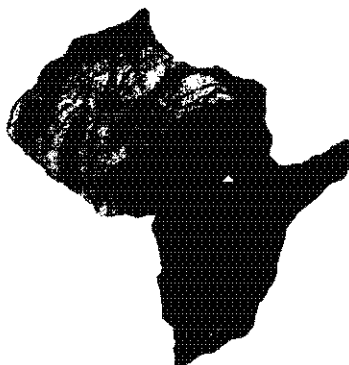


Towards a *Mudzimu*¹ Hermeneutic: A Basuto Reading of the 'Strange Woman' in the Post-Exilic Texts

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Ngoana rangoane

boele saken

'nyalle likhomo li

**'Cousin, marry me that the cattle return to the kraal'
(Ashton).**

Introduction: Kinship at the Core

In recent years, African theologians have been challenged to develop a hermeneutical model that is born upon African soil, which could be

¹ Mudzimu = 'African Kinship'.

employed across the continent, speaking to its context and inhabitants. The rising challenge for developing such a hermeneutical model to facilitate the reading of the Bible in Africa has been addressed by the efforts of prominent scholars such as Dube, Lategan, Maluleke, Mugambi, Ukpong, West and others (Getui, Maluleke & Ukpong 2001). Building upon the foundation set by these scholars, I began my personal journey in search of a common discourse shared amongst the inhabitants of Africa and the ancient society, which would have an impact upon the contextual interpretation of the Bible. I recalled the words of Mbiti:

For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. All the dimensions of time meet here and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate (Waruta 2000:103).

In analyzing the scenario put forward by Mbiti that marriage is a drama, in which all members of a given community participate as 'actors' or 'actresses' and not just 'spectators', my attention shifted to a similar situation in the narratives of Ezra where marriage was seen as a rhythm of life to the newly established post-exilic community of Judah.

[A] very large assembly of men, women and children gathered to him from Israel, ... and Shechaniah ... spoke up and said to Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the people of the land Now therefore, let us make a covenant to put away all these wives and those born of them ... (Ezra 10:1-3).

The consequences of the contractual marriages to foreign women had greater implications than merely trespassing against the covenant. The corporate society was jeopardized by exogamous marriages, which required the attention of Ezra to rectify the institution of kinship, which was in threat of disintegration. These understandings related to the institution of kinship;

is not strange to Africa. Fortes (1945) noted that in Africa and a large part of Zaïre, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania, people trace their decent unilineally, that is through father to father's father, or mother to mother's mother. As a result people are linked by mode of descent or lineages, which are the sources of certain rights, e.g. inheritance. Thus, to read the Bible in Africa is to understand the Biblical texts through the mindset of an African. Hence, it remains my objective and the thesis of this research paper, that understanding the African kinship institution and finding parallels and similarities with the Ancient Israelite kinship institution can be a valuable and essential tool in interpreting the Biblical texts among the local African communities, with new insights on African Biblical interpretation.

In developing an African Kinship Hermeneutic, my initial approach is to provide a definition of kinship for the context of this research paper. There has been a fair amount of discussion by social anthropologists such as Needham, Southwold, Rivière, Leach, Korn, Forge, Fox and others concerning the definition of kinship (Needham 1971). My own view is that much of this debate is pretty scholastic and inconsequential. Therefore, I will not recapitulate any of it or embark on another definitional exercise. However, for the purpose of this research paper, I adopt the minimal premises of Needham (1971:3) that kinship has to do with the allocation of rights and their transmission from one generation to the next. These rights are various. They include most prominently rights of group membership, i.e. clan and tribe membership, succession to office, inheritance of property, locality of residence, and type of occupation.

This research paper aims to provide a hermeneutical model based on the integration of an African and Biblical kinship structure with which the relevant ancient texts can be read in a paradigm of common understanding and shared perceptions, amongst local African inhabitants. Hence, I have identified this approach as a 'Mudzimu Hermeneutics'. Mudzimu is an African spirit in the VaHera clan of the Shona people with the parochial self-interest in the survival of one's own immediate kin. Mudzimu literally translated means 'family' or in a more extended sense, 'kinship' (Mbigi & Maree 1995: 19). In developing this hermeneutical model, I hope to facilitate a reading of the Bible, which takes into account and stimulates an appreciation for the institution of African kinship.

Current Trends in African Kinship Discourses

In attempting an analysis of modern trends, mention should perhaps first be made of the diminishing importance of the collective or group aspect of marriage. Emphasis is shifting to the individual aspect of marriage as a relationship between two persons. In regards to the prospective husband's capacity, it very often happens nowadays that a young man is an entirely free agent. His ability to provide the necessary bride-price out of his own earnings may make him, in practice, fully independent of his own kinsfolk, and even in societies where matrilineal customs have in the past made it necessary for the bridegroom to live for a period with his wife's family (like Jacob), and to render service in order to gain his bride, the tendency is for the modern suitor to ignore such requirements and to demand that a cash payment be accepted in discharge of the traditional obligation. On the woman's side such freedom is less easily achieved. Nevertheless, it seems that, in general, a marriageable girl is more likely than in former times to be able to assert her own will effectively in the choice of a husband. As for older women, there is an increasing tendency to challenge the customary principle of perpetual marginalisation and to repudiate the ideal that marriage involves the transfer to the husband's kinship group of a permanent and quasi-proprietary interest in the women's person and her reproductive powers.

In an analysis of contemporary kinship research, the following trends have taken pre-eminence in African kinship discourses.

(a) Marriage Strategy and Alliance

A full review of the theoretical literature on African marriage strategies and alliances is obviously beyond the scope of this research paper. Hence, I shall limit my discussion to the major contributions made by certain kinship scholars pertaining to my research definition of kinship. According to Radcliff-Brown, the importance of marriage lay principally in its effect of creating new elementary family units, the universal, basic building blocks of kinship structures, with the role of legitimating children to provide social continuity for lineages and other corporate groups (Radcliff-Brown 1950: 5). Many Africanist descent theorists recognized that marriage was also of political significance in that it allied two distinct individuals. However, according to Fortes (1959: 209), the political implications of marriage were

clearly thought subordinate to those of consanguineal kin ties in general and in relations of particular descent.

Goody (1958) analysed marriage and family formation using the concept of the 'development cycle of domestic groups', with the emphasis on the process of social continuity. According to the perspective of Goody, marriage was considered to fulfil relatively predictable and mechanistic functions in the reproduction of kin group membership. As a result, analytical attention was directed away from patterns and processes of competition, inequality, conflict and exploitation within domestic groups and the elementary family unit, which were regarded as the unproblematic atoms of kinship.

Lévi-Strauss (1969) offered a radically different approach to marriage from that of the descent theorists — one that emphasised the role of marriage in defining and allying groups in society. Adapting Lévi-Strauss's alliance theory to the African context was Héritier, a former student of Lévi-Strauss, who extended his methods to encompass various forms of non-prescriptive marriage systems, or semi-complex systems of marriage alliance, which were relatively common in the African continent (Héritier 1981).

Meillassoux (1960:38-67), proposed the analytical model that has come to be known as the 'lineage mode of production'. Meillassoux focused on the issue of elders' power over junior men via their control over the marriage system. According to Meillassoux, control over women is crucial in such a system because of their role as 'producers of producers', i.e. women's direct participation in agricultural production, food processing, and other economic activities being considered secondary to their reproductive functions.

(b) Marriage and Political Economy in the Formation of the Household
In many contemporary African societies, a large household remains a valuable political and economic asset. According to Cladwell (1982:12-14), given the economic value of children in many African settings, family sizes are unlikely to decrease significantly in the foreseeable future. Burnham noted that among the Bambara farmers of the Malian Sahel, a preference for larger household units in response to labour supply requirements related to large-scale millet farming with plough oxen. In Sierra Leone among the

Mende rice farmers, a large household composed of wives, children, apprentices, and fostered children remains the mark of a politically influential man (Burnham 1987: 45). The examples of Malian Sahel and Sierra Leone are only two, however, the relevant point to be grasped is that changing social conditions do not necessarily always move in a direction that favours smaller households. As Guyer (1981:99) has warned, we should not take the household boundary as the natural limit for a man's influence over his kin, affinity continues to be the crucial political economic significance in many African societies, whether they are housed under one roof or not.

In analysing the formation of the household and marriage in this more conflictual manner and taking seriously the notion that, despite the normative altruism of kin relations, individuals are likely to be pursuing personal interests in domestic contexts, we are confronted with the necessity of considering the ideological content of kinship norms in everyday life. According to Poewe's analysis, among the Zambian Luapula, different marital and family arrangements have different ideological responses for men versus women, for rich versus poor, and for Catholics versus Protestants. She goes on to describe how such ideologies are called into service in different social settings (Poewe 1981). This type of analysis, despite the slippery character of the concept of ideology, merits to be applied in other ethnographic contexts and is also evident in the post-exilic Judean community to be discussed.

(c) Polygamy and Monogamy

Polygamy remains a widespread feature of African societies and one which despite the predictions of modernization theorists, does not necessarily seem to be on the decline. Even in situations where monogamy is morally valued or even legally enjoined, functional alternatives to polygamy are frequent, such as concubines or 'outside wives'. ('Outside wives' implies wives outside the legal statute of the so-called 'ordinance marriage' in several African states.) According to a study conducted by Clignet (1970), among the Bete men (Ivory Coast), the factors of urban residence, salaried employment, and high educational levels all correlate with higher rates of polygamy—a case in which men with 'many powers' are liable to take 'many wives' as symbols of their high status. Men's pursuit of 'many powers' through polygamy in African societies can take multiple forms but,

in the present day, economic considerations are often paramount in the decision to take a second or third wife. In certain economic circumstances where women's and/or children's productive activities are highly lucrative, polygamy may result in increased capital income for the household, and the motivation to practice polygamy may be based on the simple profit or loss system. However, if taking multiple wives represents a substantial financial drain on a man's resources, polygamy may serve to symbolize a high status (Burnham 1980).

Polygamy also contributes to an increase in female status and economic independence. This is likely to be more evident in societies where farming is not a major economic activity and where women are more directly involved in the distribution of goods outside the domestic group. The pattern of full-scale integration in the global market economy which has been impacting on African communities now for the last few centuries, diverted male labour from subsistence agricultural production to cash-crop production and wage labour. In this scenario, women were primarily responsible for the subsistence and reproductive spheres. In the upper Guinea Coast and Sierra Leone, women participated in the cash economy in separate spheres with autonomous financial authority (Steady 1987: 212).

(d) Gender Symbolism

African women, according to Burnham (1980:130), often maintain different budgets from their husbands, engage in many forms of productive labour on their own behalf, and take the major responsibility of funding their children's education. To take a particular case in more detail, Robertson (1976), writing of non-elite Ga women in Accra, notes that: (1) economic cooperation between spouses is not an ideal, (2) there is mutual suspicion between spouses concerning sharing of knowledge of business dealings, and women in trade keep their husbands ignorant of their profits lest they cut on the wives' financial support, (3) women avoid obtaining business capital from their husbands, and (4) a spouse's property is considered to be legally separate in Ga courts.

Moral judgments about the 'correct' role for women within marriage are prevalent both in academic literature and in public discourses. In analysing the question of female-male relations in general and conjugal relations in particular, I should make clear that I am not envisioning the

imminent demise of marriage as an institution in African societies. Rather, it is analytically valuable to consider that all forms of conjugal relations represent a bundle of interactional possibilities with associated political, economic and other legal implications.

As Guyer (1981:100f) notes:

... the modification of sex roles has not been ... simple, precisely because it is not just cultural. How land, labour, and incomes are controlled is an aspect of social structure, involving complexes of rights and duties, sanctions and consequences

Guyer continues to argue that such issues are the subjects of struggle in African societies, a point with which I would agree, although I feel that feminist theologians have done much to hide this fact in portraying ignorance to the inevitable conflict with the institution of African kinship.

Towards a Mudzimu (African Kinship) Hermeneutic

The current trends in African kinship discourses offer great potential for the development of an African kinship hermeneutic. The marriage strategy theories of Radcliff-Brown, Goody, Levi-Strauss and Meillassoux, provide some basic information with similarities in Biblical societies. Perhaps, the most information about the customs of marriage strategies is to be found in Ecclesiasticus, the book of Sirach, who wrote about 150 BC in Jerusalem (Malina 1981: 111). Poewe's ideological content of kinship norms was also a prevalent issue in the Biblical society, as marriages were also contracted for reason of political alliances (i.e. the *harem* of Solomon) (de Vaux 1965: 31).

Entering into a new era, Africa has given birth to intellectuals who are challenged to discern new metaphors and insights to propel the continent into a new dispensation. The Bible as a tool of 'redirection' provides Africa with a mirror through which it can see its endeavours to rebuild the land out of the ruins of ideological branding as the land of the 'uncivilized' and a nation with no 'identity'. According to the late Biko (1996: 29), in order to destroy the African infrastructures of kinship, i.e. social, political and economical, that had been built and passed down through generations within

the African society, and to impose a system of imperialism, the colonialists were not satisfied with 'holding a people in their grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content; they turned to the past of the oppressed native and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it'. As a result the heritage of the African society was reduced to 'tribal battles' and 'bloody wars'. The complexity of destroying their identity resulted in the contemporary African child 'hating' his/her own heritage.

The current trends in African kinship discourses (as discussed above), although complex and debatable, open a new window in which kinship in Africa could be comprehended and lost heritages revived. These challenging discourses form the foundation for the development of a Mudzimu Hermeneutic. The following are the potential outcomes of an application of Mudzimu Hermeneutics.

(a) Revitalization of 'Primordial' Consciousness

An outstanding consequence of the African kinship system is its constitutive social formation of 'primordial consciousness' (Ekeh 1999:104). Wherever kinship has a powerful sway, its adherents are moved to demonstrate a community of feelings among the putative kindred when the basic security needs of its members are threatened. Primordial consciousness embodies a degree of empathy for putative kinsmen that one will not exercise for those who are outside the perimeters of the assumed kindred. Primordial consciousness also generates mutual compassion for those in the primordial fold, allowing individuals to sacrifice greatly for members whose welfare and security needs are in danger. However, it can also generate hostility to groups that appear to threaten the survival of its identity. The kinship's hold over the kindred is therefore, a great deal stronger than would be indicated by rational calculations of measurable economic benefits that its adherents gain from their interrelationships. According to Ekeh (1999:105):

... kinship is, ..., an underground spring of sentiments, which sometimes will remain dormant in periods of normalcy but which will erupt into mighty passions in periods of crisis that threaten the corporate existence of the kindred

The primordial consciousness that has been cultivated as an aspect of

kinship in Africa is closely associated with land and language. This dominant form of kinship has produced a specialized form of primordial consciousness that has sought to include all members who share these similar characteristics. They have a region and a specified land area that they point to as theirs, and they speak a common language. Often they will sacrifice their lives defending the domains of their ethnicity. At many times, members will sacrifice much to defend the sanctity of their kinship heritage against outsiders. The application of Mudzimu Hermeneutics results in the rejuvenation of 'primordial consciousness'.

(b) The Restoration of an African Identity

There is a great determination of the people of Africa to end the feeling of self-alienation and to restore their civilization. For over four centuries, the ancestors of Africa have been in bondage. This bondage encompassed by colonial power, racism, exploitation and oppression has led the people of Africa to lose their identity, by accepting the notion of the inferiority of their cultural identity. Generations of African descendants experienced the onus of seeing themselves through western lenses. The identity of Africa that emerged after the period of initial contact with the first western Europeans was one of a 'dark continent', whose descendants were 'subhuman', 'heathens' and 'barbarous'. The mischievous understanding of the Biblical Hamitic myth, said to be of Babylonian Talmudic origin, assigned Africans the role of servants to other people because of Canaan's misdeeds (Skinner 1999: 30).

This was the intellectual and moral climate which the descendants of Africa found themselves in, when they became conscious of their position in a western Christendom. Imperial Europe wished to remake the world in its image, or in its shadows, and estranged Africans from themselves. Many descendants of Africa succumbed to these notions about themselves and accepted their existential inferiority and loss of identity. Emerging from a colonial scenario that has reaped the loss of an identity, Mudzimu Hermeneutics as a post-colonial hermeneutic, aims at rejuvenating an African identity. This hermeneutic provides a new way of looking at the continent and provides new generations with an identity of their own:

... a culture, abandoned, sloughed off, rejected, despised, becomes

for the inferiorized an object of passionate attachment... The customs, traditions, beliefs, formerly denied and passed over in silence are violently valorized and affirmed ... tradition is no longer scoffed at by the group. The group no longer runs away from itself. The sense of the past is rediscovered ... the past becoming henceforth a constellation of values, becomes identified ... (Skinner 1999: 38).

(c) A Restoration of Communal Relationships

In explaining the relationships of the individual to the community, Mbiti, in his seminal study, *African Religions and Philosophy*, affirms the interconnectedness of African societies. In his chapter entitled, *Ethnic Groups, Kinship and the Individual*, Mbiti (1990:106) explains:

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole ... when he (the individual) suffers, he does not suffer alone, but with the corporate group, when he rejoices, he does not rejoice alone, but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and relations whether dead or living.

In promoting a paradigm of communal relationships as explained by Mbiti, the kinship is first and foremost concerned with the unity of all members. A principle of Mudzimu Hermeneutics is that it seeks to use the comprehension of communal relationships within the traditional African society as a 'key' to 'unlock' the understanding of communal relationships within the ancient Biblical society.

A Case Study of the 'Strange Woman' in the Post-Exilic Texts

The question that now arises is how we can read the Biblical texts in the light of these hermeneutical principles. In order to make an application of Mudzimu Hermeneutics, I have chosen a case study of the 'Strange Woman' in the post-exilic texts, which will be analyzed through a Basuto reading.

1. Current Exegetical Research on the 'Strange Woman'

Boström suggested that the 'Strange Woman' was not an ordinary prostitute, but a foreign devotee to the goddess Ishtar, who engaged in cultic prostitution as a fertility rite (Childs 1979: 223f). Van der Toorn (1989:205) offered an alternate scenario that the 'Strange Woman' was far from being a professional prostitute. She was instead engaged in an extraordinary act of prostitution for the sake of paying a vow. Whatever their merits, Van der Toorn's reading together with Boström's theory, are too superficial and cannot be applied to the larger complex of the 'Strange Woman' passages as will become evident.

(a) Who is the 'Strange Woman'?

Taking into consideration that Proverbs can be dated in the post-exilic period (Washington 1994), scholars have concluded that the 'woman' in Proverbs 1-9, portrayed as a 'prostitute', can be a reference to the 'foreign women' of the land (Eskenazi & Richards 1994: 229). Washington argued that the warning in Proverbs 1-9 against unfamiliar women was already a theme for the post-exilic sages (Eskenazi & Richards 1994: 223). With these broader interpretative issues in view, I propose to describe the particular social and economic factors that originally motivated the polemic against the foreign women in the post-exilic community. In agreement with the hypothesis of Washington, during the post-exilic period, the 'Strange Woman' was a representation of the women who did not belong to the returning post-exilic community. Relationships between the Judean men and the foreign women posed economic problems. Due to land tenure and cultic membership being linked to genealogical lineage, the prospect of exogamous marriages brought about the danger of outside encroachment upon the land holdings of the Judean congregation (Eskenazi & Richards 1994: 220-222). As a result the Judean men were forbidden to marry foreign women not only for moral and religious reasons, but also because they were a threat to the social and economic stability of the Judean community.

However, this conventional hypothesis needs relevant substantiation. In order to prove this hypothesis, an analysis of the semantic linguistics in the Biblical texts for the application of the 'Strange Woman' needs to be investigated. Under the grouping of *zārāh*, the Wisdom Literature (i.e. Proverbs 1-9), gathers an assortment of warnings against 'unfamiliar

women'. Due to the composite nature of her portrayal, the prescribed figure has no consistent identity. The woman according to Yee, is depicted as 'alien, harlot, evil, adulterous and foolish' (Yee 1989: 53-68). However, the essential attribute unifying the accounts of the forbidden woman, is her designation as *nākeriyāh* / *zārāh*. To ascertain the motivation of the sage for denouncing her, the semantic value of these terms are as follows.

According to Biblical Hebrew, the adjective *zār* denotes 'otherness' referring to what is outside the field of recognition or legitimacy (Snijders 1954: 67). As a sociological designation *zārāh* refers explicitly to those outside the pertinent kinship group, whether family, tribe or nation. Thus, the law of the Levirate marriage stipulates that 'the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside (i.e. the kinship) to a stranger' (Deuteronomy 25:5). In the prophetic literature the term *zār* denotes non-Israelites, often used to denote the enemies of Israel (e.g. Ezekiel 31:12). A similar range of meanings to those of *zār* is found in the adjective *nākeriy*. In Psalms 69:9, *nākeriy* is used to denote 'strangeness' to the household. However, as a social designation, *nākeriy* denotes 'foreignness' by reason of nationality or ethnicity (Eskenazi & Richards 1994: 230). In the exilic and post-exilic contexts the words *zār*/ *nāker* are prominent, especially in the prophetic literature where it designates the foreign opponents of Judah (Jeremiah 5:19). In Proverbs 1-9, the usage of *zārāh* with *nākeriyāh* suggests that the terminology is a reference to a foreign adversary of the Judean community. In comparison with Proverbs 1-9, are Ezra 10:2, 10-11, 14, 17-18, 44 and Nehemiah 13:26-27, where *našiym nākeriyāh* refers to women outside of the community, whom men within the Israelite community had married. Camp suggested that while deviant sexuality was preeminent in the earlier tradition of warnings against the 'Strange Woman', the secondary interpretation of the 'Strange Woman' as ethnically foreign came to the fore in support of the post-exilic marriage reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah (Camp 1985: 269-270).

(b) The Social-Historical Context of the Post-Exilic Polemic against the Foreign Women (Land Tenure Issue)

According to the thesis of Weinberg, the post-exilic Judean community was organized as a *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* (Civic-Temple-Community), a religio-political unit fictively constituted as an agnatic lineage of property-holding men and their families (Weinberg 1972: 54). According to Ezra 1:5,

2:59, and Nehemiah 7:70-71, 11:13, membership in the temple community was determined by descent, within a paternal estate, i.e. property was distributed according to the divisions of this lineage. This implied that in the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde*, participation in the temple cult, land tenure and citizenship were linked under the leadership of the heads of the paternal estates (Weinberg 1972: 231).

The deportees to Babylon comprised only a small proportion of the Judean population. According to 2 Kings 25:12, and Jeremiah 39:10, 40:4-12, after the deportation, the remaining Judean majority appears to have made claims to the land holdings left behind by the exiles. As members of the returning community began to return and re-establish themselves, conflict over the land was inevitable. Thus, the land tenure was a critical issue for the early post-exilic Judean community. In response to the local opposition, the returning exiles conceived themselves (typologically) as the generation of a new conquest (Ezra 9:1-2, 10-15). The true Israel, now identified with the returning community (Ezra 1:11, 2:1, 9:4, Nehemiah 7:6), had entered the land from the outside, and those presently occupying the land were excluded from the covenant community (Williamson 1989: 155). The returning community effectively classified the local Judean community (the people of the land), together with their neighbouring non-Judean people (Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Samaritans, etc.), as alien (foreigners) to Israel. Ezekiel 11:15-17 portrays both the non-deported Judeans and the exiles acknowledging that legal right to the land accrues to those with access to the cult (Leviticus 25:23) (Smith 1987: 81f). With an endorsement from the Persian Empire, those who took membership in the re-established *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* secured their legal right to land (Davies & Finkelstein 1984: 330f). Membership into the cult and rights of land were established genealogically. Genealogical reckoning thus, provided an 'ideology of descent', which allowed the leaders of the post-exilic community to identify the true Israel, grant membership into the temple, and who would possess land.

Exogamous marriages brought more difficulties in community membership and over land allotments among divisions of the lineage. Marriage alliances had implications on property holdings. This implied that the economic stability of the *Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde* was vulnerable to disruption by marriages outside the community. Hoglund (1991:67)

recognized marriages as a means of transferring property and social status from one group to another and related the marriage reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah to concern over property rights. This can be rendered as a support to Merton's *'exchange theory'*, where we need to consider the *upward* advantages the foreign women gained by marrying outside the social boundaries of an ethnic group (Merton 1941: 362).

Thus, we can understand the emphasis in Proverbs 1-9, Ezra and Nehemiah on avoiding women outside the community, as it posed a threat to the real property holdings of the Judean collective. As within the patrilineal land tenure system women were capable of inheriting and disposing property (Numbers 27:1-11). The provision for women inheriting land aimed at securing the inheritance within the bounds of its rightful patrilineal tribe. Thus, female heirs were required to marry within the lineage of their late father. These laws, presumable post-exilic in their present form, make clear that it was possible for women to inherit land. This introduced conflicts over the land tenure issue within the Israelite tribe(s).

According to Hoglund, in order for the Persians to facilitate ease of identification for administration and taxation, they enforced a guarded ethnic identity among the returning community, to whom they entrusted regions of the imperial domain (Merton 1941: 65f). According to this thesis, the returning community risked losing their land entirely if they did not maintain themselves as a distinct community.

(c) The 'Strange Woman' as a Threat to the Judean Temple Economy

The analogy of the 'Strange Woman' in the Wisdom literature associated with Ezra and Nehemiah, is not only a warning against the foreign women, but with close literary analysis it denotes the consequences of failing to heed the prohibition. Camp associated the house of the 'Strange Woman' with reference to its sinking (Proverbs 2:18) with the possession of land (Camp 1985: 251). building upon the analogy (Proverbs 2:21), that the *upright*, being those who avoid the 'Strange Woman' will inherit the land, whereas those who seek the 'Strange Woman' shall *be cut off from the land*. The reference to inhabiting the land with the warning against foreign women in Proverbs reflects the anxiety over land tenure, which was one of the motivating factors in the campaign against exogamous marriages in Ezra and Nehemiah.

According to Washington, this text related to the fear that Judean property will fall under the control of foreign families, via relationships and eventual marriages to women outside the community (Washington 1994: 240). In an analysis of Ezra's established commission to deal with the problem of the exogamous marriages (Ezra 10:16), the commission identified and prosecuted those who had married outside the community. The penalties for failure to submit to these proceedings included expulsion from the temple assembly and the confiscation of property. Thus, in sum Hoglund (1992) stated that the systems of allocating territories to dependent populations will work as long as the imperial system is capable of maintaining some clarity as to who is allowed access to a particular region and who is not. Intermarriage among various groups would tend to smudge the demarcation between the groups (Hoglund 1992).

(2) A Basuto Reading of the 'Strange Woman' Discourse

(a) The Basuto: A Historical Introduction

The first Bantu to enter Basutoland were three Nguni groups, who crossed the Drakensburg from the east in three waves and settled south of the Caledon River. They were the Phlela, the Polane and the Phuthi. Some years later they were joined by the 'First Basuto', who were the Peli, Phuthing, Sia and Tlokoa. They were followed by other clans or tribes, of whom the most important were the Fokeng, Koena and Taung. The Tlokoa were at one time the most powerful military group, particularly in the days of the famous 'Queen' Mantatise and her son Sekonyela. The other tribes are also important, and practically all the principal chiefs today belong to the Koena, and many are related on the maternal side to the Fokeng (Ashton 1955: 3).

All these groups were scattered and more or less independent of one another. For the most part they lived at peace with one another, disturbed only by intermittent cattle raids. However, as history shows, this relatively peaceful existence was irretrievably shattered early in the nineteenth century. Shaka, a young Zulu, fired by the value of proper military discipline, began to spread war and destruction far and wide. Neighbouring tribes fled before him and burst across the Drakensburg with his regiments in pursuit. The Tlokoa bore the brunt of the first invasions, but eventually they broke under the strain and plunged southward. Eventually, a young Koena

chief, Moshesh, gathered around him the remnants of former tribes at Butha Buthe, where he fortified the Butha Buthe Mountain and held it against the Tlokoa for some time, until he withdrew and went to Thaba Bosiu. With the impregnable mountain fortress of Thaba Bosiu as his base, he restructured the remnants of the tribes into a fighting unit and slowly beat back the invaders. In 1831, the last of them were repulsed (Ashton 1955: 3). Within a few years Moshesh became the acknowledged leader of the Basuto and set about restoring the peace and prosperity of his people.

(b) The Basuto: A Social Background

All Basuto are divided into clans. These are primarily social groupings or affiliations distinguishable by name, genealogical lineage and also sometimes by totem and other cultural features. The most common clans to be found at present in Basutoland are the Fokeng, Hlakoana, Khoakhoa, Phuthing, Tlokoa, Sia, Taung, Tlounge, Khlokoe, Phletla, Polane and Phuthi (Ashton 1955: 17). Membership of the clan is determined by birth and is theoretically acquired only through the father, but there are exceptions. For instance, illegitimate children belong to their mother's clan, unless they are acknowledged by their father. According to Schapera (1938), clan endogamy was prescribed. However, women often married out of the clan (exogamy) to identify themselves with the dominant clan. According to Poewe and Merton's analysis (discussed earlier), this reflected a marriage strategy with an ideological content, which would be to gain access to the privileges of a dominant clan.

Within the clan, we have the family, which is less clearly defined, but more important. It does not consist of a particular or limited group, but shades away from the nucleus of parents and children to indefinite individual kinsmen. It is a complicated and widening tangle of relationships, involving specific attitudes and obligations towards people with whom one is connected by blood and marriage. The basic family group is the biological family of parents and children. This widens out to include parents' parents and children's children, together with the brothers and sisters of all these individuals and their wives and children. One's close kinsmen are known as '*ba heso*' (the people of our place) (Ashton 1955: 6). They form what is primarily a patrilineal group, composed of one's parents, paternal grandparents, paternal uncles and their wives and children. One is usually

brought up amongst these people, lives and works with them, assists them in ceremonies, domestic and agricultural activities, is helped by them to marry and bring up one's own children. For a woman this connection with her own people is weakened by marriage, for she has then to go to her husband's village and identify herself with his people.

(c) An Analysis of the 'Strange Woman' in the Basuto Society

The search for the 'Strange Woman' within the Basuto society, is not a very difficult task. With the consistent battles for land amongst the various clans, women tended to marry into a clan in which they could reap 'wealth and power'. There are three key questions concerning the 'Strange Woman': (1) how did the 'Strange Woman' gain entry into the new clan, (2) how did the 'Strange Woman' gain access to land, and (3) how did the 'Strange Woman' pose an economic threat to the community?

Single blessedness is looked on as something abnormal and even a little sinister and marriage is regarded as a right and proper for all adults. Women usually get married after initiation or on leaving school, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. As the Basuto are patrilineal, (similar to the returning post-exilic Judean community), marriage between brother and sister is forbidden (Ashton 1955: 144). The closest and most senior relative that one can marry is one's father's brother's daughter. This type of union is encouraged by the desire to retain the marriage cattle within the family. Second preference goes to marriage between cross cousins. Custom dictates that one's relationship with one's maternal uncle and his family should be particularly friendly (Ashton 1955: 147). Marriage with his daughter is in keeping with this injunction (i.e. strengthening kinship ties). However, the question of preferential marriages is strongest among the families such as those of the chiefs and other leading families. They take a greater pride in their ancestry and family lineage. Due to their economical status, they are better able to indulge this traditionalism as they can afford second and third wives. However, poorer people can afford to marry only one wife, and prefer to take the girl they like rather than the one they ought to like.

As a result, exogamous marriages with other clans are intensified, although not recommended. Nowadays, there are several departures from the 'correct' procedure of marriage. A less acceptable variation, which occurs in more than a quarter of the marriages made today, is '*chobeliso*' (elopement)

(Ashton 1955: 126). In these cases the boy (e.g. Fokeng) seizes the girl of another clan (e.g. Sia), usually when she is in the fields or visiting friends, and takes her home. Even though the elopement may have been instigated or facilitated by her people (i.e. Sia) and agreed to by the girl herself, she usually makes a show of resisting, as an affectation of modesty. Her lover does not harm or have intercourse with her, but leaves her with his mother (i.e. Fokeng) who breaks the news to his father. It is then customary, that since the girl is in the house of his father (i.e. Fokeng), that the father accepts the proposal and in earnest and good faith arrange to give some six head of cattle as a first instalment of the full '*bohali*' (bride-price) to the girl's father (i.e. Sia) (Mair 1969). The motives for such elopement are numerous and complex. However, the most common is when parents do not agree with the marriage to an offspring of another clan (e.g. Fokeng to Sia). This then creates the entry for the *našiyim nakeriyāh* — 'Strange Woman', the woman outside of the pertinent kinship group. The 'Strange Woman' in the Basuto society is a parallel to that of the 'Strange Woman' in the post-exilic Judean community. She is an 'outsider', a representation of a woman with foreign traditions, totems, genealogical lineage, cultural differences and from a different land. The semantic linguistics employed in the Biblical texts to denote the 'Strange Woman' are applicable in the context of the Basuto society, depicting 'otherness' referring to an illegitimate member of that particular kinship.

The exploitation, distribution and protection of the land are controlled by the chiefs who are a parallel to leaders of the heads of the paternal estate in the post-exilic Judean community. According to Ashton (1955: 144), every chief must by law, provide all members within his clan with land to cultivate. These rights normally accrue on marriage. Similar to the strategy endorsed by the Persian Empire in the post-exilic period, payment of tax was claimed on the basis of land ownership, and land was granted to all those with accrued membership to the cult. When a man wants to build a house for himself, after getting married or moving with his family to a new village, he approaches the chief, through his father if resident there, and asks for a household or building site. The chief then inquires where he would like to build and grants his request if practicable; if not he gives him another plot of land. The site is roughly indicated to the applicant and his neighbours, and should be large enough for two or three huts (approximately

one-eighth of an acre; an additional plot may be granted for a small garden) (Ashton 1955: 142).

Application for farming land is made in the same way and usually at the same time. The original method of allotting farming land has never been described and is now forgotten in most parts of Basutoland, but it was probably similar, to that practiced by the Tlokoa within living memory. The applicant would show the local chief an area that he would like. He was then either given what he requested or told to run around the desired area. He was then granted as much as he could circle without stumbling (Ashton 1955: 145). When agreement was reached, the boundaries of the area were publicly described to the applicant in the presence of the villagers and beacons off. These areas were much larger than required or could be managed by one household and were regarded as family lands, vested in the family head for that of his own use and as an inheritance to his family. The holder may dispose of the land in certain limited ways with his chief's consent.

According to the traditional Basuto custom, when land is given to a family for cultivation, it can be transferred by process of inheritance to the wife or children but not sold (Ashton 1955: 179). The propagation of exogamous marriages and polygamous marriages brought severe consequences to the larger community. In the case of polygamous marriages, each wife, except the one who may be attached to the senior household, had their own properties and own fields (Ashton 1955: 188). Each wife was entitled to the exclusive use of the properties, its proceeds and the sales thereof. However, the 'Strange Woman' was soon to pose an economic threat to the larger clan community. As the family grew, its new members would be given their own farming plot, which resulted in a general shortage of land. As the demand for land increased, and due to no vacant land being available, applicants would have to wait for years for fields to fall vacant through forfeiture, death or emigration of the holder.

Exogamous marriages brought difficulties over the allotment of land as marriage alliances had severe implications on property holdings. This implied that the economic stability of a particular clan was vulnerable to disruption by marriages outside the clan. Once again, similar to the case of the Judean society, much of the land of a particular clan came to be in the hands of the 'Strange Woman'. In practicality the clan risked losing their land entirely, because they did not maintain themselves as a distinct clan.

The Basuto society strived on the principle that 'grain was the artery of life' or more prosaically that the 'wealth of a Basuto community is the land' (Ashton 1955: 131). Thus, in understanding the principle of Needham's definition that kinship has to do with the allocation of rights and the transmission from one generation to the next, we can understand the emphasis of the Sages, Ezra and Nehemiah on avoiding the 'Strange Woman' as it posed a threat to the property holdings of the Judaeans and in this contextualisation, the Basuto collective.

In sum, my hypothesis is that the characteristic of most of the societies that we call primitive is that the conduct of individuals to one another is largely regulated on the basis of kinship, this being brought about by the formation of fixed patterns of behaviour for each recognized kind of kinship relation. These kinship relations were more than just cultural ties. On close analysis they depict social, economical and ideological relationships.

Conclusion

The aim and objective of this research paper was to develop a hermeneutical model, which is born upon African soil and which speaks to its inhabitants, the people of the 'soil'. In response to this, I have developed a Mudzimu (African kinship) hermeneutical model, which is based on revitalizing primordial consciousness, restoring an African identity, and restoring communal relationships. The principle of this post-colonial hermeneutic is to rekindle a desire to know more about the traditional African way of life, which could be used to develop a common understanding of shared perceptions. In beginning my personal journey in search of a common discourse shared amongst the inhabitants of Africa I have discovered that Africa is a land of opportunities, a people with diversities, and a rich cultural heritage that has long been forgotten but which lies in the hearts of many ordinary people scattered throughout the continent. I still have much more to discover in this vast continent, so I offer this paper as a work in progress, and hope that it stimulates a greater interest in this field of African Kinship and the Bible.

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A glimpse of an African Woman and her daughter in the Laura Plantation
(www.lauraplantation.com).

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