be one's strength before God

Applying the hermeneutics of liberation, one finds that these lessons from the Hagar and Ishmael story can be used to liberate many of those among the Shona and Muslim communities who find themselves in similar traps like that of Hagar and Ishmael. A clear demonstration that God knows the plans he has for every person, plans for welfare and not evil is that though it looked an unfortunate turn of events for Hagar and Ishmael to be disenfranchised from Abraham's inheritance, it was not the end of the road for them for God stood by them. Hagar and Ishmael had before them a future full of life and satisfaction. Such a future life is symbolized by the well abundant with water which Hagar discovers in the wilderness. On many occasions, water symbolizes life. While Abraham had given her a meager skin of water, symbolizing a short destiny of life to which she had been subjected; God grants not a limited life but eternity to the dynasty of Ishmael. What this Hagar and Ishmael story teaches is that God/Allah is on the side of the disenfranchised, he does not abandon them in their misery.

The above lesson when applied to the context of the Shona and Muslim communities of Zimbabwe ignites hope in the apparent hopeless situations faced by the Hagars and Ishmaels of these two societies. The death of the shared husband, for example, which can look to be almost the end of the road for *mashipiri* and her children need not leave them in total despair but rather with hope that something positive awaits them. As a result of the gravity of what some undergo when the husband is no more, it is an experienced reality that a number become so sad at heart to the point of wishing death but the Hagar and Ishmael story becomes to them a well in the desert from which to draw strength and inspiration. The story shows that once they trust and have confidence in the heavens, God will not in any way abandon them. Though one may be left almost naked after having been stripped of a place to stay, a piece of land to grow what would be for one's survival, a bank account from which to buy clothes, food and other necessities of life, the custodian of children and other basic needs, the text revives hope in *mashipiri* that God will provide. Just as he assured the exiled sons and daughters of Israel, "[...] I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for welfare and not evil, to give

you a future and a hope [...]" (Jer.29:10-14), so also God, through the Hagar and Ishmael story, assures *mashipiri* that all will be fine with her and her kids even if it means being exiled from the family.

How liberating the message that God knows the plans he has for every person, plans for welfare and not evil can be gleaned also from the manner in which God blesses the innocent boy Ishmael. Besides the promise made to Hagar that Ishmael would be the father of a great nation, God was with the lad as he grew up and became an expert with the bow (Gen.21:21). As evidenced also in Shona society, some of those children of *mashipiri* who grow up in the care of their mother's family members or alone can become so determined to regain their identity through hard work in school and later when they get employed. Some really rise to positions of power in the society that even *vahosi* and her children find shelter also in their care. What this helps show is that God, in as much as he had plans to bless Ishmael, so too does he have plans for the welfare of *mashipiri's* children. Almost every tear they would have shed before is rewarded as God hearkens to them.

It is undeniably true that the Islamic version of the story also reinforces the lesson that God knows the plans he has for his people when one brings into focus the building of one of the most holy sites in Islamic religion, the Kaa'bah and the founding of the holy spring, Zamzam. Allah's plans for the billions of his Muslim children through what appeared to be an unfortunate plight for Hagar and Ishmael is captured so well in Prophet Muhammad's praise of Hagar's faithfulness:

May Allah bestow His Mercy upon Isma'eel's mother! If she had left Zamzam - or if she had not cupped her hand - Zamzam would have been a flowing spring. [...] So she drank and nursed her son. The angel then said to her, Do not fear abandonment, for a House for Allah (the Kaa'bah) will be built in this area by this boy and his father, and most certainly, Allah does not abandon His people.[35]

As a result of her sincerity, Allah made Zamzam flow with water not only for her and Ishmael but also for the billions of Muslims throughout the ages who drink this water and take some of it back to their homes during their visit to the Kaa'bah. Just like Hagar, Islamic women who find the challenge of polygamous marriages a thorny path to walk need not despair but submit themselves also into Allah's care and He will be there to assist them. Their children too need not feel guilty of the situation and keep nagging at the wound of an apparent hopeless situation but should look at the model of Ishmael. Just as Allah did not abandon Ishmael but made him into a father of a great nation and together with his father Abraham rebuilt the Kaa'bah which has become the site of pilgrimage for billions of Muslims, so too they need to learn that Allah knows the plans he has for them, plans for welfare, not evil.

The second lesson that we derive from the Hagar and Ishmael story is that foreign peoples are just as much objects of God's solicitude as the presumed 'selected' ones. As we saw from the story, it was not only Sarah who got a blessing from God just because she was an Israelite and the rightful wife of Abraham but Hagar, despite her being a foreigner, was a blessed woman also who merited heavenly visitations on at least two occasions. The privilege she enjoyed here of seeing God face to face was unusual for women. She appears to have shared the privilege of the patriarchs who on different occasions met God and would shower Him with a new praise name. The story is thus liberating to *mashipiri* in that it shows no partiality of God's love. More like Hagar who remained pure at heart and was deemed worthy to receive heavenly visitations, so too if *mashipiri* remains good hearted the possibilities of experiencing the epiphanies of God in her own life-situations abound. Her moment of visitation would be just by the corner as it is the nature of God not to abandon those who suffer and remain true to him.

Just as Hagar, an Egyptian foreigner captured the attention of God, so too is *mashipiri* even if she is rated an outsider in the family or a foreigner among the Shona. It is only of recent that the Shona are beginning to accept and tolerate marriages with other tribes other than the Shona. Emphasis was placed on marrying a lady *wematongo* (from the neighbourhood), the presupposition being that a distant person is unpredictable when it comes to her behaviour as well as her ability to work in the fields than a locally known person. If one went ahead to marry a distant unknown person or a non-Shona, such a move attracted criticism from the family as well as from the neighbourhood and this was exacerbated if the wife happened to be a *mashipiri*.

Equally to be learnt especially from the Islamic version of the Hagar and Ishmael story is that in trust shall be one's strength before God. Though it looked a tough challenge, as we saw, being left in a barren valley with a baby, Hagar was blessed when she submitted herself to her Lord, 'I am satisfied to be with God!' Such a powerful expression of submission to Allah's care when adopted can be a source of great strength to Islamic women and their children when expelled from their matrimonial homes. One general trend we saw also with many Muslim communities is that an accusation brought against a woman is rarely questioned and a woman who is blamed rarely finds a chance to express herself in a fair way. It is indeed such moments as these when one feels abandoned, not listened to that a woman needs to submit herself to Allah's care as what Hagar did.

It is not only Muslim women who learn the value of trust in Allah from the Hagar and Ishmael story but their counterparts also in the Shona society. Cases may arise, as we saw, when *mashipiri* is falsely accused of practicing witchcraft and thus resulting in her being ostracized by the very community she may have thought she is now part through marriage. Such developments are really agonizing moments in *mashipiri's* life that only trust in God will give one strength to push on with life.

Conclusion

The story of Hagar and Ishmael though told in different ways in Biblical and Islamic sources highlights a common fact that the Most High/Allah is not a *Deus Otiosus* (Remote God) but one who cares so much even for those who in the eyes of the world are in hopeless situations as long as they abandon themselves into His care. The disenfranchised as a result of non-functional polygamous marriages in both Shona and Islamic communities have a lot to learn from this Hagar and Ishmael story. While in human eyes they may be considered the scum of the society, God abandons them not. In as much as He stood by Hagar and her son, He actually blesses them to prosper and opens for them ways of survival that may actually secure their future lives. Having been blessed by God therefore, their names do not die but live forever and God builds them into great nations. Each time they are disenfranchised appears to be occasions when blessings are added on to them.

As to how the lessons from the story can be imparted on a practical level to the peoples concerned in the societies which have been under study in this paper, just as Gerald West, Sarojini Nadar or Musa W. Dube,[36] for example, would read biblical passages with a group of people and find meaning of the texts in the context of those people, it lies beyond the scope of this paper. This paper has been intended to give just a theoretical demonstration that it is possible to apply the Hagar and Ishmael story in the context of challenging situations faced by some polygamously married women and their children in Shona and Islamic communities of Zimbabwe.

Notes

- [1] B.C. Lategan, as cited in West, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 61
- [2] J.S. Croatto, as cited in West, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 155.
- [3] Croatto, as cited in West, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 157.
- [4] Shona is a name collectively given to several Bantu groups of people in Zimbabwe and some parts of Mozambique who speak a range of related dialects whose standardized form is also known as Shona. Shona speakers in Zimbabwe are divided into regional groups: Karanga, Zezuru, Korekore, Manyika, Ndaou and Kalanga.
- [5] W.W. Karanja, as cited in Y. Hayase & K.L. Liaw, *Factors on Polygamy*, p. 294.
- [6] Karanja, as cited in Y. Hayase & K.L. Liaw, *Factors on Polygamy*, p. 293.
- [7] D. Pursiful, *Reading the Bible*.
- [8] M. Luther, as cited in Pursiful, *Reading the Bible*.
- [9] Cf. *Ishmael*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishmael>.
- [10] Cf. *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 55: Prophets*, Vol.4, Nos. 583-584.
- [11] Cf. *Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 55: Prophets*, Vol.4, No. 583
- [12] One of the authors of the present article, Canisius Mwandayi, is himself a Shona, and much of what he writes about the Shona in this article is taken from his own experience.
- [13] Cf. M. Gelfand, *Growing Up in Shona Society*, p. 27.
- [14] Cf. L.M. Hatugari, "Barika", p. 67.
- [15] Cf. J.M. Gombe, *Tsika DzaVaShona*, p. 32.
- [16] Cf. J.C. Caldwell & P. Caldwell cited in Y. Hayase & K.L. Liaw, *Factors on Polygamy*, p. 296.
- [17] Cf. Y. Hayase & K.L. Liaw, *Factors on Polygamy*, p. 296.
- [18] Cf. M. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples*, p. 315.
- [19] Cf. L.M. Hatugari, "Barika", p. 67.
- [20] M. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona*, p.176.
- [21] A. Masasire, 'Kinship and Marriage' in S. Mutsvairo et al, *Introduction to Shona Culture*, Kadoma: 1996, p. 42.
- [22] Cf. Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona*, p. 179.
- [23] Cf. A. Masasire, "Kinship and Marriage", p. 42.
- [24] L. Madhuku cited in Vanessa von Struensee, "The Contribution of Polygamy to Women's Oppression and Impoverishment".

[25] 2003 *Report on International Religious Freedom, Africa, Zimbabwe*.

[26] 2005 *Report on International Religious Freedom, Africa, Zimbabwe*.

[27] An important thing to note, however, with the Customary Marriage Act/African Marriages Act is that only Africans are competent to marry under this Act. What it means then is that two non-Africans or an African and a non-African cannot marry each other under this African Marriages Act (Cf. W. Ncube, *Family Law*).

[28] Cf. J.L. Esposito & N. J. DeLong-Bas, *Women in Muslim Family Law*, p. 15.

[29] Cf. Y. Hayase & K.L. Liaw, *Factors on Polygamy*, p. 308.

[30] G. A. Badawi, *Polygamy in Islamic Law*.

[31] Cf. Badawi, *Polygamy in Islamic Law*.

[32] Cf. Esposito & DeLong-Bas, *Women in Muslim Family Law*, p. 26.

[33] Tirmidhi *Hadith* 278, 628, 3264 and Abu Dawud.

[34] *The Hadith, Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 73: Good Manners and Form (Al-Adab)*, Vol. 8, No. 2.

[35] *The Hadith, Sahih Bukhari, Book 40: Distribution of Water*, Vol. 3, No. 556.

[36] Cf. G.O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation* (1995); S. Nadar, "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth" (2001); M.W. Dube, *Grant Me Justice* (2004).

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