

**PERSPECTIVES OF INFERTILITY-A COLOURED WOMAN'S READING OF
1 SAMUEL 1-2**

Student Name: Alison Harwood

Student Number: 205509459

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Date

March 2017

Supervisors:

Prof Susan Rakoczy

Dr Helen Keith-Van Wyk

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

I, Alison Cathrine Harwood..... declare that

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Student

Alison Harwood

Supervisor

Professor Sue Rakoczy

Professor Sue Rakoczy

Signature

27 January 2017

Date

23 January 2017

Date

Co-Supervisor

Dr Helen Keith-van Wyk

Helen Keith-van Wyk

Signature

31 January 2017

Date

DEDICATION

To Alex and Zoë

I dedicate this dissertation to my late son Alex Harwood. Your brief presence has touched our lives forever and in immeasurable ways. You will always be remembered in our thoughts and your brief life will always be valid, valued and cherished.

To our beautiful daughter, Zoë Harwood; you are the light of our lives and our greatest joy. Never doubt that you are valuable and powerful.

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ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS

In Africa, procreation is held in high regard even though many women are affected by infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. The subject of infertility is addressed in cold clinical terms or in silence, even in the modern world. This empirical study has analysed how perspectives and understandings of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth have been constructed by women from African and Western perspectives. Furthermore, it has investigated the ways in which women from the St. Johannes Parish, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cape Town, perceive, understand and approach miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility. In addition, the study analysed all these perspectives and presented their similarities and differences.

The overarching framework that has been applied for this study is narrative theology and African feminist theology which draw on the real life experiences of African women that are expressed through narratives. Contextual Bible Study, as a methodology, has been applied to explore the ways in which 1 Samuel 1-2 has been appropriated by the women from Cape Town referred to above. Additionally, the perspectives of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth gained from the experiences of scholars and the participants of the Contextual Bible Study have been analysed together, to see how they complement each other and where gaps may exist. Finally, I have presented a life-giving interpretation of the role of God in human suffering, specifically in the lives of women who are unable to have children.

The purpose of this research project is to argue that all women are complete women; fertility does not define the value of a woman. Infertility therefore, is an experience and not an identity.

Key Terms *infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth, procreation, motherhood, Coloured identity, 1 Samuel 1-2*

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCING THE RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

1. Introduction

In Africa, fertility and procreation are held in high regard. They are often associated with blessings, and the inability to produce offspring brings a dark cloud of despair and hopelessness to women and men. Infertility, miscarriage and childlessness appear to be associated with silence or shame. These experiences are not often validated or recognized as painful and traumatic. It is assumed that women have been created to procreate and therefore should bear children naturally and without any distress. However, the experiences of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth are real and should be recognized as damaging to women who are not able to have children. Most importantly, it should be recognized that a woman who has infertility problems is a complete woman who should not be limited because of her medical condition since this is an experience and not an identity.

This chapter provides an introduction to the entire dissertation and substantiates the rationale for this study. It presents the background, motivation, key research questions, methodology, objectives and the structure of the dissertation.

2. Background

Ahlberg and Kuhlane (2011) argue that all individuals have the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including the right to life and survival. All individuals have the right to control their sexual and reproductive life and the ability and right to make reproductive decisions which include the number and spacing of children, without interference or coercion (Ahlberg & Kuhlane 2011:313). Furthermore, these authors argue that human beings are born with and possess the same rights regardless of where they live, their gender, sexual orientation, race and religion, cultural and ethnic background. According to their findings, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ensures and upholds non-discrimination, and therefore, respect for difference (Ahlberg & Kuhlane 2011:313). This research project intersects with gender, religion and sexual reproductive health rights; therefore it is important to highlight this contribution by Ahlberg and Kuhlane (2011). As much as the fertility rights of women and men are protected, there are no rights that protect women and men who are infertile. This research project has highlighted how infertility negatively affects women

psychologically, socially, culturally and religiously. This is evident not only in Africa, but around the world, yet there are no rights that protect men and women who experience the pain of infertility. Some women undergo numerous medical procedures that are painful and degrading, as will be discussed in this dissertation. Often, after these traumatic procedures to their bodies, they are abandoned and regarded as useless because of their inability to bear children. Some women are deserted by their husbands and left to fend for themselves economically. These women are not only left powerless by their husbands but they are also deemed worthless by their communities and are treated as outcasts. These cold facts have prompted me to ask critical questions regarding infertility.

Infertility is described by Thompson (2013) as the result of a disease, an interruption, cessation, or disorder of body functions, systems, or organs of the male or female reproductive tract. This prevents the conception of a child or the ability to carry a pregnancy to term. In addition, the duration of unprotected intercourse with failure to conceive should be about 12 months before an infertility evaluation is undertaken. However, if medical history, age, or physical findings indicate abnormalities then earlier evaluation and treatment is undertaken (Thompson 2013:6 & 7). Furthermore De Kok (2006:14) adds that the most common causes of infertility in Africa are related to infections. These infections include pelvic inflammatory disease. Pelvic inflammatory disease can cause infertility when it results in blocked fallopian tubes, pelvic adhesions or ectopic pregnancies. De Kok argues that over 85% of infertility cases in Africa, were related to infections.

The infections responsible for PID can be related to unsafe, unhygienic pregnancies and abortions and STDs, especially HIV/Aids and gonorrhoea and chlamydia. Syphilis can lead to infertility as well, by causing miscarriages or stillbirths (De Kok 2006:14).

Although De Kok (2006) focuses on the medical aspects related to infertility, this research will focus on how Christian women perceive this phenomenon, It will also present theological perspectives on infertility.

As a full time pastor I have realized that the focus in the church is mainly on family life. Baptism, Father's Day and Mother's Day celebrations are held in high regard. However, there are many women who will never be able to bring babies for baptism and many women

who will never receive recognition on Mother's Day because they do not have biological children. During a Mother's Day service all mothers are typically asked to stand. This practice brings pain and hampers the healing process of many women who have infertility problems. This means that a large number of congregants are being excluded from a place that should be inclusive. Society places huge emphasis on procreation and the importance of "increasing and multiplying" (Genesis 1:28) as the biblical text prescribes. However, this excludes and marginalises those who often suffer in silence due to infertility and childlessness. Those who come to church for healing and to be embraced, experience the opposite because they are not accommodated in worship. Infertility is a topic that is whispered about because of the shame attached to it and the negative experiences faced by women who feel that they are not complete or fully women.

Having experienced the pain of losing a son, I have started to reflect on this loss critically. I have tried to understand why there is silence surrounding this topic from a theological perspective. Most importantly, I have tried to understand how women in the modern world have appropriated this experience. Even though I do not have infertility problems, this research project is important to me because it highlights the perspectives of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth by presenting a 'coloured' women's perspective of 1 Samuel 1-2. I have found that 1 Samuel 1-2 captures the endeavours of this research project clearly. It speaks about a woman, Hannah, who struggled with infertility problems and then finally had a son. This text provides the challenges associated with infertility and childlessness. It is the most appropriate story in the Hebrew Bible to understand the full experience of infertility. In 1 Samuel 1-2 the story brings to light the challenges associated with infertility such as being marginalised by other women like Peninnah. It describes the pain, suffering and humiliation experienced by Hannah. Therefore, I have chosen this text because it aligns with the aims of this project.

It is important to acknowledge my own story and experience because it is where I started to engage with this topic theologically, personally and psychologically. Nadar (2014:7) argues that stories and experiences are important for the academy because stories can be used to engender suspicion of master narratives. Furthermore, stories are a tool of knowledge gathering as well as knowledge sharing. According to Nadar (2014:7), stories, by their very nature, object to objectivity by privileging subjectivity. Stories make us reflexive as

researchers, and finally stories engender a yearning for change that can be translated into a working for social transformation. She argues that narrative research helps researchers to insert the 'I' back into research and gives lived experience a criterion of meaning. Furthermore, Nadar (2014:7) argues that instead of presuming this omniscient, omnipotent invisible researcher, one gets a glimpse of the flesh and blood researcher. Here she argues that a plea for recognizing positionality is an important part of the research process and that this process involves a constant interrogation of one's positionality at all levels of research. According to Nadar, this relates to the "social and personal, to the intellectual and political as an active subject location of shifting interchange where meaning is made, and not an essentialised location where meaning is discovered" (Nadar 2014:7). Therefore, I include my story alongside the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1-2 as a point of departure and because I can relate to women who have experienced such a loss. Most importantly, my own research contributes to academia and gives a voice to the silence that surrounds the topic of infertility and childlessness.

This project will highlight that fertility and reproductive health, as an issue, is of equal importance and worthy of attention in religious matters, as any other concern, especially in the Cape Town context where I have conducted this research. This research, which will be located within a Colored community, within the Lutheran church is an important contribution for the African context because it addresses a gap that exists within scholarship. This research will focus mainly on the negative impact that infertility has on women. However, it will seek to prove that infertility and fertility are important issues, not only in traditional communities but also in contemporary urban contexts in a city like Cape Town.

3. Theories and methodologies guiding the study

African feminist theology, the matrix of domination, standpoint theory and feminist theory in relation to miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility has been applied to this study. These frameworks are important because they argue for the rights of women; they acknowledge that women's narratives and experiences are imperative.

The nature of this research is highly sensitive and interviews with individuals may have been a better approach; however Contextual Bible Study, henceforth CBS, was chosen as a method. CBS is an important approach for the purpose of this research because it takes into consideration the opinions, interpretations of the Bible and lived experiences of participants.. The aim of this research is to understand how 1 Samuel 1-2 has been conceptualised in the light of infertility, rendering CBS an appropriate tool. CBS is built on the foundation of liberation theology. CBS begins with the context and experience, then analyses the context and attempts, communally, to find ways of engaging in the struggle to overcome oppression and suffering (Nadar 2009:387). It may appear that this approach is a way of pre-empting the outcomes of this study. However, this theory is transformative and it does not impose on participants. Instead, it allows participants to make meaning from the Bible in their own ways and for their own circumstances. Furthermore, West (2011) and Nadar (2009) concur that CBS was a response to liberation theologies which urged scholars to take context seriously. This was a post-Enlightenment development which argues that all interpretation of the Bible is motivated and ideological. According to Nadar (2009:387), Contextual Bible Study is an interactive study of particular texts in the Bible, which bring into dialogue the perspectives of both the context of the reader and the context of the Bible, for the purpose of transformation. Therefore, I find this approach relevant for the rationale of this study. One interview was conducted with a participant who became very emotional when sharing her story during the CBS and a follow-up was imperative to acknowledge her contribution and to give her an opportunity to share in private that which was difficult to share in public. This research project will present feminist scholars' perspectives and experiences of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. Furthermore, data produced from a CBS has been analysed, together with narratives and key themes from participants.

CBS uses the See-Judge-Act method, where the Bible study process begins with the analysis of the local context (See), and then re-reads the Bible to allow the biblical text to speak to the context (Judge). It then moves to action as we respond to what God is saying (Act). West (2011:3) argues that social analysis enables us to understand our reality; re-reading the Bible enables us to judge whether our reality is as God intends it to be; and our plan of action enables us to work with God to change our reality. Furthermore, this is an ongoing process; it is repeated and each action leads to further reflection (See). He describes this as the cycle of praxis (West 2011:3 & 4).

The narrative theology method utilizes the methodology of oral history and African women's theology to tell the stories of suffering and trauma. As stories of trauma are told, Phiri (2006:116) argues that the interface between Christianity and African religion as practiced in South Africa becomes clearly visible. Although this method utilized by Phiri focuses mainly on the apartheid context, it is still relevant for various contexts, and therefore I incorporate it into this research project.

4. Research question

What are Christian women readers of the Bible in the St Johannes parish (henceforth Coloured women) perspectives and understandings of infertility, childlessness and miscarriage, based on 1 Samuel 1-2?

5. Objectives

1. To analyse how academic scholars present perspectives of infertility in general and on 1 Samuel 1-2 in particular.
2. To investigate how Christian women readers of the Bible from the Lutheran Church in the St Johannes parish (Cape Town) read and construct 1 Samuel 1-2.
3. To determine how the perspectives of the Christian women readers of the Bible from the Lutheran Church in the St Johannes parish (Cape Town) relate to scholars' interpretation of infertility and childlessness in general and in 1 Samuel 1-2 in particular.

6. Structure of dissertation

Chapter one will introduce the study and present the theories and methodologies guiding the study. Furthermore, it will highlight the objectives of the study and the research question. Chapter two will present in-depth findings and perspectives of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth from African and Western perspectives. An exegetical analysis of 1 Samuel 1-2 will be presented. Chapter three will discuss the theoretical frameworks and methodologies that have been applied throughout this study. Chapter four will analyse data that has been produced from a CBS and will show how women read 1 Samuel 1-2 in relation to academic

scholars. Chapter five will present theological conclusions from the study and a general conclusion on the findings of the research.

7. Summary of chapter one

This chapter introduces the contents of the thesis by providing the background for the study, the key research questions, theories and methodologies guiding the study, as well as its contribution to academia. The chapter that follows will present contributions from academic scholars in Africa and the West regarding perspectives of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. In addition, an exegetical analysis of 1 Samuel 1-2 will be presented.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Introduction to Chapter two

This chapter will review the literature that has been produced by scholars regarding perspectives of infertility, miscarriage and childlessness from both African and Western perspectives. It will provide an exegetical analysis of 1 Samuel 1-2 to highlight Hannah's experience of infertility. This review will be done to emphasize that infertility is a problem affecting many women around the world. This review will present perspectives of infertility, miscarriage and childlessness to provide data which validates these experiences. Here I will draw from research produced from the African continent with specific focus on Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Swaziland because I have found the most recent literature from these locations; and I will also draw from scholars who provide insight from a Western context. I have chosen this approach in order to have a diverse and more comprehensive view of infertility because it is a world-wide experience. This is important because where there are gaps in the one perspective the other view may address these. These views, although different, complement one another.

2. Perspectives of infertility, childlessness and miscarriage

2.1 African perspectives of infertility and childlessness

The study of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth is undergirded by an African feminist framework which is based in liberation theology. This is an important approach to the study of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth because it values the experiences of women and it interrogates the ways in which the work done by African women theologians relates to African and womanist theology (Phiri & Nadar 2006:3). Odinga (2011) presents perspectives of infertility from a Kenyan perspective. According to Odinga (2011:463), reproduction is an aspect of human function through which various forms of power and identity have been constructed. Moreover, as a gendered practice, the Luo of the South Nyanzi province in Kenya constructed masculinity, manhood and fertility through the ability of the man to beget children (Odinga 2011:463). Historically, the Luo perceived the male as inherently fertile;

therefore, infertility and childlessness were considered feminine conditions. Women who were not able to procreate were ascribed the identity of *tassa* which is a Swahili word for an infertile chicken (ibid). Odinga (2011:463) asserts that women who are childless are relegated to the periphery of society. They were not allowed to participate in communal events; these women were regarded as nobodies and perceived of as liabilities. In these cases, a household without children was considered incomplete and the women were automatically regarded as the guilty parties. Infertile women had no status, no voice and were often beaten by their husbands. In these communities, the infertility of a man was not discussed but treated with secrecy and women were expected to guard this secret. Odinga's contribution is very interesting because it records experiences of women who went to the tribunal court and struggled against the Luo construction of fertility as male which was described as inherently fertile, as mentioned previously. In these cases, the women use evidence from their husband's previous marriages where they were not able to have children. These defiant women were given a voice in the courts and could demonstrate that they were not infertile and that this medical condition was, in fact, their husbands' problem (ibid). In the Kenyan society, which is still hugely patriarchal, courts often served the interests of men, and this Luo society is regarded as the state of male hegemony. However, Odinga (2011:463) argues that women use these courts to voice their interests and to construct an identity that is far from what the Luo society had ascribed to them. In these cases, fathers came forth and testified on behalf of their daughters and they were willing to reimburse the bride wealth in order to free their daughters from abusive marriages. Odinga (2011:463 & 464) correctly notes that the fact that some women were granted divorce clearly illustrates the extent to which they were able to influence the judges to rethink the masculinisation of fertility and the feminisation of childlessness and infertility. The Luo perspective of infertility has proven that even in a patriarchal society, women do not allow themselves to be marginalized or labelled in these courts.. Their fathers and brothers step in to protect them, but it is the women who have agency because they break the silence.

Odoyoye (1999), Alhassan, Ziblim and Muntaka (2014) regard infertility, miscarriage and childlessness, especially in Africa, not only as medical conditions but as experiences which impact women both psychologically and socially. They argue that the desire of many young women to become mothers may be due to the fact that society places the importance of procreation in high regard (Alhassan et al.2014:1). This is evident on the African continent

especially because children are highly valued for social, cultural and economic reasons. Women who are infertile and childless are therefore confronted with a series of societal discriminations and stigmatization which often leads to psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression (Alhassan et al. 2014:1).

Odoyoye (1999) provides insight into her own personal experience of infertility and childlessness. Her focus is not specifically on the psychological aspects and I will highlight her experience in detail throughout this dissertation. I have quoted her extensively because of her ground-breaking contribution to this topic. Her work is important because she speaks from an African perspective of which I am part, and it provides a theology which responds to the absence of fruitfulness and gives a voice to the silence around this topic (Odoyoye 1999:105).

Alhassan et al (2014:1) have argued that infertility is of particular concern in Africa, and Ghana in particular, because of the extent of the problem and the social stigma attached to it. In some Ghanaian communities, motherhood is often the only way for women to enhance their status within their family and community. Only if you have given birth to a living child, male children in particular, are you regarded as a real woman. In these communities, the stigma of childlessness is so great that infertile women are socially isolated and neglected by their own families. According to Alhassan, Ziblim and Muntaka (2014:1) husbands go to the extent of entering polygamous marriages in order to ensure progeny. Infertile women are often excluded from social events and ceremonies or may even be despised and perceived of as dangerous or associated with bad luck (Alhassan et al). Furthermore, these authors argue that the social and psychological consequences of infertility are particularly profound for African women as compared to men. One can deduce from Alhassan, Ziblim and Muntaka's observation (2014) that if the man is the one with the infertility problem, the blame and focus still rests heavily on the wife, as Odinga (2011) observed in the Kenyan, specifically the Luo, community. It is often assumed that the wife is the one with the problem so she serves as "protector" of the male ego. Hence, depression as a psychological consequence of infertility may play a significant role in the life of someone with infertility problems and could subsequently affect the mutual relationship and the quality of life of a couple (Alhassan, Ziblim and Muntaka 2014:1 & 3).

According to the Ghanaian world view, the Akan people regard the signs of human well-being as fruitfulness of plant and animal life, fruitfulness in the land of the living, and keeping harmony with the cosmic totality so that the vital force of each human life is in intimate rapport with other forces (Odoyoye 1999:109). Fruitfulness has traditionally been considered as necessary as a sign of a good quality life, for the immortality of humanity and the survival of the clan. It is believed that ancestors return to be born into this realm of life. Therefore, the power to procreate is an important aspect of wellbeing. Hence, the perpetuation of family names and preservation of the memory of those who have borne these names reveal the power of a clan's fruitfulness through procreation. Furthermore, in most African cultures, naming has religious and spiritual significance and is tied to the experience of childbearing (Odoyoye 1999:109). Odoyoye reflects on the experience of women who belong to traditions where naming is according to fruitfulness in childbearing. Her full names are Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Odoyoye. These names are critical for her relationship with the Yoruba people. They were given to her in a concerted effort to make her a biological mother some day. Those who named her hoped that her soul would respond readily when she was called on by these primal names. However, these names did not respond to an expectant spirit and did not include biological children (Odoyoye 1999:107). Odoyoye (1999:109) acknowledges that there are many women who have been named according to fruitfulness but like herself have not been able to "increase and multiply" (Genesis 1:28) the human race. She has argued that this area of research does not receive enough attention or is often ignored even though lives and relationships are ruined daily because of the 'child factor', especially in childless marriages (Odoyoye 1999:109).

Odoyoye's article addressed the topic of infertility in 1999, which suggests that attempts had already been made to address this silence. The literature that will be presented in addition to that of Odoyoye will give more modern perspectives and show whether progress has been made in theological circles since she shared her experience. Being a biological mother appears to be an expectation of both society and the church in Odoyoye's experience. Infertility does not affect only the couple involved but causes disharmony within the broader family and community. The individual affected often tries to please family members by partaking in rituals and practices that are uncomfortable and degrading. Odoyoye (1999:111)

mentions drinking bitter herbs for fertility to please the elders and enduring many painful and embarrassing medical and traditional procedures sometimes from insensitive doctors and traditional healers. Odoyoye (1999:111) shares an experience in this article. She writes that she was asked to be at the clinic at seven one morning, without having breakfast. The doctor could only see her at three in the afternoon and only then was she told that the machine that they were going to use was broken. One of the doctors told her and her husband that he would not perform another operation to remove the cysts and that she had only a fifty-fifty chance of retaining a pregnancy. Furthermore, the doctor said, “At any rate, unless you two are expecting a virgin birth, I’d say you are not giving yourselves the best of chances with your travelling schedule” (Odoyoye 1999: 116).

Donkor (2008:22) concurs with Odoyoye about the rituals, practices and beliefs associated with infertility. When infertility is linked to witches and evil, spiritual means are used to treat women. In the Akan tradition, many people seek herbal treatment. These herbs are used to prepare soup to drink. Some women go to a fetish priest who performs rites to their gods. When a child is born to this woman, they are given special names as a sign that they have been delivered through the power of the spirit. Infertility and childlessness in some instances lead to divorce and emotional abuse from husbands (Donkor 2008:22). Furthermore, the Christian community has made the experiences of the childless excruciating because it has not developed a theology that could help couples. What is helpful, especially from a liberating point of view, is that Odoyoye (1999:116, 117 & 118) affirms that all women are diverse in their gifts and abilities even if they are childless and that they can be fruitful in other areas of their lives and still be complete women.

Njoroje (2006) writes an essay in honour of Odoyoye and presents this article regarding Odoyoye’s experience of infertility. According to Njoroje (2006:63) Odoyoye has broken one chain of conspiracy where patriarchy and sexism are used to debase women’s identity and dignity. Odoyoye’s article teaches us the value of being vulnerable, honest and true to ourselves even though this comes with great responsibility (Njoroje 2006: 63). Odoyoye’s intention in presenting her experience is to encourage theologians to create a life-giving theology of procreation and eschatology that addresses the trauma women undergo in the quest for a child of their own (Odoyoye 1999:112). Furthermore, Odoyoye (1999:112)

argues that theologians need to assist churches to formulate teachings, counselling methodologies and material that help women, men and their families to realize that there is more than one way to be fruitful in the eyes of God (Odoyoye in Njoroje 2006:63).

There is no aid for the judgments of inferiority and shame, no clarity for the childless couple from an alternative theological view of their forms of fruitfulness, their participation in the glory of God. Only passive resignation is offered in an adequate eschatological perspective. (Odoyoye 1999:116).

This is true and eight years later it appears that this cry for a theological response has yet to be addressed, especially in Africa. In addition, Donkor (2008:22) presents another aspect relating to infertility from a Ghanaian perspective. She used a qualitative research design to explore the socio-cultural perceptions of Ghanaians about women with fertility problems. This approach was used because not much information has been documented in this area of study and she therefore could not build upon the research of others. This indicates that since 1999, after Odoyoye's attempt at breaking the silence surrounding infertility, this topic had still not been dealt with in Ghana.

Infertility is often associated with supernatural causes; voodoo, curses by ancestors or deities as well as evil spirits and witchcraft. In addition, it is believed that infertility is caused by previous abortions, diseases and witches, who take the womb, hide it and eat it (Donkor 2008:22). Though the womb would be physically present, it was believed to be spiritually absent. She argues that culture shapes people's thinking and attitudes towards infertility. Society pressurizes women to procreate and if they are not able, they are blamed for their fertility problems. In Ghana, childless women encounter unfavourable treatment from society. Some women are excluded from important activities and celebrations. Fertility is held in high regard and the inability to bear children is considered a great tragedy. The woman who fails to bear children suffers humiliation and sometimes abuse from her husband and in-laws (Donkor 2008:22 & 23).

Donkor (2008) writes that a woman might be expelled from the husband's house either by her husband or his family, and infertile women are not accorded a proper burial when they die. During the funeral ceremony, the number of children that the deceased had is read at the gathering of family members. At the death of a woman with fertility problems it would be read that she had no children. In these cases, there are certain rites that are performed for a dead childless woman because it is believed that the dead reincarnate after death. These rites are performed so that the dead do not reincarnate with barrenness. One of these rites includes four scarification marks made to the pubic area with the message that she should not reincarnate without a child. In some customs a leaf is tied around the woman's waist before burying her to convey a message that when she does come back, she should not come back barren (Donkor 2008:29).

Odooye and Donkor's perspectives can be aligned with Nyawo and Reddy's (2015) contribution to the discussion of infertility, miscarriage and childlessness, because they too advocate for a new cultural orientation which attaches value to women apart from their reproductive capabilities. Nyawo and Reddy present a Swazi perspective and draw from the experiences of women who tell their stories and experiences (2015:127). The women who took part in Nyawo and Reddy's research (2015) are women who have fertility problems and who do not have children. Some of these women have girl children but are not considered complete women because they do not have sons. According to a report conducted by the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse, the patriarchal nature of Swazi society often exacerbates the patriarchal behavior of men, where women are seen as subordinates to their husbands (Nyawo & Reddy 2015:127). Furthermore these scholars argue that male dominance extends to control over women's reproductive abilities, and that the Swazi family is pro-natal. Hence, the ultimate purpose of marriage is procreation. Therefore, women's fertility is highly regarded and it provides a sense of security for women (Nyawo & Reddy 2015: 128 & 129).

In Swaziland, progeny are of such importance in traditional societies that the inability to bear them is considered a great tragedy (Nyawo & Reddy 2015:133). Women who are unable to bear children suffer humiliation, ridicule and abuse. Failure to fulfil the expectation of

procreating renders an infertile woman a nonentity in her marital family home and the entire society in general. Based on the feedback from the women whom they interviewed, Nyawo and Reddy (2015:134) argue that women with fertility problems live in indescribable agony; they feel incomplete, worthless, cursed, and as failures. They fear the day their partners succumb to family pressures and develop an interest in other women who could make them fathers (Nyawo & Reddy 2015: 133 & 134). It would appear that women are only valued for their ability to bear children and, if unable they are worthless. Their pain and anguish are not regarded as valid because the male image is tarnished due to his wife's infertility (Nyawo & Reddy 2015:135). In my opinion, based on Nyawo & Reddy's contribution, the focus rests mainly on the fact that the woman cannot fulfil her husband's desire to have a child instead of the emotional and psychological pain she experiences due to infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. The women that Nyawo and Reddy interviewed regard fertility as security, especially when a son is born. A woman who has only girl children or who has fertility problems remains incomplete in society and often faces ridicule and rejection (Nyawo & Reddy 2015:135).

In another contribution, Nyanzi (2006) focuses on a debate about the interaction between deeply engrained values, beliefs, customs and practices of reproduction in Africa. She examines the public health ideals and concerns about the reproductive and sexual health of African women, men and children (Nyanzi 2006:611). She argues that this is in effect bringing together two contrasting and perhaps contradictory paradigms; one that is context-specific to particular tribes, societies, subcultures, countries or regions, and the other that is often designed at macro levels of the world, continents, regions or nations. Furthermore, her central focus is on analysing the experiences and lived realities of women in Africa (Nyanzi 2006:613). She highlights the prevalent social inequalities of gender, economics, sexual politics, patient rights, globalization, and local patriarchal culture, all interwoven in the meanings attached to reproduction in this era of a growing HIV and AIDS epidemic (Nyanzi 2006: 614). There are four main aspects of this debate namely: a) A woman's social status is dependent upon undergoing childbirth, b) HIV-infected women have sexual and reproductive rights equal to the general population, c) the female breast is a source of life sustenance, not death and finally d) children born to HIV-infected parents have a right to life. Although my research does not relate in any way to HIV and AIDS, Nyanzi's (2006) research is germane

to mine in that it highlights experiences among African women and the perception of motherhood. Furthermore, she highlights the importance of reproduction from an African perspective. In many cases, especially in the data presented by Odooyoye (1999), Nyawo and Reddy (2015), men are encouraged to seek a partner outside of marriage to produce children. If the wife has given birth only to girl children, the husband is encouraged to seek another partner to have a boy child. Yet, as Cummings (2006:2) argues, it is the male chromosome that determines the gender of a baby and not the woman's. When seeking a partner outside of marriage the risk of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections are increased because the husband will have various sexual partners in order to have a child. Due to the patriarchal structures embedded in African cultures women are not able to negotiate for safer sex practices, which puts them at greater risk of HIV and AIDS (Nyanzi 2006:615).

Sewpaul (1999) provides an important analysis from a South African perspective, which is based on understanding the cultural and religious aspects of infertility. She does this through a qualitative interpretive feminist research methodology (1999:742). Here an analysis of different cultures within South Africa was pursued. White, Coloured, Indian and Zulu cultures were critically analysed in relation to infertility. Sewpaul argues that cultural beliefs lend particular meaning to the infertility experience (ibid). This research has demonstrated that despite societal pressure and a decreased sense of self-esteem experienced by most women, the Indian, White and Coloured women generally did not feel that their status in society was diminished. However, in the Zulu culture it was clear that women were labelled if they did not produce any children (Sewpaul 1999:743). The themes that were presented from this research included that infertility was related to retribution, a destiny that prepared one for a higher purpose in life, provided an opportunity to re-evaluate life and one's relationship with God, infertility is beyond human understanding and biological error. These themes emerged due to the impact that religion has on its approach to infertility (Sewpaul 1999:743).

Therapy, such as psychological help, pastoral counselling or traditional healing is only entered into based on cultural backgrounds and life experiences. Sewpaul (1999) argues that respect and acceptance for these cultural differences should be maintained. This may provide positive transformation about the idea of infertility and meet the needs of those with fertility problems especially women who are often prejudiced, through cultural stereotypes and

beliefs, into blaming themselves and carrying the burden of guilt. Sewpaul (1999) offers insight into cultural aspects of infertility by interviewing South African couples from different social and cultural backgrounds. According to Sewpaul, cultural beliefs lend particular meaning to the infertility experience; therefore couples with fertility problems enter therapy informed by their cultural backgrounds (1999:742). Sewpaul argues that culture is a social construct which is not fixed but dynamic and subject to change as well as preservation (1999:753). She too is located in South Africa and draws from this context to provide her research (Sewpaul 1999: 741,742 & 753).

Baloyi (2001:4) does a similar study of the views of infertility from a South African perspective. She investigates the ideal of marriage from a Christian ideology, in which it is regarded as primarily for procreation, and how polygamy is often the result of a woman's not being able to produce offspring. Her focus is mainly devoted to assisting couples with regaining their dignity and providing coping mechanisms from a pastoral care perspective. Baloyi (2001), attempts to change the mind-set of communities to accept infertility and not view it as a shame. The stigma attached to infertility and the experiences of womanhood, motherhood and infertility are important for my research. However, the gap in this article is found in the scholar's endeavour to empower and motivate women who suffer due to the stigma attached to infertility, it constitutes a rather stereotypical approach in the naming of women and couples who experience fertility problems (ibid). Baloyi (2001) refers to and, in my opinion, labels women and couples as "infertile people" throughout her article, which is not a shift away from deconstructing the labels attached to infertility because it creates the tension of us and them. Hence, I argue, infertility is an experience and not an identity. Her article creates the impression that infertility has authority over women. It also suggests that women with fertility problems have limitations and are incomplete. There are women who choose not to have children, not because of fertility problems, but simply because it is their right to choose. Baloyi (2001:4) completely leaves out the perspective that men can also have fertility problems and in such cases women are the ones who bear the infertility label to protect the image of their husbands. Baloyi speaks from a practical theology perspective. This, in my view, is associated with holistic transformation which is good but Baloyi's (2001) approach is neither life-giving nor transformative because this approach can do more harm than good. This is evident in the following quotation:

The problems attached to infertility become evident in our Christian communities. It is every normal person's duty to get married and to bear children is an obligation. A failure is like committing a crime against the traditional beliefs and practices. The nature of this challenge needs pastoral caregivers to offer their assistance to those victims of infertility. It is thus imperative that a research about the issue of infertility amongst the African people is made, so that the stigmatized infertile people can be helped to overcome this type of problem through pastoral care (Baloyi 2001:2)

The attempts made to assist men and women who suffer from infertility are important, but Baloyi (2001:2) addresses these men and women as if they are a completely different species who are under the microscope for investigation. Her intention is to provide pastoral guidelines on how African Christians should view "infertile people" and to minimize the problems that "infertile people" face in the African community and the church (ibid). This suggests that men and women who suffer from the stigma and the pain of infertility have no agency and should be treated with special care.

2.2. Infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth and childlessness: A perspective from the West

The theology of Russell presented by Jones and Farley (1999) Jones (2001) and Reynolds (2016) captures the main focus of this research project. Russell's work offers a theology that speaks to those who have good reason to walk away from the church, but who instead have decided to walk with the church in love and justice. This approach relates to issues of marginalisation and oppression and the silence of the church on real life experiences of women. Russell's main argument is that the Bible is not only a text of terror, but also of emancipatory hope, hence the relation to my research (Russell in Jones & Farley 1999:x & iv). Russell invites readers to join her in the imaginative world of scripture where the struggle to understand God's new creation is depicted; where all are equal regardless of differences. She weaves together social analysis, prophetic critique, doctrinal reflection and scriptural exegesis. Russell focuses on women affirming their identity as women and creating identities of resistance with other women. Most importantly, Russell encourages women to acknowledge and celebrate the differences that mark their lives, differences in which God delights (Jones & Farley 1999:x & iv).

I have incorporated work done by Serene Jones (2001), Susan Reynolds (2016) and Adrienne Rich (1995) who speak from an American perspective. According to Jones (2001), the

American Society for Reproductive Medicine conducted research in 1999 which states that 6, 1 million Americans presently experience infertility. This represents ten percent of the childbearing population. In addition, twenty-five percent of women of childbearing age will experience a miscarriage and one in eighty pregnancies will end in a stillbirth. This is endemic and widespread, yet it remains a topic that public discourse continues to address only in cold clinical terms (Jones 2001: 227). Jones (2001) and Reynolds (2016) agree that an emptiness or critical lacuna exists especially in theological discourse (Reynolds 2016:48). There are no words to respond to this prevailing phenomenon. Jones (2001:228) addresses this silence by bringing the experience of reproductive loss into conversation with two fields of thought. She uses insights from feminist theory and systematic theology to understand why such painful silences surround reproductive loss. Her aim is to find resources that are available which help us to think about infertility, childlessness and miscarriage as individuals who suffer this loss and as a broader church that seeks to understand it (Jones 2001:228).

According to Jones (2001:231), it is important to note that the experience of grief associated with infertility, stillbirth and miscarriage never occurs in a vacuum. It is often socially mediated and is shaped by its cultural context on many levels. She argues that recent feminist work on the topic of motherhood helps us appreciate the degree to which women's sense of failure around not being able to bear children is related to powerful cultural assumptions about the value of motherhood (Jones 2001:231). Jones states, "This serves to reason that being a full or complete woman is thus to bear children and then to lovingly raise children" (Jones 2001: 231).

In my opinion, Jones' view can be aligned with the views of African scholars presented above which says that women are created to procreate and enter marriage for this specific reason. If a woman has fertility related problems, then it also impacts the communities who already have their ideas about what it means to be a woman and mother. The feelings and ideas associated with infertility and the loss of a child are often determined by the community. If grieving such a loss is accepted, then grieving and healing become easier. But, if infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth are constantly regarded as strange, or if blame is associated with these phenomena, then women are marginalized and oppressed over and over again. The American context that Jones examines measures a person's value according to what they produce or make (Jones 2001:232). In relation to this is the view that as agents

who creatively make things, human beings are capable of, and responsible for, making the terms of their future. Hence, Jones argues, “In such a culture to experience one’s body as ‘unproductive’ is consequently to experience this body as a social failure and to view the hopes that were tied to this body as a failure as well” (Jones 2001:232).

Rich (1995) offers an interesting and important view of motherhood and how it is culturally embedded and normalized. According to Rich (1995:11), women’s status as child bearer has been made into a major fact of life because much emphasis is placed on this role. However, the term ‘nonfather’ does not exist in any realm of social categories (Rich 1995:11). As mentioned earlier from the African perspective often the woman is referred to as infertile even though the man has the problem. Society still struggles to accept that men can also be infertile. This African view of infertility is viewed in patriarchal terms and since childlessness is a problem related with being incomplete and a failure, it will not be associated with masculinity which is associated with strength.

Rich (1995:13) focuses on the pressures faced by women who have to validate themselves in maternity from a social perspective. Her central focus is to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood. Firstly, being a mother should come naturally for all women. Secondly, it is the focus of society which aims at ensuring that all women remain under male control. She challenges the norms attached to motherhood, especially the constructs created by society, but most importantly from her own life experience since this, according to Rich (1995:13), is lacking in most theories regarding motherhood. Her main argument is summed up by the fact that being in control of one’s body is a prerequisite to being fully human. All human beings must be able to touch the unity and resonance of their own physicality. Furthermore, she emphasizes control of our bodies and asserts a universal unity among women based in a shared physiology (Rich 1995:13). Her contribution contains the glorification of woman’s ability to have control over their bodies, particularly when speaking about conception and birth (Rich 1995:13).

Reynolds (2016:48) highlights the neglect of prenatal loss in feminist theology, a field concerned with giving voice to silenced narratives of female suffering. She argues that

theologians have overlooked the experience of such a loss. Her research aims at retrieving stories and symbols that can construct rituals and ministries that bring comfort to women and families grieving the loss of a child in the womb (Reynolds 2016:48). Her paper is an exercise in practical theology that emerges from the tears of women whose wombs have become tombs and unites them with the tears of Mary Magdalene before the empty tomb of Jesus. This is not entirely linked to my own research on 1 Samuel 1 but it has connections with the suffering associated with childlessness and gives an understanding of motherhood based on society and the church. She suggests that a critical lacuna exists in theological reflection and pastoral practice with respect to the statistically widespread, socially silenced experience of prenatal loss.

The sparse and improvisational nature of theological, pastoral, and liturgical responses to women who experience the loss of a pregnancy calls into question the depth and breadth of its commitment to the conviction that all unborn life is sacred and, when it ends, is worthy of public mourning (Reynolds 2016:48).

According to Reynolds (2016:49), the silence of narratives about miscarriage and stillbirth from feminist theology highlights the contested and ambiguous nature of these experiences. She argues that in both social and theological spaces, women who have lost children in the womb are propelled into a liminal space that defies categorization. Hence, this dimension of human experience, which is an experience shared by hundreds of millions of women throughout the world and one that is as intimately connected to the human condition as birth and death “belongs” nowhere. Therefore, the voice of a woman who has experienced the pains (physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, social) of prenatal loss is viewed as insignificant especially when she does not have other, living children (Reynolds 2016:49).

Thorn’s research (2009:50) suggests that grief and loss related to infertility and miscarriage are emotionally challenging. The grief is not related to a concrete loss, but to the loss of a potential, a wish. She argues that in most western cultures, there are no mourning rituals for this type of loss. Some couples have reported that family members and friends do not understand their profound feelings of loss but that they are expected to move on with life quickly. According to Thorn (2009:50), grieving infertility often involves typical reactions such as shock, disbelief, anger, blame, shame and guilt, and includes depressive reactions and low self-esteem.

Furthermore, Reynolds (2016:51) argues that the exclusion of prenatal loss from feminist theological explorations of pregnancy and motherhood is unfortunate. Since feminist theological explorations seek to take seriously women's embodied realities and subvert disempowering, shaming, or exclusivist understandings of motherhood, it should be eager to address the silence associated with infertility (Reynolds 2016:51). Reviewing feminist theological accounts of motherhood, leads her to believe that either all women's bodies carry all babies to term, or that experiences that fall outside of this norm are either theologically insignificant or so abnormal that to address them directly would be unwarranted. This important work done by Reynolds highlights and gives evidence to the lack of resources available to support women around the world who face the stigma, pain, humiliation and psychological trauma associated with stillbirth, miscarriage and infertility. This loss is often regarded as natural and perhaps not valid since the mother and child have not established a bond outside of the womb. This loss in the womb, according to Reynolds (2016) rejects and nullifies the emotional connection established between mother and child especially when a woman already knows that she is pregnant. Even though my research is mainly on infertility, miscarriage and childlessness based on 1 Samuel 1-2 it is important to highlight Reynolds' view that is based on the death of a child in the womb because it relates to women experiencing infertility, stillbirth and childlessness. It provides further evidence for the necessity of breaking the silence associated with the subject of infertility. Reynolds provides possible reasons for the silence around the topic of miscarriage especially from a theological and pastoral view. I agree with Reynolds' argument and would like to add that much emphasis is placed on issues related to masculinity. Television advertisements, billboards, pamphlets and so forth are loaded with assisting men with low libido, penis enlargement and low sperm count. These issues seem to be regarded as pressing and in need of serious intervention. The same importance and value is not dedicated to issues related to women. Reynolds' argument is summed up as follows:

I would suggest that theological and pastoral silence surrounding prenatal loss reflects the intersection of three factors: cultural taboos surrounding miscarriage; longstanding theological and ecclesial ambivalence with respect to women's embodied experiences of reproduction; and polarizing, vitriolic rhetoric of the US abortion debate that co-opts theological discourse and pastoral practice while undermining women's attempts to construct

meaning when confronted with the pain of death before birth (Reynolds 2016:51).

2.3 Summary of perspectives of infertility from an African and Western perspective

This section of the literature review has presented views and ideas of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth from African and Western perspectives. It has focused on contributions from South Africa, Ghana, Swaziland and the United States of America. 1 Samuel 1-2 will be analysed exegetically.

Perspectives of infertility based on 1 Samuel 1-2

2.4. Infertility, miscarriage and childlessness theories from 1 Samuel 1-2

According to Scott (2011:1) the Hebrew Bible records five stories about barren women who become mothers, namely Genesis 11:27-30, Judges 13:2, and 1 Samuel 1. Originally, the women (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Manoah's unnamed wife, and Hannah) are described as childless and then receive children after their barrenness is removed. Scott (2011) argues that the removal of the women's barren state comes in a variety of ways, but God is always involved in their experience of barrenness. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel's stories appear in Genesis, whereas Manoah's wife and Hannah's stories appear in Judges and 1 Samuel 1 respectively (Scott 2011:1).

Furthermore, Scott (2011:1) has argued that these stories, though they have multiple authors, have similarities that are present through all of the narratives. In Genesis 11: 27-30, Sarah, the first barren mother who appears in the text, is the wife of Abraham and becomes the mother of Isaac. Her story begins in Genesis 11 and then continues through Genesis 23. Her son Isaac marries Rebekah, another barren woman who becomes a mother. In the text,

Rebekah's first biblical appearance is in Genesis 24 where we are told that she had two children, Jacob and Esau. Here the theme of barrenness continues with Isaac and Rebekah's younger son, Jacob. Later, Jacob marries two sisters, and the younger sister, Rachel, is barren. Rachel's barrenness is presented in Genesis 29:31 and is removed in Genesis 30:22, after which she gives birth to Joseph (Scott 2011:1). This suggests that infertility was a major factor in the lives of many women then and based on the findings presented above, women still struggle with fertility related problems today.

I have specifically chosen 1 Samuel 1 -2 as a point of reference for this research project because it is a story which speaks about the experience of a barren woman named Hannah. According to Scott (2011:8), Hannah is a character who is more active than any other parent in her promise to God. In Genesis 30: 1 Rachel renders her pain and desire for a child to her husband and out of despair offers Bilhah her servant to Jacob. Unlike Rachel, Hannah takes control of the situation from beginning to end. She asks God for a son and she takes control of how he will be weaned and raised. Hannah came from a patriarchal society yet takes matters into her own hands and approaches God on her own without the assistance of the priest or her husband. She makes a request for her barrenness to be removed (Scott 2011:8). Hannah makes her request to God directly and further evidence of Hannah's active role appears following her request, when she makes a dedication to God to give her son in service of God. Hannah's story is an example of a woman taking on a completely active role in a promise scene. Hannah's story is described as the culmination, within the barren mother stories, of control over her own life because of her trust that God will fulfil her request (Scott 2011:8).

In my opinion, the introduction of this story emphasizes the role of her husband Elkanah and his lineage but says very little about her painful experience of infertility. When the author describes Hannah her circumstances are described in cold terms and she is identified with her problem of being infertile. It describes the experience associated with being barren or being infertile from a biblical and patriarchal perspective. It describes the role of the broader community, especially where Penninah mistreats Hannah, and how customs and practices limited Hannah because she did not have any children. This narrative clearly outlines the role of God within these situations in life because God is described as the One who closed

Hannah's womb in 1 Samuel 1:5. It is important because it illustrates how this child that Hannah received from God played a major role in the leadership of Israel. Since I am doing this research with Christian women it is important to draw from the biblical text which is held in high regard for many believers in their daily experiences. Even though there are other women in the Bible who suffered from infertility, such as Sarah (Genesis 16:1) and Rachel (Genesis 30:1), I have chosen 1 Samuel 1-2 specifically because it goes into detail to describe Hannah's ordeal.

In this text the term barren³ is used which often refers to a land that does not produce fruit. It is important to emphasize that this term describes the emptiness and lifelessness that is associated with infertility. However, I will use the term infertility throughout this project even though it is a rather cold, clinical term. I am using it because most scholars that I will draw from refer to the term infertile instead of barren.

Cook's (1999) interpretation focuses on God's providence because God is interpreted as the One who empowers barren Hannah by making her fertile after closing her womb. Through this the powerless woman finds courage and not despair in her fertility status and rises to praise God (Cook 1999:19). Callaway (1986) examines the feminine image of a barren woman in a patriarchal tradition whereas Cook views the types of barren women in the Old Testament and shows that human initiative and the divine causality work together in barren mothers (Cook 1999:19). This can be said of the text in the case of Hannah because she approaches God through her own initiative and not based on what the prophet says. Because of her own initiative and the providence from God, her wish is granted.

Hannah specifically asked God for a son and she shares this cry with four other characters in the Bible as presented in Hyman's (2009) article "Four acts of vowing in the Bible." Here he refers to Hannah's childlessness as an affliction and only freedom from this will give her

³ Hebrew word עקרה , meaning barren (Scott 2011:13)

The word עקרה , Hebrew for barren, is present in all of the stories with the exception of Abraham and Sarah's. In the story of Sarah, (Genesis 16: 2) the first barren woman mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, the J source refers to her as childless using the Hebrew word עקרה (Scott:2011:13)

respect in her community and her home. These interpretations are patriarchal because they do not focus on Hannah's plight and experience of infertility but rather that on the fact that she was an instrument in the birth of a leader, Samuel, her son. In these patriarchal interpretations she is regarded as an object that carries the burden of giving birth to Samuel who later becomes an important leader. In these interpretations the focus is mainly on Samuel and not on Hannah (Hyman 2009:231). Traditional interpretations view Hannah as an object of patriarchy. Without children she was not regarded a complete woman especially in the eyes of her husband's second wife. Hannah's role is regarded as that of a victim of patriarchal structures of her time which confine women's roles to the home and to procreation (Klein 1994:77).

Kim (2008:3) examines three dimensions of Hannah's life in 1 Samuel 1. The first dimension has to do with her personal life. Her husband Elkanah cannot resolve her painful experience of infertility. Elkanah is described here as a naively good husband. He tries to comfort her: 'Am I not more than ten sons?' (1 Samuel 1:8) But his comfort, in fact, aggravates her discomfort because he does not understand the deeper side of Hannah's personal pain and struggle caused by Peninnah, Eli and himself. Elkanah, as a male patriarch, has what he wants, which is sons born by Peninnah, his second wife. Hannah is the one who has to deal with a very personal dimension of anger, frustration, powerlessness, helplessness, and hopelessness (Kim 2008:3). Furthermore, Elkanah shows indifference to Hannah's pain by neglecting her wish to become a mother and he is guilty not only of insensitivity to his wife's feelings but also of disregard for her future. Kim (2008) argues that if the husband dies and the woman is left with no children she has no man to support her (Kim 2008:3).

The second dimension of Hannah's suffering, which overlaps the first dimension, concerns her immediate communities, including her family. From the text it is illustrated that Hannah's pain and suffering increase in the context of a double marginalization. This is evident firstly, with the burden of bearing a male child for Elkanah and secondly, bearing public stigma in society. Hannah lived with the shame or stigma levelled against her because of a cultural frame that holds her responsible for the couple's inability to bear a child (Kim 2008: 3). According to Yung Suk Kim (2008), the third dimension of Hannah's ordeal had to

do with the larger society and involves politics and religion. It is implied that the priest, Eli, is not doing his job well, to the extent that he cannot distinguish between praying and being drunk (1 Sam 1:12–14). When Hannah prays silently with her lips moving, Eli thinks Hannah is drunk. He is not aware that her situation has become unbearable and he cannot distinguish between praying and being drunk. This suggests a leadership crisis because the priest is not able to understand the plight of his people and he does not know them very well. Hence a new leader is required (Kim 2008:4).

Kim's (2008) examination of the narratives provides three moments of life experience as Hannah undergoes the process of transformation: 'I am nothing,' refers to the time when she was barren and had no children. 'I am something' refers to her experience when God heard her prayer and removed the cause of her distress. 'I am anything,' refers to the experience of the birth of Samuel where she was restored and validated as a real woman in her household and society (Kim 2008:4). Though the text does not say how long Hannah prayed when her family went to the temple at Shiloh, it seems clear that she prayed for a long time, for many years, they went 'year by year' (1 Sam 1:3). Hannah does not pray only overnight or just a few times. If we suppose that she has prayed through pain there must have been ample moments of life when she experienced grief, distress and pain over a long period of time, including everyday life at home, in a community, and in society. In other words, there is a long process of pain in life. Thus, we can safely divide Hannah's life experience or moments in her life into the three phases of transformation (Kim 2008:4).

According to Kim (2008) 'I am nothing' is described as a moment of life when her soul is severely damaged or ruined by oppressors or self-inflictions because she feels that she is nothing due to her barrenness. Peninnah provokes her: 'you are nothing because you do not have a son, and God has closed your womb' (Kim 2008:4). In Hannah's time, if someone did not bear a child, it was a sign of misfortune or sin. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine her agony and pain. Her despair was deeply rooted in her own soul. The feeling of being nothing in society is a moment of life in which she gets stuck between herself and social expectations; society views her as worthless or nothing for her inability to bear a child. In a patriarchal society, no male child means less participation in society. Moreover, Hannah will be left alone without protection if Elkanah dies without children born by her (Kim 2008:4).

She also has to struggle with the issue of theodicy: ‘Why did God close her womb?’ This painful experience of infertility or barrenness means that Hannah weeps enough, struggles enough, and prays long nights and days, year by year (1 Sam 1:6–7). Every time Hannah went to the temple of the Lord at Shiloh, Peninnah troubled her about her infertility. Furthermore, Kim (2008) argues that the text says that Hannah received only one portion from Elkanah because she did not have a child. These facts cause her to lose her appetite; she does not eat or drink. That is why she seems to pray, according to Eli, with no voice because she was faint from the experience of nothingness. However, I argue that this fact can be contested because it depends on the biblical translation used which describes differently the portions that Elkanah gave Hannah. (Kim 2008:4).

On the other hand, Berlin (2004) argues that Elkanah favoured Hannah in spite of her barrenness is the more natural reading. However, in the light of what follows in the story, it may be that Elkanah showed favour to Hannah by giving her a special portion because she was barren. Elkanah, here and in verse 8, is trying to compensate for Hannah’s barrenness (Berlin 2004:227). We may infer that Elkanah would not have given Hannah a special portion if she had had children, even if she were the favourite wife. Furthermore, Peninnah was quite naturally jealous of Hannah’s special treatment and taunted Hannah about her childlessness. Berlin (2004) argues that Hannah must have been miserable enough already, but Peninnah’s taunts made her feel worse. She would cry and refuse to eat. Not eating was regarded as a common sign of depression in the Bible, and here the effect is even more pronounced, because Hannah’s refusal to eat meant that she was not participating with the rest of the family, and not eating the special portion that Elkanah gave her (Berlin 2004:227).

The second part of the transformation, according to Kim (2008) that Hannah experiences in the midst of her nothingness is that she asked the Lord to hear her, and God hears her plea. This is described as a moment of moving from a feeling of nothing to being something when she recovered the sense of who she was. Namely, she had moved from laments of nothingness to the realization that ‘I am really nothing’ before God. Then Hannah recovers a sense of self (‘I am something’), and opens her eyes to God and sees a greater meaning of life. However, this moment of something does not happen overnight but through a long time

of prayer and struggle as she undergoes an extensive process of gradual understanding about herself in relation to God and others (Kim 2008:5).

Berlin (2004) provides an important contribution regarding the prayers rendered by Hannah to God with special focus on their rhetoric and function. However, I will focus only on her insights regarding Hannah's experience of infertility because my focus is not on her prayers but her experience of infertility. The first few verses of this text are dedicated to describing the lineage of Elkanah. Not much time is spent on describing the background of the women. (Berlin 2004:228). According to Berlin, when we read this narrative the first thing we are told about the women is that Peninnah had children and Hannah did not. Based on this I argue that Hannah is described as a woman with a problem, instead of a woman in her own right. She is identified by her situation in life and not as a complete woman. From the onset Berlin (2004) says that this juxtaposition of Peninnah's children with Hannah's lack of children immediately alerts the reader to trouble ahead; there is inequality between two women. Hannah is inferior, a failed wife, in her own eyes and in the eyes of society, because she does not have children (Berlin 2004:228).

Furthermore, Berlin (2004) provides a perspective regarding the role of Hannah's husband. It appears that Elkanah feels personally responsible to make up for Hannah's lack of children. Apparently this makes Elkanah look less than heroic. I agree with this statement made by Berlin (2004:228) because Elkanah could not possibly understand her emptiness because he was a man who already had children from his second wife. As her husband, he does not realize that gifts and compliments cannot take away Hannah's deep longing for a child. However, there are areas where he appears as an unusually sensitive husband because no other husband of a barren woman in the Bible reacts this way.⁴ On the other hand, Elkanah seems to have given up hope that Hannah will bear a child, or to not care perhaps because he already has children he does not entreat God on her behalf, as Isaac does in Gen 25:21 (Berlin 2004:228). Since Elkanah, in my opinion, was a man he could not fully comprehend the pain associated with being childless especially from a woman's perspective. This experience did not affect Hannah only physically but also emotionally because, as described, she cried and

⁴ An example of this is found in Genesis 30:1 where Rachel says to Jacob, "Give me children or I shall die!" Jacob is insensitive in his response by saying, "Am I in the place of God." He responded to her with anger, unlike Elkanah.

did not eat in 1 Samuel 1:7. It affected her spiritually because she did not fully participate in the yearly Temple ritual because she was childless. It also affected her socially because she is tormented by Penninah and led to feel inferior amongst the other women (Berlin 2004:228).

Hannah specifically asks for a son in verse 11; based on this request it is evident that male children were held in high regard. Hannah wants to give birth to a male child and be known as a mother of a male child. At the same time, she is also willing to give this child back to God to serve in the Temple and in this way still choose to remain childless. Based on this it is evident that being known as a mother or giving birth to a living child is more important than raising children. Scott (2011) argues that Hannah's story demonstrates a human being taking an active role in her request for a child. Further Hannah imposes requirements on herself in response to God answering her request (Scott 2011:17).

The theological implications of Hannah's plight are also significant. As mentioned earlier, by Kim (2008), her relationship with God was hampered due to her inability to bear children. Hannah did not fully participate in the religious ritual at the Temple. When God heard her prayer and granted her request she was complete. She was a complete woman, a complete wife, a complete member of society and in her eyes a complete child of God. She could participate in worship and at the yearly temple visit in Shiloh. This restored relationship with God is portrayed in the second part of this narrative in chapter two of 1 Samuel (O'Day 1985:204). O'Day (1985) provides an examination of this praise song. She argues that Hannah's recital of the incomparable deeds of Yahweh relates to the end of her barrenness and the birth of her son. The answer to this is found in verses 5 and 6: "The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. The Lord kills and brings to life; the Lord brings down to Sheol and raises up." (O'Day 1985:205). Based on these verses, it is clear that the God to whom Hannah sings praise is able to create life out of nothingness. Barrenness is an 'effective metaphor for hopelessness,' (O'Day 1985:205) because barrenness means no promise of life, no promise of a future, and no humanly possible solution. Into this situation of empty and echoing impossibility, God comes and shatters our notions of the impossible and gives life. However, I would like to argue that Hannah was a complete woman made in

the image of God but it may have been the pressures of society that made her believe that being complete meant having a child (O'Day 1985: 205).

The radical gift of life fits well with the examples of social inversion celebrated by Hannah. The Exodus celebrated by Miriam and the gift of unforeseeable life celebrated by Hannah sing of the power of God that transcends and transforms all human categories. These songs place the world on notice that God makes poor and makes rich; that God brings low and also exalts. Therefore, one cannot keep silent about such a God (O'Day 1985:205).

This interpretation aligns with Odoyoye's (1999) experience. She says that her liberation was found in the same song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2. For her, children are God's gift to creatures that need to survive by procreation (Odoyoye 1999: 118). Not all women who pray to God will become mothers and there are women who choose not to become mothers. Therefore, I agree with Odoyoye that we are created in the image of God and this grace liberates us, therefore we are complete with or without children. She argues that the church must acknowledge and embrace the diversity of God's gifts and celebrate all the ways of bringing forth life (Odoyoye 1999:120).

2.5. Summary of an exegetical analysis on 1 Samuel 1-2

This chapter has presented literature that has exegetically analysed infertility from the perspective of 1 Samuel 1-2. It has emphasized the importance of procreation in the Hebrew Bible with a focus on Hannah and her role in wanting a son. The purpose of this chapter is to indicate how scholars have investigated the topic of infertility.

In the following chapter, theoretical framework and methodology will be applied to critically investigating the topic of infertility. The theories that are relevant for this study are African feminist theology, feminist theory in relation to infertility, standpoint theory, narrative theology and the matrix of domination. Furthermore, CBS will be applied as the methodology to analyse data produced from the contextual Bible study conducted at St Johannes parish, in addition to the narrative method and intercultural bible reading.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND METHODOLOGIES

3. Introduction to chapter three

This chapter will highlight the theoretical frameworks within which infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth have been analysed. Furthermore, it will present the methods that have been used in order to achieve the outcomes of this research project. The overarching framework that has been utilised is African feminist theology, the matrix of domination and the importance of narratives to study this phenomenon. In addition I have incorporated feminist theory in relation to infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth and standpoint theory.

3.1 Theoretical frameworks

3.2 African feminist theology and the matrix of domination

According to Mwaura (2015:13) African women theologians are conscious of the web of oppression that women live under and feel a compulsion to resolve oppression and destructive patriarchal notions. The emphasis is on praxis and action (Mwaura 2015:13). This relates to the matrix of domination theory which was coined by Smith (1987) and extended by Collins (1990) to highlight that one's position in society is made up of various multiple standpoints rather than just one essentialist standpoint. Collins (1990:226) attempts to make a shift away from the assumption that power operates from the top down by forcing and controlling unwilling victims to bend to the will of more powerful superiors. Furthermore, she argues that depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed (Collins 1990:227). This theory makes an attempt to point out the rights of women, to validate their roles in society and to prove that women have agency. Smith (1987:4) argues that behind and within the so-called neutral and impersonal rationality of the ruling apparatus, which is

concealed as a male subtext, women are often excluded from the practices of power within textually mediated relations of ruling.

Furthermore Mwaura (2015:13) argues that theology is regarded as an ongoing process which is committed to life, justice and freedom from oppression. In her view, African women's theologies engage with a wide range of theological and social themes: scripture, God, Christology, religious anthropology, sin and evil, church and ministry, with an emphasis on justice and participation, spirituality, culture, suffering and sacrifice, marriage, family life and children, HIV and AIDS, gender based violence, ecology, and much more. African feminist theologians recognize that any issue that is important to women has profound implications for the church (Mwaura. 2015:13).

According to Nyawo (2014:73), African feminist theologies question patterns of theology that justify male dominance and female subordination such as exclusive male language for God. Feminist theology seeks an alternative view over and against oppressive notions. These oppressive views argue that males are more like God than females are and that only men can represent God as leaders in church and society. Furthermore, women are created by God to be subordinate to males and thus commit sin by rejecting this subordination (Nyawo 2014:73). Hence, African feminist theology, as a branch of feminist theology, reconsiders and reinterprets African traditions, practices, perceptions and scriptures from a feminist perspective (Nyawo 2014:74).

In addition Landman (2001:89) presents an important view regarding African women's theology. Even though there are many similarities in relation to African feminist theology there are also vast differences. This presents an interesting debate which is linked to the rejection of many African women of western feminism. Landman (2001:89) describes African women's theology as a theology of relations. Attempts have been made by African women's theology to replace the hierarchical relations of patriarchal theologies and customary practice with relations based on mutuality. Furthermore, African women's theology is described as a theology of interrelatedness because it acknowledges that men, women, people and nature coexist and relate and cannot be separated. In essence, this makes African women's theology ecologically sensitive (Landman 2001:89 & 90). African women's theology is culturally sensitive because it encourages dialogue between cultures and

within cultures. This approach is used to criticize what is oppressive and to develop that which is liberating in African customs. Finally, African women's theology implements its research findings through a ministry of storytelling (Landman 2001:90). Even though I am using an African feminist theological framework, it is important clearly to state that not all African women's theologies are feminist in their approach. This is evident especially with the tenets of African women's theology presented by Landman (2001:90).

Nadar (2014:19) argues that not all research done by women is feminist, and that many men use the values and principles of feminist research in their scholarship. The central question she poses is related to the values and lessons that can be learned from feminist ways of doing research, especially narrative research, and the unique difference this makes in African contexts. Furthermore, she investigates how decades of feminist epistemology and more recently Black feminist epistemology and research practice enhance research practice in general and not just the practices of those who self-identify as feminists (Nadar 2014:19 & 20). Some African women are reluctant to identify with the term 'feminist'. This is due to the political identity objection to the term 'feminist'. This is in relation to its apparent exclusion of discourses of race and class and because these objections hide other biases which are described by the scholar as unwillingness to recognize that gender equality can and must be part of African cultures too. Much has been documented about the reluctance of African women scholars to self-identify as feminists (Nadar 2014:20). In addition, she provides three essential contributions of African feminist epistemology which are: the process of research is as important as the product of research, the identity of the researcher is as important as the participants in the research and finally feminism puts a human face on the body of researched knowledge (Nadar 2014:20). This is a profound way of describing the value that feminist discourse has contributed to research and knowledge production (Nadar 2014:20). I have chosen African feminist theology as a lens because of the value that it places on the lived experiences of women in Africa.

Rakoczy (2004:30) suggests that patriarchal structures have been a way of life and therefore have been considered ahistorical, eternal and sanctioned by God. She argues that since patriarchy is embedded in human structures and human creation it can be challenged (Rakoczy 2004:30). Since the biblical text has been written by human beings it can be

regarded as a human construct though inspired by God . African feminist theologians have made an attempt at reading the Bible through a feminist lens. It has been achieved through deconstructing oppressive texts and in turn presenting a life-giving alternative (Rakoczy 2004:30). With this approach, the fact that the Bible was written in the context of a particular culture and tradition, is taken into consideration. White (n.d)) argues that African feminist theologians take into account that these contexts were fully patriarchal in nature which could influence the approaches of the authors. African feminist theologians regard all relationships in humanity in God's original plan which was intended for equality and not domination (White. n.d 18 & 19).

3.3 Narrative research within African feminist scholarship

Although there are a number of research methods that have been developed within feminist scholarship, one of the most profound ways in which research has been given a human face is through narrative research which is story research. Feminist scholars like Nadar (2014) assert that stories incorporated into research are legitimate and they serve as a scientific part of a study. The telling of stories, the listening to stories, the construction of stories in a narrative in order to represent research findings are all processes which are counted as legitimate components of the research process and an essential part of feminist epistemology. This notion is practiced widely in Africa (Nadar 2014: 20 & 21). Nnaemeka (2003) explains the significance of building on indigenous literature and of writing our own stories in our own voices. She argues that African worldviews and thoughts are capable of providing the colloquial platform on which to hang African literature and therefore African feminist scholars do not need to rely on Western scholarship to validate ways of doing research (Nnaemeka 2003:369). Narratives are a powerful and potent method of critiquing oppressive practices in Africa. Through storytelling, women have declared their solidarity with religion and culture and have remained true to their African roots. In addition it has pointed out aspects of culture and religion that demonize and oppress women (Phiri & Nadar 2006:8). I have drawn on both African and Western scholarship, which include narratives, in order to have a broader perspective of infertility, childlessness and stillbirth.

Narratives in my analysis are an important way in which to acknowledge those who participate in the research project, to illustrate how knowledge has been produced (Nadar

2014:21). Nadar (2014) legitimates the use of stories and this will be highlighted throughout this chapter because both Jones (2000) and Reynolds (2016) produce a framework to address miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility from their own stories and personal experiences.

3.4. Feminist theory in relation to miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility

Jones (2000:2) describes feminist theory as deepening our understanding of human identity and community. It opens up new avenues for understanding the Christian theological tradition and its view of divine grace. This is important for my research to understand how the participants who are women, mothers and grandmothers make sense of their realities from a Christian faith perspective. However, when I refer to feminist theory it will be in relation to infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. Jones (2000:2) argues that feminist theory describes a collection of critical texts and a conversation, not as a discrete academic field but a field that allows women to address their personal experiences from a faith perspective. Even though feminist theory focuses on a collection of writings it includes the conversations of women which bring feminist texts to life. Feminist theory can be applied in many contexts such as; academia, science, government and even in local women's Bible study groups. The importance of the shared reality of these conversations is that they focus on the end goal which is the liberation of women. In addition, feminist theory acknowledges that oppression is not always easy to name (Jones 2000:3).

Jones (2001), Reynolds (2016) and Odoyoye (1999) argue that the loss of a child whether through miscarriage, stillbirth or the struggle with infertility is endemic and widespread. Even though fertility related problems affects millions of women throughout the world, public discourse continues to address this topic in cold clinical terms (Jones 2001:228). Jones (2001) observed this within the discourses of two communities which intersect her own life; the feminist community and the mainline Protestant churches. In these two areas one would expect powerful resources to be available for reflection on the character of such loss in the lives of women and men. Hence the absence of such reflections in these areas are striking. Jones (2001:228) addresses this particular silence by bringing the experience of reproductive loss into conversation with two fields of thought, namely feminist theory and systematic theology. Reproductive loss raises important philosophical questions about the nature of the self. Furthermore, she investigates how we construct doctrinal spaces that

include such lived realities as reproductive loss, the theology of suffering and how it shapes this unique grieving (Jones 2001:228, 229 & 239).

Reynolds (2016) shares similar sentiments to Jones about reproductive loss. The death of a child in the womb brings with it no community of memory (Reynolds 2016:47). Her own experience was the separation between her and her husband which she experienced during the wake of her loss. This experience of miscarriage smothered her pain and it was intensified by the realization that she knew many women, including both her mother and mother-in-law, who had experienced it. However the question for Reynolds remains: what did her mother and mother-in-law do afterwards and whether they grieved this loss? The details of this loss were not discussed because “it hung like shadows in the unlit corners of her family’s histories” (Reynolds 2016:47). It was a kind of death as ancient and expansive as humanity itself yet nothing was shared about this loss (Reynolds 2016:47).

Questions of loss find a particular home within the Christian tradition. Christianity abounds with images of suffering and death. Its sacred texts echo with cries of lamentation and its soteriological claims involve a confrontation with suffering and meaning. It has powerful symbols: a wooden cross; ashes; a crucified God whose head is encircled by a crown of thorns; flesh and blood turned bread and wine, broken and poured out whisper of death. Where, in this religion of passion, death, and resurrection, did my suffering belong? (Reynolds 2016: 47).

The near silence of feminist theologians on miscarriage and stillbirth is surprising. In spite of general early feminist discomfort with maternal themes, Reynolds (2016:28) argues that contemporary feminist theological writing evinces a strong desire to grapple with the embodied, broken, and non-idealized dimensions of contemporary motherhood. Furthermore, this exclusion of prenatal loss from feminist theological explorations of pregnancy and motherhood is unfortunate when one considers that many such explorations seek to take seriously women’s embodied realities and subvert disempowering, shaming, or exclusivist understandings of motherhood. However, when reviewing feminist theological accounts of motherhood, one is led to believe that either all women’s bodies carry all babies to term, or that experiences that fall outside of this norm are either theologically insignificant or so anomalous that to address them directly would be unwarranted (Reynolds 2016:28). She argues that at least one in five pregnancies ends in miscarriage. Though women experience

prenatal loss in a vast multiplicity of ways, few would relegate the experience to the realm of insignificance (Reynolds 2016: 28 & 51).

Reynolds (2016) and Jones (2001) have done extensive research on answering the question regarding the silence surrounding fertility related problems; therefore I have used these scholars extensively. Reynolds (2016:51) goes further to develop a liturgy of blessing parents after the loss of a baby whether through miscarriage or stillbirth to respond to this empty space from a theological perspective. This proves that attempts have been made to address and give meaning to the ways in which infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth have been addressed.

According to Neyer and Bernardi (2011:5) motherhood has been one of the issues which has split feminist movements. Most women become mothers, and many feminists have regarded motherhood as a uniting element among women and have based their claims to rights for women on it. However, the issue of motherhood has also been one of the anchor points for denying women rights and equality and for discriminating against them. Based on this observation, the mainstream feminist discourses up to the mid-1980s took a critical approach to motherhood and regarded the rejection of motherhood as a pre-requisite for overcoming women's subordination and for gaining equality (Neyer & Bernardi 2011: 5). This argument by Neyer and Bernardi (2011) presents a dichotomous notion of motherhood. Therefore, I now turn to standpoint theory which provides a critical lens through which to view motherhood. It considers an individual's situation in life, culture, religion and argues that nothing is fixed but fluid.

3.5. Standpoint theory

The proponent of feminist standpoint theory is Sandra Harding (1986). Standpoint theory was developed based on Harding's reading of feminist theorists specifically that of Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hatsock and Hilary Rose which were used to describe a feminist critique beyond the empirical, which claimed a special privilege for women's knowledge and emphasizing that knowledge is always rooted in a particular position. Standpoint theory argues that our standpoint in life determines how our world views are affected, or rather

influenced, by society (Smith 1987:5). If a woman is a leader in the socio-political arena, then she is validated because she does not have to be a mother to be a leader. From a cultural and religious standpoint not being a mother is regarded as an inferior position especially in Africa. The notion of standpoint theory is used to emphasize that what one knows is affected by where one stands: in particular, one's subject position in society. We begin from the world as we actually experience it and what we know of the world and of the other are conditional on that location (Smith 1987:6). Smith's argument is not that we cannot look at the world in any way other than from our given standpoint. Instead, she points out that no one can have complete, objective knowledge; no two people have exactly the same standpoint; and we must not take for granted the standpoint from which we speak. Instead, we must recognize our position and standpoint, be reflexive about it, and problematize it. Our situated, everyday experience should serve as a point of entry, of investigation (Smith 1987:6 & 7). Smith (1987) argues for a reformulation of sociological theory by fully accounting for the standpoint of gender and its effects on our experience of reality. Furthermore, she argues that the standpoint of men is consistently privileged and that of women devalued, and that the standpoint of the white male upper class pervades and dominates other worldviews. This theory is a relevant approach to examine infertility, childlessness and stillbirth. It demonstrates that culture, gender and religion need to be taken into consideration to understand a certain position in life. Furthermore standpoint theory reflects a dual rational and non-rational approach to action and individual and collective approaches to society. Therefore, standpoint refers both to our objective position, our subjective position in the social hierarchy, and to our unique biographical situation (Smith 1987: 7 & 8).

3.6 Summary of theoretical frameworks

African feminist theology, narrative research within African feminist scholarship, feminist theory in relation to miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility and standpoint theory have provided me with the conceptual framework to place miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility under the microscope. These frameworks point out the importance of representing our embodied theologies in safe spaces; how African women theologies have made an attempt to address patriarchy, liberate women from oppressive cultural structures and to challenge systems of power that continue to oppress women. Hence, I argue that although attempts have been made in academia to empower and break down destructive patriarchal structures, the reality

in the lives of everyday women in communities differs. Therefore women remain stuck in these destructive realities which are not transformative. This may be due to the fact that churches still hold onto patriarchal interpretations of the Bible which are not life-giving nor liberating.

3.7 Methodology

3.7.1 Research participants

Twelve women participated in the Contextual Bible Study. I have limited their personal information to age, employment, the number of children, grandchildren and whether they have experienced fertility related problems. This information shows that fertility related problems are important for all women and not only a certain age group. The number of children they have is important in relation to the child factor that has been discussed throughout this dissertation. Their names have been omitted for confidentiality and due to the sensitive nature of this subject being discussed.

Participant	Age	Marital status	Profession	Number of children	Number of grandchildren	Comments
A	60	married	nurse	One child	Four grandchildren	
B	66	married	unemployed	Three children	Two grandchildren	
C	51	divorced	librarian	one	none	Her mother had two stillbirth experiences
D	60	married	teacher	two	five	Her mother had two stillbirth experiences
E	60	divorced	Retired teacher	one	two	Her daughter and her mother experienced the

						death of an unborn baby in the womb
F	51	single	unemployed	none		Had two miscarriages
G	45	married	cleaner	two		
H	46	married	nurse	three	two	
I	72	married	pensioner	two		
J	66	divorced	pensioner	none		Had a miscarriage
K	70	widow	Retired teacher	three	one	Her son and daughter are unable to have children
L	53	unmarried	one		Two grandchildren	Her mother had two stillbirth experiences

On 8 October 2016 an empirical study was conducted in the form of a Contextual Bible Study. It was conducted in Afrikaans at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cape Town, South Africa in the St Johannes Parish. The Prayer Women's League consists of 30 women. The nature of the CBS was highly sensitive and instead of inviting women who have had experiences with infertility, I instead chose to invite women to share their perspectives of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. This approach was undertaken to prevent women from being marginalized. The CBS and its purpose was announced in church on two consecutive Sundays. Thereafter, the secretary of the Prayer Women's League sent out invitations to all members with the option to accept or decline the request. Only twelve women attended the

CBS. Most of the women who attended the CBS, reside on the Cape Flats. However, many of them are originally from Mossel Bay, Laingsburg, Worcester and Ladysmith and have moved to Cape Town in search of jobs or to study further and/or in search of better opportunities. This particular group of people came forward of their own accord. I have done extensive work with this League as parish pastor and due to this relationship of trust, I felt that it would be appropriate to conduct this research with them. Eight of the participants come from a teaching, librarian and nursing background while the rest are unemployed and retired. Five are elders serving in the parish and the rest are active members who participate in the life of the church. Most of these women are between 40 to 70 years of age. CBS was chosen as a method because it differs from the traditional method of bible study, where one person informs and interprets the text while the participants listen. According to West (2011), the power of the CBS process is that it allows participants to articulate and own their interpretation of a particular text in relation to their context (West 2011:11).

3.7.2 The Coloured Identity

I am a woman from a so-called Coloured identity. My observation and experience is that this identity has often been associated with a population who belong nowhere and have no culture. The term 'Coloured' has often been associated with gangsterism, drunkards, sexual promiscuity and the nobodies of society, who have been born from rape, slavery and intermarriages. The Coloured identity, although contested, is not an attempt by the researcher to increase the stigma or to refer to the apartheid notion of separation. However, this is my heritage and I am proud of my roots. This research has illustrated the ways in which infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth have been conceptualised by women who identify as Coloured and to argue that infertility is important even in this community. The African culture has illustrated that often infertility is associated with witchcraft and bad luck and the Western culture has illustrated that infertility is biological as well as the will of God. However, this research intends to demonstrate that the Coloured community also has a unique understanding of infertility which is closely linked to our particular socialisation and our situation in life.

According to Grauman (2016), when reference is made to the term Coloured, it is used in relation to a South African population of diverse origins that intermarried and/or fused culturally and economically in the colonial society, as colonial blacks. Furthermore, he argues that the use of Coloured in the upper-case signifies the researcher's own identity as a social construct having been socialized to accept this identity as an 'ethnic' or 'racial' identity. Today this identity is still recognised in legal and government documentation to diversify black, as meaning African, Coloured or Indian (Grauman 2016:1). Erasmus (2001:14) attempts to rethink what it means to be coloured in post-apartheid South Africa by exploring the making of coloured subjectivities in a way which scrutinizes established boundaries of black and white, African and European, progressive and reactionary. Furthermore, he argues that coloured identities are not based on race mixture but rather on cultural creativity which has been shaped by South Africa's history of colonialism, slavery, segregation and apartheid.

This conceptualization undermines the common sense view that conceives colouredness as something produced by the mixture of other 'purer' cultures. Instead, it stresses the ambiguity and ceaseless fluidity of coloured identity formations while remaining conscious of the conditions under which they are produced (Erasmus 2001:14).

On the meaning of Coloured identity, Van der Ross' (2010:8) view is that this term was not regarded as unacceptable in the earlier years because it was a descriptive term meaning of mixed descent. He argues that during the apartheid era there was no stigma attached to this identity. This identity was freely attached to sports, unions, charitable bodies and many other things which never seemed problematic. This identity was also attached to these entities to specify that it was specifically for Coloureds and not whites or blacks. Contestation seems to have developed in relation to Coloured's marginalization and limited privileges; therefore political awareness was needed for this tension to develop (Van der Ross 2010: 8 & 9).

Van der Ross (2005:93) provides evidence to these arguments presenting the impact and the influence of slavery in the Cape. Through the colonising of the Cape and the importation of slaves a new population emerged who were later called Coloured people. The very first unions came into existence with people who were noticeably different from either the white settlers or the slaves (Van der Ross 2005: 96).

These arguments presented by Grauman (2016), Erasmus (2001), Ross (2005) and Van der Ross (2005) illustrate the diverse and contested views regarding the Coloured identity. However, these contributions are an attempt at validating the Coloured community and identity as legitimate and not a product of the past which is linked to apartheid. I use this term because I refer to my own identity as researcher and to signify that I am not an outsider but part of this community. When the topic of this research project was introduced to the participants there was resistance from one woman. She felt uncomfortable to be identified as “Coloured” and argued that she is a South African woman and does not want to be labelled by a derogatory label from the destructive apartheid past. She shared this after the CBS was conducted but she was reassured that the term Coloured has no derogatory connotation and was a necessary component and contribution for the broader academy.

3.7.3 Qualitative research

This research has drawn on a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative approaches to research involve measures that do not use numerical data. Qualitative research approaches are well suited when new theories or hypotheses are generated. They are also suitable when a researcher wants a deep understanding of a particular issue to present detailed narratives to describe a person or process (Murray & Beglar 2009:47). This research project has analysed material from a literature review which presented perspectives of infertility from African and Western perspectives. Data has also been produced from an interview as well as a CBS which was conducted in the vernacular of the participants. These responses were later transcribed by me. The raw data was read through several times and a range of themes have emerged which will be analysed in the following chapter.

3.7.4 Limitations of the study

Ethical clearance was granted by the ethics committee of the University of KwaZulu- Natal at the end of September 2016 and this meant that only two weeks were available to send out the invitations to as many women as possible. The CBS was conducted on 8 October 2016 on a Saturday afternoon at 3pm. This was a rather difficult time of the day because many of these women had other appointments and two of them had to leave early. There were nine

questions that were discussed at great length; however, our time together was too short and some participants became agitated because they were worried about the time. Some of the questions in appendix B were repeated but posed differently and some of the participants felt it unnecessary to repeat their responses. However, this was done strategically to demonstrate rigour throughout the data production process. The topic of this research project discusses infertility, miscarriage and childlessness which are very sensitive subjects. This was the first CBS in the parish that openly discussed this subject of infertility and based on the input from the participants it was necessary. Due to the sensitive nature of the issues, many women preferred not to attend.

3.7.5 Reflexivity

Watt (2007) argues that researchers need to be aware of their personal reasons for carrying out a study, specifically their subjective motives. These motives will have important consequences for the trustworthiness of a project. Furthermore, if research design decisions and data analyses are based on personal desires without a careful assessment of the implications of these for methods and conclusions, the researcher risks creating a flawed study. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of these influences, how they shape the research and to think critically about how best to deal with their consequences (Watt 2007:85).

While attempting this research project, I was constantly aware of my position as the researcher. I am a South African woman from the so-called Coloured context. I live and work in Cape Town where I grew up. I am a female pastor who constantly struggles for emancipation from patriarchal oppression within this position as leader in a parish of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. I will now share my own story as the researcher.

In 2012 I was pregnant and during my 26th week of gestation I had to go to hospital for my monthly check up. At this stage the doctor realized that there were complications due to high blood pressure. The doctor's words still resound in my ears whenever I think back to this day, "*We will have to terminate your pregnancy or else you will die. You cannot go anywhere; we are admitting you now!*" In shock I responded, "Doctor, please explain that to

me again? She said, *“Your blood pressure is very high and if you go home you will have a seizure and you and your baby will die.”* I was in a state of shock and panic and immediately left her consultation room and called my husband who worked in the North West province which was 700km away from me. I was admitted to hospital and given large doses of medication in order to stabilize the blood pressure. Two weeks passed and the hypertension started affecting my kidneys and lungs and then the placenta ruptured and I was rushed to theatre. My son Alex was born at 28 weeks on 20 August 2012 and immediately after his birth he was rushed to the premature intensive care unit. I could only visit him the next day because I was in a lot of pain. The following day my husband and I spent most of our time with him and that same night I was called to the premature unit. On my arrival I found my son covered in blood and I knew that something was wrong. The doctor on duty sat me down just opposite my son and first asked me to explain to him what I was told by the hospital staff regarding my son’s life expectancy. I then explained and after my explanation I was told, *“Your son’s lungs collapsed and he is not going to make it.”* I then baptized my son while tears rolled down my face and then I called my husband. Moments later our son took his last breath and passed away in my husband’s arms.

During this experience many people from the church tried to comfort me by saying that this was the will of God and as a pastor I should know this and be strong. I was also told that one day God would bless me with a soccer team of children. Some said that it was best that it happened at such an early stage because if it happened later, the pain would have been even greater. The worst comments from congregants were that I was bewitched and that is why my son died. So many times I had to pray for congregants and encourage them but during my own experience of pain I found no comfort from the same people whom I have had to console so many times. I went on leave for six weeks and when I requested one more week because my husband and I were attending counselling sessions in his home town in the North West, I was told to return immediately because there were many funerals and the parish needed a pastor.

After my son’s birth, medical procedures showed that there were cysts growing on my uterus and this posed possible infertility problems for the future. A year later I had these fibroids removed. A year passed and after my son’s tombstone was unveiled on his first birthday, I

found out that I was pregnant with a little girl whom we have named Zoë. Her name means life!

This experience has made me reflect critically about the loss of a child and the inability to have children. It has made me aware and sensitive to women who experience this loss whether through miscarriage or stillbirth, and how the church responds to these experiences. As a pastor I have realized that huge emphasis is placed on family life through baptism and confirmation and as much as we intend to be inclusive, we are in fact excluding many people. I have realized that my position is both a privilege and a limitation. It is a privilege because I know the participants and they have a level of trust in me as their pastor. They were willing to participate in this research, even though the topic is very sensitive because of the relationship of trust that was established between us. However, there were limitations because the women often responded to questions with an intention to please me by giving spiritualised answers instead of being truthful about the pain and suffering that infertility related problems bring. This research project is not an attempt to answer personal questions about my own experience. The aim of this project is to acknowledge that there are women who suffer due to miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility and that these experiences are real and often unaddressed. This project intends to create awareness regarding infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. Since the church is a place of spiritual transformation it is lacking in its life-giving nature if it continues to ignore the many women who experience the pain of fertility related problems. The purpose of this project is to understand how women from the Cape Flats understand and appropriate these experiences.

3.7.6 Procedures and instruments

The CBS was based on 1 Samuel 1-2 with a focus on perspectives of infertility. One week prior to the CBS it was announced in church that all women were invited to attend this Bible study. A random sampling method was used to select participants. This was done to ensure that those selected were a representative sample of the larger group (Shenton 2004:65). Those who responded to the invitation were all welcome to participate in the CBS. Although infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth are sensitive topics, the CBS was welcomed by all who participated. During May 2016 permission was requested from Bishop William Raymond

Bowles who acted as gatekeeper from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, Cape Orange Diocese. His letter of approval has been included as Appendix A. Ethical clearance was granted at the end of September 2016 which permitted me to continue with the research. I met with all the participants at the church, to create a safe space for the women who attended. Gerald West (2011:12) argues that if the Bible study is conducted in a safe place, a place of trust and affirmation, then the participants may begin to articulate their embodied theologies. Furthermore West (2011) explains that embodied theologies are those theologies that are formed within us. These embodied theologies are drawn partly from our theological heritage and partly from our own experience of God and the world. However, for many marginalised people their embodied theologies are different from the public theologies of the church. Therefore, the CBS is an important resource because it empowers participants and enables people to articulate and own their embodied theologies. In most cases participants from marginalised contexts have very little opportunity to consider whether their own embodied theology is shared by anyone else. The CBS provides an opportunity to articulate and then own local contextual theologies (West 2011:12).

A pastor who specialises in pastoral care and counselling was available to counsel and console those women who became emotional. There were two women who became very emotional while sharing their stories. They were taken aside for counselling. Before we started with the CBS, a few minutes was spent to discuss the background of the CBS and to reaffirm that all contributions were highly appreciated and valued and that a report back would be done upon completion of the research project. All participants were made aware that their responses would be kept confidential and the session was concluded with their signing an informed consent form. This form gave permission to record their responses on newsprint, take pictures and to include their stories in the final dissertation.

After my reflection on the CBS I realized that the data based on the responses was spiritualized because the women gave spiritual meaning to their personal experiences. In order to provide additional data, I requested an interview with one of the participants after the CBS. She shared her story during the CBS and I wanted some more information regarding her story. This interview took place on the 10 November 2016. I chose this participant because she was willing and open to share her full story with me. She gave permission to

record the interview and to use her story as part of this project. This opportunity was therapeutic for her because she could never tell her story before and allow herself to heal from the pain of two miscarriages. She kept thanking me for this opportunity to talk and mentioned that it helped her move forward. The interview was recorded and she listened to it after our discussion. In my opinion it was her way of acknowledging and validating that her story and contribution was important. The data produced from this interview was beneficial for my study. The story from this participant once again reiterates the silence surrounding the topic of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. Her story indicates that having a child can provide financial and emotional security as well as a life partner. However the father can still choose to leave as soon as the pregnancy is known to him. The story shared by this participant will be presented and analysed in the data analysis chapter.

3.7.7 Validity and Reliability

According to Brink (1993), reliability is concerned with the consistency, stability and repeatability of the informant's accounts as well as the researcher's ability to collect and record information accurately. Furthermore, it refers to the ability of a research method to yield consistently the same results over repeated testing periods (Brink 1993:35). During the CBS, the questions that were posed were repeated but phrased differently. This was done to ensure consistency. The questions have been attached as Appendix B. The CBS that was conducted was done with women with whom I have worked for two years. The responses were written on newsprint with the name of each participant next to their response. However, in the thesis I have used pseudonyms when presenting their responses. Throughout the study, I was constantly aware of my role as pastor and the power that came with this position. To ensure the reliability of this research I remained neutral and did not impose or influence any of the responses, i.e. I did not add my own view or opinion to any of the responses that were given. However, Nadar (2009:392) argues that the uncritical acceptance of indigenous knowledge appears as almost sacrosanct, without an acknowledgement that the community can themselves be in possession of destructive and life-denying interpretations. Furthermore, these interpretations should be exposed, interrogated and ultimately transformed. This contribution of CBS by Nadar as a liberation pedagogy comes after eight years of experience

of working in communities of faith with the Bible. The author discovered shocking and disturbing interpretations of biblical and social contexts from the participants that were more life-denying than life-promoting (Nadar 2009:392). During the CBS I assumed that my role was mainly to facilitate the process, write down all the responses and to ensure that everyone had a chance to respond. It is unfortunate that I did not use the opportunity to share for the cause of liberation as Nadar (2009:394) argues because CBS goes beyond simply servicing the “other” but also to be in service of the cause of transformation. During the CBS the participants’ responses were valued and not undermined by thanking them after each response and encouraging them. The data that has been captured has not been misrepresented and serves as a true reflection of the outcomes during the CBS.

3. 7.8 Contextual Bible Study

The Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB) provided an institutional base from which to develop a collaborative Bible reading practice. After years of sustained work with ordinary readers, communities of the poor, working-class and marginalized the ISB’s reading practice shifted its emphasis away from a socio-historical starting point to a more egalitarian one (West 2006:141). The ISB was founded in 1989 after more than seventeen years of Bible study praxis which is described as a process of sustained action and reflection on the Bible reading methodology, produced what is now known as Contextual Bible Study (West 2006:141). During CBS participants discuss biblical texts in plenary and smaller groups, with reporting happening after both sessions. CBS is generated by a contextual theme from the community in which it is conducted. West (2006:141) uses three key terms to describe the methodology, See, Judge and Act. CBS was a response to social analysis and this is where the term See comes in. This then becomes a vehicle from which to Judge reality which is followed by a challenge for the community to Act and be an agent for transformation. Furthermore, the CBS process begins and ends with community conscious questions. These questions are based on the context of the participants which incorporates their local knowledge and analysis as well as the communities’ interpretive resources. Furthermore, CBS is described as an approach which provides non scholarly interpreters with additional sites of engagement with the biblical text in three ways namely; See, Judge, Act. There is access to unfamiliar texts which are neglected or suppressed by church traditions, like 2

Samuel 13: 1-22 which is about the rape of Tamar. CBS provides access to unfamiliar literary units and finally it provides ways of reading familiar texts in unfamiliar ways (West 2006: 142 & 145).

Nadar (2009) offers an alternative view to West (2006) regarding Contextual Bible Study. She argues that CBS is not just a liberation discourse, but a form of liberation pedagogy. Her reasons for this view are that the South African context and indeed the global contexts have changed; hence our analysis of communities and intellectuals must change too, and that given these changing contexts, a far more deliberate role of the scholar is needed (Nadar 2009:390).

3.7.9 Intercultural Bible Reading

This approach and method of reading the Bible shifts from the traditional hermeneutical model called bipolar. This traditional model is centred on the text, which is historical critical exegesis. The method places emphasis on the position of the author in the text (Kessler 2003:452 & 453). This approach ignores the reflection and position of the readers of the text. The final two decades of the 20th century brought a new wave of feminism. The dawning of the feminist movement brought awareness that the subject who reads a text is not man as a genderless being but is either male or female. Understandings of the biblical texts differ depending on whether a man or woman is reading the text. The intercultural method is unique because it explores whether the Bible can be a factor for binding different cultures, and be an instrument for intercultural communication (Kessler 2003: 454 & 455). Although the participants in my study are not from different cultural backgrounds this method is important because it takes into consideration the readers and their contribution. Van der Walt (2012) critiques this method and points to the gaps that exist. The process of intercultural Bible reading should create a safe space where the voice of the individual can be heard in community with others. In addition, it should be a space where the individual is not only free to speak but also to have the natural experience of truly being heard. The intercultural Bible reading experience becomes a space that promotes human dignity and has the inherent

capacity to facilitate social transformation. Although these Bible study groups can ideally be a safe space with the potential for social transformation, she argues that the practical reality shows a more complicated dynamic (Van der Walt 2012: 110). Two important factors that contribute to the complexity are the ideological framework of individual participants and the underlying power dynamic in the social interaction (Van der Walt 2012:110). I agree with this approach presented by Van der Walt (2012) because the Contextual Bible Study that I conducted proved that even though a safe space was created for social transformation, some women still choose to accept patriarchy as the norm and to spiritualise their pain.

3.7.10 Narrative theology method

The narrative theology method utilizes the methodology of oral history and African women's theology to tell the stories of suffering and trauma. As stories of trauma are told the interface between Christianity and African religion as practiced in South Africa becomes clearly visible (Phiri 2006:116). Although this method utilized by Phiri (2006) focuses mainly on the apartheid context it is still relevant for various contexts and therefore I incorporated it into this research project. According to Balcomb (2008:47) stories are not simply about how things start and how they end, they are also about constructing meaning for our lives. He argues that stories have to do with epistemology and if human beings are not able to tell the stories of their lives coherently, then they have difficulty finding meaning in their lives. Ultimately this means they are probably undergoing a crisis on a very profound, epistemological level (Balcomb 2008:47). This is an important method because throughout the CBS women were sharing their stories which added richness and authenticity to this project.

3.7.11 Summary of methodology

This chapter has focused on the theoretical frameworks of African feminist theology, narrative research within African feminist scholarship, feminist theory in relation to miscarriage, stillbirth and infertility and standpoint theory and the matrix of domination in which infertility; miscarriage and stillbirth have been mapped. It has described the methods of Contextual Bible Study, intercultural bible reading and narrative theology and how they were used to answer the research questions as well as the processes involved to obtain the

data. In the chapter that follows an in depth analysis will be provided of the data produced from the CBS, as well as the analytical frameworks that have been applied.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS

4. Introduction to chapter four

This chapter will present the importance of narrative epistemology and analyse three key narratives, namely the biblical narrative of 1 Samuel 1-2, the scholarly analysis of the biblical text, and the narratives of the participants who attended the contextual bible study (CBS). This chapter presents themes that emerged from the data that has been analysed after the CBS. These themes are infertility, polygamy, depression, patriarchy, agency, importance of male progeny, motherhood, faith, loss in the womb and liberation. The themes have been extrapolated from the biblical and scholarly sources, as well as participants' narratives which were drawn from a Contextual Bible Study on 8 October 2016. The main aim of this chapter is to answer the following research questions:

- a) How do Christian women readers of the Bible from the Lutheran Church in the St Johannes parish (Cape Town) respond to the narrative of infertility and childlessness presented in 1 Samuel 1-2?
- b) How do the perspectives of the Christian women readers of the Bible from the Lutheran Church in the St Johannes parish (Cape Town) relate to scholars' interpretations of infertility and childlessness in general and in 1 Samuel 1-2 in particular?

I will present the importance of narrative epistemology which will be the substance of this chapter together with the key narratives as well as the analyses thereof.

4.1. Narrative epistemology

According to Nadar (2014:21), who writes from an African feminist perspective, narrative research is an important approach of investigation in academia. Even though it is becoming an increasingly popular research method, she argues that this does not mean that narrative research is simply accepted within the predominantly white and male research academy as legitimate or scientific. African women's theologies are derived from the personal narratives

of real African women. She maintains that narrative research is still regarded as ‘soft’ research (Nadar 2014:21).

The alternative, I would suggest, is that we view narrative research not as soft and feminine research but as an epistemological value of feminist thinking, particularly Black feminist thinking, from which other researchers can learn (Nadar 2014:21).

Balcomb (2008:47), ironically a white male scholar, agrees that stories create meaning and are deeply entrenched in our being. I believe that including narratives as part of this research project, gives a human face to the research which is, as Nadar (2014:20) asserts, imperative within African feminist scholarship. The importance of narratives in my research is elucidated in my analysis of the three key narratives namely, the biblical narrative 1 Samuel 1-2, scholars’ interpretation of this narrative and finally the participants’ narratives.

4.2 Summary of the Biblical Narrative 1 Samuel 1-2 based on a feminist re-reading of the text

This research project is undergirded by a feminist approach to the biblical narrative. There are many male-centred readings of 1 Samuel 1-2 which focus on Elkanah and the birth of Samuel as the leader. My approach to this text focuses on Hannah’s experience of infertility; hence, my summary will focus, primarily, on her. Traditional feminist interpretations view Hannah as an object of patriarchy within a patriarchal context. Without children she was not regarded as a complete woman especially in the eyes of her husband’s second wife, Penninah. Hannah’s role is regarded as that of a victim of the patriarchal structures of her time, which confine women’s roles to the home and to procreation (Klein 1994:77). Therefore, my approach to the text will focus specifically on Hannah’s experience. As the researcher, I am re-appropriating this text towards feminist ends. The text begins with a very long explanation about Elkanah and his background, yet the author introduces Hannah as the wife of Elkanah only in verse 2. Furthermore, the text focuses on the birth of Samuel, the leader, which makes Hannah only an instrument who serves as a means to an end. Using a feminist lens, I argue that the experience of infertility and childlessness is as important as all other issues.

1 Samuel 1¹⁰ presents a story about a woman named Hannah and her relationship with God (verse 2). She could not have any children because God closed her womb (verse 5). Her husband Elkanah had a second wife and the second wife's name was Penninah (verse 2), who provoked and tormented Hannah because of her barrenness (verse 7). As much as her husband loved her, his love could not compensate for her longing to be a biological mother (verse 8). Her husband gave her a double portion of the sacrifice during their yearly religious festival and visit to the Temple in Shiloh (verse 5), which made Penninah's jealousy towards Hannah even stronger (verse 7). This situation tormented Hannah and she prayed to God, asking for a son while promising to dedicate the child to God (verses 9-11). While she was praying in silence at the Temple, the priest Eli thought that she was drunk because her lips were moving but she made no sound (verse 13). Hannah explained that she was not drunk, but that she was deeply distressed (verse 14) and Eli, moved by her actions, sent her off in peace with a blessing by saying, "Go in peace; may the Lord of Israel grant the petition you have made" (verse 17). Then God remembered Hannah, and she was granted her request. She gave birth to a son, Samuel, whom she weaned and then returned to the Temple (verse 19 – 20). After God granted Hannah's request, she praised God for the faithfulness that was shown to her by rendering a praise song in 1 Samuel 2: 1-10.

4.3 Summary of scholars' exegetical analysis of 1 Samuel 1-2

Many scholars, all working within a broad feminist perspective, such as Odoyoye (1999), Scott (2011), Kim (2008), Berlin (2004), O'Day (1985) and an unknown scholar¹¹, have done extensive research on this narrative. As indicated previously Odoyoye (1999), shares her own experience of infertility from an African feminist theology approach, examining the importance of progeny in Ghana. As much as 1 Samuel 1-2 may be regarded as a story of despair which speaks about the pain and suffering of infertility, especially for a woman who is unable to have children, Odoyoye (1999: 105) reads it as a story of hope. O'Day (1985) also regards the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1-2 as a story of hope, liberation and freedom. The African feminist theology theory works within liberation pedagogy and social

¹⁰ All biblical texts are taken from the New Revised Standard Version

¹¹ This resource does not have an author listed on the publication nor date. It can be sourced on Google by typing in the following 1 Samuel 1 – 4 Hannah: the powerless woman. The page number used to draw these insights from is page 26.

transformation. It is relevant for this project because it is life giving in its approach and it touches on the responses of the participants regarding liberation. Kanyoro (2006:20), who presents the work done by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, asserts that feminist theology is engaged in theological dialogue with the cultures, religions, sacred writings and oral stories which shape the African context and define the women of this continent. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians attempt to collaboratively reflect on issues of justice across the boundaries of gender, faith and belief (Kanyoro 2006:20). The theme that I extrapolate from Odoyoye's approach is liberation, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Scott (2011:1) whom I have mentioned in the previous chapter, examines the five narratives in the Hebrew Bible related to infertile women who became mothers. In her analysis, she mentions Sarah, the wife of Abraham in Genesis 16: 1 and in Genesis 17:19. Other narratives are Genesis 25:21, the story of Rebecca; Genesis 30:1, the experience of Rachel and Judges 13:2, the account of Manoah's unnamed wife. Scott juxtaposes these women to Hannah in 1 Samuel 1-2. According to Scott, Hannah is the only barren woman who renders her petition directly to God and not to her husband. . Hence, Hannah takes full control of her situation and does not depend on any intervention from her husband Elkanah or the priest Eli (Scott 2011:1). This analysis of Hannah's character suggests a level of agency on her part. Hence, the theme of agency is pertinent to this study.

Berlin (2004) and Mshubeki (2011) discuss the dynamics involved in a polygamous marriage especially with a focus on the relationships between Hannah, Penninah and Elkanah. Berlin (2004) focuses on Hannah's prayers and how one should pray to God. Her contribution is to alert readers to how Hannah's infertility and the taunting she experiences from Penninah and her society, transformed Hannah's way of praying to God (Berlin 2004:227). She describes the prose prayer by a barren woman for a child and her poetic prayer of praise and thanksgiving in 1 Samuel 2. As much as the scholar focuses on the prayers rendered by Hannah, she also emphasises the agony that a polygamous marriage can bring, and how this negative situation can lead to a stronger relationship with God through prayer. This contribution focuses on a theme of relationships within a polygamous marriage as well as a relationship of faith with God (Berlin 2004:231).

4.4 The narratives of participants presented at a Contextual Bible Study

During the CBS, the questions posed to the participants (Appendix B), focused on the characters in the text. The CBS also looked at aspects of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth, encouraging the participants to share their own experiences, as well as those of family members such as their mothers and daughters. Pertinent themes which came to the fore during the CBS, were motherhood, gender preferences for children, patriarchy and so forth – closely linked to Collins (1990: 16) matrix of domination, the importance of a male child, faith, belief, agency and liberation. These themes will now be discussed in depth and the responses and narratives of the participants and scholars will be aligned to these themes as a point of departure.

4.5 Emerging Themes

4.5.1 Infertility

Infertility is the inability of a woman or man to conceive a child after trying for several years. It also refers to complicated pregnancies that end in miscarriage or stillbirth.

The first question that was posed to the participants was drawn from their own perspectives on the text. The responses were as follows;

Participant B) “Hannah could not bear children, but God gave her a child.”

Participant J) “The story is about a very worried woman who thought she would never have children.”

Participant C) “Hannah was barren, infertility and childlessness is a lonely road of prayer and trust in God.”

Participant D) “The experience of Hannah is the best story to understand infertility.”

Participant L) “Hannah was physically infertile but spiritually very fertile and the priest is moved by this.”

In addition, they were asked to reflect on infertility and childlessness and their knowledge around this subject. The responses from the participants were as follows;

Participant L) "You are unable to have children, it is a painful experience and one should remain prayerful if you believe in Christ."

Participant D) "Being childless means that there may have been an opportunity at one stage when you could have had children, but then circumstances changed due to being in a car accident perhaps or making the choice not to have children."

Participant A) "You are fertile and fruitful, but with complications."

Participant C) "Motherhood is not given to everyone. God decides."

Close analysis and reflection of these responses show that most participants did not see infertility as a scientific issue. Rather, many of the participants' responses relate infertility to God because they believe that it is God who determines fertility without any intervention from human beings. This response may have been influenced by the text which clearly states in 1 Samuel 1:5 that God shut Hannah's womb.

Infertility brings anxiety and fear about the future without children. Some of these participants are mothers and grandmothers and have experienced the joy and love of having children and grandchildren. Despite this, however, is an underlying belief that infertility strengthens one's relationship with God, as shown in the case of Hannah. On the other hand, women who do not have a happy ending like Hannah who never have their "Samuel" may feel rejected by God and not grow spiritually and end up blaming God. Even though the data from the participants does not argue that infertility is an experience and not an identity, Hannah's experience shows that her experience did not make her barren in all areas of her life like her relationship with God. Therefore infertility, miscarriage and childlessness does not render a woman infertile in all areas of her life because it is an experience and not an identity. When a couple does not have children, it is the assumption that either the woman or the man has fertility problems. Society labels people without knowing the facts and usually the woman or wife automatically gets the blame. However, the responses presented above show that many of the participants argue that men and women can choose whether or not to have children, and thus have control over their own fertility. This is directly related to the sexual reproductive health rights of men and women which protects an individual's choice. Some of the participants expressed the view that infertility referred to the inability to carry a baby to full term because of complications. While this is an incorrect understanding of infertility, it is interesting that the participants link this understanding of infertility with Hannah's experience. For them, infertility can be overcome, as in the case of Hannah. These

pregnancies can lead to miscarriage or premature births that lead to death and stillbirth. 1 Samuel 1-2 has served as an important narrative to explore the topic of infertility. Although there are other narratives within the Bible that could have been utilised, the story of Hannah provides a foundation to interrogate Hannah's experience within her household and community of faith, in greater depth. For these participants, children are a gift from God and if God says "no" then this must be regarded as the will of God because as stated, "*Motherhood is not given to everyone, God decides.*" This statement, in my opinion, excludes many women especially those women who have not been 'chosen' to be mothers and those who believe that God "closed their wombs". This response also argues that fertility is predestined for some and not for others.

The response by participant L, "*Hannah was physically infertile but spiritually very fertile and the priest is moved by this,*" argues that Hannah was not infertile in all areas of her life. It suggests, moreover, that Eli could learn a few lessons from Hannah regarding faith in action. Participant E regarded Hannah as a prophet in the following response, "*She comes across as a prophet.*" Participant E said this in light of 1 Samuel 2 regarding the praise song. Her barren status made her fruitful in other areas of her life, especially with regards to her spirituality.

Scholars use the words infertility and barrenness interchangeably. Cook (1998:11) describes Hannah as a barren woman who bears a son through divine intervention. The Deity acts not only in the particular event of childbearing, but also on a larger scale in fulfilment of the promise of descendants to Israel. Cook (1998:11) argues that these women, Sarah, Rachel, Rebecca and Mannaah's unnamed wife [presented by Scott (2011) in chapter two in the literature review] are blameless while there are other women such as those of Abimelech's house in Genesis 20: 17-18, who were punished with barrenness. Furthermore, Cook (1998:11) argues that the Bible does not specifically call Hannah barren but states that "Hannah had no children" because, "the Lord had closed her womb" (verses 5-6). This, she describes as divine intervention (Cook 1998:11), a perspective which aligns with most of the responses from the participants, suggesting that God is the giver of life and the One who determines fertility and infertility.

Gaiser (2014: 281) argues that Hannah's barrenness is the life blood of the story because her infertility provides the tension of the narrative. This correlates with the re-appropriating of

the narrative which I have presented. Hannah's barren state provides the internal flow of the narrative as well as the outcome. Hannah sees her barrenness as her problem and does not involve either her husband, Elkanah or the second wife Penninah. Hannah believes, rather, that the problem is between her and God, and that God is also the solution to her problem. Thus, because of her faith in God, she exhibits an attitude of expectation. Therefore, Hannah takes her frustration up with God (Gaiser 2014:281).

Kim (2008:2) regards Hannah's infertility as bitterness, a marginal experience, hardship and shame, which she, ultimately, overcomes, therefore describing Hannah's trajectory of infertility in the light of transformation. Kim describes Hannah as a bitter person who goes through a transformative process which engages self, community and society. Hannah is, indeed, marginalised due to her infertility, but her experience of marginality though difficult and negative does not define Hannah as she engages with her marginal identity in the process of struggle and transformation (Kim 2008:2). Kim (2008) interprets 1 Samuel 1-2 as a text in which Hannah's infertility leads to transformation of the self and the community.

Based on the scholarly perspectives explored above, it can be deduced that infertility is a painful experience that some women, like Hannah, endure. God is the One who intervenes and grants Hannah's request without any human intervention. Hannah's barrenness made her an important figure in history because by overcoming her barrenness she is able to bear a new leader for Israel. This can be related to the narrative of Mary in the New Testament (Matthew 1:18) who gives birth to Jesus, the Messiah. Scholars argue that Hannah was not punished with infertility especially when related to other narratives in the Hebrew Bible. The main theme of this narrative is infertility because it is this painful experience that gives the story a voice and which affirms the importance of the experience of infertility. Hence, infertility is regarded as an experience that can lead to transformation. This is evident in 1 Samuel 2 when Hannah renders a song of praise to God who transformed her life with the birth of a son.

4.5.2 Polygamy

Polygamous marriages refer to those in which one is married to more than one spouse at any given time. Hannah's experience clearly highlights the experiences of such a marriage as well as the dynamics involved.

The responses from participants during the CBS presented the following responses especially when the characters of Elkanah and Penninah were analysed.

Participant C “Elkanah had two wives but one was his favourite.”

Participant B “Penninah took advantage of the situation and Elkanah did not understand her pain that is why Hannah rendered her pain and desires to God.”

Participant L “Elkanah had sons and daughters from Penninah.”

Participant G “At the sacrificial ritual Elkanah gave Hannah a double portion.”

The responses relating to Penninah specifically were;

Participant K “She was hurt deeply because the husband, to whom she had given children, belittled and hurt her. This he did openly since he chose Hannah above her by giving her a double portion.”

Participant E “Although Penninah was envious of Hannah it must have been Hannah who gave permission that she be the second wife as Sarah did in Genesis 16.”

From the above responses, it can be assumed that the participants believe that polygamous marriages cause tension within the family unit if one wife is favoured. Hannah’s infertility may have been the reason for the polygamous marriage and both situations caused her great agony. Participant K, with downcast eyes and a breaking voice, explained that “It is devastating when a man openly chooses and favours another woman over you.” Elkanah did not hide the fact that Hannah was his favourite wife and even though Hannah permitted him to take a second wife she may have regretted this decision. Although much emphasis was focussed on Hannah’s pain and suffering, the participants highlighted an important aspect that often goes unnoticed. This is the pain and suffering brought about by polygamous marriages. In this situation of Hannah and Penninah, Penninah was merely there to fulfil the task of bearing children. Penninah’s reaction to Hannah may seem unfair, harsh and cold; however it may have been her way of fighting against her own pain. This could be regarded as Penninah’s agency.

The text makes it clear that Elkanah loved Hannah more and that she was his favourite wife. But choosing another wife which was justified by culture for procreation may have been difficult for him too. He loved Hannah but had to do what was reasonable for him. He knew

that this brought pain to Hannah and he most probably wanted her to be the mother of his children. Hence, polygamous marriages affect all partners involved.

According to Kim (2008:3) if someone did not bear a child especially during Hannah's time, it was a sign of misfortune. In a patriarchal society, no male child meant less participation in society and Hannah would be left alone if Elkanah died without having children with her. Elkanah did not fully comprehend the deeper side of Hannah's pain and struggle caused by his polygamous marriage to Penninah. Elkanah, a male patriarch, has the sons he wants with Penninah. In this marriage it is Hannah who has to deal with the anger, frustration, powerlessness and hopelessness that this polygamous marriage brings. Furthermore, Elkanah is described as one who shows indifference to Hannah's pain by neglecting her wish to become a mother. Therefore, Elkanah is guilty, not only of insensitivity to his wife's feelings, but also of a disregard for her future, as there would be no one to support her upon his death (Kim 2008:4). I disagree with this argument, however, because it is Elkanah, the patriarch who engages with Hannah and asks, "Hannah, why do you weep?", "Why do you not eat?", "Why is your heart sad?", "Am I not more to you than ten sons?" (1 Samuel 1: 8.). This illustrates that he is aware of her pain. Throughout the narrative, especially with the weaning of Samuel, he is supportive which presents evidence of his concern for Hannah.

Gaiser (2014:280) argues that Penninah's role, though small, is essential. She was the one who was blessed with children but she provoked Hannah severely and irritated her because of her barrenness. One can easily regard Penninah as the enemy as described in many laments such as Psalm 55, because it is Penninah who increases the pain of the sufferer by adding psychological torment by reminding her that God closed her womb. This adds to Hannah's physical distress. If Penninah had her way then Hannah would be cut off from her people and her God. In this relationship and marriage, Elkanah is regarded as the husband who responds lovingly and with compassion. In the midst of Hannah's distress where there is danger of total isolation and withdrawal, Elkanah draws Hannah into conversation. Instead of regarding Hannah as a vehicle to provide him with the blessing of children, Elkanah appeals to the value of the relationship itself which is evident when he asks, "Am I not more to you than ten sons?" This is a striking move, since marriage, during Hannah's time, was regarded as a contract to regulate property (Gaiser 2014: 281).

According to Mshubeki (2011:10) the ideal marriage, as revealed in the Old Testament, is based on monogamy, can be deduced from the Old Testament creation story (Genesis. 2:24) which states that man is to leave his mother and cleave to his wife. Furthermore, this verse does not say “wives”, but rather “wife”, to emphasise monogamous marriage. Monogamy is reflected in Wisdom literature texts such as Proverbs 12:4 and Proverbs 18:22. Children were regarded as important in marriage as already alluded to by Kim (2008). If a woman was unable to have children then a second wife or concubine could be taken for procreation. Furthermore, Mshubeki (2011: 10, 11 & 12) asserts that having more than one wife in a polygamous marriage caused conflict in some families, particularly, if the husband favoured one wife over the other, as Elkanah did. As a result, in 1 Samuel 1-2, Hannah, as a barren, yet favoured, wife is despised by Penninah, who is able to have children.

Meade (1998:22) presents a diverse view regarding Penninah as the co-wife. She argues that a co-wife may be present, but is not always required; however when there is a co-wife, the barren wife is always the favoured wife. In addition, the favouritism that the husband displays towards his barren wife is there for many reasons. Firstly, the author of the biblical narrative needs to establish a reason for the continuance of the marriage; secondly, to show how committed the husband is by not divorcing his barren wife, and thirdly to highlight how much he loves her. This may be a way in which the authorial voice may also be quietly acknowledging that women are not always solely responsible for infertility. Moreover, much of the Jewish law that exists concerning divorce shows that one of the major causes of divorce is actually the inability to bear children. By introducing a fertile co-wife, a husband need not divorce his favoured, barren wife since the task to have sons and heirs can be fulfilled by the co-wife (Meade 1998:23). Furthermore, the presence of a fertile co-wife is used both as proof that the inability to produce children is not the fault of the husband but of the barren wife. Meade further argues that the fertile co-wife takes advantage of her ability to bear children in order to raise her own social status above that of the more unfortunate but favoured co-wife. Penninah, who is the co-wife and mother of Elkanah’s heirs fulfils society’s notions of what constitutes a proper and suitable wife. Penninah increases her own social status as well as the status of Elkanah. On the other hand, this is to the detriment of Hannah, the barren wife. Penninah had the added bonus of her own future security through her sons and this leads her to promote jealousy and rivalry between herself and Hannah the barren wife. Meade mentions that when the fertile co-wife presses her advantage and begins

to taunt the barren wife about her lack of sons and her failure as a proper wife, the barren wife becomes agitated and feels shame for her lack of fertility, as her status in society falls even lower. This leads to her constant anxiety and despair because she feels incomplete and there is inequality between the two wives (Meade 1998:23).

From the foregoing discussion we can say that polygamous marriages were culturally permitted especially in the Hebrew Bible, when a woman was not able to procreate. Due to Hannah and Elkanah's childless marriage a second wife had to be taken. Elkanah did not fully comprehend the anguish that Hannah endured. The CBS participants, in keeping with some of the scholarly arguments, felt that, in polygamous marriages, it is the man who gets what he wants. The feelings of Hannah and Penninah are less considered as Hannah suffers anxiety and her inability to have sons affects her future financial security. Penninah, on the other hand, also suffers as a woman but instead of becoming a victim, she, herself, becomes an oppressor.

4.5.3 Depression

Depression refers to a psychological state of mind with feelings of sadness, discouragement and a deep sense of negativity towards oneself and about life in general. "Hannah was tormented and depressed. Something about her appearance proved that something was wrong therefore Eli thought she was drunk" (Participant L, CBS).

During the CBS we discussed the role of Eli and most of the participants regarded him as a very good spiritual leader who had empathy for Hannah. These participants saw him as her only hope while others, like participant D, assert that "Eli was judgemental and failed to understand Hannah's feelings". Participant L, then, argued that Hannah's face and appearance revealed signs of depression, remarking that, "People who suffer from depression do not bath, brush their hair and so forth. Therefore Eli was justified in his response to Hannah".

From the response above it can be gleaned that depression is a real experience associated with infertility. Infertility is not apparent on the faces of people but the depression, anxiety and stress that it causes can be seen in one's appearance. Stein (2010:492) describes

childlessness as a tragedy in the Ancient Near East because a barren wife was likely to be despised by her husband, family and the society. The story of Hannah is unique in comparison to other barren women in the Hebrew Bible. This is evident because the Bible gives a personal account of Hannah's feelings, describing in depth, her sadness regarding her infertility, her relationship with her husband and the suffering caused by their polygamous marriage. According to Stein (2010:492), these details are enough to give a diagnosis of depression. The narrative of 1 Samuel 1-2 reveals to its readers, Hannah's great distress because of her infertility, exacerbated by Peninnah's taunting, causing a loss of appetite, general distress, vexation and anxiety. Hannah weeps, feels bitterness, misery and sadness; however, after her prayers, her spirits are lifted and she has hope. Moreover, Hannah loses her voice while praying, which is described as more than silent prayer but in actual fact it was Hannah mouthing her words. "This picture is typical of aphonia, a hysterical conversion symptom commonly associated with depression" (Stein 2010:492). In addition, infertility is recognised as a gynaecological disorder and so Hannah's narrative represents a case for depression (Stein 2010:492).

According to Thompson (2013:12), infertility, childlessness, miscarriage and stillbirth are stressful events in the life of a human being. Furthermore, in comparison to patients with other medical conditions, those showing psychological symptoms associated with infertility, are similar to those experienced by cancer, hypertension and cardiac patients. It has been argued that couples struggling with infertility face a wide range of emotional and mental health concerns. Often, most people assume that they will be able to procreate. However, there are a number of husbands and wives who are taken by total surprise when they became aware of their infertility. In addition, women struggling with infertility can have as much stress and anxiety as those suffering from a terminal illness. When a woman is unable to do that which is naturally expected of her, namely procreate, it can lead to depression. This situation becomes unpleasant when society and family members are insensitive (Thompson 2013:12 & 13).

Kim (2008:4) presents a view of Hannah's feelings which clearly comes to the fore while she is at the Temple. She argues that, when Elkanah gives Hannah only one portion because she cannot have a child, it causes Hannah to lose her appetite. Not eating is also a sign of depression. The view regarding the portions that Hannah received depends on the translation

being read. Although Kim (2008) indicates that she is using the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) her explanation of the portions is not a true reflection of this version. I have also used the NRSV which says that Hannah received a double portion in 1 Samuel 1:6 because Elkanah loved her.

Berlin (2004:228), argues that Hannah was already miserable but Penninah made her feel worse. Hannah would cry, refuse to eat, especially the special portion that Elkanah gave her, and refrain from participating with the rest of the family. Therefore, Hannah takes her despair to God. She says to Eli, “No my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:15). According to Kim (2008), the Hebrew phrase for “deeply troubled” is *qeshat ruah*. Respectively, these words mean severe, harsh, hard (*qashah*) and breathe, wind, spirit (*ruah*). Furthermore, if this is put together, the phrase can be translated as, “I am a woman whose spirit is hard or I am a woman who has had a hard time to breathe” (1 Samuel 1:10). Hannah expresses her situation as *marat nepesh* which means embittered soul. In addition, Hannah’s engagement with Eli continues in 1 Samuel 1:16 when she says, “Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety all this time”. “It is important to understand her ‘anxiety and vexation all this time,’ which goes deeper than a mere personal level and should include the social political dimension of her time” (Kim 2008: 4 & 26). These feelings and moments in the life of Hannah are described as a period of nothingness and are closely linked to depression (Kim 2008:26).

In Africa, in specifically Ghana as mentioned before, children are highly valued for cultural, social and economic reasons, hence childlessness creates huge problems for couples with the woman generally being blamed for infertility (Alhassan, Ziblim & Muntaka 2014:4). In Ghana women with fertility problems are socially isolated and neglected even by the people who should support them like their husbands and extended family. Motherhood is described as the only way for women to enhance their status within their family and community. Thus, these societal pressures may have a psychosocial impact on the woman experiencing infertility. The findings suggest that there is 62.0% prevalence of depression among women with infertility (Alhassan, Ziblim & Muntaka 2014: 4). This high depression rate was shown among women who are 26 and above and tend to be higher as the women advanced in age. The possibility of fertility decreased after the age of thirty five, which puts women under

added psychological pressure. However, in most societal studies, higher education increases an individual's chance of securing a well-paid and stable job which may bring relief to the psychological impact of the infertility (Alhassan, Muntaka and Ziblim 2014:4).

From the foregoing discussion it can be said that Hannah's experience of infertility can be related to depression which becomes unbearable especially without support from her family members. Everything that Hannah experiences within her home, including the torment of Penninah and the judgement of society has an effect on her state of depression. The argument presented by Alhassan, Muntaka and Ziblim (2014) regarding depression in women in Ghana can be related to Hannah. Women with fertility problems who have financial security cope better with the impact of infertility and its psychological effects. In Hannah's case it was completely different as Kim (2008:26) argues that Hannah was worried about her financial security in the event of Elkanah's death. This can be linked to the story of Ruth, Naomi and Orpah in Ruth 1. In Ruth 1, Naomi's husband dies and her sons die which leaves Naomi, her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, behind as widows (Ruth 1:5). The country of Moab was experiencing a famine; therefore Ruth and Naomi travelled to Judah in search of food and to start a new life (Ruth 1:7). In Ruth 3:1-5, Naomi instructs her daughter in law, Ruth, to go to Boaz at the threshing floor in order to secure her future, "My daughter I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you." After Ruth followed the instructions, she later married Boaz (Ruth 4:13) and then bore a son. The story ends here and both women's futures are secure with a breadwinner who will care for them and a son who will be "your restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age" (Ruth 4:15). This proves that sons provide financial security in a patriarchal society.

4.5.4 Patriarchy

Patriarchy is the understanding that males should dominate in society, government and all other institutions and that females are excluded from any leadership positions.

Participant A- "Elkanah had two wives but one was his favourite."

Participant K- "Samuel was a boy; a girl child may not have been held in high regard"

My reflection and analysis of these responses are that they refer to the polygamous marriage that Hannah was in and her specific request to God for a male child. Hannah lived in a patriarchal society and therefore the practice of polygamy was acceptable as mentioned before. However these customs brought pain and frustration because some of the women involved in these marriages were not always happy. Hannah requested a male child because it was only men who could play an integral role in the Temple. If Hannah had asked for a girl she could not have made the promise to God to dedicate the child in the service of God as she did with Samuel. In addition, as much as this text was written in a patriarchal society, Elkanah who was a traditional man and loyal to the customs and practices of the time was, nevertheless, very supportive of Hannah. He allows her to make important decisions regarding the weaning of Samuel; he accepts that the child must be given back to God even though he was not included in the decision or the vow made between Hannah and God. According to Cartledge (2002:143) it is Hannah who names the child even though it was culturally acceptable for Elkanah, as the father, to choose the name.

It is important to highlight the vow that Hannah made to God. According to Hyman (2009:231), the definition of a vow in the *Tanakh*, is a promise to dedicate "persons or property" to God. A vow made to God was very significant in the Israelite culture in the Hebrew Bible. In the Hebrew Bible there are four vows which he analyses: Jacob's vow in Genesis 28:20-22, Israel's vow in Numbers 21:2, Jephthah's vow in Judges 11:30-31 and Hannah's vow in 1 Samuel 1:11. Those who make a vow to God are in deep distress and seek God's assistance to remove the source of anxiety. The vow made by Hannah specifically illustrates that she made a voluntary vow which can be made by anyone and everyone, man or woman, individual or group. Furthermore, it is the unidentified narrator, and not the vower, who defines the act as a vow. Hannah was in a state of distress and sought the Lord's support through the vow that she made. Hannah uses language that manifests some intensity of feeling, as well as a personal relationship with the Lord. The vow that Hannah made shows a complex concern with urgent human issues and fears. She addresses God directly and in a personal manner and sets forth a condition for the Lord to meet. Finally, Hannah follows the condition with a promise to dedicate the child to God as a sign of her gratitude to God (Hyman 2009:236 & 237). This vow, in my opinion, proves that all human beings have access to God. This vow speaks of an intimate relationship that Hannah had with God and

that her situation also led her to a point of desperation because she was willing to become childless again as long as she was validated in society as a mother of a child. This vow speaks about the human capacity to bargain with God when all avenues have been exhausted.

Collins (1990) and Smith (1987) use the term “standpoint theory” as described in the previous chapter relating to theoretical frameworks to underscore that one’s position in society is made up of multiple contiguous standpoints rather than just one essentialist standpoint. Thus, it is assumed that power operates from the top down by forcing and controlling unwilling victims to bend to the will of more powerful superiors. Hannah had to surrender to this structure of domination which renders males superior. Collins (1990) argues an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed. This is evident particularly in relation to Penninah, who was not a male but who operated as an oppressor. “Each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone’s lives” (Collins 1990:15). Furthermore, it is explained that people simultaneously experience and resist oppression on three levels. These levels are “personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions” (Collins 1999:15 & Smith 1987:7).

4.5.5 Agency

This refers to an individual who is in a position of power to make decisions or influence a situation.

Participant G “Hannah was an assertive woman who made her own decisions regarding the weaning of Samuel.”

Participant C “Hannah was persistent until God heard her prayers and she believed that God will hear her prayers”

Participant J

I had a stillbirth and after that I could never have any children. This experience disappointed me. I had a lot of problems in my marriage which later ended in divorce. After my sister died I raised her children. I kept my faith deeply rooted in God even though I was disappointed.

Participants C, D & L

Our mother had two stillbirth experiences. After her second baby died, the doctor told her if she becomes pregnant again, her child (ren) will have a mental disorder. She poured her heart out to the Lord and trusted that God will provide. She had eight children and all of them were born healthy. Some of the children suffer from depression but they live a normal life with good jobs. There were times when my mother wondered whether the doctor was right but, she remained steadfast in her faith and trusted God. (The three participants at the bible study are sisters and each one contributed to this story).

My own analyses and reflection of these ideas and responses are that amidst the rather negative experiences and challenges faced by Hannah, she chose to be proactive. She did not allow Penninah's taunts to keep her in bondage. Neither did she allow Eli, the priest, to rob her of an opportunity to enter the Temple and speak to God. She approached God and did not need a mediator to approach God on her behalf.

The narratives presented by participants J, C, D and L are experiences of real women who have experienced infertility related problems. Participant J did not allow her situation to cripple her but instead became the mother of her sister's children and this validated her as a woman and a mother. After participant J shared her story with us, she was taken aside for a moment of reflection and counselling by the pastor who was available at the CBS. When she returned she shared that her hope had been renewed and restored because at the same time her sister asked her to take care of her children, her sister had just given birth to a baby. The pastor then told her that this was God's way of compensating for the loss she experienced together with the other children. The joy expressed by participant J suggests that she was finally recognised as a mother.

Participants C, D and L are sisters and they shared this story about their mother with admiration for their mother's strength and faith in God, having proved the doctors wrong and not allowing the prognosis to deter her. Participants C, D and L compared their mother to Hannah.

Odoyoye (2001:225) presents an important aspect on transforming power and agency. In the African patriarchal societies, women and power are like oil and water which cannot be mixed. When women have agency, onlookers become uneasy and seek ways to separate them. In an attempt at locating the origin of this uneasiness, traditions, mind-sets and attitudes which have been reinforced by traditions and daily experiences hold this source of fear, anxiety and apprehension that power will be accessed by women. Those who become uneasy are described as naturally nervous about women in powerful positions. “Such people’s experience of power as a two-edged sword makes them feel safer if women are excluded from it” (Odoyoye 2001:225). I would like to relate this to the narrative of 1 Samuel 1-2. In this story of Hannah, it is Penninah who assumed that she had agency because she had a fruitful womb. She also had sons and daughters from Elkanah which secured her position in their household and in society. As the story unfolds, Hannah does not allow this control to diminish her agency because she takes power and acts in her own interest. Later, Hannah, too, was able to give birth to a son because of her determination and faith in God. Her barren womb did not deem her powerless. As soon as Hannah gave birth to Samuel, Penninah’s role in the narrative ends and she does not control Hannah any longer.

According to Cartledge (2002:142 & 143) Samuel was Hannah’s project from the beginning. It is Hannah who goes to the Temple, weeps, prays, pours out her heart to the Lord and engages with Eli. However, what is most significant is that it is Hannah who makes a vow to God, promising to return the child to the Lord if God grants her a son. This view argues that the narrative is not centred on the life of the men, even though Elkanah is described in full detail in the beginning. It is, according to the participants, a story which highlights Hannah’s full experience of infertility as well as her relationship with God. This is evident when the comment is made, “This is the best story to understand infertility”. Hannah constantly seeks meaning in the midst of her painful situation. She takes control of the situation and recovers sense of self as a full person (Kim 2008:5).

In addition, Landman (2001) agrees that Hannah is an agent of transformation. Although Hannah initially conforms to culture and custom, she later abandons conformity and is at odds with society. Although Hannah is childless, she calls on God’s help to bear a child and conforms to what is expected of her as a woman. After the birth of Samuel, she gives the

child back to God. She did this, not because she regarded children as property to be disposed of at the will of their parents, but because she saw no future for him in a context where the relations between people, especially the relationship between her and Penninah, were based on jealousy. Furthermore, this story illustrates how women use culture against one another with Penninah using infertility to disempower and ridicule Hannah. However, Hannah refuses to be subjected to this cruel custom which forces her to conform, thus giving her only child to God. Her son Samuel became a great man of God and leader of the Israelites but this was due to his mother's determination and because she dared to rise up against the cultural norms instead of conforming (Landman 2001:90 & 91).

From the foregoing discussions, it can be gleaned that scholars and participants agree that Hannah had agency in a patriarchal society. Even though there are many male centred readings of 1 Samuel 1 which centralise the birth of Samuel, it is evident that the focus is on Hannah as the main character and as agent, unlike the other barren women who became mothers.

4.5.6 Gender preferences for children

Gender preferences for children refer to when the birth of a girl or boy child is favoured in a community or society for specific reasons that are applicable for that culture.

Participant B- "He was a boy, a girl child may not have been held in high regard"

Boys are often regarded as the stronger sex and the ones who will ensure that the family lineage continues. On various occasions, I have heard some people within the St Johannes parish discuss the importance of having a son. In these discussions, it is argued that it is important to have a son, even if it is only one son and the rest are girl children. The response by participant B is interesting because it suggests that the women participating in the CBS have started to think critically about gender roles and about how one gender is regarded as more important than the other.

In 1 Samuel 1: 11, Hannah specifically asks for a son. According to Nyawo (2014:128), who writes from a Swazi perspective, all children are important but boys are the more preferred. In some cultures, boys are held in high regard because boys will assume the family name and the lineage will be extended. Furthermore, an extended lineage is a sign of blessings and

prosperity and Swazi women do not feel complete when they have not produced a male heir for the family. This can be related to the story of Ruth and Naomi in the book of Ruth. After Naomi's husband and sons die, she and her daughter-in-law Ruth leave Moab and travel to Bethlehem (Ruth 1:5 & 6). Without sons or husbands, Ruth and Naomi have no guarantee of financial security and they have to leave in search of such security. Only after Ruth finds a husband and has a son, do Naomi and Ruth feel complete and secure (Ruth 4: 13-15). Based on this it is clear that having a son was held in high regard and, therefore, Hannah specifically asks for a son.

Meade (1998:13) argues that, according to the Hebrew Bible, the only real mother is the mother who has sons. In the Hebrew Bible, mothers may desire offspring at any cost, as Hannah did, but the only children that actually matter are sons. The importance of sons may have been motivated by inheritance laws which decreed that only males could inherit and that married sons were to remain within the family whereas daughters were married out. According to Meade, the importance of sons over daughters was because mothers depended on those who would remain in her home with the resources, and thus take care of her when she became old or widowed. In addition, it was believed that daughters were not able to protect and care for their mothers in the same manner as sons did (Meade 1998:13).

4.5.7 Motherhood

This refers to what it means to be a mother, the experience, the state of what it means to raise, nurture and care for children.

Participant G- "The story is about a very worried woman who thought she would never have children"

Participant B- "Her desire to have a baby was so great that she was prepared to sacrifice everything."

Participant L- "How did she treat Samuel during the four precious years of his life knowing that she must give him back to God? Did she spoil him?"

Participant L- "Hannah prepared her child for the day of separation"

Participant D- "Am I worthy to be a mother?"

Participant C- "Motherhood is not given to everyone God decides"

Participant I- "Some people make the choice not to have children"

The above responses, from the participants, argue that motherhood is established or legitimated through the birth of living children. The participants of the CBS are mothers and grandmothers and they know that there is a special bond between a mother and her child. The experience between Hannah and Samuel, when she had to give him back, is not recorded. However, participant L enquired into this aspect of the text which is not mentioned. Even though Hannah was childless perhaps for many years, she had the innate ability to nurture her son like most women who become mothers for the first time. This response argues that Hannah made the choice to become a mother; however, in my opinion, it was also due to the pressures of society and the situation in her home that made the longing to be a mother even greater. Hannah was barren for a long time but she was prepared to become 'childless' again because she gave Samuel back in service of God. It appears that being known as a mother of a living child is more important than actually raising a child. What is important for society, it seems, is knowing that a woman has had children and this authenticates her position as mother. Participant D mentioned that she has two children, a son and a daughter and five grandchildren. Towards the end of the Bible study, I asked the question, "How does this text make us feel?" Participant D then answered by posing a question, "Am I worthy to be a mother". She felt that there are many women unable to be mothers yet she was found "worthy" by God to be blessed with so many children in her life. This made participant D sensitive to women who have either had infertility problems, miscarriages or experiences of stillbirth. These responses argue that not all women become mothers and this should be accepted and respected. Women who never become mothers or who mother their nieces, nephews or who choose to adopt should also be respected. Furthermore, women do not have to validate themselves by having children; they have a choice.

Meade (1998) analyses the idea of motherhood and marriage from a biblical perspective. She argues that motherhood and marriage were regarded as experiences through which women were able to increase their relative status in society, because it is through these two roles that women increase the honour of their household (Meade 1998:7). It is argued that this structure in the Hebrew Bible reinforces itself: women marry and have children, especially sons, not only because it is expected of them but also because it is one of the only methods by which they can contribute to the honour of their families, while at the same time acquiring great personal honour. The first step a woman takes on the road to higher social position is to become a married woman. According to her, when a young girl has reached the onset of

puberty she is considered of marriageable age. She is regarded as old enough to run a household of her own and also to have children of her own. However, the age of twelve is very young for puberty to start and differs from one child to another. At the age of twelve a child is not mature enough to run a household. In addition, the woman is required to have children to perpetuate the memory of and continue the name of her husband after his death. Therefore, the role of motherhood is crucial to the survival and the honour of the entire household since the wife is the only person who is able to bear legitimate children, especially sons. In order to fulfil these needs it is the wife's status which becomes reliant upon the institutions of both marriage and motherhood (Meade 1998: 8 & 9).

Steinberg (2010) presents a diverse view regarding the responses of the participants. Her view is in defence of Samuel the child, in that she argues that the child, Samuel, is a victim of what today would be labelled child abuse. Steinberg focuses on childhood and gives a negative view of Hannah's skills as a mother. To prove this, she demonstrates that Samuel was exploited at the hands of his mother Hannah. This argument is based on his vulnerability as someone who could not speak for himself. Samuel had no choice and had to accept his fate because of the vow that his mother made. Furthermore, within the perspective of the rights of a child, 1 Samuel 1 could be regarded as a troubling text. Hannah made a vow to reverse her fertility and therefore Samuel was forced into a life consecrated to the service of God at the sanctuary of Shiloh. This links with participant B's response about Hannah being willing to sacrifice everything in order to become a mother. Hannah's request to God for a child who, if born, would be given over for cultic service enhances her socio-economic status by legitimising her as a mother, yet does not consider the needs of the child (Steinberg 2010:6).

Furthermore Steinberg (2010:7) reacts against the patriarchal, hegemonic dynamics in ancient Israel and against some earlier critical biblical scholarship. An attempt is made to analyse the fate of the child Samuel in light of his parents' interests. The scholar argues for readers to focus on the character of Hannah and the social dynamics that prompt her actions, raising questions regarding the fate of her child from the child's point of view. In addition to this view, the topic of children has been absent from most investigations of life in ancient Israel. Therefore, the fact that there are many constructions of childhood in any society has not been brought to the forefront in most past biblical investigations of 1 Samuel 1. In this regard the

adult-centred goal of his mother, Hannah, renders the child Samuel a passive object who can be regarded as a victim who is abandoned by his parents (Steinberg 2010:7). This view of motherhood is in opposition to that of the participants. Hannah is portrayed as a woman who put her needs of being a mother before the needs of her son Samuel.

My response to Steinberg's (2010) argument is that, 1 Samuel 2:18-21 gives evidence that suggests that Hannah goes to great lengths to be involved in Samuel's life even though they are separated. She makes him a linen robe which she takes to him yearly at the sacrificial ritual (1 Samuel 2:19). Her love and care for her son does not end as soon as she he is given back to God. Unknown author (no date) argues that Hannah was in fact a good mother and is an example of being faithful in keeping promises made to God. Unknown author¹² (no date) quotes Ellen White (no date) in the following;

When separated from her child, the faithful mother's solicitude did not cease. Every day he was the subject of her prayers. Every year she made, with her own hands, a robe of service for him; and as she went up with her husband to worship at Shiloh, she gave the child this reminder of her love. Every fiber of the little garment had been woven with a prayer that he might be pure, noble, and true. She did not ask for her son worldly greatness, but she earnestly pleaded that he might attain that greatness which Heaven values that he might honor God and bless his fellow men.¹³

This opinion by the unknown scholar suggests that Hannah did not regard Samuel as a means to an end. She continued to have a loving relationship with her son.

4.5.8 Faith and belief

This refers to confidence, trust or loyalty towards an individual or Deity.

The participants are from the Prayer Women's League in the St Johannes parish. This is an organisation in the church that addresses the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of

¹² This resource does not have an author listed on the publication nor date. It can be sourced on Google by typing in the following 1 Samuel 1 – 4 1. Hannah: the powerless woman. The page number used to draw these insights from are from page 26

¹³ Ellen G White patriarchs and prophets- BiblePlus.org Accessed 20 November 2016

women. When the organisation has their meetings, it provides an opportunity for women to share their hopes, dreams and fears with one another, while offering a space for encouragement from the Bible. As the facilitator of the CBS, I entered this space knowing that, when these women meet, it is their purpose to meditate on the Scripture, which they regard as the Word of God, which cannot be questioned and they relate it to their own experiences. Therefore, it was rather difficult to expect them to read the story of Hannah with critical lenses. They read this story as they would any other story from the scripture because the Bible is an anchor, source of strength and comfort for them. Nadar (2006:80) contends that for African biblical scholars to simply theorise about oppression in the biblical text or the biblical texts history seems self-indulgent. Furthermore, the majority of Africans, particularly women, view it as a source of inspiration in their daily lives and not as a document under scientific scrutiny. She argues that it is irresponsible for the biblical scholar to ignore such readers since there is overwhelming evidence for the pivotal role that the Bible plays in most communities of faith. This is evident among the poor and working class.

In other words, I am arguing that the biblical scholar who claims to be committed to liberation has to take into account the communities of faith who interpret the Bible and the way in which their interpretation either liberate or oppress (Nadar 2006:80)

It is argued by West (2011) that a CBS creates a safe space for participants to unearth their embodied theologies as highlighted in the methodology chapter discussing the theory and method of CBS (West 2011:11). This CBS has proven that Christian women spiritualise their pain and real experiences. This may be because most of the participants were not speaking from their own experience of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth but rather on the experiences of other women, like their mothers' and daughters'. My role as facilitator and their pastor may have influenced the ways in which they answered the questions. However, spiritualising their pain may have given them hope and it this faith and belief that serves as their liberation.

The participants' responses regarding faith and belief are as follows;

Participant A- "Hannah was a heartbroken woman who carried her burden but who poured her heart out to God."

Participant C- "Would Hannah have been disappointed if God did not hear her prayer?"

Participant J- “Yes she would, but she would have kept her faith in God.”

Participant E- “Elkanah’s wife was a prayerful woman”

Participant L- “Hannah gave her precious son back as a sign of her commitment to God. She does this with strength and commitment.”

Participant D- “Hannah was persistent until God heard her prayers and she believed that God will hear her prayers”

Participant A- “Infertility and childless is a lonely road of prayer and trust in God”

Participant L- “I feel sad because it points out my own spiritual bareness”

Participant B- “Eli was spiritually barren but his encounter with Hannah touched him deeply”

Participant L- “Hannah was physically infertile but spiritually very fertile and the priest is moved by this”

Participant C- “Hannah had a deep relationship of trust with God”

Participant K- “Through every phase Hannah’s relationship remained intact with God”

The participant responses point to the spirituality of the participants. In the context of Cape Town, where gang violence, drug addiction, abuse of women and children are part of the daily realities of these participants’ lives, their faith in God reveals an unwavering hope. One of the participants has a daughter who is addicted to drugs and her son passed away while under the influence of drugs. She now raises her grandchildren. Participant J lost everything she owned when a fire burnt down her home in August 2016. She shared that only the Bible remained intact while everything else burnt. These experiences shape the faith of these women. When participant C asked, “Would Hannah have been disappointed if God did not hear her prayer?” Participant J responded by saying, “Yes, she would have been disappointed but she would have kept her faith in God.” She, then, shared the following story during the CBS;

Participant J

I had a stillbirth and after that the doctor told me that I will never be able to have children again and I never had any. I raised my sister's children. This experience disappointed me but I kept my faith in God.

In the case of the story of Hannah, her context and experiences may have left her feeling rejected. Hannah may have felt like a misfit or as someone who did not belong because she did not have a child. She may have felt incomplete in her marriage and in society. Therefore, Hannah renders her pain and fear to God. An unknown scholar¹⁴ argues that the depth of Hannah's misery is clearly portrayed in 1 Samuel 1:10. In Hannah's bitterness, she weeps and prays continually and faithfully attends the annual religious festival at Shiloh. Her husband, Elkanah, does not understand her pain; therefore God represents her only hope and recourse. Hannah believes that since it is God who closed her womb in (1 Samuel 1:5), that God would be the only One who would have the power to open it. Furthermore, the unknown scholar argues that we should never underestimate the importance of prayer in sharing our thoughts and feelings, miseries and joys with the One who understands all. The time of prayer may have been the only therapy available for Hannah. Hannah's deepest desire is met because of her faith and complete trust in God. The fact that she continues to consult and ask God to hear her prayer suggests that she has found help, even on those occasions when there seemed to be no response. This suggests that Hannah clearly acknowledges that her childlessness was in some sense a result of God's action or inaction¹⁵.

Jones (2011:242) looks to the Trinity as an image to locate reproductive loss. She suggests that when Christ was crucified, God's only beloved child dies. God who sent this child into the world brings the hope of God's eternal love. This love is described as hope, the hope that the people who see this child will believe. Furthermore, God who bears this loss does not turn

¹⁴ This resource does not have an author listed on the publication nor date. It can be sourced on Google by typing in the following 1 Samuel 1 – 4 1. Hannah: the powerless woman. The page number used to draw these insights from are from page 26

¹⁵ This resource does not have an author listed on the publication nor date. It can be sourced on Google by typing in the following 1 Samuel 1 – 4 1. Hannah: the powerless woman. The page number used to draw these insights from are from page 26

away from the people who reject Christ. God is described as helpless in the face of dying because God does not stop it. However, by allowing it to happen, God bears the guilt for it. Here, she argues that, in this dying, the borders of divine identity are confused and made fluid, because “the One who is the source of life eternal bears the stamp of complete death.” This death, she describes, as taking place right in the womb of God. This death makes a grave of the Trinity (Jones 2011:242).

And yet, like the women we have heard from in my stories this death bearing grave of God paradoxically does not die but lives. And She lives to love yet again and to offer to the world the gift of the future. (Jones 2011:242).

Furthermore, she argues that this view of the Trinity should not encourage women to imagine their suffering as redemptive because they are not God. Suffering is not the source of redemption but rather the persistence of love in the midst of suffering is. The intention is not to identify women who have experienced reproductive loss with God but to suggest that God is in solidarity with them. God, who knows this loss, has the power to save, to heal and to love women by the grace of the Trinity (Jones 2011:242).

Participant L regarded God as a very significant character in the course of events within the narrative. The participants did not blame God for infertility, miscarriage or stillbirth. God remained the source of hope amidst these painful and challenging experiences. They described God as follows;

Participant J- “God is Almighty and ever present”

Participant K- “God is all knowing”

Participant F – “The one who hears prayers”,

Participant G- “God’s presence changes circumstances”

Participant A- “God is a silent presence who listens to prayers”

During the CBS participants J and F shared their own personal experiences of stillbirth and miscarriage respectively. Participant F in Afrikaans “*Ek het twee kinders gehad en nou het ek niks*” “*I had two children*”. (Participant became emotional), “*Now I have nothing.*”

Participant F became very emotional and had to be taken aside for counselling. Her response made it rather difficult to understand whether the children lived and then died, whether she

had two stillbirth experiences or two miscarriages. In order to gain a deeper understanding of her experience and to produce a rich data source, I scheduled an interview with her. This interview highlights the effect of the CBS regarding unearthing embodied theologies (West 2011:11).

4.5.9 Theme- appropriating loss in the womb

Loss in the womb refers to either stillbirth or miscarriage

Interview with participant F on 10 November 2016

At the Bible study, I shared my story for the first time in a group. I told one lady and she held me and said, "I am sorry about what happened." But this is the first time I spoke about this in a group. I am not one to easily talk about it.

I felt very emotional after the first miscarriage and felt anxious. Why did God do this to me and let me lose my child. I was not pregnant for a full month and then it came down. The morning I had my miscarriage I was at work. I worked at an engineering firm and a friend helped me and took me to the doctor. The doctor gave me something to clean my stomach and clear everything.

The second time I did not go to the doctor. By then I was two months pregnant. I only carry my babies a month or two months then I lose them. I saw pieces coming down and then I knew.

I never spoke to anyone about it but in 2003 I spoke about it for the first time and I told my friend. I never spoke about this before. I chose not to speak about what happened because I left my boyfriend because he impregnated someone else and I did not want to burden him with my situation because he would not have known which way to go but he loved me a lot. He wanted to be with me but I told him to go to her and I had already lost the baby but I never told him. He should have known that I was pregnant and I expected him to tell me that I am pregnant.

During the second pregnancy he told me that another girl is pregnant and I knew he was referring to me. He would not have known which way to go and the woman he had a relationship with was very harsh.

If I did not lose the baby, I would have told him and he would have married me. I feel much better now. There were many nights when I cried and when I thought that all my sisters have children and I don't have a child. Why are

things this way? But since I spoke about this at church, I feel very pleased. Sometimes I still feel sad (becomes emotional) but I feel satisfied now that I have spoken about it again. I am glad that I can talk about it because I do not have a mother that I can speak to. How can I talk to other mothers who already have children? They must talk to their own daughters. They will not speak to me like they speak to their own children. That is why I never spoke to people about this. But my friend understood she worked with me and we visited each other a lot.

This guy is married now luckily I do not have to mourn over him anymore. I mourned for him very long. That is why I still don't have a man because I do not want to get hurt again.

God carried me through, I thought that I would die at the same age that my mother died but today I am 51. God is still carrying me today.

Previously I have argued that the CBS was highly spiritualised because of the huge number of responses related to faith and spiritual infertility. The responses by participant F is a rich source of data, which gives a greater meaning to the loss experienced through miscarriage and infertility related problems. Participant F's responses have proven that, when women realize that they are not alone in their suffering, they are moved to share their own stories. When participant J shared her story and experience, participant F who was quiet throughout the CBS raised her hand and very briefly shared part of her story. The interview that we had gave clarity regarding the response which said, "I had two children and now I have nothing."

The interview points out the following; women who have experienced miscarriage, find it difficult to express their loss because as Reynolds (2016:51 & 52) has argued, this loss belongs nowhere. Miscarriage can lead to a spiritual wrestling and refusal to talk about the experience because the pain is relived. Throughout our interview, participant F continued to refer to her loss as 'it'. She found it difficult to name her experience. During the CBS she stated that she had two children, as though the children were born alive and then died. This, further, gives evidence that it is difficult to name and locate the experience of miscarriage. During my own loss many people who comforted me made me feel that, since I did not have a relationship with my son, and because he did not live long enough to impact me emotionally, the pain I felt should not be so great. The loss suffered during a

miscarriage could also be viewed with a similar attitude. Since the lost baby was not fully developed and still regarded as a foetus, it does not give a woman convincing reason to cry and mourn.

Participant F did not want to go to the doctor perhaps because her first experience with the doctor was not very good; perhaps the doctor was cold towards her or it was better to deal with her loss at her own pace. Her story shows that it is not easy to talk about miscarriage.

Her explanation about her relationship with her boyfriend is rather confusing. At first it seems like she left him, but my analysis is that if she carried the baby to term then she would have fought for this relationship. In some instances, her decision to leave her boyfriend gave her agency, but I think she said this in an attempt to forget the pain and humiliation that she experienced. Her story suggests that she tried to protect her boyfriend because of her love for him. Losing a child through miscarriage has the same experience of trauma, guilt and pain in relation to losing a baby through stillbirth. This pain lasts for years, especially without counselling and a support system.

Her story suggests that a child secures a woman's future, especially with regard to marriage. She compared herself to other women like her sisters, who have children and this comparison shows that she felt inferior because she has no children. Being able to acknowledge her experience was helpful and it brought some healing. Participant F did not only lose her babies through miscarriage, but she also lost the man that she loved because he rejected her and chose someone who was able to make him a father. Even though she wrestled with God, she acknowledged God as the One who carried her. However, her main argument remains, without a child you have nothing.

4.5.10 Narratives from participants during the CBS referring to loss in the womb

Participant E

My mother expected twins but one of the babies died while still in the womb (Participant becomes emotional and cries). My mother is such a strong woman and never spoke about how she felt. I wonder how my mother managed to live with this experience without talking about it. I would like to ask her at some point how she felt and how she coped. My brother who survived this pregnancy was spoiled by all the family members somehow to compensate for the loss of the baby who did not survive. (Participant smiles as she speaks about her brother)

My daughter also expected twins but the doctor said, "The one dissolved." How could he say this? As if it was not a life but a disprin being dissolved in water. How could this doctor be so cold?

Participant E's story, highlights the important role of the physician. Doctors often regard themselves as agents who have the final say concerning major medical decisions. Their approach and advice can be either positive or negative. This approach can make women either want to forget their experience, and not talk about it because of the pain it brings, or, if approached positively, can help women deal with loss in the womb more optimistically. According to Reynolds (2016:52), the silencing that occurs around pregnancy loss tends to obscure the reality of a woman's grief, while isolating and compartmentalising her suffering, thus contributing to a myth of anomaly. Furthermore, she argues, that newly pregnant women are encouraged by medical professionals and social convention to wait until their second trimester, when the risk of miscarriage decreases, to tell others they are expecting a child. Even though this may be regarded as sound advice on some level, it implies that a miscarriage, should it occur, is logically something that is supposed to remain secret, even to friends and loved ones. She argues that, while the death of a loved one brings with it a network of support, the loss of a child in the womb often brings isolation. The role of doctors and nurses is important because they are the ones who discover pre-natal losses. This is done or confirmed through the use of ultrasound, in which the womb and its contents are projected in stark, grainy detail and interpreted by a medical professional. When the subject in the womb is placed under these lenses, then the life that, both, was and almost was, becomes an object of clinical translation. In addition, women experience the deep intimacies of their own bodies as profoundly 'other', when these are re-presented and reinterpreted back to them in the harsh objective grammar of modern medicine. Instead of a hoped-for child, this

experience becomes a “spontaneous abortion”. Moreover, a shattering loss becomes the mere failure to detect a heartbeat (Reynolds 2016:52 & 53).

Participant E’s story seeks the affirmation and validation for the loss of a child whether through miscarriage or stillbirth. This loss should be located somewhere and validated as a real experience which causes pain. The pain is experienced not only by participant E’s mother and daughter, who were directly impacted by the experiences of death in the womb, but it has an effect on her as well. Participant E’s narrative expresses hope, especially, when one of the babies survived and could be carried to term.

4.5.11 Liberation

This refers to freedom or emancipation from slavery, imprisonment, oppression and deliverance from circumstances that affects one’s life negatively.

The following question was asked regarding Hannah’s praise song; “How does her song of praise make us feel?”

Participant C- Reminds me of the praise song of Mary in the New Testament

Participant L-It brings a feeling of joy knowing that God can do this to all who serve faithfully

Participant E- She identifies God as the source of all things

Participant D- She feels free

Participant K- She comes across as a prophet

Participant A- One does not overcome through own strength

Participant F- She overcomes her barrenness

As mentioned in chapter two, scholarly perceptions by feminist theologians show the link between infertility and pain and indignity. The aim of this research project was to ascertain the theological, psychological and cultural impact that infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth have on women. However, it also seeks to argue that women who cannot have children should not be deemed infertile or barren in all aspects of their lives. Njoroge (2006:60) writes

that, within Africa, there are many challenges that produce enormous pain, suffering and indignity. Nonetheless, African women theologians have attempted to name these challenges and to draw courage to address them in ways that are life giving. Njoroge writes about Odoyoye's (1999) experience of infertility and how she has powerfully demonstrated the ability to rise from the pain and suffering which it caused. Odoyoye (1999: 118) refers to the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2, when she talks about her own liberation from infertility;

Just as Hannah rose, so that day, on the island of Crete, Amba rose to the realization that children are God's gift to creatures who need to survive by procreation. I have prayed to join in obeying the command to increase and multiply, and God was saying a clear no to my offer. I felt free; I felt open and fertile, a new person for whom God has a purpose. It was like putting my life on the altar for God to consume what is now necessary for my journey. Rather than being consumed by childlessness, I rose, like Hannah, as one who had experienced a secret conversion and a secret pact with God. I was convinced that something would be born of this experience. I was pregnant with expectation of great things to come to me from God (Odoyoye 1999:118).

The participants have identified with Odoyoye's (1999:118) idea of transformation from infertility. They have also made a clear link between the song of praise from Hannah, in 1 Samuel 2, and that, of Mary, in Luke 1:46-55. Even though Mary was not barren, both these songs are rendered to God for providence of a life to come. However, the reality is that not many women choose to read liberation into this text. This is true for thousands of women worldwide who are not able to have children and those whose stories do not have a happy ending like Hannah and Mary and who continue to experience infertility as a punishment from God. This is also true for women who choose not to have children for various reasons. On the other hand, Nadar (2006), argues that faith communities begin with the assumption that the Bible is the word of God; furthermore, if scholars want to enable liberation within communities, negation of this understanding would be irresponsible. She does not suggest that scholars must themselves believe that the Bible is the word of God, rather that they must take seriously the ways in which the Bible operates within the community as the inspired and authoritative Word of God (Nadar 2006:82).

4.5.12 Summary of chapter four

Narratives are important and life giving in safe spaces, but in other spaces, where our stories are not validated or shared, it is difficult to present the realities of our lives. Infertility,

miscarriage and stillbirth are experiences that have been recorded throughout history and can be located as far back as the Hebrew Bible, yet it cannot be expressed in words by those who experience it. This has been evident in chapter two and three of this thesis. 1 Samuel 1-2 has been regarded as a good example of a woman and her experience of infertility because her full experience is projected in this narrative. As much as there are many male centred exegetical analyses of this text, focussing, primarily on the birth of Samuel and the role of Elkanah, feminist scholars argue that this story is about Hannah. It is because of her agency and consequently, God's action that she is able to bring a leader into the world. Hannah was not passive but an active participant throughout the narrative. Infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth can lead to marginalisation, however, making the choice to rise above the oppression is significant in that the experience does not become definitive. The biblical text is a story about two powerful women, Hannah and Penninah, because both acted in ways that they thought would be beneficial for them. This proves that in a patriarchal society, women did have power.

Infertility can lead to depression and Hannah's experience of barrenness has illustrated this. The responses by the participants and, especially, participant F's story, demonstrates that women without children find it difficult to relate to those who have children.

The next chapter will present theological conclusions regarding the participants' concepts of God in relation to infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. It will present a personal reflection and a general conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter Five

THEOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

5. Introduction to theological conclusions

This chapter presents theological conclusions of the responses by participants regarding infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. The focus on key theological issues includes: women's understandings of images of God, their interpretation of the will of God, their agency and passivity in relation to God, the role of God in human suffering, how God is portrayed in patriarchal scriptures and how this impacts contemporary readers. A personal reflection of the responses from the CBS has been presented, as well as a general conclusion.

5. 1. The concepts of God

The concepts of God that came to the fore from the participants' responses are: the will of God, an omnipotent God, the role of God in human suffering and the portrayal of God in patriarchal Scriptures.

5.1.1 The will of God

Motherhood, infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth have been regarded by participants as the will of God. These responses have created the understanding that human beings are passive in relation to God in some instances. On the other hand, it has been highlighted that human beings are not entirely passive because they can make requests to God as Hannah did. Motherhood has been regarded as pre-destined for some women and not for others. It has been conceptualised that the will of God is only activated on the basis of: whether God regards a woman as worthy of the title mother; the faith of the believer, persistence in prayer and keeping promises and vows made to God. Some responses have presented an understanding which argues that the will of God should not be questioned. As much as it was

argued that human beings are passive in relation to God, some of the responses illustrate that humans can decide how they react to the will of God and have a choice because of free will.

This theme highlights a few destructive connotations and can be regarded as life denying especially where it appears that God shows favouritism to certain individuals. It demonstrates that in order to receive from God, human beings must negotiate or make a vow so that they will receive what was requested. Furthermore, this theme paints God as an oppressor who intentionally and possibly punitively withholds a blessing from Hannah. The interpretation of the will of God depends on the interpreter and his/her situation in life.

5.1.2 The omnipotence of God

The text has illustrated the role of God in Hannah's, Penninah's, Elkanah's and Eli's lives at every phase. In this narrative, God does not speak, but God's actions are conveyed by the narrator. The participants have described the omnipotence of God as a silent yet ever-present force within the narrative. The course of events within the narrative are regarded as the action of God which is not controlled or determined by human beings.

5.1.3 The role of God in human suffering

The participants view God as the One who acts behind the scenes, yet is fully present and completely aware of the suffering of human beings. The Old Testament often refers to the anger and wrath of God. Yet this narrative and the views of the participants argue that as much as God shut Hannah's womb and was aware of her turmoil for years, especially in her household and society, Hannah still chose to render her pain and suffering to God. This observation demonstrates that Hannah still felt connected to the One who did not grant her request for many years and she still chose to render her pain to God. These responses do not view God as One who suffers with human beings, but instead as a refuge for human beings who suffer.

In the African context where the prosperity gospel is preached, those who have fertility related problems may feel excluded from this prosperity, because not everyone has a happy ending like Hannah. Some women must accept that they will never have children even though the church creates expectation and false hope. This can cause a faith crisis. In many cases, churches preach that human beings must suffer as Christ has suffered in reference to the crucifixion. This stance argues that suffering is important because it ultimately produces faith. I disagree with this stance because we are not God and this understanding justifies human suffering and it perpetuates painful experiences.

5.1.4 The portrayal of God in patriarchal Scriptures

The Bible can be described as a book that is patriarchal, that contains historical and colonial language which is particularly male orientated. Inherently, these texts portray God as a God for men, a God who favours men over and above women and a God who is unable or unwilling to identify with women. This is evident in texts that silence women, encourage male domination and that request submission from wives to their husbands, for example Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Peter 3: 1-7 where men are regarded as the head of their wives. These texts can make it problematic for women to view God as One who understands or who is actively present and available in the lives of women and their needs. It can portray God as a Father figure only concerned with the needs of men and who is not concerned with the suffering of women. These texts perpetuate the suffering of women and favour the rights and privileges of men, encourage violence against women and dismiss the understanding that both men and women are created equally. However, this text also demonstrates that in a patriarchal society in which Hannah lived, God listened, remembered and answered a prayer by a woman.

5.1.5 Infertility and a relationship with God

The outcomes of the CBS have raised my interest regarding how women with fertility related problems or any other problem, pray to God, especially when the church teaches us that everything that happens in our lives is the will of God and should not be questioned. How do women relate to a God who is a Mother and Creator but does not allow them to procreate

even though She has the power to do so? The narrative of 1 Samuel 1-2 presents a new way of praying to God. Hannah did not shout or scream, her words were not heard but her lips moved. This silent prayer from the heart was heard, acknowledged and answered.

5. 1.6 Agency/Passivity in relation to God

With regards to agency in relation to God, the responses by the participants argue that even if it is God's will to grant children, human beings have free will to choose whether or not they want to have children. Human beings are agents of their own destiny and future with the help of God. Hannah could have accepted her fate especially with a closed womb, but the participants argue that she was persistent until God heard her prayer. Hannah did not accept that it was the will of God for her to remain barren and not have children. Their interpretation of the will of God on one hand is that one must accept that motherhood is not granted to everyone and on the other hand in relation to Hannah, you must be persistent in your prayers and take action.

5.1.7 Personal reflection

Throughout this research, narratives were important and made this project come alive because it responded to the theories and perspectives that have been presented in chapter two and three. Balcomb (2008) argues for the importance of narratives and emphasizes that our worldviews impact and construct meaning for our lives. Hence narratives are imperative for research (Balcomb 2008:47). Thus far this project has illustrated that the stories we dream for our lives do not always come to fulfilment especially if children are part of that story. Furthermore, as Balcomb (2008) has correctly argued that when our narratives no longer make sense, then a new life story must be constructed. This too has been proven relevant in relation to infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth because these experiences can lead to depression and suicide.

The CBS may have been life giving for those who attended it, but some women still found it very difficult to revisit their experiences of loss or inability to have children. For these women, it was easier not to speak about their experience and instead reflect on their pain.

In my opinion Eli represents the church which is not always sensitive to the reality of infertility. Eli sits at the Temple door and does not enquire from Hannah if she needs assistance; he immediately assumed that she was drunk. Throughout the Contextual Bible Study, I constantly made the participants aware of the importance of reading a biblical text from beginning to end. It is important to read what has happened before and what has happened afterwards and how these events relate to each other. Chapter 2 verse 12 introduces Eli's sons as worthless men. It is interesting that Eli did not judge his sons, but did not withdraw his judgement from Hannah. Although Eli's sons were not the main characters in the CBS, this is an important dynamic to present because the birth of Hannah's son has replaced Eli and his son's. The CBS has created sensitivity in me as the researcher and in the participants towards women who have fertility problems, those who have miscarried and those women who have experienced stillbirth.

5.1.8 General conclusion to the thesis

This research has set out to answer the following questions: how have academic scholars presented perspectives of infertility in general and on 1 Samuel 1-2 in particular? How do Christian women readers of the Bible from the Lutheran Church in the St Johannes parish (Cape Town) respond to the narrative of infertility and childlessness presented in 1 Samuel 1-2? How do the perspectives of the Christian women readers of the Bible from the Lutheran Church in the St Johannes parish (Cape Town) relate to scholars' interpretation of infertility and childlessness in general and in 1 Samuel 1-2 in particular?

The research topic is significant especially from a theological perspective. Infertility, miscarriage and childlessness are not often regarded as real experiences. Human beings are able to mourn the loss of loved ones, but the loss of a baby not carried to term or the inability to conceive are located nowhere, not even in church where hope should reside.

Chapter one provided a brief introduction to the study which includes the background and research questions. Chapter two was a literature review which presented perspectives of infertility from African and Western perspectives. It also highlighted an exegetical analysis of 1 Samuel 1-2. Chapter three provided the theoretical frameworks and methodologies applied to the study. Chapter four presented a thematic data analysis that was produced from a Contextual Bible Study. Chapter five is a theological conclusion drawn from the responses of participants and chapter six is the concluding chapter to the thesis.

The theories that were applied to address the rationale of the subject of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth were African feminist theology, feminist theory in relation to infertility, narrative research and standpoint theory and the matrix of domination. These theories were relevant because they address the real struggles of ordinary women and value their experiences. Standpoint theory in particular argued for an approach to one's standpoint and position in life. This has been an important element throughout this project because it takes different aspects of life into consideration. The theory gives insight that the subject of infertility cannot be seen in isolation, but that different experiences and positions have an impact on how it is experienced. These theories have proven to be emancipatory and transformative but not for all women. For some, infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth are regarded as a curse and punishment from God. The methods that have been applied are Contextual Bible Study, intercultural bible reading and narrative theology method. These methods have been relevant to reach the objectives for the purpose of this study.

This research project has examined the perspectives and impact of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth with a focus on women. These perspectives and understandings have been presented by feminist scholars from Africa and the West. These perspectives and knowledge include experiences from the scholars themselves. A perspective from the West, in particular America, and an African space has proven that infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth are important experiences in both of these contexts. However, in the African context it has been proven that infertility deems a woman an incomplete woman and even worse, not a complete human being.

The perspectives from Africa and the West have demonstrated that silence surrounds the topic of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth. This is evident in theological spaces in particular because the topic of infertility is not addressed often. Women live with the trauma of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth and find it difficult to articulate, understand and validate this experience because it belongs nowhere. It has been argued that huge emphasis is placed on motherhood even though being a mother is not something that comes naturally for every woman. Furthermore, not all women have the innate ability to nurture or the desire to have children. Yet, this is what society expects and not living up to this ideal is considered abnormal.

The Kenyan, South African, Ghanaian and Swazi contributions of the interpretation of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth have demonstrated that not being able to procreate renders a woman useless. In addition, a woman who only has girl children is not a complete woman until she gives birth to a son. These communities are ruled by patriarchy. Here men are the dominant gender and women are not held in high regard in all areas of life. Gender inequality exists even among those who come from more modern contexts and among the educated. Infertility in relation to men is taboo because infertility is a sign of weakness and therefore cannot be associated with men. If a woman is unable to procreate, her husband is encouraged to find a partner who can make him a father. Furthermore, if his wife has given birth only to girls, he is encouraged to find a partner who can give him a son. This often leads to polygamy which can cause further emotional, psychological and physical tension amongst the women involved. Women in these marriages have no agency because society and family make pertinent decisions which favour only the men.

Contributions by feminist scholars have shown that since men are encouraged to seek partners outside of marriage, women are at a greater risk of being infected by HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Women are unable to demand safer sex practices because of the power associated with men. In some instances, men are encouraged to get a divorce and send his wife back to her family since the purpose of marriage is procreation. Having a child secures a woman's future financially and she is valued as a woman who has successfully contributed to society and her clan.

This study has also produced data from a Contextual Bible Study on 1 Samuel 1-2. The women who participated in this study are Christians. They have regarded the narrative of 1

Samuel 1-2 as a good example to present the struggles associated with infertility. In their view, motherhood is not granted to all women because God is the one who decides who will become mothers. In as much as this perspective is challenging, the participants argue that this is the will of God and one should remain prayerful and be willing to accept rejection as Hannah did. The participants have expressed their dissatisfaction with the brutal and very cold ways in which medical staff have treated them and their relatives who have experienced the loss of a child in the womb. However, their experiences have proven that medical practitioners are not always right regarding their prognosis.

Infertility in relation to 1 Samuel 1-2 has been presented as a real problem that challenges all women, but through faith in God, healing from the pain of infertility is possible. Infertility has also been aligned with depression and despair that does not just go away especially when there is no place to locate this pain. The participants have highlighted an important aspect that often goes unnoticed. They have examined the role of Peninnah and have argued that her jealousy did not come from nowhere. It may be that she felt hurt and used as if she was only serving a purpose, to procreate. The text clearly portrays Hannah as the favourite wife. However, this text undoubtedly indicates that there were two women who endured suffering and no one noticed their pain. Like the African scholars, one of the participants has viewed fertility as security. The inability to procreate therefore means no husband or breadwinner to support you.

Like Odoyoye (1999) the women in the CBS have read 1 Samuel 1-2 as a text for liberation. Yet, in reality not all women have a happy ending like Hannah and not many women want to sing praise to God like Odoyoye (1999) did because infertility in their experience remains a curse and addressing it brings only pain. This text has also been related to the New Testament text of the story of the Virgin Mary who praises God and accepts God's will for her life.

The gap in this research has been indicated by the contribution made by scholars with regard to expressing our embodied theologies in safe spaces. The participants who participated in the CBS attempted to shy away from their real life experiences. West (2011) argues that social analysis enables us to understand our reality; re-reading the Bible enables us to judge whether our reality is as God intends it to be; and our plan of action enables us to work with God to change our reality. Furthermore, this is an ongoing process; it is repeated and each

action leads to further reflection which West describes as the cycle of praxis (West 2011:3 & 4). The responses and reflection of the participants have demonstrated that the participants are not always willing to judge and critically analyse their own lived experiences. This is mainly because tradition teaches us not to reason with God and to accept our circumstances with faith and submission to the will of God. This makes the process of action rather challenging. Instead of being liberated from the pain of our circumstances, we choose to accept enslavement.

Most of the responses were spiritualized and not about the painful realities of infertility. Although there were a few participants who expressed their true feelings regarding the pain and suffering of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth, the majority of the women regarded 1 Samuel 1-2 as a narrative to address spiritual infertility. This CBS sensitized women to the subject of infertility and to treat those who have experienced miscarriage and stillbirth with dignity and respect. This was an opportunity for two women openly to share their pain and to find meaning for their loss after many years of hiding their grief and despair.

The findings of this research suggest that infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth are experiences and not identities. A woman is complete and has been created in the image of God, with or without children. However, in reality there are many women who feel inferior because of infertility. These women fear that they cannot relate to those who have children especially from participant F's experience. Infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth are important aspects and real experiences in life which should be treated with importance like any other religious matter. Finally, this research has provided theological conclusions and personal reflections based on the findings of the CBS.

The most important and profound theological conclusion that has been made is that a barren womb can be a womb of possibilities because infertility does not deem any woman or man useless in all areas of life. This theological conclusion is inclusive and it invites everyone, even those who will never be mothers or fathers.

In conclusion, I recommend the following areas for research in response to my own contribution to the discourse around infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth: practical responses to the silence of infertility, miscarriage and stillbirth from practical theological perspectives; the effect of infertility on males; how adoption is appropriated in African communities where

couples are infertile; the child factor in LGBTQI communities and how fertile couples who choose not to have children are perceived in an African context.

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24 Natasha Str.
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Foon/Phone 053-8711032
Fax: 053-8711162
Cell: 0827192411
Email: bishop@elcsacod.co.za / williamr.bowles@yahoo.com

P.O. Box 703
Kimberley
8300

Office of the Bishop

Let us build and develop our Diocese! (Eph.4:12-13)

23rd May 2016

Rev. A. Harwood

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

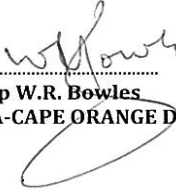
I greet you with Psalm 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength"

The Diocese have given you permission to do your Master Degree at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal in Pietermaritzburg.

Your research topic is " How do ordinary Christian readers of the Bible from the Lutheran Church in the St Johannes Parish Cape Town relate the construction of infertility and childlessness by academic scholars and the Biblical text in Sam.1:2 and how do they relate this to their own experiences of infertility and childlessness.

We realize that this is a very sensitive topic and also admonish you to go about it in a sensitive way.

May God bless you with your studies.


.....
Bishop W.R. Bowles
ELCSA-CAPE ORANGE DIOCESE



Jesus said: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. John 14:1

Appendix B- Contextual Bible study questions

Ask participants to read the text 1 Samuel 1-2:

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the characters and what do we know about them?
2. How do we feel when we read this text?
3. What do we know about infertility and or childlessness?
4. What does this text tell us about Hannah's experience of being barren?
5. What does this text say about Hannah's relationship with God?
6. How does Hannah's experience of infertility relate to our own knowledge and perspectives of infertility and childlessness?
7. How does her song of praise make us feel?

PARTICIPANT'S LETTER

Dear Participant

This letter, respectfully, seeks your participation in a Research Project being undertaken to obtain data pertaining to the knowledge and perspectives of Christian women in the St Johannes Parish on infertility and childlessness in the context of Cape Town based on 1 Samuel 1-2. This project is aligned with the Masters programme in the field of Gender, Religion and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights. I am well aware of that the nature of this research project deals with a sensitive issue; therefore it is important to request your consent and provide you as valued participant the details involved in this focus group discussion listed below.

1. Participation in this Research Project, which will be conducted with a Contextual Bible Study, is entirely voluntary; with the right being reserved to the Participant to withdraw participation without experiencing any disadvantage.
2. Participants are offered the opportunity to elect that their involvement in this Research Project remains confidential and anonymous. Your identity will be protected with the use of pseudonyms within the final thesis.
3. The focus group discussion will take place for the duration of one hour at the church in the Bellville congregation. Audio Recording devices will be used to record the session.
4. The primary data will be stored with my supervisor at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics. Data on which any research publication is based will be retained in the School for at least five years after publication.

The Research question I wish to answer during our discussion is, “How do Christian women readers of the Bible from the Lutheran Church in the St Johannes parish (Cape Town) relate to the constructions of infertility and childlessness in 1 Samuel 1-2.

I look forward to receiving your responses to this request.

Yours Sincerely

Alison Harwood

Contact details

Mobile number 0820585330

Email address alleyw@hotmail.com

Alternative contact details

Professor Susan Racokzy

Email address srakoczy@sjti.ac.za

Doctor Helen Keith van Wyk

Email address helenkeithvanwyk@gmail.com

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH PROJECT

I.....(full names of participant)
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

Appendix D- Ethical Clearance



16 September 2016

Mrs Alison Cathrine Harwood 205509459
School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Harwood

Protocol reference number: HSS/1498/016M
Project title: "Perspectives of Infertility" - Coloured women's reading of 1 Samuel 1-2

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 9 September 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shamila Naidoo (Deputy Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

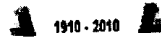
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Cc Supervisor: Professor s Rakoczy & Dr Helen Keith van Wyk
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Denis
Cc School Administrator: Ms Catherine Murugan

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 280 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 280 4609 Email: ximbag@ukzn.ac.za / snymann@ukzn.ac.za / mohunp@ukzn.ac.za
Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



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