

Sub-Saharan Reception of Masenya’s *Bosadi* Approach

JORUNN BJERGA (VID SPECIALIZED UNIVERSITY) AND KNUT HOLTER
(NLA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE)

ABSTRACT

Madipoane Masenya’s search for an interpretive approach that would enable her to read Proverbs and eventually other parts of the Hebrew Bible from an African-South African woman’s perspective led her to develop what she calls a bosadi approach to biblical texts. The article considers the reception of Masenya’s bosadi approach in other sub-Saharan contexts, analysing five scholars who have been inspired by Masenya to do similar studies. The question that is raised is how a consciously contextual approach like bosadi is re-contextualised into other Sub-Saharan contexts than the original Northern Sotho/African-South African one: Kondemo (DRC), Mudimeli (Vhavenda, South Africa), Ramaribana (Botswana), Mbowe (Maasai, Tanzania) and Wee (Madagascar).

KEYWORDS: Bible, *Bosadi*, Feminism, Masenya, Reception, Sotho, Sub-Saharan Africa

A INTRODUCTION

Professor Madipoane Masenya (Ngwana’ Mphahlele) is known particularly for developing an interpretive approach to Proverbs and eventually other parts of the Hebrew Bible from an African-South African or more specifically a Northern Sotho Woman’s perspective. It is called the *bosadi* (“womanhood”) approach.¹

* Jorunn Bjerga, Faculty of Theology and Social Sciences, VID Specialized University, Stavanger, Norway. Email: jorunnbjerga@hotmail.com. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5555-4481>.

Knut Holter, Department of Teacher Education, NLA University College, Bergen, Norway. Email: knut.holter@nla.no. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6467-3325>.

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It is a great privilege to dedicate this article to Professor Madipoane Masenya (Ngwana’ Mphahlele) as a token of gratitude for who she is and for the insights she has shared with the global community of critical biblical studies.

¹ See Madipoane Masenya, *How Worthy Is the Woman of Worth? Rereading Proverbs 31:10–31 in African-South Africa*. Bible and Theology in Africa, 4 (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

This article examines the reception of Masenya’s *bosadi* approach in other Sub-Saharan African contexts, analysing the research of five studies that were explicitly inspired by Masenya and asking how the five researchers conceptualise a consciously contextual approach like *bosadi* to be re-contextualised into their respective religio- and socio-cultural contexts.²

Masenya’s *bosadi* approach is thoroughly analysed in other articles of this issue of *Old Testament Essays*,³ which is a Festschrift in honour of Masenya. The issue serves to strengthen the scholarly attention that her *bosadi* approach has already received.⁴ As for the present contribution to “*Masenyanana*” studies, let us start with two clarifying remarks. First, we are convinced that Masenya’s interpretive concerns catch important aspects of the encounter between biblical texts and the interpretive resources of Northern Sotho women. However, it seems that similar aspects may be found elsewhere as well. This is why we aim to map and interpret some of the potentials of Masenya’s concerns beyond her Northern Sotho context. Second, for pragmatic reasons, we use the term “approach” to categorise Masenya’s contribution as this is the term she mostly uses. We have considered terms like “model” (which she does not use) and “concept” (which she uses occasionally),⁵ but we have ended up following what seems to be Masenya’s preferred term, “the *bosadi* approach.”

B SUB-SAHARAN RECEPTION

Several scholars operating at the interface of African biblical studies and African feminist studies have dialogued with Masenya over the last two decades, such as

² The article builds on Jorunn Bjerga, “Recontextualizing *Bosadi*: A Critical Study of Sub-Saharan African Receptions of Masenya’s *Bosadi* Approach to the Old Testament” (Unpublished M.Th thesis, VID Specialized University, 2023). The research was supervised by Professor Knut Holter.

³ See especially Kjersti Wee and Marta Høyland Lavik, “Beyond Feminist and Womanist Hermeneutics: Some Critical Remarks on the *Bosadi* Approach of Madipoane Masenya (Ngwan’a Mphahlele),” *OTE* 38/2 (2025): 1–17; Palesa Nqambaza, “*Mosadi ke Motho*: Masenya’s Contribution to Indigenous Gender Theorisation,” *OTE* 38/2 (2025): 1–20; Hans-Georg Wunsch, “Worlds Coming Together: What a White Male German Evangelical Learned from a Black Female South-African *Bosadi* Scholar,” *OTE* 38/2 (2025): 1–25.

⁴ Amongst the most recent studies that dialogue with Masenya and her *bosadi* approach, see Lerato Mokoena, “Bosadi Theology of Masenya Madipoane (Ngwana’ Mphahlele),” in *Nehanda: Women’s Theologies of Liberation in Southern Africa*. (Circle Jubilee Vol. 3; ed. Nelly Mwale et al; Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2024), 85–96; Victor M.S. Molobi and Abraham Modisa Mkhondo Mzondi, “African Motherhood and *Bosadi* (Womanhood) among Pentecostals and Evangelicals: A Mohlakeng Perspective since the 1980s,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 48/3 (2022): 1–14.

⁵ Madipoane Masenya Joyce, “An African Methodology for South African Biblical Sciences: Revisiting the *Bosadi* (Womanhood) Approach,” *OTE* 18/3 (2005): 745.

Sarojini Nadar,⁶ Musa W. Dube,⁷ Elivered Nasambu-Mulongo⁸ and Beverley Haddad.⁹ However, the present article will not go into details about these dialogues and their discourses. Rather, it will concentrate on five cases in which next-generation (compared to Masenya) scholars have been inspired in various ways by Masenya and her *bosadi* approach and have produced similar thesis or monograph-level studies outside her Northern Sotho context. We will present the five cases chronologically, keeping in mind our research question: How did the five scholars re-contextualise a conscious contextual approach like *bosadi* into their respective religio- and socio-cultural contexts?

1 Marthe Maleke Kondemo in a DR Congo context

Dr. Marthe Maleke Kondemo is currently teaching at Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Mbandaka and Université Protestante au Congo, both in the DR Congo. She also serves as a pastor of the Église du Christ au Congo and is the Circle Country Coordinator the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians for the DR Congo. Kondemo employs Masenya's *bosadi* approach in her Master's and D.Th. theses (University of South Africa, both supervised by Masenya). In the former, she reads the book of Ruth and in the latter the book of Esther, both from the perspectives of Congolese women and more specifically women of the Mongo ethnic group.¹⁰

⁶ Sarojini Nadar, "Changing the World: The Task of Feminist Biblical Scholars," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25/2 (2009): 142.

⁷ Musa W. Dube, "Talitha Cum Hermeneutics: Some African Women's Ways of Reading the Bible," in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations* (ed. Musa W. Dube, Andrew Mbuvi, and Dora R. Mbuwayesango; Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 39–40.

⁸ Elivered Nasambu-Mulongo, "Bosadi: Madipoane (Ngwana' Mphahlele) Masenya's Contribution to African Women's Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations* (ed. Musa W. Dube, Andrew Mbuvi, and Dora R. Mbuwayesango. Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 43–61.

⁹ Beverley Haddad, "The South African Women's Theological Project: Practices of Solidarity and Degrees of Separation in the Context of the HIV Epidemic," *Religion & Theology* 20 (2013): 7–8.

¹⁰ Marthe Maleke Kondemo, "Women's Security through Heterosexual Marriage in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: An African Woman's Reading of the Book of Ruth" (Unpublished M.Th thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2011); Marthe Maleke Kondemo, "In Search of Affirming Identities and Role Models: A Gender-Sensitive Re-reading of the Vashti and Esther Characters in the Book of Esther among the Mongo of the Democratic Republic of the Congo" (Unpublished D.Th thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2015). See also Marthe Maleke Kondemo, "What Now of the Vashti Character in the Hebrew Bible? Ruminating on the Future of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians among Emerging Scholars in [the] Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37/2 (2016): a1588.

Kondemo argues that Mongo women are far behind when it comes to equal rights and representation. They remain bound to the patriarchal norms that define them both in private and public spheres and their roles are defined socially and culturally by men. The culture is marked by various practices that dehumanise women such as taboos that guide food, relationships, widowhood rites, child betrothals and early marriages, domestic and cultural violence and female genital mutilation. Thus, through several cultural practices, women are silenced and prevented from claiming their rights and living a dignified life.¹¹ Kondemo makes it clear that she builds on Masenya’s *bosadi* approach:

Given the above African women approaches in relation to the aim of this study, I will appropriate the *bosadi* (womanhood) approach developed by the African-South African biblical scholar Madipoane Masenya (ngwan’a Mphahlele) as the main methodology for re-reading the Esther story in the Hebrew Bible (Masenya (ngwana’ Mphahlele) 2003:9–12). My appropriation of the above approach is due to the apparent similarities between the terms *bosadi* (Northern Sotho) and *bomwasi* in the Mongo language.¹²

In the case of the book of Ruth, Kondemo considers how Ruth seeks to find favour in the field and how Naomi instructs her to make herself clean and beautiful before lying at Boas’ feet at night. The intention was to find a kinsman for Ruth to marry so that she could be secure. In the Mongo society, heterosexual marriage is a highly regarded institution that is viewed as contributing significantly to the true identities of women. Kondemo finds inspiration in Masenya’s *bosadi* approach and applies her terminology such as “idolization of marriage” and “marriage at all costs” as springboards to reread the story of Ruth in light of the experiences of Congolese women who tend to regard marriage as a norm. Kondemo argues that, in some sense, Ruth can be emulated in terms of her sense of independence. However, in terms of her commitment to seeking marriage at all costs, she cannot be a helpful model to many poor Mongo women who today are trapped in poverty and who continue to regard heterosexual marriage as the norm in their search for survival, security and value.¹³

Regarding the book of Esther, Kondemo considers how members of the Jewish diaspora negotiate intrigues in the Persian Empire. The key figure is Esther, who finds favour with the king, replaces the disobedient Queen Vashti and risks her life to save the Jewish people from destruction when the court official Haman persuades the king to authorise the killing of all the Jews of the empire. Kondemo investigates how the Esther and Vashti characters are read and

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v37i2.1588>; Marthe Maleke Kondemo, “Role Models for Mongo Women: A *Bosadi* Reading of Vashti and Esther” *OTE* 34/2 (2021): 554–572.

¹¹ Kondemo, “Role Models,” 554–557.

¹² Kondemo, “In Search of Affirming Identities,” 10.

¹³ Kondemo, “Women’s Security,” iii.

interpreted in the Mongo context, asking which reading emerges if the *bosadi* approach is employed in one's engagement with the two characters. She considers how Mongo women can be enriched by the stories of these two women in their search for new roles and identities, that is, how they can identify with the two characters and what message both characters convey to women that could either promote their liberation or aggravate their actual situations.¹⁴

Kondemo looks for both liberating and oppressive elements in the texts, in the context of the text and in the context of the reader. She makes a thorough analysis, showing how the texts can be both liberating and oppressive and how these liberating and oppressive elements can be reinforced from the perspective of the reader's contexts and experiences. Kondemo argues that the situation of Mongo women when it comes to security within marriage, sexual relations, expectations and demands from men in the society from a very young age, challenges today's theologians and preachers of the biblical texts to be aware of how these texts can be interpreted, understood and received by a Mongo woman. Kondemo's studies show that it is possible to use the *bosadi* approach by a Congolese woman theologian, amongst a people and a culture she knows well and in the country where she was born and raised.¹⁵

2 Lufuluvhi Maria Mudimeli in a Vhavenda/South Africa context

Dr. Lufuluvhi Maria Mudimeli is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Human Sciences at the University of Venda, South Africa, where she teaches Systematic Theology. In her 2011 D.Th thesis (University of South Africa, supervised by Christina Landman and Masenya), she holds that culture and religion have both healthy and unhealthy effects on the leadership development of women in Africa.¹⁶ Based on fieldwork in Vhavenda Pentecostal contexts and with biblical and Vhavenda cultural discourses as interpretive resources, she studies the lives and experiences of women leaders.

Mudimeli claims that Vhavenda Christian (especially Pentecostal) women are denied of or restricted from leadership roles in the church even today because of the impact of cultural and religious discourses on Venda society.¹⁷ Against this, she develops an interpretive approach which she calls a *vhusadzi*

¹⁴ Kondemo, "In Search of Affirming Identities," 14–16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 8–13.

¹⁶ Lufuluvhi Maria Mudimeli, "The Impact of Religious and Cultural Discourses on the Leadership Development of Women in the Ministry: A *Vhusadzi* (Womanhood) Perspective" (Unpublished D.Th thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2011). See also Lufuluvhi Maria Mudimeli, "The Voices and Experiences of Vhavenda Women in the Pentecostal Churches in Thohoyandou," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 47/2 (2021): 1–15; Lufuluvhi Maria Mudimeli and Christina Landman, "The *Vhusadzi* Theology of Ministry," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* Supplement 40 (2014): 269–283.

¹⁷ Mudimeli, "The Impact of Religious and Cultural," 9.

("womanhood") approach, aiming to give Pentecostal women (amongst others) tools to fight oppression. The *vhusadzi* approach is informed by Masenya and is close to her *bosadi* approach; the term itself corresponds to *bosadi*. Mudimeli points out that Masenya's decision to use Northern Sotho proverbs that portray both negative and positive elements regarding women reveals how women are viewed and treated in their relationships with men. Therefore, she argues:

Masenya's *bosadi* approach gives a voice to women who are Bible readers, and whose lives are shaped by different interpretations of the Bible. With this voice, women can construct alternative discourses by shifting these oppressive discourses.¹⁸

The *bosadi* approach challenges patriarchy, race, gender and classism and of particular importance to Mudimeli is that the *bosadi* approach challenges biblical texts that have been used to oppress women whilst at the same time elevates liberating texts. Mudimeli has a stronger focus on women's leadership roles in the church than Masenya has; her *vhusadzi* approach offers the Venda Christian woman tools for deconstructing the faces of both cultural and religious discourses that are harmful to women's lives.¹⁹

3 Felicia Ramaribana in a Botswana context

Rev. Felicia Ramaribana is based in Botswana, where she works as the School Chaplain of Maun Secondary School. Her 2012 M.Th degree (University of KwaZulu-Natal, supervised by Helen Efthimiadis-Keith) offers a *bosadi* reading of the book of Ruth in relation to poor rural women.²⁰

Ramaribana's reading of Ruth emphasises socio-economic perspectives. Ruth tells the story of two women, Naomi and Ruth, who have lost their husbands and are left without children. As for the patriarchal cultures and customs of the time, this situation leaves them economically disempowered.²¹ Ramaribana argues that the book details how Ruth and Naomi—two rural widows—overcame the patriarchal constraints of their society to secure a continued living. She therefore finds it appropriate to probe the book of Ruth for strategies that may ultimately empower poor, rural, Botswana women to achieve greater socio-economic agency. In her view, a social-deconstructive analysis of Ruth would be best suited for such a task²² and she finds tools in Masenya's *bosadi* approach:

¹⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Felicia Ramaribana, "Reading Ruth for the Sake of Poor Rural Women: A *Bosadi* Womanhood Approach" (Unpublished M.Th thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2012).

²¹ Ramaribana, "Reading Ruth for the Sake," 4.

²² Ibid., 4.

While Masenya limits her approach to the South African context, I find it equally applicable to the Botswana context as Northern Sotho traditional norms and values are closely linked with those of the Batswana. For example, as I have indicated above, certain aspects of traditional Tswana culture are oppressive for women, curtailing their socio-economic agency. Using *bosadi* as a theoretical framework will enable me to critique various patriarchally motivated socio-economic aspects of Tswana culture and ancient Israel which portray women as sub-human.²³

According to Ramaribana, rural women in Botswana are generally poor and suffer from economic marginalisation. For example, because women are traditionally confined to the domestic sphere, they do not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts to improve their economic status and therefore their living conditions.²⁴ Very few rural women can obtain land, even though most of them depend on subsistence farming. The reasons for this are varied, but include illiteracy and the absence of those to negotiate on behalf of the women.²⁵

Ramaribana uses Masenya's *bosadi* approach as a framework. It gives her the motivation, perspective and solid arguments for the historical analysis and deconstruction of the biblical text. She finds the *bosadi* approach appealing in that it does not only reread the texts through the lens of the marginalised African woman's experiences but it also challenges ideologies of poverty/classism, sexism and ethnicity, as they appear in the text. She argues that the *bosadi* approach does not offer in itself socio-economic contributions, but a socio-historical analysis, a reading of different biblical and ancient texts and African women theologians' commentaries on the text.²⁶

4 Hoyce Jacob Lyimo-Mbowe in a Maasai/Tanzania context

Dr. Hoyce Jacob Lyimo-Mbowe is from Tanzania but is currently working in Zambia as a Professor of Biblical Studies and an Executive Director of Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe. Lyimo-Mbowe holds a PhD in Old Testament studies from the University of Bonn, Germany (2013)²⁷ and in 2015–2017, she was a Postdoctoral Researcher in a program on the encounter between the Maasai and the Old Testament (VID Specialized University, Norway, supervised by Knut Holter). In her postdoctoral research on Maasai women and the Old

²³ Ibid., 6.

²⁴ Ibid., 1–2.

²⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁷ Hoyce Lyimo-Mbowe, *Feminist Expositions of the Old Testament in Africa (Tanzania) in the Context of the Office Held by Deborah in Judges 4 and 5* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2015).

Testament, she makes Masenya’s *bosadi* approach a major theoretical dialogue partner.²⁸

According to Lyimo-Mbowe, most research work on the Maasai affirms that in the traditional Maasai family structure, women are quite powerless and under the authority of men. The husband is the head of both the family and homestead; he is known and recognised as the legitimate owner of his homestead, family members (including their wives) and livestock.²⁹

The Maasai embrace of Christianity has only improved the situation of women living in traditional contexts to some extent, as traditional androcentric interpretations of the Bible tend to dominate preaching and teaching.³⁰ Against this, Lyimo-Mbowe develops what she calls the *enkitok* approach. The term is a singular noun with a double meaning, “woman”/“wife” or “honorable one.” The influence of Masenya’s strategy of balancing inculturation and liberation perspectives is clear: “Knowing that African culture has positive and negative attitudes towards gender, Masenya clarifies that the *bosadi* approach also deals with the negative side of African culture... based on the *bosadi* approach, I developed the *enkitok* approach.”³¹

Even though the *enkitok* approach is strongly influenced by Masenya’s *bosadi* approach, there are some differences. Lyimo-Mbowe notes that, “The South African context stresses the experiences of apartheid and is derived from post-apartheid South Africa... and is different from that of the East African context where this research is located.”³²

With the *enkitok* approach in her toolbox, Lyimo-Mbowe reads a series of four Old Testament texts (Gen 1:27; 1 Sam 1; Exod 21:10–11; Deut 21:15–17) together with her female Maasai research associates, offering alternative narratives and concepts to those that use biblical texts to legitimise a continuation of oppression of women.³³ This is a reading that echoes that of Masenya, though it lacks the latter’s experiences of the kind of oppression that reflects an apartheid past that continues in some forms into the present.

²⁸ Hoyce Lyimo-Mbowe, *Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading* (Bible and Theology in Africa 29; New York: Peter Lang, 2020).

²⁹ Lyimo-Mbowe, *Maasai Women*, 17–25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25–51.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

³² *Ibid.*, 72.

³³ *Ibid.*, 96–206.

5 Kjersti Wee in a Madagascar context

Dr. Kjersti Wee (Norway) defended her Ph.D thesis earlier this year 2025, supervised by Knut Holter and Marta Høyland Lavik, VID Specialized University, Norway. Her project analyses how a group of so-called “ordinary readers” of the Bible—all female and all from the same city in the highlands of Madagascar—read the text about the good wife in Prov 31:10–31.³⁴ The fact that Wee selected the same text that Masenya used in her 2004 monograph on the *bosadi* approach reflects a clear influence of Masenya. However, Wee is reluctant to use Masenya’s *bosadi* approach in its entirety (Wee uses the term “model”) since her methodology is different from that of Masenya:

In my project, I am using the *bosadi* model in a way that slightly differs from Masenya. I define my research participants as grassroots women, and ordinary readers without a higher education in theology. However, since my research is based on empirical material rather than an active use of local proverbs, as in *bosadi*, my analysis will be closely tied to the citations and experiences of my research participants. I will use the *bosadi* model as a framework to structure my analysis, categorising it similarly to Masenya’s model, which focuses on women’s experiences as mothers and wives.³⁵

Despite using a different methodology, the interpretive results seem to correspond with Masenya’s findings. In her empirical material, Wee observes many of the same points that Masenya has highlighted. Most of the informants use the Prov 31 text as a guideline for how to live their lives as married women. Overall, the women do not criticise the text even though they find it impossible to achieve the standards of the “perfect wife”:

The women read the text from the perspective that women are expected to fulfil all the duties of the text. Even though they find it hard, they believe that doing so would earn them respect and value. Still, when they were unable to meet these expectations, they felt sad, bitter and disappointed in themselves and they seem to believe that their failure would create a negative atmosphere in their families.³⁶

C RE-CONTEXTUALISING *BOSADI*

³⁴ Kjersti Wee, ““A Perfect Wife? How Do Ordinary Malagasy Women Relate to the Text about the Good Woman in Proverbs 31:10–31?” (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, VID Specialized University, 2025). See also Kjersti Wee and Marta Høyland Lavik, “Beyond Feminist and Womanist Hermeneutics.”

³⁵ Wee, “A Perfect Wife,” 99.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

As pointed out above, our research question is: How do the five cases conceptualise a conscious contextual approach like *bosadi* to be re-contextualised into their respective religio- and socio-cultural contexts?

It is important to acknowledge that Masenya does indeed expect her interpretive experiences of reading biblical texts to have a far-reaching impact beyond her Northern Sotho context that would extend to the rest of South Africa and the African continent:

“[...] it should be stated that the coinage of the *bosadi* concept was done not only with national and continental concerns in mind but also with global concerns! To do this effectively, one had to start at home, from the African-South African setting.³⁷

1 Recontextualising a consciously contextual ...

The above brief survey of the five scholars and their relation to the *bosadi* approach demonstrates that all of them credit the *bosadi* approach for illuminating their respective experiences and concerns with biblical texts, although in various ways and various degrees.

One way the scholars adopt the approach is to translate the term and some of the content that Masenya attributes to it. Kondemo does so with her *bomwasi*, which is the Mongo equivalent of Northern Sotho *bosadi* and outcomes of her readings of Ruth and Esther are close to Masenya's. Another example of a terminological translation is that of Lyimo-Mbowe whose *enkitok* more or less covers the meaning of *bosadi*. However, Lyimo-Mbowe goes in a slightly different direction in the sense that she includes more of the practical and theoretical tools such as “reading with,” “reading otherwise,” “action research” and “see, judge and act.” She emphasises the need to know how to read for the emancipation of women and she includes, to a higher degree than the others, reflection on obstacles that can arise in the process.

Both Kondemo and Lyimo-Mbowe closely follow Masenya, not only in the sense of translating her key term but even more as they share her perspectives on content. Still, as their interpretive contexts *are* different from that of Masenya, their emphases will in practice differ somewhat.

The opposite of “translation” is probably “inspiration.” Admittedly, all five scholars who are portrayed above would gladly say that they are inspired by Masenya. Even so, Wee sticks out in the sense that she is “only” inspired by *bosadi*, that is, she decided to establish the interpretive material in a different way. Rather than collecting and interpreting local proverbs (which could have been done in Wee's field, Madagascar, as popular wisdom still plays significant roles in Malagasy cultural discourses), she established empirical material

³⁷ Masenya, “An African Methodology,” 746.

through qualitative interviews. Admittedly, Mudimeli does the same but Wee expresses a more clear-cut break with Masenya, referring to the *bosadi* approach as a starting point to develop and establish her own interpretive approach.

In between “translation” and “inspiration” we find other categories of recontextualising a conscious contextual approach like *bosadi*. One is to go with Ramaribana, who uses the *bosadi* approach as a theoretical framework for identifying aspects of traditional Tswana culture that are oppressive to women. Another is to go with Mudimeli, whose *vhusadzi* approach enables her to go into the disputed field of women’s roles in church and in particular the question of female ordination in Vhavenda contexts. This is done through the deconstruction of powerful discourses that harm the lives of African women. Masenya’s *bosadi* approach gives a voice to women who are Bible readers, and whose lives are shaped by different interpretations of the Bible. With this voice, Mudimeli argues, women can construct alternative discourses by shifting these oppressive discourses and though Wee did not use the *bosadi* approach to the extent she was anticipating upfront, she found it to be inspirational and a valuable contribution to African womanist hermeneutics.

2 ... and flexible approach

The reflection above demonstrates that the *bosadi* approach serves both as an inspiration, as a framework and as a step-by-step guide for what to be aware of not only in the text as well as the culture and the history that the text emanated from but also the culture and history of the contemporary reader. It is an approach that is potentially flexible. Scholars use it in ways that are helpful for their particular focus. Sometimes the focus might be more on the culture and the context of the reader (such as in the case of Mudimeli), other times it might be more on the culture and context of the text (such as in the case of Ramaribana) and again it might be used in ways that balance the two (such as in the cases of Kondemo and Lyimo-Mbowe).

This shows that the *bosadi* approach has an open profile that may include theories and tools that reveal both oppressive and liberating aspects. In her publications, Masenya is in dialogue with three different hermeneutical movements—contextual, inculturation and liberation hermeneutics—with the main aim, though, to facilitate emancipation for women in rereading the Bible in liberating and life-giving ways and to revive the positive elements of the African culture and the unity between men and women.

We can add to these hermeneutical movements by pointing out that the *bosadi* approach also comprehends deconstruction and reconstruction, both within the text and the culture. Ramaribana argues that the deconstructive approach is consonant with the *bosadi* framework of her study, as it brings to the fore both oppressive and liberating elements of Ruth. Mudimeli finds that it helps her deconstruct and reconstruct religious and cultural discourses. The *bosadi*

approach critiques both cultures and texts, not only in terms of gender concerns but also regarding issues of class, “woman-as-strange” and “African-as-strange” in their territory. The *vhusadzi* perspective, informed by *bosadi*, deconstructs discourses that exclude women from leadership by reconstructing new discourses. These are the following discourses, namely, that Vhavenḁa women can find affirmation in their new understanding that God created them in His own image, that they are equal partners with men and that both sexes should have mutual respect.

D CONCLUSION

The article has presented the research of five scholars who operate in Sub-Saharan Africa and who—inspired by Masenya’s *bosadi* approach—have done studies similar to hers. The research question has been: How do the five scholars conceptualise a conscious contextual approach like *bosadi* to be re-contextualised into their respective religio- and socio-cultural contexts? The conclusion is that Masenya’s and our five colleagues have found different ways to adopt Masenya’s interpretive experiences and concerns. Some are close to Masenya in terms of terminology and content, more or less translating the *bosadi* approach into new contexts. Others are influenced by Masenya but end up with a broader set of dialogue partners and concerns.

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