

## ***Read as/with the Perpetrator: Manasseh's vulnerability in 2 Kings 21:1-18 and 2 Chronicles 33:1-20.***

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### **I. Introduction**

It is common knowledge that in the Kings narrative Manasseh receives no redemption, whereas the Chronicler provides redemption in the form of his building projects and religious reforms. The question is on what basis the latter happens. I will argue that Manasseh is redeemed the moment he rendered himself vulnerable. Vulnerability only seems to appear in the face of calamity: publicly humiliated by being caught by hooks, chained in bronze fetters, and deported to Babylon, Manasseh faced a miserable life as prisoner of the Assyrians.

The Judeo-Christian tradition sees the human being as the bearer of dignity and rights. Human dignity is based on being created in the image of the deity, meaning that vulnerability is a direct consequence of being created. A further consequence is that human vulnerability is posed against divine invulnerability. It is as if “every entity in the world is vulnerable except for God.”<sup>1</sup> Joseph Tham argues and asks: “Clearly there is a tendency in the Bible to see imperfection or disease as the result of sin. Nevertheless, is absolute perfection the ideal to strive for? Isn't imperfection a fact of life?”<sup>2</sup> To Tham, imperfection is part of the vulnerable condition of the human being. It is “built into” human nature and it would be hubris to ignore it.

As a white male South African biblical scholar, the current socio-political context requires me to openly acknowledge my racist and patriarchal upbringing and subsequent privileges in perpetrator culture. The critique of white patriarchy is very public, its effects no longer masked because of the decolonial project. Thus, in any reading of the biblical text, I am publicly obliged to render myself vulnerable in order to face those aspects of oppression that would previously have been masked. Manasseh's hooks and fetters have become my silence and introspection in a process of embarrassment and internalizing the critique.

What good comes from a reading as/with a perpetrator? Usually, once indicated, a perpetrator is removed from the scene, sometimes very publicly. I have found that reading the biblical text as/with a perpetrator renders one extremely vulnerable. To make it beneficial it needs to be turned into an instance from which change can occur—a redemptive moment.

Hendrik Bosman asks the following concluding question in an essay on Old Testament Scholarship in South Africa since 1994:

How can “organic intellectuals” maintain a self-critical awareness of the inevitable and pervasive influence of power, and be able to produce “theological honey” that can challenge and nurture a society in need of making sense of its precarious existence? OT scholars in South Africa must face up to the challenge and the responsibility of producing “theological honey” – time will tell whether we were able to do so.<sup>3</sup>

What theological honey is there in discussing perpetrators within the context of South African whiteness? This celebratory essay to honour his scholarship and role as lecturer in Old Testament wants to explore Bosman's question in looking at Manasseh as perpetrator. Although not explored here the context of this question is current South African public discourse portraying whiteness as perpetrator of racism.<sup>4</sup> The critique of whiteness is very

public, its effects no longer masked because of the decolonial project.<sup>5</sup> The latter project requires from whiteness an acknowledgement of its role in perpetrating various kinds of oppression. Such recognition renders one vulnerable in its effects but in its provision of possibilities, it suggests a change in epistemology, something Bosman refers to in the above-mentioned article.<sup>6</sup>

This paper will explore Manasseh's vulnerability in both narratives in terms of the current reader's own vulnerability. The paper will start by looking at the basis for vulnerability in terms of Levinas' "ethical moment"; the prevailing negative understanding of vulnerability in current discourse and vulnerability as part of the human condition. It will then look at the presentation of Manasseh in the Kings narrative and its mirroring in Chronicles.

## II. The basis for vulnerability

My understanding of vulnerability has been shaped by (a) a particular reading of Cain in Genesis 4 with the help of what Levinas called "the ethical moment,"<sup>7</sup> (b) by the notion of vulnerability as a negative state, and (c) by Erinn Gilson's book *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice*, which sees vulnerability as a human condition.

### (a) Levinas' ethical moment

On the basis of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment Levinas formulated his idea of the ethical moment as a face to face meeting between two human beings in which each one, reciprocally and metaphorically, become for the other someone without anything, someone without any relations or kinship, someone without family, parents, siblings, children, friends or colleagues. Each one confronts the other in his or her destituteness and proverbial nakedness. Both faces the other, crying to not be killed by the other. The face demands from the other a radical obligation to not destroy or violate the other.

The face, and more specifically, the eyes are central to the ethical moment. With reference to Cain in Genesis 4, Levinas argues as follows:

The face ... is inviolable; those eyes, which are absolutely without protection, the most naked part of the human body, none the less offer an absolute resistance to possession, an absolute resistance in which the temptation to murder is inscribed: the temptation of absolute negation ... For in reality, murder is possible, but it is possible only when one has not looked the Other in the face. The impossibility of killing is not real, but moral.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas it is Abel's voice in his blood from the soil that activates the ethical function in the story, Levinas utilizes the vocal as well as the visual to call the self to account for the other. Abel's eye did not prevent his murder, but his voice persecutes Cain from beyond the grave as if it is the deity's eye following Cain. Ultimately, it is the destitution in the face of the other that cries out for justice and designates responsibility. But Cain cannot see it, as his own face, or countenance, is fallen: "The fall of the face, in some sense, is the negation of the face, an event of psychological death which indeed leads to Cain's inability to face the other and recognize him, and issues, as though inevitably, in the latter's [Abel] murder."<sup>9</sup> Cain and Abel's story is one of failure in an ethical sense, argues Ben-Naftali.<sup>10</sup>

From this dialectic of the two faces confronting each other, it follows that one cannot do without the other. To be human is to be recognized as such by another. It is reciprocal. James Perkinson explains it as follows:

To achieve a genuinely human dignity of spirit, each consciousness must risk itself to the point of becoming a threat to the other. It must face into the other's fierce gaze, give birth to desire and plunge into what lies beyond life, risk death and meet the other's (reciprocal) resistance with utmost struggle. ... To become a reality in-itself-for-itself, human 'being' must pass through the phase of serving negative notice to its other: 'Here I stake life itself; I refuse to remain immediately, "naturally," within myself.'<sup>11</sup>

With the colonial and apartheid legacy, however, the gaze was not reciprocal. The black gaze did not meet its opposition, only indifference.<sup>12</sup> It was confronted with negation. Subsequently, a different black gaze developed through the anti-apartheid struggle, a particular black consciousness that would become a face of terror for whites. Whiteness was outed, in Perkinson's words, "[w]hite people were finally, briefly, made to look in the mirror of race and confront a gaze that looked back, but did not look alike."<sup>13</sup> It is a gaze that is no longer captive to the white gaze, to the contrary, it forces the gaze of the (white) other to become consciously aware of its own body as human; the black gaze becomes its pedagogue.<sup>14</sup> The vulnerability of the black other needs to be recognized by the white gaze in order for whiteness to realize its own vulnerability. The imperative to come to consciousness of oneself as white is grounded on "daring to look into black eyes and not deny the reflection," even when it proves to be embarrassing by having been found out by one's most frightening other!<sup>15</sup>

(b) *Vulnerability as a negative state*

Vulnerability reveals itself in the ethical moment created by the meeting of two faces, of two pairs of eyes looking at each other, reciprocally exclaiming, "Do not kill me!" Within a paradigm of subordination at least one pair of eyes negates the other, exploiting the latter's vulnerability. It is in this context that the need for recognising the vulnerability of the other arises. Hence the need for Article 8 in the 2005 UNESCO Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights.<sup>16</sup> However, it is a vulnerability in negative terms according to which certain individuals and groups of people are in need of special protection; people who are exposed to the possibility of being misused or abused, physically or emotionally attacked or harmed. Such persons are in need of special care or protection because of their age, disability or specific risk to be harmed or abused. This is a biological vulnerability for which bioethics constructed their framework to safeguard people with physical vulnerabilities. It is a negative definition shaped for science which perhaps cannot deal with justice as social vulnerability or cultural vulnerability can.<sup>17</sup>

The definition of vulnerability in this sense associates vulnerability with affliction, suffering, harm, or injury. The South African *OED* defines vulnerability as being exposed to being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally. Understandably, no one wants to be in a position of such vulnerability, as it is associated with weakness and powerlessness, a situation in which exploitation is rife. Such vulnerability is to be avoided as it signals weakness and lack of mastery and control. Vulnerability does not equal wellbeing. It is something to overcome:

as susceptibility to harm [it] is aligned with other dualist patterns of association concerning power, gender, and autonomy, all of which render vulnerability

something to be overcome rather than something to be experienced, avowed, or understood.<sup>18</sup>

The purveyors of vulnerability in bioethics acknowledges the limits of the definition.<sup>19</sup> The UNESCO definition sees a vulnerable person as a failed autonomous subject in terms of a particular Western paradigm. What is not clear is the social, political, economic, and religious dimensions that also causes vulnerability. In other words, vulnerability is not merely a deficit of autonomy; what needs to be put on the table is the production of vulnerability itself.<sup>20</sup> Vulnerability as a deficit of autonomy assigns to the vulnerable inferiority, weakness and dependency with capability, strength, autonomy, well-being as the antidote. In this sense, vulnerability is not normal; it is a determined negative state that needs to be fixed by someone strong, an admirable invulnerable saviour. Without any possibility of agency to move out of vulnerability, the vulnerable opens up towards patronising attitudes of paternalism with subsequent affirmation of inequity and hierarchy.<sup>21</sup> As a fixed negative state, vulnerability is stigmatising and oppressive. It symbolises powerlessness. Thus, it does not surprise that acknowledgement of vulnerability does not happen. After all, no one will acknowledge powerlessness, as it would be tantamount to a recognition of weakness and lack of control, that is, autonomy.

Understanding vulnerability as a negative position necessarily sets one on the road to striving towards invulnerability. The harm or injury associated with vulnerability is transferred to the other in order for the self to stay invulnerable. Erinn Gilson refers to an epistemology of ignorance that wilfully cultivates invulnerability as ignorance of vulnerability. This ignorance props up a subjectivity of a self-sufficient master subject that maintains itself as independent and invulnerable.<sup>22</sup> To be confronted with vulnerability is deeply uncomfortable and uneasy; to ignore it maintains a strong and competent masterful subjectivity. Gilson argues that invulnerability is constitutive of the master model of subjectivity with which Western science is practiced—it is constitutive of the cultural identity of those who occupy positions of privilege and who participate in domination by values such as detachment, self-containment, self-mastery, and control.<sup>23</sup>

The link between vulnerability and autonomy put on the table in the medical science in the nineties of the previous century was indicative for the development of the 2005 UNESCO Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights. Ten Have, who was deeply involved in the construction of this declaration, later acknowledged that vulnerability is less the result of lack of respect for personal autonomy and than the result of lack of justice, equality and solidarity.<sup>24</sup> Vulnerability is part of the human condition that Ten Have depicts as “inherently fragile”: because bodily existence is vulnerable, human beings have constructed various ways to protect themselves, resulting into an openness to the world.<sup>25</sup> Openness in terms of engaging others is not regarded as a drawback but as an advantage: “We cannot come into being, flourish and survive if our existence is not connected to the existence of others.”<sup>26</sup>

*(c) Vulnerability as a shared human condition*

The basic premise of a hermeneutic of vulnerability is the latter being a common feature of being human. It is not marginal but fundamental, unavoidable, and inherent to our being human—physically, corporeally, and socially.<sup>27</sup> The negative and popular view of vulnerability associates vulnerability with harm, injury and weakness. However, vulnerability is not the harming itself, but only the susceptibility to harm or the ability to be wounded.<sup>28</sup> Vulnerability makes harming possible. In other words, vulnerability is a potential condition that enables certain capacities.

If vulnerability is a common human condition, it is shared between human beings and not something to be categorized or isolated and set apart from those who are not deemed vulnerable.<sup>29</sup> As a condition, (ontological) vulnerability is attributed to human beings, but not everybody may experience themselves as vulnerable. In contrast, vulnerability as experience is situational. It is a vulnerability experienced on the basis of race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, nationality, etcetera.<sup>30</sup> However, as soon as it is designated as a property that pertains to certain groups of people rather than an experience or condition, vulnerability becomes viewed in a negative light.

Vulnerability as a shared common condition, for example, means that our bodies are exposed to the gaze and touch of others whilst the bodies of others are similarly exposed to our scrutiny and physical contact. The shared and common nature creates a (political) community in which one has no choice but to participate. One is simply part of the community because one always stands in relation to others.<sup>31</sup> Vulnerability is constructed in virtue of the relationship one has to other individuals or groups: we are who we are in relation to others.

This kind of vulnerability brings violence into the picture.<sup>32</sup> Our being exposed to others as well as our experiencing the exposure of the other to us are premised upon violence: the latter makes one aware of vulnerability. Violence shows how one is vulnerable in relation to the other in terms of being formed in violence and / or in terms of violence with which one conducts oneself—one is born into racism and then conducts oneself in a racist way. However, awareness of vulnerability as a shared condition—of being formed in violence—is inadequate. Awareness, or consciousness of such a vulnerability, needs to be linked to a comprehension of one's own capacity to act violently in relation to the political community with whom one is bound as a result of a shared vulnerability.<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless, the argument above links violence to vulnerability and leaves the impression of a reductively negative understanding of vulnerability as weakness, harm and injury. This kind of violence is a destructive violence dividing a community into victims and perpetrators.<sup>34</sup> In this instance vulnerability can only pertain to one party in a relationship—vulnerable sufferers over-against invulnerable perpetrators.<sup>35</sup> The latter can indeed be vulnerable, but when the norms that enables the recognition of vulnerability are regulated by dehumanising frameworks, the vulnerability of a perpetrator will be unperceivable and unrecognizable.<sup>36</sup> A prisoner, for example, is not regarded as vulnerable, but dangerous, and thus does not deserve response when harmed in the prison system. The perpetrator is not seen as in need of protection. However, to see vulnerability in this way, ascribes to a dualist conception of vulnerability in terms of who merits and who does not merit vulnerability. It presumes a hierarchical and inequitable distribution of vulnerability that “generate patronizing, oppressive, paternalistic and controlling, and stigmatizing and exclusionary dispositions and treatments of others.”<sup>37</sup>

Over-against this reductively negative view of vulnerability, the concept of epistemic vulnerability is suggested.<sup>38</sup> Epistemic vulnerability can be summarized by the terms openness and affectivity. It is an openness to not knowing, to be wrong yet not refraining from interaction in which one's ideas, beliefs and feelings are put to the test. Epistemic vulnerability enables one to learn in a context where one is unknowing and foreign, a context where one is not in power. Openness to new ideas entails the dispelling of willful ignorance and altering unconscious beliefs and habits that are ingrained into our bodies. It entails an openness to the ambivalence of our bodily and emotional responses, to enable knowledge to sink in into our bodies. Openness to alter beliefs and habits also entails an openness to

altering one self as well as the concept one has of the self. In other words, the change must go down to affect what one does, how one thinks about and defines oneself. Gilson defines it as follows:

If epistemic vulnerability is defined by openness to changes in the self in light of coming to perceive what one does not know and has prevented oneself from knowing, then it entails a different perspective on change, permanence, history and the formation of the self. In allowing the self to change, one likewise allows change in what one knows, how one knows, and in relation to whom and what one knows. Thus, epistemic vulnerability entails rejecting the closure of the self that defines invulnerability. Instead, one begins to comprehend oneself as a being who has come into being and is continually evolving, one positions oneself as one who has been and will continue to be affected by others; one perceives oneself as vulnerable and conceives this vulnerability as the condition of one's knowledge since it is only by being affected by others that one knows and is.<sup>39</sup>

*(d) Vulnerability and oppression*

The discussion started with Levinas' ethical moment in which the face of the other plays a crucial role. It is in the naked face of the Other, in his or her vulnerability, that an ethical responsibility is called up: "The Other, a stranger who shares my humanity, exacts from me a certain responsibility to respect his dignity once I am aware of our interconnectedness."<sup>40</sup> It is also apparent that this vulnerability as a core human condition and its concomitant ethical responsibility that is generated, are fairly commonly constructed in different religions under the names of "agape or charity, neighborly love, solidarity, *visheshdharma*, *ren*, *karunā* or compassion, and mercy or *hesed*."<sup>41</sup>

Vulnerability can be interpreted in two ways: a reductively negative understanding that sees it as weakness, harm and injury, in line with the common perception of vulnerability as expressed in dictionaries; and as a common condition of humanity that makes wounding possible. In this sense, vulnerability is a potential that requires an openness to affect and be affected, the ability to be harmed and experience loss, and the ability to transform oneself and change deep-seated habits.

It is with this understanding of vulnerability that I renew my proposal for a hermeneutic of vulnerability to heed to the ethical obligation the naked face of the Other imposes on me.<sup>42</sup> Such an obligation is especially pressing in the current South African postapartheid context in which whiteness is forced to face the consequences of apartheid in particular and the entire population the aftershocks of colonialism. A hermeneutics of vulnerability enables one to unmask the privileged positions apartheid and colonialism have allocated to a certain group at the expense of other groups.

Recognizing vulnerability is a helpful step in dismantling the after effects of apartheid. However, from a position of privilege and sovereignty, a common reaction still seems to be one of disavowal and avoidance of vulnerability.<sup>43</sup> In this context, vulnerability is seen as an impediment and limitation that needs to be repudiated and ignored. It is rather a feature one would project onto others. A failure to recognize vulnerability enables the flourishing of oppressive social, economic and political relations, or, conversely, to undo oppressive relations it is necessary to recognize vulnerability.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, a definite ignorance of vulnerability is cultivated in order to achieve a sense of invulnerability, a sovereign master subject that is self-sufficient. Sometimes it is a wilful ignorance, sometimes it is cultivated subconsciously. However, in both instances it is

actively produced and maintained through the projection of invulnerability.<sup>45</sup> A willful ignorance of the after effects of apartheid and the lingering residues of racialized thinking enables the persistence of white privilege and racism. This kind of willful ignorance is more than not caring to know. It is continuously produced in the choices people make and their actions; it is not only a question of omitting because of particular ideological interests but also a question of shaping those ideological interests further.<sup>46</sup> Vulnerability is ignored because it produces extreme discomfort and unease. From a position of privilege and power vulnerability is repudiated as it would make the strong, competent, autonomous master subject less so.

From a position of weakness and harm vulnerability also becomes objectionable when the power remains asymmetrical with the privileged in possession what the vulnerable needs and the latter with no other possibility of access as through the dominant powerful party knowing the latter may refuse access.<sup>47</sup> The vulnerable is forced to seek the help of the invulnerable as the saviour and the self-sufficient.

### III. Manasseh in 2 King 21:1-18 and 2 Chr 33: 1-20

#### *(a) Manasseh's villainy in both narratives*

In the story of Manasseh in 2 Ki 21:1-18 the kingdom of Judah is rendered extremely vulnerable because of the actions of Manasseh as king. Manasseh receives the blame for the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. A description of his sins reveals transgressions of key aspects of Deuteronomistic law.<sup>48</sup> Both 2 Ki 21:1-8 and 2 Chr 33:1-8 participate in the vilification of Manasseh.

**2 Ki 21:2/2 Chr 33:2:** The deity regarded Manasseh as evil since he followed the abominable practices of the nations that YHWH drove out before Israel

**Deut 12: 29-30:** Israel is warned against the abominable practices of the nations they are about to drive out of Canaan and instructed not to inquire about worshipping them in order to imitate these abhorrent practices (see Deut 18:9).

**2 Ki 21: 3, 7/2 Chr 33:3:** Manasseh is accused of returning the high places and erecting high sacred poles for Asherah.

**Deut 12:2-4:** The people is admonished to destroy all the high places in the hills and mountains as well as under trees. **Deut. 16:21** prohibits the planting of any tree with the aim of making it a sacred pole for Ashera.

**2 Ki 21: 3, 5/2 Chr 33:3, 5, 7:** Manasseh erected altars for Baal and the host of heaven in the two courts of the temple.

**Deut. 17:3:** Any man or woman found to have worshipped other gods, such as sun, moon or host of heaven, will be stoned to death.

**2 Ki 21:6 2 Chr 33:6:** Manasseh is accused of sacrificing by fire his children for Moloch and practicing divination by visiting mediums and wizards and practising soothsaying and augury.

**Deut 18:9-14** polemicizes the abhorrent practices of the nations Israel drove out in Canaan: passing children through fire, practices of divination, soothsaying, augury, sorcery, consulting ghosts, and seeking oracles from the dead.

**2 Ki 21:16 (no parallel in 2 Chr 33):** Manasseh shed so much innocent blood that it filled Jerusalem to the brim.

**Deut 19:10** prohibits the shedding of innocent blood on caution of bloodguilt.

Both the Deuteronomist and the Chronicler provides a negative portrayal of Manasseh that can be labelled with the term “blackballing.”<sup>49</sup> In Kings Manasseh is not regarded as part of the successful kings of Judah.<sup>50</sup> He is marked as Judah’s Ahab in 2 Ki 21:3: he made a sacred pole and an altar for Baal as king Ahab once did. Ahab was the epitome of depravity in the Northern Kingdom. Since Manasseh is not the only king in Judah committing various idolatrous evils, his are nonetheless described in such terms that he becomes the pinnacle of those who committed cult crimes with regard to the laws laid down in the Deuteronomistic history. The straw that broke the camel’s back seems to have been his personal villainy:<sup>51</sup> his shedding of innocent blood to the extent that it filled Jerusalem from end to end (2 Ki 21:16), a detail absent in the Chronicles version.

*(b) Manasseh’s wickedness in 2 Ki 21:1-18*

Judah’s eventual exile is blamed on Manasseh’s wickedness and transgression of Deuteronomistic law. He is constructed as a scapegoat and villain in order to provide a comforting explanation for an audience struggling with exile and catastrophe.<sup>52</sup> Yet Manasseh is distanced from Judah in being closely associated with aspects of the Northern Kingdom. The latter was destroyed because of their following of the cults of the foreign nations. Manasseh is associated with these “abominable practices of the nations that YHWH drove out when they entered the Promised Land” (2 Ki 21:2). In fact, he was even worse than these nations in that he saw to it that Judah worshipped these idols (v. 11). Stavrakopoulou observes that this extreme foreignness remains in the focus in the entire narrative.<sup>53</sup>

His following of the foreign cults strengthens the comparison in v. 3 with king Ahab and analogy with Jeroboam, the foremost villainous king of the Northern Kingdom, and who like Manasseh, who is compared to the Amorites in v. 10, is compared in 1 Ki 21:26. Ahab serves to depict Manasseh in ways even worse than Ahab himself. Ahab might have done all these things Manasseh did, except that Manasseh caused Judah to follow suit.<sup>54</sup> Here Manasseh parallels Jeroboam who is also accused of causing the people to sin (1 Ki 14:16). Manasseh’s wickedness has the same consequences as Jeroboam’s evil initially had for Israel:<sup>55</sup> “Manasseh appears to have been depicted as akin to the worst monarchs, especially Israelite ones, and as the opposite of the best kings.”<sup>56</sup> His wickedness completely outweighs Josiah’s piety and cultic reforms (2 Ki 23:4-24).<sup>57</sup> In fact, Manasseh’s wickedness had an impact on Josiah’s role in Deuteronomistic history: although apparently repairing the damage Manasseh did, his cultic reforms failed to thwart the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem that resulted into the exile. “Manasseh’s sin has doomed the reform to futility from the start.”<sup>58</sup>

Not only is Manasseh linked to the Northern Kingdom by Ahab (2 Ki 21:3) and Jeroboam (2 Ki 21:11), his name is also of Northern Kingdom origin (1 Ki 3:13).<sup>59</sup> It seems the name’s presence in the biblical texts functions in terms of an anti-Manasseh polemic: “His vilification in Kings is prompted by his name: in sharing a name associated with the Northern Kingdom, Manasseh is singled out as a religious deviant in the eyes of the Kings Writer.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, it is as if the narrative in listing all Manasseh’s crimes and linking Manasseh to the Northern Kingdom, asks the reader what do they expect from such a man. But two things happen in the process: a king whose reign was 55 years long, and in terms of Deuteronomistic theology a successful king, is completely vilified and attribute the exile of a kingdom, whilst the inhabitants of the kingdom abscond their own responsibility.

*(c) Manasseh's wickedness and vulnerability in 2 Chr 33:1-20*

2 Chr 33:1-9 more or less replicates 2 Ki 21:1-9, except that Ahab is not mentioned in the Chronicles version. Verses 10-17 tells a different story from the Kings version, perhaps with more of a recitation of generic impieties and without a reference to Manasseh's slaughter of innocent people in Jerusalem.<sup>61</sup> Here Manasseh is said to have failed to listen to Yhwh and the latter sent the Assyrians to publicly humiliate him in taking Manasseh captive in manacles and in bounding him in fetters in order to take him to Babylon.<sup>62</sup> In Babylon Manasseh experienced conversion<sup>63</sup> and he was sent back to Jerusalem where he induced religious reforms and initiated large building projects, signs that his reign was successful and long. The building of the wall, alluding to Nehemiah's own wall building project, suggests a presentation of Jerusalem as the central administrative location for the province—Jerusalem is mentioned 5 times in the Manasseh narrative.<sup>64</sup>

How does one explain the repentance of Manasseh in the Chronicles narrative? The repentance is indicative of his vulnerability and subsequent change in thinking and behaviour. One possible explanation is that his long reign was incompatible with the image of scapegoat and that it became theologically necessary to have him ending his kingship successfully.<sup>65</sup> Japhet argues that the Chronicler had a choice of either explain the long reign or change the length of the reign. He chose the former in finding an explanation for the long reign in Manasseh's repentance.<sup>66</sup> But what did Manasseh need to repent of? The Deuteronomistic history suggested cultic abominations, which appeared to have been a problem even in the Persian Period. Manasseh's Ba'als, Asherah's and host of heavens became those deities that are not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: in the Diaspora the Jews were confronted with worshipping foreign deities and in Yehud, those who settled there under the migration policies of the Empire, brought with them their own cult. Manasseh symbolized those Jews who accepted these foreign cults.<sup>67</sup>

Whereas the Kingdom of Judah experienced the consequences of Manasseh's apostasy a few generations later, retribution is immediate and personal in the book of Chronicles. Retribution is constructed in terms of the Assyrian Empire striking at Judah represented in Manasseh in terms of a theological interpretation<sup>68</sup> with Assyria as the rod of Yahweh's anger and the club of his fury (Is. 10:5). The capturing is public and meant to be humiliating, but Japhet thinks that Manasseh's capturing is "a relatively mild reaction and quite disproportionate to the gravity of his evil when compared to someone like Jehoram's bowel disease (2 Chr 21:18)."<sup>69</sup>

While in captivity Manasseh repents and prays to Yhwh, who hears his pleas and forgive him in sending him back to Jerusalem (2 Chr 33: 13). The appropriate response to his vulnerability is humility and prayer: Manasseh humbled himself before the deity and prayed. The deity, in turn, received his prayer, heard his plea and restored him. Handy argues that the trope of repentance before a merciful deity stands central to Persian and Hellenistic literature and strands of the Jewish tradition as can be noticed within the rabbinic tradition and the early Christian tradition.<sup>70</sup> The prayer of repentance seemed to be of considerable importance: the Chronicler refers twice to it and in the Hasmonean period an apocryphal text was produced to fill in the contents of Manasseh's prayer.<sup>71</sup> The prayer constructs a Manasseh devoid of any evil, "a penitent and pious Manasseh,"<sup>72</sup> yet somehow in the collective archive Manasseh failed to be ridden of total wickedness.

Manasseh backs his repentance with a building project, a military strategy and a spiritual renewal. He builds a wall around Jerusalem and manned the fortified cities with military commanders. Both alludes to a strengthening of the power to resist.<sup>73</sup> On religious

level he negates the cultic changes he brought about earlier except the high places. Moreover, no reference is made to child sacrifice, witchery, soothsaying or augury too. Something needed to be left for Josiah to do in Chronicles!<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, his reforms encapsulates the reforms of Josiah in Kings and the reader is left with an image of a monotheistic temple of Yhwh with the high places also consecrated to the one single deity called Yhwh.<sup>75</sup>

*(d) Two traditions of Manasseh's story*

It is clear that the story of Manasseh in Kings as well as Chronicles presents the reader with two traditions that developed after each other and provided an impetus within the history of reception of Manasseh to two different readings:

During the period of Persian and Hellenistic rule there were two diametrically opposed trajectories regarding Manasseh that begin in the Persian period and carried on into early Judaism and Christianity. One leads straight from the book of Kings, intensifying the wickedness of Manasseh until he is presented as the tool of Satan, if not the embodiment of evil itself. In this trajectory Manasseh exemplifies the danger of Judeans/Jews who go after foreign cultures and harm Jewish practice. The other trajectory builds on the Chronicler's addition of Manasseh's prayer and repentance. Here Manasseh becomes the very embodiment of the penitent, producing a vision not only of a converted king but also of an all-merciful deity who provides a way to make amends for evil behaviour. Both extreme views of Manasseh are elaborations of the memory first encoded in Kings. The wonderful, temple-restoring, good king Manasseh developed in Yehud under Persian imperial rule. The Manasseh of irredeemable evil, incorporating the entire notion of Satan as the embodiment of evil, seems, as a working hypothesis, to have originated during the Hasmonean wars and rule. Remembering Manasseh as having abandoned the true faith, cult, and people of Israel, the authors could then equate those of their day who they felt followed in his footsteps with this national exemplar of wickedness.<sup>76</sup>

There is a strong tradition of regarding Manasseh in a negative light.<sup>77</sup> In I Enoch Manasseh is compared to the blind straying bellwether who abandoned his flock of sheep to beasts of prey. In the Martyrdom of Isaiah chapter 5 Manasseh becomes demonic in participating in sawing Isaiah in two. In 2 Baruch Manasseh is associated with apocalyptic imagery of destruction. The portrayal of Manasseh in Rabbinical literature is quite ambivalent. The Talmud singles out Jerobeam, Ahab and Manasseh as those kings whose evilness caused them to forfeit their share in the world to come.<sup>78</sup> But Rabbi Johanan (*b. Sanh.* 103a) argues anyone who thinks this, weakens the power of repentance. In the Talmud Manasseh is introduced as a Torah-scholar who interpreted Leviticus in 35 different ways.<sup>79</sup> In *b. San 102b* he is not allowed to be judged since Yahweh already judged him. In the Assyrian records Manasseh is portrayed positively as a loyal vassal (Prism B and Prism C).<sup>80</sup>

Even his name is interpreted negatively. His name is suggestive of forgetfulness: he forgot God and his father Hezekiah. In fact, he is described as poking fun at his pious father when he was brought to the synagogue in his youth. He is also said to have violated his sister. His role as scapegoat is enhanced by such incest and even parricide, such as killing his grandfather Isaiah.<sup>81</sup> The exile is thought to be caused by idolatry, incest, shedding of blood and release of land. In the Kings version, Manasseh commits two of the four and in the postbiblical literature, he commits three of the four.<sup>82</sup>

In the Pseudepigrapha he is depicted as under the influence of Satan who led him to be the cause of Jerusalem's apostacy. But he is thought to have been a great scholar of the Torah despite his ridicule of it. The greater the scholar, the greater the evil inclination, the

rabbis argued! His repentance reported in Chronicles did not go unnoticed in some rabbinical writings. His repentance redeemed him from losing out on his share of the world to come. When the angels urged God not to accept his repentance, the deity replied in not accepting him, he would be closing the door on all repentant sinners.<sup>83</sup> Josephus, whose *Antiquities* was intended for non-Jews, looks at Manasseh's transgressions as an internal affair and do not link it to the pagan religions surrounding Judah at that stage. He regards these transgressions as lawlessness that eventually brought down the Kingdom of Judah. And he credits the origin of such lawlessness with Jerobeam.<sup>84</sup>

One scholar made an important observation regarding the scholarly interest in Manasseh: most authors usually side with the biblical heroes, like David, Solomon, Hezekiah, or Josiah. Villains, such as Manasseh, does not track a lot of interest.<sup>85</sup> One contextual study suggests an analogy between the two kinds of presentation of Manasseh and what is happening in an African context.<sup>86</sup> The Assyrian praise for Manasseh, for example, is echoed by Western praise for African leadership that promotes and protects Western economic interests, whilst leadership that questions and problematizes such approaches is portrayed as bad leadership in the eyes of the West.

For the rest, it seems scholarship adds to the vilification of Manasseh. For example, he gets blamed for the introduction of foreign cults (despite evidence that the cult in those days differ very little from surrounding cultures or that his worshipping constituted a syncretistic cult enhanced by Assyrian beliefs). He is sometimes even accused of cult crimes not found in the biblical text. In his deviation, a personal and intentional villainy is assumed in his rejection of his father's reforms.<sup>87</sup>

#### **IV. Vulnerability**

Starting with Levinas' ethical moment and the face-to-face dialectic with the Other, reading the story of Manasseh in both Kings and Chronicles, one realizes one never really sees the face of Manasseh. He is very much a cardboard character because the reader senses his story is manipulated to achieve other ends. In 2 Ki 21 Manasseh's reign is long (and apparently successful if one measures it up with that of Solomon). He does not suffer the consequences of his wrongdoing. The people of Judah suffers. One tends to see vulnerability in a negative light when reading the two narratives: infliction of harm and punishment. In 2 Chr 33, Manasseh is the one who suffers. On a different level, with Manasseh as king, he is actually the autonomous one. In addition, one wonders whether his openness to other ways of worshipping deities does not constitute vulnerability as potential on his side, with the deity as the invulnerable opposite other. In his story, this openness tends to be harmful for the deity, and he lashes out. The more historical question one would ask is whether Manasseh's behaviour as king and his openness to other forms of religions were not valid for his time when Yhwh was still the chief deity and the rest part of the pantheon.

It is clear that the story in Kings searches for an explanation for the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah, which it finds in the deeds of one person, Manasseh.<sup>88</sup> In terms of the depiction of the kings of the Northern Kingdom, it is usually the actions of the entire kingdom that resulted into divine destruction of Samaria.<sup>89</sup> In Judah's case, it is the misdeeds of Manasseh, who then mislead Judah, that is regarded as the origin of the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Here a particular problem is created: The Davidic House's presence on the throne is for all practical purposes secured for eternity, yet the deeds of a single king nullifies this divine promise: "Nevertheless, the question of the Deity's culpability in renegeing on the promise to the house of David and in holding the entire nation responsible for the action of one man remains."<sup>90</sup>

Römer is of the opinion that Manasseh was a loyal vassal and it was quite possible that he merely reinforced the cultic symbols to relate with Assyrian culture and politics.<sup>91</sup> Buchner suggests that Manasseh

steered a safe course between placating his Assyrian masters on the one hand and serving the religious needs of his population on the other, by maintaining the YHWH cult as the official cult, but resuscitating within it bolder expressions of folk religion, which included veneration of the goddess and now also Assyrian astral deities, who were visibly portrayed as part of YHWH's court.<sup>92</sup>

Another possibility is that the catastrophic situation that saw the demise of the monarchy and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem would have logically been linked to the defeat of YHWH as national deity or to him abandoning his elected favourite, Israel. Within Judah itself, or rather, within the exiled powerful elite, (Römer refers to them as “mandarin,”<sup>93</sup>), that is, high functionaries such as scribes and administrators, within an empire, rather sought to explain the loss of power and exile in terms of a deity who provoked the Babylonian invasion to punish his elected people:

L'exil et la deportation sont le thème global de cette histoire qui relie les diverses traditions et périodes pour aboutir à la fin de la monarchie, la destruction de Jérusalem et la perte du pays, événements qui, selon les deutéronomistes, résultent de la colère de Yhwh contre son peuple et ses chefs. Juda et Jérusalem ne peuvent échapper à l'attaque babylonienne parce que c'est Yhwh lui-même qui a envoyé cette armée pour annihiler Juda et Jérusalem.<sup>94</sup>

It is not a question of Babylonian deities conquering the national god of Judah, but a question of divine wrath as agent in afflicting Judah. And if Yhwh used the Babylonian deities in this way, it means he controls them too, preparing the way for monotheism to be finalized within the Deuteronomistic history<sup>95</sup> and Deuteronomy itself (Deut 4: 39): “C'est une manière remarquable de maintenir l'ancienne idée de Yhwh comme dieu national ou tutélaire, tout en affirmant qu'il est le seul vrai dieu.”<sup>96</sup>

The composite nature of the biblical text in overlaying traditions atop of older ones, presents readers with two contradictory and sometimes mutually exclusive portrayals of the deity Yhwh: Yhwh as the only and universal deity and Yhwh as one amongst many, albeit the head of the divine council or of the other deities.<sup>97</sup> These discordant incongruous views about Yhwh is deliberately constructed:

A nascent, monotheistic community in the Persian province of Beyond the River would have had a vested interest in both approaches—one more subtle and the other more direct, to critique old orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the monarchic era that still existed in Yehud. They wished to rebuff the understanding of Yahweh as the head of a pantheon, replacing it with a monotheistic Yahwism that allowed for angelic, messenger-type beings.<sup>98</sup>

The new view would have entailed economic benefits to the priestly scribal class in pushing for a new ideology yet not alienating those who pay taxes and make voluntary sacrifices in the temple. Yet, the new view made it clear that the ways of the past, worshipping Yhwh as part of a pantheon, led to the catastrophe of the exile and the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. The Exile becomes the end result of the religiosity and behaviour of the past.<sup>99</sup> If this is true, the context of the authors of these texts was still very precarious because of the corrupt ways of the past:

The [new form of Yahwism] was essentially used to state more openly and directly that the old position, though still around, where Yahweh was the head of a pantheon, was a bad one. Look what happened—Yahweh allowed us and our ancestors to suffer and be subjugated and taken into captivity because of our apostasy in worshipping him incorrectly.<sup>100</sup>

An unintended consequence of the development into monotheism is that the deity is made invulnerable and defended against other deities. Noncompliance by human beings makes the latter extremely vulnerable and the object of harm and injury by the deity.

By the time Kings wrote the story, monotheism started to set in and the story was constructed in that way, resulting in the depiction of Manasseh as idolatrous. Philip Davies draws a link between the political development of the monarchy from a national institution to an imperial one and the religious development towards monotheism in the Persian Period.<sup>101</sup> Following his remarks on the development of monotheism,<sup>102</sup> it is clear that autonomy paralleled invulnerability. The monarchy emerged as an autonomous locus of power with the ability to impose taxes, engage in war and require personal loyalty which encouraged a parallel religious development with a centralized cult. The kingship on earth reflected the divine kingship in heaven. The monarch as well as the deity became invulnerable, i.e. any effort to render them vulnerable, is met with negative sanction. Both lived in a designated area with designated personnel to serve them. The emergence of empire allowed for the construction of a dynastic deity that overshadowed the local or nationalistic deities of the vassal-kings and their states, sometimes causing a tension in loyalty towards either of the deities. Monarchic theism became imperial theism. In Chronicles, in the last verses of the book, the deity becomes imperial in its support for the new imperial ruler.

Does monotheism in the story not create a reductively negative view on vulnerability? In terms of invulnerability, Gilson talks of a self-sufficient or autonomous master subject who remains independent and invulnerable. Gilson links such a model to a particular epistemology that has become constitutive to the practice of science as well as top positions of privilege and control. In other words, in order to stay invulnerable, vulnerability has to be ignored. It is a god-like position and currently associated with whiteness and white privilege. In Manasseh's story, the deity is thought to be invulnerable and worshipping other deities harms that invulnerability. Such harm has consequences, according to the Kings' story within a Deuteronomistic framework. The divine response is one of violence.

In the Kings narrative, Manasseh can be seen imitating this violence. He is said to have shed so much blood that it filled Jerusalem from end to end (2 Ki 21:16). He caused harm and renders his people vulnerable. Yet, these very vulnerable people later pay the price for Manasseh's act of invulnerability as his punishment—Manasseh renders the deity vulnerable in his openness towards others and because of his position as invulnerable king, his subjects are rendered vulnerable a few years after Manasseh died. In Kings the subject people does not merit vulnerability. There seems to be an inequitable distribution of vulnerability generated by a power structure that was patronizing and oppressive. The Kings version of Manasseh's story presents the reader with a cause and effect scheme: actions have consequences. Vulnerability is largely negatively perceived. 2 Chronicles 33 repeats the cause and effect scheme, but it adds affect: Manasseh repents and becomes vulnerable. This vulnerability allows him to be open to change, albeit then a change forced by an invulnerable monotheistic god. Although the deity then tolerated Manasseh, the exile and the destruction of the temple did not change. It still happened, though for other reasons in Chronicles.

## V. Conclusion

Perpetrators are not always kindly dealt with in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, but in contrast to the negative portrayal in 2 Ki 21:1-18, Manasseh receives a better hearing in 2 Chr 33:1-20. There are obvious historical reasons in the respective worlds of text production of these different portrayals, but playing the role of perpetrator is never easy. For this reason Manasseh's role in Chronicles is somewhat symbolical for the kind of perpetratorhood I as reader need to deal with in the current South African context. The ethical moment refers to the gaze of the eyes. In the Kings narrative, Manasseh does not look anyone in the eye. He is simply depicted in all his evilness. But then, he is not a rounded character in that representation. On a different level, I could ascribe a certain vulnerability to him in that he allows for the veneration of other deities. In terms of the power configuration, he was wise to do it as his long reign indicates. In Chronicles he picks up on the gaze of the narrator and he comes to consciousness of his wrongdoing. This process creates his vulnerability with which he returns and changes the epistemology.

A central focus on both stories is the role played out by the deity and Manasseh's response to that role. The stories suggest royal subordination to divine power. In Kings the conflict is between Yahweh as the sole deity to be recognized by royal power as well as the curbing of royal power that renders the subordinates vulnerable, as was the case with Manasseh's letting blood flow in Jerusalem. In Chronicles, it is the recognition of the subordinate king of the power of Yahweh as deity.

In both these instances vulnerability is characterized negatively as harm, injury, and death (or murder). This is a kind of vulnerability one would want to overcome. The negative interpretation of vulnerability is exacerbated by the depiction of the king as well as the deity as autonomous subjects. Both narratives want the king to be subordinate to divine power, but it fails to happen. The story thus needed a saviour to make it happen. In Chronicles, that saviour is explicitly Yhwh who sends the Assyrian army to take Manasseh captive in order to render him vulnerable. In the Kings narrative, Manasseh seems to uphold his invulnerability, only to render his subjects a few years on utterly vulnerable in the face of renewed captivity. Ironically, vulnerability is effectuated by an invulnerable monotheistic deity.

Because Manasseh never repented in the Kings narrative, one can surmise he remained ignorant of vulnerability. In Chronicles, Manasseh is directly confronted with it when he is turned fragile in captivity. Moreover, his body is violated with manacles and fetters, a public humiliation. Manasseh became physically vulnerable, a position from which he repents and brought about changes. He experiences vulnerability in a particular situation: captivity, or prison. His autonomy has been severely curtailed. As prisoner Manasseh seemed to have experienced an epistemic vulnerability, especially an openness to be wrong. It is this kind of vulnerability that enables me from a position of whiteness to negotiate the apartheid past in a postapartheid world.

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- <sup>2</sup> Tham, "Lessons Learned," 221.
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- <sup>4</sup> See especially Gerrie F. Snyman, "A Hermeneutic of Vulnerability: Redeeming Cain?" *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 1 (2015b): 633–65. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2015.v1n2.a30>.
- <sup>5</sup> See Gerrie F. Snyman, "Responding to the Decolonial Turn: Epistemic Vulnerability." *Missionalia* 43, no. 3 (2015a): 266–91. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7832/43-3-77>.
- <sup>6</sup> Bosman, "Ants, Spiders or Bees . . . and Ticks?" 643.
- <sup>7</sup> See, Snyman "A Hermeneutic of Vulnerability: Redeeming Cain?" 633–65, see also Gerrie F. Snyman, "Cain and Vulnerability: The Reception of Cain in Genesis Rabbah 22 and Targum Onkelos, Targum Neofiti and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan." *Old Testament Essays* 29, no. 3 (2016a): 601–32; Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2016/v29n3a14>, "Obadiah and a Hermeneutic of Vulnerability," in *Obadiah, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (ed. Bob Becking, Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2016), 45–63 and "Responding to the Decolonial Turn: Epistemic Vulnerability." *Missionalia* 43, no. 3 (2015a): 266–91. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7832/43-3-77>.
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- <sup>11</sup> James W. Perkinson, *White Theology. Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 76.
- <sup>12</sup> Perkinson, *White Theology*, 77.
- <sup>13</sup> Perkinson, *White Theology*, 85.
- <sup>14</sup> Perkinson, *White Theology*, 103.
- <sup>15</sup> Perkinson, *White Theology*, 3.
- <sup>16</sup> The public protection of vulnerable groups in medical research became necessary after a few public scandals of unethical experimentation in the USA. See Joseph Tham, "The Principle of Vulnerability: Meeting Ground of Six Religions." In *Religious Perspectives on Human Vulnerability in Bioethics. Advancing Global Ethics*, edited by Joseph Tham, Alberto Garcia, and Gonzalo Miranda, 2:1–8. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014. Doi: 10.1007/978-94-017-8736-9\_19. Article 8 of the declaration reads as follows: "In applying and advancing scientific knowledge, medical practice and associated technologies, human vulnerability should be taken into account. Individuals and groups of special vulnerability should be protected and the personal integrity of such individuals respected."
- <sup>17</sup> Joseph Tham, "Lessons Learned." In *Religious Perspectives on Human Vulnerability in Bioethics. Advancing Global Ethics*, edited by Joseph Tham, 2:215–24. Dordrecht: Springer, 2014. Doi: 10.1007/978-94-017-8736-9\_19, distinguishes between biological, social and cultural vulnerabilities. Social vulnerability arises from war, crimes, prejudices like racism, and poverty and cultural vulnerability stems from the categorization of cultural norms and traditions in such a way that groups or individuals are rendered vulnerable. These two are based on extrinsic factors whereas biological vulnerability is based on intrinsic factors.
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- <sup>19</sup> Henk ten Have, "Vulnerability as the Antidote to Neoliberalism in Bioethics / Vulnerabilidad Como Antídoto Al Neoliberalismo En Bioética." *Revista Redbioética/UNESCO* 5, no. 1 (2014): 87–92.
- <sup>20</sup> Ten Have, "Vulnerability as the Antidote to Neoliberalism in Bioethics," 90-1.
- <sup>21</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 34-35.
- <sup>22</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 75.
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- <sup>24</sup> Ten Have, "Vulnerability as the Antidote to Neoliberalism in Bioethics," 89.
- <sup>25</sup> Ten Have, "Vulnerability as the Antidote to Neoliberalism in Bioethics," 89.
- <sup>26</sup> Ten Have, "Vulnerability as the Antidote to Neoliberalism in Bioethics," 89.

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- <sup>27</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 15-16.
- <sup>28</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 23.
- <sup>29</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 35.
- <sup>30</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 37.
- <sup>31</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 55.
- <sup>32</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 48.
- <sup>33</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 57.
- <sup>34</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 66.
- <sup>35</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 67.
- <sup>36</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 65.
- <sup>37</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 129.
- <sup>38</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 94-6.
- <sup>39</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 96.
- <sup>40</sup> Tham, "Lessons Learned," 223.
- <sup>41</sup> Tham, "Lessons Learned," 223.
- <sup>42</sup> My initial proposal was in the article "Empire and the Hermeneutics of Vulnerability," *SHE Suppl* 37 (2011): 1-20. Various articles followed since then on the issue of vulnerability and Decoloniality.
- <sup>43</sup> Recently, a pastor in a church in Sandton, Andre Olivier, tried to soften the sharp racist edges of whiteness in claiming certain innocence in his (self) presentation of whiteness in terms of the role white people plays in the country (cf. Areff, Ahmed. "Listen: Whites Took Nothing from No One - Pastor Andre Olivier." *News24.com*, June 28, 2916. <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/listen-whites-took-nothing-from-no-one-pastor-andre-olivier-20160628>). The pastor's sermon exhibits a false innocence in claiming that whites are not that privileged as is commonly thought. In fact, they did not take anything from black people. Olivier is completely ignorant about the political history of the country. The white South African self is in Olivier's sermon very much a racialized self with racial imaginations intertwined with white anxiety and fears about people who are different. These racial imaginations about the white self is one of goodwill which is being vilified by the racial black other, communicating a particular self-importance that denies complicity in racial oppression. The sermon was countered by a response by Klippies Kritzinger (Kritzinger, Klippies (J.N.J.). "Response to Pastor Andre Olivier of Rivers Church, Sandton." Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, July 1, 2016. <http://www.kathradafoundation.org/tags/klippies-kritzinger>) from the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, in which he argued that in as much as apartheid laws favoured white people, the sermon creates a false sense of innocence. In as much as the sermon links wealth of white people to hard work and, by implication, poverty to laziness, the sermon reveals a particular set of political, economic, and cultural assumptions within the white cultural archive. Kritzinger states "if Pastor Olivier can acknowledge complicity in the racist policies and practices that have divided our nation and oppressed the majority of its citizens for more than 360 years, then he may be able to find the humility not to be annoyed when black fellow South Africans keep on pointing out just how broken and unhealed our society still is."
- <sup>44</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 76.
- <sup>45</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 75.
- <sup>46</sup> See Tuana, Nancy. "The Speculum of Ignorance: The Women's Health Movement and Epistemologies of Ignorance." *Hypatia* 21, no. 3 (2006): 1-19 in Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 75-77.
- <sup>47</sup> Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis*, 27.
- <sup>48</sup> Thomas Römer, *L'invention de Dieu*. Les Livres Du Nouveau Monde (Paris: Seuil, 2014), 250-1.
- <sup>49</sup> Francesca Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings. The Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century BCE.*, T&t Clark Biblical Studies (ed. Lester Grabbe; London: t&t Clark, 2007), 248-9.
- <sup>50</sup> Andrew T. Ohm, "Manasseh and the Punishment Narrative." *Tyndale Bulletin* 61, no. 2 (2010): 249-252 sees in the Deuteronomistic version of Manasseh's story in 2 Ki 21 a punishment narrative: (i) sin description – vv. 2-3; (ii) sin development – vv. 4-8 and 16; (iii) Reminder/Prophetic intervention – vv. 10-15; (iv) Response / climax – v.9; (v) Punishment – 2 Ki 24: death of Josiah, military defeat, destruction of cult and deportation.
- <sup>51</sup> Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," 249.
- <sup>52</sup> Stuart Lasine, "Manasseh as Villain and Scapegoat," in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, 163-83. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 143 (eds. Cheryl Exum and David J. A. Clines, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 166.
- <sup>53</sup> Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," 250.
- <sup>54</sup> Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," 252.

- <sup>55</sup> Percy S. F. van Keulen, "Manasseh through the Eyes of the Deuteronomists. The Manasseh Account (2 Kings 21: 1-18) and the Final Chapters of the Deuteronomistic History." (PhD, Leiden, 1995), 145: "Notwithstanding the fact that in the Book of Kings Jeroboam, like Manasseh, is presented as the king whose sin caused the downfall of his people, Ahab is undisputedly presented as a more idolatrous king than Jeroboam."
- <sup>56</sup> Van Keulen, "Manasseh through the Eyes of the Deuteronomists," 148.
- <sup>57</sup> Van Keulen, "Manasseh through the Eyes of the Deuteronomists," 148.
- <sup>58</sup> Baruch Halpern, "Why Manasseh Is Blamed for the Babylonian Exile. The Evolution of a Biblical Tradition." *Vetus Testamentum* XLVIII, no. 4 (1998): 486, 489. Morton Smith, "The Veracity of Ezekiel, the Sins of Manasseh, and Jeremiah 44:18." *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 87, no. 1 (1975): 12 sees in the Manasseh's sins a reason for Josiah's death and defeat, but not the final fall of Jerusalem in 587.
- <sup>59</sup> Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," 253.
- <sup>60</sup> Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," 256.
- <sup>61</sup> Handy, "Rehabilitating Manasseh," 224 argues that the preservation of Manasseh's impieties in Chronicles but not his shedding of innocent blood relates to the function of the narrative: "A heretic can repent and make restitution, a murderous tyrant can repent, but his victims stay recalcitrantly dead."
- <sup>62</sup> Brian Kelly, "Manasseh in the Books of Kings and Chronicles (2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chron 33:1-20)," in *Windows into Old Testament History. Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel,"* (eds. V. Philips Long, David W Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 141 finds the reference to Babylon puzzling as the Assyrian capital would have been Nineveh. Perhaps the Chronicler uses Babylon here to link the eventual exile of Judah here with Manasseh's exile as a typology of what will happen.
- <sup>63</sup> Kelly, "Manasseh in the Books of Kings and Chronicles," 142, refers to the Assyrian practice of restoring rebellious vassals to their original kingdoms, as was the case with Neco I of Egypt.
- <sup>64</sup> Handy, "Rehabilitating Manasseh," 226, argues that Manasseh became the embodiment of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, their defender and not desecrator.
- <sup>65</sup> Becker, Joachim. *2 Chronik*. Die Neue Echter Bibel. Kommentar Zum Alten Testamentum mit der Einheitsübersetzung. Vol. 20. (Würzburg: Echter, 1988), 111. See also Handy "Rehabilitating Manasseh," 227.
- <sup>66</sup> Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles, A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. (London: SCM Press, 1993), 1002. Lasine (Lasine, "Manasseh as Villain and Scapegoat," 179) argues that Manasseh's crimes, his subsequent punishment, repentance and return exhibit what is known as a royal scapegoat. Like Oedipus he is expelled from the community and he repents. Like Oedipus he then brings blessings to the community before he dies.
- <sup>67</sup> Handy, "Rehabilitating Manasseh," 228 argues that by the late Persian period Jews who took up these foreign cultic practices were no longer regarded as Jews. Anyone not serving Judah's god were no longer regarded as Jewish.
- <sup>68</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1003. Handy, "Rehabilitating Manasseh," regards the idea of Manasseh having been invited to a coronation and taken as prisoner to the event as "nonsense." See Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles*. Vol. 13. The Anchor Bible. (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 198-9. Myers explains the event Manasseh supposedly attended, but not the capturing with manacles, fetters, and hooks.
- <sup>69</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1009.
- <sup>70</sup> Handy, "Rehabilitating Manasseh," 231.
- <sup>71</sup> Hugh Page, "Prayer of Manasseh," in *The Africana Bible. Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, (ed. Hugh Page, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 318 says the Prayer of Manasseh is a reclamation of a king who represented "the re-embrace of leaders within the community who had at one time been classified as marginal, unacceptable, or outside of the mainstream." Josephus also must have known a version of the prayer of Manasseh in his rendition of the story. See Etienne Nodet, "Prières de Manassé (2 Chr 33, 1\*; TSK 1.144\*; 4 Q 381)." *Revue Biblique* 117, no. 3 (2010): 345-60 who also discusses the Geniza Fragments and Qumran evidence to a Hebrew version of the prayer.
- <sup>72</sup> Handy, "Rehabilitating Manasseh," 232.
- <sup>73</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1010.
- <sup>74</sup> Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, 1010.
- <sup>75</sup> Handy, "Rehabilitating Manasseh," 231.
- <sup>76</sup> Handy, "Rehabilitating Manasseh," 234.
- <sup>77</sup> Lowel K. Handy, "Rehabilitating Manasseh: Remembering King Manasseh in the Persian and Hellenistic Periods. Social Memory and Imagination," in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian & Early Hellenistic Periods* (eds. Diana Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi, London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 222-223.
- <sup>78</sup> Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Manasseh," *JSP* 9 (1991):4.
- <sup>79</sup> Hanna Liss, "'The Sins of the Prophets: Biblical Characters through Rabbinic Lenses.'" *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (2002): 207.

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- <sup>80</sup> Obvious Vengeyi, "King Manasseh of Judah: A Paradigm for Understanding What Lies behind *Good/bad* African Leadership Dichotomy." *Review of Human Factor Studies* 20, no. 1 (2014): 101-108 provides an in depth discussion of the two texts in Prism B and C.
- <sup>81</sup> Lasine, "Manasseh as Villain and Scapegoat," 178.
- <sup>82</sup> Lasine, "Manasseh as Villain and Scapegoat," 178.
- <sup>83</sup> See Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Manasseh," 6-8.
- <sup>84</sup> Feldman, "Josephus' Portrait of Manasseh," 10-12.
- <sup>85</sup> Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," 258.
- <sup>86</sup> Vengeyi, "King Manasseh of Judah," 99-130.
- <sup>87</sup> Stavrakopoulou, "The Blackballing of Manasseh," 257.
- <sup>88</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, "King Manasseh of Judah and the Problem of Theodicy in the Deuteronomistic History" In *Good Kings and Bad Kings. The Kingdom of Judah in the Seventh Century BCE*. T&t Clark Biblical Studies, (London: t&t Clark, 2007), 266.
- <sup>89</sup> Sweeney, "King Manasseh of Judah and the Problem of Theodicy," 268.
- <sup>90</sup> Sweeney, "King Manasseh of Judah and the Problem of Theodicy," 273.
- <sup>91</sup> Römer, *L'invention de Dieu*, 251.
- <sup>92</sup> Dirk Buchner, "*Boshet* in Jeremiah 3:24: Disenfranchisement and the Role of the Goddess in Seventh-Century Judah." *Journal of Theological Studies* 59, no. 2 (2008): 488. William S. Morrow, "Were There Neo-Assyrian Influences in Manasseh's Temple? Comparative Evidence from Tel-Miqne/Ekron." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75 (2013): 73 concludes on the basis of evidence in Ekron that Manasseh in all probability pursued indigenous practices without having to disturb the Assyrian cultic practices Judah incorporated as an Assyrian vassal.
- <sup>93</sup> Römer, *L'invention de Dieu*, 285.
- <sup>94</sup> Römer, *L'invention de Dieu*, 286.
- <sup>95</sup> Römer, *L'invention de Dieu*, 287.
- <sup>96</sup> Römer, *L'invention de Dieu*, 288.
- <sup>97</sup> James Anderson, "Creating Dialectical Tensions: Religious Developments in Persian-Period Yehud Reflected in Biblical Texts," in *Religion in the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Emerging Judaism and Trends*. Orientalische Religionen in Der Antike 17 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 10-11.
- <sup>98</sup> Anderson, "Creating Dialectical Tensions," 15.
- <sup>99</sup> Anderson, "Creating Dialectical Tensions," 16.
- <sup>100</sup> Anderson, "Creating Dialectical Tensions," 16.
- <sup>101</sup> Philip R. Davies, "Monotheism, Empire, and the Cult(s) of Yehud in the Persian Period," In *Religion in the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Emerging Judaism and Trends*. Orientalische Religionen in Der Antike 17 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 26.
- <sup>102</sup> Davies, "Monotheism, Empire, and the Cult(s) of Yehud in the Persian Period," 25-29.