

# Worlds Coming Together: What a White Male German Evangelical Learned from a Black Female South-African *Bosadi* Scholar

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## ABSTRACT

*This article explores the works of Prof. Madipoane Masenya, a Black South African theologian, and her theological approach known as the "Bosadi Reading." It analyses how Masenya developed and understands her theological position, highlighting the ways in which the "Bosadi Reading" differs from "womanhood" or feminist approaches and identifying areas of intersection. In the second part, the article considers what a white German evangelical theologian (the author) can learn from this approach and what critical questions could be posed from his perspective.*

**KEYWORDS:** Bosadi, Masenya, South Africa, German, Evangelical

## A INTRODUCTION

This is a very personal article. Therefore, contrary to the tendency usually observed in academic lectures and articles, I will write mostly in the first person. I will also begin with a brief account of how I personally encountered Prof. Madipoane Masenya.

I first met Masenya in 2008 when I was in South Africa to initiate collaboration between our seminary (Theologisches Seminar Rheinland, TSR, a member of the "Gesellschaft für Bildung und Forschung in Europa, GBFE) and the University of South Africa (UNISA) in the area of Old Testament (OT). Masenya was the Chair of the Department (CoD) of Old Testament at UNISA at that time. I was very impressed by her personality and also by the efficiency with which she led the department. At that time, the vast majority of lecturers working in the department were men (mostly white) and a black woman in a senior position was the exception rather than the rule in a university in South Africa. Nevertheless,

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Submitted: 06/05/2023; peer-reviewed: 16/08/2024; accepted: 15/07/2024. Hans Wünc, "Worlds Coming Together: What a White Male German Evangelical Can Learn from a Black Female South-African Bosadi Scholar," *Old Testament Essays* 38 no. 2 (2025): 1–26. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2025/v38n2a2>.

Masenya had the respect of everyone in the department and was appreciated by all for her leadership. This was also communicated to me several times by the white professors I came to know.

About two years later, Masenya was a guest at the Masters and Doctoral seminar of GBFE in Wiedenest, Germany. During this visit, she also came to visit our seminary, where I had asked her to give a lecture. I have to admit that I was curious. What would a South African professor, who I knew at that time had feminist inclinations, say at an evangelical seminary in Germany and how would our students react?

She then gave a lecture on the book of Job, which I had the privilege of interpreting. I was very impressed by her refreshingly different way of engaging with the book and its main character, Job. I still remember how surprised I was during the interpretation when she spoke about Job's complaint that he wished his mother had given birth to him as a stillborn child. She then looked at it from a woman's point of view, asking us what Job's mother would have thought about it.<sup>1</sup> That was a question that had never occurred to me before.

It was only much later that I began to understand what drives Madipoane Masenya, what is important to her and how she has anchored her personal faith in her theology. That is what I would like to talk about next.

## **B MADIPOANE MASENYA'S *BOSADI* APPROACH**

### **1 Personal development – the two horn surgeries**

I will now turn to Masenya and her *Bosadi* approach. Masenya is the first Black South African woman to receive a PhD in Biblical Studies in South Africa. She is also the first theologian at the University of South Africa (UNISA) to use a female perspective in her studies of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Madipoane Masenya. “All from the Same Source? Deconstructing a (Male) Anthropocentric Reading of Job (3) through an Eco-*Bosadi* Lens,” *JTSA* 137 (2010): 57–58.

<sup>2</sup> Masenya tells the story of her personal and theological development in “Is White South African Old Testament Scholarship African?” *BOTSA* 12 (2002): 3–7; cf. also “Reading the Bible the *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Way,” *BCTSAA* (1997): 15–16 and for more details, “Teaching Western-oriented Old Testament studies to African Students,” *OTE* 17/3 (2004): 455–469). A more personal account of her own spiritual development, especially in her youth, can be found in the article, “The Bible and Prophecy in African South-African Pentecostal Churches,” *Missionalia* 33/1 (2005): 36–37.

In<sup>3</sup> "An African Methodology for South African Biblical Sciences,"<sup>4</sup> Masenya uses the image of a cow bullied by other animals because of the shape of her horns. The cow eventually gives in to the pressure and has her horns surgically removed, replacing them with the horns of a Merino sheep. While these new horns may look beautiful, they are no longer her original horns—the horns that belong to her. They are artificial and cannot perform all the functions of the original ones. Masenya quotes a Northern Sotho proverb which states that counterfeit horns cannot stick permanently on a different head.<sup>5</sup> She understands this as an analogy for the kind of South African Old Testament Theology she often encountered during her own theological studies. This theology tried to live with artificial Western-European horns imposed by colonial rulers. Later, she uses this image in a somewhat modified way, talking about two horn surgeries she has undergone herself. Metaphorically, it represents her gradual return to her African origin, her "original horns."<sup>6</sup>

The two "horn surgeries" Prof. Masenya underwent can already be seen on the outside. Her oldest articles on this subject, dating from 1994, are titled "A Feminist Perspective on Theology with Particular Reference to Black Feminist Theology"<sup>7</sup> and "Freedom in Bondage: Black Feminist Hermeneutics."<sup>8</sup> As the

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<sup>3</sup> Since most of the references in this article refer to Madipoane Masenya, the name of the author will be omitted in the references, when not especially needed.

<sup>4</sup> Madipoane Masenya, "An African Methodology for South African Biblical Sciences: Revisiting the Bosadi (Womanhood) Approach," *OTE* 18/3 (2005): 741–751.

<sup>5</sup> Masenya, "An African Methodology," 742. Masenya uses this proverb in different contexts and with slightly different translations. Already in 2004, she used it in her article, "Teaching Western-Oriented Old Testament Studies to African Students." There she translates the Sotho proverb, "the artificial horns which have been put on a particular animal, do not stick" ("Teaching Western-Oriented," 456). With this proverb, she describes the fruitlessness of Western-oriented theology for African students: "They read the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament yet fail to see any close affinities with the state of affairs in their own cultures. They do hermeneutics from the Book of Amos and yet remain blind to many injustices in their country/communities." (457). In the article, "Struggling to Find 'Africa' in South Africa: A Bosadi (Womanhood) Approach to the Bible," *SBL Online Forum* 3/5 (2005), published online in the SBL Forum, she translates the same proverb: "artificial horns cannot stick permanently on a different head" (article has no page numbers). In the article "African Biblical Hermeneutics," she translates "artificial horns do no [sic!] stick to a (foreign) head" ("African Biblical Hermeneutics: A Liberation Reading of the Old Testament Canon," *Sacra Testamentum* 1 (2018): 2).

<sup>6</sup> Masenya, "An African Methodology," 744.

<sup>7</sup> Madipoane Masenya, "A Feminist Perspective on Theology with Particular Reference to Black Feminist Theology," *Scriptura* 49 (1994): 64–74.

<sup>8</sup> Madipoane Masenya, "Freedom in Bondage: Black Feminist Hermeneutics," *JBTS* 8/1 (1994): 35–48.

titles suggest, these were written before she developed the term "*Bosadi*" to describe her approach. Instead, she calls for a "black/African feminist reading"<sup>9</sup> of the Bible, a theology that "strives for the equality of all human beings"<sup>10</sup> and "a hermeneutics that will appropriate the liberatory message of the Bible to the oppressed majorities, to the Black (Christian) women."<sup>11</sup>

Masenya published these articles under the name Joyce Masenya, with Joyce being the Christian name given to her. Masenya grew up in a society where her Black African culture was considered inferior. This was evident from the fact that as soon as she entered school or sought respect elsewhere in South African society, she was compelled to abandon her African name Madipoane and instead adopt a "Christian" name (Joyce). At a point later in life, she reflects on being compelled as a child not to use her African name, but to "be called by a foreign name," a name supposedly associated with the Christian religion.<sup>12</sup> She herself describes this experience in the following words:

As an African-South African girl, one's whole identity was wrapped in foreignness: foreigner to the land, foreign to the normative race, foreign to the normative sex, foreigner even in one's own home as sooner or later, a girl would be married off to be a foreigner in her husband's place!<sup>13</sup>

In her thesis, two years after her first article,<sup>14</sup> she uses the name Madipoane Joyce Masenya and she defines her approach as the *Bosadi* approach. We also find the appellation "Ngwana' Mphalele" in brackets after her name. This designation refers to her kinship origin (and means "the daughter of Mphalele"). This designation appears in most of her later articles. In an article from 1997 titled, "Redefining Ourselves: A *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Approach,"<sup>15</sup> the name "Joyce" is missing. It is also absent in her later works.

This outwardly recognisable development is also evident in terms of content. It marks a progression from a traditionally Western-oriented theology through an African feminist approach to a distinctive female reading of the Bible known as the *Bosadi* approach. Let us now briefly trace this development.

<sup>9</sup> Masenya, "A Feminist Perspective," 64.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

<sup>11</sup> Masenya, "Freedom in Bondage," 42.

<sup>12</sup> Madipoane Masenya, "Invisible Exiles? An African-South African Woman's Re-configuration of 'Exile' in Jeremiah 21:1-10," *OTE* 20/3 (2007): 760.

<sup>13</sup> "... But You Shall Let Every Girl Live': Reading Exodus 1:1-2:10 the *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Way," *OTE* 15/1 (2002): 99.

<sup>14</sup> Madipoane Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context: A *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Perspective" (PhD thesis, University of South Africa, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Madipoane Masenya, "Redefining Ourselves: A *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Approach," *OTE* 10/3 (1997): 439-448.

Masenya initially experienced a traditional theological education marked by the prevailing "academic" methodology, the Western way of doing theology. Later, she writes: "I struggled hard to fit in, to be what I was not."<sup>16</sup>

In her first published article in 1991, based on her 1989 Master's dissertation at UNISA, titled "In the School of Wisdom: An Interpretation of Some Old Testament Proverbs in a Northern Sotho Context"<sup>17</sup> she already employs a cultural-sensitive methodology<sup>18</sup> but without discernible critical approaches suggesting a feminist perspective. For example, she discusses the concept of the man being the 'בעל' (lord) of his wife in Hebrew culture, without any critical comments.<sup>19</sup> Four years later, in 1994, she published "A Feminist Perspective on Theology with Particular Reference to Black Feminist Theology"<sup>20</sup> and "Freedom in Bondage: Black Feminist Hermeneutics,"<sup>21</sup> in which she takes a decidedly feminist viewpoint.<sup>22</sup>

She later describes this change as her first horn surgery: "Initially, after becoming attracted to women's liberation theologies through reading feminist resources, with no mentor by my side, I underwent my first surgery and came out sporting feminist horns."<sup>23</sup>

Feminism provided Masenya with the opportunity to apply a distinctly female perspective to biblical texts. However, there were also aspects she found critical. As early as 1996 in her doctoral thesis, she therefore opposed labelling her viewpoint as "feminist": "Moreover, I prefer to name my perspective an African woman's liberation reading of the Bible and not the commonly used 'feminist' reading ..."<sup>24</sup>

She gave two reasons for this. First, the word "feminism" has a Western origin and orientation and second, in the African-South African situation, one must consider a variety of mechanisms of oppression to which women are exposed. These include "racism ... the sexist African culture, classism as well as

<sup>16</sup> "For Ever Trapped? An African Voice on Insider/Outsider Dynamics within South African Old Testament Gender-Sensitive Frameworks," *OTE* 27/1 (2014): 190.

<sup>17</sup> Madipoane Masenya, "In the School of Wisdom: An Interpretation of Some Old Testament Proverbs in a Northern Sotho Context," *OTE* 4 (1991): 171–191.

<sup>18</sup> Masenya, "In the School of Wisdom," 172.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 174–175.

<sup>20</sup> Masenya, "A Feminist Perspective,"

<sup>21</sup> Masenya, "Freedom in Bondage,"

<sup>22</sup> See also "The Bible and Women: Black Feminist Hermeneutics," *Scriptura* 54 (1995): 189–201.

<sup>23</sup> Masenya, "An African Methodology," 744; see also "For Ever Trapped?": 199.

<sup>24</sup> Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10-31," 4.

sexism in general."<sup>25</sup> The feminist focus, however, is "more on gender asymmetry than on other forms of oppressions like classism and racism."<sup>26</sup>

Masenya's other criticisms of feminism included her recurring impression that certain contemporary feminist standards were being applied more or less uncritically to the ancient culture of the Bible, which had a vastly different background.<sup>27</sup> She also expressed concern about the potential danger of reading one's own ideas into the Bible in this manner. While Masenya acknowledges in many of her articles and works that there is no completely "value-free" interpretation of the Bible, she emphasises the need for a corrective to the subjective tendencies she observed in some feminist interpretations.<sup>28</sup>

Masenya realised that the purely feminist approach was not sufficient for her. In addition to the criticisms already mentioned, she was particularly concerned that feminism focused broadly on the situation of women in general, rather than specifically on South African women. This realisation prompted her to distance herself from the feminist perspective. Instead, she found herself drawn to the perspectives of American female theologians who were specifically addressing the challenges faced by Black women in America: "The African American women's situation appeared to be closer to that of African-South African women in terms of addressing issues of class and race."<sup>29</sup>

Masenya found the idea of adopting this approach of "womanism"<sup>30</sup> quite attractive. She writes, "I quickly embraced the term 'womanism' for an African South African woman's liberation framework of the Bible."<sup>31</sup>

This term was developed in the African-American context, which shares many overlaps with the African-South African context but also exhibits differences. Masenya identifies four such differences as follow:

- "African-Americans experienced a history of slavery while Africans in South Africa experienced a history of colonialism and apartheid."<sup>32</sup> Masenya acknowledges that both contexts have been impacted by slavery, colonisation and apartheid, yet she perceives significant distinctions between Black people in America and South Africa.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>29</sup> Masenya, "For Ever Trapped," 199.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Madipoane Masenya, "Katie Geneva Cannon's Canon on Womanist Ethics: Reflections from African-South Africa," *JTSA* 170 (2021): 93.

<sup>31</sup> Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10-31," 153.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

- American Blacks “lost touch with the rich cultural heritage of Africa while we are still in Africa.” Despite efforts by agents of colonialism and apartheid to undermine this rich cultural heritage, Masenya believes: “We can still revive the beautiful elements of our culture,” a goal she intends to further with her *Bosadi* approach.
- American Blacks were a minority “in the midst of Whites,” while in South Africa, Blacks were the majority, dominated by whites.
- Due to its origin, the term “womanism ... was coined as a response to the African-American context” and was therefore not really suitable for Masenya to describe her own approach.”<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, Masenya developed the *Bosadi* approach, which she considers to be her second horn surgery, “I therefore underwent one more session of surgery which has enabled me to put on horns that will, for the first time hopefully stick”!<sup>34</sup>

## 2 Bosadi approach

In her doctoral thesis for the “Doctor of Literature and Philosophy in the subject Biblical Studies,” which Masenya completed in 1996, she develops her very own special approach, the *Bosadi* approach.<sup>35</sup> She writes:

A *Bosadi* approach acknowledges the African-ness of African people, both males and females.<sup>36</sup> African females in South Africa have a responsibility to affirm their Africanity and to receive the good elements of their culture while condemning as well as resisting those elements that denigrate others.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, according to Masenya, there are overlaps and points of contact between the *Bosadi* approach and both feminism and womanism but it is still neither one nor the other. It is its own approach within a very specific context.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> All citations in this paragraph are from Masenya, “Proverbs 31:10-31,” 153–154.

<sup>34</sup> Masenya, “An African Methodology,” 744–745.

<sup>35</sup> Masenya presented her approach for the first time (outside of her thesis) in her article, “Reading the Bible the *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Way.” Cf. also “A *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Reading of Genesis 16,” *OTE* 11/2 (1998): 271–287, where Masenya counters the traditional colonial/missionary reading of Gen 16 with her newly developed *Bosadi* reading. See also “...But You Shall Let Every Girl Live.”

<sup>36</sup> Masenya does not want to elevate the woman to a special position vis-à-vis the man but to criticise her disregard or subordination to the man. Her goal is co-operation of both on one level. Concerning marriage she writes: “If any marriage or family is to flourish, both husband and wife should jointly work together for the welfare of such institutions.” (“BRIEF NOTES: Searching for Affirming Notions of (African) Manhood in the Paeon in Praise of the ’Ēšet Ḥayil? One African Woman’s Response to Joel K. T. Biwul’s Article, “What Is He Doing at the Gate?”” *OTE* 29/2 (2016): 364.

<sup>37</sup> Masenya, “Proverbs 31:10-31,” 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 17–20.

Masenya has therefore coined a new term, which she further explained in her PhD thesis and many subsequent articles. It has now become a technical term for a very specific kind of interpretation—the Bosadi approach or Bosadi hermeneutics. The term has also been adopted by other theologians, such as Felicia Ramaribana in her 2012 Master’s dissertation at the University of Kwazulu-Natal<sup>39</sup> and more recently Maleke Kondemo in her article in *Old Testament Essays* “In Search of Biblical Role Models for Mongo Women: A Bosadi reading of Vashti and Esther.”<sup>40</sup>

The term *bosadi* is a Northern Sotho word, derived from the word *mosadi*, which means “woman, married woman, wife.” Both words originate from the root “*sadi*,” which fundamentally denotes “womanhood.” Therefore, *bosadi* can be translated as “womanhood.”<sup>41</sup>

Masenya deliberately avoids the term *mosadi* due to its colloquial usage with a negative connotation, often implying “effeminate” or “girlish” behaviour in men. While *mosadi* refers more to the individual woman, the term *bosadi* emphasises womanhood itself. It “describes what it means to be a woman in Northern Sotho culture.”<sup>42</sup> “The major hermeneutical focus of the *Bosadi* biblical hermeneutic is the unique experiences of an African-South African woman with an emancipatory commitment.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Felicia Ramaribana, “Reading Ruth for the Sake of Poor Rural Women: A Bosadi Womanhood Approach” (Master’s thesis, University of Kwazulu-Natal, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> Maleleke M. Kondemo, “In Search of Biblical Role Models for Mongo Women: A Bosadi Reading of Vashti and Esther,” *OTE* 34/2 (2021): 554–572.

<sup>41</sup> Masenya, “Proverbs 31:10-31,” 156.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Madipoane Masenya, “Kgarebe (Virgin) and Carnal Knowledge: Reading Genesis 19:30–38 from the Margins,” *HTS* 77/3 (2021): 2. Masenya has used this *Bosadi* approach on different Old Testament stories. For example, the story of Ruth and Naomi is read against the background of the struggle against poverty and loneliness in the article, “Struggling with Poverty/Emptiness: Rereading the Naomi-Ruth Story in Africa-South Africa,” *JTSA* 120 (2004): 46–59. Similarly, Ps 6 is read “from an HIV and AIDS Gender Perspective” (Madipoane Masenya and V. N. Mtshiselwa, “Dangling between Death and Hope: An HIV and AIDS Gender-Sensitive Re-reading of Psalm 6,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37/2 (2016): 2), the “woman of worth” (Prov 31:10-31) is discussed before the background of selected proverbs from the Yorùbá and Sotho contexts (“A Literary Figure or Patriarchal Reality? Reflections on the ‘Ēšet Hayil in Light of Depictions of Womanhood from Selected Yorùbá and Sotho Proverbs,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39/1 (2018): 2) or Exod 1 is read against the context of African (South African) women (“Whose Reading Matters? Rereading Exodus 1 in the Context of African (South African) Women,” *Dialog* 59/2 (2020): 107–114).



Masenya understands her approach as an exercise in transformational hermeneutics<sup>44</sup>—a method of interpreting the Bible aimed at “transforming unjust structures in society so as to end up with an emancipated society.”<sup>45</sup> The goal is to articulate the “African-ness of an African woman in South Africa,” critically analysing her context to identify and counteract oppressive elements. Simultaneously, the approach seeks to highlight and empower aspects that strengthen women.

Moreover, this approach involves analysing the context of the Bible in a similar manner and facilitating a dialogue between these two contexts.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> In the article, “Anything New under the Sun of African Biblical Hermeneutics in South African Old Testament Scholarship,” Masenya (together with Hulisani Ramantswana) uses the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus as an analogy for defining the task of African Biblical Hermeneutics: The Bible has to incarnate into African contexts, it has to die through a critical engagement with it and it must then be resurrected by allowing the biblical text “to address and transform an African person in new creative ways” (Madipoane Masenya and Hulisani Ramantswana, “Anything New under the Sun of African Biblical Hermeneutics in South African Old Testament Scholarship? Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of the Word in Africa,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 26/1 (2015): 1–121); cf. also “Challenging Poverty through Proverbs: An African Transformational Hermeneutic,” *OTE* 19/2 (2006): 393–404.

<sup>45</sup> Masenya, “Proverbs 31:10-31,” 205. In her article, “African Biblical Hermeneutics,” 1, Masenya states the main question she tries to answer: “What is a liberation reading of the Old Testament and even more importantly, how may the Old Testament canon ... when read through the lenses of African women’s experiences, be read in a liberative way?”

<sup>46</sup> Madipoane Masenya, “A Mosadi (Woman) Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31,” *NAOTS* 6 (1999): 2. It should be noted that the Old Testament context and the African-South African context do have many similarities, as Masenya remarks (e.g. “Making Sense of Psalm 127:3-5 in African/South African Contexts,” *OTE* 32/2 (2019): 412). One of the main similarities is the holistic worldview that characterises both cultures (413). Masenya explicitly discusses this topic in an article published already in 1994, where she compares Old Testament proverbs with proverbs from the Northern Sotho (“Wisdom Meets Wisdom: Selected Old Testament Proverbs Contextualized in a Northern Sotho Setting,” *Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif* 1 (1994): 15–23). This article draws on her 1989 Master’s thesis (15, fn 1). Cf. also “Who Calls the Shots in Naomi’s Life? Reading the Naomi-Ruth Story within the African Religio-Cultural Context,” *ATS* 24 (2016): 84–96. As Masenya states concerning the South African context, “This context also shares a world view that is in many respects similar to that found in the Old Testament.” (“Between Unjust Suffering and the ‘Silent’ God: Job and HIV/AIDS Sufferers in South Africa,” *Missionalia* 29/2 (2001): 186); cf. also “Ngwetši (Bride): The Naomi-Ruth Story from an African-South African Woman’s Perspective,” *JFSR* 14/2 (1998): 88 and “Wisdom Meets Wisdom,” 16. This parallelism of the two contexts is elaborated very clearly in the article, “In the Ant’s School of Wisdom: A Holistic African-South African Reading of Proverbs 6:6-11,” *OTE* 28/2 (2015): 421–432.

The *Bosadi* (womanhood) methodology allows one to navigate between the contexts of the production of biblical texts and present day African-South African women bible readers.<sup>47</sup>

This is not only about a comparative analysis of the two contexts—the biblical context and the context of South African women—but both cultures, both contexts, are critically examined and not only in terms of gender concerns. “It also includes issues of class, woman-as-strange’ and ‘Africans-as-strange’ in their own territory.”<sup>48</sup>

In order to elaborate on the biblical context, Masenya deliberately employs the methodology of the historical-critical method, specifically literary criticism, tradition history or form criticism. In doing so, she aims to liberate herself from “the dogmatic framework in which the Bible was interpreted in the past.”<sup>49</sup>

In doing so, Masenya asserts that the reader himself always makes an essential contribution to the understanding of the biblical text.<sup>50</sup> In her research on Prov 31:10-31, she writes:

As I read the text in my own context, imagination, perceptions and images of an ideal woman shaped by my context as an African woman scholar, make me form a story about what ideal womanhood is and should be. Such a story ... created in my mind ... makes me derive sense out of ... an ancient as well as a strange text. My reading [sic!]

<sup>47</sup> Madipoane Masenya, “Seeking Security through Marriage: Ruth 1:6-18 Placed Under an African Woman’s HIV and AIDS Lens,” *JCT* 13/2 (2007): 57.

<sup>48</sup> Masenya, “An African Methodology,” 745. Masenya strongly criticises the fact that even in the post-apartheid society, “the South African economy still remains basically in the hands of the historical winners while poverty continues to carry a black feminine face [this; HGW] reveals some of the factors which continue to estrange African-South African women on own territory ... In fact irrespective of how educated an African woman can be, entrenched patriarchal world views continue to make life difficult for her” (“Ruminating on Justin S. Ukpong’s Inculturation Hermeneutics and Its Implications for the Study of African Biblical Hermeneutics Today,” *HTS* 72/1 (2016): 2).

<sup>49</sup> Masenya, “Proverbs 31:10-31,” 22.

<sup>50</sup> In her article, Madiopane Masenya, “Parental Instruction in Differing Contexts: Using Hermeneutical Phenomenology to Understand Selected Biblical and African Proverbs,” *OTE* 23/3 (2010): 728–751, Masenya elaborates on this idea by using the concept of Hermeneutical Phenomenology. She writes: “Readers’ subjectivity is always present when they interpret texts and/or life expressions.” (728). Masenya explicitly emphasises that this also applies to scholarly work with the biblical text. The life experiences of the scholar should be taken into account when doing theology (“What Now of the Proverbial Sage and Qoheleth? Casting a Wisdom Gaze over South Africa, Post-Independence,” *JTSA* (2015): 153).

in turn makes me come up with a new story about the old text. In this way, I rewrite my own text and the latter becomes meaningful to me.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, by taking the two contexts seriously and integrating them into the conversation,<sup>52</sup> Masenya aims to avoid reading the biblical text with a one-sided agenda or imposing one's own ideas and pre-conceptions onto it:

A *Bosadi* critical perspective, which sets great store by the liberation of women, in particular African women, may succumb to inserting/reading women's wishes or desires into the text. A critical analysis of the reader's context thus, may help alleviate such an eisegesis. As a way of curbing the latter, a *Bosadi* concept will include the reconstruction of a socio-cultural setting of the text studied ...<sup>53</sup>

Thus, both the experiences of women<sup>54</sup> and the authority of the Bible should "be taken into account in our hermeneutical efforts."<sup>55</sup> The Bible holds authority as it "contains the words of life capable of addressing my experiences as an African woman in South Africa."<sup>56</sup> However, this only applies to texts that

<sup>51</sup> Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10–31," 11.

<sup>52</sup> As Madipoane Masenya does in many articles, see for example her articles, "Reading Hegemonic Masculinities in 2 Samuel 11 in the South African Contexts," *STJ* 5/3 (2019): 399–419, "Towards an MIT-Conscious Biblical Studies in South Africa? Glimpsing the Stories of Absent Husbands and Waiting Wives," *OTE* 30/2 (2017): 384–402 or "Hearing Jeremiah's Confessions in Light of the Metaphor of the 'Silent' Sheep: Reflections through the African Lore," *OTE* 31/3 (2018): 705–718. In her article, "Engaging with the Book of Ruth as Single, African Christian Women: One African Woman's Reflection," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34/1 (2013): 1–9, she first presents a retelling of the biblical story from a South-African woman's perspective and then shows, how different single African women reacted to this story of Ruth and how they related this story to their being single.

<sup>53</sup> Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10–31," 12.

<sup>54</sup> Masenya, "The Bible and Women," 189, speaks about a "trilogy of oppression," Black women experience in South Africa, consisting of sexism, racism and classism (192; cf. also "Kgarebe (Virgin) and Carnal Knowledge," 2). Already in one of her first articles she names these threefold oppression ("Freedom in Bondage," 36–39) and then adds the family with its patriarchal setting (39–40) and the Church with its male domination (40–42) as further aspects that reinforce this oppression.

<sup>55</sup> Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10–31," 212.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Masenya considers how the authority of the Bible relates to the authority of women's experiences in her article "Biblical Authority and the Authority of Women's Experiences: Whither Way?" *Scriptura* 70 (1999): 229–240. In "The Sword that Heals! The Bible and African Women in African-South African Pentecostal Churches," *JCT* 10/1 (2004): 29–40, she discusses, "how the use of the bible [sic!] in South African Pentecostal Churches can provide women with a liberating/positive interpretive model for being Church." (31). She asks, how the metaphor of the Bible as Sword can "be used positively for the purpose of healing rather than wounding." (33).

have a life-affirming and liberating effect. According to Masenya, the Bible has “both oppressive and liberative elements.”<sup>57</sup>

In the description of the *Bosadi* approach in Masenya's thesis, it is evident already that while it is strongly rooted in the female perspective of a woman from the Northern Sotho cultural sphere, this approach also encompasses a much wider perspective:

A *Bosadi* critical approach recognises the worth and equality of both males and females. It also acknowledges the differences between the two sexes. Each of these sexes has its own limitations and strengths ... Therefore both male and female should strive to exercise *ubuntu/botho*, which literally means 'being human'.<sup>58</sup>

The term *ubuntu* describes fundamental aspects of being human, a “fundamental respect for human nature as a whole.” This state of being “human” (*ubuntu*) is characterised by values as “justice, respect for the person and property, tolerance, compassion and sensitivity to the aged, the physically challenged and the less privileged, reliability, et cetera.”<sup>59</sup> The sense of belonging is encapsulated in the well-known dictum, “I am because we are,” which reflects the

<sup>57</sup> Masenya, “Proverbs 31:10–31,” 212. For example, in her study of the book of Ruth, Masenya argues that, on one hand, this book has the potential to liberate women by portraying a strong and proactive woman. On the other hand, it could also reinforce the notion that the “basic determinant of worthy (ideal) womanhood in African cultures is a woman's capacity to be a wife (whether in a monogamous or polygynous marriage relationship) and a mother” (“Is Ruth the *‘Ēšet Ḥayil* for Real? An Exploration of Womanhood from African Proverbs to the Threshing Floor (Ruth 3:1–13),” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 36 (2010): 262); cf. also “The Bible, HIV/AIDS and African-South African Women: A *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Perspective,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXI/1 (2005): 196. She maintains her view in another article on the role of women in the post-exilic period (“The Dissolution of the Monarchy, the Collapse of the Temple and the ‘Elevation’ of Women in the Post-Exilic Period: Any Relevance for African Women’s Theology?” *OTE* 26/1 (2013): 137–153) and in her different articles on Proverbs (especially Prov 31). See for example “Tamed Identities? Glimpsing Her Identity in Proverbs 10:1–22:16 and Selected African Proverbs,” *HTS* 74/1 (2018): 4–5), the article on Vashti in the book of Esther, “‘A Small Herb Increases Itself (Makes Impact) by a Strong Odour’: Re-imagining Vashti in an African South African Context,” *OTE* 16/2 (2003): 341–342); “African Biblical Hermeneutics,” 3; “Killed by AIDS and Buried by Religion: African Female Bodies in Crisis,” *OTE* 19/2 (2006): 486 or the article on Ps 1, “Amidst Tongues Tearing Apart and Lying Lips, God of and for the Oppressed: Casting an African Gaze at Psalm 12,” *STJ* 2/2 (2016): 365–380. In “Female and Royal Humanity? One African Woman’s Meditation on Psalm 8,” *OTE* 27/2 (2014): 489–501, Masenya also uses Ps 8 to criticise the inequities present in her Sotho culture.

<sup>58</sup> Masenya, “Proverbs 31:10–31,” 3. Cf. also “Redefining Ourselves,” 442–446 and “Without a Voice, with a Violated Body: Re-reading Judges 19 to Challenge Gender Violence in Sacred Texts,” *Missionalia* 40/3 (2012): 205–216.

<sup>59</sup> Masenya, “Proverbs 31:10–31,” 157.

"communal/corporeal mentality of Africans"<sup>60</sup> and serves as a contrast to the individualism often recognisable among Western feminists. "Such a communality ... implies that the struggle for the liberation of African women should be a joint effort by both men and women ... for ... if a part of humanity is oppressed, all of humanity is oppressed."<sup>61</sup>

The same idea of belonging together also applies to the relationship between Western and African/South African approaches to theology. While Masenya critiques the dominance of individualistic Western theology, she does not seek to abolish Western theology as a whole. Rather, she aims to engage it in dialogue with the more communally oriented theology of Africa/South Africa:

As we keep the healthy tension between the 'individual' and the 'communal', we would be reminded that both the Western-oriented and African-oriented approaches have a role to play in our current context. The positive aspects of the cultures of Africa and those of the West can be engaged and realised, whilst in the interest of redress and restitution, African and other approaches which we have marginalised, will need to be given greater prominence.<sup>62</sup>

One could criticise the *Bosadi* approach for narrowly focusing on a specific group—Northern Sotho women. In her dissertation, Masenya acknowledges that her approach is indeed group-focused: "... a reading in favour of a particular group of people; what we may call a partisan or a one-sided reading ... of the text," which some might view as "a subjective reading of the biblical text."<sup>63</sup>

Such a focus on a particular group might give the impression "that this group is more humane than others."<sup>64</sup> In particular, readers with a Westernised understanding might criticise the *Bosadi* approach as ethnically limited and local.<sup>65</sup> Masenya counters this criticism by saying: "... the *bosadi* concept was done not only with national and continental concerns in mind, but also with global concern!"<sup>66</sup> The criticism that the *Bosadi* approach is only relevant for a very specific group of people is therefore not justified. Masenya uses a concrete context to illustrate what a culturally relevant, transformational hermeneutic might look like. In her article on "Professor David Tuesday Adamo's Biblical Scholarship on Women," she writes: "Although the Northern Sotho African-South African context serves as a point of departure within the *Bosadi* framework,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Madipoane Masenya, "For Better or for Worse": The (Christian) Bible and African Women," *OTE* 22/1 (2009): 147. Cf. also "For Ever Trapped?" (2014): 200.

<sup>63</sup> Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10–31," 213.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>65</sup> Masenya, "An African Methodology," 746.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele)'s goal was to include other African-South African contexts.”<sup>67</sup>

We will return to this point later. For now, I wish to share my encounters with South African theology, particularly with Masenya and her *Bosadi* approach.

## **C MY LEARNING STEPS IN THE ENCOUNTER WITH SOUTH AFRICA AND ESPECIALLY PROF. MASENYA**

### **1 Personal origin**

“Worlds Coming Together” is the title of this article and that phrase encapsulates exactly what I experienced when I went to South Africa—first when I was there to initiate partnership with UNISA and subsequently when I began giving lectures and publishing articles. It was a new world for me, one that also opened up new perspectives. Allow me to elaborate.

I come from a conservative, evangelical<sup>68</sup> background. This means that I maintain a critical distance towards the historical-critical method. While I have utilised certain methodological aspects of the historical-critical method, such as textual criticism or the analysis of the Old Testament context and literary styles, I have always maintained the belief that the Bible is the Word of God, not merely containing or potentially becoming this Word. In Germany, this stance has resulted in my theology and that of many other lecturers and researchers from the evangelical camp not being widely accepted in academia. My theology has remained a niche perspective, often regarded with a degree of scepticism or overlooked altogether by university theology.

During my doctoral studies in the Netherlands, I encountered a different academic environment. I distinctly remember facing rigorous questioning about my interpretation of the Bible during my dissertation defence. However, I also recall how the professors were open to accepting my perspective, despite their differing views.

I experienced even stronger affirmation in South Africa where my theological position was not only noticed but taken seriously—an experience far beyond mere tolerance. This acceptance was particularly pronounced when I fo-

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<sup>67</sup> Madipoane Masenya, “Professor David Tuesday Adamo’s Biblical Scholarship on Women: Reflections from an African-South African *Mosadi*,” *OTE* 33/2 (2020): 350 fn5.

<sup>68</sup> I use this term although I am aware of the potential misunderstandings. According to my definition, “evangelical” refers to a personal practice of Christianity and an understanding of the Bible as the Word of God. This term is not to be misunderstood in a political sense, as is often the case in American evangelicalism.

cused more on the literary-scientific method, a shift that has also garnered attention in Germany in the last twenty years. This journey has profoundly enriched my theological development.

When reflecting on my experience, it becomes clear that South Africa offered a fertile ground for my academic journey. The acceptance of my perspectives was a result of several deliberate steps and strategic decisions. Firstly, embracing the literary-scientific method provided a scholarly framework that resonated both locally and internationally. This methodological approach emphasises the exploration of biblical texts through the lens of literary analysis and historical context, aiming to uncover deeper meanings and nuances that transcend traditional theological interpretations.

Furthermore, South Africa's academic community has a rich tapestry of perspectives and methodologies, embracing diversity and fostering robust intellectual discourse. Engaging with this vibrant academic environment allowed me to refine and articulate my theological positions with clarity and confidence. The willingness of colleagues and scholars to engage in dialogue, even with differing viewpoints, nurtured a spirit of mutual respect and intellectual curiosity.

I would not go as far as likening my development during these years to a transformation akin to horn surgeries. However, there were two significant stages of growth and learning that I experienced during this period. The first was primarily shaped by my engagement with the South African theological landscape itself, while the second was greatly influenced by my close interaction with Madipoane Masenya and other colleagues who have become friends over the years. I would like to briefly illustrate this with two articles that I wrote during this period.<sup>69</sup>

## **2 First learning step: Theology and context**

In an article published in 2015, based on a presentation at the OTSSA the previous year, titled, "Learning from African Theologians and their Hermeneutics:

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<sup>69</sup> It is not feasible within the scope of this article to detail extensively the specific insights I have gleaned from engaging with Madipoane Masenya and other South African theologians, as this would exceed its intended focus. Therefore, I explicitly refer to the two aforementioned articles where I have thoroughly articulated these insights.

Some Reflections from a German Evangelical Theologian,”<sup>70</sup> I aimed to articulate insights gained from South African theologians and their relevance for a broader audience.<sup>71</sup>

What struck me most about many South African theologians was their integration of “real life” issues into theology. In contrast to academic theology in Germany—and perhaps in Western culture more broadly—which often occurs in a kind of “ivory tower” with the practical implications for everyday church life or Christians considered in a secondary step of application (if at all), South African theology approaches things differently. In that context, the question of application is already deeply embedded within academic research itself.

The Catholic theologian Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator writes, “When we talk about African theology, we understand this to mean the ongoing attempt to make sense of the African reality in the light of Christian faith and revelation.”<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Gerald West views this strong emphasis on African reality and its significance for theological work as a fundamental element of African theology:

While Western forms of biblical interpretation have been reluctant, until recently, to acknowledge that text and context are always, at least implicitly, in conversation, the dialogical dimension of biblical interpretation has always been an explicit feature of African biblical hermeneutics ... Interpreting the biblical text is ... always about changing the African context.<sup>73</sup>

On African hermeneutics, Elisabeth Mburu also states that, “The text is always interpreted with application in mind. In other words: how does the text

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<sup>70</sup> Hans-Georg Wünc, “Learning from African Theologians and Their Hermeneutics: Some Reflections from a German Evangelical Theologian,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36/1 (2015): 1–9.

<sup>71</sup> I am aware that I am making a broad generalisation by using terms like “African theologians” or “Western theologians.” Unfortunately, this is unavoidable in the context of this topic. A comprehensive overview of the history and current state of theological education in Africa/South Africa can be found in the recently published book, Johannes J. Knoetze and Alfred R. Brundson, *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa: A South African Perspective* (Reformed Theology in Africa Series 7; Cape Town: AOSIS, 2021).

<sup>72</sup> Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, “Contextual Theological Methodologies,” in *African Theology on the Way: Current conversations* (ed. Diane B. Stinton; New York: SPCK, 2010), 4.

<sup>73</sup> Gerald West, “Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa,” in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (ed. Diane B. Stinton; New York: SPCK, 2010), 22.



speak to concrete, contextual realities being experienced by the African people"?<sup>74</sup>

Mburu attributes the greater emphasis on application and contextual reality to a stronger holistic view that characterises African thinking, despite the influence of Western educational paradigms in Africa:

In general, Africans tend to have a more holistic approach to life (even with the influence of Western education), which translates to the way they understand literature, the Bible included. This means that from the moment an African reader begins to interact with the text, he or she is already deriving meaning and significance or application simultaneously.<sup>75</sup>

I therefore concluded in my article: "In sum, this calls for more wholeness or unity of theology and life, academia and the church."<sup>76</sup> This experience gave me the courage to engage confidently in international academic settings and to integrate this aspect much more consciously and purposefully than before with my life as a Christian and my activities in the church.

### 3 Second learning step: The Bible and its reader

Already in that 2015 article, I emphasised the role of the reader in understanding the text. This leads me to the second significant insight that has become important to me—an understanding I particularly gleaned from conversations with Madipoane Masenya and many other colleagues from South Africa—the active role that the reader plays in reading and interpreting the Bible.

Stinton has likened the process of interpretation in an African context to a "palaver." She writes:

African palaver thus provides one image for understanding African theology, in terms of a serious conversation among believers who meditatively chew on the word of God in their respective contexts and offer an interpretation of its meaning and implications for communal consideration.<sup>77</sup>

In this way, the focus is strongly placed on the individual's understanding of the Bible text. As Orobator puts it: "Christian revelation may be closed, in the sense that Christ's revelation is valid for all times. Yet the way it is understood

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Mburu, "The Importance of African Hermeneutics in African Theological Education," in *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa* (ed. Johannes J. Knoetze and Alfred R. Brunson; Cape Town: AOSIS, 2021), 89.

<sup>75</sup> Mburu, "The Importance of African Hermeneutics," 96.

<sup>76</sup> Wünc, "Learning from African Theologians," 8.

<sup>77</sup> Diane B. Stinton, "Introduction," in *African Theology on the Way* (ed. Diane B. Stinton; New York: SPCK, 2010), xvii.

and appropriated reflects the evolving patterns of human life within a clearly defined context."<sup>78</sup>

Kwame Bediako states that biblical texts not only require skills and techniques of exegesis and hermeneutics. They are "also a context, in which modern Christians can share as illuminating of their own human experience."<sup>79</sup> Gerald West therefore speaks of a "dialogue to take place between text and context."<sup>80</sup>

It was Madipoane Masenya who, primarily, through her *Bosadi* approach, helped me grasp the significance of reading and understanding biblical texts from a particular perspective—in her case, "the perspective of the specific Northern-Sotho cultural sensibilities of womanhood."<sup>81</sup>

I published this perspective in an article titled "The Living Word of God: Doing Hermeneutics between Orthodoxy and Arbitrariness," which appeared in the *South African Baptist Journal of Theology* in 2016.<sup>82</sup> In this article, I sought to articulate my conviction that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, manifested in a form comprehensible to the reader within their specific context. The starting point of the article was the question:

Do these texts represent a truth, which stands "once and for all" (orthodoxy), so that the primary role of hermeneutics is to apply this truth to the questions of today? Or are they more or less "fluid" (arbitrariness), so that there is no inherent meaning of a text itself?<sup>83</sup>

My aim has been to navigate between these two extremes by thoughtfully integrating the fundamental aspects of a "reader-response" theology with my evangelical theology. This emphasis on the role of the reader is a theme I have encountered repeatedly in Masenya's works, and it was also evident in the paper she presented on Job at our seminary.

Here, too, I would like to reaffirm my conviction, as articulated in the article, with a quote:

<sup>78</sup> Orobator, "Contextual Theological Methodologies," 8.

<sup>79</sup> Kwame Bediako, "Biblical Exegesis in Africa: The Significance of the Translated Scriptures," in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (ed. Diane B. Stinton; New York: SPCK, 2010), 15.

<sup>80</sup> West, "Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa," 21. Cf. also Mburu, "The Importance of African Hermeneutics," 93.

<sup>81</sup> Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, "African Women's Theologies," in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations* (ed. Diane B. Stinton; New York: SPCK, 2010), 95.

<sup>82</sup> Wünc, Hans-Georg, "The Living Word of God: Doing Hermeneutics between Orthodoxy and Arbitrariness," *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 25 (2016): 157–173.

<sup>83</sup> Wünc, "The Living Word of God," 157.

Taken as a whole it should be clear that the questions of intertextuality and reader orientation are worth being also considered in evangelical hermeneutics. It is important not to understand the biblical text just as a one-and-for-all-time given meaning, which we can "decode" in a more or less objective way. Obviously, many personal, confessional, societal and ideological questions play an important role in exegesis.<sup>84</sup>

My own theological development has thus received numerous valuable insights from South African colleagues in recent years, particularly through my interactions with Madipoane Masenya and her *Bosadi* approach.

In a final step, I would like to pose three critical questions on the *Bosadi* approach and offer one suggestion. It is essential for me to emphasise that these questions are not meant as general criticism or rejection of her approach, as I greatly value and respect both Masenya and the *Bosadi* approach.

## D CRITICAL ENQUIRIES INTO THE *BOSADI* APPROACH

### 1 Truly free from Western theological thinking? (khM<sup>85</sup>)

I wonder whether Madipoane Masenya, despite her critical distance from Western theology, adheres to aspects of this theology in certain areas. This is particularly evident in her application of the historical-critical method. My impression is that the colonial influence of the missionaries is seen very clearly and rightly rejected but at the same time, the at-least equally strong influence of "Western" theology in the form of the historical-critical method is not sufficiently taken into account.<sup>86</sup>

I would like to illustrate with an example. In dating the book of Proverbs, Masenya posits that it was written during the post-exilic period, which she notes is "a general consensus among commentators."<sup>87</sup> However, she also suggests that Prov 31:10-31—the text she discusses in her dissertation—could potentially be "pre-exilic material."<sup>88</sup> Both proposed dates for the composition of the book are

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>85</sup> The term hkm means „Historisch-kritische Methode“, the historical critical methodology, which was developed in the 19th and early 20th century in Germany.

<sup>86</sup> I am aware that due to my personal development, as described above and my resulting distance from the historical-critical method, I am likely to be very sensitive to this question. However, it is evident that in recent years, the historical-critical method has increasingly been regarded as a remnant from the colonial era in theological discussions and is subject to critical scrutiny. Names such as Stefan Silber, *Postkoloniale Theologien: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: UTB, 2021) and Simon Wiesgickl, *Das Alte Testament als deutsche Kolonie: Die Neuerfindung des Alten Testaments um 1800* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018) are particularly worthy of mention here.

<sup>87</sup> Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10–31," 87.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 92.

speculative in nature. Arguments supporting a post-exilic dating typically focus on the content of the text rather than external evidence. Conversely, some Old Testament scholars argue for the book's composition during the latter part of the monarchy or even earlier.<sup>89</sup>

I am not particularly focused on the question of dating the book of Proverbs here. I acknowledge that a post-exilic composition is plausible. My concern is whether we should draw historical and cultural conclusions based on a dating that is highly debated. Would these interpretations not change if a different dating were proven correct? Perhaps it would be more prudent then to begin with the concept of the "implied reader," as Masenya also emphasises in principle.<sup>90</sup>

## 2 A question of scale

Another question that arises for me concerns the standard for truth. On one hand, Masenya emphasises the danger of imposing one's own ideas onto the text. She poses the question: "According to this approach, what should be deemed as significant in our hermeneutical endeavours? The biblical text or the experience of African (Northern Sotho) women suffering under kyriarchal<sup>91</sup> South Africa"?<sup>92</sup> In this context, she asks the interpreter to take the text itself seriously and to listen to uncomfortable texts:

I therefore, [sic!] suggest that, in order to reduce the biases that we might bring into the text as we approach it from a woman's liberation perspective, including the *Bosadi* perspective, it might be worthwhile for us to take seriously the context of the text as well.<sup>93</sup>

Nevertheless, she employs the ideals of a *Bosadi* woman to determine which texts are relevant to her and which are not as well as which texts carry authority and which do not. Regarding a specific text, she writes:

If it fails to address my experiences in a life-giving way; if I find that it proclaims death instead of life, oppression instead of liberation, I then question the authority of such sections for my life as a *mosadi*. I

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. William S. LaSor, David A. Hubbard, and Frederic W. Bush, eds., *Das Alte Testament: Entstehung - Geschichte - Botschaft*. 4., durchges. und erw. Aufl. Giessen: Brunnen (2000), 650.

<sup>90</sup> Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10-31," 15.

<sup>91</sup> Masenya prefers "the term kyriarchy (domination by the master or lord) to patriarchy (domination by the father), as the former includes several forms of oppression, such as racism, classism and sexism, while patriarchy basically focuses on sexism ..."; "Proverbs 31:10-31 in a South African Context: A Reading for the Liberation of African (Northern Sotho) Women," *Semeia* 78 (1997): 57.

<sup>92</sup> Masenya, "Proverbs 31:10-31," 211.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

challenge and resist such passages as being against the life-giving nature of the God and the Christ proclaimed by the Bible.<sup>94</sup>

How can I simultaneously take the text and its context seriously, yet also decide that a particular text should be resisted? I do not have a ready answer to this but I recognise it as a tension that requires further exploration. This tension is of importance to me as an evangelical theologian.

### 3 A question of hermeneutics

This brings me to my third critical observation. It seems to me that the particularities of proverbs may not always have been adequately considered. After all, a proverb is by definition a generalisation. Proverbs do not specify or define precisely; rather, they generalise from everyday situations. I believe that sometimes in the past, insufficient attention has been paid to this aspect.

Unfortunately, in my evangelical environment, for example, there are exegetes who interpret passages like Prov 13:24 ("He who spares the rod hates his son") as divine instruction to use corporal punishment in child-rearing. This interpretation completely overlooks the nature of Proverbs. I am convinced that this verse is not meant to prescribe a specific method of education but rather to emphasise consistency in parenting. It appears to me that some texts advocating "death instead of life" may have been misinterpreted and misapplied. More thorough investigation and reflection are needed in this regard as well. Finally, I would like to propose a suggestion of my own.

### 4 What might be missing

Several times in her writings, Masenya suggests that the *Bosadi* approach might also hold relevance for other cultures, as well as for men, white people, and other theologians.<sup>95</sup> I fully agree with this observation. While it may not be Masenya's primary responsibility, I believe she would certainly be supportive of corresponding efforts in an advisory capacity. To me, this appears to be a valuable undertaking for the future of theology, not only in but beyond South Africa. I also opine that it would be beneficial for Western theology to more deeply engage with the *Bosadi* approach.

## E SUMMARY APPRAISAL

"Worlds coming together" often results in these worlds clashing or at least not respecting each other. Western theology, in particular, has typically conveyed the impression that it is more significant, more academic or simply superior to

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Masenya, "For Better or for Worse," 148; "An African Methodology," 746; "For Ever Trapped?" 200; "Professor David Tuesday Adamo's," 350, fn 5.

theologies from other regions. Unfortunately, this has also often been the case in relation to South Africa.

I believe it is time for a new perspective. We should engage in dialogue and seek to learn from rather than look down on one another. I am convinced that German theology can gain much from South African theology. Personally, I have experienced this enrichment in my own journey. Looking ahead, I aspire to always prioritise listening, to genuinely consider other perspectives and to reflect on how my own beliefs can be challenged, critiqued, and ultimately enriched through such interactions.

Many thanks to Prof. Masenya for the countless hours we spent together, for the enriching conversations, exchanges and the numerous papers and articles I had the privilege to read. I am also grateful to all my other colleagues for what I have learned through the interaction between our respective worlds.

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<sup>96</sup> Masenya uses different variants of her first name: Joyce, Madipoane, Joyce Madipoane, or J. Madipoane. The reasons for these variations are explained in the article itself. Additionally, in many articles, the notation "Ngwana' Mphalele" appears in parentheses after her name. In this bibliography, all these different variants may be consolidated under "Masenya, Madipoane."

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