

SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY

**RE-READING GENESIS 16 AND 21 WITH ZULU WOMEN WHO ARE
IN POLYGAMOUS MARRIAGES: IDENTIFYING OPPRESSIVE AND
LIBERATIVE MESSAGES**

BY

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preliminary Remarks

Reading the Bible is like meeting a stranger. It is an encounter of two cultures, the reader's culture and the biblical culture. Therefore, it requires one to be familiar and be able to differentiate between the two cultures, more especially if the task ahead is to do comparative studies. This dissertation seeks to find both the liberative and oppressive messages from Genesis 16 and 21, through contextual reading of the two narratives, in a form of Contextual Bible Study Method¹. Genesis 16 and 21 are one of the polygamy stories in the Old Testament. The two narratives are about Abraham and his two wives, Sarah and Hagar and their living conditions in their polygamous marriage. This dissertation is rooted in the academy, but not confined to it. It dialogues outside the academy, and a further explanation of this will be given later. The key characters in these narratives are Abraham and his two wives Sarah and Hagar. The underlying question in this dissertation is how polygamy in the Zulu culture challenges the biblical hermeneutics and Old Testament in Africa. The purpose of this study is to read the Bible in ways that bring gender social transformation to the Zulu women who are in polygamous marriages. The starting point of my research is on the experiences of these women.

1.2 Research Question

According to literature on polygamy in the Zulu culture and Old Testament, one of the most underlying factors that leads men to have more wives, or that leads to polygamy is bareness. Being barren for women in both the Old Testament and the Zulu culture, has never been an easy situation to handle. This is one of the reasons why I chose Gen. 16 and 21 narratives. This is also testified by one of my interviewees. Joyce (not her real name) She says:

In these two texts I identify more with Sarah. I can imagine the kind of pain she was going through for being barren. I think it was not an easy decision for her to suggest Hagar for her husband. She might have done it out of frustration, cultural expectations, and maybe pressure from the society. In reality,

¹ This method of reading the Bible has its roots in Brazil. It was a Bible movement that attempted to search for the challenges of the poor and the marginalised. It emerged with the poor and the marginalised, trying to find new perspectives, which enables the poor to speak in their own situation. In the early 90's, the Contextual Bible Study Method was also adopted in South Africa. It was a project for the Institute for the Study of the Bible (which is now called Ujaama), in Pietermaritzburg. It is linked to the University of KwaZulu- Natal. This institution works with communities of faith, mainline and Indigenous African Independent Churches. The emergence of this institution is rooted in the assumption that the readings of the Bible in South Africa have the significant contribution to make to our understanding of the Bible and what God is doing in South Africa (See West, 991:217).

no woman wants to share a man, but culture and circumstances forces us to do so. When my husband took a second wife, it was very hard for me. I could not show my disapproval, I had to pretend that I was okay with it. I could not even leave him because my father would be very angry at me. He would have to return all the *lobola* cows back to my husband, and that would be a disgrace to the society and my family. There was nothing I could do about the situation, because I was childless. To make matters worse, my late mother-in-law used to call me *inyumba* [Zulu negative name for a barren woman]....That made the situation more hurtful and worse. (an extract from the interviews)

This quotation captured my attention because it shows how “ordinary readers” of the Bible can unknowingly use the comparative method of the biblical texts and the African culture by sharing their experiences and identify with certain characters in the text.

1.3 Thesis structure

This dissertation argues that literary and African women hermeneutical approaches can be used as a resource for gender social transformation in South African for Zulu women who are in polygamous marriages, through the contextual reading of Genesis 16 and 21. It also maintains that the very same Bible that has been used to legitimise some oppressive practices can also offer liberative messages. This can be done through contextual reading of the biblical narratives with “ordinary readers” of the Bible. In this dissertation I am using the term “ordinary readers” within the South African context. The term “ordinary readers” in a South African context is used to refer to the marginalised, the poor or the oppressed. I am also aware of the fact that the term in other contexts is used to refer to all those who have no theological training or untrained readers of the Bible, not necessarily the poor or the marginalised. As mentioned previously, this dissertation maintains that biblical scholarship cannot be confined into the academy.

This dissertation is divided into two sections, an introduction a theoretical framework of polygamy in the Old Testament, the Zulu culture, and African Theology that serves background information of polygamy both in the Bible and African culture, with special emphasis on the Zulu culture. The second section is the comprised of the conceptual tools that serves as a foundation for analysis, literary details of the text, and the critical interpretation that contributes to gender social transformation, and the conclusion. This is done through an analysis of a Contextual Bible Study I conducted to my informants. My location, issues of representation and conscientization are also examined in this section.

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. *Chapter one* presents the introduction of the study. It starts with the case of Joyce, one of my participants, whom I met during the field study. Having her story as a background, the chapter discusses the research problem, and the experiences of Zulu women who are in polygamous marriages and how these women can

relate their experiences to the Bible. *Chapter two* gives a literature review on polygamy in the Old Testament, Zulu culture and African Theology. It serves as a background chapter on the understanding of polygamy and how this understating can be utilised in comparative studies between the Old Testament and African culture, with special emphasis on the Zulu culture. *Chapter three* starts with a detailed description of African biblical scholarship, African women hermeneutical approaches that lead to the *ubufazi* approach that I have developed. The *ubufazi* hermeneutical approach will be discussed later in the dissertation. *Chapter four* highlights the method of data collection and how my participants dialogued with Genesis 16 and 21, relating the two narratives to their own context. *Chapter five* discusses and analyses Genesis 16 and 21. It gives a description of the two narratives and uses the *ubufazi* hermeneutical approach and also the textual interpretations and experiences of my informants for the analysis and discussion. The research question raised in chapter one, is answered in this chapter It is an evaluation of the contextual use of Genesis 16 and 21 with Zulu women who are in polygamous marriages, and reflect on the way forward for gender social transformation. *Chapter six* is the conclusion, and it highlights the main points of this dissertation and summarises the research findings.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is about the context or background of my research. It outlines the issue of polygamy in the Zulu culture, the Old Testament and African Theology. In this chapter, I will not do a deeper analysis of the facts that will be presented about polygamy that will be done later in chapter five, the data presentation chapter. Within the context of Christianity, the issue of polygamy can be approached from different angles. It can be approached from a practical theological point of view, by focusing on the role of the Church on counselling polygamous families or from the historical point of view by focussing on ongoing discussions within the churches regarding polygamy, and the role played by the Old Testament in this discussion, as observed by Knut Holter (Holter, 2001:77). In view of this, my focus is on the ongoing discussions about polygamy in Africa, with special emphasis to the Zulu culture (South Africa) and the role played by the Old Testament in these discussion.

2.2 Polygamy in the Zulu culture

The word polygamy is used when a man marries more than one wife. This type of marriage (polygamy) in Africa is looked upon as a traditional ideal, and is practiced by a minority of men. In African anthropological studies, polygamy has always been a central topic, especially in the field of kinship (colonial period) studies, and more recently (postcolonial period) women studies (Holter, 2001:78). Polygamy takes various forms, for example, one form is “polygyny”, in which a man is concurrently having more than one wife. The second form is “consecutive” polygamy, in which a man takes more than one wife in sequence, after divorcing the previous wife (Breckenridge, 2008:67).

South Africa is one of the countries in the African continent in which polygamy was an accepted practice, and it is still a legal and accepted practice. However, today, out of eleven South African ethnic groups, polygamy is only maintained by one group, the Zulus. On the other hand, the practice of polygamy among the Zulu people is becoming less popular as compared to the ancient days, because of “modernity” and “western” ways of life. Nevertheless, it is more popular in rural parts of KwaZulu-Natal province (Zululand/Northern part). In the Zulu culture polygamy, which is commonly known as *isithembu*, is embarked upon when a man is able to take more than one wife to show his wealth and that he can take

care of her.² In other words, for man, polygamy is seen as a sign of wealth and prestige in the Zulu culture.

Traditionally, in the Zulu culture, there are a number of reasons that lead people to settle for polygamy. To name the few, the first one is childlessness. In the Zulu culture, *childlessness* is considered as calamity, and one of the most important aspects of marriage is procreation, more especially if a woman gives birth to a male child (Maillu, 1988: 12). The second reason is *sexual incompatibility*, which means that if a man does not get sexual satisfaction from the wife, he is most likely to take another wife (Maillu, 1988: 13). Thirdly, *widow inheritance*, which means, if a woman lost her husband through death, the family of the deceased husband would find a male family member as a replacement for her deceased husband, whether the man has other wives or not. It is usually the brother of the deceased husband, and if the deceased husband had no brothers, the family would choose one of the late husband's cousin brothers from the paternal side of the deceased husband (Maillu, 1988:13). The fourth reason is *labour force*. For example, in the Zulu culture farming has always been part of the culture and the production required a large labour force. In such cases, polygamy had been used as a better alternative for the expansion of the family. This was due to the fact that if a man marries more than wife, that could create more hands in the family in a form of children. Children of plural marriages were of greater importance for the economy of the family (Maillu, 1988:15).

In South Africa, polygamy has been criticised by some, as not fitting in the modern society, and one of the reasons is that, it sends a wrong message to a country with the world's highest rate of HIV/aids.³ Some Zulu people who are in favour of polygamy declares that its part of their culture, and that they cannot do away with it, including the current country's president, Jacob Zuma, who is both polygamist and Zulu. In 2010, on his visit to the United Kingdom, president Jacob Zuma was criticised by the British media for having more than one wife.⁴ In response to this, president Jacob Zuma defended polygamy as part of the culture. He was quoted as saying, "When the British came to our country [South Africa], they said everything

² See BBC News, "How do Zulus explain Polygamy", available from, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk/_news.magazine/8549429.stm; accessed on 10 January

³ See BBC News, "How do Zulus explain Polygamy", available from, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk/_news.magazine/8549429.stm; accessed on 10 January

⁴ See BBC News, "How do Zulus explain Polygamy", available from, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk/_news.magazine/8549429.stm; accessed on 10 January

we are doing was barbaric...”⁵ This is a general comment by many who are in favour of some cultural practices that are not favoured by the others within the country.

2.3 Polygamy in the Old Testament

In African biblical scholarship, polygamy in the Old Testament has been interpreted with “cultural lenses”. Primarily, the interpreters of the Old Testament (western interpreters) came from contexts where polygamy was and is still an unfamiliar tradition. As noted by Knut Holter, the cultural difference complicates the interpretation of polygamy and this requires a kind of interpretation that will use non-western eyes (Holter, 2001: 80). In the Old Testament, Ancient Israel had no marriage manual for its citizens. But there are few laws pertaining marriage in legal codes throughout the Old Testament (Freedman, 1992: 560).

These legal codes address issues such as dissolution of marriage, remarriage, what is to become of a childless widow and so forth. In the Old Testament there are also stories about man and women, and the narration of these marriages are of central importance to the narrator, for the development of certain themes or motifs. These marriages are different, for example, some are happy marriages, while others are not happy marriages (Freedman, 1992: 560). Therefore, one cannot take all these marriage stories together, looking for a common thread, and on that basis try to construct a common concept of Old Testament marriage. David Freedman argues that the ideal marriage in the Old Testament was monogamous marriage, on the basis of the Old Testament creation story. He argues that the Old Testament creation story (Gen. 2:24) confirms this, whereby a man is to leave his mother and cleave to his wife. He further says that this verse does not say “wives”, but rather “wife”, to emphasise monogamous marriage (Freedman, 1992: 560). Knut Holter also affirms that monogamous marriage seems to be the ideal marriage in the Old Testament, and that it is also reflected in Wisdom literature, such as Proverbs 12:4, 18:22 (Holter, 2001:81).

In Genesis 16 and 21, Abraham had more than one wife. This was due to the fact that Sarah (the first wife) was barren. After Sarah, he took a second wife, Hagar, who is not really

⁵ See BBC News, “How do Zulus explain Polygamy”, available from, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk/_news.magazine/8549429.stm; accessed on 10 January

considered as a wife, but a concubine.⁶ After the death of Sarah, he took another wife, Qeturah.⁷ Abraham was following the traditional customs of that time (De Vaux, 1965: 24). According to the Code of Hammurabi,⁸ during that time, a husband could only take the second wife, if the first one is barren, and he loses this right if the wife herself gives him a slave as a *concubine*. On the other hand, the husband could take a *concubine* himself even if his wife has given him a child, but he could not take another *concubine*, unless the first *concubine* was barren (De Vaux, 1965: 24).

A concubine would also not have the same right as a wife. In the fifteenth century BC, in the region of Kirkur (ancient Arrapkha), the same custom applied, but the barren wife was obliged to provide a *concubine* for his husband (De Vaux, 1965: 24). In these instances, one may conclude that there was relative monogamy, hence there was not more than one lawful wife. Still in the Old Testament, there are also instances whereby these customs were not followed. For example, in Genesis 29-30, Jacob married the two sisters, Leah and Rachel, and they both had a status as lawful wives, neither of them was a concubine (De Vaux, 1965: 24).

At the end of the second millennium BC, according to the Assyrian Code of law, an *esirtu* (Assyrian concubine) could gain a status of being a lawful wife, if he chooses to give her that status. The man was allowed to have as many *esirtus* or wives as he want. According to De Vaux, later, during the time of Judges and monarchy in Israel, this law was “misused”. For example Gideon (Judges 8: 30-31) had many wives and one *esitru* (De Vaux, 1965: 25). Later, the Talmud restricted the number of wives that should be taken by man, for ordinary man, it was four, and for the kings, it was eighteen. And during that time, it was only the royalty who could afford to have many wives. Still a man had to take more than one wife only if the first one is barren, or only have daughters (De Vaux, 1965: 25)

Having many wives caused conflicts in some families. For example, some barren wives would be despised by those who have children, or a barren wife would be jealous if the other

⁶ A concubine is defined as a slave girl who had sexual relations with his master, even though she was not a wife.

⁷ See Gen.16: 1-2; Gen. 25:1; Gen.23:1-2)

⁸ Babylonian code law code of the Ancient Iran (Mesopotamia) which dates back in 1772 BC

wife has children. And if the husband favours one wife more than the other, that could cause more bitterness in the family. This led to the formation of legal texts on polygamy (Ex. 21, Deut.17), on issues pertaining the welfare of those who are in polygamous marriage, especially women and children. Nevertheless, the most common type of marriage in Israel was monogamous (De Voux, 1965: 26).

2.4 Polygamy in African Theology

Throughout the history of the church, the issue of polygamy has always been on debate among the theologians and the church. For example, Augustine argued that polygamy was not contrary to the natural law, and that it was not wrong, as long as its purpose was the multiplication of humankind or procreation (Hillman, 1975: 185). On the other hand, the Protestant reformers, such as John Calvin, argued that the natural law prohibited polygamy because polygamy was a hindrance of peace within families who were practising polygamy. Martin Luther, one of the reformers had a different view from that of John Calvin, and he argued that monogamous marriage was not possible to every situation, and that the Laws of Moses did not prohibit polygamy. Therefore, a Christian man was at liberty to have more than one wife (Hillman, 1975: 185).

After the reformation period, there was little discussion on the issue of polygamy, until the nineteenth century, during the missionary period in Africa. It was again a big issue that was debated (Hillman, 1975: 185). During the missionary time in Africa, the only acceptable form of marriage by the missionary churches was the monogamous marriage. They had a common rule within the church that a polygamous man that wants to be converted into Christianity should abandon all his wives, except the first one. The church had to decide whether or not women living in polygamous marriages and polygamous should be accepted as members of the church (Hillman, 1975: 186). This was a pastoral challenge in the Church. All mission authorities maintained that polygamy was contradictory to the teachings of Christianity, and they enforced monogamous marriages. They refused to baptise those who were in polygamous marriages (Hillman, 1975, 187). The reaction to mission's response to polygamy in Africa led to the formation of African Independent Churches, for example, the Nazarine Baptist Church (founded by Isaiah Shembe in South Africa) and African Apostolic Church (founded by Johane Maranke in Zambia) and many more. The founders of these churches were polygamists themselves. Some Africans, who still wanted to maintain their polygamous

marriages, left the mission churches and became members of these African Independent churches (Hillman, 1975: 188).

Still on the issue of polygamy and African theology, there is a need for a methodological reflection on the subject, by doing a comparative study between polygamy in Africa and in the Old Testament. Many African scholars have reflected on this. Knut Holter articulates that this can be done through using the Old Testament to interpret Africa, by looking at the relevance of the Old Testament to contemporary Africa or by using African experiences of polygamy as an exegetical analyses tool to Old Testament texts on polygamy (Holter, 2001:83). The basic idea here is to affirm that there are some parallels between the cultures that are reflected in both the Old Testament and African context. This methodological approach can help in providing the clearer understanding on how we can relate the two (Africa and Old Testament) (Holter, 2001: 83).

In the encounter between African theology and polygamy, it is important to note that African theology is characterised by liberation and inculturation. Liberation has its roots from God's liberative activity, from any oppression that is based on politics, economy, race and gender, whereas inculturation has its roots from African culture and traditions (Holter, 2001: 88). These two characteristics of African theology are important and relevant in the discussion between Africa and the Old Testament polygamy, For example, from the inculturation point of view, the reference to Old Testament polygamy can be used to draw lines between the Old Testament and the lives of its contemporary African readers (Holter, 2001: 88).

On the other hand, the liberative characteristics of women in the polygamous Old Testament texts can offer liberative messages for women who are in oppressive situation in their polygamous marriages. In these Old Testament polygamous stories there are also some correspondences between the oppression of women in the Bible, and the traditional oppression of women in Africa. (Holter, 2001: 89). One example of liberative messages in the Old Testament can be found in Musimbi Kanyoro's argument about women interpreters taking the initiative of the Bible translation, where the language is masculine (Kanyoro, 1990:33).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted a brief summary of polygamy in the Zulu culture, the Old Testament and in African Theology. It has pointed out some factors that lead to polygamy in both the Zulu culture and the Old Testament. Lastly, on African theology and polygamy, it has pointed out the methodological reflection that can be used to give a clearer understanding of polygamy in the Zulu culture and the Old Testament.

CHAPTER 3

TOWARDS AN *UBUFAZI* HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the conceptual tools that I will use in my investigation. These tools serve to make a foundation for the analysis of the data collected during fieldwork, which will be presented in chapter four, they also serve to sharpen the analysis of the data that I have collected through fieldwork research. In this chapter, I will first present my location/position that has influenced my hermeneutical choices. Secondly, I will give a brief background of the Bible interpretation and its developments in Africa. All the hermeneutical tools that will be discussed in this chapter are the result of the development of biblical interpretation in Africa, which leads to the conceptual tool such as literary criticism, liberation, inculturation and the *Talita Cum* hermeneutics. Lastly, in addition to the *Talita Cum* hermeneutics, I have endeavoured to develop a new South African “womanist” approach, which is called *ubufazi* approach. I will explain this further, later in the chapter.

3.2 My location as a researcher

Sharon Ringe articulates that a critical reading of the Bible, such as feminist reading, entails experience, perspective and commitment. The perspective of such reading is a social location occupied by women. The social location includes the following aspects, gender, race, class, ethnicity, [culture], physical condition, and so forth. These perspectives of social location are transformed into experience, as one becomes aware of how they intersect with events of local, personal, and global history to result in suffering or marginalisation (Ringe, 1997: 156). Through such perspective and experience, feminist critical reading of the Bible entails a commitment to physical, psychological and social wellbeing for all women through the transformation of all the social systems and ideologies that defines women’s lives in “*kyriarchal*”⁹ social realities (Ringe, 1997:156). However, such feminist interpretation is not easy because of the complexity of women’s realities, and that for most women this complexity results in a degree of “status inconsistency”, for example, power or some degree of autonomy in one’s area of life that is coupled with dependence in another person or powerlessness (Ringe, 1997:156). This requires some efforts to analyse the experiences that result from one’s (women) reality. Most of all, commitment to women’s lives requires living against the grains, for example, reading the texts against the dominant *kyriarchal* society. The

⁹ Small groups of elite males that are dominant over all women and many men.

task becomes more difficult if it is going to be carried out within a theological framework in the Church or theological institutions, because within that context one has to move within the grain of Christian doctrine and tradition (Ringe, 1997: 157). In addition to what Sraro Ringe articulate, critical feminist reading of the Bible within communities of faith also becomes a challenge when one has to live against the grains of traditional culture. In view of this, as a black South African woman, I am fully aware that my context (gender, ethnicity, class and culture) influences my perspectives. I admit that the hermeneutical choices I have made are influenced or determined by my ideological position and experience.

My history as a black South African woman, who has experienced being discriminated against, due to her gender, race and class, has shaped both my logical and academic thinking. In addition to this, also my experience of working as a female priest in a Zulu patriarchal society has also influenced my hermeneutical choices. These are some of the factors that influence the way I read the Bible. Sarojini Nadar argues that it is not enough for biblical scholars to declare their location and “to carry on with business as usual” (Nadar, 2001: 10). In view of this, the most defining part of my history, that has shaped both my academic thinking and my special interest in matters pertaining gender empowerment/activism, is the fact that when I was working as a priest, I experienced cultural oppression, both from some of my male congregants and some of my male colleagues. In most cases, the circumstances were hard to deal with, and I had to succumb as a way of respecting the culture. This is one of many factors that had influenced the way I read or interpret the Bible. I read the two narratives (Gen. 16 and 21) as a black South African woman, and the central concerns are the issues of gender, ethnicity, class and culture. The group of women that I have read the two narratives with, have also at some point experienced what I have experienced as a black South African in the apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Even though there might be some slight differences in our experiences, I still feel as part of them because of some common aspects in our backgrounds and experiences. Therefore, my commitment in this study is to the black South African women who are vulnerable situations through polygamous marriages and how we can identify both oppressive and liberative messages from the two narratives that will lead to gender social transformation.

In this dissertation I have opted for methods that focus on the text, rather than the author and the original recipients of the text, and these methods belong to the postmodernist paradigm.

These methods take into consideration the life experiences of the readers. I chose not to focus on historical-critical methods due to the fact that they do not embrace the context of the readers, as compared to the methods that I have chosen. I argue that postmodernist methods can bridge the gap between the academics (biblical scholars) and “ordinary readers” of the Bible, in a way that historical-critical methods cannot. Black South African women read the biblical texts with lenses of their life experiences. Therefore, in this dissertation, I intend to place the reader at the entry point of the “hermeneutical circle” of text interpretation and I also want to acknowledge the importance of the reader in this process. Nevertheless, I would also like to acknowledge the historical-critical methods¹⁰ which “gave birth” to these postmodernist methods.

Historical methods were developed within a different context than that of contemporary Africa. They were developed as part of the western traditional scholarship. They reflect the liberation of western academia from church authorities and embrace historical perspectives of the text (Holter, 2011: 377), whereas the concern for African biblical scholarship is to bring personal and social transformation to the ordinary readers. Even though some African scholars reject these methods, other scholars such as Knut Holter and the others, still embrace these methods and regards them as an addition to the contemporary methods of African Biblical scholarship rather than a question of replacement by postmodernist methods (Holter, 2011:377). Some scholars assert that the historical-critical methods are biased. Nevertheless, Holter further argues that there is no innocent interpretation of the Bible. For example, the inculturation hermeneutics may end up cementing oppressive cultural aspects.

3.3 African Biblical Interpretation

¹⁰ The historical-critical methods emerged in the era of Humanism and Renaissance in Europe. The aim and idea of the biblical scholars during that period was not to formulate the historical methodology per se. The aim was to explore new and better ways of understanding biblical history and the society, and their sources for this understanding were biblical texts. Therefore, the biblical scholars had to develop exegetical methods for this task See (Jonker, 2001:81)

In recent decades (1930's to the present), new ways of reading the Bible in Africa have been developed by African biblical scholars (Old Testament), such as comparative approach, contextual reading with the "ordinary readers" and so forth. Further explanation of these approaches will be discussed later. The roots of African biblical interpretation can also be traced from the early Church, even though the approach was different. In the early church, African scholars such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Egypt laid a foundation for the interpretation of the Bible [in Africa], and their approach was allegorical and uncritical in the modern sense, but African biblical scholarship retained its pioneering work in the 2nd and 3rd centuries of the Christian era (Ukpong, 2000:11). In the 18th century, this method (allegorical approach) was replaced by historical-critical methods, followed by literary methods in the 20th century. Both the literary and historical-critical methods were developed in the West (Europe) and to this day, they are still recognised as scientific tools of modern biblical research methods. In Africa, the current biblical scholarship is to some extent "a child of these methods" (Ukpong, 2006:9)

In addition to historical-critical methods, African scholars have been able to develop parallel methods of their own, as already mentioned previously. One of the characteristics of these methods is their concern to create an encounter between the biblical text and the African context. The parallel methods that have been developed by African scholars links the Bible to the communities of faith that read the Bible, rather than just focusing on the authors and what the text means to its original recipients, as it is a case with historical-critical methods (West, 20010:26). In other words, these methods are more contextual. Therefore, there are two different ways of interpreting the Bible in Africa, the Western pattern (historical critical methods) and the African pattern (contextual approach) (Ukpong, 2006: 11). Gerald West articulates that the African biblical interpretation consists of three poles, "the pole of the biblical text, the pole of the African context and the pole of appropriation" (West, 2010:21), which Jonathan Jonathan Draper refers to as "tri-polar approach" (Draper, 2001:13). It is always a reader that activates this pole of appropriation, in a form of a dialogue, and it has a theological dimension. In other words, the reader is the one that characterises the pole of appropriation (West, 2010: 21).

Gerald West also articulates that there is another approach which is called, the "bi-polar" approach. He argues that this 'bi-polar' approach is the most characteristic of African biblical

hermeneutics, whereby the African context and the biblical text interpret each other [comparative method] (West, 2010:23). One of the factors that led African biblical scholars to develop an African biblical hermeneutics was the fact that they wanted identify the presence of Africa in the Bible. Using a comparative method in African Biblical interpretation is due to the fact that in the past the Bible in Africa was used to legitimize colonialism and slavery. Secondly, the Bible has also been used, and is still being used by certain Africans to legitimize some oppressive cultural aspect. In response to this, African biblical scholars developed critical methods, through contextual reading of the Bible, such as the comparative methods. Knut Holter is one of those scholars that uses this kind of an approach. He argues that the Old Testament interpretation is contextual, in a sense that the reader/interpreter's hermeneutical experiences are used to analyse the material under investigation, and that there are some religious and socio-cultural parallels between the Old Testament and the African culture. The comparative approach reflects two sets of comparisons, either letting the Old Testament interpret African culture/experiences, or using the African culture/experiences to interpret the Old Testament. (Holter, 2008: 15).

West argues that that the real reader who brings the biblical text and African context into dialogue tends to be hidden in Holter's explanation of the comparative method and emphasise that the biblical text and African context are only able to illuminate one another through the mind of the reader (West, 2010:29). I agree with West due to the fact that in the past, the Western biblical scholarship, has failed to acknowledge the importance of the reader, or communities that interprets the text. The commitment and aim of African biblical scholarship is to bring social and personal transformation and this requires the involvement of the reader within the process.

Justin Ukpong presents the developments of biblical interpretation in Africa in chronological and topical issues (three phases). The first phase is from the 1930's –70's, and it focuses on legitimatizing African religion and culture and it is dominated by comparative method (Ukpong, 2000:12). According to Ukpong, this phase was a response "to the widespread condemnation of African religion and culture by the Christian missionaries of the 19th and 20th century" (Ukpong, 2000:12). Therefore, this phase involves research that was undertaken to legitimise African religion and culture, and it "took the form of showing continuities and discontinuities between African religious cultures and the Bible, particularly the Old Testament" (Ukpong: 2000:12).

The second phase is from the 1970's -90's, and it focuses on the using the African context as a resource in the hermeneutical encounter with the Bible. It has two main aspects, such as inculturation and liberation. It recognises the African culture as a preparation for Gospel, nevertheless, Christianity was still looked upon as a foreign religion expressed in foreign idioms and symbols (Ukpong, 2000:14). This created a need for African biblical scholars to make Christianity relevant to the African religio-cultural context and this gave rise to the inculturation movement in theology. During this period, there was also an influence from social ideology, whereby there was a need for theology to show concern for secular issues, for example, oppression and liberation (Ukpong, 2000:14). Out of this, arose liberation movement in theology "which seeks to confront all forms of oppression, poverty and marginalisation in the society" (Ukpong, 2000:14), and this is expressed in liberation hermeneutics, black theology and feminist hermeneutics (Ukpong, 2000:14).

The third phase is from the 1990's up to date. In this phase two main aspects from the previous phase (inculturation and liberation), are carried forward with new orientation. The first orientation is the recognition of ordinary African readers/non-scholars and their contribution to the process of academic Bible interpretation. This is exemplified by Contextual Bible Study Method. The second orientation, apart from recognising the ordinary readers, is that it recognises, and makes the context of "ordinary readers" a subject of Bible interpretation. This is exemplified by inculturation hermeneutics (Ukpong, 2000:123).

3.4 Literary Criticism

Contemporary literary criticism is an approach to the Bible that focuses on the readers not the authors. Literary criticism is one of the approaches that developed in the last half century. It is also one of the approaches that have not originated from biblical scholars, but is an "adaptation of methods developed in other fields, especially literary studies" (Clines, 2001: 15). In the past the term "literary criticism" has been referred to as historical criticism, and it dealt with the question of authorship, sources, and so forth (Clines, 2001: 15). Today the term literary criticism "refers to the kind of criticism that scholars of literature-biblical and otherwise-undertake when they are considering texts as work of literature" (Clines, 2001: 15), and the historical dimension is usually absent in it. In literary criticism, texts are considered as more or less independent of their authors, and creating meaning through the integration of their elements. The approach of literary criticism is "synchronic" rather than "diachronic", which simply means dealing with the text as it stands rather than with its (presumed)

prehistory (Clines, 2001:15). Contemporary literary criticism includes a variety of dimensions such as, genre criticism, rhetoric criticism, new criticism, reader response criticism and reception criticism. However, my focus is mainly on the reader response dimension.

In reader response criticism, the focus is on the reader as an important contributor to the meaning of the text. It also regards the meaning of the text as coming into being at the meeting point of the text and the reader, or as created by the reader in the act of reading. Another element of reader-response criticism is that “any quest for determinate meanings is invalidated, the idea of a definite meaning of the text disappears and meaning becomes understood as relative to the various readers who develop their own meanings.” (Clines, 2001:15). Therefore, in that case, a text means whatever it means to its readers. With this kind of method, there is no right or wrong interpretation of the text. The interpretation of the text has to lie on the “interpretative communities” (Clines, 2001:16). The reader response-criticism is de-historicizing, hence the historical circumstances of the text’s composition makes no difference to the meaning that readers finds in the text (Clines, 2001: 16).

3.5 African Women Hermeneutic

As mentioned previously, biblical interpretation in the last decades was dominated by white male scholars, and the method of interpretation was historical-critical method which grew out of Europe’s socio-political interest. With the wake of feminism, some men and women in biblical scholarship sought to include the viewpoint and approaches of women in biblical interpretation and in different ways (Okure, 1993: 76). The aim is to give women a liberating understanding of the Bible. This is necessary, hence over centuries the Bible has been used to legitimise sexism, racism and classism (Okure, 1993:76). Contemporary women’s interpretation of the Bible has received different names in different cultural and racial contexts. For example, from its first inception it was tagged “feminist or feminism”, which is described by Schussler Fiorenza as a kind of biblical interpretation that must place in the centre the attention of all women’s struggle (Fiorenza, 1992 :8). This pioneering work was done by European and North American women. Feminist hermeneutics was basically identified with white women theologian’s approach of reading the Bible, and African American women felt that they were left out. This was due to the fact that the white feminist approach only addressed the issue of sexism, and it did not include the issue of race and class. Therefore, African American women coined the term “womanist”, to describe their own

biblical interpretation (Okure, 1993:76). However, there are some women African scholars who are still adopting the concept of feminism. For those African women who still adopt some form of feminism, they do so because of feminism's framework and methodological legitimacy in the academy. They also adopt feminism because of the absence of suitable framework for their individual needs as African women (Weems, 1993:18).

Even though there are still some African women who are adopting the label "feminism", more and more African women in the academy are reassessing the agenda for modern feminist movement (Weems, 1993:19). Some of these African women use the term "women's theology" in their approach, and prefer to undertake gender analyses as opposed to feminist analysis. The choice is determined by number of factors, one's context. Some women speak of African women and others prefer to be specific to their countries (Dube, 2001: 10). These African women scholars, in terms of methods, they employ different kinds of methods. For example, story-telling, field research methods, ideological reading of the text and documentation of historical cases (Dube, 2001:10).

African women's approach is to do theology from women's perspectives and it has a distinctive characteristic of inclusiveness. It describes the efforts of both men and women to interpret the Bible in search of a common inclusive message. In this regard, it differs from the feminist approach, which excludes the possibility of men to interpret the Bible as it relates to women (Okure, 1993: 77). By including men in their hermeneutical effort is to read the Bible with "new eyes" and open up for new ways of reading the Bible. African women scholars are aware that the Bible addresses both men and women, who together must form the community of its interpretation. Some of these African women argue that a predominantly matriarchal interpretation of the Bible would be distorting as a patriarchal one has been over years (Okure, 1993: 78).

African women hermeneutical approach is also inclusive of scholars and non-scholars, the historical-critical methods, the rich and the poor, In contrast of traditionally male approach of doing theology, African women's hermeneutical approach emphasises solidarity with other female theologians, irrespective of their theological formation and status. This is one of the reasons behind the formation of the Circle for Concerned African Female Theologians¹¹

¹¹ This is a movement of African women theologians who came together to reflect on what it means to be a woman of faith within their experience of religion, culture and politics in Africa. It empowers women to actively work together in their communities. This is a movement of African Women's theologians who came together to reflect on what it means to be a woman of faith within their experience of religion, culture and politics in Africa.

(Okure, 1993: 77). These African women theologians searched and discovered their unwritten voices by articulating the theological and ethical concerns. They developed their hermeneutics, called *Talitha Cum*.¹²

Talitha Cum hermeneutics: is the combination of different biblical interpretation methods used by African women theologians. Musa Dube defines the *Talitha Cum* hermeneutics as the hermeneutics of liberation and life, “as the practice of living daily in confrontation with international oppression, gender oppression, physical wounds and confrontation with sickness and death, which must all give way to healing and life” (Njongore and Dube, 2001:10). The *Talitha Cum* hermeneutics entails women contributions, both from the academic and grass roots. Helen Nkabala articulates that in some cases these women uses the already existing African biblical hermeneutics, and give it a feminist angle, for example inculturation and postcolonialism. She furthers says that in some cases these women theologians come up with totally new approaches in response to their needs, for example, the *Bosadi* hermeneutical approach (Nkabala, 2013: 386). The *Bosadi* hermeneutic will be discussed later.

Liberation hermeneutics: the main emphasis of liberation hermeneutics is on the political and economic dimension of African life. The starting point of liberation hermeneutics is the social life of black people and their struggle for liberation. Race and class are the critical categories of liberation hermeneutics. It draws heavily on Marxist framework, and it uses the Bible as a resource for liberation (West, 2006: 30). However, it also raises questions or suspicions about the Bible. It argues that the Bible is also a source of domination and oppression. For example, Itumeleng Mosala argues that the Bible is a political document and that this is attested by its role in the *apartheid* system in South Africa. The ideology of *apartheid* was directly derived from the Bible, where the superiority of white South Africans over black South Africans was premised on the Israelites being a chosen nation over the Canaanites in the conquest texts of

It empowers women to actively work together in their communities, and it was founded by Mercy Amba Oduyoye in 1989 (See Njongore and Dube, 2001:9).

¹² Talitha Cum is drawn from Mark 5 in the New Testament. It is about Jairus’s dead daughter who was raised from death by Jesus. When Jesus came to Jairus’s house and found her dead, He touched her hand and said, *Talitha Cum*, which means, little girl rise up. This girl is nameless, she does not have a name in this story, and was healed by a man. On reading this, African women feel that the girl have been freed to explore and engage in the profession of her choice. It is this “unfinished business” in the story, “*Talitha Cum*”, which fascinates African women theologians as they strive to take the story further. For African women theologians, this story has come to symbolise the theological struggles, and the quest for empowerment of African women in God’s household. For many African women theologians, their work has revolved around this story. See (Dube, 2001 :5)

the Old Testament (Mosala, 2006: 135). This ambiguity of the Bible is the important feature of liberation hermeneutics (West, 2006: 30).

Cultural hermeneutics: this hermeneutical approach was developed by a Kenyan feminist biblical scholar, Musimbi Kanyoro. She describes this approach from a “feminist” or “womanist” point of view. It is an approach whereby women dialogue with their own cultural understanding and become critical of the intersections between them. It also analyses cultural issues in the biblical texts in order to reach out to women in bondage (Kanyoro, 2001:104).

Bosadi hermeneutics: the term *bosadi* is a Northern-Sotho word which means “womanhood”. *Bosadi* hermeneutics was developed by a South African feminist biblical scholar, Madipoane Masenya. This hermeneutical approach investigates what an ideal womanhood should be for an “African”-South African woman reader of the Bible (Masenya, 2001:148). Firstly, it critiques the oppressive elements of African culture that is manifested in women’s lives, while reviving the aspects that uplift the status of a woman. Secondly, it critiques the oppressive elements of the Bible, while identifying the liberative elements (Masenya, 2001: 149). Thirdly, it argues that, racism, classism, sexism and the African culture are the significant factors in the context of an “African”—South African woman, and that they shape her reading. Fourthly, it argues that the liberation of African women in South Africa calls for the involvement of all South Africans, both men and women (Masenya, 2001: 149).

South African Indian Womanist hermeneutics: this approach was developed by a South African feminist scholar Sarojini Nadar. Its methodology is a postmodernist literary womanist perspective, which analyses the text to expose liberating possibilities within it. By using the literary approach, it uncovers the narrative voice of the text. The methodology of this approach is literary but distinctively postmodernist (Nadar, 2001:162). This postmodernist literary analysis is distinctive in a way that it does not only focus on the author’s intention, but on how the author interprets the text, which is based on the reader’s location. It affirms the importance of “flesh and blood” reader. It includes autobiographical reading of the text, which means that the reader acknowledges their context from the beginning (Nadar, 2001:163).

3.6 Ubufazi approach

Ubufazi is a Zulu term which means “womanhood. I have chosen this term to designate my approach. An *ubufazi* approach is grounded in the previously mentioned hermeneutical approaches, and it is developed within the South African context, with its main emphasis on the Zulu culture. It has adopted an indigenous designation. Palkar argues that Western feminism tend to universalise patriarchy. She further says that the problems of patriarchy differ according to the national, historical or national contexts. For example the ideological construction of women in India is not the same as that of women in Argentina, even though they both belong to the Third World (Parker, 1996:147). In view of this, one of the reasons that have motivated me to develop the *ubufazi* hermeneutical approach is the fact that the oppression and experiences of my informants (Zulu women in polygamous marriages) does not necessarily coincide with those of other black South African women from other ethnic groups, within the South Africa context. The way they have experienced patriarchy might have similarities, however, it also have some differences. Therefore, I argue that that oppression experiences are not exactly the same as those of other black South African women.

As mentioned previously, this approach is an engagement between the academy and the “ordinary readers” of the Bible. As a South African, I am aware the biblical engagement between the “ordinary readers” and biblical scholars is not something new within the South African context. Some scholars such as Gerald West, Sarojini Nadar, and Madipoane Masenya have done the pioneering work in this. Gerald West argues that there are some reasons why African biblical scholarship should not be confined to the academy in their biblical interpretation within the South African context. One of the reasons is that the “primary interlocutors” of liberation theology in South Africa are the poor, the marginalised and women, and their conditions and experiences are necessary in biblical interpretation. Furthermore he argues that this enable the scholars to take seriously the interpretations offered by the poor and marginalised in the communities of faith (West, 1996: 26).

The *ubufazi* hermeneutical approach, like the *Bosadi* and South African Indian Womanist approach, argues that it is possible to find liberating elements within the biblical texts, despite the fact that they were written from patriarchal contexts. Like the *Bosadi* and South African Indian Womanist and liberation hermeneutics, this approach is in dialogue with religio-cultural and the racial-economic political aspects. It tends towards inculturation hermeneutics in its focus on religion and culture. It also shares the attitude of “suspicion” on reading the text as a way of identifying the oppressive element of the text, just like the *Bosadi*, South

African Indian Womanist and liberation hermeneutics. However, it does not stop at this point, it exposes the patriarchal element in the text and develop strategies of reading the biblical texts in a way that empowers a Zulu women to resists the patriarchal and apartheid oppression that victimised them. The *ubufazi* approach also focuses on the analysis of both the biblical text and the African culture, with its focus on the element of gender and patriarchy. This will be done by confronting and challenging the patriarchal and oppressive Zulu culture. Like the South African Indian Womanist hermeneutics, it uses literary-criticism method.

This approach will also use the Bible as the exegetical starting point, it will not use the historical-critical methods for the reason that the authorship of Scriptures matters little for the oppressed. Another reason for using the Bible as an exegetical starting point is that, when the communities of faith reads the Bible, they read it as a source of their comfort, Like all the other hermeneutical approaches, such as the *Talita Cum*, its commitment is also on liberation through gender social transformation. Nevertheless, it also draw some insights from all hermeneutical approaches that also considers the issue of race, such as liberation hermeneutic, and it will add a feminist angle, hence liberation hermeneutics does not have a feminist angle.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the hermeneutical tools from which an *ubufazi* approach is grounded. It has also discussed the developments of the Biblical interpretation in Africa that gave birth to all these hermeneutical approaches. For example, some of these women feel that feminism has racist origins and they find little solace in its mission. The mission of feminist and womanist group is different. Even though colonialism and slavery era is over, but they still feel the burden of oppression in their shoulders. They feel that they cannot embrace feminist's movements with Eurocentric ideal.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of my field findings. It discusses the methods I used to collect data and information about finding oppressive and liberative messages from the Bible. The main sections that I will present in this chapter are as follows: a brief description of the area where I conducted the interviews, the demographic profile of the informants, the research process on how the data was collected, methods of data collection, ethical consideration, limitations and presentation of results. The themes that I present in this chapter are social themes from the interviews and some textual theme. More textual themes from the interviews will be presented in chapter 5.

4.2 Research process

I conducted empirical research which used in-depth interviews and group discussions in a form of Contextual Bible Study. This was conducted in Zulu language. The research was carried out in Empangeni, Kwa-Dlangezwa area, in the North of KwaZulu-Natal province (South Africa). Empangeni is a small town that has +-80% of rural population, and Kwa-Dlangezwa area is one of the rural parts of this town. In this area, some members of the community still adhere to the Zulu traditional ways of life, such as polygamy, and so forth, despite being Christians. One of the reasons why I chose to do my fieldwork research in Empangeni is the fact that I used to work there as a priest, and I am familiar with the local culture. In order to gain access in this area, I was helped by one of my former congregants, who knew the Ward Councillor (a person in-charge) of Kwa-Dlangezwa area. The Ward Councillor helped me with finding the participants for my research, and he was my “gate keeper” (a person who helps the researcher to gain access to do field research). He organised thirteen Zulu Christian women who are in polygamous marriages and also the meeting place. The meeting with my participants took place at the local community hall, in Kwa-Dlangezwa. Initially, I intended to do participatory observatory method, by visiting these women in their homes individually and observe how they live, before meeting them as a group. However, due to some cultural boundaries, I could not do so. I was advised by the “gate keeper” not to do so due to the fact that their husbands might have some suspicions, and that it would be impolite to exclude their husbands, as I wanted to do participatory observation with their wives only. He further said that in the Zulu culture a man is regarded as a head of the family, and he has to be present in all forms of discussions that take place in his home. Therefore, I

decided to follow the “gate keeper’s” advice by not doing the participatory observatory method.

The research was carried out in two phases. The first phase was a short introductory meeting with the informants, where I introduced myself and presented the purpose of my research to them, and it was held on the 28 July 2013. When I met with these women for the first time, they did not seem to be comfortable or pleased to meet with me. The second phase meeting was held on the 31 July, where I did a Contextual Bible Study. When I met with these women for the second time, the “gate keeper” told them that I was a priest, even though I told him not to do so because I thought that if they know that I am a priest, they will not feel free and comfortable to discuss and share their views about polygamy or their experiences of being in polygamous marriages. However, after he introduced me as a priest, I noticed a change of atmosphere. They looked more relaxed and comfortable than before. I used background information questions to break the ice and also to determine my informants’ level of education. Five of them were from African Indigenous Churches, three were Methodists and the other five were from the Anglicans. They also shared their church denominational backgrounds. Thereafter, we proceeded with the Contextual Bible Study.

In South Africa, the Contextual Bible method is one of the familiar ways for Christian communities interact with the Bible, but it is not no all churches that uses this method of Bible study. Even though I chose to do Contextual Bible Studies with my informants, despite the fact that they are used to the Bible studies, it was a new kind of a Bible Study for them. They are not used to an interactive Bible study method, they are more used to the kind of a Bible study in which somebody teach and interpret the biblical text for them, without being given an opportunity to interact with the text and this kind of Bible study is also common in some South African churches. I had seven prepared in-depth questions to use for the Contextual Bible Study with my informants, and during the process there were also some follow-up questions that emerged during the discussions.

In South Africa, Gerald West is one of the biblical scholars who advocated Contextual Bible Study or the reading of the Bible with “ordinary readers”. Contextual Bible Study attempts to bring interface between scholars and “ordinary readers” of the Bible, particularly the poor and the marginalised in order to facilitate social transformation (West, 1991: 219). This method of reading the Bible goes beyond biblical scholarship, by interacting with “ordinary readers”. In the South African context, the Contextual Bible Study method of reading the

Bible has been used in addressing some ethical issues, such as HIV and Aids, poverty and so forth, with the communities of faith (West, 2001:15). Apart from Gerald West, some South African feminist biblical scholars such as Nadar, uses this method with “ordinary” readers who are women, for gender social transformation (Nadar, 2003, 184). I also chose this method with the aim of gender social transformation.

The Contextually Bible Study that I conducted with my informants, was guided by the following principles: A commitment to read the Bible from the South African context, particularly from the context of the marginalised and the poor, a commitment to read the Bible with others in the community, a commitment to individual and social transformation, commitment to read the Bible critically (West, 2001: 220). The Contextual Bible Study usually begins with the question of needs, experiences, and resources of the community (marginalised or poor). This method of reading the Bible also allows the readers to bring their own context in the interpretation (West, 2001: 220). However, Gerald West asserts that in a context like that of South Africa, there are many realities. For example, the Bible has been used to support the apartheid system by others, it has been used as a resource of struggle for liberation by others and it is still used by others as resource to maintain justice and democracy, therefore we have to be particular when talking about reading the Bible from the South African context (West, 2001: 220). In view of this, my context of reading the Bible with my informants, is specifically the Zulu culture, from the perspective of the culturally, ra marginalised. My commitment to my informant is not just to recognise and acknowledge their context, but to understand and analyse it.

Gerald West asserts that biblical scholars due to their training in theology, tend to read the Bible *for* the “ordinary readers”, and that this may give an impression that they are not hearing the contributions of the ordinary readers, but they are telling them how to read and interpret the Bible (West, 2001: 223). Gerald West further says that this might minimise and rationalise the contribution and experiences of ordinary readers. Therefore, the contextual Bible study attempts to avoid this by reading the Bible *with* “ordinary readers”. This means that that trained readers acknowledges their privilege and power as scholars and that they must empower the ordinary readers to recognise and acknowledge the significance of their contribution and experiences. This is particularly important when the trained readers reads the Bible with the marginalised groups, because their interpretations have been silenced and suppressed (West, 2001:223).

Through the contextual Bible study, “ordinary readers” can also be empowered to read the Bible critically due to the fact that the main concern is that all readers should recognise the ideological nature of the Bible and its interpretations, and that all readers should develop critical skills so that they are empowered to do their own critical readings of the Bible and its interpretations (West, 2001:225). Reading the Bible with ordinary readers requires that the ideological nature and the interpretation of the Bible be investigated because the Bible has been used, and is still being used to legitimise oppressive practices by some (West, 2001:225).

Contextual Bible study plays an important role in breaking the culture of the “silence” of the marginalised. In contextual Bible study the Bible is used as a resource for social transformation, and through this process, the “ordinary readers” appropriate and apply the Bible in their context, and this needs to be done critically (West, 2001: 226). Appropriation by “ordinary readers” requires two steps, firstly, to critically read the Bible, secondly, to critically analyse the reader’s context. This (appropriation) makes it possible for the reader to identify the differences and similarities between their context and the Biblical context. Appropriation is the most important part of the contextual Bible study (West, 2001:226).

My informants were between the ages of 30 and 58. I divided them into three small groups. I randomly mixed the participants, regardless of the difference in age. I gave them the same task. They were given time and space to talk among themselves before reporting back to the entire group. I asked them if they they were comfortable with the fact that I wanted to use a tape recorder, and they agreed. Two of the participant could not read, but they seemed to be familiar with the biblical texts and were able to interact with the rest of the group. During the Contextual Bible Study process with my participants, there were some problems that were encountered. Some of the participants became emotional and started crying, as they were sharing their personal experiences about being in polygamous marriages. I asked the rest of the group to pause for some few minutes and I did not know how to deal with those emotions, hence this came unexpectedly. The only option I had was to let the have a few minutes break. Another problem was that during the whole process of the Contextual Bible Study, the “gate keeper” was present and I could not ask him to leave us. I tried as much possible to be polite and to respect the culture. I felt that it would be difficult for my participants to participate freely in the discussion, hence he was a man, more especially when it comes to issues pertaining sexuality. However, it was the opposite of what I thought. They seemed to be

comfortable with him being around. At the end of the Bible study session, the participants conveyed their words of gratitude to both me and the “gate keeper”, and asked for the possibility of having such meetings in the future. They expressed that such kind of a Bible Study (contextual) was therapeutic to some of them, as they could relate with some of the characters in the two biblical narratives (Gen 16 and 21), and to share their sad experiences. They further said that they need such platform, where they could freely talk about issues that concerns and touches their lives as women. The “gate keeper” promised them that he will organise such a similar forum the on the 9th August 2013, which is a national women’s day in South Africa.

The informants were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided. They did not sign any ethical form, instead we had a verbal ethical assurance. The names that will appear on the data presentation are not be their real names. Prior to the data collection process, the interviewees were assured that there was no financial reward for participating in the research, in order to avoid some misunderstandings through the process.

In this study I was not a neutral observer. By asking the questions that I have asked, my interest was to make a contribution to gender-social transformation. I was also interested in how women in polygamous marriages interpret such narratives. My focus was also on the physical reader, which Fernando Segovia terms as “flesh and blood reader” (Segovia, 2000: 5), and I wanted the readers’ context to be part of the interpretive process, as I mentioned in the previous chapter.

Having described how the data was collected for my research I will now discuss how the data was analysed. The data based on the recording and notes taken during the Contextual Bible Study was typed and coded. The participants were coded according to pseudonyms. The information that was gathered through field research was categorised as follows: 1) polygamy in the Old Testament 2) polygamy in the Zulu culture. The central research question cutting across these categories was how to find liberative and oppressive messages from Gen. 16 and 21, that would enhance gender social transformation.

For the Contextual Bible Study with my informants, I categorised the questions as follows:

- 1) Thematic questions-the groups were divided and had to discuss different themes about the text.
- 2) Textual question-the groups had to discuss the questions related to the literary content and content of the text
- 3) Contextual questions-the groups were required to relate the text to their own context
- 4) Action plan-the groups had to reflect on the Bible study and formulate action plan that indicates how liberating elements of the Bible can contribute to the gender social transformation within communities of faith.

The questions given to these groups were open-ended, in order to foster discussions in the groups. After spending time on the questions given to them, the small groups had to report back on the discussion to the entire group. During this time, the participants did not only share the text, but they also shared their own personal stories, and were able to relate them with the text.

4.3 Themes

There were quite a number of themes that emerged through the Contextual Bible Study process with my participants. The first general theme was polygamy. When I asked the participants what was the theme of the text, they all said that the text was about polygamy. In this section I just give a summary of those themes and a deeper analysis and explanation will be given in the next chapter. The themes are as follows:

a) Sexuality

During the discussion, some of these women raised the issue of sexuality, when I asked them to say their views about polygamy in the Zulu culture. Seven out of thirteen women highlighted the issue of sexuality and “uncleanliness” of women as one of the reasons for Zulu men to take more than one wife. One participant argued that:

There is nothing wrong when a man takes more than one wife. Polygamy is part of our culture, and our parents and great-grandparents had been practicing this tradition for a very long time. It is good for a man to take more than one wife. In our Zulu culture, when a woman is in her monthly menstrual cycle, she cannot touch the food, she is unclean. Who will then cook for the husband? He needs another woman who will cook for him when the other one is in her monthly menstrual cycle. And also when a woman is having a baby, she cannot sleep with her husband, not until the baby becomes one year old. Obviously, a man would need somebody to satisfy his sexual needs. Therefore, it is good for a man to have more than one wife.

Some of these women argued that polygamy is even accepted in their churches, and these were women who belong to the African indigenous churches (Isaiah Shembe's church). They also gave reference of Isaiah Shembe who had more than one wife.

b) *HIV and AIDS*

Some of these women expressed that they sometimes feel uncomfortable in their polygamous marriages, because of the fear of contracting HIV and AIDS. They expressed that they become more uncomfortable if the husband is working in the city, away from home, for they do not trust "city girls". Mary, one of the participants testified this by saying:

My husband is working in Durban. He only comes home once a month. Recently, he told us (her and the other two wives of the same husband) that he wants to take another wife. The woman my husband wants to marry is from Durban. I have serious problems with this. I do not trust city girls... City girls are promiscuous!

Some of my participants shared the same sentiments with this woman. On the other hand, some of my participants seemed a bit uncomfortable when these other women were raising their concerns about their fear of contracting HIV/aids

c) *Education*

Some of these women, especially the younger ones expressed that being in polygamous marriages have deprived them of education. Anna, one of my participants shared her her story on how she was deprived her right to educated. She said:

My father forced me to get married when I was in secondary school, and I was only fifteen years old. I was forced to get married to a man I was not even in love with. My father forced me to get married because he wanted to get the *lobola* cows (dowry). When I got married, my husband had three wives already. I blame my father and my Zulu culture for not being educated. Culture gives us pressure to get married, as women. Who said a woman is not a woman enough if she is not married? If I was not forced to get married at a young age I would be educated and have a better life. I could not even dare to leave my husband because of the fear of being rejected by my family. I had to learn to love him and accept the situation. cows from the husband's family.

c) *Financial security and protection*

Some of these women expressed that sometimes one of the reasons that lies behind involving yourself in a polygamous marriage is financial security and protection. They said that in their culture, a man is considered as a head of the family who should protect and financially take care of the family. Therefore, they need men to take care of them, and they believe that as women they are not strong enough to take care of themselves and families.

On the other hand, others were not in agreement with that. They expressed that the society that they have been raised in, has made them to look down upon themselves, as being incapable of taking care of themselves and their families. One of them said:

There is no such a thing that women cannot take care of themselves. We are capable of taking care of ourselves. The society and culture has made us to look at ourselves as incapable. An African woman is stronger than a man. An African woman can take care of more than five children alone, without anybody's help. No African man could ever do that. Men always need women's support. Women are physically and emotionally strong. I was raised by a single parent. I am the last born at home out of four children. My father died when we were still young, and my mother managed to raise us on her own without any man's help. She never got married again after my father's death. She knew that she was strong enough to take care of us, she did not need any man to do that for her.

d) *Widow inheritance*

Some of these women mentioned the issue of widow inheritance in their culture. Widow inheritance is when a woman loses the husband through death and the family members from the husband's side forces her to marry the brother of the deceased. One of my informants also experienced this and she had to get married again to the brother of her late husband. She said that the brother of the deceased husband had another wife already. She also explained how the other wife was bitter, when the brother of her deceased husband took her as a second wife. They were not in talking terms with the other woman for a long time, because she did not want her husband to take another wife. She also said that this woman was only bitter at her, but not towards the husband, and when the husband was around, they could not show that they were not in talking terms, they had to pretend. They both had to respect the family's decision, they did not have a right to complain, because they are women.

f) Bareness

When it comes to the characters in the two narratives, the majority of these women identified more with the character of Sarah, who was barren. One of these women also shared her story of being barren and how she was humiliated by her mother -in-law for being barren.

Some of my women identified the issue of bareness. Two of them shared their personal stories about not being able to conceive, and that led their husband to take other wives. They also pointed out that in the Zulu society being barren is considered as a disgrace, especially for married women. They also mentioned that if a woman cannot conceive, the blame is always put on the woman, nothing will be said about a man. One woman said:

I was married for fifteen years. After three years of not getting children I suggested to my husband that we go for medical examination, to see who has a problem between us. I also told my mother-in-law about my suggestion. My husband was so angry at me, and he blamed me for not being able to conceive. He said there was nothing wrong with him, the problem was with me. My mother-in-law, also said the same thing, and she suggested that my husband should take a second wife who will give him children. And my husband did as my mother-in-law suggested. Unfortunately, even the second wife could not conceive. I think he knows that he has a problem, but he cannot say it. And his family members think that me and the other wife are the ones who have a problem. This is what culture does to us women. We always have to carry the blame.

From the group, there were also other women who agreed with her, even though they are not barren. The interpretations of my participants were mainly contextual. They focused more on relating the texts with their own experiences and some of them even identified with certain characters in the text.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has summarised the field research process, and how it was carried out. It has also highlighted some few themes from the Contextual Bible Study, and deeper discussion on this will be given in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

An *ubufazi* interpretation of Genesis 16 and 21

5.1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I have explained my research is rooted in the academy, but not confined in the academy only. My research is textual in nature with the goal of gender social transformation. This chapter is the combination of academic and non-academic interpretation of the two narratives, with the aim of gender social transformation. In this chapter I give a description of the two narratives and present some oppressive and liberative messages from the narratives that were identified by my participants and also give my input from an *ubufazi* perspective.

5.2 Description of Genesis 16 and 21

Before I give the description of these two narratives, I would like to point out that the exegetical starting point which I use is “the text itself”, and it also incorporates the responses from my participants on how they understand the text. I also use the “in front of the text” mode of reading the Bible, which enables the readers to relate the text to their own context. The responses of my participants are part of my hermeneutical circle, as I have mentioned previously. My focus is on the oppressive and liberative messages portrayed in the “text itself,” and “in front of the text” (contextualization), through reading the text together with Zulu women who are in polygamous marriages for gender social transformation.. Therefore, the focus is only on two modes of reading the Bible, the “text itself” and the “in front” of the text” mode. In the analysis of these two narratives I also use an *ubufazi* hermeneutical approach.

In these two narratives, there are elements of gender, social class, and race. The three main characters of the narratives are from different classes. Abraham and Sarah are both portrayed by the narrator as Israelites and Hagar, as an Egyptian slave. On the issue of gender, Abraham is a man and Sarah and Hagar are women. On social class, Both Abraham and Sarai are from the upper class, and Sarai and Hagar is from a lower class. Genesis 16 and 21 are related stories, with the same theme. The two stories are family narratives on polygamy. In some cultures, they are also referred to, as narratives about the birth of the two the two

religious traditions, namely, Islam through Ishmael and Judaism through Isaac¹³. Nevertheless, my main focus is on the first theme, polygamy.

The narrator of the two narratives begins Genesis 16 with Sarah as a “subject” and she continues to be the “subject” throughout the scene in both narratives. Both narratives end with Hagar as “object,” in a sense that Sarah was more powerful than her and this unfolds throughout the two narratives. The underlying problem in these two narratives is the barrenness of Sarah, which led her to request her husband Abraham to take Hagar as a concubine, with the hope that she will build a family through Hagar. The two narratives do not mention the word concubine, but as I had already mentioned in chapter two, in the Old Testament, a slave girl who had sexual relations with her master was defined as a concubine, and this was the case with Hagar. It was also common in the Hebrew culture for a man to take another woman or a concubine if the first wife was barren, as according to the Hammurabi code, which I have discussed in chapter two. The barren wife was obliged to provide a concubine for the husband. Sarah was following the traditional customs of that time. However, a concubine did not have the same rights as the wife. This must have been the case with Hagar too, as she was a slave woman. In the previous chapters, the narrator has put Abraham as a key character, however, within the context of these two narratives, it looks like the narrator has deemphasised Abraham’s character. He seems to be a bit passive in the two narratives.

Despite God’s promise that He will give Abraham many descendants in the previous chapter, Abraham went along with Sarah’s suggestion. According to the narrator, when Hagar discovered that she was pregnant, she started despising Sarah. As I have already mentioned in chapter two, it was a common thing for the wives of the same husband to despise one another, especially if one wife is barren, and the other one has children. Therefore, what Hagar did to Sarah, was common in the culture of that time. Polygamous marriages caused conflicts in many families, and this led to the development of legal texts that we find on polygamy¹⁴. Sarah blamed Abraham for the negative attitude that she got from her maid servant, and even asked the Lord to judge between her and the husband. Abram’s response was that her servant was in her hands, and that she should do whatever she wants with her (Hagar). Abraham’s response to Sarah is not surprising, hence Sarah had legal rights as a wife, and Hagar had no same rights, because she was a concubine, and a foreigner (Egyptian slave), or perhaps

¹³ Judaism and Islam are referred to as Abrahamic faiths. Judaism was born out of Isaac and Islam, out of Ishmael. They are called Abrahamic faiths based on the fact that they share the same ancestor and worship the same God.

¹⁴ See Exodus 21:10, Deuteronomy 21:15-17

Abraham just wanted to maintain peace in the family, and he thought that by sending Hagar away, there will be peace. Sarah started to ill-treat Hagar, up to the point that she even ran away from her and Abram. However, the angel of the Lord told her (Hagar) to go back to her mistress, Sarah, and submit to her. She did as she was told by the angel of the Lord, and she gave him a son named Ishmael. One may conclude that the birth of Ishmael was a fulfilment of the promise of God. In Genesis 21:-1-2, the Lord blesses Abraham and Sarah with a son, and they named him Isaac. In this very same chapter (21:8-11), the drama between Sarai and Hagar starts again, after the birth of Isaac. Sarah's concern here is Isaac's inheritance. Hagar and her son are excluded in the family and wonder in the wilderness. Through my reading of these two narratives, as part of the *ubufazi* hermeneutics which draws some insights from literary approach, I identified five categories within the narration of the two narratives through the reader response aspect of it. They are the introduction, the problem, the climax, the resolution to the problems, and the conclusion.

a) *The Introduction*: in 16:1-2, the narrator is introducing the three main characters of these two narratives; Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar

b) *The problem*: the narrator introduces the underlying problem of the two narratives which is barrenness in 16:1. The other problem is the issue of inheritance in 21:10, where Sarah is concerned about his son Isaac's inheritance. She gets jealous of Ishmael and does not want him to share Abraham's inheritance with his son.

c) *The climax*: the climax of these two narratives can be depicted in 16:4, where Hagar had a sexual intercourse with Abraham and become pregnant. Her pregnancy causes conflict in the family of Abraham. The results of Hagar's pregnancy become a problem throughout the two narratives.

d) *Resolution of the problem*: through my reading of these two narratives, I detected the resolution of the problem in various verses and in different ways. In 16:2, Sarah orders her husband Abraham to go and have sexual intercourse with the maidservant, Hagar. Sarah could not give her husband a child, and she sees this as a solution to her bareness problem. In 16: 6, Sarah complains to her husband Abram about Hagar, her maidservant who was despising her. Abraham's respond by saying, "your servant is in your servant is in your hand, do with her whatever you think is best". For Abraham, this is the solution for Sarah's complaint about Hagar. In 16:7 the Angel of the Lord ask Hagar where she was going, and she responds by saying that she is running away from her mistress (16:7b). For Hagar,

running away from her mistress, was the only solution for her problems. Again, in 16: 9, God intervenes in the situation through his angel, and in 21: 9-11, the Lord through his angel orders Hagar to go back and gives her a Divine assurance that He has heard her cry. This gives Hagar courage to go back and face her mistress and it is a solution to her misery of being ill-treated by her mistress, Sarai

In Gen. 21:1-2, the narrator reveals the solution to Sarah's agony of being barren. The Lord fulfils His promise, and Sarah finally gets pregnant and bore Abraham a child named Isaac. In verse in 21:6, the narrator depicts Sarah as confirming the resolution of the problem, she (Sarah) says, "The God has brought me laughter and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me" (21:1-2). In 21:12-13, we see God bringing a solution to Abraham's misery by assuring him that he will protect and make Hagar's son into a nation too, and that through Isaac (Sarah's son), his offspring will be reckoned. In verse 21:17, God hears Hagar's son crying and gives Hagar a Divine promise of making her son into a great nation.

e) *Conclusion:* In Genesis 20:17-21, the narrator concludes the whole scenario between Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, and finally there is a happy ending for Hagar and his son Ismael. The narrator emphasise that God was with Ishmael. In 21:20, the narrator does not say anything about Hagar's happiness, or God being with her. Nevertheless, the fact that the narrator says, Hagar got a wife for his son from Egypt, gives an impression that Hagar was not a slave anymore, she was free, for she was even able to find an Egyptian wife for her son, from her place of birth, which was Egypt.

5.3 Oppressive elements in Genesis 16 and 21

Hagar: some commentators argues that the name "Hagar" was a labelling name meaning "foreigner" and Hagar's real name was Ketura (Heyenen, 1981:299). Based on this, I argue that the label given or used by the narrator includes some element of oppression and discrimination. It can convey a negative message to a reader in a sense that the way the character of Hagar is depicted in the two narratives, for example her ill-treatment by her "mistress", can lead a reader into thinking that it is normal to ill-treat foreigners. In 16:1, the narrator refers to gar as an Egyptian slave girl. This also creates a suspicion that there is an ideology behind his emphasis on Hagar as an Egyptian maid servant. It gives an impression that the narrator wants to show that the Egyptians were of low class and that they had no value in the society. It also gives an impression that the narrator is Hebrew, and wants to portray that the Hebrews were better than the Egyptians. As a reader who reads from a South

African context, where the issue of race has been a problem for a long time, this verse can be seen as conveying a negative message than can promote racial discrimination. And Sarah's attitude towards Hagar, confirms the racial discrimination.

Barrenness: As mentioned in the previous section, in these two narratives, Sarai's barrenness seem to be the underlying problem. From the beginning of the first narrative, the narrator opens up with the focus on Sarai's barrenness to draw the attention of the reader. The narrator, instead of saying Abraham and Sarah were barren, he focuses on Sarah. This gives an interpreter or the reader an impression that in the Old Testament the value of a woman was based on having children, especially if one reads from a womanist perspective, hence an element of "suspicion" is part of the womanist interpretation of the text. In Ancient Israel, being barren was considered a curse.

The status of a woman, who was not able to conceive, was not the same as the status of a woman who was able to conceive. This was in line with the norms of the society. A woman who was not able to conceive would consider herself a failure. and would have constant depression. One example of this is a story of Hanna (2 Samuel), who felt that she was a failure by being barren (Farisani, 2006:77). Lubunga argues that, for Sarah being part of the same socio-historical context, she might have also had the same feelings as Hanna about being barren (Lubunga; 2013:11). Sarah was despised by her maidservant for being barren, and this was also the case with Hanna. She was despised by Peninah, even though Peninah was not her maidservant. It seems that it was common in ancient Israel for barren women to be despised.

The fate of being barren in the ancient Israel is the same as in the Zulu culture. For example, one of my participants also highlighted how she was despised by her mother-in-law. She said that the mother-in-law used to call her *inyumba* (a Zulu negative name for being barren). And she also mentioned that her husband took a second wife, due to her barrenness. However, the difference between the Hebrew and the Zulu culture is that, in the Zulu culture it's not up to a woman to decide whether the husband should take another wife or not. Being barren in the Zulu culture is not the only reason why men go for polygamy, there are other reasons two, which I have already explained in chapter two. He can do it without the approval of the wife, whereas in the Old Testament, it was usually women who suggest concubines/wives for their husbands.

From an *ubufazi* hermeneutical point of view, I identify an oppressive portrayal of Sarah as a kind of woman who gives up dignity in order to protect the image of her husband. For example the Hebrew cultural circumstances force her to succumb and suggest a wife for his husband. The narrator does not give deeper details on Sarah's feelings concerning this matter. As I read the two narratives, I imagine a woman who is forced by cultural circumstances to "pour salt" on the already existing wound of being barren by offering herself to share her husband with a maidservant, the emotional and psychological trauma that she must have been through. My informant Jane also confirmed this psychological trauma when she identified with the character of Sarah, and explained how hurt she was when her husband took another wife due to her barrenness and that she had to accept that because of the Zulu culture and the society. She further said that there was nothing she could do, she was powerless.

In these narratives, the portrayal of Abraham's character is passive. The emphasis is on the two women, Sarah and Hagar. The narrator's portrayal of the character of Sarai is that of an oppressive woman who ill-treats her maidservant. Some of my informants compared the situation of Sarai in this story as the one that is portrayed in Genesis 12. Even though they did not give deeper details of the text but they mentioned that they think that Abraham was a weak man who could not protect his wife. In Genesis 12, Abraham due to famine in Canaan had to go to Egypt with his wife Sarah, to live there for a while. However, he was afraid that he might be killed by the Egyptians. He knew that the Egyptians will not kill Sarah because of her physical beauty.

As they were about to enter Egypt, he told Sarah that she should lie to the Egyptians and tell them that she was his sister. He did not want the Egyptians to kill him, and Sara did as she was told by the husband. In this narrative (Gen. 12) Abraham broke his marital loyalty as a strategy for his survival. If Sarah had lived in today's [South African] context, she would have been in danger of contracting sexual transmitted diseases from people she was forced to perform sexual favours for (Lubunga, 2013:12). The narrative does not say anything about Sarai being sexually violated. However, the way the story is being narrated, it gives an impression that Sarai might have been exposed to sexual violation. For example, in this narrative Abraham say, "I know what a beautiful woman you are...Then [Egyptian men] they will kill me and let you live" (Gen. 12:11-12). From an *ubufazi* hermeneutical point of view, I am suspicious of Abraham's emphasis on Sarah's beauty. It gives an impression that her beauty will lead the Egyptian men into being sexually attracted to Sarai and they would not kill her because they want to sexually violate her. The narrator does not tell in the story what

happens in Pharaoh's palace after Sarah was taken to the palace. For example, from a Zulu cultural perspective, it is common to use women's beauty for personal enrichment, especially in the royalty. The Zulu king has a privilege to take any woman and make her his wife, without being questioned. This happens during *umkhosi womhlanga* (reed dance). *Umkhosi womhlanga* is an annual royal ceremony, where the Zulu King selects a maiden girl and makes her a prospective queen. According to the Zulu culture, all Zulu young girls are expected to attend this annual ceremony. A night before this ceremony all the girls who are participating in this ceremony are required to go for virginity testing. There are certain women who are appointed to perform virginity testing of the girls. On the day of *umkhosi womhlanga*, they parade half-naked in front of the king, and the king usually chooses the most beautiful girl to be his wife. These are usually teenage girls, and some of them are being forced by parents to be part of this ceremony. To some extent, these girls become the "objects" in the name of culture and are "sacrificed" while celebrating their virginity.

Lubunga argues that there is a cause to wonder whether the gifts that were given to Abraham were the compensation for Sarah's sexual abuse (Lubunga: 2013:12). In the narrative, the narrator does not tell whether Sarah was comfortable with the idea or not, the narrative only reveals that Sarah did what the husband told her to do. Sarah's rights were being violated. She was given by her husband to strange men, and she remained loyal to her husband. In Gen 16 and 21, I see a continuation of her loyalty too, by giving up her dignity in order to get a child for Abraham.

Jane, the woman who shared her story of being mocked by her mother-in-law for being barren, compared the character of Abraham with that of her husband who could not protect her when the mother-in-law was mocking at her. She mentioned that she had to carry all the blame by herself. In the two narratives we also see Abraham being quite about the situation of Hagar mocking at Sarah. The narrator does not show any intervention of Abraham in the situation. He only intervenes when he is "forced" by Sarah. The narrator only vindicates the intervention of God in the situation.

The picture of Sarah that is portrayed by the narrator in the two narratives is that of a woman who is expected to behave according to the patriarchal expectations of the society and give up her dignity for the protection of the husband. In these two narratives the Hebrew culture betrays Sarah. In the two narratives, Sarah is presented as an oppressor who oppresses her maidservant. The narrator does not really show how the society and the circumstances force

Sarah to behave the way she does in the text. Some of my informants also mentioned that in the Zulu culture, when it comes to polygamy people are always interested to know about the relationship between the different wives. They do not care much about how the husbands treat their wives. In other words, the society and the culture have certain cultural expectation of women who are in polygamous marriages.

In the Zulu culture, the expectation is that a woman should get married and have children. Failure to give children brings anguish to the family, and it is mostly women who are affected. Being able to have children is a gift from God, but according to the Zulu culture, it is as if it is every woman's right to have children. If a woman fails to conceive within two or three years of being married, everybody would question that in the family and also the society. Such situations in the Zulu culture forces women to consult traditional-doctors to remove what they call, a "curse of barrenness". In some cases in the Zulu culture, barrenness is associated with being cursed or bewitched. Sometimes when they consult traditional doctors they are required to do some practices that might endanger their lives. One of my informants testified this. She said:

When I could not conceive, I was devastated did not feel as part of the society. When I told my mother about the situation, she felt sorry for me, and told me that it is a disgrace to be barren. She suggested that I consult a *sangoma* [traditional doctor], and I did. Then the *sangoma* told me that I need to remove the "barren curse". He further said that somebody from the extended family members bewitched me when I was young. She had put a "barren curse" on me, due to jealousy and they wanted to hurt my mother. The *sangoma* told me that I needed to go to a nearby river where there are crocodiles, to wash myself as a way of removing this curse. However, I could not do what he told me to do because of the fear of the crocodiles in the river, and I did not want to put my life in danger.

When I read Genesis 16 and 21, of which the main problem is bareness, it forces one to ask the following questions: what message does it convey? Does it encourage women to succumb to cultural expectations? The way the wrong narratives are narrated, it can encourages the readers to succumb to cultural expectations. In biblical times, barren women were subjected to same agony as the Zulu women.

"The Lord has kept me from having children" (16:2): this phrase gives the reader that being barren is a curse from God. Also in the Zulu culture being barren is considered as a curse. Therefore, the way the narrator has put this phrase might have an influence in the Zulu people thinking barrenness as a curse, hence most Zulu people uses the Bible to find solution for their problems.

“Sleep with my servant” (16:2b): here the narrator is trying to show that Sarah wanted Abraham to sleep with her maidservant so that she can conceive. This phrase gives an impression that women were used as “sexual objects”. For example, the narrator does not tell us if there were any negotiations with Sarah on whether she agrees to have sexual intercourse with Abraham or not. It gives a reader an assumption that it was normal for a man to just go and have sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent. Secondly, Sarah wanted her husband to have sexual intercourse with her maidservant Hagar, so that she can conceive. As I have already mentioned in chapter two, it was normal during that time for a man to take another wife or a concubine if the first wife is barren. This can also convey an oppressive message in a sense that women are used in marriages as “child bearers”. This is also the case within the Zulu culture according to the culture the most important thing in marriage is to have children. This is more expected from a woman. This can be oppressive to those who can’t conceive. Some of my participants also testified this when they shared that their husbands took second wives because of their bareness. This cultural expectation of having women sends a wrong message about marriage. Marriage is not only about having children, but more about companionship.

The character of Hagar: In these two narratives, the reaction of Hagar to Sarah’s interest of making her a surrogate is not explored or shown by the narrator. Hagar, as a slave and foreign woman she is forced to succumb and adopt the customs of her mistress, Sarah. The narrator in the two narratives gives an impression that the Hagar’s behaviour towards her mistress stem from her change of status (carrying Abraham’s child). Hagar knew that she was just a surrogate, and that the child would not be hers. As a reader, I ask myself, why she would be happy up to the extent of despising her mistress. The narrator’s interpretation of Hagar’s reaction towards her mistress victimises her (Hagar). It has some element of oppression and victimises her in a way that it gives the reader an impression that Hagar was willing to accept the patriarchal customs of the Hebrew culture. The narrator does not say anything about Hagar’s feeling on whether she was comfortable with their idea of being a surrogate or not. Hagar might have felt dehumanised and angry due to the fact that she was “used” to carry somebody’s child. The manner in which Hagar despises her mistress might be her way of showing her emotions of frustration, brought to her by the patriarchal culture. I might be her way of trying to show her mistress that she does not want to be a surrogate anymore. Unfortunately she cannot show that emotion to the rest of the patriarchal society and Abraham. She chooses to show her emotions on Sarah. On the other, hand Sarah is also a

victim in this scenario because to suffer the consequences of what the patriarchal culture forced her to do. The narrator does not tell about the relationship between Hagar and Sarah before the subrogation. Maybe they had a good relationship before, even though Hagar was a slave woman. The narrator only gives the readers an impression that both women, Sarah and Hagar were negative towards each other, and he (the narrator) does not give the readers the background of their relationship before the surrogation

The suffering of Sarah increases the oppression of Hagar. Sarah's suffering makes her think that Hagar is despising her due to the fact that she is barren. She does not question Hagar about her actions, she just assumes that she is making fun of her situation. Sarah emphasizes on Hagar's action against her, without thinking how she must have wronged Hagar by "forcing" her to sleep have sexual intercourse with her husband Abraham. Hagar is portrayed by the narrator as an "object" who cannot defend herself. In these narratives, in all the discussions between Sarah and Abraham about Hagar, the narrator doesn't give any details on whether she was part of the discussions or not. The narrator gives an impression to the readers that Hagar's status of being a slave woman denies her the right of protecting herself or her image, and that she has to accept everything that is being said by her master or mistress, regardless of her feelings. Hagar is being silenced. She might have feel sexually abused and betrayed. She is being betrayed by both Abraham and Sarah. Abram does not come to her rescue when Sarah ill-treats her, even though she is carrying his child. Hagar might have felt that Sarah and Abraham were ungrateful to her, and that might have caused stress on her. On the other hand Sarah is hurt too. They are both betrayed by the patriarchal culture, and they end up hurting one another. They could not show anger to Abraham because it was unacceptable to do so in the patriarchal society. The only acceptable thing in the Hebrew society was for women to show anger towards one another. Having identified the oppressive messages from the two narratives, I now move to the liberative messages/

5.3 The liberative element of Genesis 16 and 21

The character of Hagar: some of my participants identified with the character of Hagar as liberating, even though the narrator portrays her as despising her mistress after conceiving. One of my participants said:

Hagar is a very brave woman. Despite what the society might have done to her, or thought about her running away from the situation, she was strong. She did what she felt was good for her and the child. With us Zulu women, the culture has betrayed us. We always think of the society, what the society will say if I act in a certain way... We do not think of ourselves. That is not good. The society makes us suffer in many ways...

Hagar's independence seem to be initiating her liberation. Hagar is an Egyptian slave and a foreigner. Her character symbolizes the struggle of people who were colonised. Hagar as a slave woman is linked to Sarah's dilemma of being barren. Hagar is portrayed in the story as the answer to Sarah's bareness. The narrator gives her a marginalised role. Hagar's location and her marginalised character is similar to that of my participants. Part of Hagar's marginalised character is her ethnicity. As I have mentioned previously, she was a concubine, and had no same rights as Sarah. Some of my informants became part of polygamous marriages due to the fact that the first wives of their husbands could not have children to fulfil the cultural expectations. They somehow identified with the character of Hagar due to that. By identifying the liberating character of Hagar in the two narratives, it means that they are recovering their dignity.

Hagar was the first person in the Bible to be visited by the angel and to receive formal annunciation (16: 11-12). She is promised innumerable descendants. She encounters God in the wilderness.. According to some feminist scholars, Hagar is a pioneer in asserting her own autonomy against the oppression of her master and mistress. Hagar is being addressed by God, she receives a Divine promise, and she is being rescued by God (Thompson, 2007:41).

Hagar needs to be recognised for what she suffered, and her courage under fire. She enters the narrative as a slave woman, and she is a surrogate mother for Sarah, and finds herself despite that, she runs away, rather than bearing further mistreatment by her mistress. Hagar is one of the biblical women who experienced abuse and rejection. From a black South African context point of view, it is much easier to identify with the character of Hagar. What happened to Hagar is what most black South African women have experienced at the hand of

their white mistresses. Even though, the circumstances might be different. All my informants have experienced being discriminated against due to their race or colour. For example, during the apartheid era in South Africa, black women had not rights to oppose whatever was said by their white mistresses, even if they did not agree. Most of them were ill-treated by their white mistresses. As compared to Sarah, they had no choice of running away from the situation due to the fact that they were poor and they needed jobs from their white mistresses.

Guided by the hermeneutics of suspicion in my reading of the two narratives, I identify the biasness of the narrator. Both Sarah and Hagar suffer from the stereotype of the portrayal of women as quarrelsome. And they are blamed for their own unhappiness. Reading the two narratives, we are challenged to read through the eyes of those whom the text does not seem to privilege, such as Hagar.

The independent reaction of Hagar initiates her liberation. She is willing to risk her life and that of her baby in order to find a better situation. Hagar as a representative of how colonised people were treated in South Africa, she has been humiliated and treated unjustly. However, she does not remain quite about her situation she prays to God and she takes action. The story ends with hope. God removes the suffering that Hagar has experienced. It is an indication that she is free to live the past and focus on the future. It is the sign that she needs to take responsibility and become her own master.

Ishmael (16:11): this name Ismael has a liberating message. The Lord Hagar that she will have a child Ishmael, which means, the Lord has heard you misery. It shows that God was with Hagar in the mist of her problems of being ill-treated by the mistress. In the Zulu culture, the Bible is always a source of comfort for the Zulu Christians, and for all their problems, they always use the Bible as a source of comfort. Usually, when they are in difficult situations, they identify themselves with certain characters in the Bible. One of my informants mentioned this verse as a source of comfort, after the other woman shared her story on how her mother-in-law ill-treated her due to her bareness. This is liberating, in a sense that it can give comfort to them, even though they know that they cannot have children, by the Divine assurance of being with those in difficult situations.

5.4 My reflection of the Contextual Bible Study

Some of my informants chose to read the text within the patriarchal framework. Some of these women who chose to read the text within the patriarchal framework were positive about polygamy. For example, one of them was expressed hesitancy about Sarah's character. She thought that Sarah was showed an attitude of disrespect when she told the husband what to do, especially about telling the husband to get rid of Hagar, She mentioned that in the Zulu culture it is disrespectful to tell a man what to do. The responses of some of these women on their submission to patriarchal cultural practice indicate that it does not necessarily imply agreement. Rather, it shows that some of them are not strong enough to deal with the consequences of defying the patriarchal culture. It also shows that they lack social frame of reference outside their own culture

According to Kanyoro culture makes women feel powerless if they are not attached to a man. She matriculated that, the practice of widow inheritance persists in many parts of Africa, and that the Church and the community sometimes uses certain biblical texts to endorse that, for she uses the story of Naomi, Ruth and Ophrah, in the book of Ruth She questions the text as it describe each woman, asking what message it conveys to women, and whether it encourages them to succumb to cultural practices (Kanyoro, 2001: 106)

This was also raised by my participants. They also mentioned that their Zulu culture makes them feel powerless without a man, and that this is one of the reasons why some women end up settling for polygamy. And they also raised the issue of widow inheritance, whereby some of them were also forced to marry brothers of their deceased husbands.

Within the discussion, there was also an element *self-empowering interpretive practice*. This was shown when some of my participants identified with the character of Hagar. They mentioned that Hagar was a slave woman, however, she was brave enough to face the hard situation she was in. I interpret this as being able to find a liberative message within the text, but my participants were not actually aware of the fact that they were empowering themselves.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted both the oppressive and liberrative messages from Genesis 16 and 21, through the textual and contextual reading of the two narratives. It has also highlighted the narrator's description of the characters in the text.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation has identified both the oppressive and liberative messages through the contextual reading of Genesis 16 and 21 with Zulu women who are in polygamous marriages. The research question was based on finding liberative and oppressive messages from the two narratives with the aim of gender social transformation. The question was answered in chapter five, through the analysis of the interviews, and the application of the *ubufazi* approach. Different categories from the interviews have been identified. This dissertation has also highlighted the factors that lead to polygamy both in the Old Testament and the Zulu culture. The main factor that has been identified is the issue of bareness, both in the Zulu culture and the Old Testament. The analysis of the interviews in this dissertation was done within the scope of the black South African context, with special emphasis on the Zulu culture.

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