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**University of KwaZulu-Natal**

**POSTCOLONIAL REDACTION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC  
PARABLES IN LUKE'S GOSPEL AND A KENYAN APPLICATION**

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the academic requirements for the  
Degree of Masters in Theology in the School of Religion and Theology,  
University of KwaZulu-Natal**

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## **Abstract**

For those who have the courage to doubt, it can be said that the Bible which is highly regarded in Africa is not only an innocent book but also a guilty one because of the many social, political and religious evils that have bedevilled Africa from time to time and which it has condoned and has been used to sanction. Using postcolonial biblical criticism, and as a way of demonstrating that the entire Bible is another text of the empire, this thesis argues that imperial ideology promoted in Luke's socio-economic parables has contributed to another social evil i.e. the gap between the rich and the poor in Kenya.

Working with the texts' socio-historical and literary contexts, this thesis shows how Luke is influenced by the imperial setting of his day to provide the images that he does in the parables and the 'empire insensitive' language that he employs in writing the parables. Further, and working with the Kenyan context and using the postcolonial elements of empire mimicry and hybridity, this thesis shows how Luke's images and language are taken up by the upper and ruling class to 're-member' the empire by marginalizing the poor hence widening the gap between the rich and the poor to insurmountable levels.

As a way of offering Kenyan subaltern tools for resisting this prevailing imperial scenario, this dissertation, by the use of Marxist critical tools within postcolonialism, provides ways of rereading these parables in a more liberative way. Apart from providing more enabling terms for doing postcolonialism in the African academy, this dissertation further seeks to decolonize the production of knowledge in biblical studies that tends largely to use Western modes of conceptualization and analysis by proposing African categories as a way of approaching biblical studies now and in the future.

Perhaps, the issues raised in this dissertation will also speak directly to those who seek a permanent solution to the prolonged unrest that has engulfed Kenya since last year's (December 2007) disputed general elections.

## **Acknowledgements**

I acknowledge your supervision Prof. Gerald West. Thank you for being very keen with me, for your professional touch and for 'mid-wife-ing' my knowledge. Your school of thought is extended in me wherever I will be.

I thank you Prof. Jonathan Draper, Dr. Sarojini Nadar and other members of staff at the School of Religion and Theology. Your varied support has been my driving force in many ways.

I acknowledge you Rev. Dr. Stephen Kanyaru, M'Impwii, Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church in Kenya for giving me an opportunity to further my studies. Thanks to Methodist Church Britain for giving me a scholarship. Special thanks to Mrs Jane Cullen and Mrs Liz Lau, Scholarship and Leadership Training (SALT) Co-ordinators for being so many things to me.

Finally, I especially thank you Meg, my wife, for your patience and encouragement and for your sacrificial love; near or far. Kimaita and Gatwiri my children you are special and you fought over the phone each time I called; thanks for insisting to *baba* to finish fast and come home *haraka!*

To all of you who have accorded me assistance in one way or another during the course of my study, *Inkosi inibusise* (God bless you).

## **Dedication**

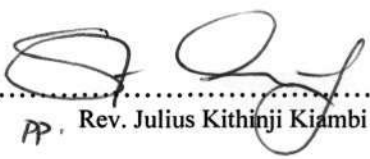
To Kimaita, Gatwiri and Kagendo,  
Te/kna mou ou)/j wdi/nw me/xrij ou=/ morfwqv= Xristo/j e)n u)mi=n.  
'Kazi iendelee'

*(My little children, for whom I am in travail until Christ is formed in you; continue working)*

## Declaration

I, Julius Kithinji Kiambi, candidate for Masters in Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Faculty of Humanities and Social sciences, School of Religion and Theology (Department of Biblical Studies) hereby declare that: Except for quotations specifically indicated in this work and such assistance as I have indicated, this dissertation is wholly my own work and shall only be submitted for the degree purposes of the above mentioned degree.

Candidate ..... Date 6 Oct 08

  
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Supervisor..... Date 6 October 2008

  
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# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.0 Introduction

Working under the topic, 'Postcolonial Redaction of Socio-Economic Parables in Luke's Gospel and a Kenyan Application', I intend in this thesis to show how biblical values have contributed to the gap between the rich and the poor in Kenya. Further, aided by postcolonial biblical critical tools, I aim to offer an alternative reading of material parables in Luke's gospel, as a way of making the Bible respond to issues which were not primarily the concern of parables. More importantly, and though not the primary concern of this study, perhaps the issues raised in this dissertation will have the potential in aiding the pursuit of a lasting solution to the issues that have currently dogged Kenya and are threatening to throw it off its balance.<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Background and Outline of Research

This research comes at a time when postcolonial concerns are slowly gaining ground in African biblical studies. Simply stated, postcolonial biblical criticism concerns itself with knowing how imperial ideology influenced the production of biblical texts, and how this ideology affected and affects those whom the Bible was meant to liberate. Postcolonial biblical criticism seems to be the 'newest' way of reading the Bible and every day new meanings for the text are being realised. Gerald West (1997:322), in particular, sees this as increasingly becoming sort of 'a cottage industry,' not only in the Euro-American contexts, but also more increasingly in Africa as well.

Within this understanding, and aided by the postcolonial critical tools, this study has attempted to redact<sup>2</sup> some selected parables on wealth from Luke's gospel with a

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<sup>1</sup> After the much disputed December 2007 general elections, confirmed election malpractices have triggered chaos with several angles of interpretation in Kenya. For those who see the election malpractices as having triggered a class struggle or what BBC's reporter Fergal Keane ([newsvote.bbc.co.uk...](http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk...) 2008/02/04) has termed 'those who have nothing looting those who have a little more', this dissertation may aid in further understanding this dimension of the on-going post election chaos in Kenya.

<sup>2</sup> Redaction criticism of the gospels deals with how authors modified, edited and interlinked their sources to conform to their unified form, style and theology. We invoke the concept of redaction, and in a resistant way, not because we expressly do redaction on the chosen Lukan texts and in the classical understanding of redaction critics, but because postcolonial biblical criticism deals with editing and reproduction of the text and in a representative way.

view of reading for decolonization.<sup>3</sup> These are: the Parable of the Prodigal Son (15:11-32), the Parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-21), the Parable of the Shrewd Manager (16:1-13), and the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (16:19-31).

Why isolate the selected parables from the main narrative to address a certain issue? Apart from analysing why story-telling was central to Jesus as a method of direct communication, this thesis has investigated what these parables say about wealth and socio-economic situations in general. In the study we have also used the parables on wealth to do a postcolonial critique of the socio-economic situation in Kenya, where the colonial legacy has left economic conditions yet to be transcended, as the gap between the rich and the poor increases day by day.

More generally, this study has set out to test the potency of postcolonial hermeneutic in the service of African biblical studies in our context, and consequently the question has been: How can postcolonial biblical criticism help bring to the fore issues submerged in colonial readings of biblical texts? In particular, how can we explain the prevailing divide between the rich and the poor in Kenya, in the light of a postcolonial reading of material parables in Luke's gospel? This study has not ventured into the business of retrieving or recovering the historical setting or original meanings of the parables, for others have done that adequately.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, several factors in the history of research, e.g. classification of parables, have been taken into account in the course of the study.

## **1.2 An Overview of the Literature**

I first became aware of this reading resource when I joined the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Religion and Theology - Biblical Studies programme. Upon contact with this hermeneutic,<sup>5</sup> I was enthused to realise that the Bible that I thought had a frozen meaning, due to my Western reading resources, was alive with new meanings. In particular, Jeremy Punt's (2003) argument<sup>6</sup> that '... in postcolonial biblical

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<sup>3</sup> According to Dube (2002), a reading for decolonization, deals with imperial setting, hidden interests, travelers, land, geography, expansion and the ideological construction of people. In this way, a decolonizing reading is not different from a postcolonial reading and this is the view taken by this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, Herzog (1994), Bailey (1983), G.W. Forbes (2000) etc.

<sup>5</sup> Sugirtharajah (2003) has rightly argued that postcolonial biblical criticism is not properly a hermeneutic but a reading posture.

<sup>6</sup> Among other similar arguments e.g. Gerald West (1997a), Musa Dube (1998) etc.

interpretation...it is not texts which contain meaning, wanting to be discovered, but meaning is properly viewed as being constructed in the text-reader interaction' (:78), awakened me to the richness of doing biblical studies under this hermeneutic.

### **1.2.1 Bible, Postcolonialism and Parables**

Historical research in parables from the times of Adolf Jülicher and Joachim Jeremias, 'our forefathers'[forebearers] (Tania Oldenhage 2002:40) in parable interpretation, to William Herzog, Greg Forbes and Tania Oldenhage representing modern research in parables, stands to illustrate the fact that 'parable research has been one of the most dynamic areas in New Testament scholarship' (Greg Forbes 2000:24). Whereas Forbes has demonstrated, on the one hand, that there has certainly been no shortage of research on the parables in general, he has shown on the other hand that Luke's parables have received limited attention.<sup>7</sup> When it comes to postcolonial biblical studies, I have noted that rarely have postcolonial biblical scholars dealt with parables as a corpus. However, a few postcolonial readers have touched parables in the manner of this study, and it is to these that I now turn.

Justin Ukpong (1996), though not an overt postcolonial reader, has dealt with 'the parable of the shrewd manager' in Luke 16:1 – 13. It is interesting to note that, though not guided by postcolonial critical tools, what qualifies Ukpong's reading of this parable to be postcolonial is the way in which he turns the tide of his reading from a celebration of the dominant to that of the marginalised. What Ukpong does is what is noted by Richard Horsley (1998), who follows Prakash (1992), to show that a postcolonial reading involves a radical re-thinking and re-formulation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorised by colonialism and Western domination. Therefore in Ukpong's reading what we see is an oppositional reading, which amplifies the voice of the poor while silencing the voice of the rich, who once formed the central aspect of the story.

To a great extent, this thesis is influenced by the works of Musa Dube on postcolonialism and the Bible. Dube (1997) convincingly argues that the Bible is an

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<sup>7</sup> I think that this is a careless statement from Forbes, for Luke's parables have received considerable attention from several leading scholars, even postcolonial scholars. Forbes uses this statement as a way of legitimizing his research in Luke's parables.

imperialising text. In fronting this argument, she rightly states that the Bible is a colonizing text in the way it repeatedly authorises subjugation of foreign nations and lands, and by the fact that many (though not all) of its books are born in imperialist settings. In doing her postcolonial reading, and though working within a feminist perspective, Dube offers several alternative readings of the text. These include, 'Reading for decolonization (John 4:1-42)' (1998), and 'Rahab says hello to Judith: A decolonising feminist reading' (2006) among others. What is distinct in Dube's work, and is relevant for this study, is the decolonising posture which 're-replaces' the marginalised from their colonial placements.

R. S. Sugirtharajah, probably one of the most celebrated postcolonial biblical critics, has dealt with the broader issues of postcolonialism as a theory.<sup>8</sup> His works show how texts can be reworked under this framework to bring out the silenced voices. In addition, he has dealt with the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, among other readings, though not with any intention of handling parables as a genre. Sugirtharajah (2006) is of particular interest to me because he has shown how postcolonial biblical criticism goes beyond liberation theology, feminist theology and inculturation hermeneutic to reclaim voices in the margins.

Stephen Moore and Fernando Segovia in their edited book 'Postcolonial Criticism: Interdisciplinary Interjections' have carefully mapped the terrain of postcolonial theory into the realm of biblical criticism. Their contributions are particularly helpful to this study, for they show that postcolonial theory, apart from providing 'enabling terms'<sup>9</sup> (2005:58), includes religious dimensions as a way of critiquing imperial ideology in prevailing biblical culture. In line with this, Moore (2006) especially has dealt with, among other things, the theme of empire in the gospel of Mark, and has revealed that Mark's gospel refuses to relinquish its dreams of the empire. Horsley (1998) has also dealt with Mark's gospel in a similar manner, and further sharpens our tools for this oppositional reading of the Bible. West (1997) has given a preliminary postcolonial reading of Genesis 37-50 to demonstrate that postcolonial

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<sup>8</sup> See particularly Sugirtharajah 2003 and 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Moore and Segovia have fully explained the so-called Bhabhan postcolonial concepts of hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence. We find these concepts particularly useful in our postcolonial work and we shall take them up in chapter three and four when we work with the parables and the Kenyan context.

criticism is workable, not only in the South African context, but also in the entire African continent. More importantly, West has reiterated the fact that postcolonial criticism can be used to contrast an interface between inculturation hermeneutics (the emphasis of Nigerians) and liberation hermeneutics (the emphasis of the South Africans). His work gives us confidence to know that postcolonial criticism is also workable in our context.

As we can already start to observe, an upsurge of creative ideas is being focussed into postcolonial criticism. What I have noticed, however, is that postcolonial biblical criticism has not been extensively used in the study of parables. This being the case, I shall work with both the socio-historical and literary dimensions of the text as we view the parables in our postcolonial context.<sup>10</sup>

Building on the strengths of these studies and the discoveries of form criticism for the classification of genres and particularly parables, this study has ventured with postcolonialism to exploit this reading gap. When it comes to dealing with the literary aspects of the text, this study will allow postcolonial biblical criticism to dialogue with literary works in the manner of Sarojini Nadar (2006).<sup>11</sup> This, for me, is a departure from cultural interpretations, which I think have overcrowded biblical interpretation in African Scholarship.

### **1.3 Research Problems and Objectives: Key Questions to Be Asked**

It is my contention that most colonial literature, the Bible included, was couched in imperial ideology. Following Dube (1998) it is important to note that the Bible especially is a product of imperial setting and it played a particularly great role in empire building, though also in empire dismantling. The reading, interpretation and application of the Bible, especially in countries with past colonial experience have had deleterious and continuous negative effects. Seen in this way, therefore, how can reading from my socio-location make a contribution to the emerging body of postcolonial readings? More precisely, how can a postcolonial study of parables explain extreme wealth phenomena in former colonies?

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<sup>10</sup> For the Kenyan context, I have mainly been guided, though not exclusively, by the recent Kenya National Human Development report as availed by the United Nations development Programme (UNDP).

<sup>11</sup> Nadar (2006) in a recent article; '*Barak* God and Die!: Women, HIV, and a Theology of Suffering,' engages the book of Job in its socio-literary context as opposed to its socio-historical world in a way that I admire i.e. though I shall also deal with the text in its socio-historic context, her work offers me a model for doing socio-literary work.

Consequently, the main objectives of this study are:

1. To use the corpus of parables as a way of bringing postcolonial biblical criticism into dialogue with issues raised in historical critical method, so as to demonstrate that postcolonial criticism can be used alongside other and older reading resources.
2. To establish why we need postcolonial biblical criticism and why it merits theological or biblical attention.
3. To offer an alternative and favourable reading of the submerged voices in these parables, and consequently a similar reading of the submerged voices in the Kenyan postcolonial situation.
4. To establish if issues of empire, mimicry and hybridity by the rich and ruling class in Kenya mirror those ideologies found in biblical text; how they contribute to society's economic imbalance and how a decolonising reading of the text can aid in imagining a balanced society.

As I set out to address the issues raised above, and as I contribute to this growing body of knowledge, I have also investigated the broader issues of the relationship between the centre and the margins; a scenario created by empire ideology. Secondly, I have investigated why postcolonialism has not been easily taken up in biblical studies, especially in Kenyan/African biblical scholarship.

Given the experience of applying postcolonial critical tools to specific biblical texts, I shall have engaged the concerns of various African scholars and reflected on the future prospects of postcolonial biblical criticism within the Kenyan/African academy. As a way of highlighting forms of empire resistance by the Kenyan subalterns,<sup>12</sup> and forms of empire mimicry by the Kenyan middle and upper class, I have also carefully reflected on how parables influence the reception of the gospel, and what they inform us of the gospel tradition in which they were born.

I invoke the concept of redaction in a resistant way, not because I have expressly done redaction on the choice Lukan texts in the understanding of redaction critics, but

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<sup>12</sup> The term 'subaltern' is adopted from the terminology of the British military where it refers to commissioned officers below the rank of captain' (Segovia 2005:30). Loomba notes that its origin is somewhat inconsistent with its current usage (see 1998:51). In postcolonial studies this word has been borrowed from Gramsci to mean any oppressed person. Generally, I use it alongside other similar words like 'margins,' 'masses,' to connote the colonized and the less privileged.

because postcolonial biblical criticism deals with a reproduction/rewriting of the text and in a representative way. This, as Dube has put it, is to question prevailing biblical interpretations 'by [revising] that complex collection of texts that are brought, born and used in imperial setting to legitimate, resist, or collaborate with imperialism' (1997:14).

#### **1.4 Theoretical Orientations**

Gerald West, writing as long ago as 1997, predicted that postcolonial concerns were on the way to becoming another criticism, alongside the other more familiar criticisms (1997:322) in biblical studies. Postcolonial concerns are now here with us in the form of postcolonial biblical criticism. In this research and in a non-empirical<sup>13</sup> way, I have applied philosophical analysis, conceptual analysis, theory building and literature review within the framework of postcolonial biblical criticism.

According to Sugirtharajah, 'postcolonialism has a multiplicity of meanings depending on location ...it is an oppositional reading practice, and a way of critiquing the totalizing forms of Eurocentric thinking and of reshaping dominant meanings'(2003:15). In an attempted definition, Frank England (2004) has also observed that 'postcolonial studies focus on power configurations that have resulted from the subjugation of indigenous peoples by colonizing powers, and investigates both those regions where the political, economic and cultural realms are still determined and informed by colonialism' (:89). Considering Sugirtharajah's and England's views, among other scholars, I have taken the postcolonial framework because it is the best suited to interrogate how imperial ideology, not only influenced the production of the texts in question, but also how the hearing of these ideologically construed texts inform and reduplicate empire mentality in many Kenyan sectors.

Postcolonial criticism relies on Marxist tools for ideological criticism. In interacting with the Kenyan context, I have also employed the ideals of neo-Marxism<sup>14</sup> within postcolonial criticism, and as advocated for by David Jobling (2005), to critique

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<sup>13</sup> We are following Johann Mouton (2001) who classifies works that employ hybrid data to analyze phenomena by seeking conceptual linkages and analyzing arguments in favor of or against, to be non-empirical. See also Blanche, Durrhiem, and Painter (eds) (2006).

<sup>14</sup> In as much as Marxism is a product of at least two centuries of European philosophical, religious and social reflection, we note the views of key postcolonial biblical scholars (see for example, Jobling (2005), Boer (2002 & 2005), Bonino (2006) and West (2003) that Marxist tools are workable within postcolonialism. In this thesis, I exclusively use Marxism as it has been articulated within the discourse of postcolonialism.



the ideology behind excessive capitalism and materialism that constitute the scenario in Kenya. Our invocation of Marxism may seem uncomfortable to those dismissive of all that is Marxist. I would agree that classical, orthodox and generic Marxism tries, though unsuccessfully, to classify religion in general, and Christianity in particular, 'as a mere 'reflex' of economic conditions' (Jose Miguez Bonino 2006:43). However, within postcolonialism, Marxist critical tools are serviceable, not only in biblical studies, but also are the best suited to critique a context like Kenya because of the particular class differences and struggles. Succinctly stated, 'to the extent that postcolonialism is hiding (from itself and others) the resources of the Marxist tradition, it is narrowing the ideological options... of the people in struggle' (Jobling 2005:191) and we do not want to fall into this trap.

Besides postcolonialism,<sup>15</sup> I have also paid attention to an inculturation hermeneutic, as fronted by Ukpong (1996) and a feminist hermeneutic, as championed by Dube (1997). Ukpong has rightly noted that 'the focus of inculturation hermeneutic is on the reader/interpreter and his/her context in relation to the text and its content' (2000:5). Consequently, in inculturation biblical hermeneutic, it is presupposed that the biblical text is plurivalent, in that the text can be understood differently according to different contexts and perspectives, though it is also emphasised that the biblical text cannot mean everything (see Ukpong 1996). Therefore, his methodology eschews the idea of one universally valid interpretation of the biblical text (1996:191). Dube's methodology employs feminist and liberation tools to offer a new position for women, who she acknowledges to be positioned at the bottom of imperial hierarchical constructions. Nevertheless, my point of departure from these is the recognition that postcolonialism goes beyond feminism, liberation theology or inculturation in articulating liberation.

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<sup>15</sup> Our use of postcolonial theory is influenced by Sugirtharajah's essay, 'Charting the aftermath: a Review of Postcolonial Criticism' in which he depicts postcolonial criticism as the most appropriate, most enlightening and most fruitful tool of our time. In particular, he convincingly shows that 'it instigates, and creates possibilities, and provides a platform for the widest possible coverage of critical forces, of multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural voices, to assert their denied rights and rattle the center' (Sugirtharajah 2006:9). Our attraction to postcolonialism is not only influenced by this borderless approach to reality but also the possibility of incorporating other methodologies in its service.

## **1.5 Research Methodology and Methods**

Since this research is descriptive in nature, and hence non-empirical study, I employ a qualitative mode of data collection ( Babbie and Mouton 2001:319). Therefore, all of my data rests on documented views, i.e. I do not use any primary data: survey, interviews, experiment etc. to support any major theory. In answering the questions at hand, using content analysis of existing data from library research in books, journals, relevant publications and internet research, I first of all offer a critical study of the territory of postcolonial biblical criticism as a theory, incorporating definitions, uses and limitations in order to come up with a workable definition that guides the rest of the thesis.

Next, and by way of philosophical analysis, I use postcolonial theoretical tools to redact the selected parables in the manner of Draper's (2001:148-168) tri-polar exegetical model,<sup>16</sup> paying particular attention to socio-economic issues. In doing this, I demonstrate the presence of imperial ideology in the text, by engaging the postcolonial elements of empire mimicry and empire resistance from within the parables' socio-literary structure and socio-historical context.

Finally, I offer a postcolonial (counter reading) interpretation of the parables from within my context. In doing so, I offer a comparative analysis of both the parable's and Kenya's socio-economic situations, by showing parallels of how different economic groups are classified and treated, and at the same time showing how I think they should be classified. For the Kenyan situation, I have mainly, but not exclusively, relied on my analysis of the recent Kenya National Human Development Report (2006) as availed by the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). Towards the end, and by way of conclusion, I have put forward a postcolonial critique of the Kenyan context and proposed a postcolonial approach for reading the Bible with a view for emancipation.

## **1.6 Outline of Chapters**

This thesis is organised in five interconnected chapters. Chapter one, the introductory chapter, outlines the research problem, delineates the research questions,

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<sup>16</sup> In Draper's Tri-Polar exegetical model, the three processes of distantiation, contextualization and appropriation are advocated.

explains why the topic is important, provides a description of the research approach and anticipates possible contributions to be made by the research.

Chapter two elaborates further on claims made in chapter one on behalf of postcolonial biblical criticism. In it I consider what the hermeneutic is all about, some of the work that has been done on it and some of the criticisms that have been labelled against it, by engaging the concerns of various African scholars regarding its suitability for doing biblical studies in Africa. This forms the basis for my postcolonial interpretation of the parables in chapters three and four. In doing so, I have analysed the parables from within their literary and social historical settings, showing how I work with the postcolonial elements of empire mimicry and resistance in the text. In chapter four, I show how parables act as vehicles for imperial ideology from within my context.

Finally, in chapter five I conclude by suggesting a way forward for the Kenyan context, its biblical scholarship, and also by offering recommendations for further studies in doing postcolonial colonial studies in the Kenyan/African academy.



## Chapter Two: Postcolonialism

*'for me, ... postcolonial studies not only comes from the heart, so to speak, it also refreshes and invigorates the heart.'* F.F. Segovia 2006.

### 2.0 Introduction

To use an economic metaphor, the arrival of postcolonial goods into the biblical scholarship market has marked a new turnover in the study's profit margins. This means that African biblical scholarship has reached another paradigm shift as more meanings are being achieved every day under the postcolonial hermeneutic. Given this and since this thesis falls within 'these' postcolonial studies, it is the task of this chapter to come up with an understanding of postcolonialism that guides the rest of the thesis. In order to achieve this, we will collate views from key scholars in this field so that we can settle for a tentative, workable definition and conception of postcolonialism that is commensurate with this study.

First of all, and even though it has been noted that there is a 'definitional ambiguity that surrounds the notion' (R. S. Sugirtharajah 2006: 245) of postcolonialism, it is our observation that many postcolonial critics working within this theory have proceeded to advance several definitions in terms of what they understand postcolonialism to be. Though we may not be entirely obliged to study the 'obligatory three', (Roland Boer 2005:171) i.e. Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak or Homi Bhabha at the expense of the field itself, it is my feeling that the primitive definition of postcolonialism rests with Said, Spivak and Bhabha.<sup>17</sup> The usage of this theory by other postcolonial scholars has added attitudes, attributes and postures to the original definitions of Said, Spivak and Bhabha and these needs to be factored into our working definition. There is also need to note that postcolonial criticism has been there as long as colonialism and the

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<sup>17</sup> R. S. Sugirtharajah can most certainly be supported by other key postcolonial scholars in his statement that, 'it has now come to be widely acknowledged that Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha are progenitors of the theory and practice of postcolonialism' (Sugirtharajah 201:247). Without robbing these three their due space in the studies, we are not uncritical of their 'brand names' which have quickly been given currency by many uncritical postcolonial critics. In order to resist this seeming hegemonization of the discourse, it is our view in this thesis that if we have to be true to the theory itself, we have to note that one becomes a postcolonial critic in his or her own right even without going to school with these. Otherwise we may fall into the danger of generating central and peripheral postcolonial critics, the very thing the theory loathes. Further, as I will argue later, postcolonialism may probably have began before Said, Spivak and Bhabha.

difference the 'triumvirate' (see also Ania Loomba 1998) makes is to theorise this longstanding criticism on colonialism.

In this chapter therefore, we will also trace postcolonial theory into biblical studies and explore what the hermeneutic is all about. Further, we will consider some of the work that has been done on it and lastly look at some of the concerns that have been raised pertaining to it by engaging the views of various African scholars regarding its suitability for doing biblical studies in Africa. In doing this, we shall also be analysing some of the key definitions, evolving our own definition and then proceed to explore other concerns that relate to postcolonial criticism. We do this in consideration of Gerald West's view that postcolonialism '...offers resources for resisting (by de-constructing) surviving forms of subjectivity, self apprehension and othering that have been constituted in a colonial past' (1997:327), so that we can lay the grounds for engaging the parables in the next chapter.

## **2.1 Tracking Key Postcolonial Definitions**

It is not an overstatement to say that postcolonialism defies any singular definition and therefore many scholars have since the emergence of the theory grappled with its meaning. Robert C. Young (2001) for example notes that 'the term postcolonial has been the subject of protracted and sometimes ingenious discussion' (:57). In his attempt to define postcolonialism,<sup>18</sup> he notes that in its emphasis on imperial modes of domination it 'names a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention with such oppressive circumstances' (:57). Therefore, by casting light upon colonizer-colonized relationships, postcolonialism 'designates the perspective of tricontinental theories which analyse the material and epistemological conditions of postcoloniality and seek to combat the continuing, often covert, operation of an imperialist system of economic, political and cultural domination' (:58). Jon Berquist (1996), borrowing from Said, notes that imperialism and colonization do not just connote acts of accumulation and acquisition. On the contrary, he argues that they are supported and impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination as well as forms of knowledge

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<sup>18</sup> Which he also prefers to call tricontinentalism.

associated with this domination. Therefore, for him the theorization of this ideological colonizer-colonized relationship partly constitutes the postcolonial and what postcolonialism is all about.

The observation of Fernando Segovia (2005) is that Leela Gandhi<sup>19</sup> in her general definition of postcolonialism sees it as a major critical discourse alongside such others as poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and feminism in academic circles. Nevertheless, he notes that for her it remains 'diffuse and nebulous and without any 'originary' moment or even a coherent methodology' (:47). In spite of this, Segovia shows that Gandhi goes on to define postcolonialism as 'a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and interrogating the colonial past' (:4). Seen in this way then, I think both Segovia and Gandhi relate postcolonialism to the systematised discourse of the events of colonialism as a form of imperialism. The colonial moment properly understood incorporates repression, representation and representability of the subaltern<sup>20</sup> thus touching on major concerns of postcolonial criticism.

According to Segovia (2005), there has been a lot of literature centred on the definition of post/post-colonialism. Most of this discourse has centred on the differentiation of the hyphenated and the unhyphenated post/post-colonialism. In this reference, the unhyphenated 'postcolonial' would refer to colonial discourse theory, while the hyphenated 'post-colonial' would stand for the field as a whole (:43). Having delved into the lengths and breadth of what this differentiation may mean, he states more precisely that, 'more recently, the term has been employed without the hyphen, by a variety of academics to signify the political, linguistic, and cultural experience of the former colonies of Europe' (:42). It is important to note at the outset that in this thesis we use the unhyphenated 'postcolonial' to encompass both meanings but make the differentiation where need arises. This is in acknowledgement of what Segovia has further stated that, no 'significance is attached to the presence or absence of the hyphen in the rubric... whether invoked or not, both term and field are seen as properly

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<sup>19</sup> Segovia refers to Gandhi's 1998 work in which she has systematically mapped the terrain of postcolonial theory.

<sup>20</sup> As we have pointed out before, the term 'subaltern' is adopted from the terminology of the British military where it refers to commissioned officers below the rank of captain' (Segovia 2005:30). Loomba notes that its origin is somewhat inconsistent with its current usage (see 1998:51). In postcolonial studies this word has been borrowed from Gramsci as a short hand for any oppressed person. Generally it is used alongside other similar words like 'margins,' 'masses,' to connote the colonized and the less privileged.

encompassing a broad range of objects of analysis, lines of inquiry and fields of study' (:45).

In our view then, a language to articulate retrieval and 're-placement' of the colonised would definitely invoke this sort of postcolonial discourse. This means that postcolonialism must also factor in the two concepts of colonisation and imperialism in its purview. Whereby according to Young (2001) the definition of imperialism and colonialism incorporates 'the exercise of power either through direct conquest or through political and economic influence that amounts to a similar form of domination [and both involving] the practice of power through facilitating institutions and ideologies' (:27).

According to Young therefore, postcolonialism is a broad concept that incorporates historical moments of decolonisation and also the realities of nations and peoples emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and sometimes political domination. Given this, it is my view that postcolonial discourse takes shape in concepts that not only sensitise the colonised of their peripheral and 'subalternic' status but also provides them with a language for articulation and imagination of their centrality (as long as their centrality does not involve a counter-marginalization of the other). In this way 'postcolonialism is both contestatory and committed towards political ideals of a trans-national social justice. It attacks the status quo of hegemonic economic imperialism, and the history of colonialism and imperialism, but also signals an activist engagement with positive political positions and new forms of political identity in the same way as Marxism or feminism' (:59).

Taken further, and given that, 'postcolonialism commemorates not the colonial but the triumph over it' (:60), then it means that, 'the postcolonial era in its name pays tribute to great historical achievements of resistance against colonial power, while, paradoxically, it also describes the conditions of existence that have followed in which basic power structures have yet to change in any substantive way' (:60). Seen in this way, postcolonialism best stands to aid a people in struggle and if their struggle is against forces that are propelled by prevailing forms of imperialism directly exercised by imperialists or by powers that be and which have mimicked their form of imperialism. A definition of postcolonialism that takes into account all these turns and twist befits a context like mine which is highly complicated by mimicked and hybridised imperialism.

More importantly, postcolonial studies theorises power struggles under such dominance to give them an academic disciplinary focus as it foregrounds their significance.

Finally, postcolonialism operates in a form of internationalism;<sup>21</sup> in it we can grasp bigger things beyond say contextual feminism, local liberation, inculturation etc. In this way 'postcolonialism refuses to reduce the history of freedom of the struggles to recalcitrant third world nationalism' (:61). Therefore, it is both local and global and at the same time and rejects any attempts to make it only either. This local and global aspect of postcolonialism is what I prefer in this work and take up later in doing postcolonial reading of parables in Kenya (see also Moore 2006).

## **2.2 When Does Postcolonialism Begin?**

Roland Boer (2005) in trying to answer Ella Shohat's question on when exactly did the 'postcolonial' begin, cites the arrival of Third World intellectuals in the First World academy as the precise moment. He notes that, operating from the space offered by Western academies, what Said is acclaimed for in his famous work *Orientalism* (1978) is that he turned the tide of postcolonial studies from what was meant to be Western studies of former colonies to now studies of former colonialists. Put more clearly in Young's words, 'the power of Western academies has been deployed against the West. For the first time in the Western academy, postcolonial subjects become subjects rather than the objects of knowledge' (:63). What emerges therefore is a kind of exchange whereby Western theory becomes transformed as a result of its encounter with non-Western cultures. Consequently, an upsurge of writings mainly in the brand name 'postcolonial' and mainly in social sciences begins to come up, but mainly from these diasporic sites.

### **2.2.1 How Postcolonialism Works**

Following Foucault, Young notes that postcolonial theory is not a theory in the strict sense of the word for it does not involve deductions on the basis of a number of axioms applicable to indefinite number of empirical descriptions. On the contrary he continues to show that it draws on a common range of theories and draws on a

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<sup>21</sup> By this I mean that the dialectical tension between the local and the global, the centre and the periphery, the dominant and the marginalized must be maintained in postcolonialism. If it is only local or if it is only diasporic, then it loses its full intention.



'constellation of theoretical insights' (:64). Perhaps it is important to note at the outset that before 'postcolonialism' there were plenty of histories and analysis of colonialism though such histories were rarely considered from the point-of-view of the colonised and in the way postcolonial does. According to Young therefore, 'postcolonial theory is designed to undo the ideological heritage of colonialism by operating through the dimension of history and reordering of the world through forms of knowledge reworked from their entanglement in long standing coercive power relations' (:65). Postcolonial theory therefore facilitates the naming of activities by which the new subaltern identities are fashioned and performed by redressing power imbalances. In this way, postcolonial key issues include the colonial, imperial and anti-colonial past, the postcolonial present, peoples and cultural rights, emigration and immigration, diaspora etc.

According to Stephen D. Moore (2005), a postcolonialism that seeks to interrogate colonizer/colonized relation works more perfectly when it incorporates the 'the Bhabhan mana-words' (:87) of ambivalence, mimicry and hybridity.<sup>22</sup> These categories best aid to conceptualize the kind of identities (both subaltern and dominant but more so subaltern) that arise out of their interactions. Since we will employ these postcolonial elements in chapters three and four, it is good that we briefly consider what they mean and how we shall use them in our postcolonialism.

### *2.2.1.1 Mimicry*

According to Bart Moore-Gilbert (2000), Homi Bhabha uses the concept of mimicry as a psychological category that estimates how the subaltern behaves in the prevailing reality of colonization or what he sees as 'the zone of psychic relations "in-between" the dominant and subordinate cultures, across which an unstable traffic of continuously (re)negotiated (counter)identifications is conducted' (:458). According to him 'mimicry' in Bhabha's sense is supposed to connote the act of the subaltern or colonized subject resistance 'by returning, in the sense of challenging, the 'gaze' of authority' (:459). It seems to me therefore that mimicry on one level is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination, for as Moore reminds us, it is the posture 'in which the colonized heeds the colonizer's peremptory injunction to imitation, but in a

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<sup>22</sup> According to Moore, these categories are Bhabha's 'own conceptual and terminological apparatus' (:87) though he benignly reminds us that they are drawn largely from Freud via Lacan, Fanon, Bakhtin and Derrida among other theorist-critics.

manner that constantly threatens to teeter over into mockery' (2005:88). On another level, it can be seen as the selective use of the master's tools by the subaltern as a way of enhancing the subaltern identity or evolving a hybrid identity or what Couze Venn following Bhabha (1994) calls 'a form of mimicry that repeats differently to disrupt colonial authority' (Venn 2006:46).

#### *2.2.1.2 Hybridity and Ambivalence*

Many scholars have attested to the fact that in Bhabha's postcolonial discourse, hybridity and ambivalence seem to be interchangeable concepts. According to Young (1995), 'ambivalence... describes[s] a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and its opposite' (also simultaneous attraction towards and repulsion from an object, person or action) (:161), while hybridity stands for 'the making of difference into sameness, and sameness into difference, but in a way that makes the same no longer the same' (:26). For Young, Bhabha uses the concepts as the heart of his analysis to 'perform a political reversal at a conceptual level in which the periphery – the borderline, the marginal, the unclassifiable, the doubtful – has become the equivocal, indefinite, indeterminate ambivalence that characterises the centre' (:161).

And for Moore colonial discourse is characterized by ambivalence which exposes it to be riddled with contradictions and incoherencies, which in turn enable 'a shifting, unstable, potentially subversive, 'in-between' or 'third' space between the colonizer and the colonized' (2005:88) or hybridity. For him therefore, hybridity is an 'insidious product of colonial encounter that threatens to fracture the colonizers identity and authority' (ibid). Since it seems to me that these categories are closely related, in this thesis, we shall employ these so called 'Bhabhan mana-words' of ambivalence, hybridity and mimicry in a near similar way but note the difference that differentiates them where it so demands. This is in recognition that these concepts intersect but cannot be used as synonyms.

### **2.3 Postcolonialism and Biblical Studies**

As early as 1995, Ukpong had hinted that African biblical scholarship was in dire need of another hermeneutic, a reading resource that would be critical in its own way paying attention to the African socio-cultural contest and the questions that arise there

from. By arguing for an 'extra reading' resource Ukpong had noted that most African biblical scholars were trained in the tradition of Western biblical scholarship hence were unable to respond to 'the questions African Christians were asking about their life in Christ and their experience with the Bible' (1995:4). At that time, Ukpong could only envision inculturation hermeneutic as the solution. However, in these days of postcolonial criticism, this gap that Ukpong had identified has probably found its fill. Consequently, it can be argued that no other reading resource closely articulates all that Ukpong envisioned better than postcolonial biblical criticism. The reasons are delineated further on.

Guided by inculturation hermeneutic Ukpong had identified that the outcome of a biblical scholarly breed that was trained in Western biblical scholarship, coupled with a questioning African Christian, brought about a visible gap between the 'academic reader' and the 'ordinary reader' (:4). However, a close consideration of his work shows that, his inculturation hermeneutic did not guide him to see how this could be resolved. Now it can be shown that in postcolonialism this gap is well bridged. In his paper 'Finding a Place among the Posts for Postcolonial Criticism in Biblical Studies in South Africa,' Gerald West (1997) has shown how the gap between the ordinary reader and the academic reader is bridged. Fronting contextual Bible studies as a way of doing postcolonial biblical studies in Africa West shows how the ordinary readers and academic readers come together without the risk of one group purporting to represent the other. In particular, West says that this 'is guided by the basic assumption that resources for a contextual reading of the Bible are to be found both in biblical studies and in the resources of ordinary indigenous poor and marginalized communities' (:331).

R.S. Sugirtharajah (2002) notes that when postcolonial criticism entered the field of biblical criticism it put colonialism at the centre of biblical studies. In his discussion on postcolonialism and biblical studies, he states that over the last four hundred years biblical scholarship has been reluctant to view imperialism as involved in shaping both the contours of the Bible and biblical scholarship. This being the case then, it means that biblical students have been oriented only to a mode of biblical studies that assumes that the Bible is devoid of ideology and particularly imperial ideology. It is for this reason that I agree with Sugirtharajah that 'the greatest single aim of postcolonial biblical criticism is

to situate colonialism at the centre of the Bible and biblical interpretation' (:25). Put more clearly, 'biblical studies can no longer be confined to the history of textual traditions, or to the doctrinal richness embedded in texts, but needs to extend its scope to include issues of domination, Western expansionism, and its ideological<sup>23</sup> manifestation, as central forces in defining biblical scholarship'(Staley 2006).

It has now been accepted by many biblical scholars that 'to study postcolonialism without taking into consideration the use of the Bible in informing and justifying colonialism and imperialism is of no use' (Kgalemang 2006:218). It follows then that the main aim of postcolonialism in biblical studies is not only to celebrate the presence of oppositional voices within the text but also to mark out silenced voices and spaces in texts which fly in the face of hierarchical and hegemonic modes of thought. In a postcolonial reading we are therefore not only alerted to the way the powerful use their power but also to the way in which the marginalised protest. Therefore the main aim of a postcolonial biblical criticism is to 'overturn colonial assumptions' (:218) not only in Western biblical interpretation but also in the formation of the text. In this way, and this is our view, postcolonial criticism becomes, 'the most appropriate, most enlightening and the most fruitful approach to biblical studies' (Segovia 2000:120).

### **2.3.1 Postcolonizing Biblical Studies**

Postcolonialism in biblical criticism is a new and not so new way of reading. On one hand, it is not so new because it was introduced into biblical studies more than ten years ago. On the other hand, it is a new reading resource in the fact that since its inception into biblical studies, it has not been easily taken up and especially in African biblical scholarship. In trying to define this important concept, Sugirtharajah (2003) notes that 'postcolonialism, has a multiplicity of meanings depending on location...it is an oppositional reading practice, and a way of critiquing the totalizing forms of Eurocentric thinking and of reshaping dominant meanings'(:15). He sees it in this light because it provides us with new concepts and language for articulating the effect of the colonial legacy and not only so, but it also helps us to imagine freedom out of this state. Therefore

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<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that ideological biblical criticism predated the advent of postcolonial biblical criticism. What postcolonialism does is to introduce a new dimension to ideological criticism i.e. criticism of Western imperialism.

for him, it can be a mental attitude or a subversive stance towards dominant thinking rather than a school of thought. However, what should be noted is that postcolonialism is a reading posture, a critical enterprise aimed at unmasking the link between idea and power, which lies between Western theories and learning.

In Moore & Segovia (2005) we see another face of postcolonialism when they observe that postcolonialism, 'is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering, and interrogating the past' (:49). In a similar way, Frank England (2004) adds that, 'postcolonial studies focus on power configurations that have resulted from the subjugation of indigenous peoples by colonizing powers, and investigates both those regions where the political, economic and cultural realms are still determined and informed by colonialism' (:89). What we see from these observations is that these scholars agree that postcolonialism is I think a sensitive and sensitizing discourse which pays attention not only to the past that shapes our present but also how this past is concealed in its domineering form.

Applied to biblical studies then, Sugirtharajah (2001) argues that postcolonialism performs tasks such as the scrutiny of biblical documents for colonial and imperial entanglements. This is a view that agrees that the Bible emanated from imperial contexts but is also a colonizing and imperializing text (Musa Dube 1997:15). Read with this understanding, the Bible is decolonized and exorcised for colonial intentions and assumptions that informed the production of the texts. In this way a reading for decolonization resurrects silenced voices, subverting the dominant other and foregrounds the 'othered' other the subject of the Bible.

Sugirtharajah (2001) also notes that a postcolonial reading of the Bible involves a reconstructive reading that pays attention to such issues as liberation struggles and other subaltern elements embedded in the texts. In this way for example, the Genesis narratives (see Moore and Segovia 2005:16) and by extension the story of entry into Canaan (Joshua 3-11) can be read from the perspective of the subalterns (Canaanites) and not that of the dominant (Israelites) as has been the common trend. Lastly, Sugirtharajah notes that postcolonial biblical criticism interrogates colonial and metropolitan interpretations of the texts. This exposes the 'inescapable effects of colonization and colonial ideologies on interpretive works' (:255) which in turn helps consolidate the colonial presence. In

this aspect, postcolonial criticism pays attention to those interpretations that contest colonial interests and concerns in an attempt to show how colonial notions and images are contested and transcended in the works of for example Isaiah Shembe<sup>24</sup> and other third world readers.

Therefore as we can see from these readings, the pursuit of postcolonial criticism is not devotional readings per se or even biblical instruction, but a concern for broader issues that touch on cultural, social and economic realities and which are triggered by colonialism (:258). Given this, postcolonialism becomes more of an avenue of inquiry that a homogenous project. For this purpose postcolonialism extends its tentacles to include other reading resources and all kinds of tools in any disciplinary field, so long as they help probe hegemonic injustices. As Kwok Pui-lan (1996) notes, 'the introduction of postcolonial discourse into biblical criticism, offers new avenues for interrogating the Bible as a cultural product, the formation of canon and the politics of biblical interpretation' (:212). Finally and in the words of Laura Donaldson (1996), this 'is to bring to the front ...marginal elements in the texts and in the process subvert the traditional meaning' (:5).

### **2.3.2 Bible and Empire**

Postcolonial biblical criticism begins to interrogate the Bible for imperial contamination at the point where it is agreed that the Bible is overtly involved in the historical events of imperialism, (Dube 1997). Following Jon L. Berquist's definition of imperialism, that it is '... a system of economic, political and cultural force that disavows border in order to extract desirable resources and exploit an alien people' (1996:24), then we can also note with him that 'canonical scripture can play a highly significant role in the ideology of imperialism, since religion and scripture also communicate the norms, values and basic assumptions of a societies ruling class' (:26). Given this, and noting that 'the point of postcolonialism is not to achieve a new objectivity but to infuse scholarly discourse with a new subjectivity' (:26-27), then it is no wonder that postcolonialism concerns itself more with the critique of imperial ideology than any other criticism.

Imperialism can further be understood, as expressed in Dube's work, where she argues that 'imperialism is an ideology of expansion that takes diverse forms of methods

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<sup>24</sup> For a detailed study of how Shembe contests colonial interpretation of the Bible, see Gerald West (2006).

at different times, seeking to impose its languages, its trade, its religions, its democracy, its images, its economic systems, and its political rule on foreign nations and lands' (1998:297). In this pursuit, she argues that the colonised are rearranged according to the interests and values of the imperialising powers, for imperialism involves subordination and domination, creating categories of 'colonised and coloniser, ruler and ruled, centre and periphery, first world and [third world]' (:298) etc. This scenario is constructed through the employment of conquest whereby, according to Dube, military might and cultural texts are seen as central to empire building. Imperialism therefore '... is the process of building an empire through the imposition of political, economic and social institutions of one nation over a foreign one' (2002:47). It is at this point and guided by these traits that I see the Bible as an imperial text and as such one of those texts that are implicit in empire building.

Dube categorically states that the Bible is an 'imperializing text' (1998:302).<sup>25</sup> This is partly because of the imperial traits that it harbours and also because of its usability in the colonisation of Africa. Following Ngugi wa Thiong'o, she illustrates this by drawing parallels between Shakespeare and Jesus to show that both were on a similar mission. Therefore according to her, the Bible must be read alongside Shakespearean and other imperialising texts for they both promote the same ideology. Given this, they must be read with a view for decolonization whereby decolonization in her work stands for 'awareness of imperialism's exploitive forces and its various strategies of resisting domination, the conscious adoption of strategies of resisting imperial domination as well as the search for alternative ways of liberating interdependence between nations races, gender, economies and cultures' (:298). This means that in postcolonial biblical studies, the Bible must be interrogated for the role it plays in empire building including the cultural values it condones above others to achieve this course. Postcolonial readers must therefore confront imperializing tendencies in the Bible by taking 'cognizance of texts that more often than not offer models of internal relationships which are less than liberating' (:314).

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<sup>25</sup> In her earlier work Dube (1997:15) expounds on this as she argues that the Bible has repeatedly authorized the subjugation of foreign nations and lands, its books are born in imperial settings and therefore the Bible hoards all traits of an imperializing text.

As a postcolonial reader, this is the posture that I shall take with my select parables. I shall probe them for their imperial settings, their imperial ideology and their usability in imperial projects. In this way I shall be attempting to arrest their hegemonic and domineering tendencies as I seek to liberate the subaltern other from such entanglements by rereading them from the perspective of the marginalized.

## **2.4 Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and Marxism**

It is arguably correct to state that ‘before postcolonial cultural critique was developed as a political and academic practice, the term ‘post-colonial’ (usually in the hyphenated form) was used in the social sciences with a specific Marxist reference’ (Young 2001:58). This is because, as Young continues to note, the phrase ‘postcolonial states’ was widely used with reference to post-independence Marxist states. According to Boer (2001),<sup>26</sup> Bart Moore-Gilbert has reminded us of the critical history that distinguishes between postcolonial theory (that which we now have after Said, Spivak, and Bhabha) and postcolonial criticism (the longer history of the critique of colonialism). In doing this, he argues that we need to go back to Marx and Lenin for the origins of this kind of criticism. This means that seriously speaking, postcolonialism can be attributed to these, for as he further argues, it was Marx and then Lenin who first developed a critical approach to what they variously called colonialism and imperialism. If then

Marx traced the way capitalism, for its very survival, had to expand, to “grow” beyond the confines of Europe and conquer ever new colonial spaces, Lenin, especially in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, developed an analysis of imperialism, or imperial capitalism, as the most advanced stage of capitalism up until that point. For Lenin, both “world wars” were conflicts between the European imperial powers, vying for global dominance, the struggle coming to head in the competition for the conquest of ever more territories throughout the globe. (Boer 2001:9-20)

This being the case, that postcolonialism has its starting point with Marxism, we can further observe that Marxism is not as present as it should be in the now postcolonialism. According to Gerald West (2007) (following Boer), ‘the [un]holy trinity

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<sup>26</sup> [http://www.sbl-site.org/Publications/Semeia/Semeia88/Semeia\\_88.pdf](http://www.sbl-site.org/Publications/Semeia/Semeia88/Semeia_88.pdf) (downloaded on 12.07.07)



of Said, Spivak and Bhabha have not only elided the actual historical precursors to postcolonial theory including Marx and Lenin's critical engagement with colonialism and imperialism, but systematically detached various key aspects of Marxist theory from Marxism itself and then negated their political potential in their construction of postcolonial theory' (:4).

Nevertheless, as Boer notes, we can observe that there are several scholars who have taken up Marxism in their readings of the Bible; these include, Itumelang Mosala (1992), Norman Gottwald (1985, 1992, 1993, 1999), Gale Yee (1995, 1999, 2003) Ron Simkins (1999), Richard Horsley (1999, 2001, 2002), David Jobling (1991, 1992a, 1992b 1998) Gerald West (2003) and Boer (1996,1997, 2003). However, Boer argues that among these, only he and West have shown direct links between Marxism and postcolonialism. How far this claim goes is substantiated by his analysis of Sugirtharajah and Mark Brett in which Boer shows the absence of Marxist concerns by these postcolonial biblical scholars, and argues that Marxism has been deliberately excluded in postcolonialism. In Sugirtharajah's work for example, Boer shows that Marx himself appears but a handful of times, and then only in the briefest fashion. For him, this is unfair,<sup>27</sup> for as he notes that Sugirtharajah comes from a history in which Marxist tools are still serviceable.

When Jeremy Punt argues that 'postcolonial biblical critics cannot afford to turn a blind eye to criticism raised against this project by Marxist critics,' (2003:68) I think that he has in mind those criticisms that have been advanced especially by Roland Boer (2005) and David Jobling (2005) and it is to these that I now turn.

As we have already noted, 'the greatest single aim of postcolonial biblical criticism is to situate colonialism at the centre of the Bible and biblical interpretation' (Sugirtharajah 2002:25). In order to do this effectively, I have followed the sentiments of Jobling who observes that 'to be of much use to postcolonial contexts, we biblical scholars will need consciously to relate ourselves to a much wider range of practices around the Bible than can be comprehended by biblical studies' (:187). Jobling does not expound on these 'wider range of practices' but it is my assumption that part of what he

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<sup>27</sup> Ironically Boer attributes Sugirtharajah's exclusion of Marxism to his obsession with a brand of postcolonialism which 'others' Marxism as another Euro-centric approach to knowledge.

means includes Marxism for this is his core discourse. Jobling critiques Takatso Mofokeng<sup>28</sup> for uncritically placing Bible/Christianity and Marxism conceptually on a par. I agree with Jobling that this is careless of Mofokeng, for we have to note as Bonino (2006:41-42) argues that classical Marxism and religion (Christianity in particular) do not automatically cohere. Nevertheless, Marxism and Christianity are to be compared in the way that both are serviceable to subaltern struggles. Given this correlation between Christianity and Marxism, and, though Jobling sees very limited ideological options for Marxism in postcolonial biblical studies, however, he agrees that there is a big ray of hope in this aspect.

But what ties, and what relationship is there between postcolonialism, Marxism and Christianity? Jobling addresses this in the following manner. Noting that there are limited ideological options for postcolonialism in biblical studies (mainly due to its exclusion of Marxism), he notes that postcolonialism is local but is often confronted by Christianity and Marxism which both have a globalizing tendency and posture. This oscillation of postcolonialism between the local and the global sites is what Jobling sees as forming the relationship between postcolonialism, Marxism and Christianity. Local struggles in postcolonialism need to be linked up globally and for Jobling their encounter with Marxism and Bible/Christianity is the point at which they are globalized, for as he notes, 'conceptual resources available [for biblical interpretation] from the Marxist side... are still enormous' (:191). Therefore both Jobling and Boer agree that postcolonialism (including that of Sugirtharajah) is eliding or shielding itself from Marxist tradition and thus is limiting its tools, though Jobling is quick to note that this situation is not quite the conspiracy that Boer<sup>29</sup> makes it to be.

Jobling ends up suggesting that the way for the Bible (read biblical studies) and Marxism to work together in local sites struggles is through a hybrid relationship that avoids the endemic tendencies of outdoing or bossing each other. Boer (2005) on the other hand argues that there is need to note that postcolonial criticism has always been

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<sup>28</sup> Jobling refers to Mofokeng's 1998 work, *Black Christians, the Bible and Liberation* in which he is drawn to the statement about 'very limited ideological options,' which forms the title of his work.

<sup>29</sup> Boer (2005) has argued that the current situation in postcolonialism whereby Marxism is sidelined from postcolonial discourse is a conspiracy.

there and the difference the 'triumvirate'<sup>30</sup> make is to theorise this longstanding criticism on colonialism. Noting that Marxist tradition/tools have been the best for offering criticism on imperial expansions, Boer argues that postcolonial celebrities including, Moore-Gilbert, Frantz Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois, among others, were all Marxist critics of colonialism. If this is so, then there is great need to pay more attention to Boer's accusation that postcolonial biblical criticism has been summoned into the wider conspiracy of those keen to dump Marx. My only problem with Boer is that he fails to show a reasonable link to the intention of this conspiracy. I do not think that postcolonialism has really forgotten Marxism in the way Boer puts it, on the contrary the proper argument would be that postcolonialism has not been conscientised of its Marxist tradition. This means that some forms of postcolonialism may not be aware of some of the useful tools in Marxism thus limiting their ideological options.

In terms of using Marxist theory as an element of postcolonialism, I would agree with Jon L. Berquist (1996) observation that '... theories connected to the writings of Marx prove very congenial to postcolonial theorists, in fact, much postcolonial theory to date is visibly indebted to Marxist sociology' (:16). If all postcolonial biblical scholars were aware of this, they would be enabled to critique ideology in the Bible with greater ease and from a Marxist standpoint. They would be able to recognize ideology in the Bible or how 'the system enforces the submission of majorities into acquiescence and conformity with minority will' (:18). Therefore as Boer would point out, there is an enabling role of Marxism in postcolonialism which is yet to be exploited. This capacity, as we have argued, is already in place in current postcolonialism, only that it needs to be widely acknowledged and strengthened. The tools provided by this encounter of Marxism and biblical studies are what we tap later when we discuss parables and their ideological role in the Kenyan context.

## **2.5 Postcolonialism and African Biblical Scholarship**

In readiness for our engagement with postcolonial biblical criticism in our next chapter, it is worth registering some of the concerns that African biblical scholars have voiced concerning this hermeneutic as a tool for doing biblical studies in the African

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<sup>30</sup> In reference to Said, Bhabha and Spivak.

continent. We mainly follow Jeremy Punt (2003 & 2006) and partly Gerald West (2007) who have attempted to systematise these concerns, as we also integrate concerns of other key African biblical scholars.

It is directly cited in Punt (2006) that postcolonial criticism has failed to take root in African biblical studies. In this work, he wonders why postcolonial criticism has failed to impact upon biblical studies in Africa in spite of the fact that it offers 'such obvious potential, spin-offs, as well as the opportunity to approach the Bible from a different than the traditional vantage point' (:63). In fact he notes that postcolonial biblical criticism has been 'less than eagerly embraced' (:65) in the African academy.

Punt goes on to give several suggestions why postcolonial biblical criticism is not being taken up in African biblical scholarship. According to him, the main reason why postcolonialism is not being taken up in Africa can be found within the wider parameters of the strained ecclesia/academy relationship. Some of the reasons that Punt offers for this kind of suggestion includes the dialectical tensions between academic and 'ordinary' readers. In part he argues that 'the explanation for why postcolonial biblical studies has not (yet) caught on, is related to, but should also be searched far beyond the strained relationship between the academy and ecclesial-popular readings, the strong pietistic context in which the Bible is read in (South) Africa and the dominance of the traditional' (:68). Thus noting that the academy-church relationship plays a role in the disinterest in postcolonial studies, he argues that postcolonial hermeneutic cannot be used to study the Bible only for identifying those intrinsic textual features which bear colonial codes without evoking resentment or what he terms 'short circuiting' itself in Africa (2003:72). I think what Punt tries to show here is that the Bible, which he sees as highly regarded in Africa (2006:71), cannot be studied for secondary reasons and this is what he sees postcolonialism trying to do. For this reason, he sees that 'trained, academic-intellectual readings of the Bible as literary document located in full-time, professional careers are often opposed to "ordinary", religious-devotional readings of the Bible as sacred text, readings for moral, mystical or ritual purposes' (2006:69).

Punt's argument brings up two issues. First is that postcolonial biblical criticism (as practised in the academy) highly compromises<sup>31</sup> the status of the text in Africa, and secondly, this text is perceived to be sacred (by ordinary readers and to a large extent also in the academy). In postcolonialism, the Bible acquires another status and it is read as another imperial document mainly due to its 'profitable use in legitimising colonization' (:71) and therefore as Punt puts it, it can reasonably be described as a colonial document. His sentiments are not far from other postcolonial scholars, for example Dube (1997), who terms it a colonizing and an imperializing text. In the prevailing circumstance, therefore, postcolonial biblical criticism fails to be easily taken up in the African academy. Therefore, it means that a hermeneutic wishing to make a lasting impact in Africa must bridge the gap between the ordinary and academic reader by according the text its due sacred status.

I am of the opinion that African biblical scholarship so preoccupies itself with 'African cultural identity' that it is hardly creative beyond the identity cultural marker. In this way, it is reluctant to grasp and include issues of economic identity, as is postcolonialism, and thereby ends up only taking up and celebrating hermeneutics that propound a 'cultural liberation' or orientation. What postcolonial biblical criticism does however is to engage broader issues. As African biblical scholarship gains maturity we can hope that one day it will soon strike the note that postcolonial biblical criticism is already drumming.

For those who have already taken up postcolonial biblical criticism as a way of doing biblical studies in Africa, there is a vast territory of academic benefits to be harvested under this hermeneutic. For example, West (1997) and Punt (2006) have both alluded to the fact that postcolonial biblical criticism can be used to unite the two major theological fronts in African biblical scholarship. Both see that its usability in African biblical scholarship rests on the fact that with its emphasis on local and global sites, it can be used to bring together liberation theology which is distinctly southern African and inculturation theology which is distinctly West African. Further, postcolonial biblical criticism will help African biblical scholarship to grapple with issues of ideology not only

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<sup>31</sup> The status of the Bible is compromised in postcolonialism in the way that it is shown to be a document under investigation for colonial and imperial traits. According to Punt, postcolonial is not concerned with the truth of the text but rather with the central issue of the texts' promotion of colonial ideology (2006:71).

at the level of the interpretation but also in issues of ideological constructions at the level of the production of the text. Ideological criticism of the empire and colonialism is more deliberate, intentional and systematised in postcolonialism than in any other hermeneutic.

Whatever is said about postcolonialism, we must not forget that 'postcolonial biblical criticism functions as an anamnestic and heuristic framework within which to engage the biblical texts' (Punt 2006:67). Nevertheless, we further note with Punt that 'if the Bible is studied only for identifying intrinsic textual elements which provide colonial codes, and when the value of studying these texts for their own sakes or for theological (and spiritual) inspiration are secondary at best, it remains a question whether postcolonial hermeneutics are not short circuiting itself, in Africa, but also elsewhere' (:71).

### **2.5.1 Emerging Trends**

Using Sugirtharajah's (2001)<sup>32</sup> categories of how postcolonialism works with the Bible, we would now want to look at some of the readings trends that have emerged in African biblical scholarship. Given this ambivalent position that the Bible receives from African biblical scholars, we note that African scholars are not agreed on a particular method of postcolonial reading of the Bible in Africa. Therefore various strands of postcolonial African readings emerge in African biblical scholarship. On one side, scholars like Gerald West (2006), Sarojini Nadar (2006) and Jonathan Draper (2006) among others concentrate on readings that show how the colonized provided alternative readings that tried to transcend colonial readings of the text. In this body of emerging postcolonial literature, African biblical scholars use resources of the vernacular to resist and show how colonialism was resisted by African interpretations. This group works within the text and mainly faults interpretations that were assigned the text by colonial interpretation.

On the other front, another group of African readers emerge, and these generally go beyond interpretations of the text to deal with the production of the text. The likes of Dube (1997) and Gloria Plaatjie (2006), among others, have demonstrated that the text is

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<sup>32</sup> Sugirtharajah sees three trends of engaging postcolonialism with the Bible. The first deals with the scrutiny of biblical documents for colonial entanglements, the second engages in reconstructive re-readings of biblical texts, while the third interrogates colonial and metropolitan interpretations. In this third way, postcolonialism interrogates interpretations which contest colonial interests and concerns.

irredeemably a colonial document. For this reason, they argue that the Bible cannot be read alone in an African context and hence must be read alongside other texts. Plaatjie for example, working within a South African context, sees that the Bible is a colonial document. In her well contested argument, Plaatjie argues that the Bible in South Africa can only make sense if it is read alongside the new post-apartheid Constitution. In fact for her, the post-apartheid Constitution stands more of a chance of speaking to South Africans (black women) about liberation issues more than the Bible.

It is Dube (1997) who probably faults the Bible more than any other African biblical scholar. Noting that the New Testament and other Hebrew Bible books were born in imperial settings, she argues that a postcolonial reading of the Bible entails its decolonization. For her, the Bible has subtly been submerged in imperial history and has itself contributed to that history. It hoards several imperializing texts, has been 'exclusively assigned a divine space' (Sugirtharajah 2006:119), and therefore needs to be decolonized. Therefore, for her to read the Bible is not only to be inevitably involved with the historical events of imperialism but also is to take a dangerous journey that connects with dangerous memories of slavery, colonialism, apartheid and neo-colonialism (1997:13). Luckily for her she does not see the Bible as irredeemably stuck in that position. Dube's call is for all African Bible scholars to read the Bible for decolonization, and I think that this is a legitimate call, though Dube's particular preoccupation<sup>33</sup> with imperialism would lead one to imagine that postcolonialism is not about other things like dominated people, submerged histories, subaltern representation, reinterpretation of past histories etc.

Given that these two trends offer resources for resisting colonial and imperial traits both at the level of the text and its interpretation, then a postcolonial reading of the Bible in Africa would take note of the fact that postcolonialism is not about dwelling on the crimes of the past and their continuation, but about seeking transformation for liberation. This is in recognition of the fact that Western interpretation of the Bible has had a direct impact on African realities, ranging from culture to politics to economics.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Dube seems to be more preoccupied with imperialism than postcolonial theory itself. I think that sometimes she becomes personal and allows her personality to entangle with her scholarship.

<sup>34</sup> See Dube 2000:18ff.

Therefore to read the Bible in a postcolonial way is to be aware of the postcolonial landscape that Dube depicts as drawn

with the colours of Western imperialism, depicting inclusive histories of unequal geographies, unequal races, unequal distribution of power, denial of difference, silencing of women [and] simultaneously flashed with the riotous colours of resisting African voices and others of the two thirds world who assert the dignity of their lands, cultures, races and differences, and challenge Westerners to ethical distribution of power over the globe. Nonetheless, the postcolonial landscape is still marked by many collaborative servants who continue to assert, consciously or unconsciously the dominance of the west and the cultural suppression and exploitation of non-Western cultures and economies (2000:21).

Aware of these trajectories, our work shall heed this 'Dubean' call to decolonization in many places, nevertheless we shall also pay attention to any need that there will be to incorporate other emerging trends as mapped above.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

We have in this chapter mapped the territory that postcolonialism occupies and the journey that brings it to biblical studies. We have in particular noted that postcolonial criticism is a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and interrogating the colonial past, that it is highly serviceable to the Bible in that 'it offers resources for resisting surviving forms of subjectivity, self apprehension and othering that have been constituted in a colonial past' (West 1997:327), that there will be very limited options for ideological criticism if Marxism continues to be sidelined in postcolonialism, and that it will offer great spin-offs, as well as the opportunity to approach the Bible from a different than the traditional vantage point if thoroughly embraced in African biblical scholarship. This is why we agree with Segovia that,

postcolonial studies is a model that marks the reality of the empire, of imperialism and colonialism, as an omnipresent, inescapable, and overwhelming reality in the world: the world of antiquity, the world of the Near East or of the Mediterranean Basin; the world of modernity, the world of Western hegemony and expansionism; and the world of today, of



postmodernity, the world of postcolonialism on the part of the Two-Thirds World and of neo-colonialism on the part of the west (2006:37).

As pertains to the Bible, we have noted that it can best be said with Kwok Pui-Lan's words that 'postcolonial criticism makes visible the ways in which modern readings of the text collude with colonial interests in the west' and that 'postcolonial studies... provide a useful framework to assess the history of biblical interpretation in the third world' (2006:47).

Given this reality, we shall proceed to the next chapter and do a postcolonial reading of Luke's socio-economic parables. This is done in pursuit of more answers to our main question i.e. how a postcolonial reading of material parables in Luke's gospel can aid the understanding of the huge divide between the rich and the poor in the Kenyan society.

## Chapter Three: Postcolonizing Luke's Social-Economic Parables

### 3.0 Introduction

Many scholars have attested to the fact that the study of parables forms part of the most interesting discourse in New Testament scholarship. Halvor Moxnes (1988) for example notes that 'parables have been studied for the types of organization and local administration that they reflect, and it has also been suggested that they are a result of a particular stage in the development of division of labour and means of production in Palestine' (:49). Consequently, the interpretation of parables has been a technical venture as many scholars have presented various understandings as they have approached them from different points of view.

According to William Herzog (1994), for example Dodd (1961) categorizes parables as 'narrative realism in miniature' (:53) and for him, this warrants every interpreter's attention for it shows how in parables the natural order and the spiritual order are perfectly fused. On a different note and informed by a post-modern hermeneutic, V. George Shillington (1997) in his work argues that the interpretations of the parables of Jesus cannot achieve true technical competence until they rise above 'that which is merely technical to the level of that which is genuinely human' (:15). According to him, therefore, the parable should conform more to real life issues than to rigid theories and methodologies.

On another front, Tania Oldenhage (2002), following John Dominic Crossan's<sup>35</sup> seminal work on parables, sees parables as a combination of story and paradox to form a paradoxical story (:103); the subversion of previously held opposites. In this way he notes that the general characteristic of a parable is to overturn nominal views and expectations of society; 'to subvert meaning and to challenge referentiality' (:77).

Given the propensity by different scholars to read parables from different points of view using varied methodologies and hermeneutics, we draw our mandate to create a platform for the engagement of parables from another front, postcolonialism.

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<sup>35</sup> John Dominic Crossan's *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* published in 1988 has been one of the most influential works on the study of parables. Crossan's work made a paradigm shift from Jeremias work by its characteristic intertextual readings of parables and twentieth century literature (see Oldenhage 2002:115-123).

Postcolonialism brings another paradigm shift into the study of parables. Besides situating colonialism at the centre of parable interpretation, postcolonialism helps to figure out how the Roman imperial setting in which these parables were penned influenced the point-of-view taken by the narrators. Further, given that 'postcolonialism has an anarchic feel' (Segovia 2000) and deals with the overturning of normative and dominant views, a combination of parables and postcolonialism offers the potential to aid one of the goals of this thesis i.e. to interrogate how the world of parables could have played a part in shaping the current Kenyan context.

In as much as postmodernism was largely understood as 'an epistemic shift that challenges biblical scholars to critically examine their own entanglement with modernity and their situatedness in terms of power' (Oldenbake 2002:82), postcolonial biblical criticism has been understood as challenging biblical scholars to question the continuing legacy of colonial and imperial ideology in current biblical scholarship. In view of this, I shall in this chapter offer an alternative and oppositional reading of a selection of socio-economic parables in Luke's gospel under the postcolonial biblical criticism optic. In doing so, I shall first consider how Luke deals with parables. Secondly, I shall employ literary tools to analyse some conventional interpretations concerning these parables as I seek to understand how materialism is considered in Luke's gospel. In particular I shall employ the tri-polar model as advocated for by Jonathan Draper (1991).<sup>36</sup> I shall go on to use postcolonial element of empire mimicry within the select parables to show how this trait could have influenced the production of the gospel. My conclusion will offer my summary analysis of this as I prepare to translate the findings into the Kenyan context in the next chapter. First, we briefly consider the world of the parables and how Luke works with parables.

### **3.1 The World of the Parables**

In order for us to be able later to locate the specific scenes sketched in individual parables, it would be appropriate for us at this time to begin by drawing a trail<sup>37</sup> of the

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<sup>36</sup> In Draper's contextual exegesis, a tri-polar model of reading behind the text, reading the text itself and reading in front of the text is advocated for.

<sup>37</sup> Here we only sketch the larger socio-historical context behind the parables. The full picture will be complemented by the information that we shall include when we deal with the specific parables later on in this chapter.

world in which parables come to appear in Luke's gospel. This is in light of William Herzog's argument that parables offer typifications which imply larger social configurations from which we can draw a social construction of reality in which people interact in varied ways. For this reason, he argues that 'even the characters found in the parables are not individual but socially recognizable types who stand in for larger social groups' (1994:54).

Drawing from historical studies, peasant studies and theoretical models of constructing social reality, Herzog skilfully crafts a detailed account of the world in which parables were born. First, he notes that the world of the first century Palestine from which the parables were born 'comprehended a variety of political form' (:55). As a result of changes and political conspiracy in the Roman Empire, he notes that the years surrounding Jesus activity were those of complexity in the political situation. Governance at this time was in form of the Roman imperium, imperial province, client kingdom and temple hegemony.<sup>38</sup>

Apart from political reforms and the 'fights' for political supremacy in Palestine during this time, secondly, Herzog notes that the economic system of the world within which parables come to be born was largely agrarian. This society was two-tiered, pitting the ruling class against the peasants with their cognate sub-groups. The ruling class were the elites and considered themselves the rightful owners of land and all the assets of the state, while the peasants were systemically reduced to labourers of the state. In Herzog's words, 'they were people with nothing left to sell but their bodies or their animal energies, and they were forced to accept occupations which quickly destroyed them' (:65). Clearly it begins to emerge that the relationships experienced at this time were beginning to take shape in the form of colonizer/colonized relationships or what Moxnes (1988) refers to as 'unequal patron-client relationship' (:70).

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<sup>38</sup> Herzog proceeds to show how these layers of bureaucracy came about and their consequent usefulness. Noting that Palestine in the first century comprehended a variety of political forms, he shows that Herod the Great was a force to reckon with. In fact, according to him, he is said to have been so politically significant that his death posed a problem for Augustus (see Herzog: 55) leading him to divide the kingdom among three heirs: Antipas, Archelaus and Philip. Archelaus was banished to Gaul and his holdings converted to the province of Judea. This meant that the Romans had to rely on the high priestly families of Jerusalem, their elite collaborators who maintained internal order and collected the tribute assigned to them. Further, Herzog shows that the effect of this was that Judea was converted into a dependent temple state and this meant that temple bureaucracy ran alongside state bureaucracy.

Structured after the Roman Empire, first century Palestine was therefore ruled by aristocratic empires with their cognate bureaucracies.<sup>39</sup> According to Halvor Moxnes (1988) this bureaucracy comprised of the emperor, rulers in Palestine and Syria, high priests and Jerusalem aristocracy and large land owners at the top. At the middle were village leaders who comprised of rich farmers, synagogue leaders and Pharisees. Peasants who were full members of the village and village outsiders who comprised the deviants, unclean, sinners etc were at the bottom. Herzog notes that bureaucratization was as a result of an expanded Empire, too large for informal control. Accordingly, this expansion came with a monetized economy as peasants were removed from their land so that it could acquire better usage. In the long run, peasants, having been subjected to the pressures of a larger economy and the changing valuation in a larger economy, were no longer able to cope and most lost their land to the elites due to inability to service loans imposed on them by the elites and which they had to cope up with.

Herzog notes that the parables suffice for the reconstruction of this world. In particular he argues,

... the figures who appear in the parables can be associated with the social types who inhabited the agrarian societies ...The values that informed the aristocrats, their bureaucrats, and the peasantry are evident in the parables and the plight of the unclean and degraded and the expendables appear in the parables as well. Whatever the larger social, political, or theological purposes the parables may express, they need to be read first as scenes from the larger world of agrarian society and the political control of aristocratic rule (:73).

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<sup>39</sup> Herzog notes that financial bureaucrats became agents who redistributed wealth by removing it from the peasants who produced it and by accumulating it for the ruler who used it to perpetuate his rule (: 57). According to him, this was made possible by two bodies i.e. the army to enforce rules and the temple to provide religious ideology, 'that could either motivate cultivators to turn in their surplus to the rulers or, failing that, would justify the coercion of those cultivators and their subsequent oppression by the ruling class (:58). Halvor Moxnes (1988) sees two parallel bureaucracies i.e. the state and the temple but particularly notes that the temple played a great role in ensuring a bureaucratic patron-client relationship which in the long run benefited the state. Noting especially that the temple tithe system is not critiqued in Luke, he argues that Luke does not seem to see that the temple tithe system seems to mirror the Roman taxation form of his day and that in both systems (temple and state) the villagers were confronted with dues to their lords.

If this proposal is true, then it can be surmised that even without much of external aid, a reasonable picture of the world of the parables can be reconstructed through the use of parables themselves. Together with what we get from other sources concerning the world of the parables, we shall also keep this view in focus in our select parables.

### **3.1.1 Luke and Parables**

That parables played an important part in Luke's narration is illustrated by the fact that 'so many of the parables are found among the gospels in Luke only' (Moxnes 1988:57). That Luke also employed more parables than Mark and Matthew stands to show that they aided him best in conceptualizing the community and events he was trying to describe. As Herzog (1994) has noted, 'if parables offer a glimpse into the world of the first-century Palestine, they also infer the larger whole of which those glimpses are a part' (:53). This means that parables account for a greater percentage of Luke's world and that Luke could not have adequately explained his world without the aid of imagination that parables accorded him. It is also unimaginable what the gospels would be without parables; but do parables tell it all?

### **3.1.2 Parables and Point-of-View**

Gary Yamaski (2006) notes that in the context of literary analysis, the concept of 'point-of-view' relates to the position held by the teller of a story vis-à-vis the elements of the story itself. Following Adele Berlin, he draws comparison from the movies to show that, in a movie, the story is filtered through the perspective of the camera eye. In this way, and due to the preferences of the director, the viewer's perspective is both expanded and controlled by the camera; he or she can see the action from many directions and perspectives, but can only see what the camera shows him/her. Likewise Yamaski observes that 'biblical narratives like modern prose narratives, narrate like film. The narrator is the camera's eye; we see the story from what he [she] presents' (:90). That means that the audience see the events of the biblical story and in particular the parable from various camera angles that are chosen for them by the director or narrator.

Accordingly, what ends up with the biblical audience is what has been presented through careful 'manipulations' to achieve a desired effect on the part of the director. This stance, as Yamaski further notes, is accomplished through the use of 'point-of-view'

technique. A full treatment of the point-of-view technique as expounded by various narrative critics is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, we have introduced this concept because it aptly helps to explain our view concerning how Luke deals with parables. It is my observation that with regard to point-of-view, Luke presents things to us in his own light, from the way he understands them and sees them, from his own point-of-view. In dealing with the issue of housing in Luke's gospel, for example, Halvor Moxnes (1988) notes that,

There are not many references to houses in Luke's gospel. It is taken for granted that everybody who was not an outsider or possessed by demons was living in a house (8:27; 9:58). Luke describes construction of houses (5:19) and the process of building (6:48-49), as well as the cost of building (14:28-29) *though not information on how labour was constituted...* some of the parables speak of houses, referring to activities connected with them: sweeping of floors (11:25; 15:8) or knocking at doors (12:26) ...[but] Luke gives little information about the size of houses (:85).<sup>40</sup>

This means that what Luke gives us concerning housing and houses is what he wants us to know and from his own point-of-view. If a reader is interested in the sizes of houses, Luke's 'camera' will simply not divulge such information because it is not within his point-of-view.

This way of dealing with parables may also be construed to mean redaction but point-of-view differs from redaction. In point-of-view, some of the details left out may simply not have been interesting to the narrator whereas in redaction, issues are included or omitted for ideo/theological purposes. In this way, we retain the term and concept of redaction for the work we shall do with Lukan socio-economic parables.

Together with Yamaski's point-of-view concept, Shillington's work also aids our understanding of how Luke deals with parables. In discussing Luke and parables, he notes in particular that Luke presents parables as beyond fables and beyond simple tales with obvious morals. For Luke especially, parables are puzzling and perplexing, they do not just inform but incite, they call to action though they do not detail the plan of action to be taken. Further, he states that in Luke's gospel, parables 'create a different world

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<sup>40</sup> Italicized sentence is mine.

from the accepted world, a tantalising new world not unlike the old world, yet radically unlike it' (:15). In a way, then, it seems to us that Luke is not an innocent narrator of the events of Jesus. Underneath his pen are competing points-of-view,<sup>41</sup> world-views and ideologies which must be further foregrounded and interrogated.

If Luke's parables succumb to a point-of-view analysis, then I think that his narration befits a postcolonial approach with all the tools that postcolonialism avails. As Sugirtharajah notes, in postcolonial biblical criticism, 'intuition, sentiment and emotion are used as a way into the text' (2002:26). If we apply postcolonial criticism to Luke's parables, then they can function as literary windows to not only the socio-economic world of Luke but also to his general world.

### **3.1.3 Rich and Poor in Luke**

Historical studies have shown that Luke uses parables to speak directly to the situations of his day. When it comes to the socio-economic situation of his day, Shillington points out that 'it is in Luke that we meet a scripted economic situation of the people of agrarian Jewish Palestine' (1997:12). For him, it is also in Luke's parables that we find a more vivid description of life and we get a clearer picture of social life and economic interactions within Luke's community. However, Moxnes (1988) notes, on the one hand, that the world presented through Luke's parables could be an exaggerated world, for according to him, the rich are very rich and the poor are extremely poor. On the other hand, he notes that viewed against the background of known differences between the rich and the poor in Greco-Roman world at this period, Luke among the other synoptic gospels presents a more accurate picture of the real situation on the ground.

Therefore, it seems to me that these scholars' preference for Luke is based on their belief that Luke's parables are more comprehensive than the parables of the other gospel writers. Though the way they arrive at this conclusion is quite general and not also the most appropriate way in which to approach parables and their authors, it is still

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<sup>41</sup> By this, I mean that I will show Luke's work at times offers different points-of-view. Being in an imperial setting and presenting a Jesus who is pro-subaltern, Luke finds himself in an ambivalent situation hence the different points-of-view that he presents. I will treat this in full when I offer my analysis as I deal with particular parables.



important for us to note that their views are based on many years of scholarly research which has placed the candour of Luke's parables above that of the other synoptic writers.

That Luke has at least nine parables unique to his gospel is a clear pointer that parables play an important role in shaping his theology and by extension that of his audience. Material or socio-economic parables in Luke's gospel occur in the so-called 'travel narrative' (9:51-19:27) section which John R. Donahue (1998) sees as having been highly influenced by the Markan motif of 'on the way' with its double nuance of the way to Jerusalem and the way of discipleship. It is in this section, however, where, according to Donahue, Luke abandons his Markan source and incorporates only Q material or material from his own tradition. This means that Luke had sufficient witness for this material and we can reliably draw from his source. As Greg W. Forbes (2000) attests, the candour of Luke's parables lifts them above all other parables in the synoptic gospels.

On another front, Luke's parables 'arise less from the mystery of nature or from the threat of judgement but from the mystery of human interaction' (Donahue 1988:126). The use of socio-economic parables in Luke, for example, has been attributed by P.W. Walaskay (1983) to a general feeling in Luke that the apocalyptic interest had faded and the community was now more concerned with praxis than law, i.e. Luke's community was no longer eagerly awaiting the second coming of Jesus but was settled to the every day reality of this life. In such a situation then it seems that the most natural thing for Luke's community was to settle to an 'earthly' life with the resultant societal structures and class differentiations. A look at how Luke's socio-economic parables present these would further complete our picture.

Luke's socio-economic parables perhaps give us the most perfect and reliable state of how the rich and poor can be perceived. Through the window provided into the lives of these two groups by the parables, it would not be eccentric to suggest that Luke is very ambivalent when dealing with these two groups. John R. Donahue (1988) notes, on one hand, that Luke's 'Jesus comes to the lowly of the earth and announces the good news to the poor' (:179) and has nothing to do with the rich. On the other hand, he notes that Luke is engrossed with the life of the rich in his language and imagery that he over-

romanticises the rich and consequently, he 'does not wage a strong polemic against wealth as is found, for example, in some apocalyptic literature' (:179).

We need to note that there is a huge divide that separates the rich and the poor in Luke's gospel. This tension runs through his gospel and is carried over and beyond, even to the heavenly life that Luke envisions (cf Luke 16:19-30).<sup>42</sup> The poor are not only the servants of the rich but are also exploited and marginalised to the extremes (Luke 15:15-19). The two groups are so irreconcilable that Luke sees their solution beyond this life whereby the situation will be reversed as the poor take their 'rightful' position in heaven while the rich become the sufferers, 'exploited' eternally by the God of those who were poor (cf also Luke 14: 12ff). This ambivalent way of treating the rich and the poor in Luke I think arises out the ambivalent situation in which Luke finds himself and which leaves him a highly hybridised writer. In the long run it seems that Luke's Jesus is pro-poor, while Luke seems to take a middle ground when treating the two. For the reader it appears ironic and confusing that Luke's Jesus repels wealth and riches. These are the very things that attract Luke and these comprise his true identity.

### **3.2 Postcolonial Biblical Criticism and Parables**

According to Forbes, much of historical research on parables has been centred on the differentiation of whether parables are allegories, metaphors or similes, with the contours being guided by the likes of Jülicher, J. Jeremias, C. H. Dodd, A. M. Hunter etc. Commenting on Jeremias in particular, Oldenhege notes that the indictment against Jeremias was that he turned parables into ancient artefacts with no literary value for today. Accordingly, he made parables into specimens for their own inquiry without allowing a timeless side to parables. This means that though Jeremias scholarship brought a new paradigm shift in parable interpretation, it also domesticated parables by not allowing parables to mean more than was presented in the text.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> As demonstrated in his parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke has the tension of the rich and poor carried on even in the afterlife. It seems that these are two irreconcilable groups even in his kingdom of God.

<sup>43</sup> Though it is not within the scope of this thesis, it is important to note that besides the classical scholarship of Jeremias (1963, 1966), Jülicher (1969) etc, and before the advent of postcolonialism, other paradigms e.g. modern (Dominic Crossan 1973, 1979 & 1980), and post-modern paradigms (see Shillington 1997), have been applied to the study of parables.

Now however, 'postcolonial discourse aims to emancipate previously submerged (colonized) histories and identities and, in the process, to reveal the complex hybridity and contingency of peoples in the contemporary world' (Horsley 1998:155). In this way, and noting that 'as far as the Bible is concerned, it is no longer the meaning of *the* text which is sought after, as a multiplicity of meanings are acknowledged from the outset' (Jeremy Punt 2003:78), postcolonialism will aid in bringing up new identities as it 'produces new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation and new sites of power' (:79).

Applied to the critique of parables, postcolonialism interrogates how historical and textual elements on the part of the authors and interpreters are deliberately used as categories that authorize domination and 'othering.' By paying particular attention to colonial elements and issues of the empire, postcolonial biblical criticism will open up the interpretive space already created by historical critical, modern and post-modern methods of interpretation. In postcolonial biblical criticism, 'it is not texts which contain meaning, waiting to be discovered, but meaning is properly viewed as being construed in the text-reader interaction' (Punt 2003:78). This for scholars imprisoned by modern interpretive methods will be seen as what Forbes terms 'hermeneutical radicalism and interpretative anarchy' (2000:41). Nevertheless, postcolonial interpretation is done in an attempt to free texts and interpretations from the 'ideological silo' (Jobling 2005:188, Mofokeng (1988) and West (1999) in which they have been contained.

Taken further, postcolonialism will show how in parables Luke, his interpreters and his readers as products of imperial settings and (though probably unaware of it) conform to an imperial world view and go on to show how this world view can be deconstructed and reconstructed in representative ways. As Fernando Segovia argues, 'the shadow of the empire in the lives of modern as well as contemporary readers must, yet again be highlighted in biblical criticism' (2000:130). The remaining part of this chapter is devoted to the task of a reading of select Luke's socio-economic parables under the postcolonial optic by way of highlighting this 'shadow of the empire,' but first, a look at how women feature in Luke's parables.

### 3.2.1 Women in Luke's Socio-Economic Parables

At the heart of postcolonial biblical criticism is the search for the silenced other. In the light of postcolonial feminist biblical criticism, we cannot fail to point out the absence of women in most of Luke's socio-economic parables. Musa Dube (1997) notes that 'postcolonial texts are born in settings of intense power struggle [and so]...colonizing texts propound relationships of profound inequality' (:17) and therefore it is no wonder that women are overpowered by being silenced in Luke's socio-economic parables. In almost all of such parables, Luke begins, 'there was once a rich man ...' totally oblivious of the plight of women. Where the rich woman in Luke is, is the question we should perhaps direct to Luke. Nevertheless, this would be a futile quest for Luke in many of his socio-economic parables is totally engrossed with male figures.<sup>44</sup>

According to Dube, this exclusion of women, first on the basis of their gender and secondly on the basis of their economic status is an imperial project (see Dube 1997: 20-21). As Monika Ottermann (2007) further puts it, in excluding women from his socio-economic parables Luke was probably driven by the fear 'that an amplified role of women would cause the Christians to be seen as practicing un-Roman activities' (:112). Seen in this way, Luke's socio-economic parables must be read with this caution, alongside other texts born in imperial setting and which have the characteristic of legitimizing the exclusion of the other. So, a feminist reader recognizes that Luke excludes women in his socio-economic parables the way he does because in a society where socio-economic activity was dominated by men, the 'rich woman' would probably have been a contradiction in terms. Luke's preference of the 'rich man' further identifies him with the dominant more than the marginal and serves to buttress this preliminary verdict on Luke.

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<sup>44</sup> Though it has been claimed by Jane Schaberg (1998) that Luke 'contains a great deal of material about women that is found nowhere else in the gospels' (:363), we have noted the absence of women in Luke's social economic parables. Moreover, Schaberg also goes on to show that this 'great deal of material' brings them up as 'subjects of [Jesus'] teaching and objects of his healing, ...models of subordinate service, excluded from the power centre of the movement and from significant responsibilities' (:363). In a similar way, Sharon Ringe (1995) notes that women are 'plentiful' in Luke's gospel more than the other gospels shed tradition of imperial domination' (:21).

### **3.3 Parable of the Rich Foolish Colonialist (Lk 12:13-21)**

Without going into scholarly arguments concerning the unity<sup>45</sup> of this parable we note that it is one of the less problematic parables and many scholars have not paid much attention to issues surrounding it. This forms part of my reason for choosing it. Further noting that this parable survives in two forms i.e. Luke 12: 16b-20 and the Gospel of Thomas 63:1, Mary Ann Beavis (1997) also argues that in recent scholarship this parable has not been of major interest in the history of parable interpretation nor has it been at the centre of any controversy. In fact she rightly observes that 'many contemporary monographs on the parables give it little or no coverage' (:56).<sup>46</sup> According to her, scholars have treated this parable in such a manner because it seems 'unproblematic' and that its meaning is plain.

#### **3.3.1 The Rich Fool and His Interpreters**

Though we have noted that this parable has not attracted the attention of many scholars, however a few scholars have done some commendable work on it. Forbes, who notes that 'the rich man is a common player in Luke's parables' (2002:83), also notes that he has been shown in negative light in Luke, such that the reader is already prejudiced against him. Therefore according to Forbes, it can be surmised that Luke is unwilling to relinquish the image of the rich man in his narrations though he often presents him in negative light. Given this treatment of the rich man in Luke, Forbes argues that this parable is primarily an exhortation not to trust in material wealth but to use wealth for the benefit of others. Further, he sees an eschatological motif in this parable whereby he notes that there is a catastrophe embedded within it, in which God is involved.

In a similar manner, Sharon Ringe (1995) complacently glosses over the issues raised in this parable and concludes that this parable concerns warning against hoarding wealth. In particular, she states that, 'far from referring to a life of generalised 'spiritual' discipline, worship, or prayer, it reflects a different posture towards wealth and possessions' (:178). Apart from Forbes and Ringe, perhaps the most comprehensive

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<sup>45</sup> Greg Forbes (2000) has shown that scholarly arguments around this parable have raised the question of the unity of Lk 12:13-21. In this respect he notes that many consider vv. 13-14 as reflecting a separate saying though this would leave the parable without a context (see :80).

<sup>46</sup> This parable is omitted in J.D. Crossan (1973), William R. Herzog (1994) among other prominent interpreters. However it is dealt with, though briefly in Havlor Moxnes (1988) and Sharon H. Ringe (1995).

interpretation of this parable is that offered by Mary Ann Beavis and to this I shall attend briefly.<sup>47</sup>

Beavis (1997) begins her interpretation by noting that the rich man in this parable is enmeshed in a web of social and economic relations that ancient audiences would have recognized without effort. She notes several assumptions that ancient listeners would have recognized from such a tale. One is the issue of the 'mode of production',<sup>48</sup> whereby she notes that the man 'did not work on his own land, but that he had slaves or (more likely) tenants to do the work for him' (:63). Since land was the principle source of wealth and the goal of the elite classes was to amass and consolidate land holding, Beavis notes that this rich man could have fraudulently gotten his land through loss of small-holder land as a result of debt. She further adds that this system was not uncommon since many peasants ended up becoming the new landowner's tenants and as a result there were several socio-conflicts between the peasants and the land owners from time to time.

Within this socio-economic context Beavis notes that 'Jesus listeners would, at least initially, have smiled at the prospect of the landowner's sudden demise, and agreed with God's (and presumably Jesus') estimation of him as a fool. However, the ancient listeners might have disagreed with vast majority of contemporary interpreters who view God as the direct agent of the rich man's untimely death' (:65). Accordingly, she notes that it would have been acceptable if this parable had assigned the death of the rich man to human agency i.e. as having undergone attack by hostile tenants in the manner of Mark 12:1-12.

Beavis interpretation comes to its most useful point when it resists kinds of interpretations that suggest that the rich man died in a peasant revolt. On the other hand it loathes all interpretations that tend to exonerate God and sees them as 'illustrating the biblical-theological – if not the historical-critical – difficulty of a parable of Jesus that ends with God summarily executing a person for greed, selfishness and foolishness' (:67). Nevertheless, her interpretation rises above that of other interpreters in that it

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<sup>47</sup> Beavis interpretation rises above other familiar interpretations that we have highlighted, mainly because it is aided by a postmodern hermeneutic.

<sup>48</sup> According to Roland Boer (2002), 'the ultimate category for any Marxist criticism worthy of the name is mode of production' (:108). This in Marxism has two senses i.e. the economic dimension of any socio-political formation which encompasses the dimension of how human beings organize themselves and relate in order to produce necessities and luxuries and the all encompassing dimension which captures economics, ideology, class, politics, religion etc in a particular historic epoch (see Boer 2002:109).

shows that this parable raises questions and dilemmas with liberating possibilities for the hearers. Beavis' interpretation is slippery and does not exactly point out who is responsible for the man's death; whether God, the peasants or both. I think this is more complicated by the Greek text in that the subject of  $\alpha\pi\alpha\rho\tau\eta\sigma$ =sin in 12:20 is not very obvious.

### **3.3.2 A Postcolonial Critique of the Parable of the Rich Fool**

Within the socio-economic context provided by the interpreters that I have already explained, I now wish to trace imperial ideology embedded in this text by situating the empire at the centre of Luke's parable of rich fool. Shillington has noted that 'in Palestine at the time of Jesus, the land that promised life for the people of God had become for many a sterile place overrun by Roman soldiers and bandits, and used by elite landlords to generate a surplus for their sumptuous city life at the expense of the dispossessed poor of the villages' (1997:10). The situation depicted in this parable is one of a covert imperialist system of economic, political and cultural domination. Moxnes observes that the society depicted in Luke's parables was bureaucratically constituted. At the top were the rich 'men', one step down was a large group of peasants and tenants and at the bottom were several groups of dependent workers, servants and slaves. According to Herzog, these groups can further be reduced to two classes i.e. the haves and the have-nots, the rulers and the ruled or the aristocrats/bureaucrats and the peasantry for as he observes, first century Palestine, the world in which parables emerge was a monetised agrarian society. For Herzog especially, 'Palestine in the first century was an advanced agrarian society, whether the political form of that society was the client kingdom of Herod Antipas, the province of Judea under the hegemony of the Temple and the Jerusalem elites, or the colonial administration of the imperial province' (:73). In view of Beavis' postmodern reading, it seems to me that not even Luke, his Jesus nor his interpreters have fully developed a view point that fully liberates the subaltern in this society from this subtle domination.

Postcolonialism, whereas admitting that Beavis' interpretation has turned God's action of executing the rich man into something to be celebrated by the poor in that it liberates them, raises further questions as to why this God chooses to execute a single rich man at the expense of an imperialistic system that is still left operational. Left at this,

this interpretation makes the subaltern celebration likely to be interpreted as what Miguez Bonino (2006) terms 'an expression of the human misery and hope generated by the socio-economic conditions and finding expression in mythical or utopian projections' (:44).

To be very rich in an extremely poor society presupposes the robbery of the poor in terms of labour and land, so postcolonialism paying attention to Marxist critical tools will not so much dwell on this rich man but the system that allows him to be rich in the midst of poverty. For as Roland Boer notes, in an oppressive system 'the relations of production involve a multitude of small land-holders who pay tribute to various layers of a significant bureaucracy, at a local, 'national' and imperial level' (2002:109). In this case, and as Bonino also argues, 'using the terms of Marxist analysis: the Bible is not satisfied with expressing human misery, nor with other worldly or subjective realms – it announces, narrates and demands historical events which, at least in principle and initially, overcome in reality this misery' (:44). If the Bible is understood only in these terms, then Luke must be called to account for the imagery he employs which to the best exposes his obsession with the empire more than his resistance to it. In other words, while Luke deeply desires the liberation of the subaltern, he does not go to the extent of deconstructing the systems that make them poor but only deals with individual cases as is illustrated in this parable. The imagery that he has provided in this parable (as acceptable norms) does not only condone misery for God's people but also fosters servitude. Within this understanding, and contrary to its conventional interpreters, this parable becomes a difficult text in which to situate liberation; its liberation becomes un-liberation.

The only hint of liberation in this parable can be traced to the death and the manner of the death of this rich man. His demise prescribes a space in which the poor can rejoice. His manner of death presupposes a seed of revolution embedded in it, which Luke does not foreground. Noting that every subaltern prayer is that God should execute all colonialists and imperialists who amass wealth for themselves without any regard for the subjugated poor, and assuming that only a peasant revolt can facilitate the speedy 'requirement' (Luke 12:20) of souls of rich and oppressive people in heaven, Jesus' conclusion of this parable evokes a celebration and not sympathy. However they die, this parable points to the fact that God approves a celebration of the 'exit' of rich oppressors.



If not their death per se, then the space and peace created by their total absence is God's doing, in order that the oppressed can reclaim their economic and other freedoms.

But is the elimination of such people postcolonial? Is the ultimate goal of postcolonialism to lead the subaltern into a celebration of the absence of the dominant other? Hasn't Bonino (2006)<sup>49</sup> given the example of father Camilo Torres to demonstrate that what the empire requires is a total and radical transformation that leads to a regard for the other? Indeed, the postcolonial project does not involve the replacement of one empire with another as Sugirtharajah has argued. It focuses on the eradication of a system rather than individuals.

The postcolonial project envisions a transformed society, and as such, viewed under the postcolonial optic, this parable takes on a totally different posture. The economic dominance portrayed by the rich colonial fool is seen as an ideological import by Luke based on contemporary Roman imperial lifestyles. Put differently, Luke in this image is replaying the scenes of his world-view as he knew them. Arguably this would benefit or evoke a reading for decolonization. Similarly the silencing of the means of production, the peasants and servants of the rich man, the uncritical usage of norms that relate to the empire in the telling of the story, all call for a decolonized reading.

Nevertheless, in our postcolonial view and without relinquishing the eschatological overtones presupposed in it, this parable can be read as an ultimate enactment of how the forces of the masses shall triumph over the forces of excessive capitalism. That the representatives of exploitive and hegemonic means of production will some day be called to book, and the masses will have unlimited access to what has systemically been taken away from them. The parable gives a mandate for the subalterns

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<sup>49</sup> By way of illustration Bonino gives the story of Camilo Torres; priest turned guerrilla. In the illustration, Camilo contemplates the issue of 'the brother who has something against you' (Mark 5:23-24) and abandons his class to join the masses. Consequently, he joins politics and ends up being a guerrilla. In this illustration Bonino reveals a necessary tension between the individual and the communal. In doing this, he globalizes the communal and localises the global. His critical point is clear in that, 'the relation between interpretation and praxis...requires the use of all analytical tools at our disposal; this is the only justification for doing theology...when it fulfils its work' (2006:46). He shows that we cannot take refuge in the normative (to use Bonino's words), and expect a new praxis. The hearing of the Bible must involve our total present reality and only then can we hear the voice of the oppressed as we should and see their situation as it is. Working on Marxist terms Bonino argues that this is what Christianity fails to do and it cannot do without rereading its book with the help of Marxist tools.

to participate with God in creating the space for their triumph over the dominant and economic oppressors.

### **3.4 Parable of the Prodigal/Travelling Son**

According to Forbes, this parable in its literary setting continues one of the dominant themes of the travel narrative, namely, God's concern for the marginalised and despised. Guided by historical critical tools, Forbes goes on to argue that 'both in its literary position and theological emphasis the parable falls into what has been described as the heart of the third gospel' (2000:109). The parable of the Prodigal Son, as it has traditionally been referred to, has over the years attracted many interpretations. Loretta Dornisch, for example, observes that, 'the story is a classic of folk [Christian] literature whether told in this form by Jesus, developed by the Christian communities, or developed by Luke' (1996:175).

In his interpretation of this parable, Richard Rohrbaugh (1997) sees it as a parable that concerns family relations in Luke's world. In fact, he deviates from the traditional title and names it 'A Dysfunctional Family and its Neighbours' (:141) to show that the parable is more about family relations than the issues of sinfulness and God's forgiveness which have been the centre of traditional interpretation (:141–164).

What is striking to us in consideration of these and other interpreters<sup>50</sup> of the Prodigal Son is that none of them sees this parable as touching on economic issues. In our postcolonial interpretation we shall deviate from these interpretations and pay more attention to economic issues silenced by Luke himself and his interpreters, but implicit in the language of his narration. To do this we shall be guided by the postcolonial elements of empire mimicry and hybridity. These elements form our basis for reading resistance on the part of Luke's characters but more on Luke himself. Once again we are reminded that mimicry connotes the act of the colonized subject resistance 'by returning, in the sense of challenging, the 'gaze' of authority' (Moore-Gilbert 2000:459) whereas in hybridity, the periphery or the marginal seek to become the centre though in an equivocal, indefinite, indeterminate ambivalence that characterises this centre.

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<sup>50</sup> Herzog's landmark book on parables, which deals with issues of oppression, does not include this parable among the select parables that it handles. In a similar manner, Moxnes who extensively handles social economic issues in Luke's gospel touches on other parables in detail but only glosses over the element of clothing in this parable.

### 3.4.1 Mimicry and Hybridity in the Socio-Historic Context of Luke 15:11-32

Noting as we have argued earlier that Luke 15 is borne out of the larger context of Luke's world-view and that Luke's 'world is that of the Greco-Roman civilization, with which [he] shows himself more conversant than any other NT writer' (C.F. Evans 1990:41), we go on to ask ourselves if there are any traits of empire resistance in especially the world behind Luke's parable of the Prodigal Son that can inform our study.

Firstly, and according to P.W. Walaskay (1983), it is Hans Conzelmann, the predecessor of Rudolf Bultmann, in his redaction criticism work who confirmed that 'Luke had lost the original eschatological understanding of Jesus, presenting in its place a history of Jesus and the Church' (:7). If this is true, then we can suggest that Luke's gospel, and by implication Luke 15 in its socio-historical setting, mimics and resists the heavenly kingdom/empire which is construed along Roman imperial thought.

Further taken, we note that Luke writes to a community that has to settle to the fact that the *parousia* is delayed and has become an indefinite hope. Delayed *parousia* also means that the coming of the kingdom of God is postponed and is no longer a pressing issue. This further means that Luke's community had to live with this fact and abandon Mark's notion that the *parousia* would appear in the lifetime of his contemporaries (Mark 9:1). As Tat-Siong Benny Liew (1999) has noted of Mark's kingdom authority, 'Mark's politics of *parousia* remains a politics of power, because Mark still understands authority as the ability to have one's commands obeyed and followed, or the power to wipe out those who do not' (:27); this can also be said of all gospel writers, but more so of Luke whose heavenly kingdom is also conceived in the notions of the Roman Empire. Therefore, on one hand and to the extent that Luke presents to us the picture of heaven with bureaucratic features reminiscent of the Roman imperial system, to that extent he mimics the empire. On the other hand, the fact that Luke settles to the idea of a postponed kingdom of God by presenting 'a not so urgent *parousia*' shows that he resists the 'heavenly empire' if it is seen as a disruption of the present status quo. Therefore, the very setting of this parable implies that we can party (like the entire family), find jobs (like the younger son), claim and await inheritance (like the two sons) for the empire of God is not an imminent factor in our daily transactions.

Secondly, Luke mimics the Roman Empire in the language and imagery that he employs. David Holgate (1999) has done extensive reading on Luke 15 and has noted that, 'the parable and its co-texts give many indications that Luke made use of the conventions and concerns of first century Greco-Roman [world] to facilitate the proclamation of the Christian gospel' (:17). To the extent that the use of these conventions and concerns helped facilitate the emergence of new Christian identity, then Luke was in favour of a hybrid identity distinct from that prescribed by the Roman authorities.

This is a recognition that the parable was meant for and would be understood by those persons who were familiar with Greco-Roman society but were in favour of difference from the status quo of the day. This introduces another dimension (which shall develop more fully in the next section) to Luke's treatment of the empire i.e. we can note for example that Luke exhibits ambivalence in his attitude towards the Roman Empire especially in the language and behaviour of the elder son. Though Luke depicts his concerns as individualistic, the son comes out as anti-empire in the way that he attracted to the treatment of the younger son i.e. by suggesting that he deserved better or similar treatment (15:29), he exhibits simultaneous attraction and repulsion towards his brother. This in my view represents Luke's own ambivalence as a writer (here and elsewhere but not always) and also the agony that he is caught up in i.e. 'a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and its opposite' (Young 1995:161) i.e. the empire.

Thirdly, Luke may have been aware that 'according to the laws of the Roman Empire, the two sons would have been able to live off the family estate during their father's lifetime, but the property would remain in his hands until his death. After his death, the older son would inherit two-thirds of the property, and the remaining third would be divided between the remaining heirs' (Ringe 1995:207). This being so, that the younger son's request to receive 'his' property during his father's lifetime was very irregular and probably could be construed in the wider plot of Luke's resistance to imperial laws which promoted economic inequalities in the society.<sup>51</sup> Put differently,

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<sup>51</sup> According to Ringe (1995:207) Roman laws required that upon the death of the father, the older son would inherit two thirds of the property and the remaining third would be divided among the other heirs.

Luke has the younger son resist dominant arrangements of social conformity and inheritance practices condoned in the Roman Empire. If Luke has a Jewish family in mind, then all the more the need for resistance by this character, for according to Ringe, laws related to land were differently governed by both the Jews and the Romans. We may not know what other forms of Roman imperial laws that were resisted by the Jews though we can note that Jewish laws and Roman laws did not easily cohere and Luke may be exploiting this discord in this parable.

### **3.4.2 Mimicry in the Socio-Literary Structure of Luke 15:11–32**

Having noted in the previous section that Luke is overtly resistant to the empire, I now turn to show how Luke is also attracted to the empire in this parable. Drawing from Dube who rightly cautioned that in dealing with the Bible we must beware of ‘the inescapable and omnipresent reality of the empire which shaped the construction of the text’ (2006:5), my reading of Luke’s Prodigal Son can never stop imagining and comparing the kind of subaltern world to which the prodigal travels with that of my own upbringing.<sup>52</sup> Though the text is silent about the land to which he travels, it is clearly the land of great social inequalities, where some citizens can afford animal food in a famine situation, while other citizens are starving.

It seems to me that Luke being the person that he was, a well to do professional, an upper middle class male,<sup>53</sup> is more eloquent when describing imperial lifestyle than subaltern lifestyle. In other words, Luke’s here has adequate ‘rich’ descriptions e.g. his narrative is rich with ‘fattened calves,’ families which can afford slaves, lavish living, gold rings, music and good clothing, but he can hardly construct the true picture of a poor person in his society. The closest that he does so in his entire gospel, I think, is in Luke

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This would have cumulatively led to generations of inequalities. It seems therefore the action of the younger son requiring his part of inheritance during his father’s lifetime and even the action of the father in granting this request all go against the expectations of social conformity. The way I see it, this is the way in which the younger son and by extension Luke by bringing up this story resists the Roman imperial system.

<sup>52</sup> This raises issues of my socio-location which shall be dealt with in the following chapter.

<sup>53</sup> Many scholars are disagreed whether to refer to Luke as a physician or not based on the corroborating evidence of medical terms and insights in his gospel that would fit that kind of profession. Without going into all these arguments, what is important for us to note is that ‘Luke’s careful use of language, his sometimes elegant style, his familiarity with both the content and the style of Greek translation of the Hebrew bible.... his use of formal rhetorical devices... mark him as a well educated person’ (Ringe 1995:19)

19, parable of Rich man and Lazarus. But even then poverty is constructed within the parameters of sickness, lack of food and clothing.

If he deliberately avoids painting the picture of a poor person, then we can surmise that it is because the Most Excellent Theophilus, to whom he writes, would also not understand this picture, leading us to make the unavoidable proposition that Luke's gospel is produced and intended for the dominant class. If this is true, then we can argue that his gospel is meant to invite the upper and middle class to the 'new empire.' Thus Luke would have been careful to skew his sources in such a way that the content, imagery and language would appeal to the hegemonic class of his day. On the other hand, if he narrates things as he knew them, it is could have been he did not know any other level of poverty and thus his probable upbringing and interactions with the dominant class had insulated him from the reality of abject poverty in his society. In this way, I think, Luke though resistant to the empire, finds himself in an ambivalent situation and his mimicry here is one that is more desirous than repellent.

#### *3.4.2.1 Subaltern Treatment*

In having his younger son desire to be treated as a subaltern (15:19), Luke further complicates his way of dealing with the empire. Contemplating subaltern treatment does not make one a subaltern, as the younger son was soon to learn. Luke deliberately weaves the story in that direction so as to conform to the class treatment of his day. Is the son really serious? Could he have taken up that role if he was given the chance? I think that by the making his 'Prodigal Son' desirous of such a life, Luke exposes us to other human layers that are present in his society. Put differently, these are layers that Luke imports from Roman bureaucracy and this can be seen as part of the wider strategy that Luke uses to classify and show how people are stratified in his society.

My reading of the parable at this point would critique Luke for failing to resist this sort of imperial arrangement whereby he conforms to classify his society the way it is done under the Roman Empire. By narrating the story in such a conventional manner, it seems to me that Luke has put the middle-class best foot forward by privileging them. The only resistance to this by the subaltern can be constructed through the younger son's contemplation of being a labourer (or rather breaking rank with son-ship to join labourers). In my own view, the son acts as the hinge between the poor and the rich,

therefore any interpretation that determines to deconstruct an unjust society cannot overlook his desired situation. Though not explicitly stated in Luke, it seems to me that the son's present behaviour seems to resist a wider society in which humans are regarded as unequal. Probably, this is also the way that Luke resists such arrangements.

#### *3.4.2.2 Empire Mimicry in Travel and Clothing Imagery*

Finally, in this parable Luke resists the empire in the way he employs the elements of travel and clothing. These elements have been discussed by several scholars and have been shown to be central to the colonialists and imperialists projects. In particular, Musa Dube (1997) has discussed the element of travel while Gerald West (1997) and Jeffrey Staley (2006) have extensively discussed the element of clothing.

Beginning with the travel imagery, Luke's use of one of his characters in this parable as a traveller (15:13) evokes some questioning and especially if we pay attention to what Dube (1997) says. Dube's work takes a considerable space to show that the element of travel is central to colonial narratives and that these travellers are depicted as powerful strangers who go to foreign lands with material interests in mind. Noting that the Prodigal Son is not out to fail but that his going out and travel to a distant country is to start a new imperial site, we can note that Luke's narrative does not escape from Dube's categorization. This is because Luke initially uses the Prodigal Son as a powerful traveller and one who has enough wealth to establish his own empire. Seen in this way, it can be further argued that by using the Prodigal Son as a powerful traveller, Luke's seeks 'to impose images, ideas' (:15) of travel on the readers. At the same time, Luke will show the failure of this traveller to establish an imperial site. In this Luke mimics the empire by offering a 'repetition that repeats differently' (Couze Venn 2006:88) in order to disrupt authority. Consequently, this section of the parable can both be categorised as part of 'the Bible [which] is a colonising text' (Dube 1997:15) and also a subaltern text that aids in deconstruction of the empire.

Turning to the clothing imagery, we notice that in this parable, being 'clothed' (15:22) becomes an important sign of the son's acceptance and transformation. In his introduction to one of the articles in a book he has edited recently, Sugirtharajah (2006) has rightly noted that, 'not insignificantly, clothing has always been an important marker of colonial power and mimicry' (:319). When relating the element of clothing to the story

of the demoniac in Mark 5:1–20, Jeffrey Staley (2006) also observes that during Chinese immigrants colonisation by America, ‘...a change of dress from “heathen clothing” to “American clothing” represented a step in the Chinese immigrant’s American colonisation as well as an important step in Christian ‘conversion’ (:324). Gerald West (1997) also relates how the clothing element of Joseph in Genesis 37–50 is used to show different stages of his life. The argument of these scholars is that change in clothing was used by the colonialists to dupe the subaltern into believing that their ways were inferior and those of the colonialist’s superior.

If clothing imagery is used by Luke to represent ‘colonial power’ (West 1997: 339), then we can argue that Luke uses it in his Prodigal Son to show a change in status; from the lower-class or the have-nots to the haves or the upper-class. It takes a postcolonial view point to see that by having the Prodigal Son clothed in the ‘best robe’ Luke is probably working under the ideology that a change in clothing represents a higher social class as opposed to the lower-class. By a change in clothing, his Prodigal Son moves from the marginalized to the dominant class. Luke uses the ideology of clothing in the same way as the colonialists did i.e. to mark-off sons of the empire from servants of the empire, the controllers and the controlled, those in the centre and those in the margins. Seen from this perspective, we cannot exonerate Luke from fostering imperial ideology, not only in this text but also in the entire Luke/Acts corpus.

As a way of concluding this parable, I note that the parable of the Prodigal Son perhaps presents us with great difficulty on how to read Luke. It is clear in this parable that though Luke more often than not resists the empire, some of the time he is ambivalent in the way that he deals with the empire. This is clearly shown in the roles that he assigns his characters and also how he uses his language. At this juncture and relying on the evidence of this parable alone, we cannot be fully decisive in our verdict on Luke but a look at a few other socio-economic parables will suffice in aiding us make a clear verdict on Luke.

### **3.5 The Parable of the Shrewd Manager (16:1-13)**

Many commentators e.g. Justin Ukpong (1996), John Donahue (1988) and Paul Trudinger (1997), regarding this parable as plainly difficult, unyielding in its meaning, ‘unedifying’ and ‘bristling with difficulties’ (Justin Ukpong 1996:189), have tended to



hinge their interpretations on the relations between the rich man and his manager. The general tendency of interpreters of this parable, as Ukpong notes, has been to focus on the manager's action of falsifying the promissory notes of his master's debtors and to me this has only further frozen the possibility of other readings for this parable. Given the difficulties that underlie the literary texture of this parable, the question that my postcolonial reading will deal with will move from why would Jesus have told such a tale, to why would Luke have ascribed such a tale to Jesus? Consequently, my postcolonial interpretation will cast its shadow upon the light shed by the historical circumstances of this parable; i.e. the Roman occupation and colonization of Palestine which has already been dealt with in the earlier sections of this chapter.

Nonetheless, it is important to reiterate with Paul Trudinger (1997)<sup>54</sup> that during this time, 'small landowners were having their farms expropriated by wealthy creditors, usually as a result of poor seasons' (1997:131). Following Trudinger, we can note further that the Galileans had systematically been reduced to poverty through games of power economics played by wealthy Jewish absentee landlords. For example, in his analysis of how absentee landlords rented the land to tenants, he argues that these tenants were charged exorbitantly, and since most of them could not afford the repayments, they were reduced to the lowest of the low by being forced to become day labourers.

Therefore according to Trudinger, 'Jesus tells this parable to expose the depth of oppression inflicted on the poor' (:136) and therefore his plea is for a 'society where expendables and acts of oppression and injustice no longer exist' (:136). For him, this parable does not lose touch with the Lukan theme of the Kingdom of God and therefore, in as much as it pits peasants against landlords, it also raises 'questions of faithfulness, of forgiveness, of the responsible use of wealth, of the need for decisiveness in crisis and of the value of resourcefulness' (:137).

In as much as Trudinger's interpretation may be construed as anticipating some measure of a postcolonial criticism, I think that it misses the postcolonial assignment in the way it fails to situate power struggles, fuelled by imperial ideology, at the centre of

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<sup>54</sup> Trudinger represents the school of thought that sees the parable ending at v. 8-9. His interpretation sees Jesus as telling a story of a typical confrontation between landlords and tenants/merchants, with the steward as a go-between. According to him, Jesus is working for a society where expendables and acts of oppression no longer exist and this is his vision for the kingdom of God (1997:136).

this parable. What postcolonial biblical criticism does is to expose the hegemonic side of the imperial system that sustains the landlord, and, further, viewed with neo-Marxist lenses, questions not only the mode of production of this landlord but also the stratification of this society into class sectors.<sup>55</sup> In order to achieve our postcolonial interpretation of this parable, we will follow Justin Ukpong's (1996) interpretation as we consider an interface of postcolonial biblical criticism and Ukpong's inculturation hermeneutics which has within it elements of liberation hermeneutics.

### 3.5.1 Ukpong's Proto-Postcolonialism

One versed with postcolonial hermeneutic tools, on reading Ukpong's interpretation of this parable, may not easily notice that Ukpong's reading employs what I would call a 'liberationist inculturation hermeneutic'. This is because the interpretation arrived at in Ukpong's reading is liberative and seems to mirror the same goal as in postcolonial interpretation i.e. centring the margins. If this is so, and considering that inculturation hermeneutics predates postcolonial hermeneutics in African biblical studies, the question to raise would be about the difference that postcolonial interpretation brings to Africa biblical studies? In relation to this, and noting that postcolonialism is an interdisciplinary project even in biblical studies, many African biblical scholars have felt as if postcolonialism has no particular role in African biblical scholarship other than that of 'disciplining' other hermeneutics. Jeremy Punt (2003)<sup>56</sup> in particular notes that, 'postcolonial study insists on transgressing disciplinary boundaries in its advocacy of an interdisciplinary and a multicultural curriculum' (:62) and cautions against this tendency. In fact he puts it that 'postcolonialism should not try to be everything to everybody' (:62).

In the ensuing debate and kind of tug of war for meaning, space and power between postcolonial hermeneutics and inculturation hermeneutics, Gerald West's (1997)

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<sup>55</sup> Though Gerald West (1997), Richard Horsley (1998) etc have critiqued postcolonialism for neglecting socio-economic macro analysis, it is my view that a properly theorised strand of postcolonialism should be all encompassing. As Horsley indicates, we obviously do not want our postcolonialism that 'often diverts attention from contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination and obfuscates its own relationship to the conditions of its own emergence that is to a global capitalism that structures global economic, political, and cultural relations' (1998:153). In other words, Horsley envisions a postcolonialism that holds the global and local struggles in balance.

<sup>56</sup> Punt's theorization sees postcolonialism representation in a hierarchical structure. This stratification of power and quest for supremacy is an unnecessary import. Postcolonial's quest for an umbrella hermeneutic is not for any supremacy reasons but for the sake of 'disciplining the disciplines' as Gugelburger sees it (see Punt 2003:62).

proposal offers a solution by which we can properly articulate the relationship, not only between postcolonialism and inculturation hermeneutic, but also other African hermeneutics as well. West proposes that postcolonial criticism can be of service in making different forms of African hermeneutics make sense of each other. For example, he sees that the South African emphasis on Black liberation theology and the Nigerian emphasis on inculturation can be brought together under postcolonialism. As he argues, 'this is one potential contribution of postcolonial hermeneutics: It holds together the concerns of liberation hermeneutics (race, class, and gender) with the concerns of enculturation hermeneutics (culture)' (:335). With this understanding we now further consider this parable.

### **3.5.2 Postcolonialism Meets Inculturation**

Though not an overt postcolonial reader, Ukpong has given a reading of this parable that I consider postcolonial in its interpretation, more so than in its application. This is because though not sensitised to postcolonial tools, he reads from an inculturation biblical hermeneutic and arrives at what I would term a postcolonial interpretation. This again evokes the unanswered question; what does postcolonialism do differently from other African hermeneutics? Noting that Ukpong does a comparative reading of this parable vis-à-vis the cultural context of peasant farmers of West Africa as well as the international debt burden of the Two-Thirds world, what I shall do differently under this sub-heading is to *postcolonialize* Ukpong's reading. More particularly, I shall engage postcolonial concepts lacking in Ukpong's interpretation so as to make his work truly postcolonial rather than colonize it. In such a reading, I do not intend to rob his work of its *inculturation flavor*.

Postcolonial biblical interpretation meet's inculturation biblical hermeneutics as fronted by Ukpong at precisely where both seek to make different socio-cultural contexts the subject of interpretation and where both eschew dominant interpretive approaches 'which assume that only approaches shaped by the dominant cultures are seen to be valid' (1996:191). In this way, both highlight the dialectical tension of the centre and the periphery which is desired in most postcolonial readings. However, what Ukpong's reading lacks from a postcolonial perspective is not only a recognition of the traits of the empire traits but also what these effects have on Luke and his interpreters.

### 3.5.3 A Postcolonial Redaction

Therefore, in this parable a postcolonial analysis begins to see a society stratified under three economic strata with their cognate assumptions and power allocations i.e. the rich man in a rich economic relationship (ruling-class), the manager representing the power brokers (middle-class) and the peasant farmers in a weak economic position (low-class). Regrettably, this form of stratification is uncritically upheld as the norm of life, not only in this parable, but also in many portions of Luke's gospel. Therefore, our postcolonial reading overturns power assumptions and uncritically accepted norms by *unsubmerging* submerged voices and making those who were not initially intended to be, the celebration of this story. This is in appreciation of the 'profound longing of poor and marginalized people for lines of connection between their lived faith and the founding events of the religious traditions in which they locate themselves' (West 2002:95).

#### 3.5.3.1 *The Manager and Empire Resistance*

The manager's act of sharing the debts of his customers resists the empire in the way it resists the concept of justice in his day. Amazingly, Jesus uses a dishonest person to critique the dishonesty of the systems of his day. As Ukpong observes, the manager's action 'is a critique of the exploitative concept of justice operative in his society, of the rich man, his master, as an exploiter, and of his former self as an agent of the oppressive system' (:206). What is at stake in the manager's action is not only the rich man's value but a whole corpus of ideology as articulated or exercised by the hegemonic class of his day.<sup>57</sup> According to Moxnes (1988), 'from the point-of-view of the debtors, this was an unjust system, creating a rift between the rich and the poor' (:141). Therefore, though the steward shifted allegiance for selfish reasons, his was 'prudent behaviour' (16:8) for it was in accordance with the 'moral economy of the peasant' (Ukpong 1996:141).

Seen in this way, 'the parable challenges Christians to work toward the reversal of the situation' (:207), or rather to be resisting agents. This call, I suggest, is what can help postcolonialism achieve its full potential in African biblical studies. He resists the empire which he had spent time building. In retrospect, his resistance can also be seen as direct resistance by Luke himself. (This does not contradict my earlier reading of Luke as

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<sup>57</sup> Moxnes (1988) further adds that the background of this parable is an unjust system of exacting interest and taking usury on loans. For him, other passages in Luke point to a situation in which farmers and smallholders were pressed down by debts.

mostly pro-empire but stands to strengthen what I noted of Luke that he is quite ambivalent when dealing with the empire. At times he can be shown to be pro-empire and copying it and at other times he can be shown to be resisting it, or in a sort of angst that attracts and repels the empire). Therefore the manager aligns himself with the poor and the marginalised. More importantly, this is also the way in which Ukpogon resists the empire by making the poor in West Africa the point of his interpretation. In this way he becomes a postcolonial reader by critiquing the hegemonic and exploitative systems of our day, as he offers a call and an example for African Christians to oppose imperialist ideological constructions in the land.

### **3.6 Postcolonizing Heaven: The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus 16:19-31**

This parable has two parts, which deal with the two sides of our perceived existence; the heavenly and the earthly. From a socio-economic point-of-view, we take up these two sides and consider how the text takes up an imperial mentality, and also show how the 'subaltern other' should resist such arrangements. In doing so we are aware that the colonial past has been constituted by surviving forms of subjectivity, self-apprehension and othering and in this respect postcolonial criticism offers tools for resisting such arrangements (see West 2003:37).

#### **3.6.1 Popular Interpretations**

Most interpreters agree that this parable makes some powerful statements about the requirements God places on one's present life. According to Forbes (2000), this parable continues one of Luke's favourite themes, that of the proper use of wealth and possessions. He alludes to the fact that it may be impossible to determine a precise setting for the parable though it is possible to trace the flow of thought which results in the composition of the parable. With regard to this, Forbes interprets this parable within the wider context of Jesus rebuking the Pharisees for being lovers of money. Therefore, according to him, '... what is at issue is not their wealth as such, but their hypocritical attitude towards money' (2000:181). This interpretation assumes that Jesus may have been silent about the social inequalities of his day and that is why his major teaching is not directed to the critique of the disparity between the rich and the poor. Further, it

means that at the level of production of the text, the kind of situation depicted here was condoned at the expense of one moral truth. Put differently, the point-of-view that Luke takes here silences other moral issues that could arise from this parable.

Reminiscent of Plato's dualism, Luke juxtaposes two worlds in order to achieve the zenith point of this parable, which according to John Donahue is that 'riches cause blindness to the presence of the suffering and needy neighbour' (1988:179). Though the contest as it seems to me is between 'in which world should one live a better life', Luke by this juxtaposition seems to suggest that one cannot have abundant life in both worlds. His dominant idea is pegged on an either/or situation. The second thing that Donahue notes about this parable is that it provides a handy summary of Luke's concern for the dangers of wealth. Therefore, according to him, 'Jesus comes to the lowly of the earth and announces the good news to the poor. The conditions under which they live will be reversed by the proclamation of the good news to the poor' (:179). If we have to follow Donahue's interpretation, the socio-economic status in this world must not be reversed or transcended, for soon God will reverse this situation in the heavenly life.

The testimony of Sharon Ringe (1995), Forbes (2000) and C.F. Evans (1990) among others, that this parable has Jewish and Egyptian overtones is a pointer that it had travelled much and has been used for different imperial settings with their cognate ideologies. That Luke ascribed to Jesus a story which has several parallels means that he probably used only those elements of this parable that were useful to his context. A close look at Ringe's perception of the meaning of this parable shows that Luke combines the two episodes in this parable to show that the rich have already been condemned. In particular, Ringe sees a double meaning in this parable when she says that, 'the one to return from the dead is both Lazarus in the story and the risen Christ in the Church, neither of whom will convince those whose tenacious greed defies divine law and stands in the way of Justice' (:218). Therefore, for Ringe, this parable warns against riches but promises a reversed life in a futuristic heaven.

Apart from the obvious condemnation of the rich man as an individual, and by extension similar rich men, none of these interpretations condemn the systems that have made the poor what they are. None of them go beyond a simple classification of people to see Luke's systemic use of religion to condone poverty of the masses. In such a situation,

I think, we need to follow Roland Boer (2002) who reminds us of the need to return to that dimension of Marx's perception of religion and its role in alienation. Accordingly, Marxism in postcolonialism will help in unmasking socio-economic exploitation and especially the dimensions that are concealed in biblical interpreters.<sup>58</sup> A look at some of these will illustrate this further.

### 3.6.2 A Rich Heaven?

In this parable, Lazarus' waiting for the scraps falling under the rich man's table draws a parallel with the prodigal who waited for the scrap from another rich man's pig's 'table.' In condemning the rich man's wealth, the parable seems to forget other biblical rich people including Abraham, David etc. who were very rich. Considering that the righteousness of Lazarus is only implicit, one wonders why the rich man is condemned. My observation is that unless unduly pressed, the actors in this parable face their ascribed eternities on account of their economic alignments and their cognate choices and not on account of their piety per se. If we pay more attention to this parable, we find out that according to C.F. Evans, 'Abraham's judgement is not that the rich man has not helped the poor but that he has already had his good things. Nor is it said that Lazarus had done good deeds on earth, but only that he had suffered evil things' (1990:615). Being as it is a travelled narrative, owing to its various unresolved origins, I think this parable is one of the most misplaced illustrations of life that Luke ever used in that it can easily be used to entice the poor masses to equate heaven as a place for those who were economically poor on earth and hell for those who were rich.

In such a scenario, the masses who by nature are religious are the ones who are seduced to opt for economic poverty in this life in exchange for an afterlife with Abraham as is the case with Lazarus in this parable. Given this, we have to consider that the earthly New Testament image of Abraham as an affluent and influential person also continues in heaven and therefore it is almost paradoxical to tell the poor to embrace this image in the afterlife. While it is not convincing from this parable why the poor should

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<sup>58</sup> David Jobling's (2005) view here serves as a reminder of postcolonialism's usefulness in biblical studies. In particular, he notes that postcolonial critics question Marxist pretensions to map the history of colonial peoples on their behalf and highlight the collusion of the Bible/Christianity in the global aspirations of colonialism. Seen from this perspective, the critics argue that both represent attempts to impose global ideologies developed in the west. In response to this, Jobling argues that in retrospect this is the way in which postcolonialism finds Marxism serviceable in Bible/Christianity.

rank themselves with 'rich' Abraham in heaven, it is my argument that this parable has an ideological recipe couched in religious language which can be used for fooling masses and consequent empire building. This is a dimension that neither Luke nor his Jesus are ready to engage. In this case, the old adage as cited by Musa Dube suffices: 'when the white man came to our country, he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us, 'let us pray.' After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible' (1998:297). The connection we see between this adage and this parable is the call for the subaltern to engage the imperial *utopic* religion while the imperialists engage the economic benefits of the subaltern. We note therefore that if there is any biblical story that would have easily caused a people in colonialism to exchange their land for prayers and an afterlife with Abraham, then it is this parable.

The parable seems to view the acquisition of material possessions with suspicion, and to depict wealth as a great hindrance to eternal life or the kingdom of God. Evans (1990) rightly notes that with the request of a warning to the brothers still on earth, 'if it is to be presumed that the brothers are also rich, it is now clearly implied for the first time in the parable that to be rich [on earth] is to be a sinner in need of repentance' (:615). In doing this the parable encourages the imagination of another utopia unto which all humans are depicted to be heading. The attachment or alignment of socio-economic benefits to eschatology may easily make people give up on earthly economic advancement in exchange for perceived materialistic heaven. In v.25 especially, the statement that '*...but now he is comforted here...*' tends to imply that just as the rich man enjoyed his riches on earth, so Lazarus sacrificed earthly riches and is now comforted by heavenly riches, and therefore by implication suggests a '*go and do likewise*' situation.

Finally, we have to observe that Luke uses the figure of the rich man because the rich though few, occupy the dominant/central/powerful position in society. Luke is so preoccupied with the 'rich' that I think he refuses to relinquish them even in his idea of the afterlife. Postcolonialism must challenge this Western notion<sup>59</sup> of eschatology that the reversal of the socio-economic inequalities of this human life will be corrected by a reversal of the same in heaven. If the God that Luke presents to us has observed people

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<sup>59</sup> Missionary Christianity especially in Kenya tended to paint a materialistic picture of heaven and ensured that preoccupation with this heaven became a pass-time business for the poor masses, while the colonialists were busy grubbing the earthly resources of the masses.



who oppress others here on earth and the only thing he/she will end up doing is oppressing them in a near similar way in heaven, instead of purifying them of oppressive traits, and if this is one of the pictures of afterlife that Luke presents to us, then postcolonialism forces us to consider if we are comfortable with Lukan eschatological hopes or with purifying what is here and now.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

We have in this chapter done a postcolonial rereading of Luke and some of his socio-economic parables and our preliminary conclusions seem to point to the fact that Luke's composition of the gospel is heavily laden with imperial ideology. Our verdict is that Luke is more pro-empire than pro-subaltern, though at times he is ambivalent. Put differently, we have established that Luke takes a particular point-of-view in his narration and this point-of-view gives him the platform to shape his audience and recipients in the way that suits his ideology. By analysing particular socio-economic parables, we have illustrated that even his interpreters whom we have termed products of an imperial setting, do not deviate from this hegemonic platform that interprets with the dominant class. We have pointed out this conformist stance that is often taken by Luke and his interpreters which like a spiral web may have had untold effects on the part of his hearers throughout the centuries and more so on nations for which this gospel was used as a colonizing and an imperialising text.

## Chapter Four: Parables and Empire Mimicry in Kenya

### 4.0 Introduction

The current postcolonial situation in Kenya can best be explained by the use of the words of the 'song of Kimathi' as recorded in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's (1977) *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*. In part, the song goes:

When our Kimathi ascended  
Into the mountain alone  
He asked for strength and courage  
To defeat the white man  
He said we should tread  
The paths that he had trodden  
That we should follow his steps  
And drink from his cup of courage  
If you drink from this cup of courage  
The cup that I have drunk from myself  
It is a cup of pain and sorrow  
A cup of tears and death and freedom... (:62-63).

I appeal to words of this song because from it we can note firstly, that postcolonial Kenya is a site of struggle and the battle is aimed at defeating the white man's legacy. The 'white man' (colonialist) left a legacy of a huge and ever widening divide between the poor and the rich in Kenya. Secondly, from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's use of Christian imagery, we can note that the postcolonial Kenya is a religious society and one that values Christian imagery as a vehicle for its ideology. Finally, we can note that postcolonial Kenya is in dire need of a liberator 'messiah', one from whom 'we should tread the paths that he/she ha[s] trodden' and one who has 'drunk a cup of pain and sorrow, a cup of tears and death and freedom' (:63).

In the light of this initial and preliminary view of the Kenya's postcolonial setting, I shall in this chapter, use the postcolonial elements of colonial mimicry and hybridity<sup>60</sup> to show how the application of Luke's parables in the Kenyan context has contributed to the huge divide between the rich and the poor. In doing so, I shall map the 'rich and poor' scenario in Kenya, guided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Kenya National Human Development Report 2006 among other documents. Secondly,

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<sup>60</sup> I draw my usage of the postcolonial elements from the explanations I did in chapter two. Though I may modify them in this chapter to capture the full imperial situation in Kenya as I understand it, nevertheless, I will not largely depart from their initial 'Bhabhan' usage.

and by use of the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o (though not exclusively) I shall establish the religiosity of the Kenyan society and in particular show how Bible/Christianity<sup>61</sup> plays an important role in the societal consciousness of the Kenyan society. I shall lay particular emphasis on the use of parables by seeking 'lines of connection'<sup>62</sup> between how parables are regarded and used in the Kenyan society. For the use of parables I shall also, though not exclusively, rely on Ngugi wa Thiong'o and his interpreters.

Towards the end, I shall show how the imagery of biblical narratives and Luke's socio-economic parables in particular have condoned imperial ideology in the Kenyan society contributing to the prevailing divide between the rich and the poor. My conclusion will problematize this ambivalent role of biblical narratives as a way of laying ground for the main conclusion in the final chapter.

#### **4.1 Poor and Rich in Kenya**

The general situation of the rich and poor in Kenya is best captured in a paragraph on the home page of the official Swedish Embassy in Nairobi, which has this inscription:

While the bottom poor earns 1 shilling, the top rich Kenyans earns 56 shillings. This makes Kenya one of the most unequal countries in the world. Inequality inspired the setting up of rich and poor, an unusual project within the development cooperation. The economy has been declining during many years and half the population lives below the poverty line. The concentration of power, wealth and productive resources in the hands of a few is detrimental to economic human development.<sup>63</sup>

Whereas it is not the best practice to source Kenyan information from a Swedish resource, nevertheless, this captures the extent to which it has generally and widely been accepted that the gap between the rich and the poor in Kenya is an issue of global concern. As Philomena Mwaura (2005) has noted, 'this problem is structural and historical and is made worse by serious social, political and intellectual crises' (:62). This is also the position held by The UNDP Kenya National Human Development report 2006, whereby it is pointed out that the poor in Kenya are very poor (some chronically poor) while the rich are very rich.

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<sup>61</sup> I am indebted to David Jobling (2005) for the use of this concept. I only allude to it here but later I shall expound the way in which I shall use it.

<sup>62</sup> 'Lines of connection' is almost becoming a concept, used as it is in Norman Gottwald (1985) and popularised by Gerald West (2002) among others.

<sup>63</sup> [http://www.swedenabroad.com/page\\_31916.aspx](http://www.swedenabroad.com/page_31916.aspx) (downloaded 20/11/07)

#### 4.1.1 The Early Beginnings: The Kenyatta Factor

According to Norman N. Miller (1984), the gap between the rich and the poor in Kenya must be traced within the ideology of capitalism that Kenya embraced at independence. Capitalism is an ideology that the Kenyan society borrowed from its former colonial masters. This can indirectly be traced from the 'father of the nation'<sup>64</sup> who was highly mastered in imperial ideology. Miller notes that the Kenyatta family had within the first years of independence transformed and entrenched itself into a famous political and economic power. The wife of the president, Mama Ngina had 'acquired a substantial economic domain and was actively expanding to include large tracts of uncultivated land and working farms, plus businesses involving road transport, ivory, wildlife trophies and mining' (1984:50). This was tantamount to building an empire fashioned after and transcending that of the colonialists.

Miller continues to observe that in the building of this empire, 'nepotism was common place' and a large number of extended family members and others profited by their favoured positions (:51). Furthermore, 'in Kenyatta's regime, all major decisions flowed from the top to the bottom and were taken by Kenyatta or by his close lieutenants. The inner circle that held real power was the family' (:61) and apart from governing, 'capital accumulation was the basic objective of the people close to the regime' (:61). As a result, Miller continues to observe, the private business and private wealth of the inner circle grew to astounding levels. This means that prosperity was directly or indirectly tied to connections to the first family. Therefore a class of the very rich was in its making and in retrospect another class of the very poor. Just as we noted of Luke's social world so it is noted of Kenyatta's time (which was a time of abandoning traditional values and embracing Western and Christian values) that 'a clear patron client relationship existed between Kenyatta's cabinet members and a network of supporters in their home areas who benefited or hoped to benefit by their ties to those in power' (:62).

It is for this reason that Miller continues to note that 'a basic theme touching all social issues is that the fragmentation and diversity found in Kenya are exacerbated by the differences in wealth and the prevailing entrepreneurial ethic' (:71). This in essence resulted in a relatively stable lower middle economic class and a recognizable class of poor people while some went ahead and obtained exceptional wealth. Therefore, as he further adds, under Kenyatta, 'it is the wealthy black elite who govern the nation' (:71). It is also important to note that among these wealthy in the ruling class are the clergymen and women and who inevitably are the teachers of the Bible. In total Kenyatta's regime produced two distinct groups i.e. the *wenyeinchi* [those who own the nation] and the

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<sup>64</sup> In reference to the first president of the republic of Kenya; *Mzee* Jomo Kenyatta.

*wananchi* (children of the nation or the poor citizenry) (:71). Oscillating between them, perhaps are the middle class (upper/lower).

Notable therefore, was that a hybrid generation<sup>65</sup> was on its way in the post-independence Kenya. Empire mimicry, in the form that both attracts and repels as we noted in chapter two, can also be noted to have started taking place immediately after independence. This can further be explained with the words of Miller:

The elite began to regard themselves as a cohesive group that deserved prestige and economic wellbeing. There were variations in income, but members of this elite were clearly distinguished from the poor and the lower middle class not only in income but in style. They adopted British styles in clothing, housing, furniture and entertainment. They lived in red brick tiled bungalows with well tended gardens in Nairobi's residential sections. They played tennis, drank whiskey, and owned well priced cars. In fact the new African elite who had joined or replaced the white elite not only copied their lifestyle but often adopted their outlook. They would still help their poor relatives, in conformity with traditional African values, but many of them tended to keep aloof from less favoured citizens. They were accused especially by university students of perpetrating dualistic social system of colonial days and of favouring a system of mutual accommodation with the remaining whites. They did not yet constitute a hereditary upper class, although their children might one day do so (:72).

The passage above details how a hybrid generation that was resistant to the colonialists yet defining itself within colonial parameters was on its way and constituting itself in the post-independence Kenya. This hybridity and mimicry<sup>66</sup> played a big role in the stratification of the Kenyan society between the poor and the rich. 'The black elite who had wholeheartedly embraced Western values were alien to their mother culture, a situation that contributed to the gap between the rich and the poor' (:84). They did not believe that Kenyan cultural values were the key to development and if they did they

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<sup>65</sup> Hybridity as used here connotes a complex identity that emerges when Kenyan cultures are disrupted by British cultures and as they seek to disrupt the British cultures by seeking a new identity. In Moore's words, it is an insidious product of the colonial encounter that threatens to fracture the colonizer's identity and authority (2005:88). This posture is evident in the general population but more so among the ruling class who use it for personal gains.

<sup>66</sup> Even though Robert C. Young (1995) explains hybridity and mimicry as Bhabhan concepts that are used to show how the colonised resist colonial authorities by copying it, the Kenyan elites engage mimicry of a special type. They show attraction to colonial identity and ideology when it aids them in colonizing the Kenyan subaltern but they resist it when it threatens to shutter their hybrid identities. They hoodwink the Kenyan subaltern into believing that colonial power is over with the exit of colonial masters yet they duplicate a subtle neo-colonial rule in Kenya.

stuck to the master's tools which aided them in othering the other Kenyans. Western religion (Christianity in particular), medicine and free enterprise were each emphasized over indigenous systems for the same reasons. As a result, Miller remarks that modern politicians in Kenya not only bypass indigenous values, they openly use Western dress, automobiles and forms of entertainment as status symbols, particularly as a way of distinguishing themselves from the masses (:84). Along with these is Christianity which is used and regarded as the religion of the 'civilized' (Ngugi wa Thion'go 2006).

#### 4.1.2 Moi Factor

Under the second president, Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi,<sup>67</sup> the gap between the rich and the poor in Kenya further widened. Interestingly, Moi was a devoted Christian and biblical virtues were part of his national oration. Moi enjoined stories and biblical parables in his national oration. Famous among these was his pet parable, that of Lazarus and the Rich Man which he used to urge the poor to forget earthly riches so that they would be rich towards God. Not only so, but as Miller further notes, during his time, even the 'Christian Church hierarchies, particularly through Anglican and Catholic bishops [were vested with] significant political powers' (:85). This move was to ensure that the Kenyan subalterns were kept submissive through the use of ecclesial means and powers. Clearly under Moi's rule, religious parables had become the famous opiate of the poor.

However, the most notable thing under Moi's regime, and which further widened the gap between the rich and the poor, was that he built his empire by mainly suppressing the poor from his oppositional tribes. According to Joel D. Barkan (1994), ethnic welfare associations were banned, ostensibly to reduce tribal conflict, but in fact to eliminate the countervailing social and economic power they represented, especially among the Kikuyu<sup>68</sup> and related groups. More significantly, 'the expansion of Moi's power was accompanied by a growing culture of sycophancy and fear' (:26). As a result, this led to politicians seeking to please or pledge loyalty to him in exchange for socio-economic

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<sup>67</sup> According to Robert M. Maxon, contributor of the article 'Daniel Arap Moi' in the online encyclopaedia 2007, [http://encarta.msn.com/text\\_761552257\\_0/Moi\\_arap.html](http://encarta.msn.com/text_761552257_0/Moi_arap.html) (downloaded 24.12.07), Moi a member of the Kalenjin ethnic minority succeeded Jomo Kenyatta to become Kenya's second president. Maxon notes that Moi, who emerged as a leader and spokesman not only for the minority Kalenjin group but also other smaller tribes was an authoritarian leader. He consolidated his political power by keeping his opponents divided and appointing Kalenjin allies to important government positions. His rule was characterized by widespread corruption, nepotism and ethnic divisions. It can be noted that during his tenure it was not the subaltern from his tribe that benefited but the elites who surrounded him. In the long run the gap between the rich and the poor widened further during the 24 years of his rule.

<sup>68</sup> The most populous and seemingly entrepreneurial tribe in Kenya and who currently (after the much disputed December 2007 general elections) have become victims of tribal violence partly due to being perceived by other tribes as the most prosperous beneficiaries of former regimes.

gains. Barkan continues to observe that this led to economic decline and political uncertainty and increased corruption.

A comparison of both Miller and Barkan serves to buttress one fact, that Moi ruled by kick-backs, corruption and other serious economic bladders without any regard for the worsening economic situations in Kenya. Under such circumstances as we would expect, a form of subtle oppression and occasional suppression of dissidents was evident. Oppressed/oppressor discourse was also taking shape in the context of this othering pitting them against the other, depending on which side of the divide one found themselves in. Moi who ranked himself among the notable 'African nationalists' (:27), repelled the White man but not his ways. As a result it can be argued that most of his governance procedures including the infamous 'Nyayo Philosophy' were all illustrative of Western imperialism.

It has been explained (see Mwaura 2005) that as cronies at the top of the economic ladder loot the country, the gap between the rich and the poor widens for only those with privileged positions who have access to wealth. More succinctly, Mwaura notes that, 'narrow political objectives, corruption at all levels, embezzlement of public funds and destructive political and economic governance' (2005:67) lead to the poor becoming poorer and the rich richer. For this reason, it can be argued that colonial mimicry and hybridity by both the ruling elites in Kenyatta's and Moi's regimes and the resultant hybrid empires have left insurmountable gaps between the rich and the poor in Kenya.

These empires, given a closer look engage all the elements of empire building as stipulated by Musa Dube (1997).<sup>69</sup> My argument is that contacts with the colonialists impinged such imperial images upon Kenyan elite/leaders that they reverted to same manner of colonization and empire building immediately after the departure of the colonialists. Many of the images that authorize the subjugation of the other as I shall show later are sourced from narratives in one of the colonizing texts; the Bible.

#### **4.1.3 Current Situation: The UNDP Version**

As stipulated on the front page of its website,<sup>70</sup> the United Nations Development Programme (henceforth UNDP) is the UN's (United Nations) global development

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<sup>69</sup> Musa Dube has argued that empire building is facilitated on one level by the use of already existing images, political elements and economic interests among others. Among the elements that Dube sees as necessary for empire building are, travel and subjugation of land, suppression of women, use of religious values of the colonizing masters and the use of imperializing texts; the Bible included, among others. In her view, these are given impetus by colonial texts of which the Bible is one and in turn they authorize subjugation and legitimize imperialism (see Dube 1997:11-17).

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.ke.undp.org/> (downloaded on 20/11/07)

network, an organization advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. Moreover, UNDP is on the ground in 166 countries, of which Kenya is one of them, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. UNDP produced the first Human Development Report for Kenya in 1999 with an aim of assessing human development. Subsequent reports have followed annually and in all of them, human development in Kenya linked to issues of unequal distribution of resources has been a key concern. The UNDP Kenya National Human Development Report 2006 with its theme, 'Human Security and Human Development: A Deliberate Choice' particularly dwelt on how a secure environment enhances human development, but also dealt with issues of the gap between the rich and the poor in Kenya.

One of the key observations that the report makes is that poverty in Kenya is systemic, partly due to deliberate marginalization of some peoples and areas. It further notes that the Human Poverty Index for Kenya in 2005 is 37%, having increased marginally from 36.7% in 2004. The HPI (Human Poverty Index) value for Kenya is lower than the income poverty level of 56%. Despite rapid economic growth in the last two years, human poverty appears to have deepened. This can be attributed to the growing structural inequalities in the HPI components (access to health, water, doctors, and nutritional status of children) (UNDP 2006:17).

Analysis from HPI distribution per province and district for example show that provinces and districts without representation in the ruling class have been the most affected by poverty levels, while those from which the ruling class hail attain relatively rich indexes. The rich index attained by the poor near the centers of power can be explained as benefit by default i.e. the benefits are not intended for the poor in the first place, but as the rich bring services closer to their localities, the poor who are close to them and mostly from their tribes end up benefiting in a way. Therefore, districts like Kiambu and Thika have a lower HPI as compared to Teso and Marsabit which have a relatively high index. The same case applies to Central and Nairobi provinces as opposed to North Eastern and coast provinces. The point is, even collective wealth in Kenya is unequally distributed and its distribution follows after the patterns of poor and rich classifications whereby the rich are typified by the elites who are the colonial hybridists and mimics<sup>71</sup> while the poor are lower middle class and the generally poor masses.

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<sup>71</sup> Whereby the ruling rich elites have repelled the white man and his ways but have retained some of his ways to maintain their ruling identity.



A more recent survey, this time conducted by the government itself and analyzed in a local Newspaper (DN 27/04/07),<sup>72</sup> further shows that 'Four out of every ten Kenyans still live in abject poverty despite the current economic resurgence which saw the country record a 5.8 per cent growth rate in 2006. According to this report, 46% or 16.5 million of the 35.5 million populations live below the poverty line. To illustrate the effects of poverty in Kenya, the report argues poverty levels in Kenya are so high such that majority of Kenyans are those who cannot afford banking facilities and result to borrowing money from neighbours and least from banks. In particular, the survey shows that 45.6% borrow from neighbours, 12.9% from shopkeepers, 11.4% from self help groups, 11.9% from co-operatives and a 3.9% from banks. From this survey can note that 15.8% of the total population can afford bank or near bank borrowing. This is mostly the group that controls the economy, while 84.2% of the population can be classified as poor though at different levels of poverty.

These inequalities in Kenyan society can only be attributed to a schemed or deliberate imbalance. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2006:216-217)<sup>73</sup> has argued, when the colonialist left Kenya, they only took away their physical presence but left behind their ideologies. A breed of neo-colonialists who were willing to foster the interests of the colonialist and who were in power used the independent moment as a time to grab public wealth and amass wealth for themselves. As Gideon Githiga (2001) also observes, 'since independence, there had been known cases where people in authority had accumulated property without thinking of the plight of the poor and the marginalised... this grabbing of economic opportunities by a few Kenyans created a wide gap between the rich and the poor' (:89). My argument is that since this habit was imported from the colonial experience through interaction with the colonialists, the neo-colonialists were bound to be ambivalent towards the colonialists and their ways upon their exit.

Having shown how the Kenyan society has slowly transformed itself into a class society as an aftermath of colonization, perhaps a look at where the Bible and parables comes in will further this argument.

#### **4.2 Bible/Christianity in Postcolonial Kenya**

Drawing from Takatso Mofokeng (1988), David Jobling (2005) problematizes the issues surrounding the Bible and Christianity in Africa and notes that the two cannot be taken to mean one and the same thing in the manner of Mofokeng. This is because

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<sup>72</sup> <http://www.nationmedia.com/dailynation/nmgopinion.asp?categoryid=4> (downloaded on 20/11/07).

<sup>73</sup> His arguments are recorded in a recently edited book, *Ngugi wa Thiong'o Speaks: Interviews* by Reinhard Sander and Bernth Lindfors. See also *Devil on the Cross* for such sentiments.

'biblical studies' and 'Christianity' do not necessarily represent one and the same thing as Mofokeng tries to show. As West (2004) also notes, 'Christian religion and the Bible are not and should not be the same thing' (:41). West's argument is that, for example, when Africans started to appropriate the Bible for themselves, they were able to separate the Bible from the messages of the missionaries in a way that the missionaries did not foresee and intend.<sup>74</sup> Put differently, the action of these Africans clearly points to the fact that the Bible and missionary Christianity can be appropriated as two different entities. Though this argument is beyond the scope of this thesis, I bring up Jobling's concept of 'Bible/Christianity' to highlight this understanding that the Bible and Christianity are different and like Jobling I let the 'stroke stand for all identities, partial identities, and non-identities between different Bibles and different Churches' (2005:188). Nevertheless, it is important to note that the concept cannot be directly applied to the entire Kenyan context as Jobling does to the South African context, for in the Kenyan context there are patches of both i.e. Bible/Christianity and those of the Bible and Christianity.<sup>75</sup>

That Bible/Christianity is highly regarded in Kenya and has had great impact on the Kenyan society<sup>76</sup> is attested in the life of the society itself and partially epitomised in the works of one of the most prolific and 'notorious'<sup>77</sup> postcolonial writers in Kenya; Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Most of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's interpreters e.g. Charles Nama (1990), Simon Gikandi (1995), Peter W. Mwikisa (2000) and Kathleen Greenfield among others, agree that his works are highly influenced by the Christian religion. Kathleen Greenfield (1995) for example rightly argues that Ngugi 'uses Christian imagery as a major medium of his message since it provides a literary language universally understood among his Kenyan audience' (:39). Peter W. Mwikisa also adds that 'the Bible and Christianity are an important seam in Ngugi's intellectual make-up' (:164). Although these interpreters agree that Ngugi resists Bible/Christianity in many ways, they all like Greenfield accept that without this medium Ngugi would not quite strike the note that he does in the Kenyan context.

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<sup>74</sup> This argument is further taken up in West (2006) whereby drawing from Kwame Bediako, he shows that when missionaries or mission societies made the Bible available to an African people in that people's own language, their grip on the gospel was loosened and so too their proprietary claim on Christianity.

<sup>75</sup> The point of emphasis here is the differences and complex situations brought about by a hybridized Christianity as represented by the elite mainstream denominations in Kenya vis-à-vis the religions that emerge from a Bible that is sorely read to enhance indigenous African religious experiences in Kenya.

<sup>76</sup> Though it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it should be noted that the Kenyan society was and is quite a religious society even before contacts with the Christian and Islam missionaries. The works of Jomo Kenyatta (1961), *Facing Mount Kenya* and John S Mbiti (1986), *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* have shown this in depth.

<sup>77</sup> In an interview with Ngugi, Nonqaba Msimang (2006) notes that instead of 'famous' the Kenya government prefers the adjective 'notorious' for Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

The fact that Ngugi is able to penetrate the Kenyan society with the biblical text by annoying those at the centre and liberating those in the margins is a clear pointer to the central role that Bible/Christianity plays in this context. Therefore, the point that the Bible is highly regarded in Kenya is an authoritative and authorizing text, and is perceived to be sacred cannot be overstated. Due to this perception of the Bible, we can also note that the Kenya society exhibits a highly hybridised religious life. This can mainly be attributed to the fact that Bible/Christianity can be seen as being in continuity with pre-Bible/Christianity modes of religious expressions.<sup>78</sup> It is no wonder as Norman Miller (1984:85) argues that even Kenyan politicians revert to biblical imagery whenever they make political speeches that would impact the Kenyan society.<sup>79</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Parables in Kenya

Owing to the fact that the Bible is highly regarded in Kenya, biblical imagery and especially parables are accorded near 'real life' status. In Meru where I come from, it is rumoured that when the first person to have visited the 'Holy land' (Israel) came back, he went around the village claiming that during his stay in Israel he had visited the inn where the Good Samaritan is said to have hosted the injured man as narrated in the parable of 'The Good Samaritan'. The joke goes that none of my villagers then pointed out that the 'actual' inn existed only in the world of the parable.

The power of biblical parables over the Kenyan society can further be illustrated with the testimony of Jimmy McCarthy an American evangelist and a regular visitor to Kenya. He has recorded in the front page of his website that,<sup>80</sup>

I had heard several stories since I had been in Kenya about the power of the parable of 'The Prodigal Son' (Luke 15:11-32) had on teenagers in the slums. I heard numerous accounts of homeless, drug addicted, starving, petty thieves who broke down in tears because they identified with this son...

McCarthy's example is a clear pointer that biblical parables in Kenya are highly regarded and have transformed many lives. As Ezekiel B. Alembi observes,<sup>81</sup> 'an interesting

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<sup>78</sup> In other words, the Bible/Christianity exhibited in Kenya is of a complex nature for in it there are elements of missionary Christianity that are accepted and repelled. This is the same case with the Bible and also with indigenous religions. To use Gerald West's (2003) concept, it is a Bible/Christianity that involves a 're-membered' Bible, a mimicked hybrid identity and a continuous ambivalence to Africaness. What kind of Bible and/or Christianity that emerges from such a state, I suggest, is a subject of future research.

<sup>79</sup> Norman Miller may not have noted it but one of the most famous cabinet ministers during Moi's rule, William Ole Ntimama once termed as 'wolves in sheep's clothing' those members of parliament who were purporting to liberate the masses from Moi's oppressive rule.

<sup>80</sup> <http://jimmymccarty.wordpress.com/2007/05/30/remebering-kenya-pt-4-living-a-parable>  
(downloaded on 22.11.07)

development in the communication of religious messages in Kenyan Churches today is the use of narratives to enhance the quality and quantity of the message' (:103). My own observation is that parables, both biblical and African are highly relied upon in Kenya to instruct, warn, communicate and pass information etc. With the entry of biblical parables into the Kenyan scene, they are more relied upon than other narratives. Therefore, biblical parables enjoy a special place in the communal life of most Kenyans.

#### *4.2.1.1 Parables: The Example of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*

As I have noted from the analysis of several scholars and the evidence of Ngugi's writings, it is clear that his work is highly hybridized. Ngugi's hybridity takes the form of attraction and repulsion to Bible/Christianity and constitutes what I would call the 'agony of Ngugi'.<sup>82</sup> Though it has also been noted (see for example Kgalemang 2006:220) that by justifying his use of the Bible Ngugi is not privileging the use of the master's tools – for in his view they are contaminated – due to the complexity of his audience, Ngugi finds himself in a most ambivalent situation for he has to use these tools and at the same time resist and deconstruct them. Because of his audience, (and probably for his own sake) Ngugi employs many biblical narratives and biblical parables in several writings as a way of resisting the empire and empire builders in the Kenyan society. I consider two of such biblical examples, one drawn from a parable and the other drawn from a narrative.

In 'Devil on the Cross' he employs the 'Parable of the Talents' (Luke 19:11-27; Matthew 25:14-30) in a postmodern Marxist hermeneutic and rereads it from a Kenyan context. His argument is that the man, who in the parable, goes on a journey and leaves servants to multiply his money, can be likened to the colonial and imperial master who upon independence would rather rule Kenya by proxy than directly. It is interesting to note for example that in the parable and upon the return of the master, Ngugi (1982) has the servant who receives the least amount of 100,000 Kenya shillings and does not multiply it being the celebration of the story other than those who receive larger amounts and comply with the master's demand to multiply them. Greenfield (1995) echoes what Ngugi notes (see Ngugi 1982:85) that this servant '...buried his and demonstrated that money would not increase in value without being watered by the sweat of the worker' (Greenfield 1995:38). In a similar way, William Herzog argues that 'the servant has

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<sup>81</sup> <http://folklore.ee/folklore/vol13/pdf/kenya.pdf> (downloaded on 20.11.07)

<sup>82</sup> This is mainly because Ngugi strongly resists the empire yet time and again he finds himself reverting to the use the master's tools. It is known for example that Ngugi for a long time reverted to writing in vernacular but this trend could not be sustained since he had to use his language to resist the empire beyond his vernacular readers.

unmasked the “joy of the master” for what it is, the profit of exploitation squandered in wasteful excess, and he has demystified “good” and “trustworthy” by exposing the merciless oppression they define’ (1994:165). Ngugi envisages the postcolonial Kenya in a similar light and uses a well known parable to critique<sup>83</sup> the Kenyan neo-colonialists for working as ‘spanner boys’ of the British neo-colonial imperial system.

In my view, Ngugi’s project of liberating the masses does not take off mainly because the same masses that he seeks to liberate are brain-washed and hybridized. They would rather stick to the missionary (perceived to be religious) interpretation of this parable than start acting like the last servant in Ngugi’s interpretation and stop multiplying the resources of the Kenyan elites and ruling class with their sweat. The agony of Ngugi is that he can free the text from its ‘ideological straightjacket in which it has been imprisoned’ (Bonino (2006:42) but he cannot free the Kenyan masses from the ‘ideological silo’ (Jobling 2005:184) of Bible/Christianity in which they are in exile. In retrospect, the space created by this ambivalence on the part of the Kenyan masses is what the imperialistic elites and rulers take in Kenya and further domesticate the masses but not before ‘exorcising’ the presence of the likes of Ngugi from such a society. Put differently, without the presence of ‘whistle blowers’ and ‘mind poisoners’ like Ngugi and given the complacency of the masses necessitated by dominant biblical interpretations, the elites rule and exploit the Kenyan subaltern at will.

The second example of Ngugi’s use of the Bible comes from a narrative (Lazarus of Bethany in John 11:38-44) from his book *Detained* (1981). Ngugi says in part, ‘colonial Lazarus from the dead: this putrid spectre of our recent history haunted us daily at Kamiti Prison. ...Who raised colonial Lazarus from the dead to once again foul the fresh air of Kenya’s dawn?’ (1981:63). According to Simon Gikandi (1993) ‘Lazarus appears in *Detained* as a figuration of a comprador bourgeoisie trying to resurrect the imagined grandeur and dubious dignity of colonial culture; for this African ruling class, ‘arise colonial Lazarus’ is the celebratory call to divine worship at the holy shrines of imperialism’ (:61). It seems clear that for Ngugi, resurrection of Lazarus means the continuity of bourgeoisie culture. For him therefore it would be better for this Lazarus and what he represents (‘the corrupt history of the postcolony’ (:61) to be left undisturbed in the grave for that is where it belongs. Gikandi’s critique of Ngugi is that the connection he makes between Lazarus and the colonialists is not so obvious. For Gikandi,

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<sup>83</sup> This parable is well known in Kenya and aided Ngugi’s critique to be understood by the masses and the elites. His critique of the elites and compromised as ‘good and faithful servants’ only served to endear him to the masses that he sought to liberate with the barrel of a pen but led to his hatred by the elites and ruling class, his detention and later to his self exile. The book *Detained* (1981) details his antagonism to the Kenyan government that led to this kind of life.

Lazarus, whose 'name resonates with forms of ennoblement and melancholy' (:61) should only be read as a 'symbol of the possibility of hope, of resurrection and renewal' (:61).

I think in critiquing Ngugi's use of Lazarus imagery, Gikandi misses out a key element in Ngugi's argument, namely, the suitability of Lazarus as a symbol of the dominant. Whereas Gikandi argues that the deployment of Lazarus as a 'symbol of suffering and death seems out of place in a discourse of power and domination' (:61), I would see it differently. Gikandi, guided by the missionary interpretation of the text or what he calls 'the hermeneutics of both mainstream (protestant) and *Karing'a* (independent) churches' (:61) fails to see how power and oppression can be situated in Lazarus story. However, a postcolonial hermeneutic helps us to see the power struggles embedded in this narrative for Lazarus and by the standards of John's gospel comes from the well to do class. Ngugi's interpretation actually situates him among the dominant and ruling class. I would go along with Ngugi's reading considering that postcolonial hermeneutic draws us to the important fact that the Bible is more often than not the story of the dominant class. Therefore, his resurrection is not only the resurrection of more discourse on the dominant but also the resurrection of domination. For Ngugi and I agree with him, this is not something to be celebrated.

The way I see it, the difference between Gikandi's critique of Ngugi and Ngugi's point arises out of the hermeneutic that both employ. Ngugi, using a post-colonial Marxist interpretation (whereby hyphenated post-colonial represents a moment) is able to identify the dominant position of the presence of Lazarus and resist it, whereas Gikandi's reading leaning on more Euro-centric interpretation totally denies power struggles in Lazarus' narrative. Therefore, Ngugi's employment and resistance of Lazarus stands to show that the postcolonial Kenya should pay attention to those in the margins and forget the 'colonial Lazaruses', the dominant and the elites. In the next section, I show how the dominant class in Kenya 're-membered' the empire and 'foul[ed] the fresh air of Kenya's dawn' (Ngugi 1981:63), and the reason why they should be resisted.

### **4.3 'Re-membering' the empire the Kenyan way**

The concept of re-membering is borrowed directly from Gerald West. In West's 'Academy of the Poor' (2003), 're-membrance' is used in three forms to show how the ordinary readers deal with the text of the Bible. Firstly, 're-membering' is used in its derivation from the more familiar 'remembering'. In this sense the text is dismembered, taken apart and then remade and remembered. Since it is assumed that ordinary readers

'have an oral knowledge of the Bible'<sup>84</sup> and that most of their information about the Bible comes from socialization in the churches as they listen to prayers and sermons, therefore the text is 're-membered' in the hearing, remembering and retelling. It is 're-membered' in the way that it is not wholly remembered and hence dismembered.

Secondly, 're-membrance' as a way of dealing with the text is used to refer to a looseness, even a playfulness towards the text where interpretation is not controlled by the literal words of the text, but by social experience where texts are heard and retold more than read; where texts are engaged as stories that seize and free the imagination; where biblical texts are usually interpreted collectively; where biblical stories function sometimes as allegory, as parable or as veiled social criticism in a situation where survival demands disguised forms of resisting discourse; where certain texts in the canon are read and others ignored (2003:80).

Lastly, 're-membering' is used in the form of 'guerrilla exegesis' whereby all manner of tools and reading resources are incorporated and in whatever way so as to come up with a desired form of meaning, even if the ends to the means traverses any known and proscribed methodological propositions. Bringing the three senses of the 're-membered' Bible together then, it means that the reading of the Bible becomes 'improvisational... eclectic... jazz and transgressive' (:80) making the 're-membered' Bible sort of what I would see as a transgressed and transgressing text or a part of the text not in any sequential or canonical way. Following West then, the 're-membered' Bible is a rewritten Bible which has a redirected message and meaning, for 're-membering' 'writes a text anew from and for a particular social location' (:82).

It is my view that this conceptual package of 're-membrance' can be used in another way. Therefore borrowing from West and incorporating the three senses, I 're-member' the concept of 're-membrance' to explain how the Kenyan elite have 're-membered' imperial ideology which is a direct outcome of their contact with the empire. As a postcolonial concept, re-membrance takes on the elements of mimicry and hybridity as we explained in chapter two and as also explained by Fernando Segovia (2005).

As noted earlier on, the Kenyan elite, those who had direct or indirect contact with the colonialist, have keenly followed after the *Nyayo*<sup>85</sup> or footsteps of the

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<sup>84</sup> This sentiment is attributed to Mosala in West 2003:78.

<sup>85</sup> *Nyayo* philosophy, which was a brain child of the second and long-serving president of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, for, so it was thought, he had governed the country well. In our view however this is seen as a pledge to maintain the imperial dispositions of the former president and as a way of maintaining the status quo.

colonialists, as is highly attested in Norman Miller (1984) and Joel D. Barkan (1994). To reiterate Miller's argument, he argues that in Kenya the 'black elites... have wholeheartedly embraced Western values [and] are alien to their mother culture' (:84). Further, he observes that modern [Kenyan] politicians not only bypass indigenous values, they openly use Western dress, automobiles, and forms of entertainment as status symbols, particularly as a way of distinguishing themselves from the masses' (:84). Consequently, what they are and have is as a result of colonial mimicry and the resulting hybridity.<sup>86</sup> The effect of this can be seen in that it is done only at the expense of the poor. This in the long run creates a situation conducive to the gap between the rich and the poor.

In trying to maintain and sustain their hybrid identities and by mimicking the rule that the colonialists<sup>87</sup> had on Kenyans, the Kenyan elite have 're-remembered' the British empire in the way that they have also dismembered it. Put differently, the dominant class have selectively used aspects of the British Empire that favour their lifestyles and economic dominance. They have used the buildings, wealth, infrastructure and political structures left behind by the white man to entrench their hegemony. More so, they have used Christianity and the Bible (and in my case the language, images and ideology in parables) to provide a religious dimension to this hegemony. In their efforts, they have not governed in the same way as the Britons nor have they replicated colonial ideology in exactly the same terms, but in my view it is that they have produced a worse rule than that of the colonizers. Am I calling for the return of the colonizers? Or worse still am I equipping the elites to fine-tune or perfect their art of empire building? No! Since the empire is the interlocutor of postcolonialism, I argue that their dominance has been the recipe for the prevailing gap between the rich and the poor in Kenya. The Bible and parables in particular have provided images, language and ideology for justifying the grounds of this dominance. In the next section I show how this has been possible.

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<sup>86</sup> As noted earlier on, in postcolonial sense, cultural hybridity refers to 'making difference into sameness' (Young 1995:26) while mimicry connotes 'a repetition that repeats differently' (Venn 2006:88). Here, hybridity is used in the same sense but mimicry is used with heavier overtones of copying and imitating what you loathe and repel.

<sup>87</sup> In reference to the mimicry and hybridity of this 'comprador bourgeoisie' Ngugi (1981) notes that 'this class has incurable wish for permanent identification with the culture of the imperialists...but to truly and really become an integral part of that culture, they would have to live and grow abroad. But to do so would remove the political base of their economic constitution as a class. So this class can only admire that class from undesirable distance and try to ape it the best way they can within the severe limitations of territory and history' (:56).



### 4.3.1 Bible and the Kenyan Ruling Class

As I have argued earlier on, the Kenyan society highly regards the Bible. The Bible is perceived to be a symbol of power and even status. This regard is not only confined to the subaltern other, but the elites and powerful as well. Commenting on the use and misuse of the Bible by the ruling class in Kenya, Miller notes for example that, 'president Moi is a devoted Christian and biblical virtues are part of his national oration' (1994:85). This means that the Bible which is highly regarded in Kenya gave Moi the grounds to identify with its voice of authority, and its readers, majority of whom are the Kenyan subalterns. Nevertheless, contrary to the biblical voice of justice and fairness, president Moi who is a Christian<sup>88</sup> bred corruption by using government positions as kick-backs for political favours. As Miller further notes, these positions became short lived and unpredictable for the appointees leading to a situation that became a recipe for corruption. Barkan puts it more clearly when he notes that,

As previously noted, presidential appointees enjoyed fairly long tenures under Kenyatta. Under Moi turnover in these positions has been far more rapid and unpredictable. The result is an incentive to loot: one should help oneself to the spoils of office while one has the opportunity, because there is no assurance of reward for professional performance over the long term (1994:27).

Further, Barkan notes that 'Moi's mismanagement of the economy and drive to monopolise power alienated large segments of the population' (:28).<sup>89</sup> This in turn, further precipitated the making of the subalternity that characterises the population in Kenya. The point is that if it is for these same masses that Moi made biblical parables and potions part of his national oration, then we should be in search of 'Moi's Bible'<sup>90</sup> which in my view would be a very 're-membered' Bible. In other words, this would be a Bible that is used selectively, a Bible that would be easily used to condone socio-economic

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<sup>88</sup>Moi was/is a committed Christian. 'His character was greatly moulded by Christianity which he had embraced at a tender age. He demonstrated inexhaustible patience and tolerance which later helped shape his political career.' <http://www.answers.com/topic/daniel-arap-moi> (downloaded 24.12.07).

<sup>89</sup> Machira Apollos (2001) also notes that 'when Mr. Moi assumed power, he systematically dismantled what the late president had done for over 15 years. He concentrated his development efforts on promoting the Kalenjin tribe' (:122). This means that other tribes kept on the periphery during his tenure of office.

<sup>90</sup> This is in reference to the particular way in which Moi understands and uses the Bible. This 'Bible' can be traced from Moi's educational background and his contacts with missionary Christianity. According to his official biographer, Andrew Morton (1998), during his early days Moi 'was taught alphabet... and had Bible readings and prayers' (:49). Later the missionaries involved Moi in teaching the Bible as they had him 'take the younger classes for Bible study' (:54). More importantly, Morton describes him as a honest, sincere, and decent Christian gentleman whose 'Christian dimension to his approach' (:215) guarantees peace. It is no wonder that Norman Miller (1984:85) says of him that he 'is a devoted Christian and biblical virtues are part of his national oration' (:85). In my view, in future research, a comprehensive 'Moi's Bible' can be sort, analysed and composed from his speeches and from his analysts.

inequalities. This Bible would readily be available in Luke's socio-economic parables and would be given more impetus by prevailing dominant and Euro-centric interpretations. Therefore, this leads to a maxim applicable to the Kenyan situation i.e. the 're-membered' empire involves a 're-membered' Bible.

#### **4.4 The Role of Lukan Parables**

Luke's parables in the Kenyan context can be viewed as having had two roles to play. First, along with other biblical texts, Luke's parables have played the role of Christianizing the Kenyan society. Secondly, along with other imperializing texts, Luke's parables have not only 'authorized the subjugation of foreign lands and nations' (Kenya in particular) (Musa Dube 1997:15), but have also provided the relevant imagery for the acceptance of this situation. For example, due to the faulty interpretation of the Parable of the Rich Fool (12: 13-21), many Kenyan masses are comfortable that God will compensate for their poverty by 'killing' the rich man. In connection to this is the fact that since the Bible is regarded as sacred in Kenya, then its world view, its language and the images that are involved in composing this world view are also regarded as sacred.

View under the second role whereby parables are seen as part of the Bible which is an imperializing and othering text, it is not surprising that for example women are absent in most of the socio-economic parables that we dealt with in the previous chapter. In Luke's Parable of the Prodigal Son for example women are totally excluded. Therefore, any recounting of this story in a Kenyan context that does not pay attention to the 'absent' other would not be 'complete' or would not complete the full world view of an ordinary Kenya. The women/mothers are too much with us in Kenya, whether in the Church, in parliament, in the coffee societies or relief food queues. In fact, any home without a mother is 'othered' to some extent. Moreover, you will hardly come across a Kenyan narrative of any significance like the Luke's Prodigal Son, which negates the presence of women.<sup>91</sup>

When Dube (1998) argues that 'one of the strategies of imperializing texts is the employment of female gender to validate relationships of subordination and domination' (:301), I think that she misses out the point that such texts might also avoid/erase the mention of women altogether. In view of the fact imperializing texts are hostile,

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<sup>91</sup> In Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* and several of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's works, for example, women are represented by employment of strong women characters. Charles Nama (1990) who does an assessment of the place of women in Kenyan narratives and particularly in Ngugi works notes that women characters play a major role in Kenyan narratives. Following Jane Bryce's interview with Ngugi, he notes what Ngugi says that, '...because women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined woman with a will to resist and struggle against conditions of her present being' (:143).

exclusive and even dangerous to women in the way that they exclude them and other them, I would also argue that the exclusion of women from Luke's socio-economic parables is part of this larger imperial scheme against women. Seen in this way, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, for example, can be used to illustrate the role of Lukan parables in condoning the 'othering' of women both in the social and in the economic realms of the Kenyan society; namely that this parable provides grounds for erasing women's contribution from the memory of the Kenyan society. This is also in line with what we noted earlier of how women are treated in Luke's socio-economic parables.

In another case, when for example Luke paints the picture of the 'Rich Man and Lazarus' (16: 19-31), and his interpreters<sup>92</sup> say that the rich oppressors shall be judged in the afterlife, then in Kenya it stands to mean that the subaltern should not worry about the rich black elites who corrupt their ways by looting the national coffers, who oppress them through excessive taxation and other means of suppression, but should await an 'eschatological reversal of the rich and poor' (Bonino 2006:44). At this level, I think as Bonino argues, biblical texts must be seen 'as an expression of human misery and hope generated by the socio-economic conditions and finding expression in mythical or utopian projections' (2006:44). This is the space provided by Luke's socio-economic parables that the elite have used to create and widen the gap between the rich and the poor. It is an ideological space and one that makes the subaltern complacent and naïve in the way that they cannot imagine a counter voice for Luke.<sup>93</sup>

In rereading such parables in a postcolonial way, therefore, we must start seeing the social orders in Luke which have deep seated social conflicts and which are a direct expression of his own world. As Bhikhu Parekh (1982) has pointed out, 'Marx argues that the ideologies of all class-divided societies...display two basic characteristics: first, they 'obscure' or 'conceal' class conflicts; and second, they 'veil' the fact that the social order is historical and transient by presenting it as 'natural' and 'everlasting'(:57). Through them we must also see social constraints in our own societies and as Bonino argues, 'use all of the analytical tools at our disposal in the understanding of our present praxis, of the text and of the conditions for a new praxis' (2006:46).

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<sup>92</sup> See for example John Donahue (1988), among others.

<sup>93</sup> This naïve and complacent posture taken by the Kenyan subaltern is the same posture taken by the Kenyan Churches, hence a key aspect of Kenyan spirituality. This can be attested by key biblical interpretations in Kenya, spiritual songs and churches role in society. With regard to the Bible, the church takes a mainstream interpretation as Gikandi (1993) has observed.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

I have in this chapter argued that the Bible is perceived to be sacred in Kenya, and that it is accorded a very high status. By mimicking the former colonial masters, I have also shown how the Kenyan ruling elites have used the Bible to legitimate a class society in Kenya<sup>94</sup>. Therefore, my argument has been that the huge divide between the rich and the poor in Kenya today, more than anything else, is of human creation which has been given divine sanction via the Bible. In particular, I have shown how Luke's socio-economic parables have provided the necessary language and concepts for this project. In doing this, and by example, I have shown how a postcolonial critique of some of these parables can provide the language, concepts and space for imagining change. Now, in the light of Itumeleng Mosala's (1988, 2002) argument that 'a liberated Bible liberates and an enslaved Bible enslaves' (2002:78), I must consequently proceed to show the way forward for the Kenyan society. I ascribe this task to the next and final chapter of this dissertation.

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<sup>94</sup> I acknowledge that one of the limitation of my research is that I have not employed any primary data. Consequently, concrete and specific evidence of how the rich and powerful in Kenya have actually used Luke's parables to widen the gap between the rich and the poor has not yet been included.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

### 5.0 Introduction

Supposing two people standing in conversation next to a river see the dead body of a baby floating downstream. The most natural thing for them to do would be to remove the body from the river. If a second and a third body do the same, they would also remove these two new bodies from the river. But supposing more bodies keep floating downstream, will not these people instead of wasting all their time and energy removing unending dead bodies go upstream and find out the source and the cause? Will they not also having found out the source and the cause stop the practice and save a situation?

I began this dissertation by mapping and delimiting a postcolonial definition that has guided the major contours of this thesis. In the chapters that followed, and by the use of the example of socio-economic parables in Luke's gospel, I argued that the Bible and its Euro-centric interpretations has been used mainly in a selective way in the Kenyan context. I have shown that the Bible authorised colonization in Kenya and later an imperialism that has played a big role in the making of the gap between the rich and the poor. However, in another way, I have shown that the Bible offered only a limited recipe for liberation in the Kenyan context that I can liken to removing dead bodies floating downstream a river. This to me has not been an adequate reading of the text for it has only uncritically mimicked the traditional missionary reading of the text which has not been able to supply abundant life for Kenyans. As Justin Ukpong helpfully observes, 'the general experience is that the traditional mode of the official Church's reading of the Bible is not capable of responding adequately to the questions that African Christians are asking about their life in Christ and their experience with the Bible' (1995:3). Therefore, what emerges is that the only time Kenyan people have been able to use the Bible for liberative purposes is when they have read the Bible with their own indigenous resources.

By way of proposing a postcolonial reading of the text, I continued to show that a postcolonial reading of the text is not only a gesture to the upstream venture but also a sufficient reading that provides literary<sup>95</sup> resources for imagining this venture. As R. S. Sugirtharajah has indicated, 'what postcolonialism make clear is that biblical studies can

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<sup>95</sup> Postcolonialism provides articulate language, images for naming and imagining liberation from surviving forms of subjectivity. As West (1997) has noted, 'post-colonial criticism may be useful in that it offers resources for resisting (by de-constructing) surviving forms of subjectivity, self apprehension, and othering that have been constituted in the colonial past' (:327).

no longer be confined to the history of textual traditions, or to the doctrinal richness embedded in the texts, but needs to extend its scope to include issues of domination, Western expansionism, and its ideological manifestations as central forces in defining biblical scholarship' (2002:74). Consequently, I have argued that postcolonialism must not only talk and help talk about domination and oppression; it must participate in stemming these vices from their presumed upstream source by providing the space for imagining useful indigenous reading resources.

As a way of concluding all the arguments that I have made in the preceding chapters, I in this chapter want to go on and argue for the way forward in doing postcolonial biblical studies in the Kenyan context. In doing this I will first be mapping (though briefly) the state of biblical studies in Kenya and their role in society. Secondly, I will be showing how an integration and mainstreaming of postcolonial studies in Kenyan biblical studies can offer potential for social change by availing resources for resisting mimicked Euro-centric domination. Finally, I will propose Musa Dube's (2001) indigenous category of divination as a starting point for using Kenyan categories to resist Euro-centric concepts in doing postcolonial biblical studies. Put differently, this is as a way of putting forward a case for liberation before liberation or stemming the possibility of fire before going fire fighting; rather, an upstream (global) solution as opposed to a downstream (local) solution. It may be that by ignoring the resources offered for resisting the empire as offered in postcolonial hermeneutic, Kenyan/African biblical studies may be denying itself of resources that can bring about not only a socio-economic paradigm shift but also point the Kenyan/African Church to a more praxiological mode of reading the text.

### **5.1 The State of Biblical Studies in Kenya**

What is generally said of African biblical studies by Gerald West (2007a) can also be said of Kenyan biblical studies. West in particular helpfully observes that 'comparative studies form the vast bulk of all academic African biblical interpretation' (:2). Biblical studies in Kenya have been largely comparative studies conforming to all the contours of the already mapped chronology<sup>96</sup> of the development of biblical studies in

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<sup>96</sup> Though beyond the scope of my study here, Gerald West following Ukpong (2000a) draws up a chronology of how biblical studies in Africa have developed over the years. In it he names the years 1930s–70s as the years which formed a reactive phase. This phase as he observes legitimized African religion and culture vis-à-vis the Western tradition through comparative studies. The second phase 70s–90s more clearly made use of the African context as resource for biblical interpretation. This in turn led to amore proactive

Africa. What has mainly been the subject of comparison in these studies are the text and the religio-cultural context. Nevertheless, it can be noted that partly due to the huge number of overseas diasporic missionary biblical scholars over and against the local biblical scholars present in the Kenyan academy, the text/context comparison has been largely underdeveloped for mainly it is alien<sup>97</sup> categories that have been employed in this comparison. Put differently, Kenyan academics are mainly taught by Western scholars or Kenyans who have studied in the West. This has led to a situation whereby mainly Western concepts have been used for conceiving reality; hence text/context comparison using local and available categories has not been developed as would have been expected.

Though not unaware of the hermeneutic of suspicion, biblical studies in Kenya have overtly employed the hermeneutic of trust. In my opinion, this can partly be attributed to the production of biblical scholars only for parish use, for it is mainly the Churches which send their preferred candidates to the academies. (Few of these students end up specializing in biblical studies). Consequently, there is a general underdevelopment of postgraduate biblical scholarship in the Kenyan academies and this can also be attributed to the relatively small number of Kenyan biblical scholars. As John S. Mbiti observed way back in 1986, 'the number of African scholars versed in biblical studies at university level is very small' (:46). I think twenty years down the line this number has not significantly increased in the Kenyan academy. Further, a greater proportion of this number is the 'study abroad(s)' type and this complicates the picture of biblical scholars who are produced in the Kenyan academy let alone the approaches to biblical studies.

In order to make biblical scholarship of greater service to the Kenyan context, there is need for Kenyan biblical scholars to mainstream their findings in research in academic forums as for example is done in southern Africa.<sup>98</sup> When biblical studies are done in isolation, and for secondary reasons, they have little chance for impact and change in society. I am not suggesting a national or regional biblical studies curriculum for academies in Kenya or Eastern Africa but my observation is that, for example, the

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phase in the 90s. This phase makes African context the explicit subject of biblical interpretation (see West 2007).

<sup>97</sup> This mainly in reference to Euro-centric, Asiatic and also American conceptual categories. See for example the 'contrapuntal' category that a Kenyan biblical scholar, Humphrey Waweru (2005) uses to read the book of Revelation and dreams among the Gikuyu.

<sup>98</sup> I have in mind societies for both Old Testament and New Testament studies in Southern Africa that offer space for exchange in biblical studies research.

resources that postcolonialism offers for resisting the empire can only be useful in Kenya and Africa at large if they are mainstreamed.

## **5.2 Making Postcolonial Biblical Hermeneutic @Home<sup>99</sup> in Kenya**

Sugirtharajah (2001) has argued and insinuated in many ways that postcolonialism is a diasporic discourse. In part he argues that diasporic intellectuals of Third World origin utilized the space offered by the Western academy in the 1980s, to interpret and understand colonialism formulated by both colonialists and nationalists. Seen in this light, a distinction between diasporic postcolonialism and that practiced @home slowly begins to emerge. As Gerald West has also noted, it is Sugirtharajah who champions this notion and tries to make this distinction by stating that 'if the 1980s was the time of the subaltern, now is the time of the diasporic intellectuals' (quoted in West 2007b:7).

Further, Sugirtharajah seems to ascribe the bulk of postcolonial reflections to the diasporic intellectuals when he says that '[postcolonial criticism] entered the academy, becoming an analytical instrument not least among diasporan scholars' (2006:5). West gleans through the implications of Sugirtharajah's argument and concludes that Sugirtharajah has come clean, for in the long run, 'what he calls diasporic hermeneutics now looks like postcolonial hermeneutics, and what [for the diasporic intellectuals at least] might be called '@home hermeneutics' surely looks and sounds like liberation hermeneutics' (West 2007b:8). Should the postcolonial diasporic intellectuals (Sugirtharajah in particular) be allowed to get away with this or is there a gap they are exploiting from the @home postcolonials?

The reluctance by many African biblical scholars to take up postcolonialism as has been noted by Jeremy Punt (2006)<sup>100</sup> means that diasporic intellectuals can claim and tame postcolonialism to serve their purposes and in the way that they would want. Though West (2007b) has tried to catalogue a constellation of African biblical scholars (at least in Southern Africa) who are taking up postcolonialism and have produced a sizeable amount of work, it still remains to see postcolonialism being taken up in the

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<sup>99</sup> This way of referring to postcolonialism is borrowed from West (2007b).

<sup>100</sup> According to Jeremy Punt (2006), postcolonialism is not easily being taken up in African biblical studies. This is partly because the Bible is accorded status of a literary and cultural production because of the role it played in legitimization of colonization. In actual fact he says that postcolonialism is itself to blame for not appealing to the Bible in the way Africans do. He faults the way postcolonial biblical studies accord the Bible equal status to other secular texts and wonders if in this way postcolonial hermeneutic is not short-circuiting itself in Africa.



entire continent as a way of doing biblical criticism. Until this is done, diasporic intellectuals will lay further claim on postcolonialism making it a somewhat 'diasporic hermeneutic' rather than the @home hermeneutic that we all wish to have. More importantly, it means that African biblical scholarship will gloss over other issues evading 'radical re-thinking and re-formulation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and Western domination' (Horsley 1998:152) and which are best interrogated in postcolonialism.

### 5.2.1 Postcolonialism @Home: Musa Dube's Example

By the use of the example of the category of divination offered by Dube (2001),<sup>101</sup> I now want to propose a way of doing postcolonialism @home in Kenya and beyond. Musa Dube's ground-breaking paper 'Divining Ruth for International Relations' offers varied ways in which the divining concept can be reused in biblical studies. According to her, divination is the art employed by a divine healer to read books of social life, to diagnose problems and to offer solutions to consulting readers (CRs). This task is performed using divining sets 'which could be composed of carved bones, beans, beads, coins, and so on' (:181) and during the session, the CR writes and reads his/her own story with the divine-healer.

In divination, the professional healer reads to diagnose and heal broken relationships and to encourage life affirming relations in society as therapy for hurting bodies. Noting that with the coming of Christianity in Botswana (Dube's socio-location) the Bible has extensively been used as one of divining sets, she argues that divination as an art must be encouraged more and more 'as an ethical method of reading in Southern

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<sup>101</sup> Apart from Dube, Makhozana K Nzimande (2005) has also attempted to make postcolonialism @home in Africa by employing an African category, 'Imbokodo', as a way of resisting Western categories. According to Nzimande, an *Imbokodo* hermeneutic arises out of the context of the proliferation of anti-colonial readings in the two thirds world 'aimed at challenging the dominant Euro-American epistemologies and modes of biblical interpretation' (:1). Nzimande introduces her *Imbokodo* hermeneutic in a way that exposes it to be a hybrid or an amalgamation of black theology, postcolonial biblical criticism, feminist theology, African woman's theology and black American theology. *Imbokodo's* hermeneutic starting point is black woman's experience in South Africa in that it values the unwritten canon which imperialism denies. This allocation of 'canonical' status to living texts and using them to build up resistance literature compares to what Dube does in her postcolonial work. *Imbokodo* resists historical colonial reconstructions by providing a counter memory. In doing this, *Imbokodo* hermeneutic realizes that when most of the recovered memories arise, they will be male and patriarchal and therefore it gives them a feminist touch.

African' (:184). In this way she argues that divining entails production of new knowledge for it requires 'a substantial understanding of social relationships' (:184).<sup>102</sup>

#### *5.2.1.1 Divining in Kenya*

Divining in Kenyan societies was used to diagnose living texts for physical and social healing. It was one of the ways that colonialists tarnished as backward and based on witchcraft. This body of knowledge that constituted healing of many Kenyan societies, families and individuals was replaced by more Western and colonial friendly methods of counselling and 'modern' medicine. Though this practice continues, it has been highly stigmatised and is only useful among a minority of Kenyans. I advocate for divination as a category for approaching knowledge firstly because it paves way for the use of other and similar categories to approach knowledge and secondly because it is a subaltern category and consequently a tool which can easily be used to deconstruct the master's house. This in turn helps in placing the margins at the centre without displacing the centre.

The way I see it is that divination as a social and political category is more or less the same as Dube's earlier concept of decolonization for both involve 'an expulsion' (or a resistance to some form of oppression), only that I think divination is more cultural and easily understood (user friendly) in a Kenyan context. Decolonization has harsh overtones calling back the ugly scenes of struggle as Kenya fought to decolonize herself from colonial masters, whereas divination would stand for a healing process that not only assures freedom but also ensures unity with the othered. Though a great difference should not be sought between the two, I would encourage Dube's category of divination for Dube herself notes that divination 'seeks to decolonize [resist] the production of knowledge in biblical studies that tends largely to use Western modes of conceptualization and analysis' (:184). This for me is as a starting point for engaging other indigenous categories in doing biblical studies in a Kenyan context.

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<sup>102</sup> Tinyiko Maluleke (2001) encourages further theorization of this category but cautions against the use of this category uncritically (though in a feminist sense) citing that divination procedures are situated within a patriarchal setting and have sometimes been used even to foster violence against women. This taken care of, we should note that Dube's intention, within the broader postcolonial framework, is to resist Western categories by employing an African category to approach knowledge; or rather to employ subaltern tools to demolish the master's house.

### 5.3 Doing Postcolonialism with the Entire Bible

Musa Dube has shown that, '... imperial projects are propelled not so much by the simple desire of showing military power but rather by economic forces' (2006:147) or what she calls the gold face of imperialism. According to her, the colonialists are also interested in the religious aspect of the colonised because religion has the potential for resistance in the way it unites the subjugated for one course of action. It is this religious aspect that should encourage biblical scholars in Africa to engage postcolonial studies in other textual genres, particularly in the New Testament but also the Old Testament as well. In this way, African biblical scholars can further and systematically unpack imperialism in the text as a way of fine tuning Bible/Christianity as opposed to missionary Christianity.

Though 'there are signs that the Bible is perceived by indigenous peoples, at least in Southern Africa [and in Kenya as well], as an object of power more like the gun than, say, a utilitarian object like the candle' (West 2001:199), the Bible is also a political book and many things as well. As Itumeleng Mosala (1992) has also noted, 'the Bible is a thoroughly political document [for this] is eloquently attested to by its role in the Apartheid system in South Africa' (:130) and other systems that it has helped build.

As mentioned earlier in my second chapter and in my view, it is through tools offered by postcolonial studies that academic readers and 'ordinary' readers of the Bible can best come together. Put succinctly, the role of the intellectuals in dealing with the masses is best articulated in a postcolonial hermeneutic. In this way, the trained reader can clarify their own readings by paying attention to the readings of the ordinary. As West (1991:215) puts it 'the challenge is to move away from the notion of biblical studies as the pursuit of disinterested truth to something more human and transformative, something which is shaped by a self-critical solidarity with the victims of history'.

Therefore, in postcolonialism our study of the Bible should shift from a haphazard<sup>103</sup> search for mere academic knowledge to, for example, systematic study of specific genres with a view for transformation of societal structures. This means for example, that postcolonialism cannot exist on its own nor should it 'try to be everything to everybody' (Punt 2003:62) but should pay attention to resources offered by the historical-critical, modern and post-modern modes of interpreting the text. It is then that

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<sup>103</sup> Jeremy Punt (2003) accuses postcolonialism of selective use of the text and categorically states that the Bible cannot be 'studied only for identifying those textual features that embody colonial codes and when the value of studying those texts for their own sakes is secondary at best' (See: 71-74).

we in Africa may be able to view postcolonial biblical studies in a new light, for it emerges with great clarity, from our postcolonial studies and from the platform offered to us by Luke's socio-economic parables that postcolonialism's potential is fully unpacked in its union with parables, as can be done with other genres.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

My general argument in this dissertation has been that postcolonialism in biblical studies offers 'potential spin-offs' (West 1997) and tools for exposing, resisting and exorcising imperial traits in former colonies that the Bible condoned and helped to build and which have had deleterious effects on the subaltern other. Going back to my earlier analogy, where our concern in postcolonialism is to stem the root cause of oppression by shifting the ideology of praxis, I must by way of conclusion say that the Kenyan subaltern has ideologically been marginalized and has been systemically preoccupied with tasks that I would liken to removing babies from the river years without an end. This in retrospect is tantamount to participating in a dangerous venture; that of unknowingly assisting in empire building.

Now, I see postcolonialism offering great potential for awakening the subaltern in Kenya to their local struggles and to what I have called an upstream venture. This potential is embedded in both local and global concepts,<sup>104</sup> in general postcolonial concerns, and more so in postcolonial resources for interpreting imperial situations, texts and particularly the Bible. As we noted at the beginning of this dissertation, perhaps, the kind of subaltern violence currently being experienced in Kenya after the much disputed December 2007 general elections has such a bearing and could not have arisen if the subaltern struggle was informed by such resources as are offered in this dissertation and in postcolonialism in general. Since many commentators have read an economic angle to the whole scenario and Ngugi wa Thiong'o in particular has seen the whole situation as a complex mess occasioned by a situation where 'the ruling party and the opposition parties (read ruling class) engaged in Western-sponsored democracy become mirror images of one another in their absurdity and indifference to the poor',<sup>105</sup> it is my

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<sup>104</sup> Ngugi in several of his works has argued for the employment of indigenous languages (Kikuyu in particular) as tools for resisting Western imperialism. This viewed in proper light is only a local intervention which underrates the extent of imperial influence and eschews the possibilities of a global world. For me, Western imperialism and local cultures especially in Kenya are intertwined and inseparable intertexts. That is why my argument is for the employment of African/Kenyan categories in the manner of Dube and Nzimande to resist dominant categories of analysis and production of knowledge.

<sup>105</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7180946.stm> (downloaded 2008/01/11)

contention the findings in this dissertation can contribute in a big way to avoid the recurrence of such situations.

Postcolonial criticism offers such avenues for liberation from the reality of the systemic bundling and classification of the human that is constructed in imperial ideology and as is experienced in Kenya today. As West (2007b) advises, we should not dismiss the significant potential of postcolonial discourse. We should also not 'do business as usual' in postcolonialism as African biblical scholars but should take it up more than we have done in the past. This is my plea to all African biblical scholars, for to the extent that African biblical scholars are hiding themselves from the resources of postcolonialism, they are narrowing the ideological options of people in struggle,<sup>106</sup> and risk living with recurring scenes of violence as are experienced in Africa from time to time.

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<sup>106</sup> See David Jobling's (2005:191) argument on postcolonialism hiding itself from the resources of Marxism for the kind of language that I have employed here.

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