

**AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON POVERTY PROVERBS IN THE BOOK OF
PROVERBS: AN ANALYSIS FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL POSSIBILITIES**

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

OLD TESTAMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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JUNE 2006

An African Perspective on Poverty Proverbs in the Book of Proverbs

In memory of my wife, my life-long support and love, Lessy Se-Nyava, for her constant inspiration and encouragement. One can grasp her recent untimely departure only within the context of God's sovereignty.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pe wisaka ubite kya ng'ani gende wiyena; pe wisaka ubite pawutali gende na vangi:
‘When you want to go fast, walk alone; when you want to go far, walk with others’
(Bena).

It is hard to believe that I am now on the point of submitting this thesis. When I look back at the academic path I have traversed this far there is even more reason to thank God about for the present outcome. Nothing is more evident as a mark on this thesis than the blow I suffered on the morning of September 14th, 2004. That tragic morning on the way to the UNISA Library in Pretoria I was attacked by two armed robbers. I was shot just an inch below my left breast. I sustained severe injuries but luckily survived after more than two months of hospitalisation. My laptop together with the updated backups and research materials were lost to the robbers. Those who know me are aware of how much the whole tragedy affected me: my beloved family, my colleagues in the Africanisation of Biblical Studies Project, friends, members of the Old Testament Department at UNISA, the School of Mission and Theology in Norway and Makumira University College in Tanzania.

- I am sincerely indebted to and appreciative of the inspiration and assistance received from many people over the whole four-year period of my doctoral research. If there is any merit in this thesis, it is dependent to a large extent on the sincere cooperation and interest of all of them, whose assistance I gratefully acknowledge. To mention names would lead to an artificial selection.
- I am most grateful for the support and guidance I enjoyed from my promoter, Professor Madipoane Masenya. Little escaped her sharp eye and concentrated enthusiasm upon the research. I also desire to express thanks to the painstaking care of my joint promoter, Professor Knut Holter, under whom both the composition and direction of my thesis to fit the particular aspect (using Africa to interpret the Old Testament) of the Africanisation of Biblical Studies Project took shape.

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- I am most grateful for all the seminar and conference invitations extended, the dialogue offered (not the least by fellow students), and the language editorial work done, especially by Mr David N R Levey.
- Thanks are due to librarians at the School of Mission and Theology, Makumira University College and the University of South Africa for their prompt accessibility and communications that have contributed to the value of this thesis.
- The financial assistance of NUFU towards the research programme underlying this study is gratefully acknowledged.
- I must put on record my deep appreciation to members of my family for their profound support, especially to my dear wife, Lessy Se-Nyava, for her active support, in graciously enduring many deprivations and single-handedly managing the home while I was away for long periods in pursuit of the project. Together with our beloved children, Vwende Victoria, Anna Sophia, Amulike Furahini and Lusungu Philip, we are joined by my senior brother Philip Mangula to earnestly wish that this thesis will be of real use to all people as another key for the need to understand the richness of the Old Testament in a practical way. If granted this wish, our labour as a family would not have been in vain.

Kimilike, Lechion Peter

June 2006

ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|----------|---|--|
| cf | : | confer, compare |
| ed | : | editor, edited by |
| eds | : | editors |
| eg | : | for example |
| ESV | : | English Standard Version |
| et al | : | and others |
| HIV/AIDS | : | Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome |
| i e | : | that is |
| JPS | : | Jewish Publication Society Old Testament |
| KJV | : | King James Version |
| LPA | : | Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa (Organisation of African Unity) |
| NAB | : | The New American Bible |
| NEPAD | : | New Partnership for Africa's Development (African Union) |
| NIV | : | New International Version |
| NJB | : | The New Jerusalem Bible |
| NRSV | : | New Revised Standard Version |
| s a | : | 'sine anno', 'no date' |
| SAPs | : | Structural Adjustment Programmes (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) |
| PRSSs | : | Poverty Reduction Strategies (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) |
| RSV | : | Revised Standard Version |

ABSTRACT

An African Perspective on Poverty Proverbs in the Book of Proverbs: An Analysis for Transformational Possibilities. This thesis contributes to the emerging global scholarly discussion on prioritising the practical relevance of biblical interpretation, particularly in Africa. Taking poverty as a case study, this thesis employs the notion of the popular social origin of proverbs to critically analyse the subject in the Book of Proverbs. A social anthropological approach, historical-critical methods, rhetorical criticism and contextual exegesis are used to analyse proverbs regarding the poor in the Book of Proverbs and African proverbial material. On one hand, the investigation reveals that many Western scholars take their cue from the ‘official’ social context of the Book of Proverbs. However, the impact of an unconscious subjectivity owing to the Western secularising influence on their studies into poverty has posited a conservative *status quo* in the way the Book of Proverbs addresses it. On the other hand, an investigation of similar traditional African proverbial material on the poor reveals a holistic transformative possibility. Its life-centred dynamism is located in an integrative worldview that comprises mutual assistance, collective responsibility, family, community, social, political, religious and economic networks as one whole. Because cultural parallels exist between the society of ancient Israel and traditional African societies, the thesis argues the use of the African proverbial performance context in the interpretation of proverbs concerning the poor in the Book of Proverbs. The result of such cross-cultural application highlights the possible transformative social, economic, political and religious supportive networks essential to a viable and sustainable holistic development of society. Consequently, such a holistic approach to poverty may enable Bible readers to make meaning and empower the will of African Christians to rise practically to the challenge of poverty eradication in all spheres of their lives. A caution also to the universal church is to be found in the fact that the Book of Proverbs made an essential contribution to the transformation of the social, economic, political and religious life of Israel. Approaching the Book of Proverbs in terms of a popular context is a fact that can no longer be simply ignored.

Key terms:

OT genre and form: proverb, social location

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OT theology: poverty, justice, common humanity, conservative *status quo*, holistic transformation

Writings: Book of Proverbs, African proverbs

African perspective: cross-cultural parallels, worldview, mutual assistance, collective responsibility, family, community, social networks, leadership, religion, economics, wisdom, folklore, development, secularism, individualism, materialism

Method: contextual exegesis, social anthropological approach, historical critical analysis, rhetorical criticism

Key texts: Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, 22:2, 29:13, 13:7, 13:18, 19:7, 21:13, 13:23, 22:16, 23:10-11, 28:8, 22:7, 28:3, 28:15, 29:14

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1 INTRODUCTION

In undertaking research into the theme of poverty in the Book of Proverbs I was struck by the content of the following unforgettable interpretation by Pleins:

The terrible condition of poverty is stressed by reference to its friendless character. Prov. 14.20 states, ‘The poor [rāš] is disliked even by the neighbour, but the rich have many friends’. The friendless character of poverty is highlighted in Prov. 19.7: ‘all a poor man’s [rāš] brothers hate him; how much more his friends go far from him!’. Friendship is also the concern of Prov. 19.4. There it is observed that ‘Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man [dal] is deserted by his friend’. The friendless character of poverty is stressed even more forcibly in a sentence which suggests that the very worst situation to be found among the poor is when one poor person [rāš] oppresses another [dal] (Prov. 28.3). Gordis comments,

But what an irony to see a poor man making life miserable for his fellows and gaining nothing thereby! The observation comes with special aptness from a perspicacious son of the upper classes, who was tired perhaps of the perpetual accusations leveled against wealthy malefactors by prophets, lawgivers and sages (Gordis 1971:172)

There is no community among the poor according to the wise. It is a condition which lacks the camaraderie known by the wealthy, i.e. in ‘civilized’ society (1987: 67).

For me as an African interpreter residing in a context of poverty, these strong comments on Proverbs 14:20, 19:7 and 19:4 are difficult to understand because they seem to contradict the very essence of the life setting of the African society. Hence, for the African, life is basically lived holistically in the sense of understanding life in terms of all its dynamics as one integrated whole. Such a holistic view perceives all aspects of life and universe as analytically indistinct because they exhibit an intrinsic unity that is an interconnected, interdependent and interrelated whole. Therefore, in this thesis I use the preceding definition of a holistic perspective of life as the ‘African perspective’ that is inherently life-giving and life-sustaining, in its creative struggle to transform the well-being of humanity for the purpose of sustainable development in the particular context.

A society which is centred on a holistic community stresses genuine unity among ordinary people. The African people understand that fidelity to unity is the only weapon at their disposal to help them survive the threats to their well-being. The following Swahili* proverbs are worthy of note: *Raslimali ya mnyonge ni umoja*: ‘The

* In this thesis all the *Bena* and *Swahili* proverbs stem from conventional sources. The rest of the African proverbs unless otherwise indicated come from Nussbaum, S (ed) 1996. *African Proverbs: Collections, Studies, Bibliographies*. CD #3 in 20:21 Library 1.0. for Windows. Colorado Springs: Global Mapping International.

capital resource of the weak is in unity'. And: *Umoja ni nguvu; utengano ni udhaifu*: 'Unity is strength; division is weakness'. In fact, there are many African proverbs which insist on unity (cf. Wanjohi 1997:239). Even the dilemma in Proverbs 28:3 (cf. Gordis 1971:172, McKane 1970:628-629; Toy 1977:495-496; Fritsch 1955:938; Whybray 1990:36-37) can be settled more easily if read from the African perspective. That is, from a communal perspective Proverbs 28:3 may actually be referring to the hypocrisy among the ordinary people themselves as the worst enemy of their unity. For the Swahili proverb makes it clearer: *Kikulacho kinguoni mwako*: 'That which eats you is within you'. In the light of this African reflection I find Pleins, in the above quotation concerning lack of comradeship, to be disempowering the poor and somehow representing the Western^{*} traditional historical interpretations. The African proverb's insistence on unity as a resource for survival somehow emancipates the poor when applied to the proverbs about poverty in the Book of Proverbs. How can the two positions be reconciled? Or perhaps, how can a deeper meaning behind the terms used in those poverty proverbs be considered?

1.1 Statement of the problem

There is a growing interest in the once neglected subject of the Book of Proverbs, which reveals three major areas of disagreement between biblical scholars.

Firstly, the question of the social context of the Old Testament proverbs.

Crenshaw writes that the 'greatest challenge facing scholars at the beginning of the twenty-first century is to describe the social setting of wisdom over the years' (2000:227). This question appears to divide the answers of biblical scholarship into two camps of 'official' and 'popular'[†] locations. The official camp is that which credits the proverbs to the ancient Israel official circles by arguing that the royal

^{*} The use of the term 'Western', like its synonym 'North Atlantic', has been problematised as an inaccurate generalisation. According to LeMarquand (2003:23) the two terms refer to the 'post Enlightenment scholarly community, in all its various disciplines...desire or attempt to learn, describe or study the truth or reality as we experience it in a manner free from subjective bias'.

[†] The term 'official' is used to represent positions holding that the proverbs were coined in or around the royal courts, school and intellectual or wisdom schools; whereas the term 'popular' is here used to refer to studies which locate the origin of proverbs within the ordinary people's daily life.

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courts, (hypothetical) schools, and more general international influences are being reflected in the proverbs (cf. Hermissen 1968, Von Rad 1972; Whybray 1965, 1974, 1990). The popular circles link the proverbs to the experiences of ordinary people (cf. Westermann 1974, 1995; Golka 1986, 1993; Whybray 1994, 1995). Nevertheless, the social location is an important key to the interpretation of proverbs (cf. Holter 2002:92; Whybray 1995:18-32), especially with regard to their performance context. A time gap exists between the period of the biblical text and today. This gap needs to be bridged for a better understanding of the text by identifying the social circumstances of its origins (cf. also Mosala 1989:10).

Secondly, the discussion about the premise which appears to inform the texts of the Book of Proverbs.

An inconclusive debate is evident as to whether certain proverbs are conclusions drawn from an independent human experience, that is, whether the proverbs are secular material, or are based on a holistic worldview (cf. Crenshaw 2000:220-221). In the latter case, the aspects of the life setting in ancient Israel, as in Africa, are argued to be wholly religiously oriented and without compartmentalisation.

Thirdly, the debate on the degree to which the texts in the Book of Proverbs represent the theological aspect of life in ancient Israel.

In the last mentioned, the discussions focus on the theological aspect of the Book of Proverbs in the Yahwistic tradition. However, research into specific characteristics of Israelite proverbs (eg, God, poverty, creation, justice, work, leadership, humanity, women, etc.) is not well developed yet, particularly if compared with other areas of Old Testament scholarship. Crenshaw has identified the links between the three inconclusive debates of the Wisdom Literature, particularly as they relate to the Book of Proverbs, very precisely.

The few attempts to specify a linear development have been criticized on several counts, largely because of the failure to recognize an oral stage alongside a literary one and the assumption that a secular tradition preceded a religious one....Both anthropocentric and cosmocentric wisdom probably existed from the beginning. The former may actually have consisted of two very different types of sayings, those with no religious intentions and others with theological purposes. Even the ones that appear secular from the modern standpoint must be understood against the background of a thoroughly religious society. This acknowledgment

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does not settle the debate over the extent to which modern interpreters may assume that Yahwistic monism has infused the sayings in Proverbs (2000:225-226).

In the discussion of the Book of Proverbs to date, the social anthropological method (cf. Rogerson 1978; Niditch 1993; Overholt 1996) is being used alongside the more established historical methods and literary criticism (cf. Ska 1990; Alter 1985). The growing trend of comparative approaches to proverbial material from the perspectives of African society is seen in both Western (cf. Westerman 1995; Golka 1993) and African (cf. Narè 1986; Nzambi 1992) biblical scholarship. It seems as if the use of the social scientific approach in one way or another enables the historical critical and literary critical methods to achieve helpful results regarding the texts of the Book of Proverbs. This approach may then add to what Barton ([1984] 1996:243-246) rightly suggests as the exegete's 'literary competence'. In addition such an interdisciplinary approach appears to overcome the scholars' obsession with the quest for the only right method of application, which limits biblical interpretation.

Recently, studies in parts of the developing world, for example Africa and Latin America (cf. Fabella & Sugirtharajah 2000; Sugirtharajah 1991) show an increase in scholars' employment of social scientific approaches. This is a promising trend which offers the previously dominant Western perspective a chance to develop into a 'new and relevant'* theological horizon in the twenty-first century. In other words, African scholarship, amongst others, is seriously challenged to face the task of participating in the ongoing biblical debates. Specifically, regarding the debate on the Book of Proverbs I agree with Golka's important emphasis that 'Es wäre besser gewesen, die afrikanischen Sprichwörter wären von denjenigen in die alttestamentliche Diskussion eingefürt worden, die näher an der Quelle sassen' (2000:78-79). Literal translation: 'It would have been better if the African proverbs, upon which the Old Testament discussion is directed, were done by those closest to those sources' (cf. also Loader 1999:217). Holter's double invitation challenges Western scholarship to acknowledge the importance of a co-existence between contextual theological studies and traditional historical critical studies (2002:113-114), and conveys his response to the Akan proverb, *Benkum guare nifa, na nifa guare benkum*: 'The left hand washes the right and the right hand washes the left'

* This caption is used in the sense of those assertions going beyond the known limits of a Eurocentric perspective (Fabella & Sugirtharajah 2000:xxi) or Western abstractive and book theology resulting from the Enlightenment and affluent social locations being considered as spiritualising religion.

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(Opoku 1997:17). In other words the Akan proverb insists on the fact that the two hands need each other to accomplish the washing activity. The truth contained in the proverb is relevant to the situation in contemporary biblical studies where historical critical methods and contextual approaches, and African scholars and Western scholars, are called to work together.

Such an integrative usage of the social anthropological method is a recent phenomenon in the field of biblical studies. On the one hand, despite its newness, its advantages, as noted previously, in complementing the traditional historical-critical, literary critical and contextual methods have to be acknowledged. However, the social anthropological approach is severely limited in its presentation of African proverbial materials. This implies that it is not yet universally acclaimed throughout all of Africa. This situation remains to be addressed.

Fortunately, radically improved source material makes it possible to extend the spectrum of representation. For instance, Nussbaum's recent (1996) CD-ROM production of African proverbial collections, bibliographies and scholarships offers an enormous potential resource for cross-cultural approaches to the Book of Proverbs (cf. Kimilike 1999). My suggestion is that all of the above exegetical positions on the Book of Proverbs are important and need a more detailed and systematic consideration. Hence, I have decided on the theme of poverty as a significant paradigm, to be treated from a multifaceted perspective along that inclusive line, as my working thesis.

Poverty is one undeniable element which is present in both the Book of Proverbs and in the African proverbial material. I concur with biblical scholarship (cf. De Vaux 1961:72-73; Gottwald 1985:285-287; Whybray 1990) that poverty in ancient Israel seems to have pre-occupied society in its various dimensions, as it did and still does in the traditional and modern African societies. However, here again the poverty paradigm faces three perspectives that attract my suspicions of the biblical interpretations available at present.

- A good number of studies on the subject of poverty are based on the Old Testament as a whole, with relatively little attention being paid to the Book of Proverbs (cf. Habel 1988; Coggins 1987-8; Weir 1988-9; Gillingham 1988-9; Hobbs 1988-9).

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- Studies in the Book of Proverbs have focused on poverty as a counter to wealth. Wealth is being taken as the point of departure for understanding poverty. Strikingly, Whybray (1988-9:332) asserts that studies which ignore the close association between wealth and poverty commit a ‘methodological error’. In other words he suggests that poverty cannot be defined independently of wealth, an argument which may be resulting from the affluent social context which has produced many Western biblical scholars.
- Some studies on poverty argue for a fundamental religious foundation to the Israelite Wisdom literature, of which the Book of Proverbs is part and parcel. The suggested holistic approach seems to assert God’s role as Creator of all human beings and serves as a critique of the poverty experienced within society.

In other words, the holistic conception of life defines what it means to be human, not in abstract theological terms, but within the true human condition (cf. Clements 1995:139, 1995:142-143). My stance in the present research will be to pursue the holistic perspective on the Book of Proverbs, especially from the point of view of impoverished ordinary people in Africa. This is a deliberate effort to listen to what Scott (1990:ix-xiii) has termed the ‘arts of resistance’ or ‘hidden transcripts’ of suffering or oppressed people. These hidden transcripts refer to the experiences of the poor or ordinary people in their struggle, reading from a marginal perspective against poverty experiences which in one way or another have been deemed as voices of nonentity in discussions relating to the fate of the poor by those who are outside impoverished contexts.

Two areas will be explored in this study, based on a comparative study of poverty in the Book of Proverbs.

- 1) Poverty - In Africa as in ancient Israel, poverty is as old a concept as these societies themselves. Neither society accepts that a ‘poverty destiny’ is a fact of life and both societies have addressed the theme from cultural, economic, political and social perspectives. This concern implies that proverbs on the poor and poverty in its various dimensions are not lacking in these contexts.

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- 2) The use of an acknowledged African holistic worldview (which can be compared with the ancient Israelite worldview) as the premise for the exercise.

The studies of Golka (1993:37, 1993:53), Naré (1986:303-306) and Westermann (1995:123-128) point to a close similarity, in the nature and theological content of the proverbial material on the subject of poverty, between the two non-literate Israelite and African cultures.

In this study, I will employ the African traditional heritage to establish a coherent view of the subject of poverty from an African perspective. This will be followed by an extensive use of the African understanding of proverbs to interpret the texts on poverty from the Book of Proverbs.

Consequently, the focus of this contextual project is the question: *in what way can the African view on poverty (derived from relevant African proverbs) enable Bible readers to make meaning of, or understand Old Testament proverbs on poverty in an attempt towards facilitating the empowerment of the poor in African Christian contexts?* In a way, the research presupposes that proverbs can contribute towards poverty eradication strategies. Hence a recognition of that contribution in African proverbs (*the African perspective*) that could more fully illuminate the linguistic imagery that may socialise the poor into transforming, rather than accepting, their unchangeable situation (*the Western perspective*) in society. The African view challenges the dominant position held by Western studies of the Book of Proverbs which appears to emphasise that the book upholds the *status quo* of the poor and the rich in society. Therefore, different dimensions of poverty will be investigated not only in proverbs mentioning the term directly but also in those which allude to the idea of poverty.

1.2 The interpreter's social location in the scholarly interpretations of Old Testament poverty proverbs

This section is a preliminary overview of a few of the most recent studies of Old Testament proverbs on poverty. Its major aim is to show some of the conclusions that provoked me to undertake further research on the subject. As a point of departure a

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personal note on my initiation into contextual Bible study will be in order. Two factors contributed to my initiation into contextual theological research.

Firstly, I am an indigenous African, born and raised in a poor Tanzanian village.

I live and minister among the majority of ordinary impoverished people in rural villages in Tanzania. In Tanzania, poverty, ignorance and diseases are the three biggest social problems. Since independence in 1961, the people, the government and institutions in Tanzania have been called to wage war continuously against these evils. The church acts as an integral part of the civil and social institutions in Tanzania and has been called upon to participate in government endeavours to eradicate the core problems of society. The invitation challenged and provoked me to explore the Hebrew Bible for responses relevant to Tanzania. I also responded, as a representative of ordinary Christians in my capacity as a church minister, to Nyerere's comments that:

[U]nless the Church, its members and its organisations express God's love for man [sic] by involvement and leadership in constructive protest against the present human conditions, then it will become identified with injustice and persecution...if the Church is not part of our poverty and part of our struggle against poverty and injustice, then it is not part of us (Nyerere 1973:214-220).

In the above statement one can read the dilemma facing the church, particularly in the Tanzanian context of Africa, with regard to its position and role in the post-independence and post-modern period.

The church can either continue to identify itself with the rich and powerful by degenerating into superstitious teaching of prefabricated theology, 'book theology...what she reads in books written by European theologians, or what she is told by Europeans' (Idowu 1965:22-23).^{*} Such a church also holds fast to practices which reveal it to be 'trying to exist without a theology' (Mbiti 1989:232) and 'without theological consciousness and concern' (Mbiti 1972:51; cf. also Kijanga 1978:103). Or the church can dedicate its ministry to, and raise its voice in defence of, the poor and the marginalised by searching for relevant and practical answers from the

* Some scholars have labelled 'book' theology as an ivory tower theology or 'theology that is unaware of its context...that pretends to be quite independent of any worldly context...with its roots in either isolated monasteries or academic enclosures' (Speckman 2001:69).

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Hebrew Bible (cf. O'Connor 1995:183; Felder 1991a:127-184; 1991b:22-68).^{*} Therefore, the direct influence of the social, economic and political environment on me partly contributes to the emerging trends and traits of theological reflection in this thesis.

Secondly, part of my initiation into contextual exegesis has to do with my theological training.

In this process of ministerial studies, the situation explained in the previous paragraphs played a major role in the development of my interest in contextual exegesis. I started my first year of theological studies in 1992 by writing one of the required Term papers, titled, ‘Theology of work in Genesis’. For my Bachelor’s degree, I conducted research on ‘Justice and leadership in the book of Amos with reference to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania’ in 1997. The topic of my Master’s dissertation was: ‘Proverbs on the poor: A comparative study of the Old Testament proverbs and the African proverbs’ in 2000. It is from the dissertation that the concretisation of my social anthropological approaches in biblical studies stems, especially in terms of the hermeneutical concerns which the current thesis develops.[†]

Thus, just like any other ‘concerned reader’[‡] I am sensitised by critical questions, especially where I encounter Old Testament proverbs on poverty. Habel expresses some of these exegetical questions succinctly:

Do these texts reflect an attempt to control and maintain the existing social order with social justice ideals that uphold the status quo? Or do these texts reflect the pains and hopes of those

^{*} I am aware of presentations of the same concern which include perspectives on the entire Bible (eg, McFague 1977; Sugirtharajah 1991; Kijanga 1978:101).

[†] I acknowledge with gratitude the encouragement of my Master’s dissertation promoter, Professor Knut Holter.

[‡] The term is used in one sense as a reference to the ‘ordinary’ reader against the ‘trained’ reader and in another sense as a reference to all Christians, especially those in Africa who are in a crisis such as poverty (cf. also Manus 2003:35; Ukpong 2001:188-190). Such a crisis, as West says, ‘impels us to return to the Bible and search of the Word of God for a message that is relevant to what we are experiencing in...Africa today. However, our experience has taught us that we will only find a new message from the Bible when we find *a new way of doing Bible study*’ (West 1993:7; West 1999). However, though I agree to an extent that some non-poor readers, trained or not, can do research on poverty my conviction is that the real essence of it is always known by the one who experiences poverty. The Bena say it this way: *Uwuhangala wupyo siwiwoneka pamiko, nde ulufihe upye* (Literally: ‘Poverty is like heat; you cannot see it, so to know poverty you have to go through it’). The Swahili would say: *Aisifuye mvua imemnyea* (Literally: ‘The person who praises the rain it has rained on him or her’). Therefore on my part I will include both of the above definitions of an ‘ordinary’ reader of the Bible.

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who are suffering injustices? Are any of the biblical texts actually the work of the oppressed, a group who normally would not have the resources to record their experiences (1995:283)?

Similar views can be gleaned in his discussion of the contribution of feminist scholars, on the identification of the poor and oppressed, and on the ‘victims or agents of resistance’ (Habel 1995:283–287; especially Masenya 1997:6-7). Golka holds a similar view regarding the Book of Proverbs:

Does Proverbs represent only the experiences of an intellectual elite, or does the book voice the experiences of God and life found among very ordinary people? Have contributions from the latter layer of society also found their way into the canon of the Hebrew Bible, if only – but possibly deliberately – under the protection of the Solomonic pseudonymity (1993:35)?

The contextualised questions are presently used as a basis for the hermeneutic of suspicion and subsequent analysis of the various biblical works of scholarship on the subject of poverty in the Book of Proverbs. Since major studies have included the topic in their commentaries and monographs on the Book of Proverbs, further analytical details will appear in Chapter Two of this thesis. In this section a few examples of ideas espoused by some of them will suffice to highlight briefly what the researcher finds to be a dilemma in the study of poverty in the Book of Proverbs.

One of the major studies is that of the renowned Old Testament scholar R N Whybray (1990) in his book titled *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*. This title will be representative of our brief analysis because a scholarly consensus exists (McKay & Clines 1993; Habtu 1993:24-65) which acknowledges this author as one of the few experts in the field of the Book of Proverbs. His presentation is a detailed examination of the ‘ideas and theology’ of the Book of Proverbs which focuses on the question of wealth and poverty as a theme. In his later outstanding survey of the Book of Proverbs (1995) he relegates the said book to a mere mention of the monograph in the bibliography! By doing so, in my opinion he downplays the theme of ‘wealth and poverty’ by not discussing it as a major theological concern in the Book of Proverbs.

An overview of his theological position with regard to proverbs on poverty as contained in the monograph seems to constitute a development of what he wrote in an earlier article (cf. Whybray 1988-9). In the latter, he attempted to critique previous studies on the subject of the error of treating poverty too much in isolation from wealth (eg, Coggin 1987-8, Weir 1988-9, Gillingham 1988-9). He fervently argues his

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basic position explicitly: ‘very frequently in the Old Testament itself the poor are mentioned in close association with their counterparts, the rich. To ignore this association is a methodological error’ (1988-9:332). He favours a study of the individual books on poverty in the Old Testament based within the preceding premise. The exegetical question of his study deals with the issue of the

social and economic standpoint from which the Old Testament writers wrote *about* poverty. Did they identify themselves with the rich, the poor, or neither? Were these two the only social and economic classes in ancient Israel (1988-9:333)?

On the one hand, Whybray’s analysis, along with the above quest for the context of the writers, deliberately ignores the theological content and treats the material of the Book of Proverbs as having a

certain objectivity, in so far as it treats these matters in their own right: that is, it is not, as are other relevant Old Testament texts, concerned with legal obligations, cultic or devotional concerns, prophetic preaching, or Deuteronomic or some other comprehensive “theology” (1988-9:333).

On the other hand, he acknowledges but deliberately neglects the implications of the growing evidence concerning the traditional non-literate oral sources for the material in the Book of Proverbs. Instead, his research treats the written proverbial texts on the poor and the rich at best as ‘comments of persons who regard themselves as belonging to neither of these classes: they are a “middle class”, commenting on the two social and economic extremes from the outside’ (1988-9:334). Finally, he interprets the definite meaning of the term ‘poor’ in the Book of Proverbs as being ‘not relative but an absolute term’ (1988-9:334) and goes to the extent of interpreting sentimental proverbs (eg, Pr 15:17, 17:1) as intending to encourage the ‘middle class’ to be satisfied with their lot (1988-9:335). Thus, his monograph, which concretises his ideas regarding wealth and poverty proverbs, in my view, takes the preceding conservative *status quo* perspective into further account. From the beginning he presupposes that the Book of Proverbs ‘nowhere gives any hint of a changing situation or of a pressing need for change. What we see here is a self-portrait of a society on the whole uncritical of the *status quo*’ (1990:10).

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More importantly, his conclusion (1990:113-117) on the subject of wealth and poverty reiterates the above mentioned viewpoint, making three assumptions:

- All the various authors of poverty proverbs had material possessions to a lesser or greater degree.
- The voice of the experiences of the poor themselves is missing in these proverbs.
- The social aspect of a caring community is also lacking.

However, I have observed in Whybray a gradual change of view, from advocating an ‘official’ solution, to the ‘popular’ solution regarding the social location of the Book of Proverbs (cf. Whybray 1965:33-71; Whybray 1974:33-39; Whybray 1990:11-74; Whybray 1994; Whybray 1995:28-33). In this process however, Whybray has not changed his ideas as to the theology of the proverbs on poverty. Notwithstanding, his theological stance on poverty continues to receive support from scholars, especially the Western exponents of the ‘popular’ social milieu of the Book of Proverbs.

Golka’s (1993:68) ‘poor and rich’ theme makes the cross-cultural assertion that when ‘compared to Africa, the Hebrew proverbs place emphasis on almsgiving...also take a more positive view of poverty by placing virtue above wealth’, which is a clear example of support for Whybray’s viewpoint (cf. also Golka 1993:69). I concur with his main argument which advocates that the ordinary African people are the source of the comparative proverbs he used in the study. But I find Golka’s endorsement of charity as a solution to poverty to be a contradiction in terms of an interpretation based on the popular social location of the Book of Proverbs. First, because his suggestion of the similarity both in Africa and in the Ancient Near East of people with a lower economic status is not specific as to which period of African history is being considered in his study. Second, no elaboration of the social organisation of the African society and the Israelite society is involved in his interpretation of poverty proverbs.

Washington’s study of ‘wealth and poverty’ appears to be too supportive of the *status quo*. This is evident, for example, in his reading of the Book of Proverbs 14:20, 19:4 and 19:6-7 as ‘describing the social isolation of the poor’ plus his

concluding emphasis that ‘while village wisdom of this sort acknowledges an indisputable social fact, it holds little redemptive potential for the poor’ (1994:198). The present thesis finds these suggestions to be portraying a view just short of sanctioning a *status quo* for the poor in society: that the poor should accept their fate. Moreover, Washington’s study appears to ignore the social forces of community and cooperation which play a part in the survival of ordinary people. On the one hand, he has not sufficiently grasped the power of folklore so that he cannot use the preceding communal social aspects in the interpretation of proverbs on poverty. On the other hand, he applies the Ancient Near Eastern background and socio-historical context for the purpose of understanding poverty in the Book of Proverbs. The latter accords the elite a major role in his interpretation of poverty proverbs.

From my viewpoint, the above suggestions regarding the poor in the Book of Proverbs seem to complicate the position of the poor as an existential problem in Africa on two grounds:

On the one hand, the expositions seem to question the relevance of the Bible as the living Word with transforming capacity. On the other hand, the suggestions also appear to frustrate efforts to effect changes in society because they emphasise the sanctioning of the *status quo*. In terms of the two perspectives, I suggest that the fate of those who are poor is ambiguous, especially in Africa, since the crisis of poverty has not been effectively solved in the Western biblical studies cited. In other words the continued dissemination of such teaching on poverty among African Christians in any form or means may have been the cause of the worsening state of poverty in Africa. It is the latter reason which encourages me to investigate further the reasons behind those expositions.

The *status quo* interpretation of poverty proverbs in the Book of Proverbs is based on the following two reasons, in my view:

- 1) Most studies, whether on the subject of poverty in the Old Testament as a whole, or only in the Book of Proverbs, were carried out by Western scholars or what Holter has called the ‘rich north’ (cf. Holter 1998:240-254; Holter 2000). Thus, since it is increasingly being suggested (cf. Speckman 2001:9) that no exegete comes to a biblical text without the biases of his/her social location, in this case, we may

speculate that the affluence of the north has influenced these Western interpretations. Such an unconscious social context may be behind the Western exegete's continued 'preoccupation with foreign scribal models that for many years fostered the view that this part of the book [of Proverbs] must be the work of a learned class rather than of the common Israelite' (Whybray 1995:26). In my opinion, it appears that the presupposed Ancient Near Eastern intellectual achievement and affluence becomes too easily understandable to the thought constructs of the Western scholars. In many respects, the presumptions of the Ancient Near East models closely relate to the predominant mentality of globalisation in Western culture and technology. The Western aspects of affluent cultural and technological life are exported as wholesale packages with imperialistic wrappings into developing countries today.

In support of the foregoing argument, Gottwald (1993:3) has generalised that the predominant Western biblical interpretation is entrenched in a Euro-American, unconscious, social context. The latter has caused Western scholars to persist in resisting the integration of social scientific methods on the grounds that the historical critical (Western) method is the 'correct' one, while the social scientific approaches are not yet stabilised. Therefore for the researcher, such an unconscious social context behind Western biblical scholarship calls for a critical awareness in reading the growing plethora of literature on the subject of poverty, especially as it appears in the Book of Proverbs.

2) I agree with Holter (2002:4) that some extreme suggestions have been made by some African scholars regarding what may appear as an intended neglect of ordinary people. The presumption that Western biblical scholars, for instance, have detested Africans' capacity to reflect theologically is a little far-fetched and an ideologically loaded assertion. Nwasike (1976:64) suggests that the latter 'confusion has its origin in the peculiar development of ideas about Africa and Africans. Various writers had assumed, and some still do, that Africans were incapable of logical thought and perception'. Taylor, for instance, argued strongly that 'the adult African concept of selfhood has retained affinities with the consciousness of children' and that few would deny this (1977:46). Thus Holter's caution will be attended to throughout so as to enable a more balanced evaluation in this research.

What appears obvious in both these reasons, from my point of view as an African, is the recognition that for too long, the so called ‘rich north’ has thought about our problem of poverty in Africa before we have. Such an exercise has not born viable solutions to the challenge of poverty in Africa. Even the worsening situation has led to the development of some extreme ideological reactions from African scholars against the ‘rich north’. But I believe in the former’s genuine concern to address the issue of dehumanisation in our society, which is aimed at provoking and motivating the will to arise to the challenge. Thus, the time is ripe for those at the margins in Africa, the ‘poor south’, to voice what we think of our African church and the continent’s problem of poverty as an example, but in a more appropriate manner (cf. Holter 2002:113-114).

1.3 Presuppositions with respect to the transformational possibilities of African proverbs

The concern of this sub-section is to analyse some aspects of functions of African proverbs which have possible transforming capacity. It is a fact that proverbs are a universal phenomenon (cf. Westermann 1995:132-133). In all African societies, proverbs are very common and a highly valued aspect of the rich oral traditions. Therefore, an understanding of the reason for their prevalence is a priority. It is also helpful in their interpretation, as the following analysis of their potential shows.

First, proverbs are part and parcel of the wisdom which may be regarded as embodying the complete principle or truth of a fairly large portion of experiential knowledge. In the preceding sense, their use is understood: to produce ‘a fundamental disposition, attitude, which influences the behaviour of the person who holds it’ (Dzobo 1982:92, 101; cf. also Mieder 1994:2). In other words, proverbs can be said to reflect someone’s practical frame of orientation and philosophy of life or worldview. Such is the idea contained in the following Akan proverbs: *Nyasa nye sika na woak yekyere asie*. Literally: ‘Wisdom is not (like) gold which may be kept in a safe’. And ‘One does not collect wisdom in a bag, lock it up in a box and then come to say to a friend: “Teach me something”’ (Dzobo 1982:92). The important point presupposed behind the proverbs is that the truth contained in them is a ‘living, creative and

productive principle, which has the power to create new situations, to promote growth and effect rejuvenation' (Dzobo 1982:96 cf. also 1982:97, 101). The above African principle and attitude towards truth as life-promoting allows no compromise with all types of falsification and lying, which are deemed by African society to be 'death'. The Sukuma ancestors say: *Mungu wizaga haha wanichenba Waniwilaga bulomolomo*: 'A man came and stabbed me. He lied to me' (Nussbaum 1996). Therefore, 'transformational' in the present thesis takes the positive sense of a truth that brings about a better situation, over and against 'death'; the latter may be interpreted as the conservation of the *status quo* of the poor.

Second, the use and function of African proverbs as tools in the formulating of the African worldview is basically that they are presupposed to be effective communicative tools. From the perspective of the present thesis, a uniform African worldview is preferred. Such a worldview exhibits four common features across sub-Saharan Africa:

[B]elief in and reverence of the eternal divine mystery;...acknowledgement of the intrinsic unity between individuals and communities;...viewing the universe as an interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent whole;...embracing life as a process of spiritual and moral formation, reformation, and transformation (Mosha 2000:15).

In this holistic approach to life the communicative dynamics of the proverb as an art form appear to be crucial. The proverbs' rhetorical, inventive, provocative and revealing language, based on beliefs and everyday life details, plays a large part in evoking the innermost reflection in a person, which may motivate him or her to a practical faith and moral action. The importance of the head as referring to the place of wisdom in a person is epitomised in the Akan proverb: *Wuso owo ti a, nea aka nyinaa ye hama*: 'If you get hold of the snake's head, the rest of its body is a (mere) string' (Nussbaum 1996). A similar proverb is also found among the Fante and the Ewe, where it is said of the Ewe and the Twi: "to be human is to have a live head", this is to say, to be intellectually alert, to grasp mentally things in terms of their fundamental principles' (Dzobo 1982: 91, 86); otherwise the head is deemed to be dead. Many more studies of proverbs emphasise proverbial rhetoric as a device of effective oration (cf. Andrzejewski 1968:74-85; Kudadije 1995:19; Mugo 1991:25; Grobler 1994:93).

Such a communication capacity suggests the proverbs' ability, in funeral ceremonies, to deal with general anxieties associated with death and sickness for the

purpose of psychological and medical treatment. This communicative possibility also provides for the use of proverbs in conveying teachings, morals, education and psychological messages which can affect a person's faith and actions in one way or another. Reference has also been made to proverbs' echoing an experience of the observation, discernment and appraisal of problematic situations (cf. Dalfovo 1991:48). The important point being made in these suggestions is that proverbs appear to possess an inherent educative and communicative power (cf. Boateng 1985:109-122; Owan 1997:161-166), which reinforces the perceptions of their inherent power to transform situations (cf. Arewa & Dundes 1964:70-85).

Third, proverbs have been used as tools for social approbation and the control of behaviour. In this sense, it is suggested that the person's astuteness, shrewdness and doggedness in the use of proverbs is what makes them effective. Consequently, the application of their descriptive and prescriptive nature controls social actions without the use of force. This is done by uttering proverbs of shame or praise with the major aim of getting a person out of a crisis situation without losing face. Acting with coolness is highly valued among the Ewe and the Akan because it represents a person's maturity or wisdom (cf. Dzobo 1982:92). Swartz (1966:94-95) seems to have observed the 'right' facts in discussing the similar concept of mature behaviour among the Bena of Tanzania. For the latter ethnic group, maturity was characterised by 'elaborate politeness, amiability, and ingratiating behaviour', with a resistance to showing 'even the mildest hostility'. Swartz has been correctly criticised by Magesa (1997:236) for the negative interpretation of 'distrust', 'dependence' and 'hostility', rendered as the secretive instead of the open behaviour of the Bena (cf. also Ngunangwa 1986^{*}).

Fourth, another premise underlying the effectiveness of proverbs' transforming possibilities is the assumption in the Akan proverb: *Nsem nyinaa ne Nyame*: 'All wisdom is from God'. On the one hand, this assertion suggests that proverbs are being used as devices to offer explanations for situations which are beyond comprehension, such as acts of God (cf. Bergsuma 1970:151-163). In other words, they seem to display a high potential for conserving and conveying the society's traditions, institutions, values and culture. At the same time, the assertion

* Ngunangwa studies in detail the content of the Bena curriculum of education, namely, 'Bena formation' (*imivedzehedze gya va-Bena*) or 'Bena transformation rites' (*Amawungo gawuvina ga va-Bena*) or 'Mature and maturing rites of the Bena' (*Ifiwungo fyawuvina ifya va-Bena*) that concern the development of **Ubuntu** (humanness) among these people.

suggests a basic theological element about the collectivity of the worldview as a public property in African society. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, African societies hold a holistic worldview: a perspective based on the existence of a Supreme Divinity who makes all human existence possible and worthwhile (cf. Booth 1977:6; Burton 1981:84-90; Mosha 2000:15). In the latter suggestion there appears to be a scholarly agreement even between conflicting African traditional religion studies, for example, Mbiti ([1969] 1989:92) and his critic P'Bitek (1971:109).

However, in spite of the above positive transformational possibilities of proverbs it is also important to be cautious of certain adverse usages and functions of the proverbial material in African societies. Conservatism has been critiqued as an outstanding negative characteristic of some African proverbs. Their usage in some instances seems to ‘thwart innovation in African traditional societies and reinforce conservative values. They have been status quo-oriented rather than change-oriented’ (Healey & Sybertz 1996:35). Owing to the patriarchal nature of most African cultures women have been the main victims of many of the proverbs’ oppressive elements. Schipper explicitly names this as gender abuse:

Many proverbs dictate a woman’s role and behaviour and this gives an image of what ‘society’ expects from her. The wishful thinking is that women should preferably be submissive, speak little, work hard, produce children....The only category of women generally favourably portrayed seems to be the mother: unique, loving, reliable, hard-working (1993:8).

Similarly, the socio-critical feminist biblical perspectives have constructively contributed to the identification of oppressive elements in the Hebrew Bible texts as tools of power for the ruling male class. To confront this major problem in the biblical text they have brought a sensitive awareness of ‘Western malestream epistemological frameworks’ for biblical interpretations (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:165; Habel 1995:283–287). In particular, some feminists have examined cross-cultural comparative wisdom literature (cf. especially Masenya 1997:6-7; Oduyoye 1995:173-174) to establish the reflection of the patriarchy of the biblical texts in the domination and subordination of women by men. But despite all this debate, the present researcher suggests that the presence of conservatism in proverbial material should not be taken as a matter of fact. It has already been noted that conservatism puts a limit on the transforming effect of the reality envisaged in the proverbial wisdom. In that sense, then, to put much emphasis on it might be too high a price to pay for the existential problem of poverty in Africa today, since in my view the positive

perspective suggested by the proverb has priority today when we are seeking an empowering means of challenging poverty.

Hence, I concur with Oduyoye (1995:63) that ‘we deceive ourselves if we think that all women who have not spoken up are satisfied with their lot in that society’. In fact the latter is the reason behind the feminist biblical search for an emancipating paradigm that seeks both to

understand biblical texts and tradition but also to provide space for transforming both wo/men’s self-understanding, self-perception, and self-alienation *and* Western malestream epistemological frameworks, individualistic apolitical practices, and socio-political relations of cultural colonization (Schüssler Fiorenza 2001:165).

The preceding statement recognises the prevalence of a domination of sorts over powerless people. In addition, it goes a step further by either engaging the victims or identifying with them in order to empower them in resisting the evils regarding human development.

Therefore the prevalence of proverbs is one indication that African societies have been concerned with the development of a high quality, self-assertive or critical thinking behaviour in people. Such a development in self-assertiveness, that is, being ‘careful or meticulous in examining our own thinking and that of others in order to improve our understanding’ (Penaskovic 1997:160, cf. also Penaskovic 1997:3-18) facilitates an improvement in a particular human situation and continuous enhancement of human life or **ubuntu** among African peoples. Much of what is going on in daily life is understood, accepted or rejected in various ways via the **ubuntu** worldview. In order to draw out the potential inherent in the **ubuntu** philosophy for the understanding of biblical texts, an interpretative strategy is needed. The following sub-section will explain the approach used in this thesis to deal with the various aspects considered in the statement of the problem.

1.4 Methodological issues in the interpretation of biblical proverbs

A variety of methods will be used to address the topic of the present research, enabling it to benefit from the interdisciplinary nature of this variety. It is hoped that the use of such methodologies will facilitate the identification of the transformational possibilities of texts in particular situations. Hence, it is argued that only when an

appropriate interpretation strategy is applied to a biblical text, is it possible to apply the texts in a meaningful way to particular contexts (cf. Speckman 2001:9).

First, the thesis uses African proverbs as the point of departure for re-reading selected texts from the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. The aim is to highlight the preceding quest by an analysis of the phenomenon of poverty. In the present text, Africa is presupposed to constitute a rich source of proverbial material comparable to that of ancient Israel. In addition, I consider that the proverbial material from both societies originates from the life situation of people at the grassroots, the ‘popular’ social location. Both communities, ancient Israel and Africa, consisted of a majority who belonged to a lower economic stratum. The implication is that I will deal with a definition of poverty arising from the perspective of the ordinary people, people who are themselves experiencing poverty. Such a definition offers a holistic view of and approach to poverty eradication (cf. Kemdirim 1998:68-79). It is necessary to make this point clear from the start, because in the contemporary Western materialistic definition of poverty it is claimed that it is undeniable that ‘Africa is a poor continent’ (Shorter 1999:6). Such a Western definition of poverty is strongly criticised for not according well with the African context (cf. Dickson 1984:226; Kemdirim 1998:68-79). To this we will return later.

Second, the African perspective can be viewed as a contribution towards the struggle of the church in Africa to explicate and adopt a holistic view of development. According to Speckman this perspective concerns a biblical interpretation that enables the role of the church to prepare the ‘people for full participation in production and distribution of economic goods and services, and the effective management of economic surplus’ (2001:2). In other words, it concerns biblical teaching which empowers people by developing their human capacity and creating transforming possibilities. From the preceding two points, one may infer that an approach integrating the following biblical hermeneutical methods is self-critical. It is also critical of the selected proverbial texts to be used in this study.

- The social anthropological method will be used as a critical guide in this thesis to ascertain six sensitive qualities of the proverbial material used (cf. Wilson 1977:11-18, 1980:15-16): that of material collected by correct social scientific methods; correct contextual interpretation of the material; material with a wide ethnic range; consideration of the cultural material on its own merit;

ascertaining the quality of the similarity between the cultural material and the biblical text; and controlling the cross-cultural comparison with the biblical text. The Book of Proverbs is regarded as a literature collection without a performance context. It displays an ideological bias on account of being a tool of the elite and ruling class in ancient Israel. Therefore, the social anthropological approach is helpful in reconstructing other possible dynamics behind the poverty proverbs that appear to elude historical criticism with its emphasis on the historical context. Similarly my emphasis on Africa as a key to interpreting the Masoretic text will be informed by a ‘popular’ social context. Such a ‘popular’ performance context of the proverbial material requires a proper observance of the social anthropological methodology (cf. Manus 2003:21-52; Ukpong 1995:3-14, 1999:107-121; Niditch 1993:4, 1993:67-87).

- The historical-critical method will be employed to analyse and interpret the selected texts in relation to their historical backgrounds. For this thesis it is important to understand biblical times and the developmental process through which the biblical text came into being. This aspect is necessary, particularly to explain why the results of Western biblical scholars seem to suggest a conservative outlook adopted by the Book of Proverbs on poverty. Textual criticism and lexical analysis are used to provide a closer reading of texts. Hence, the focus of historical criticism here falls on the socio-political environment of the biblical period, with the aim of reconstructing the dynamics underlying the selected proverbial texts. Using the reconstructed dynamics it will be possible to raise new questions that can be freshly answered by investigating similar African proverbs for the presence of comparable transforming forces.
- Rhetorical criticism is deployed in this thesis in order to perceive the underlying argument of the theme of poverty in the shape, *genre* and conventions of the selected biblical proverbial text itself as it stands. The meaning of a text depends on the crucial point of how the text should be read; that is, in terms of the *genre* and the conventions of the literary culture of the context to which the interpreter belongs. In short, the rhetorical approach in my particular case study uses the *genre* of proverbs with its parallelisms of

word-pairs and chiasms to clarify and reinforce the reader's conception of the theme contained in the selected proverbial material.

- A contextual approach is followed in this thesis because one's understanding of the biblical texts is not free from the thought constructs of one's own life situation. Hence, my interpretation of the proverbs on poverty in the Book of Proverbs also derives from my cultural background, experiences, identity and questions regarding the situation of poverty in Africa, Tanzania. Contextual criticism in my context helps my studying of the proverbial material on poverty by raising new questions or shedding a new light on old questions. The preceding application goes hand in hand with the hermeneutics of suspicion, which seeks to identify elements supporting an oppressive *status quo* and a resistance to change (cf. Conn 1976:403).

Therefore, the African reading referred to in the present thesis is contextually orientated in order to be sensitive to the situation of interpretation. Such an approach employs the services of a wide range of exegetical methods (eg, historical criticism, rhetorical criticism et cetera) and includes methods derived from social anthropological disciplines (eg, a social anthropological approach). All the tools of exegesis in this thesis are permeated by an African folklorist reading. The goal of all these methods is to enable one to gain a deeper understanding of the poverty proverbs in the biblical Book. In particular, an integration of these approaches is of major importance not only for the development of an Africanised biblical scholarship, but also for the more general Africanisation of the humanities.

1.4.1 The structure of the thesis

In Chapter One the major focus has been to identify the Euro-American interpretations of poverty proverbs in the Book of Proverbs and their pessimism concerning the alleviation of poverty among African peoples. I have argued that the African proverbial material indicates the presence of transformational possibilities.

Chapter Two details the pessimistic outlook on poverty of the Book of Proverbs as perceived in Westernised studies. It also focuses on the establishment of a

background to the need of an African perspective on poverty which can be used to understand the biblical proverbs on poverty.

Chapter Three focuses on the African context for the understanding of African proverbs on poverty in order to enable a satisfactory employment of the cross-cultural hermeneutical method used in the contextual interpretation in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four offers a contextual exegesis of Proverbs 13:7, 13:18, 19:7, 21:13, 13:23, 22:16, 23:10-11, 28:8, 22:7, 28:3, 28:15, 29:14 14:31, 17:5, 22:2 and 29:13.

Chapter Five concludes the whole study by presenting its main lines of argument, pointing out the need for taking account of Africa in Old Testament studies and its implications for contemporary African biblical hermeneutical circles.

Page layout and other elements of style of ‘author date citation and reference list system and abbreviations’ are based on Kilian’s (1985) manual: *Form and Style in Theological Texts: A guide for the use of the Harvard Reference System*.

1.5 Sources for the study

I concur with Speckman’s (2001:4-5) three basic reasons for focusing on the Bible in respect to issues dealing with human development, especially in present day Africa.

- First, the Bible’s ‘sound theological rationale’ legitimates and gives significance to a contextual study.
- Second, because religion is a vital tool for social transformation (cf. Vivian 1965:88) and since the Bible constitutes the most predominantly available ecumenical faith resource used by the majority of people in Africa it makes sense to use it as the main resource for a study into the African perspective on poverty.
- Third, as Mugambi also affirms: ‘deep in the heart the African Christian remains an African’ (2001:16); that is, a holistic approach to life predominates and therefore wholeness of life is essentially the ordinary person’s biblical interpretive tool.

Therefore, the Bible, especially the Old Testament, seems to be closest to the African worldview, which contributes to making it an undeniably effective agent of social change (cf. also Holter 1996:11-12; Masenya 2001:145^{*}). In this thesis, then, the Old Testament book of Proverbs is the primary source for the poverty proverbs to be discussed.

The chief source of African proverbial material is Nussbaum's (1996) updated CD-ROM production of African proverbial collections, studies and bibliographies. The collections contain over 28,000 proverbs, covering a geographical and ethnological spectrum of over 1,200 primary source languages stemming from Africa south of the Sahara. In addition, the proverbs are furnished with translations, explanations, illustrations and indices. Whereas the scholarship section includes comprehensive cultural anthropological studies, reference books, maps, abstracts and book notes, the bibliographical part provides a few full reprints and certain key pages of books and the bibliographies on the subject. The use of this source is fundamental for a prioritisation of socio-cultural integration in a study focusing on the issue of transformation in Africa (cf. Shorter 1990:15). Unlike other African proverbs cited in this thesis, all proverbs are extracted from the African Proverbs CD-ROM (that is, about two-thirds of the 168 proverbs used in this research); therefore I have not indicated any other source at the end of each translation.

In addition, with the source containing so much material gleaned from primary sources, the present study attempts to make possible what may seem to comprise excessively broad generalisations on poverty in Africa. Nevertheless, poverty is a genuine concern for a major part of Africa (cf. Kimilike 1999:9), specifically, sub-Saharan Africa. In view of this situation I find it is timely to prize the cultural and historical unity shown by the similarities in worldviews between the various African ethnic groups and the continent as a whole (cf. Mbon 1987:9; also Mugambi 2001:22).

The African perspective on poverty proverbs also draws significantly from my own *va-Bena* ethnic group experiences, understanding and imagination, in response to the question of poverty in the context of Tanzania as representative of Africa. For this reason the Bena and Swahili proverbial material in this thesis is treated under

^{*} Masenya's (2001:145) comment on the failure of today's Africans to understand the cultural material as being due to loss of Africanness is to a certain extent true, especially in urban areas, because of the unprecedented influx of the disco, TV and other technological Euro-American cultures (cf. also Holter, forthcoming).

conventional sources. Swahili is my country's, Tanzania's, national language, used in daily life activities more extensively than my *Bena* mother tongue. Thus the *Bena* and the Swahili proverbs (that is, about a third of 168 proverbs used in this thesis) unless otherwise indicated constitute a conventional collection. The rest of the proverbs originate from secondary sources, indicated at the end of each proverbial translation. These sources include various monographs, books, commentaries and journal articles which are gleaned from the Old Testament and related bibliographies on the subject (eg, Holter 2002; Mieder 1994; *The African Proverbs Series* 1997; etc).

1.6 Scope and limitations of the project

The major aim of this section is to present a few reasons for the scope and delimitation of the present thesis. I have used Nussbaum's (1996) CD-ROM for the African proverbs, which is limited to the African ethnic groups in the sub-Saharan region. Therefore, my title's reference to *An African Perspective* will be limited basically to that geographical area and to the common elements of the African worldview within that boundary. This is however not to be taken as a denigration of the contribution of the communities of North Africa, such as the Maghreb. I support Mugambi's (2001:22) opinion on the irrelevance of holding fast to political borders and cultural differences in today's situation in Africa. Nevertheless, Nussbaum's CD-ROM, the remarkable Christian numerical growth and the rapid spiritual developments in this part of the continent, offer enough justification to limit this thesis to Africa south of the Sahara. The importance of the last mentioned *raison d'être* for the scope of the present research is quite obvious, according to Holter's study.

One reason for this is the fact that the numerical—and probably also spiritual—centre of Christianity is drifting southwards. Africa is a major exponent of this development, as sub-Saharan Africa throughout the 20th century has more or less become a Christian continent. This has important consequences for the global distribution of institutionalized theological and biblical studies (2000:2).

The accuracy of Holter's comment on the sub-Saharan African Christian developments is well surveyed in the *World Christian Encyclopedia* ([1982] 2001).

Mbiti (1986:228) in an earlier survey terms the figures in this source a ‘statistical reality’, suggesting the claimed rapid numerical growth of African Christianity.*

Second, the importance of limiting the present thesis to the Book of Proverbs is two-fold. On the one hand, Proverbs is a central book in the Hebrew Bible, yet for one reason or another, it has frequently suffered neglect or disparagement by many renowned biblical scholars (cf. Heim 1998:194, Farmer 1998:138). According to Farmer (1998:137) some of the reasons which lead to such a negative treatment of the book are simply argued in terms of the ‘wisdom’s lack of dependence on covenantal themes and its consistent avoidance of reference to Israel’s history as the “chosen” people’. On the other hand, the concerns contained in the Wisdom literature, in particular in the Book of Proverbs, are at best very close to or even more at home with the facts in ordinary African people’s daily activities.

The similarity between the two cross-cultural proverbial materials has been established by biblical scholars. Therefore, I agree with O’Connor (1995:183) who expresses the opinion that the concerns portrayed in proverbs as part and parcel of human existence contain ‘alternative theological visions that can modify and expand traditional OT theologies to meet some of these challenges’ (cf. also Owan 1997). In fact, the feminist discussions founded on the preceding ideas have generated firm alternatives which are inclusive and liberating and which have contributed enormously to the critique of the otherwise patriarchal biblical scholarship (cf. Masenya 1994; 1997; 1999).† The above methods used in the feminist debate have led to my choice of the theme of poverty in the Book of Proverbs, which is yet another characteristic theme in this Book, having an enormous deposit of proverbs which needs particular attention (cf. also Whybray 1988-9:332). The two situations are synonymous: that is, the situation of the cultural, social, economic and political marginalisation of women is part of poverty at an inclusive level.

Third, it is known that poverty is one of the greatest problems in Africa today (cf. Akao 2000:41). It is common knowledge that in the postcolonial and post-modern world, especially, African governmental and church institutions are engaged in seeking possible means to address poverty in its social, economic and political dimensions. In global terms, poverty alleviation-cum-eradication by a self-sustainable

* Mbiti’s (1986:235-241) data is extracted from Barret, Kurian & Johnson’s (1982) *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative study of churches and religions in the modern world AD 1900-2000* (1st Edition).

† A recent standard general presentation of feminist criticism of the Bible is that of Fiorenza (2001).

development in the above mentioned aspects of life was the major concern of the 2002 Earth Summit held in South Africa under the auspices of the United Nations.

Speckman (2001:13-34) provides a sound but brief survey of some of the dynamics involved in causing dependency, need and conditions of beggary, which are very negative in human development terms. His suggestion regarding an alternative theory of development is based on the adverse effects of the foreign aid extended to developing nations not only in Africa, but also in Latin America and Asia to date. The same aid has made the poverty situation in those countries even worse. Speckman deals with South Africa as a case. But in a similar sense Akao joins him by extending the poverty issue to a more general existential problem for the whole of Africa. Akao questions: ‘As poverty touches the greater percentage of the population in Africa...what contribution is African biblical theology making in proffering solutions to the problem’ (2000:42)? For this reason, the focus of the present thesis falls on the proposed alternative principle: ordinary people’s inner motivation for active participation in their own holistic rehabilitation from poverty.

Lastly, it would be interesting and rewarding to offer an interpretation which covers all the poverty texts in the Book of Proverbs. However, within the time and space limits set for the present thesis that will not be possible. The following representative texts will be dealt with in detail in the fourth chapter: Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, 22:2, 29:13, 13:7, 13:18, 19:7, 21:13, 13:23, 22:16, 23:10-11, 28:8, 22:7, 28:3, 28:15 and 29:14. Their selection has been based on catchwords from the Masoretic text which suggest the possibility of theological potential, human insight and literary style. In addition, the few texts selected will suffice to explicate and exemplify the purpose of this study.

1.7 Significance of the research for the problem of poverty in Africa today

The approach undertaken by this project and its theme sets out to achieve a number of relevant objectives regarding the problem of poverty in Africa today. It seems quite clear that Western studies are inadequately reflecting and expressing the hermeneutical concerns of the African context. Therefore, the most important aspect of the present thesis is that it represents an African initiative contributing to the Africanisation of biblical scholarship. It addresses the question of poverty as a

hermeneutical concern of the African context from an African perspective. Akao endorses this in a similar suggestion:

[I]deologically, the common practice of assuming to know what the poor need to get out of the state of poverty should be abandoned because the poor have their own way of learning and a different world view which should be appreciated if they are to be maximally helped (2000:54).

The above citation criticises biblical interpretations on poverty based within capitalistic systems as being defective where Africa's poverty eradication cause is concerned (cf. also Cochrane & West 1991:1). It applauds an indigenous African perspective that tries to understand the transforming possibilities emerging from within society as the primary solution to poverty in Africa today. This perspective is used as a key to understanding the Old Testament poverty texts. The present thesis exemplifies the approach by limiting its interpretation to a few poverty proverbs in the biblical Book. The importance of this approach is that it facilitates a down-to-earth teaching that can help ordinary African Christians to grapple earnestly with the issue of integrating faith and daily life activities. In other words, my major focus or object of transformation is a liberating African biblical hermeneutic, which confronts a history of traditional Western biblical scholarship with its inability to deal with contextual issues (eg, poverty, HIV/AIDS, landlessness), and whose focus has been on the abstract and the significance of the 'spiritual' lives of the believers.

The secondary significance of the research is geared toward the critical analysis of the presuppositions and potentialities which underlie the concepts of an Africanisation of biblical scholarships. I acknowledge that concrete scientific methodology is a vital tool in order to render as accurate as possible a relevant Africanised interpretation on poverty (cf. Akao 2000:42).

1.8 Conclusion

To sum up, the Bena express the topic of this chapter with the proverb: *Kwejihumile ngolo kwejibitila nongwa*: 'It originates from an alarm and proceeds to a prosecution court case'. This proverb means that before an event can happen, there must have been something to trigger it. In so far as the present thesis is concerned, there is an obvious dichotomy in biblical scholarship studying the social location of the Book of

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Proverbs. A follow-up along the lines of the ‘popular’ social location of proverbs detects the contradiction between the Western and African understanding of the function of proverbial materials. Western scholars seem to perceive the poverty proverbs in the Book of Proverbs as conservative; thus as sanctioning the *status quo*. However, some African scholars perceive that on the whole, proverbs display a transforming potential aimed at enhancing **ubuntu** or humanness. Such a discrepancy is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

2 A SURVEY OF WESTERN AND AFRICAN INTERPRETATIONS OF POVERTY PROVERBS IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

2.1 Introduction

The leading survey questions for this chapter include the following, which are developed in terms of a transformational perspective: Do the biblical interpretations of poverty support and maintain the *status quo* or do they promote creativity and transformation in society? Do the biblical interpretations of poverty posit values which can result in inequality or equity in society? Do the biblical interpretations of poverty help the poor to develop a mature self-assertiveness, which will enable them to be an analytical, creative, free, active and responsible society? To achieve its aims, this chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section will focus on Western biblical studies of poverty in the Book of Proverbs. Its analysis clarifies some of the interpretations of poverty proverbs, interpretations which basically conserve the *status quo*. The second analyses African biblical and anthropological proverbial studies, and lays down the basic possible groundwork for a liberating and transforming interpretation of the proverbs on the poor.

2.2 Western interpretations of poverty proverbs in the Book of Proverbs

Most Western studies of the Book of Proverbs have for long relied on the opinion that the book is the work of the elite rather than the poor Israelite masses. As a result, the biblical interpreters have used in their studies cultural models originating in the neighbouring, allegedly advanced, foreign nations (cf. Whybray 1995:26). Therefore, the aim of this sub-section is basically to present a critique and analytical discussion of such studies in terms of some issues resulting from the use of such models. In order to achieve this target, the following questions are posed: What constitutes Israel's literary dependence on its Ancient Near Eastern neighbours? What cultural ideals (values, patterns, social structures and the worldview regarding poverty and the poor) are assumed to be held in common by the Ancient Near Eastern nations? What are the positive and negative results of the above Ancient Near Eastern connections for a

balanced appreciation of the Israelite understanding of poverty (cf. also Murphy 1998:xxvii)?

2.2.1 The Ancient Near Eastern parallels

Previously, I mentioned the presence of the two scholarly groups involved in the discussion of the social location of the Old Testament proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, namely, the proponents of the ‘official’ solution and those of the ‘popular’ solution (cf. Kimilike 2002:255). In fact, the distinctions between the two positions are based on the characteristics of the proverbs. One of the common arguments favouring the ‘official’ solution to the social location of the Book of Proverbs is based on those characteristics which confirm its similarity to the development of wisdom in the Ancient Near East (cf. Clement 1992:17; Crenshaw 1981:212). A short survey of those historical lines of research showing an affinity to the Ancient Near East is necessary in order to see their effects on the interpretation of poverty proverbs.

The flood of studies containing the notion that Israelite wisdom had its origins in the Ancient Near Eastern culture began with the discovery and publication of the Teaching of Amenemope in the 1920s (cf. also, Whybray 1995:33; Murphy 1998:288). This international influence on Israelite wisdom, however, is accepted to varying degrees in the Western critical biblical interpretations. On the one hand, in certain circles, one finds a reflection of the idea which propagates the Solomonic authorship based on

- the superscription (eg, Pr 1:1, 10:1, 25:1) and
- Solomon’s alleged brilliant and clearly defined reputation for wisdom (eg, 1 Ki 3:10-13, 4:29-34, 10:1-10).

Such a position is observed in the New Evangelical Translation of the Book of Proverbs when it comments that ‘to assume numerous unknown redactors, editors, wisdom schools, and circles of wise men, who learning of Solomon’s “alleged” wisdom formulated the book under his name, is pure speculation’ (1991:xiii).

The preceding stance seems to deny any influence of the Ancient Near Eastern material on Israelite proverbial wisdom. The reason behind the denial of the links comes from the understanding that the religious influences and lifestyles of Israel differ from those of the neighbouring Ancient Near Eastern nations (cf. New Evangelical Translation 1991:72). Some of the differences are briefly commented on by Crenshaw (1981:212). The Solomonic superscription theory seems to be favoured by Childs (1979:551-552) who also does not wish to emphasise the Proverbs' analogy with the Ancient Near East, especially Egypt.

The evaluation offered by Ceresko (1999:13) is that Western thinking has been inclined to neglect the influence of Israel's neighbours on the Book of Proverbs and Wisdom literature in general (eg, Job 1:3; Mt 2:1-2). On the one hand, Ceresko's evaluation then is supportive of the advocates of Solomonic authorship and indirectly of Childs' canonical approach to the Book of Proverbs. On the other hand, however, Ceresko's evaluation speaks against a flood of scholarly analyses based on the wisdom of Egypt (cf. Murphy 1998:288) referred to earlier in this section. Murphy's comment concerning the increased debate is derived from the more than seventy years of research into the Book of Proverbs following the discovery and publication of the Egyptian Teaching of Amenemope.

Despite these conflicting situation(s) however, both responses to Ceresko suggest that the responsibility of coining and collating proverbs should be located in and/or around the 'official' circles of ancient Israel. The argument for the Solomonic authorship is part of the 'official' social location of the Book of Proverbs, the effect of which on the understanding of proverbs relating to poverty will be considered later. At this point, I will proceed to develop my hypothesis in terms of the comparative analyses based on the second response. The intention is to critically analyse their understanding on poverty based on proverbial similarities which are claimed to have been borrowed from the Ancient Near Eastern wisdom culture.

In one way or another many scholars express the conviction that the literary and content forms of Israelite wisdom reflect international influence. The direct parallelism of form found in Proverbs 22:17-24:22 is taken as the most common example of the proverbial material drawn from the Egyptian Teaching of Amenemope. It is argued that the latter antedates the former in its literary development. Thus, from the Western perspective, it simply makes sense to propose that at the height of Israel's development, it imported (in significant quantities) the

developed literature of the older sapiential traditions of Egypt and Mesopotamia (cf. Ceresko 1999:32, 1999:60; Clements 1992:20-24, 1992:40; Schmid 1966; Würthwein 1970:197-216; Bryce 1979:87ff). In my view it is this inclination towards the origins of Israelite wisdom as stemming from the elitist circles of Israel that has contributed to the devaluation of the grassroots oral evaluation of proverbs in Western biblical interpretations.

On the one hand, some scholars indicate straightforward reluctance to pursue the earliest Israelite folk traditions. These writers cite the concise nature of the proverbial material that makes it difficult to define the folk proverbs, as the reason for their hesitancy (cf. Clements 1992:23). On the other hand, other scholars, such as Von Rad, opt for an apologetic defence of their failure to pursue the oral proverbial sources further. In their studies they show an awareness of the strong possibility of the existence of oral sources. However, they are reluctant to take it into consideration because

- they are too difficult to analyse and define
- there is no proof yet of their relationship to the wisdom school.

Therefore, they are content to treat the Book of Proverbs in the form of the latter, that is, the wisdom school (cf. Von Rad 1972:11; Clements 1992:124).

The position taken by Von Rad confirms the difficulties engendered by many Western intellectuals and may relate to their own social background. It is an indisputable fact that Western culture thrives on literature that has replaced much of the oral communication tradition prevalent in non-literate societies. As a matter of fact, the appreciation of folklore has become difficult for scholars in this culture. This may also explain why they have deliberately opted for such an approach to the biblical proverbs, a departure that is claimed to be understood in terms of the Ancient Near Eastern context. Perhaps they assume that their own modern educated society is similar to that which used to constitute the neighbours of ancient Israel. I also suggest that the preceding context explains the reason why some recent commentators on the Book of Proverbs continue to rely on the Egyptian influence: a claim that is said to be exemplified by a comparison of Proverbs 22:17-23:11 with the Teaching of

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Amenemope (eg, Murphy 1998:288; Ceresko 1999:60; O'Connor 1995:187; Washington 1994:135-146; 1994:203).

In addition to the emphasis on the literary link between the Israelite and Egyptian traditions, strong suggestions have been made regarding the importation to Israel of other, already developed, older traditions from the Ancient Near East, particularly those of Mesopotamia. These views are represented in the comparative analogy drawn by Malchow regarding the origins of social justice in the Israelite wisdom literature. He asserts: ‘Thus, it appears that justice for the weak was a common concern throughout the Near East long before Israel existed. Israelite wisdom received this theme from other countries, particularly from their wisdom literature’ (1982:120).

The point addressed in the above argument is that if there is to be a feasible and appropriate understanding of the references to the poor in ancient Israelite wisdom literature, it has to be drawn from its counterpart in the Ancient Near Eastern social and economic environment. Hence the priority of a serious consideration of the corresponding proverbial material from Israelite’s Ancient Near Eastern neighbours, Egypt and Mesopotamia, is emphasised. Crenshaw (1981:213) suggests that the preceding approach to Old Testament wisdom literature is the only means by which Israelite wisdom can be appropriately explained because it is dependent on the Ancient Near Eastern wisdom.

These two emphases of Western biblical interpretation account for these scholars’ preferences for an educational and royal setting of the Israelite proverbial wisdom. The school and the court have been considered as the mediums through which the older civilization of their ‘powerful neighbours’ was transmitted to Israelite culture. In many discussions these biblical scholars treat Israelite wisdom as a carbon copy (cf. Grizzard 2000:195), or a ‘theological reinterpretation’ (Whybray 1990:67) or reformulation of the Ancient Near Eastern wisdom. Such an imposition has far-reaching consequences for one’s understanding of the Israelite proverbial material. Two conclusions can be drawn from the above point:

First, such a view favours the interests of people in the upper social class who are thought to have had the greatest opportunities for foreign contacts, sufficient free time to work on abstract ideas and desires for intellectual advancement (cf. Porteus 1967:79-80). Crenshaw finds a similar emphasis in the scholars’ usage of terms like ‘elite class’, ‘intellectuals’, ‘urban dwellers of landed estates’, ‘courtiers’,

'professional counsellors or teachers' (1993:163; cf. also Boström 1990:239; Pleins 1987: 61-78; Waltke 1979:230-231). Such terms have been critiqued as being ideologically loaded (cf. Golka 1993:35), since their users' emphasis falls rather on the role of these professionals in developing the material in order to emphasise and legitimise their *status quo* in society. Also, the named social classes are said to have developed the details of rituals and written texts as tools for the ruling class (cf. Whitelam 1989:121).

This theory appears to be similar to that advocated by McKane (1965:44) and especially Scott (1960:262-279). The latter emphasises the Egyptian influence on the Israelite royal court system. Skladny (1962) also argues on the basis of the implications of the instructions to royal officials in Proverbs 16:1-22:16. Such an understanding of the origins of the Israelite proverbs accords the authors of this Book only a spectator's role because the proverbs on the poor 'appear to reflect a certain detachment; at least they do not appear to be delivered from personal experiences' (Whybray 1990: 31, 1990:116; the position also held by Pleins 1987). Even the wisdom reflected in the Prologue to the Book of Proverbs is said to be beyond the reach of ordinary people: shepherds, the peasant farmers, the simple craftsmen and the labourers (cf. Habel 1988:33). Hermisson (1968:55), for example, emphasises the profundity and complexity of the thought portrayed by Old Testament proverbs (eg, Pr 14:10, 14:12, 14:13, 19:3, 22:2): a feature which to him places this wisdom beyond the reach of the ordinary folk.

A similar opinion is expressed by Crenshaw (1993:168) when he suggests that the majority of ancient Israelites lacked the desire and opportunity to become literate, a situation which resulted in the existence of a privileged few. This view of the influence exerted on the Book of Proverbs by surrounding nations is supported by what Dennis (1995:82) terms the two fallacies of modern Western thought constructs: 'that a brilliant man [sic] will always produce a brilliant work, and...that the poor are incapable of brilliance'.

I concur with Washington (1994:175) who finds the stance on the 'dull and unreflective' Israelite folk adopted by Hermisson (1968:53-55) to be not only misleading in the study of the Book of Proverbs, but also a reflection of the Westerners' historical prejudice towards the non-literate societies. Therefore, I insist, on the contrary, that the abundance of quality folklore amongst the pre- and/or non-literate societies in Africa (as in Nussbaum 1996 CD-ROM collection) proves that

ordinary people are brilliant, capable of abstract ideas and a love of intellectual development (cf. also Fontaine 1985:94-100; Golka 1983:257-70; Golka 1986:13-36).

Second, the Ancient Near Eastern bias seems to affect the Western students' understanding of Israelite social institutions. Today's intellectual notion of the terms 'father' or 'brother' or 'mother' or 'son' or 'neighbour' for the average contemporary Westerner is based on the emphasis on nuclear households within Western social relationships. The isolated households are engulfed by a city that lacks kinship, extended family, neighbourhood and friendship values. I deduce that this conception of social institutions with no communal values is being imposed on the interpretation of ancient Israel society and wisdom (cf. Clement 1992:123-125). The Westerner's crisis as to the understanding of family explains the struggle by some scholars to comprehend the proverbial 'father – son' relationship. For instance, difficulty is encountered in the picturing of the 'son' where the image appears to exclude adult and aged persons. Thus the tendency is to favour the metaphor of 'teacher - student', which is based on the view of the existence of (hypothetical) schools and isolated household units.

I also argue that Westermann's (1995:24-25, 1995:31) references to 'father-mother-child' are based on the closed and nuclear family values of the West. Informed by such a way of thinking, he suggests the presence of individualism, small farming communities, an absence of brotherly relations and other similar matters in ancient Israel which are in fact common only in Western cultural patterns. Similar is the position suggested by Pleins that 'there is no community among the poor....It is a condition which lacks camaraderie known by the wealthy, i.e. in "civilized society"' (1987:67).^{*} Therefore, I hold a position opposed to an understanding of Israelite social institutions which is merely informed by an understanding of Western social institutions, on the following grounds:

- The latter neglects the Israelites' cultural originality.
- In some Western biblical interpretations, the communal perspective in the Old Testament, and particularly as it is revealed in the Book of Proverbs, appears to be tremendously downplayed. Suggestions of situations like the lack of

^{*} Though the expression 'the poor' in Pleins' reference may give the impression of poverty as a collective concept, as far as it is informed by Western cultural patterns it does not take into account the poverty that affects the majority of people in the Two Thirds World.

community among the poor and brotherly relations, that contradict the facts of the social institutions, values and traditions which were crucial to their survival, support the conservative view of the society.

2.2.2 The holistic nature of the worldview of ancient Israel

A holistic approach is one that relates to the whole of life: that is, all aspects of life are understood to be intrinsically integrated, interrelated and interdependent. Hence, in the Israelite worldview the aspect of religion is at the core and permeates all the beliefs, behaviours and institutions of that society. Such a holistic conception of life, that seems to underpin the social worldview of ancient Israel, is another issue that has engendered differing opinions among Western biblical interpreters. Murphy (1987:449-458) provides a notable evaluation of the spectrum of this scholarly diversity.

Firstly, besides the stance adopted to the international influences on proverbial wisdom described above, emphasis has been placed on the practical and individualised nature of Israelite proverbs. The major reason behind such an emphasis focuses on a kind of high degree of independence originating from both the content and literary context of each proverb. In addition, the proverbs in their present literary collections offer no descriptions of their sociological performance context. Such assumptions have led some interpreters to suggest that Israelite proverbial material is less religious and more independently practical than was at first thought (cf. Eichrodt 1967:81-83; for a detailed discussion cf. also Crenshaw 1970:1-60). In other words, the proverbial material was not being informed by the Yahwistic faith but constituted an independent entity in Israelite thought patterns.

A similar opinion asserts that Israelite wisdom was originally secular and anthropocentric and only became theological either through an independent knowledge of Yahweh's established world order (cf. Gese 1984:198, 1984:206) or through the influence of Israel's faith (cf. Gunkel 1966:383; McKane 1965:15, 1970:10-22). Regarding the latter, McKane argues that originally, whether in Egypt or Israel, the proverbial material was a tool for educating officials; only later did it become a means of indoctrination in Yahwistic piousness (1970:10). In my view his interpretation opposes any consideration of a religious worldview which may inform

the Israelite proverbs. Such a secular understanding of proverbs underlies the conservative position being argued forcefully by Preuss (1974:165-181, 1972:117-145, 1970:393-417) as well. The idea of the secular orientation of the proverbs has also led some biblical scholars to argue that among the Israelites tension existed between human life and the understanding of the divine world order. Grizzard, for instance, suggests that it is too difficult to conceive of the same people as integrating the two perspectives with each other. At most he would rather think of two separate groups based on the two differing views (2000:227). This emphasis on the secular nature of the proverbial material, in my view, stems from the Eurocentric compartmentalisation of life.

Secondly, it is worth noting that the view of the polarity of sacred and profane, as well as the lesser role accorded to religion in the Old Testament proverbial material, have met rejections in some Western scholarly quarters. From a canonical point of view Childs (1979:553) finds McKane's idea on the secular nature of proverbs (1970:10) to be far-fetched. He contests the fact that McKane (1970) posits a redactional view of the Book of Proverbs, which does not accommodate the divine concept of order in the world that basically informed the sages' approach to life. According to Whedbee (1971:118-119), to insist on a faith-free empirical observation of Israelite wisdom is to impose a modern concept, in this case, the Western compartmentalisation of life that misinterprets its intended reality.

A number of biblical scholars seem to support Whedbee's religious position regarding the sages (eg, Murphy 1967:103; Hubbard 1966:18; Waltke 1979:236-237; Weeks 1994:73). One very interesting study is that by Von Rad (1972), who posits the model of a hypothetical Solomonic Enlightenment which was informed by ancient Israelite pan-sacralism. He argues that the older Israelite wisdom was influenced by this intellectual enlightenment construct, whose worldview did not differentiate between an independent idea and faith; reason and revelation; rational experiences and religious experiences. The differentiation understanding is a common thought in the modern interpreter which would have been inconceivable to the sages. Therefore, Von Rad explicitly supports the religious quality of the wisdom experience of the teachers by saying that 'Israel knew nothing of the aporia which we read into these proverbs. It was perhaps her greatness that she did not keep faith and knowledge apart. The experiences of the world were for her always divine experiences as well,

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and the experiences of God were for her experiences of the world' (1972:62). In short, the teachers conceived all truth as born of and controlled by Yahweh.

Crenshaw holds a different view to Von Rad's pan-sacralism of Israelite wisdom. He argues that this pan-sacralism is based on an elevated idea of Solomonic enlightenment, claimed by Von Rad (1972) to have swept away the old holistic view and thereby giving room for a humanised explanation (cf. Crenshaw 1981:52-53; 1976:6-12, 1978). But Crenshaw himself seems to be a victim of modern thinking concerning the relationship of the sacred and the profane in Israelite thought. He imagines secularist and sacral thoughts as subsisting as parallel entities from the start, with an alteration in prominence during Solomon's era (1981:53). However, as a response to Crenshaw's suggested notion of evolution, I find that the possibility exists for a compromise of some kind with Von Rad's theory.

Crenshaw's concept of the three stage evolution of the development of wisdom within ancient Israel is well argued (1981:93-97) and seems to offer evidence of that compromise.

- First stage: wisdom dawned as part of parental nurture centred in the nuclear family in the clan.
- The second stage of wisdom development involved the royal court as a training ground for the nobility or for possible courtiers (also cf. Humphreys 1978:177-90).
- The third stage, presumed to be the latest and last in wisdom development, comprises theological wisdom, which aims at providing religious dogmas for everyone in society.

In terms of this evolutionary theory of wisdom development, Crenshaw suggests that since the first two stages were geared to the clan and royal court, their approach was secularist. The theological wisdom stage was sacred because it had a religious purpose. Some of the results of such a position have the following implications for the interpretation of proverbs regarding poverty in the Book of Proverbs:

Firstly, for some scholars, proverbs as form of experiential knowledge are assumed to be a very complex a phenomenon, credited with a very distinctive elementary activity of the human mind (cf. Von Rad 1972:4, 1972:25-26). In other

words, Von Rad (1972:193) is of the opinion that such achievement in wisdom (in terms of human experiences and perception) could lead to trust in Yahweh (cf. also Hermissen 1968). I find that the complexity or independent thinking of the human mind which is envisaged in such an argument seems to favour the secular nature of proverbs (eg, Von Rad 1962:418-421). In addition, the minority elite are given the responsibility of coining them. Hence, if proverbs have been created by the secular elite, the possibility of ordinary people participating in the production of proverbs is excluded, which contradicts the theory of the ‘popular’ social location of proverbs.

The second misleading opinion is expressed by Crenshaw: the focus on ‘proper table manners, eloquence, propriety, humility before superiors, fidelity’ reflected in the second stage of the evolution of wisdom literature being the privilege of the royal court (1981:94). A similar emphasis is by Whybray when he argues that matters like writing skills and a defence of property rights are the concern and mirror the ability of the elite and of royal officials (1988-9:334). I find both emphases eroding the human dignity of the ordinary people, especially the poor, by denying them right and adequate relationships with self, society, creation and God. In short, this is a dehumanising point of view that limits and frustrates their sense of worth, motivation and participation in enriching the life of a society.

Thirdly, some interpreters favour a dualistic approach to the interpretation of proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, which maintains a tension between the spiritual and practical contexts of the Israelite viewpoint. Consider as an example Job 40:15-24:

"Look at Behemoth, which I made just as I made you; it eats grass like an ox. Its strength is in its loins, and its power in the muscles of its belly. It makes its tail stiff like a cedar; the sinews of its thighs are knit together. Its bones are tubes of bronze, its limbs like bars of iron." It is the first of the great acts of God-- only its Maker can approach it with the sword. For the mountains yield food for it where all the wild animals play. Under the lotus plants it lies, in the covert of the reeds and in the marsh. The lotus trees cover it for shade; the willows of the wadi surround it. Even if the river is turbulent, it is not frightened; it is confident though Jordan rushes against its mouth. Can one take it with hooks or pierce its nose with a snare?

Von Rad asserts regarding the above citation from Job that the description of the ‘behemoth’ (*hippopotamus*) only became theologically interpreted by being made part of the divine speech. In its original form the description of the ‘behemoth’ was a mere artistic or scientific presentation without any religious or moral value (1972:117-118). Such an emphasis on the separation between the sacred and the secular is prevalent in Western thought. It is built on rationalism or a scientific culture. In addition, this

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culture is propounded by a minority elite in academic disciplines and, by means of the mass media, feeds and shapes the opinion of the larger sector of Western populations.

The implication of maintaining the dualistic tension which is built on two centuries of the Enlightenment is evaluated in no better terms than the words of Bosch concerning the context of Western biblical studies.

As their wealth accumulated, rich Christians increasingly tended to interpret the biblical sayings on poverty metaphorically. The poor were the “poor in spirit”, the ones who recognized their utter dependence upon God. In this sense, then, the rich could also be poor – they could arrogate all biblical promises to themselves (1991:435).

Brueggemann endorses Bosch’s assessment of the context of Western Christianity. He argues: ‘The imagined world of privilege and disparity is treasured by all of us who live in the West. It is treasured more by men than by women, more by Whites than by Blacks, but all of us in the West have enormous advantage’ (1993:19). Therefore, the maintaining of the dualistic tension results in the spiritualisation of poverty in certain works of biblical studies.

Fourthly, in a number of Western biblical interpretations of the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament (eg, Boström 1990:9; Von Rad 1972), ancient Israel’s intrinsic holistic perception of life is being credited solely to the sages or intellectual elites. Following a similar trend of thought Brueggemann is supportive of a holistic worldview lying behind the genre of Old Testament wisdom. He considers the latter material as representative of an attempt by Yahwism to integrate faith in Yahweh to the aspects of life that are not directly evident in the core Israelite testimony (1997:335). I consider Brueggemann’s opinion as being more inclusive, exhibiting a potential for accommodating the ordinary people, than that of his former colleagues. A single voice which I have found recently, that of Murphy, considers both preceding positions as naïve because they are supported by excessively hypothetical presuppositions (cf. 1998:264). However, Murphy’s argument does not marshal enough evidence to free itself from the similar assumptions being raised against it. Hence, as a result the contradiction Murphy raises does not suffice to overrule my views.

I argue that a holistic worldview fits the corporate nature of the Israelites’ communal interests, objectives and standards of life, based on the integrative Yahwistic orientation. Such an approach which takes the wholeness of life seriously

offers the possibility of an alternative interpretation to that of many Westernised biblical interpretations. Two main possibilities exist:

- The analysis demonstrates that many biblical interpreters have struggled in various ways and degrees to make the means of theological reflection inaccessible for ordinary people.
- The dualistic approach, whose roots are entrenched in the Western Enlightenment and Renaissance, has resulted in biblical interpretations that favour the materialistic advantages of the so-called developed world both in theory and praxis.

The next sub-section, then, discusses some of the definitions of poverty and the poor furnished by certain Western biblical scholars.

2.2.3 A review of Western scholars' interpretations of poverty in the Old Testament

What is the biblical conception of the poor and poverty? This is an important question for a relevant reading of the Bible on poverty and the poor. In response to this question and with renewed interest, recent Western interpretations have attempted evaluations of several Old Testament definitions of poverty. The significant renewal of interest in the subject of poverty, Weir argues, seems to be stimulated by the challenge set forth by the ever growing socio-economic gap between the rich and the poor in the world today (1988-9:13; 1988-9:15). He also suggests that the necessary rethinking may well stem from new analyses by theologians from the developing nations (i e, Africa, Latin America and Asia), where the existence of a majority of the poor is a situation which needs to be addressed in real terms.

Foremost, I regard the definitions of poverty in many Western biblical studies as highly confusing. A number of Western scholars seem to ignore the new input on the subject from developing nations (eg, Tamez [1982], Gutiérrez [1987] – Liberation theology, Letty Russell [1985] – feminist theology and Cone [1986] – Black theology) because of what appear to be extreme ideas. Some Westerners are alienated by the

new criticism of the wealthy nations. I consider such a response to be due to a lack of understanding of the new input. This is two-sided in nature:

- Firstly, it is probably the result of different social backgrounds, teaching practices, and the reality of day-to-day life.
- Secondly, even well-developed social scientific studies (eg, Gottwald 1979 and Rohrbaugh 1978) have not taken seriously the definition of the subject of poverty.

Therefore, the task of scholarship will be to answer these questions: ‘Who are the poor? Or what is poverty?’

The crucial aspects that provide the answer to the previous questions are limited to the source material involved. In other words, to an extent I agree with Whybray’s suggestion that the social and economic conditions of those who produced the Old Testament texts on the subject of poverty should be recognised (1988-9:333). In my opinion, however, political and religious aspects should be added before one can engage in the interpretation of these texts. In spite of Whybray’s suggestion, a significant feature of the definition of poverty is that it is dependent on the perspective of the authors concerning the material being considered. In such a case some knowledge of the social and economic stratification that existed in ancient Israel is helpful to determine the definition of poverty: whether it represents the perspective of the rich, the poor, or neither of the two.

Almost all Old Testament studies, including those on the Book of Proverbs, accord governmental, religious and other ‘official’ circles of ancient Israel priority in the production of the proverbial material on poverty (cf. Levin 2001:256; Habel 1988:27-28; Whybray 1974). As a result it is speculated that the benefits of such material appear to have been aimed at appealing to the same category of people (cf. Hobbs 1988-9:293; Gordis 1971:162; Pleins 1987:62-63; Hoppe 1987) rather than to ‘popular’ circles. In other words, it is assumed that the view of poverty portrayed in any form in the Old Testament is not authentically that of the poor themselves, but that of the minority literate and affluent classes (cf. Coggins 1987-8:11; Pleins 1987:61). Therefore, taking the viewpoint of the ruling class I will comment on it from two related perspectives: 1) a general definition of poverty as understood in the

Old Testament studies, and 2) a more specific definition of poverty as found in the interpretations of the Book of Proverbs.

1) Generally, many biblical scholars have developed definitions of the terms ‘poor’ and ‘poverty’ based on the assessment of texts from the whole of the Old Testament. This category of scholars holds the opinion that the Old Testament portrays poverty as a relative rather than an absolute condition of life (cf. Coggins 1987-8:12). Relative poverty refers to a person’s poverty in relation to other persons around him/her, while absolute poverty is based on an established minimum standard or what is normally called the poverty line. Thus using these two ideas, by means of a historical investigation of the Old Testament, Hobbs simply asserts that there is a variety of definitions of poverty even among the same social class (1988-9:293). He further argues that poverty as a culturally valued term must be defined with regard to the Ancient Near Eastern world viewpoint. Hobbs acknowledges the lack of sources for the latter approach.

Weir criticises Coggins and the liberation theologians for ‘selective exegesis’. He suggests that this is a shortcoming of ‘all’ biblical exegetes (1988-9:15). He especially points the liberation theologian’s errors in the use of biblical texts concerning David and Uriah (2 Sm 11-12) and Ahab and Naboth (1 Ki 21) for establishing poverty as an economically destitute situation. Such an error, however, does not exempt Weir from criticism because of the inclusive ‘all’ which also seems not to make enough sense in his own argument. It appears to me that, along similar lines of argument, he himself uses the same texts to support Coggins’s definition of the poor by describing their economic impoverishment and powerlessness (1988-9:13). This definition of poverty refers to two definite concepts:

- Income poverty, based on having less money than the designated minimum standard in a country, owing to economic deprivation.
- Human poverty, or ‘structural’ and ‘conjectural’ poverty, based on other factors than money. These factors may include lack of access to means of survival such as land, knowledge, a decent standard of living and participation in society; such factors, however, do not seem to have received much emphasis in the above studies.

Gillingham (1988-9) advances the definition of poverty a step further by analysing four different terms used for ‘the poor’ (i.e., **לִדְ;** [dal], !Ayb.a, [°ebyôn], **יָנִים** [' (±'nî] and **וְנַנְ**" [' (±'n'w]) in the context of the Psalms.

These terms are used variously yet synonymously in the Old Testament. **לִדְ;** (dal) refers to a socially weak, frail and helpless person. !Ayb.a, (°ebyôn) denotes a person in extreme economic deprivation who is dependent on charity and alms. **יָנִים** [' (±'nî) and **וְנַנְ**" [' (±'n'w), indicate the state of a person who is needy, oppressed, afflicted, humiliated, dispossessed, humble or meek. In the course of his discussion Gillingham lists certain literary-critical scholars who understood that

- the poor in the psalms were an exploited class in Israelite society, a class at the mercy of the rich
- the author of the psalms identifies himself with the afflicted people
- the psalmic reference to the poor concerns the mistreated religious groups (1988-9:16).

The importance of this observation is that the literary-critical approach can complement the historical critical methods in demonstrating that the words used for the poor cannot be classified precisely in terms of economic deprivation, as indicated previously by Coggins and others. In his final analysis of these terms, Gillingham suggests the inclusion of the spiritual conception of poverty, which is evident in the usage of the terms **יָנִים** [' (±'nî) and **וְנַנְ**" [' (±'n'w) in Psalms. From the holistic perspective of the present thesis the notion that the religious aspect of poverty can be observed in the Prophetic and Wisdom Literature as well (Gillingham 1988-9:19) is acceptable, albeit with reservations.

The suggestion supports the assumption that human life in the Israelite worldview was not compartmentalised between the sacred and secular but was oriented towards the wholeness of humanity. With such an understanding the challenge of poverty can be reframed as a concern about empowerment rather than primarily being considered a problem of injustice. I consider that with such a holistic framework the necessary structural reforms and issues of justice can be easily

incorporated. My reservation regarding Gillingham's notion of the spiritual conception of poverty in the Psalms, Prophetic and Wisdom Literature is that it is spiritualised by its being limited to the viewpoint of the ruling class and the elite, which contradicts the holistic framework whose existential part involves the reality of poverty among ordinary people.

2) Furthermore, the definition of poverty in specific studies of the Book of Proverbs is also uncertain. One group of biblical scholars have based their definition of poverty on God's guaranteed social order. Von Rad (1972:113-137), in his study of wisdom, focuses his explanation of the fundamentals for coping with truth on this order but does not analyse the term 'poverty'. His discussion suggests that every human behaviour, experience and value according to the sages' perspective was ambiguous. Even poverty, that was experienced as a very negative thing in life, could sometimes be understood positively (eg, Pr 17:1, 19:1, 15:16). Thus the wisdom teachers attempted to cope with the ambiguity of poverty in a similar way to that of its counterpart, 'wealth'. In the same vein the terms 'poor' and 'rich' are taken to designate a social reality with a divine sanction established in the order of creation (cf. also Gese 1958:33ff). As a result the suggested ambivalence of the terminologies of poverty and wealth is not discernible due to the limitations of human understanding (1958:39f) concerning the established social order as intended by God (cf. also Whybray 1990; Golka 1993; Washington 1994). Therefore, I argue that the ambiguity in the definition of poverty offered by this scholarly group reflects the influence of the affluent context of Western biblical exegetes. As a matter of fact, the subject of poverty receives only minimal treatment, with the emphasis being on the *status quo*..

Another group of biblical scholars approaches the definition of poverty by an analysis of its terminology in Wisdom literature. On the one hand, Kuschke's analysis of **vWr** (*rûsh*), to be in want, famished, **rAsx.m;** (*mausôr*), impoverished, lack, and **!Kes.mi.i** (*misk&n*), beggar, needy, indicates that the terms imply some kind of offensive nuance regarding poverty: they blame the poor for 'self inflicted poverty'. Such an understanding of poverty implies an upper-class mentality which justifies their claims of advantages for themselves over and against the poor (1939:47). An analysis of the terms **lD.i** (*dal*), **!Ayb.a,**

(^o*ebyôn*), and *YnI* [' (±'nî), especially by relating them to the Psalms, conveys an indirect social criticism which seems absent among the elite wisdom authors but reflects the mentality of the poor themselves (1939:53-55). I concur with the criticism by Wittenberg (1986:42-43) of Kuschke's approach. The latter evidences the tripartite weakness of:

- disregarding the genre and creating differences between the Book of Proverbs and Psalms
- committing the etymological fallacy and
- neglecting the lexical and situational contexts in the treatment of the terms.

In spite of the above weaknesses, Kuschke's approach can be credited with observing the possible existence of what in Sneed's terminology can be referred to as a 'vestige of the voice of the oppressed still residing in the Hebrew Scriptures' (1999:499) in the terms *lD; (dal)*, *!Ayb.a*, (^o*ebyôn*), and *ynI* [' (±'nî), though Sneed (1999:507) himself discusses the Israelite concern for the *rGE* ([ḡer] alien), *~Aty"* ([y'tôm] orphan) and *hn"m'l.a;* ([^oalm'nâ] widow). He asserts that the Old Testament usage of the preceding terms appears to serve the interests of the 'official' circles rather than the 'popular' or ordinary people or the oppressed themselves. In other words, the terms 'alien', 'orphan' and 'widow' are suggested to bear a spiritualised meaning because the Hebrew Scriptures are considered as a document for the ruling class and the elite.

Wittenberg offers a detailed lexical context analysis of the term 'poor' in the Book of Proverbs and gives the impression that poverty cannot be considered in isolation from wealth (1986:51, 1986:53, 1986:54). His main argument is that the two terms 'poor' and 'rich' are 'paradigmatic oppositions belonging to the same lexical field' (1986:53) of social status. Though verbal clauses indicate a kind of historical process, of 'using entreaties' and 'answering roughly' in Proverbs 18:23, this process is, however, underplayed. Wittenberg argues without providing any feasible reason that it is not the dynamic verbal clause but the static noun which should be considered in the interpretation. Hence, the preference for using the nouns 'prosperity' and 'poverty' to refer to the social status or 'static order' which is described by those two

results (1986:56, 1986:61; cf. also McKane 1970:576). And Wittenberg reinforces this argument for the *status quo* by taking the nouns ‘the rich’ and ‘the poor’ of Proverbs 22:2 as an indication that the two states are ‘both part of social reality, the existing order of things which is ultimately grounded in Yahweh’ (1986:57).

I find Wittenberg’s stances in the preceding paragraph to be contradicting his own assertion, which compromises his consideration of proverbial verbal clauses about the definition of righteousness and wickedness in the Book of Proverbs. He suggests that the definition of the last two terms is based on the viewpoint adopted towards the poor and how they are treated (1986:71). In principle, however, these aspects of ‘thinking’ and ‘handling’ are found in dynamic verbal clauses. It is clear to me that these processes neither depend on a wealthy social status nor on a distinction between the types of poverty for their effect (cf. Pr 19:17, Pr 14:21, Pr 22:9, Pr 14:31, Pr 17:5). Yet, it is the precise definition of the poverty terms, which is in harmony with Wittenberg’s lexical field of justice, that renders poverty a very regrettable and undesirable condition demanding respect and kindness (1986:77-82). Therefore, I argue that such a dynamic condition must be considered seriously in the interpretation of the proverbs on the poor. The significance of such an approach is that it takes account of the marginalised people in the struggle against poverty, rather than considering them as being unable to help themselves (cf. Pr 22:22-23, Pr 22:28, Pr 23:10, Pr 29:4, Pr 29:14, Pr 28:15, Pr 29:7, Pr 31:1-9).

The important point to note concerning all of the interpretations considered in this section is the apparent consensus of Western biblical scholars that the authors of the proverbial material were not part of the poor nor ordinary folk. Thus these scholars’ definition of poverty does not accord well with the existential problem of poverty, especially in the African context. Consequently, it is important to investigate further how the biblical experts have treated the issue of poverty alleviation in the Book of Proverbs.

2.2.4 Analysis of a poverty alleviation-cum-eradication strategy

What are the strategies that are suggested in the Book of Proverbs in order to avert the evil associated with poverty and attain a prosperous life? On the whole, there is no single specific systematised approach available for my research, which may be an

indication that the problem is not a priority for Western church commentators. Even some of the answers mentioned in passing also vary, depending on the poverty perspectives already considered in this study. Moreover, the terms ‘alleviation’ and ‘eradication’ by definition and content do not convey the same meaning. Alleviation is geared particularly towards the short-term relief and reduction of pain, suffering and difficulties. Such an approach to the challenge of poverty is pessimistic in the sense that it aims at coping with or sustaining a better form of poverty, that is a less painful one. The other term, namely, eradication, denotes to abolish completely, especially something bad or undesirable such as poverty. Therefore, the terms cannot be used synonymously and interchangeably as each possesses an independent, concrete and complete sense with respect to the challenge of poverty.

In terms of the aspects considered in sections 2.2.1 to 2.2.3 (the Ancient Near Eastern parallels, the holistic nature of the worldview of ancient Israel and a review of Western scholars’ interpretations of poverty), simplistic responses to the challenge of poverty by Western biblical scholars are evident. The answers seem to point more in the direction of pessimism than optimism, as the following analysis, it is hoped, indicates:

First, an extremely pessimistic point of view takes the issue of poverty alleviation either lightly or basically neglects it. In this regard, Fox (1996:238) concurs with Shapiro, who suggests that the poverty situation revealed in the Book of Proverbs comprises a mere collection of utopian and ironic materialistic infatuations (1987:324). In other words, the Book of Proverbs does not reflect the reality of poverty, nor does it require any kind of social, economic or political reform related to poverty in ancient Israel. Therefore, in this perspective the proverbial material is treated as a form of propaganda intended to console the poor in their poverty (cf. Van Leeuwen 1955:161, 1955:164). I submit that this understanding supports the earlier idea that the Book of Proverbs, and the Old Testament as a whole, served the interests of the ruling class and the elite, that is, in subjugating and controlling the masses.

Second, a different view is expressed by Whybray (1990:18). In a study contrasting the terms ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ Whybray argues that the two terms are evidence of the two extremes of economic status in ancient Israel (cf. Pr 13:8, 14:20, 18:23, 22:2, 22:7, 28:6). If the idea implied by this suggestion had been that the existence of the two economic conditions was a reality, then I would have agreed with him (also cf. Murphy 1998:261). However, Whybray adds:

If the two extremes of social and economic status formed a natural pair in the minds of the ancient Israelites, this is a significant datum which affects the interpretation of the Old Testament texts. Further, this association of the two in the texts is of importance for the definition of the precise meaning(s) of the words for the poor and poverty in the Old Testament (1988:9:332-333).

I consider such a suggestion, that is that pairing the two terms was a thought construct of the ancient Israelites, to be dangerous in discussing the predicament of the poor. The conservatism imposed on the Israelite thinking pattern leads Whybray to the presupposition that a person is born into wealth or poverty (1990:23-42). In other words, in his emphasis on the *status quo* he appears to be advocating the co-existence of a ‘culture of prosperity’ and the so-called ‘culture of poverty’ in ancient Israel. The ‘culture of poverty’ believes in inherited poverty transmitted over generations without any hope of eradication. The poor people are held responsible for their poverty while the institutional and other causes of poverty are allowed to escape scot-free (cf. Wafanaka 1997:249, footnote 4).

I oppose Von Rad’s assertion that wealth and poverty are always caused by either observing or ignoring established principles (1972:125). Nor in my view, is it right to suggest that wisdom and prosperity should be considered to go together or that folly and poverty accompany each other because, to me, both are obviously misleading conceptions. Not every wise person becomes wealthy and vice versa. Nor does every foolish person become poor and vice versa. Furthermore, no term is traceable in the Old Testament which combines both wisdom and prosperity, or poverty and wickedness/foolishness/ungodliness (cf. Donald 1964:29). Therefore, I consider the pairing of both wisdom and prosperity or folly and poverty to be a risky one (cf. also Murphy 1998:261). It is not justifiable because the ambiguity it creates concerning the meaning of poverty makes it difficult to understand the plight of the poor.

Another danger of the *status quo* perspective towards the social order of the Book of Proverbs is that it depersonalises the poor. The poor are considered to be insignificant participants in the social order because they have no contribution to make (cf. Pleins 1987:72). Pleins’ assertion leads to this question: If the poor have nothing, that is, if they are not a resource for the social order, why does the Book of Proverbs refer to the oppression of the poor and the king’s dispensing of social justice to the poor? This question is not satisfactorily addressed by Western scholars. My

own reaction to such an idea is that it leads to a pessimistic view that embraces poverty by limiting the possibility of its eradication.

Third, a point of view regarding poverty alleviation stems from Murphy (1998). He argues his point basically in terms of the number of different Hebrew words (nouns and verbs) used for ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ in the Book of Proverbs. He discovered that poverty is described by several Hebrew words, while the rich are designated by only one Hebrew word; however, he finds that he is unable to take a clear position on whether to impart blame to the poor for their poverty. That is, are they poor because of their own laziness, their folly or on account of some mistakes of their own? Moreover, if the ideas in the last sentence are accurate, how will the rights of the poor in the Old Testament (eg, Ex 23:6, 11) be understood? These are sensitive questions whose several answers Murphy considers to be in an irresolvable tension, which he holds against the limiting character and the varied social contexts reflected by the proverbs (1998:261).

Van Leeuwen suggests that the exegete should first and foremost study the basic rules of life in order to understand what seems to be the contradictory stance of the terms for ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ in the Book of Proverbs. In his opinion, generally the principles of life observe that wisdom and righteousness contribute to good life and prosperity. Even the converse is also true. But in all the preceding principles, the results are not guaranteed (also cf. Wittenberg 1986:68; eg, Pr 17:2, Pr 22:11). Therefore, because of this uncertainty, the basic principle is that righteousness is better than wickedness. Van Leeuwen argues that the Israelites held fast to this fundamental rule of life, in terms of their underlying and intense belief that God loves righteousness and hates wickedness (cf. Van Leeuwen 1992:32). If this basic rule of life is to be taken as foregrounding the conception of poverty in the Book of Proverbs, then, I argue that it is possible to make sense of the Israelites’ understanding of the obligation to eradicate or alleviate the situation of poverty.

Wittenberg seems to support Van Leeuwen in arguing that to a certain extent, human actions are responsible for poverty and wealthy social conditions (1986:59; also cf. Von Rad 1972:125; Koch 1955:30ff; McKane 1970:576). It is possible that the use of social scientific methods (cf. Gottwald 1979; Rohrbaugh 1978) may establish, with some certainty, those social and economic conditions of ancient Israel which may have led to the growth of poverty. I believe that an understanding of those conditions is important for an appropriate approach to today’s destitution in Africa.

The tendency to ignore poverty-generating factors has caused many people in modern day society to take eagerly simplistic approaches to the challenge of poverty in their midst (cf. Crenshaw 1989:34). Thus I consider that there is a possibility of re-examining some of the views analysed above, ones which furnish less opportunity for the redemption of the poor.

Fourth, one may mention the issue of charity as an approach to poverty alleviation. Pleins (1987) suggests that charity is the only strategy which appears to address the question of poverty in the Book of Proverbs (also cf. Malchow 1982:122; 1996:67). In his view, the concern about false weights and measures (cf. Pr 11.1; 16.11; 20.10; 20.23), and respect for property boundaries (cf. Pr 23.10-11) can hardly be considered as significant social justice in terms of the level of criticism in the prophetic literature (1987:70). Hence, the eradication of the society's inequity is dependent on the kindness of the wealthy. In giving generously to the poor, the rich in turn benefit by being blessed (1987:71). But have generous acts to the poor been able to relieve injustice anywhere? Is it not that charity makes worse the situation of poverty by increasing the dependency syndrome of the afflicted (cf. also Speckman 2001:13-34)? The argument here is that charity in the form just described is likened to a painkiller that does not cure the paralysing disease of poverty.

On an equally dubious foundation is the silence or refusal 'of those in power' to take proper action to rid society of poverty (cf. Crenshaw 1989:42). Therefore, Pleins' (1987:70) criticism of Malchow's (1982:122) stance in relating charity to social justice seems unjustifiable. In spite of not considering the difference in *genre* and setting between the Book of Proverbs and Job, Malchow appears right to suggest that in ancient Israel charity was only worthy and a moral act 'when those who gave it had no part in making the needy poor' (1982:122, also cf. 1982:123; Murphy 1998:261). In short, a strategy for poverty eradication is through dispensing charity and justice.

Fifth, social justice may be viewed as a strategy to address poverty in the Book of Proverbs. The issue of justice is pointed out clearly as a fundamental function of all instruction. This basic goal of the Book of Proverbs is emphasised by the use of three terms: *~yrIV 'yme* (*mêsh'rim*), 'equity, fair-dealing', *jP 'v.mi* (*mishp'‰o*), 'justice', and *qd , c ,* (*fedeq*), 'righteousness', in Proverbs 1:3. The instruction leads to the development of an ideal person whose behaviour in

everything is totally just. An ideal, or a just personality is responsible and accountable for the rescuing of the poor, orphans and widows (cf. Malchow 1982:122-123). In short, this emphasis stresses advocacy for justice towards the poor (cf. Pr 29:7, Pr 29:14, Pr 31:8-9), regardless of an oppressor(s)' power.

This social justice approach to poverty appears to be advocated by commentators who suggest that Proverbs 1-9 creates a framework for interpreting the rest of the Book of Proverbs (eg, Childs 1979:552-55). Hence, Washington (1994:194-195) considers the framework relevant especially for the ideas of wealth, poverty, and social equity. He concurs with Malchow (1982:123) that wealth and poverty in Wisdom literature should be interpreted against the social values of 'righteousness' and 'justice' because these values are also central in the Law (cf. Dt 33:21) and the Prophets (cf. Is 9:6, Is 16:5; Jr 22:15-16). In addition, the phrase *hw^hy> t^a; r>yI* (*yir^oât yhwh*), 'fear of YAHWEH', is considered the 'motto' of the Book of Proverbs (cf. Pr 1:7a), which constitutes Israel's mission in the Old Testament (cf. Washington 1994:195; Weinfeld 1995:7-44). Israel's mission was to become a holy nation by the establishment of visible signs of God's righteousness and justice in its life. Even more precisely, then, the measuring rod and the plumb line of the success or failure of the 'fear of Yahweh' in the Israelites' life were the manifested acts of justice. In spite of all the preceding worthy opinions, almost all studies appear to exclude the issue of social justice in considering poverty eradication programmes in the Book of Proverbs. On the contrary, Shorter's position is worthy of note: Poverty is an 'injustice – a degradation, particularly in Africa. In removing poverty and its causes, we are not robbing people of a human right! Instead, we are restoring a human right to them, by removing the injustice' (Shorter 1999:9; cf. also Kobia 2003:170).

2.2.5 Assessment of the Western interpretations of poverty

The analysis of Western studies of the Book of Proverbs reveals some of the problems related to the interpreters' social contexts. The dominant scientific interpretation of the proverbs on poverty does not indicate an objective evaluation. Although it is not evident that the Western interpreters considered here are themselves rich, it can be

assumed with a measure of confidence that they are typically middle class because they are part and parcel of the so called ‘rich north’. The indication of the scholars’ social context is suggested by their attitude towards poverty. They all have in common the fact that their debates on poverty have not escaped the subjectivity of the Western exegetes’ secularising pressures, which include:

- Rampant individualism, which destroys a person’s trust in others. As a result, it becomes difficult to think of an alternative society patterned along communal or corporate life and moral ethics.
- Materialist consumerism, which makes the understanding of poverty bear less on factors contributing to the ‘structural’ and ‘hypothetical’ understanding of poverty. In other words, there is a decline in social relationships stemming from the increased emphasis on commodities, where the individual consumer or person actually becomes passive (cf. Westermann 1995:122).
- Moral relativism, originating in the science-oriented Western culture, compartmentalisation of life, which makes it difficult to conceive of the essential transforming faith necessary for the realisation of a full humanity as purposed by God in one’s daily life activities.
- The ever-growing derogatory exaggerations of calamities in the mass media, which demonise people, communities and nations and spell their imminent doom. As a result, the psychological influence on the audience prevails over their sensitivity in terms of being present for the other in the biblical interpretation of poverty.

The preceding four factors emanate from the economic and political achievements of the developed nations and their influence on Western exegetical patterns (cf. Aboagye-Mensah 1994:72-74; Luow 1995:43-44). In spite of this, I do not mean to condemn their interpretations as erroneous. But to follow up my earlier argument it might be correct to presuppose that the interpretations reflect the spiritual, cultural, economic, and political requirements of people in Western contexts. According to Fabella’s and Sugirtharajah’s arguments, the biblical interpretations developed within such contexts can only list concerns for the developing world as an ‘afterthought or

tailored to suit Western protocols and expectations' (2000:xxi; cf. also Mafico 1986:400-401; Magesa 2002:112-113, 156-157).

The framework of Western biblical interpretations of poverty is also exclusive because its strategic point of departure is from above, that is, from the middle class perspective. It is understandable that this approach would prevent Western exegetes from imagining a different meaning of poverty in biblical texts, a meaning based on perspectives from below. In other words, it is a status-based linear model in which the elite develop and test new ideas and tell the poor what to do. As a matter of fact, constructing an interpretation of poverty on the preceding model leads to an ideological formation which sanctions poverty as 'divine will in the Bible'. Canon (1989:9-24) considers that such a top-bottom model of biblical interpretation is that which sanctioned and led to the existence of slavery over many centuries. In addition, apartheid, racism and colonialism can be added to the list of evil ideological constructs founded on similar misconstrued models.

Moreover, the secularising pressures earlier mentioned, have forced Western society to rely more and more on 'experts' in everything. The obsession with consulting experts leads to the assumption that new and feasible ideas originate only from them. Consequently, this tendency neglects the resourcefulness and ability of the poor to generate innovative ideas. In other words, an emphasis on the 'expert' leads to sanctioning subordination and domination because it drowns alternative meanings and the voices of the poor. In the process the poor become marginalised. It is no wonder that the poverty alleviation means suggested by such scholars comprise programmes which emphasise charity and benevolence. Such programmes are simplistic and pessimistic because they intend to civilise and develop the poor countries 'in order to emulate and measure up to the expectations' (Fabella & Sugirtharajah 2000:xxii) of the Western society (cf. also Dube Shomanah 1997:1-35; West 1999). These programmes also ignore the fact that the Bible was and still is a community text that makes meaning as the community's lives are shaped by it.

In other words, Western debates regarding poverty in this book acknowledge the obvious: that the biblical text we have in essence conveys the ideological construct of the Israelite ruling class because it represents their efforts to control the masses. Hence the Bible is a tool that establishes the elite's dominance over competing groups and interests. Its approach appropriates the struggles of the oppressed and marginalised for the benefit of the privileged: an idea which fits well within the

Western thought pattern and its context today. Yet as Mosala (1989:13-42) argues, the situations of conflict and struggle in the biblical community have to be exposed in order to produce a relevant interpretation that befits those involved in the liberation struggle. I agree to an extent with Mosala's suggestion based on his materialist biblical hermeneutic that to achieve the latter, the Bible must be read from the perspective of those struggles for liberation. In the case of poverty, the Bena proverb says: *Uwuhangala wupyo siwiwoneka pamihō, nde ulufihe upye*: 'Poverty is like heat; you cannot see it, so to know poverty you have to go through it'. I find Mosala's approach supportive of many African biblical scholars who suggest that the Bible contains both liberative and oppressive elements (cf. Masenya 2004:159-165). Therefore, the interpreter is cautioned to be critical of both the biblical text and one's own experience in order to convey a relevant life-giving message.

The appreciation of some proverbs on poverty from the Book of Proverbs actually requires a clear 'previous knowledge' of the morals and characteristic behaviour of human beings (cf. Madu 1992:190). Without such knowledge, the fundamental message of such proverbs is either misconstrued or lost to the interpreter. The proverb may also become very literal in meaning or even meaningless. For example, the Kaonde proverb says: *Mbalala ya kukanga nayo imena*: 'Roasted groundnuts can also germinate'. The interpreter of the proverb is expected to know beforehand that roasted groundnuts do not germinate at all. Hence, the figurative possibility of germination functions as a key for further critical reflection on the unexpected truth embedded in the proverb. Since the utterance is pronounced by someone to another person, then, the message refers to something which is not expected by that other person. It may for instance be a statement of gratitude, for being helped by a person from whom little help would be expected. Here are two practical examples of biblical poverty proverbs underscoring the need for prior knowledge regarding the understanding of certain principles by Western and African scholars.

- *Poverty is not absolute:*

Proverbs 18:23 A poor man pleads for mercy, but a rich man answers harshly.

Western interpretation:

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The poor suffer negative effects, being treated with disrespect by the rich because they regard the former as dependent. In fact, it is suggested that the flattering of the proverb mocks the futile situation of the poor and ‘reminds him to take pains and prizes calmly’ (Kidner 1964:131, also cf. Golka 1993:65; Washington 1994:183).

African interpretation:

Similar proverbs: If a poor person has nothing else, he/she has at least a (sweet) tongue with which to defer the payment of his/her debts (Akan [Nussbaum 1996]).

People don’t tell a poor person how to weep; she/he knows well how to weep (Oromo [Nussbaum 1996]).

A poor person feeds on porridge in his/her dreams (Oromo [Nussbaum 1996]). After one week of austerity, one can gain seven heads of cattle (Oromo [Nussbaum 1996]).

Explanation: No one is without any ability, and to be poor or destitute does not mean to be poor in everything. Every person, whatever their condition, has at least some talent which they can put to good use. Material poverty does not impoverish the entire person. The inherent possession of human value, dignity, knowledge, experience and vision remain with people and constitute the strongest resources to eradicate the suffering caused by poverty.

- *Poverty, friendship and neighbourhood:*

Proverbs 14:20 The poor are disliked even by their neighbours, but the rich have many friends.

Western interpretation:

Poverty has a friendless character, that is, those who are well off in material terms socially tend to reject the less fortunate ones. Moreover, the poor themselves do not help each other because they lack communal and friendly behaviour. These two aspects are characteristic of the wealthy [‘civilized’?] (cf. Pleins 1987:67; Murphy 1998:105-106).

African interpretation:

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Similar proverbs: You perceive who your true friends are in a time of distress (Akan [Nussbaum 1996]).

The capital resource of the weak is unity (Swahili [Healey & Sybertz 1996:42]).

Unity is strength; division is weakness (Swahili [Healey & Sybertz 1996:114-117]).

Sharing is wealth (Swahili [Healey & Sybertz 1996:114-117]).

The poor ones know each other: when a lion is sick, the mosquito does the cupping (Luganda [Nussbaum 1996]).

Explanation: Poverty does not shut out friendship. On the contrary, it brings the destitute together and tests the sincerity of one's friends, because those who come to a neighbour's aid in time of trouble are one's true friends. Poor people share generously whatever they have – not out of plenty but out of scarcity. Thus poverty or scarcity does not destroy the essence of friendship, or neighbourliness or family. Therefore, from an African perspective which emphasises the value of unity and community the Old Testament proverb is a critique of people who build friendship on the superficial basis of wealth.

The analysis of Western studies of poverty proverbs has revealed some positive indicators, though owing to the unconscious influences on Western biblical scholars of the secularising pressures of their context, these indicators have not been taken seriously. In spite of this previous neglect, lately there has been a plethora of social scientific studies on poverty. Taking together the previous studies and the state of the developing world, an engaging international dialogue on poverty has been created anew. The new development has broadened the spectrum of biblical discussion, which was formerly dominated by traditional historical-critical concerns, to include political, social, theological and ideological scholarly questions. Regarding the latter issues, the focus of the new inputs is on realising the strengths of humankind in order to challenge destitution. Therefore, the goal of the new approaches is to enhance the suppressed integrity, social relationships and other internal resources of the poor in particular. The inherent rights of human beings are essentials for improving the effectiveness of societal values in order to live a meaningful life (cf. Luow 1995:43-48), not least the issue of social justice in the Book of Proverbs. This has also been revisited in some cross-cultural studies by African scholars. These have

shown ‘a hint’ of a Western bias and theological prejudice in their discussion of social justice. I have supported the latter point with enough evidence in this subsection. Hence, this bias has led to an unbalanced appreciation of the Israelite understanding of poverty and marginalisation in the Bible (cf. Kunhiyop 2001:14; Masenya 1997).

2.3 An analysis of African [biblical] scholarship and proverbs on poverty

A full and comprehensive African [biblical] study of proverbs on poverty is still in its infancy. Therefore, in this sub-section, my discussion will not single out one approach as a model for analysis. Instead I shall glean some concepts of poverty from the various pioneer undertakings on proverbs which have focused on political systems, kinship and economic relations in terms of two categories of studies. One consists of African biblical studies related to the Book of Proverbs and the other category focuses on more general African proverbial studies.

Few basic African biblical studies have been aimed at substantiating the view that Biblical proverbial wisdom and African proverbial wisdom share much in common. It has been shown variously that their similarities consist of the forms of parallelism, grammar, syntax and content. Such similarities can be accounted for by the fact that both are non-literate cultures (cf. Naré 1986; Nzambi 1992; Sumner 1995; Owan 1997). As a result of this cross-cultural debate, the discussion on the social context of the material which constitutes the Book of Proverbs is developing into a major trend that favours the ordinary people’s contribution to these sayings. It is increasingly being acknowledged that the proverbs originated among ordinary people. In Owan’s words, African biblical scholars are becoming surer of having

at least one more effective instrument in their hands, in the contemporary fight for inculcation and contextualization of the biblical message in our local milieu: it is the *proverbial sapiential genre*, in light of the revealed word, that should act as the leaven on the African Traditional Religious Life. For, it must be emphasised, it is by a thorough understanding of the African Traditional Religious Life (including the *good*, the *bad* and the *ugly* therein), that any talk of an evolution therefrom [sic] of an African Christian *Theology*, or African *Spirituality* can be deemed authentic. African proverbial wisdom in one fell swoop presents the African soul to those who search for the same (1997:152-153; also cf. Enweh 1997:5-22).

In essence, here Owan suggests a proactive phase (cf. Ukpong 1999a:313-329) which takes a step beyond the objectivisation of the material collected and the comparison of proverbs. Africa already has a rich heritage of proverbial resources, both in anthropological collections and studies (eg, Nussbaum 1996) and oral in circulation.

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This may enable the researcher to recognise, appreciate and evaluate the themes and patterns of proverbs which deal with the above quoted contextualisation possibility. Most significant could be the use of the African comparative proverbs as an interpretive key to an historical understanding of Old Testament proverbs. Such a utilisation of the corresponding ordinary African people's social, economic, political and religious experiences and concerns could have an impact on the interpretation of proverbs, especially those referring to the poor and the marginalised in the Book of Proverbs.

Taking advantage of the above similarity between Israelite proverbial material and African proverbial wisdom, the cross-cultural womanhood (*bosadi*) approach which has been pioneered by Masenya (1991, 1997, 1997a, 1999, 2001, 2003) concerning the poem 'Woman of Worth' of the Book of Proverbs is perhaps the most thorough African biblical study advocating the effectiveness of contextual interpretation. On the one hand, her constructive critique of the biblical text, Proverbs 31:10-31, and of African culture concerning the marginalisation of women is noteworthy. On the other hand, her discernment of empowering possibilities in both the biblical text and African culture opens a liberating door for African women who are considered as being the most underprivileged class in African society (2001:148-149; 2003:4-6). I commend, for instance, the suggestion that a woman's capacity to manage her family and her virtue of commitment to being 'selfless, hard-working, and serving others' (2001:155) are substantial and essential dynamic resources for the transformation of humanity's well-being. Even more important, she argues that such noble qualities should not be restricted to women: all members of the African community, including the male folk too, should aspire to such qualities, for the smooth transformation of African communities. Moreover, I think that the presence of these resources within every human being, family and community should be recognised and cultivated. The main reason for the struggle to recover African resources is 'the urge to rid Africa of its negative self image, mindset of dependency, its poverty and underdevelopment. Poverty has become a very macabre part of African identity' (Du Toit 1998:376; also cf. Pobee 1987:53-55).

On a more general level, Wafanaka (1997) proceeds with a similar method to the cross-cultural comparative approach, placing a particular focus on poverty in the Old Testament as a whole. His intention is to enhance the structure, causes, dynamics and coping mechanisms regarding poverty in ancient Israel, in the light of African

culture. With regard to the Book of Proverbs (cf. 1997:247-249, 1997:257-268, 1997:281-283, 1997:295-297), he suggests that the book, together with other Wisdom literature, presents a ‘synthesized’ form of poverty. In his view, the Law books present a ‘controlled’ form of poverty while the Prophetic books present an ‘uncontrollable’ form of poverty (1997:297). I find his ‘synthesized’ type of poverty, located between the latter two categories, to be far fetched and contradictory, to the enhancement of the fate of the poor. First, he considers the Book of Proverbs as a product of the elite and wealthy people of Israel (1997:248, 1997:297). As I have argued in my analysis of Western biblical studies, such a supposed social context of the biblical text foregrounds the maintaining of poverty, in the interest of the rich and elite. Unfortunately, Wafanaka does not rid himself of these defects in his interpretation of poverty when he takes the ‘official’ social context as his point of departure for understanding poverty in the Book of Proverbs (cf. Owan 1997:166-167).

Second, the comparative levels of the materials do not utilise similar cross-cultural sources. Wafanaka considers the material of the Book of Proverbs from the point of view of the ruling class while the African proverbial context is that of the popular level. As a result his exegesis of poverty in ancient Israel is not illuminated by the elements of ordinary African people’s daily life. For example, the African cultural setup concerning family and community is too insignificant in his analysis to affect the view of poverty in any way. As a matter of fact, only one Shona proverb is mentioned in footnote form during the entire analysis of poverty in the Book of Proverbs (1997:265). I consider this to be a good example of the limited African cultural input in the interpretation of biblical texts by African biblical scholars, which is probably caused by the Western biblical framework which informs their reading (cf. Ukpong 1995:4).

Third, Wafanaka is completely silent with regard to the relationship between God and poverty. However, he posits that the Book of Proverbs evidences a strongly individualistic outlook on poverty, which is typical of modernism and the Western cultural influence on his training, a crisis situation which many other African biblical scholars are experiencing (cf. Ukpong 1995:4; West 1999:93). He is, for example, aware of Washington’s (1994:185) warning about the possibility of misplacing the responsibility for the problem of poverty onto the poor themselves, for example in the misuse of the proverbs on laziness in order to sanction poverty caused by oppression

and exploitation. Yet he argues: ‘Perhaps the most memorable cause of poverty according to the book of Proverbs is one’s own laziness, signified by the legendary sluggard’ (1997:281) of Proverbs 6:6-11. Such a wholesale acceptance of the Western construction is also evident among certain African biblical scholars, especially with regard to poverty in the Book of Proverbs.

Additional examples in step with Wafanaka are to be found in the assertions of Kunhiyop (2001:11) and Akao (2000:52) with regard to the issue of poverty in the wisdom literature. They both consider this literature as serving the interests of the upper class in ancient Israel. Hence, according to them Proverbs 6:6-11, 10:4, 12:11, 13:18, 14:23, 19:15, 20:13, 21:5, 21:17, 28:19, 28:22 et cetera, are evidently placing the responsibility of poverty on the victims. At the same time wealth is seen positively in wisdom literature, they argue, because it is shown as God’s blessing. In such assertions I find, on the one hand, the valorisation of poverty in order to sustain the prosperity of the well-to-do upper class. On the other hand, the major questions of oppression, exploitation and social injustice as causes of poverty in the Book of Proverbs are treated as a relatively minor footnote in their corpus, which displays an overwhelming emphasis on individualism and charity strategies which do not eradicate poverty (cf. Kunhiyop 2001:14-16). The Ewe proverb sums up the fate of the poor in this approach: *Koklovi fe nya medzÇna le aúakowo de o*. Literal translation: ‘The chicken is never declared innocent in the court of hawks’. Because the chicken is the prey of hawks, does it become morally unethical for their prey to interfere in the affairs of hawks?

From the perspective of African studies, Mbiti’s (2002a; 2002b) explorations of proverbs offer an illuminating glimpse of the challenge of poverty in Africa. His point of contention is that poverty can be overcome, which is possible in terms of some basic concepts, attitudes, feelings and values related to poverty in both traditional and modern African societies. For example, it is emphasised that social, cultural, inner and outer structural, educational, health and technological relationships have a potential role in poverty eradication. I also support the positive suggestion concerning the persistence of the hope for survival, and the inherent human rights of experience, knowledge and dignity among the poor as resources to overcome poverty. I agree with much of his description of the negative effects of poverty on human beings, such as its dehumanising effects, loss of dignity and value through humiliation, dependence, disgrace et cetera.

However, Mbiti does not clear himself of his own criticism that the majority of theological professors and the elite speak from a safe distance because they have no experience or detailed knowledge of poverty or famine as a form of poverty (2002a:2). This point of weakness in the analysis is probably caused by the lack of a proper contextual definition of poverty for his set goal (cf. 2002b:4-6, 2002b:9-10). I argue that this reason is probably behind his emphasis on individualism in combating poverty in Africa (2002a:14-15), which falls short of the traditional African approach: a holistic and communally based life.

Mbiti does not use his results to develop a cross-cultural biblical interpretation. Instead, he uses the traditional African understanding to challenge biblical scholars by posing some related Christian ethical issues concerning poverty. Important questions are raised concerning the Christian ethic of love to God and neighbour, the image of God in human beings, relationships between male and female, food, land and salvation in relation to the challenge of poverty in Africa. Some questions include whether wealth can enable people to love one another or whether the poor experience donations from the rich as an expression of Christian love (cf. Mbiti 2002b:12-14).

Therefore, in spite of the difficulties faced by African [biblical] scholars owing to the influence of their Western frameworks of training, there are ample signs of concern on their part for an alternative understanding of poverty, especially as it relates to the African context. Most of them variously suggest the African proverbial material as a means to the innermost understanding of the African life which can be used as an interpretive entry into the Biblical proverbial texts. And their point of emphasis is that the voice of the ordinary people, people encountering poverty in their cultural context, is needed for an appropriate understanding of the Biblical proverbial texts.

2.4 Conclusion

It has been shown throughout this chapter that there is a difference in their understanding of poverty between the Western biblical scholars and African biblical scholars. On the one hand, an analysis of the Western interpretations of poverty proverbs in the Book of Proverbs suggests that the *status quo* is emphasised with little

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hope of redemption for the poor. It is argued that the discussions of the concepts of poverty in these proverbs on the poor show the influence of Western culture, self-understanding and worldview. As a result the Western interpretation of poverty proverbs is found to make little or no sense for the reality of poverty in Africa. It appears to be idealistic and pessimistic. The latter approach could paralyse the poor in their destitute condition if imposed as the ‘correct’ teaching of the Bible.

On the other hand, the emerging African response is both a reaction and a revolt against the dehumanising legacy of colonialism, the missionary era, and the history of African oppression and exploitation. The African culture, self-understanding and worldview are viewed as fundamental resources for an emancipatory interpretation of the proverbs on the poor. The empowering approach aims at penetrating below all the crippling factors in the texts, traditions and institutions of both the biblical, Christian tradition and African society in order to expose them for the purpose of reconstruction. It employs both pragmatic and optimistic perspectives as an alternative reading of the Bible in Africa in relation to the challenge of poverty. Consequently, how is the study of African proverbs on the poor related to the misery and poverty of the masses of people on the African continent? To this question we turn in the next chapter.

3 POVERTY AND PROVERBS ON POVERTY IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

The initial focus of this chapter is to review and provide some insights into African initiatives to rid the continent of poverty: How have the various African economic, political and theological endeavours fared to date? The answer to the preceding question therefore situates the challenge of poverty in the contemporary context. It suggests the need for people-oriented solutions.

Secondly, this chapter will therefore consider questions that are related to the African societal conception of the expressions ‘poor’ and ‘poverty’. It is important that this thesis discovers a usable definition of poverty. This implies a critical analysis of what it means to be poor or of the situation of poverty in the African social and cultural contexts. The task of defining poverty in the African context is made difficult by the inadequacy of the literature. I trust however that the incidental sources are enough to provide an attempt at a basic definition of poverty in this study.

In facing the existential challenge of poverty, the framework of this concept is considered in terms of the socio-economic structure of the particular society. For an African society, that socio-economic pattern is considered to be directly or indirectly informed by the African worldview. Therefore such a worldview analyses the principal means available to a micro-level economy in order to provide sustainable life and livelihood. Some leading questions include: What constitutes the socio-economic structure behind poverty in Africa? What does it mean to be poor in the African context? Is there a practical example where the African value system co-opts modernity?

The third focus of this chapter will fall on how poverty is challenged, especially by the use of proverbs on poverty as part of the indigenous transformational educational system. In short, the multifaceted nature of grassroots poverty in Africa calls for a consideration of all the internal dynamic resources such as financial resources, socio-cultural networks, indigenous educational systems of knowledge and skills, work and livelihood principles and tools, including land rights.

3.2 Contemporary responses to the challenge of poverty in Africa

The aim of this section is to investigate the sorts of actions taken to eradicate poverty in Africa.

- First, I will briefly consider a number of basic reasons for the ineffectiveness of certain political and economic steps taken by African governments and international financial institutions.
- Second, I will also present a short general analysis of African biblical studies by looking at some suggested liberating modes. Statistics indicate that Christianity is the most prevalent faith on the African continent and represents a dominant force to be reckoned with as regards economic, political and cultural change (cf. *World Christian Encyclopedia* 2001). Such a vital factor cannot be neglected without severe consequences for the process of poverty eradication.

3.2.1 A critical review of some political and economic initiatives in Africa

This sub-section presents a brief overview of the African initiatives to tackle the challenge of poverty in Africa today. However, I do not intend to undertake an extensive analysis of the historical impoverishment of the continent here. Many studies in various disciplines have accomplished a great deal in arriving at enlightening results which point to relations of domination between Africa and developed countries (eg, Iliffe 1987; Akao 2000:52-53). Some aspects of poverty considered here are directly connected to the elitist view on poverty described above. Examples of this category include the debt burden, bilateral and multilateral aid and relief, and the flow of capital from Africa. I commend Speckman (2001:13-34) for his detailed critical analysis of how Africa has become a ‘beggar’ continent as a result of this relief and foreign aid. It must be pointed out, however, that there are other factors which are not linked with the elitist view, which have contributed a great deal to the problem of poverty in Africa. These include corruption, abuse of power, HIV/AIDS, drought, overpopulation, civil and ethnic conflicts (cf. Kunhiyop 2001:5-8).

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The 2001 African Union New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) document states the relationship between the two sides of poverty succinctly: 'The impoverishment of the African continent was accentuated primarily by the legacy of colonialism, Cold War, the workings of the international economic system, and inadequacies of and shortcomings in the policies pursued by many countries in the post-independence era' (2001:4).

Africa is a poor continent both on the macro and micro levels. It is a truth, which stares one in the eyes and is impossible to refute:

In Africa, 340 million people, or half the population, live on less than US \$1 per day. The mortality rate of children under 5 years of age is 140 per 1000, and life expectancy at birth is only 54 years. Only 58 per cent of the population have access to safe water. The rate of illiteracy for people over 15 is 41 per cent. There are only 18 mainline telephones per 1000 people in Africa, compared with 146 for the world as a whole and 567 for high-income countries (NEPAD 2001:1).

According to the Human Development Report (2001) the population in the majority of African nations has become increasingly deprived, marginalised and pauperised in socio-economic terms. In principle, they live in a destitute situation that is indicated by declining household income, degrading, difficult and vulnerable living conditions. Poverty in its different forms is therefore affecting the whole of society in all its constitutive elements. There is no difference between rural and urban people in this regard.

Poverty is linked to the failure of parents to pay for their children's education, increased school dropout rates and children running away from home. Poverty has brought about the existential problems of street children, street people, street vendors, hawkers, beggars, criminals, drug-pushers, prostitutes and large waves of migration from rural areas to urban centres in pursuit of a better life (cf. Shorter 1999:6-7; Kunhiyop 2001:4). Poverty contributes to the breakdown of traditional structures, institutions and societal values. This has contributed in turn to the spread of HIV/AIDS and violence, the impoverishment of the land and the inability to mobilise and integrate the local resources for survival and development. Therefore, the vicious circle of poverty which begins with a decay at the grassroots or local level makes it difficult to do well at the national or continental levels. I suggest that ordinary people be given a chance in the process of poverty eradication. In this respect I strongly support Shorter's (also cf. Akao 2000:54) viewpoint on poverty.

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The poor of Africa usually know quite well what has to be done to alleviate their condition. They yearn for liberation from the structures of poverty, but they see little help coming from the authorities that are responsible for running their countries. On the contrary, they are disgusted by selfishness and individualism of the affluent ruling classes, by their greed and – very often – their corruption. They are not content to receive occasional hand-outs, and they do not want to live on charity (1999:7).

Across the continent, African governments, the church and non-governmental organisations have tirelessly launched strategic programmes to allay poverty. Most of these are macro poverty alleviation programmes run by governments under the auspices of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organisation. These international financial institutions have imposed unfavourable conditions embedded in globalisation: for example, liberalisation, privatisation, deregulation and other rules, agreements and procedures biased against the poor African countries (cf. Nyirabu 2003:10; Ilesanmi 2004:79-81). Such programmes include the various Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and their latest associates, the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) which do not enhance the human capabilities of the poor countries in Africa. The implementation of these programmes is being blamed for the worsening poverty situation, which results from the high indebtedness and dependency in African countries (cf. Davidson 1992:222). According to Chachage (2003:5-6) the failure of the SAPs and PRSs as external initiatives is due to:

- Using short-term strategies to deal with the long-term problem of the vicious circle of poverty, ignorance and disease (cf. Shorter 1999:7).
- Ignoring the ordinary people's point of view in favour of the elite, especially those who are experts in modern economics (also cf. Randriamaro 2002:5). In Mkandawire's words the 'adjustment programmes have proved extremely poor instruments for mobilizing domestic resources' (2002:113).
- Applying globalisation strategies that do not address the social and economic inequities and practices of the international political economic system (cf. Ilesanmi 2004:76-81).

African governments have also made efforts towards an internal initiation of the basic restructuring of the economic base of the continent, to enable greater human development. Two major commitments are worthy of mention here: the Organisation

of African Unity Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa 1980-2000 (LPA) and NEPAD. The driving spirit of LPA was the promotion of the desirable quality of self-reliance regarding Africa's development both at national and continental levels, through the mobilisation of its internal human and material resources (cf. LPA 1980:7). Unfortunately, in spite of this desire the LPA sought its main economic aid from the international financial institutions. As a result, its laudable goals collapsed under the pressure of the unfavourable conditions and reforms required by these institutions under the SAPs and the PRSs programmes (cf. Mkandawire 2002:106). The conditionality of SAPs and the PRSs is at odds with the spirit of LPA and has not been successful in ridding Africa of poverty.

Therefore, because of the failure of the SAPs, PRSs and LPA approaches, NEPAD was introduced as the new African initiative. NEPAD is a holistic, comprehensive and integrated strategic framework for the socio-economic development of Africa. It provides the vision for Africa to move into the twenty-first century by stating the key social, economic and political problems and a programme of action to resolve them. NEPAD was launched by African leaders in 2001 as their commitment to integrating the continental and international community in the process of encouraging Africa's sustainable growth. But the new approach is not without faults of its own. Many critics of NEPAD point out the following aspects as some of its major flaws.

- It claims to be people-oriented although the people have not yet been consulted.
- It is vague about the driving spirit behind it. This was not the case with its predecessor, LPA, whose emphasis encouraged the utilisation of domestic resources to achieve a self-reliant development (cf. Mkandawire 2002:106).
- It conveys a narrow understanding of issues of poverty. In fact, according to Randriamaro it takes lightly people's participation, pro-poor and gender-sensitive schemes, which are crucial issues in an effective pulling-together of internal resources for development (2002:14; also cf. Nyong'o 2002:11-12).
- It is greatly reliant on external support (cf. Mkandawire 2002:106). It is in this sense that some have amusingly referred to NEPAD as an equivalent of 'kneepad'. This implies that African leaders need the kneepads to cushion

their knees when they kneel to beg for assistance from the rich industrialised partner countries (cf. Nyirabu 2002:15-16).

To sum up, the need to rescue Africa from its current poverty appears to be far from reaching its goal. In spite of all the problems as indicated in this section, the struggle against poverty continues to be a priority. The importance of basing these approaches on the internal principles of self-reliance and self-sustenance is more relevant now than ever before. Africa needs to democratise its development process by a just distribution of the produce to the poor masses (cf. Nyong'o 2002:6).

Mkandawire provides three reasons for the significance of such a local initiative:

- external resources will not be sufficient for the needs of Africa's task of poverty eradication;
- history shows that the basis for any feasible and sustainable development strategy stems from within; and
- in spite of globalisation, the conditions for receiving external resources must be weighed against Africa's sovereignty so that it shall not be jeopardised and so that the spirit of nation-building and the democracy of its people shall not be threatened (2002:105).

What results from this short discussion on African initiatives, I find, is the urgent call to all Africans to formulate local settings and concepts for addressing poverty, together with peace and justice, to foster sustainable growth. Hence, it is time that the rich cultural heritage of Africa, acknowledged in the various indigenous frameworks, is made use of as the foundation for such an alternative development model (cf. Nyong'o 2002:13). This is a call to awaken the spirit of patriotism, as the Bena proverb would say: *Pe wisaka ubite kya ng'ani gende wiyena; pe wisaka ubite pawutali gende na vangi*: 'When you want to go fast, walk alone; when you want to go far, walk with others'. An equivalent Hehe proverb remarks: *Uluvilo behe vikiimbila availugu*: 'Do run when others run' (Madumulla 1995:153). The proverbs emphasise taking the majority decisions seriously.

3.2.2 Some African theological voices on poverty

The following three contemporary African hermeneutical approaches exhibit a common primary concern: the development of biblical interpretations in situations of the struggle for justice and peace in Africa.* Such contextual studies are important for my research because their interest and commitment have a bearing on the eradication of the condition of poverty, exploitation, illiteracy and suffering of the marginalised African people. However, due to the scope and space limitations of my thesis the exploration of the preceding aspects will be brief. And the overview focuses on those aspects which are significant in demonstrating the relevance of the strategy undertaken by my thesis. Hence, my quest: What implications for living, especially with regard to poverty, do the three approaches suggest?

a) **Liberation hermeneutics**

In the phrase ‘Liberation hermeneutics’ I want to treat African biblical scholars and theologians jointly and limit the details of distinctions between them. Hence, the spectrum of liberation hermeneutics in my view covers approaches by African theology, black theology, liberation theology, inculturation theology and women’s theology. In general the preceding approaches have been categorised as inculturation and liberation, with an emphasis on their dichotomy (cf. Lavik 2002:5). However, I link myself with the recent trend where scholars argue for a synthetic interpretation of the two (cf. Martey 1995; Goba 1980:23-35, 1988:17; Tutu 1993:388, 1993:391; Muzorewa 1990:177; Carr 1978:202; Mveng 1988:18). I consider liberation hermeneutics in Africa to be a contextual response to African cultural, political, and socio-economic realities with a mutual overlapping of their concerns. A possible conceptual framework is based on shared beliefs, practices, conventions and traditions. In addition, contrary to Western individualism and modernism, the liberation hermeneutics in Africa treats most aspects of life as an integrated harmonious unity, that is as holistic. All the liberation hermeneutical approaches are intent on making the African masses, clergy and laity become more aware of their

* I am aware of and do not oppose Njoroge’s division of ‘African theological thought: (a) Cultural retrieval; (b) Liberation perspective; (c) Feminist or African women doing theology’ (2000:103).

identity, their difficult situations and of how to enhance possibilities from within (cf. Bujo 1997:141). Therefore, the difference between liberation and inculturation theologies consists in the point of departure rather than the *raison d'être* for actually liberating African Christians as a whole.

In their first step, they challenge the oppressive *status quo* in society in terms of the legacy of colonialism, the impact of missionary history, the presence of modern Western secularising pressures, and the history of Africa's own oppression and exploitation in its various forms. These processes are criticised by African scholars and are seen to be the cause of large-scale material and spiritual poverty, suffering and dehumanisation which have amounted to Africa's 'anthropological pauperization' (Louw 1995:42; also cf. Du Toit 1998:368-369; Pobee 1987:53-54; Mveng 1994; Éla 1994; Bujo 1997:137-139; etc):

These indices of poverty are as much the result of Africa being assimilated to the North, being treated as the 'backyard' of the nations of the North, as self-inflicted through bad planning and ruthless power-drunk African leaders who have no qualms in 'raping' their own people. Abuses of human dignity are much in evidence everywhere in Africa. Poverty and marginalization then are experienced at the gut level (Pobee 1987:54).

The above quotation is but one example of many other African liberation studies, in their variety advocating in one way or another that Africa's causes of poverty, marginalisation and moral decay originate both from within and from without. After locating the contextual problem there follows the search for a way to address it.

In the second step, liberation hermeneutics in Africa is concerned with the search for economic, political and cultural empowerment strategies. It develops approaches and interpretations which can enable the poor and marginalised to challenge their poverty. To achieve this goal the strategies of African biblical scholars and theologians have prioritised the mobilisation and utilisation of indigenous resources for the purpose of developing interdisciplinary contextual biblical interpretations. The pioneer works and articles in this respect within the last two decades, into the twenty-first century, focused on the methods for the alternative contextual reading of the Bible (eg, West 1991, 1993, 1999; West & Dube 2000; Kinoti & Waliggo 1997; Speckman 2001; Manus 2003; etc). The trend also includes numerous doctoral studies (cf. Holter 2002) and some conferences (cf. Getui, Holter & Zinkuratire 2001; Getui, Maluleke & Ukpong 2001) on the Bible and Theology in Africa.

With regard, for instance, to the existential challenge of poverty in Africa, it has been argued that it is important to arrive at a clear definition of it within the liberation approaches. In Mveng's (1994: 154-158) view, the experience of poverty in Africa differs from that in the West. Hence the definition of poverty in the Western perspective entails a lack and deprivation of basic material (eg, food, drink, clothing, housing et cetera), spiritual, moral, cultural and sociological goods. The parameters of such a definition do not accommodate the anthropological and structural poverty that Africa experiences. Therefore, the preceding unsatisfactory definition of poverty in the Western approaches is the reason behind Dickson's argument that the Church in Africa should reconsider the issue from an appropriate viewpoint.

[W]hen we speak of poverty, one question that arises is, in whose eyes is a situation one of poverty?

It is essential that poverty should not be defined using foreign parameters. Poverty is not synonymous with cooking on a coal fire, or feeding babies at the breast, or living in a non-Western type of house, or wearing just enough clothes to feel cool in the tropics, or eating non-Western type of foods. It is when the norm of life is defined solely in the way implied in the last sentence that the pre-conditions are created for real poverty (1984:226).

In the preceding analysis, the following three advantages of the liberation hermeneutics in Africa are evident. As a struggle against poverty, these advantages encourage the continuation of the Africanisation of biblical studies, because economic and spiritual emancipation must go together. The contemporary African human situation engenders both material and spiritual deprivation (cf. Kobia 2003:171; Mveng 1994:155-165). The following tools are indispensable for the process of the emancipation of the poor in Africa:

- The African indigenous resources, such as the networks of relationships, co-operation and mutuality in the holistic approach to life, can be used for a proper understanding of Africa's own challenges to poverty. Hence, the local resources can define effective solutions from within an African socio-cultural setting.
- These resources can be used to re-examine key texts on poverty in the Old Testament from a new perspective. They can also be used to re-design some aspects of poverty definitions and poverty eradication strategies current in Old Testament interpretations of poverty in terms of a Western orientation.

- Such resources can serve as channels of contact between the grassroots African communities, the elite and the international community in the process of transforming the crisis of poverty.

b) Women's liberation hermeneutics

The last decade, leading into the twenty-first century, has witnessed an increased and substantial women's liberation input to overcome women's long standing oppressed voice. Women's liberation hermeneutics'* universal perspective concerns the empowering of women and of all people struggling for survival, justice and wholeness of life. The focus of these studies falls on the method of understanding and interpreting the Bible and Christian tradition in the light of women's experiences of suffering, pain and struggle for living, within a diversity of locations and traditions in the world (cf. Ortega 1995:viii). The aim of this approach is to achieve the proposed goal of justice, peace and wholeness of life. The success of women's liberation hermeneutics has been well evidenced by the realisation of the potential of a women's perspective. With the input of the latter, it has been possible to identify the patriarchal nature of cultures, Christian traditions, biblical texts and interpretations which have resulted in the marginalisation of women.

The priority for women's liberation hermeneutics in Africa is to transform the prevalent, traditional and modern dehumanising basic perceptions of women's bodies and capabilities (cf. Oduyoye & Kanyoro 1992; Amoah 1996; Oduyoye 1995; Njoroge 2000; Dube 1997; Masenya 1991, 1997, 1997a, 1999, 2001, 2003, et cetera). Therefore such studies engage and challenge the negative beliefs and practices regarding women which have, for a long period been perpetuated through either cultural sanctions and traditions or the androcentric orientation of African social institutions. They also challenge the legacy of colonialism and the patriarchal nature of the Bible and its interpretation. These oppressive aspects, indeed, conspire to bring the condition of the African woman to the abyss of material and spiritual poverty (cf. Amoah 1995:1; Dube 2001:17).

* I use the phrase 'women's liberation hermeneutics' because I consider it to cover the overlapping of purposes in what others have called *feminist theology*, *feminism*, *women's liberation* and *theology from the perspective of African women* (cf. Ortega 1995; Oduyoye 1994:166-167).

Though women's liberation hermeneutics in Africa in terms of publications is still in its infancy, I believe it to have provided a viable principle for transforming the destitute situation of Africans. The major principle advocated, concerns responsibility for liberating, nurturing and developing the consciousness of resistance or the '*The Will to Arise*' as Oduyoye and Kanyoro (1992) have called it, from the point of view of the African women's experiences of survival. The will to resist oppression is generally present among the dehumanised women as the poor *per se*. I argue that the spirit of resistance to poverty functions like the political will that eradicated colonialism and heralded independence in Africa. Similarly the spirit of resistance to poverty, accompanied by a committed determination to improving one's life, can eradicate poverty and bring about a better life in Africa today. In fact, Africa could be saved much more completely if all African institutions took the challenge to find better ways of organising and motivating society along these lines. The suggestion is that Africa possesses an unexploited vital strength that is represented by its abundant internal human resources and potential to eradicate poverty (cf. Fassinou 1995:16-17; Kobia 2003:170-185).

Another key principle derived from women's liberation hermeneutics is the egalitarian model between the two genders. Equality is emphasised as a fundamental constituent of life-giving situations and of abundant life for communities and societies in Africa. This principle is affirmed in the motif of the creation of human beings in the Bible that is similar to the traditional African understanding. The Akan proverb sums up the issue of equality in the argument:

Onipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obi nnye Asaase ba – all human beings are children of God, no one is the child of the earth. Humanity has the image of God and thus each and every human being, regardless of age, class, gender or race, is endowed with dignity and respect. Physical, spiritual, social, economic and cultural resources should be used to sustain all God's creatures (Amoah 1995:2).

Therefore, many African women's liberation interpretations critique oppressive elements of cultures and traditions but with a keen sense of orientation along the lines of Amoah's suggested inclusive approach. Their quest for an inclusive solidarity is witnessed in the formation and contributions of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, which has involved women of all cadres. An inclusiveness based on unity and equality between women and men is also found to be necessary in transforming the strategies of human well-being (cf. Dube 2001; Njoroge & Dube

2001). In my view, the perspectives of women's liberation hermeneutics in Africa are representative of the lowest stratum of poverty victims, and have indicated that it is within the African capacity to eradicate poverty. In the words of Fassinou (1995:17) quoted from Ka-Mara (1991)*, women's liberation hermeneutics contributes in two ways to the task of the reconstruction of the African continent.

- First, it begins with the grassroots women's experiences by reckoning these as a major force for bringing about feasible changes in life and society.
- Second, it provides a serious systematised contextual understanding of faith that concerns the empowerment of the marginalised.

c) Reconstruction hermeneutics

Reconstruction hermeneutics is concerned with the role of Christian theology in the social and economic reconstruction of Africa, in the light of the contemporary rapidly changing circumstances in the continent, which is riddled with pertinent issues of food crises, child abuse, the AIDS pandemic, poverty, et cetera. From the perspective of reconstruction hermeneutics the preceding challenges to social and economic transformation must be addressed in a unique and inspiring way. Therefore, reconstruction hermeneutics aims to put an end to the destitute situation of African society in two ways:

- Firstly, it analyses the context of the destitution in the society and defines the relevant biblical solution.
- Secondly, reconstruction hermeneutics challenges the society to action, towards the realisation of the social and economic vision that is defined by the biblical metaphor of the kingdom of God (cf. Villa-Vivencio 1992:280).

The pioneer studies regarding the reconstruction paradigm are by Mugambi (1989, 1995, 1997a, 1997b, 2003) who discusses some key details for reconstruction theology. His main arguments propose the reconstruction of social structures that can

* Ka-Mara, *Foi chrétienne, crise africaine et reconstruction de l'Afrique*, Clé, Lomé, 1991.

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empower Africans to overcome their own self-pity and inferiority complexes and find purpose in life. These complexes resulted from being under the domination of foreign cultural and religious influences for a long period and have caused the African to appear passive. Hence, Mugambi (1997b:1-25) prioritises the reconstruction of religion since it plays a central role in providing a worldview that can synthesise all aspects of life in the rapid social transformation of Africa. Africans have to retrieve and affirm their cultural identity and awareness in order to give a new lease of life to Africa's economy, politics and social life. The implication for Christianity in Africa is that it should strive to develop and teach a holistic reconstruction theology that is

reconstructive rather than destructive; inclusive rather than exclusive; proactive rather than reactive; complementary rather than competitive; integrative rather than disintegrative; programme-driven rather than project-driven; people-centred rather than institution-centred; deed-oriented rather than word-oriented; participatory rather than autocratic; regenerative rather than degenerative; future-sensitive rather than past-sensitive; co-operative rather than confrontational; consultative rather than impositional (1995:xv).

In the above quote, Mugambi (1995:226-243; 1997b; also cf. Du Toit 1998:369-373; Louw 1995:46-48) suggests a multi-disciplinary approach with at least five key reconstructive considerations for African Christian reconstruction hermeneutics:

- Reconstruction theology should preserve the rich, positive elements of the African heritage.
- It should critique missionary activity, insisting that its message needs to be relevant to the African context.
- It should convey an ecumenical analysis and solution which deters wicked and competitive denominational biases or extreme positions.
- It should involve an assessment of Africa's place in the New World Order by making clear and raising the new roles of its institutions for development to the level of Pan-Africanism.
- Reconstructive visions should underscore agricultural policies in which the production of food crops rather than cash crops for Africa's masses is emphasised.

From what has been discussed in this section, 'other African voices on poverty', it can be argued that the crucial responsibility to eradicate poverty rests with Africans themselves. On the one hand, Africa south of the Sahara is a Christian

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continent. More than 48% of the total population is Christian, that is, more than 350 million out of a population of 770 million, which makes Christianity the most prevalent faith and the dominant force on the continent. Not only is the number of Christians great but also many people read the Bible in Africa, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, because the Bible is the only widely available literature. It is read even by non-Christians. I would think that Christianity has to be taken seriously as a fundamental catalyst for any feasible transformation of the lives of people in Africa.

On the other hand, the African voices of liberation hermeneutics, women's liberation hermeneutics and reconstruction hermeneutics indicate that the Bible has a history of being misused in Africa, because its interpreters have been people with reasonable means, even well-to-do people. Hence, they have either treated biblical studies as an isolated island in the ocean of theology and hermeneutics, or not recognised the part played by the exegete's social context in the interpretational framework of the Bible they use. The resulting biblical interpretation is apolitical, that is, does not challenge the reader's social reality and creates a shelter for sexist, racist, oppressive tendencies: marginalisation of children, of blacks, of women, of the poor and the uneducated. In other words, the African voices suggest that the Bible as the Word of God has been used as a tool for sustaining and preserving the *status quo* of the few privileged people instead of promoting the life of the majority.

The question we can ask ourselves is: Can a twenty-first century Bible interpretation address the two challenges in Africa? This question can be answered by a sound grasp of the Bible itself and its life-promoting contents by the African interpreters themselves. In addition the African communal understanding, its struggles and worldview, should influence and determine the biblical teachings in Africa. There is, therefore, a profound need for a new agenda for biblical studies in Africa today. I therefore submit that for any poverty eradication strategy to offer an effective hope and empower the marginalised to rise to the challenge of poverty, it will require the same zeal that was used to eradicate colonialism and apartheid. It is possible to eradicate poverty because Africa commands the resources and the technical ability. What is needed is the will to arise from poverty, that is to undergo a spiritual emancipation as an integral part of the liberation of the whole person (also cf. Kobia 2003:170-171; Mugambi 1997b:3). Such a spiritual liberation is possible by

beginning from the viewpoint of the poor themselves, by a re-affirmation of cultural identity and consciousness. It involves allowing the poor to speak their own language and chart their own course in order to be able to discern their own humanity in exercising their social and economic rights. The following section responds to this important quest that most African scholars have mentioned but without attempting to offer a detailed background.

3.3 Challenging poverty through returning to African values

The heading of this section refers to the search for the true values of African culture that can provide a practical understanding of poverty. These values can only be gleaned from the rich African heritage stemming from the traditional African societal context. They too have suffered from an inferiority complex and neglect. In order to carry out this search I critically analyse the application of the term ‘poverty’ in traditional African conditions and proceed to exemplify its presence in African proverbial material, adding suggestions regarding its relevance for the twenty-first century African. The major contribution of this section is that it reflects and establishes the thinking pattern of African worldviews on poverty that forms the framework informing my interpretation of biblical proverbs in the following chapter.

3.3.1 The socio-economic structure of traditional African society

In sub-section 3.2.1 (a critical review of some political and economical initiatives in Africa) it has been pointed out that poverty alleviation strategies in post-colonial Africa, have in common, the exclusion of local resources in favour of foreign donors. Some scholars still seem to consider this approach to be a deliberate act of extermination of the ‘brutes’ that is perceived in terms of Western postmodern influence. Yet it would be misleading to assume that poverty arrived with colonialism, even though the latter has made it appear worse. Poverty has existed from antiquity in societies, including those of Africa. Therefore, it is correct to accept Shorter’s (1999:7) and Akao’s (2000:54) emphasis that the people at the grassroots possess a good experiential understanding of the poverty challenge. In fact, the majority of

these people are largely based in rural areas where the African traditional societal values are still applied to a great extent. Owing to the latter reason, I also find it important to consider a departure from this African grassroots experiential conception of poverty when searching for a new approach to the challenge of poverty that stems from below. A definition of poverty based on the popular or majority social context is representative of the grassroots' destitute situation both physically and socially. I consider that such a definition is crucial to my search for an alternative biblical interpretation of the poverty texts in the Book of Proverbs, based on their popular social location.

The focus of this section is to demonstrate how all other aspects of life relate to the basic question of poverty according to the African holistic view of life. A holistic approach to life is favoured because the core concerns of poverty are shaped basically by the integrative African perception of God, religious experience, self-esteem, worldview, political realities, natural resources and climate. Hence, I disagree with Du Toit's words that these shaping forces are 'all vitally determined by one's basic living conditions. It would seem sacrilege to expect a Western hermeneutic consciousness from people lacking the basic means of existence' (1998:364). Rather, these elements are constitutive in the allocation of resources, arrangement of work and distribution of products for earning one's livelihood in a traditional society in which the indigenous social organisation appears to be the central organising principle. Therefore it is rather these forces that determine the living conditions than vice versa. An analysis of an actual social context indicates that the living conditions and means of livelihood are being influenced by such forces. Hence an understanding of the functioning of the actual social context is necessary to shed more light on the individual proverbs' interpretation of poverty (cf. Loader 1999:222). In other words, the function of poverty proverbs is dependent on an existential situation.

In Africa, no cultural economic theory and programmes exist which one can compare to Western modes of production and distribution of the necessary items to live in society and survive as individuals. Hence production, including that of material goods, is mostly 'undertaken by intimate communities of persons sharing a multitude of social ties and functions' (Dalton 1967:63). In other words, it is a community activity in which the kinship, political, and religious institutions are inextricably involved in restricting and directing all stages of production. This holistic life is

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characterised by the interdependence of social obligation, affiliation and rights in terms of the following facets (cf. Moyo 1999:49-57; Dalton 1967:66-80):

- Land is a basic public resource for subsistence and the social right of every household; traditionally, it is acquired through social relationships and rarely through purchase. The emphasis falls more on the common use of the land and property rather than its ownership (cf. Moyo 1999:54-56). Moreover, Africa is a continent rich with land and other potential natural resources. More than eighty percent of the African population lives in rural areas where land is the major means of livelihood.
- Labour to work the land and herd cattle may also be obtained through various free and unconditional clan social or communality relationships, generosity, cooperation, hospitality, and compassion (cf. Mosha 2000:146).
- Physical environment, social structure and values determine work arrangements such as the division of labour on gender lines, beliefs regarding work time, the enjoyable aspects of working groups, getting more people than needed to perform a task. The most important emphasis is on working hard, which earns dignity and respect because it is regarded as a ‘manifestation of a mature and maturing person in society. This is a virtue that, in coordination with other virtues...keep [sic] the heartbeat of communities alive and healthy’ (Mosha 2000:145).
- Emphases on social obligations for distributing a product that are built on the principles of reciprocity, sharing, solidarity and redistribution. The first three are typical features of the African way of life in terms of both for tangible and intangible resources: ‘the frequency and amount of such gifts are greater; the number of different people with whom one person may engage in gift exchange is larger; the social obligations (and sanctions) to do so are stronger’ (Dalton 1967:72; also cf. Shorter 1999:14).
- Wealth is community-centred, that is, whether it independently or obligatorily accumulates to a friend, kin, neighbour, chief, king or priest, it is intended for the promotion of the welfare of the community (eg, defence, feasts, rewards and assistance to the poor or less fortunate). The Akan proverb declares: *Sika*

pereguan da kurom a, ewo amansan: ‘If there is a *pereguan** in a town, it belongs to the whole people’.

- Generosity is one quality which gives value to wealth; otherwise by itself it is worth very little (cf. Gbadegesin 1991:215; Potkanski 1999:199-200; Shorter 1999:13).

In addition to the communal ownership of land, wealth and property, there is a recognised presence of the African traditional religious belief system in the features described. The resources to sustain life, such as land, rivers, sea, trees, animals, minerals, work and the like are considered to have a divine source and are dynamic gifts to humanity (cf. Gbadegesin 1991:226-232; Magesa 1998:63; Moyo 1999:50-51). There is a strong belief that all human beings are created by God and have been endowed with these divine elements in public trust, for the basic common good of the present generation and the preservation of future progeny. As the Sukuma proverb puts it: *Idimagi chiza isi, kulwa nguno batang'winhile babyaji bing'we bamubikija bana bing'we*: ‘Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children’ (Healy & Sybertz 1996:324). This permeating consciousness accords meaning to the emphasis on the inter-connectedness of humanity: the dignity and respect due to every one in society in the use of such resources.

Therefore morality is an essential element in social relationships. The inclusive morality in the ownership of property, together with the other values pointed out earlier, enabled the traditional community to transcend self-centredness, individualism and unhealthy competition to outdo the other. Instead, society thrived on a communal, equitable distribution of resources stemming from a sound understanding of common humanity, respect and dignity as given by God. This internal mechanism that was reinforced by a profound respect for the ancestors who put in place values of cooperation, unity and community within the African traditional way of life ensured that no one lived in abject poverty. As a result, in traditional societies life was secure enough for everybody, and is rarely known to have had specialised institutions to care for the disabled or the destitute (cf. Luow 1995:46-47; Shorter 1999:11; Magesa 1998:241-247).

* A unit of British colonial currency, used in Ghana until 1957 (gold valued at £8.2s).

3.3.2 Notions of poverty in the traditional African context

One should enquire as to the content, usage and function of the term poverty in African society. Many African proverbs and stories refer to the poor or poverty. This indicates that imagery of poverty is prevalent in the African ethnic languages, demonstrating that the challenge of poverty has been there from time immemorial. Hence, Bible translators have adopted the indigenous words for poverty in their variety without much difficulty. It is not clear to me, however, whether the translators have considered if the semantic perspectives on the poor in the African context show a close affinity with similar words for the poor in the Hebrew Bible.

In Africa, poverty constitutes one of the basic challenges of life. It is considered a challenge rather than a problem because a problem in traditional African society is a mere symptom of a real social or cultural or economic crisis. In the case of poverty, treating it simply as a problem is considered to inhibit the enhancement of confidence, dignity and empowerment within the people and communities, thus making the problem worse (cf. Craftsman & McKnight 1993:8). Considering poverty as a challenge offers a dynamic opportunity for community initiatives which use internal resources such as the capacities, skills and assets of the poor people and their network of relationships to transform the situation. This brings to mind the complex, multifaceted content, usage and function of the term poverty in Africa.

The large number of ethnic languages and the lack of expert linguistic and lexical vernacular documented sources makes it difficult for me to present a detailed semantic view regarding the terminology of poverty in Africa. However, I submit that in all African vernaculars one finds words referring to the poor that are full of meaning. A few literal translations of Ashanti, Bena, Chewa, Igbo and Yoruba terms for poverty will suffice to exemplify the point.

- ‘*Muhangala*’ in Bena of Tanzania literally means ‘deprivation’.
- ‘*Ohia*’ in Ashanti literally means ‘needy’. ‘*Ahokyere*’ literally means ‘want’.
- ‘*Umphawi*’ in Chewa literally means ‘lack of kin and friends’.
- ‘*Ogbenye*’ (*Ogbo* literally ‘community’, *Nye* literally ‘to give’). The Igbo terminology for the poor refers to a person whose existence is the collective responsibility of the society.

- '*Aku-ise*' in Yoruba literally means 'carrying misery'.

In the various proverbs concerning the poor in Africa one finds as many words that designate the content and function of the terms for the poor. Their semantic content implies the following:

- Lack of a sustainable means of subsistence for oneself and one's family that can provide the basic needs of livelihood in terms of food, shelter, education and clothing is a form of poverty. The inability to fulfil human needs does not give one a general feeling of well-being within the entire community of which one is part. It puts limits to debt servicing and participation in the rites of passage that confer honour, prestige and dignity on a person. A major African cultural socio-economic principle is one of self-sustenance that gives a person freedom to mature towards independent humanness. On the contrary, one becomes a beggar, totally dependent on others and subjugated by one's benefactors. This applies, for example, to the sick, the slaves, the oppressed and the marginalised (cf. Onyejekwe 2001:583; Kemdirim 1998:72).
- Inability to ensure the family's belongingness in the community is a form of poverty. This is a social deprivation which in the African context is the worst kind of poverty. Being secluded, alienated, isolated or ostracised from the family or community is a curse because life is meant to be shared. In Africa, the family is the most basic social unit which defines a person in terms of human relationship and traditional socialisation processes: 'I am because we are; we are because I am'. The deep sense of belonging to the family and community is indicated by behaviour of solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue, trust and care for others in terms of reciprocating and sharing obligations and responsibilities amongst each other. Hence, the existence of African people counts more on community support and strength than on individualism (cf. Onyejekwe 2001:579; Alt 1992; Kisembo, Magesa & Shorter 1998:202-203; Healey & Sybertz 1996:83). The family community, which includes the extended family and the clan, is considered a sacred institution. As a result, its firm principles of co-operation and co-responsibility bear on the individual's performance in life. By means of

the former's strong spirit of solidarity the individual is integrated into the larger human community's moral and material supportive system as reciprocation for acting in accordance with the norms and virtues of the society.

- Deprivation of farming land is a kind of poverty. As indicated in parts of section 3.3.1 of this thesis, land constitutes a basic resource with a divine sanction in the African context. Before colonisation by foreigners, Africans were solely dependent on land. This situation still holds true for the majority of people in Africa today because they are rurally-based, and land offers the only potential resource for agriculture, pastures, hunting and fishing. Hence, the traditional African system was meant to ensure that an equitable distribution and judicious use of land was in place at all times. This approach was a means of dealing with poverty so that a person did not become worthless for lack of access to land, as a means to meet the minimum requirements for life (cf. Kemdirim 1998:72). However, it is important to note that owing to the patriarchal nature of most African societies, women did not enjoy direct control and access to the land.
- Childlessness or having no offspring, no family and friends, comprises a situation of real poverty. In Africa the priority is the continuity of the family and community, which is ensured by having children. The culturally-determined family values emphasise marriage and procreation for the survival of the community. Hence, the emphasis on male children to achieve continuity is evident in most African societies. But children, regardless of gender or physical features, are treasured as a measure of success in the life and well-being of the family and community. A childless adult or person who is incapable of caring for a family by accident or out of personal imperfection is regarded as a worthless and unfulfilled human being in the society he or she is part of (cf. Kemdirim 1998:72-73; Onyejekwe 2001:580-581, 2001:583).
- Failure to qualify for membership in some sacred socio-cultural institutions or cults is another form of poverty. In the African context, social organisations exist such as age grading systems and cults, initiation into which is conceived to impart honour, prestige, dignity and protection from dangers. It is through such processes that a person achieves wholeness, pride and fulfilment in her or

his humanness and accesses the solidarity of the community as a mature person. Otherwise the person is regarded as weak and poor (cf. Kemdirim 1998:73).

- Being bodily weak, lazy, a loiterer, an idler, incapable of planning for one's future, incurring high indebtedness without the ability to repay debts is a kind of self-induced poverty. In the African context such symptom is considered a disgrace because it is regarded as a type of parasitism and slavery. Moreover, poverty in Africa is relational as it affects all in terms of the inter-relatedness and connectedness of relationships. As a result, the lazy, the idlers and the loiterers are a liability and a threat to society as a whole (cf. Gbadegesin 1991:229; Luow 1995:46).

The foregoing poverty distinctions are not necessarily mutually exclusive of each other because of the nature and causes of poverty in Africa. From the terms for poverty, it becomes obvious that the causes of poverty relate closely to the African worldview as well.

- The life of a human being in an African society is understood to be regulated by the acts of gods, divinities, ancestors, witches/wizards and the like. The gods and divinities are believed to inflict infirmities, that is, barrenness, impotency, mental disability, incurable and mysterious diseases on people that in turn cause them to become poor. The same happens with the ancestors if they are angered by not being properly revered according to tradition. Also, witches and/or wizards who use magic, witchcraft and other supernatural powers, causing misfortunes to other people in order to make them become poor.
- Another form of poverty is caused by groups of people in society. Such groups protect their status in life by maintaining conditions of impoverishment for others. Some examples of this type of poverty include colonisation that took away land from Africans and destroyed the human infrastructure, reducing persons to wage-slavery (cf. Nürnberg 1999:205). Also owing to the patriarchal nature of African social organisation, women on account of an alleged inferior social status, seldom own land in spite of being the main

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agricultural producers (cf. Hadjor 1987:103-108). As a result, such people have been enslaved and own no inheritable property. The offspring of such parents are being born into slavery. I concur with Akao (2000:51) that one perpetrator of poverty is social stratification which serves the vested interests of the rich. In such a situation, even when the poor would have liked changes, they remain powerless to transform the dominant social structures that determine their livelihood.

- Probably a common cause of poverty in Africa is weak households, especially where families are deprived of an able-bodied male workforce (cf. Iliffe 1987:4, 1987:7). This can happen if the household's members are incapacitated, elderly, young, and/or lack sufficient support from the clan and community to benefit from the land. Natural catastrophes such as drought, floods and war can be treated as similar in effect to the previously mentioned cause of poverty because they also either deprive or overstretch people's means of life and livelihood.
- Finally, poverty is caused by laziness, idleness and frustration regarding their work in some physically able people. Lazy behaviour may comprise an unwillingness to engage in productive activity and an evasion of as much work as possible. A lazy type of person works under the stress of necessity and tries to make his or her living from hard-working people by continual begging, stealing and other fraudulent means. Work frustration concerns demotivated, hard-working people who have struggled very hard to overcome their poverty but without success. Also, despair regarding work may be caused by the unjust socio-economic structures of the community, that is, the existence of an inequitable distribution of resources (cf. Gbadegesin 1991:224-225).

In understanding the notion of poverty in the African context, it is also important to look into the attitude of African society towards the poor and poverty. In all senses, poverty in Africa is not perceived as a virtue in life because it undermines the well-being of a person. Hence, an ongoing process has usually taken place within the society to eradicate the causes of poverty, which involves building a way of life that embodies a strong moral ethic of solidarity and participation. This means that the African qualities of spirituality, co-operation, hospitality, a sense of belonging,

sharing, compassion, respect and reciprocal responsibility are highly internalised among the members of such a society. I agree with Kemdirim (1998:75) that with the presence of such a dynamic collective responsibility in the family and society, it is possible to provide for the poor without formal poverty institutions.

The content and context of such a social organisation is based on the unity of the different aspects of life in the African worldview. In the latter, life is conceived as sacred in respect of the integrity of the spiritual and mystical nature of creation. In addition to such an understanding, the human being, family and community are defined in terms of the values of solidarity and participation. Hence, these emphasise the virtues constitutive of unity: procreation and sharing in life, friendship, healing and hospitality (cf. Magesa 1998:55, also cf. Luow 1995:46-47) as one whole. In such cases, assisting the poor is the responsibility of all regardless of age, gender and rank, with the sanction of God, divinities, spirits and the ancestors. Thus assistance to the poor brings blessing, whereas lack of generosity to the poor incurs the wrath of gods and ancestors towards the family and community. Usually in the African context assistance, charity and generosity do not constitute a free hand-out because both the beneficiary and the benefactor observe a sanctioned role to preserve the human dignity of each other in the process.

But in addition, family and community honour, integrity, credibility and dignity are at stake when the poor amidst them do not receive the proper rehabilitation assistance, or when mockery, gossip and numerous forms of disrespect from immediate neighbours and others are used to shame the respective families or communities for irresponsibility towards their kinsfolk. These latter are duty-bound to conceal the shame of the poverty of their kindred by helping to bring the person back to balance. The practice of the spirit of mutual and social justice in African communal life ensures the sustaining of the well-being of orphans, widows and the weak. True friendship, neighbourliness and family relationships are strengthened in times of scarcity and suffering through ‘being with’, both in spirit and a physical sense of solidarity, to enable a person to survive with dignity (cf. Onyejekwe 2001:583-584). The communal approach to poverty is the basic reason behind both the lack of formalised institutions and a hostile attitude to institutional care for the poor in Africa (cf. Iliffe 1987:7). But it is obvious that the issue of poverty is a sensitive one in the African context. Various means have been employed in order to combat poverty, but mainly from within, through an equitable distribution of resources, instilling

communal moral principles and religious ideals supportive of the transformational systems of the society.

3.3.3 The concept of *Ujamaa* (familyhood) in Tanzania

This section briefly analyses a practical case of some positive African traditional values that co-opted modernity. The approach, *Ujamaa* (familyhood), made valuable contributions towards people's empowerment by the recognition and protection of human equity and dignity in Tanzania. Owing to the large amount of literature on *Ujamaa* and the nature of my study the account will focus mainly on the sense of the dynamics of poverty and the transforming strategies undertaken by the policy to address the challenge.

Tanzania became independent in 1961 under Julius K. Nyerere, commonly known as *Mwalimu* (teacher). At some point in time, he was being honoured in Tanzania as '*Baba wa Taifa*', literally, 'Father of the Nation'. His precepts were being aired by a public mass medium, namely, Radio Tanzania. A half-hour speech was broadcast in the morning and evening under the title '*Wosia wa Baba*', literally, 'The Father's Will'. The speeches, which are also documented in his writings, poems and translated works, demonstrate his major concern as the leader of an African country that has been, and still is, among the world's poorest countries. From 1962 until 1985 the government of Tanzania under its architect, the first President, Nyerere, adopted and practised an egalitarian socio-economic policy to challenge poverty in the country. That human-centred political programme was called *Ujamaa*, which was basically an extension of African familyhood principles and values. It exhibited a deliberate holistic orientation in the sense that economic development was to go together with social equity so as to enhance the dignity and humanity of the poor.

Even in retirement Nyerere (1986:4) emphasised the focus of *Ujamaa* on the human being as constituting the realistic acceptance of human equality and dignity. Every human being has an equal right to a decent life, participation in government and the responsibility to work to the limit of one's ability for the benefit of the society. Any individual should not accrue a surplus to oneself when there is someone still in need in one's society. Until his untimely death in 1999, Nyerere's firm position towards defending the poor was remarkable. In one of his last speeches on the subject

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of poverty and globalisation he sternly cautions his audience about the grievous side-effects for the ordinary people in Africa:

The relentless and single-minded drive by the rich and powerful to globalize and liberalize; to privatize every public enterprise; to deify the Market; to weaken our governments and make it impossible for them to intervene decisively on behalf of the poor and powerless: all this will, no doubt succeed in creating immense wealth for a minority of countries and a minority of citizenry in every country. But it is also creating massive poverty and hopelessness for the majority of countries of the world [more so in Africa] and their citizens (1998:6).

The Tanzanian *Ujamaa* approach was a home-grown initiative. Strategically, *Ujamaa*'s intention was to construct a self-reliant society that was different from the colonial capitalist background which the country had inherited at independence. It was realised that the colonial (that is, social, political and economic) organisation was based on an individualistic philosophy that contradicted the African heritage and the latter's egalitarian principles. The colonial organisational structures were only aimed at fostering foreign law and order. Differently expressed, the inherited colonial, social and economic system was a poor tool to mobilise and empower people to work for the improvement of their living conditions (cf. Nyerere 1969:4). In other words, desperately needed economic and social change in Tanzania, perhaps in Africa at large as well, had and still has to

be determined by our own needs as we see them, and in the direction that we feel to be appropriate for us at any particular time. We shall draw sustenance from universal human ideas and from the practical experiences of other peoples; **but we start from the full acceptance of our African-ness and a belief that in our own past there is very much which is useful for our time** [emphasis is mine] (Nyerere 1967:316).

The basic sense of African identity envisioned in the above quote is the reason why *Ujamaa* is considered as essentially an African approach to poverty. It appropriated the positive legacy of the African cultural values of familyhood to challenge poverty at the grassroots. In the traditional African context, the family constituted the entirety of the existential and survival means of the African individual, family, clan and society (cf. also 3.3.1 & 3.3.2 above). The vital resources in African society comprised togetherness, cooperation, sharing and work as communal responsibilities. *Ujamaa* embodied all these principles in order to create a new vision and environment that could bring the socio-economic structures of the Tanzanian nation into line with what is happening in the world.

The priority of *Ujamaa* was to maintain social cohesion, stability and peace, which are the essential elements of meaningful political freedom, social and economic change. Therefore *Ujamaa* was designed as the framework to construct a new platform for further economic development. *Ujamaa* was a system where the sound traditional African values of social justice existed, where there was equal opportunity for all, and where there was a just system of wealth distribution. These three essential factors that determined the foundation for autonomy and self-reliance in *Ujamaa* were within the capacity of the people themselves. In other words, the essentials for creating a society according to the *Ujamaa* policy constituted no financial implications in real terms because they were to be paid for in kind, namely, people for labour, land, good governance or leadership and a viable policy – *Ujamaa*.

Ujamaa as a programme for viable social, political and economic transformation depended on the voluntary participation of the people: the attitude of mind to carry out the necessary empowering actions for and with human dignity and equality. The emphasis is placed on raising awareness in order to empower the people to emancipate themselves and become masters of their own destiny. Therefore, the *Ujamaa* policy undertook to involve all people in the implementation of its extensive communal socio-economic plans by means of the following practical steps:

- All major productive means of commerce, industry and natural resources were vested in the public sphere. In this case, land, including that of the traditional society, family and clan, was placed in the hands of the public and in trust to the State so that the majority of the citizens could enjoy access to it. This was done because land redistribution as a necessary driver for economic growth became a matter of priority for the people at the grassroots. As a result, land nationalisation in Tanzania to a large degree has solved the problem of landlessness because land is plentiful despite low fertility. Yet this problem is still prevalent in other African countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, et cetera.
- The people who were to work on the land were available but scattered in the rural traditional ancestral settlements. Therefore, they were brought together to form larger *Ujamaa* villages. The vision of the ‘villagisation’ programme was to create an inevitable solidarity and community at national level: an

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extension of African ‘familyhood’ foundations, tightly knitting together self-reliant village communities. This step was also intended to aid the government to distribute the scarce social services of health, education, communication and technology to the majority of the people in the country. Such an approach could enable the people to achieve a higher standard of living and reduce the gap between the minority haves, who are normally the intellectual elite and urban dwellers, and the have-nots, mostly residing in the rural areas.

- Free social services, education and health, were offered to all people by the government in order to eradicate ignorance and disease. This step was a breakthrough to equal opportunity. It was compulsory for all school age children, for instance, to be enrolled in the seven-year primary education system in order to eradicate ignorance and illiteracy in the country. In the process the inherited colonial educational curriculum that had encouraged individualistic advancement was overhauled to become people-centred. Education came to be geared to self-reliance. The intention was to enable those who completed their education at any stage to master their destiny using the available resources. This was also the goal of the efforts of the traditional African educational system. For those who received higher education it was intended to create socialist elites who put the people’s interest first: that is, they were to provide consultative leadership in the *Ujamaa* process.

As a matter of fact, the reforms embedded in the *Ujamaa* vision have been varied in terms of uplifting the living standards and decency of the majority in Tanzania rather than a few privileged members of the population.

- The historical causes of poverty, such as inequalities in political and socio-economic terms, were addressed using Tanzanian, African, experiences.
- Efforts to communicate relevant knowledge through a viable educational structure that could establish mutual trust and respect between the elite and the poor were undertaken.

- Cultural constraints that prevented the people from engaging creatively in initiating their own responses to the challenge of poverty were liberated by means of providing an equal opportunity for all towards attaining self-reliance.
- The means of productivity were enlarged and technologically advanced, especially in the move from household small farms to the larger collective farms.

The above points indicate that the Tanzanian government was largely successful in its determination to build a decent nation. Its course of action received sympathy from the donor community, especially from the Scandinavian countries and the policy of the World Bank (under the presidency of Robert McNamara) of achieving growth and equity (cf. Bigsten et al 2001:295). In spite of all these efforts, the country suffered from a combination of bureaucratic causes/factors and a series of economic catastrophes beyond its control. These grievously affected the country and eventually led to an economic decline.

- Oil price hikes in 1974 and 1979 by OPEC (the Oil and Petroleum Exporting Countries) caused the prices of petroleum products to reach record levels. As a result, most of the proceeds of agricultural exports, the mainstay of the economy, were used to pay for the fuel import bill, which led to a decline in development investments in other categories.
- The severe drought of 1973/74 affected maize production, the main subsistence food crop. The disaster caused Tanzania, which was an exporter of maize, to become dependent on food imports, compounding the problem of the import bill in trade terms.
- The fall in coffee prices during 1979 brought about a major revenue shortfall that led both to an accumulation of international debt and recourse to foreign assistance.
- The costly war against the Amin regime in Uganda in 1978-1979 in order to protect the dignity of the nation of Tanzania depleted any remaining reserves.
- Bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, authoritarianism in enforcing *Ujamaa* from above after the State lost patience regarding the voluntarist vision, all failed in making the rural peasants contribute substantially to the economic

maximisation of the policy, because the peasants continued to live according to the economy of affection that is based on social relations (cf. Nugent 2004:149).

As a result of the above difficult situation, the World Bank was approached for a standby credit in 1981. But the World Bank was only willing to provide this credit when Tanzania had agreed to the International Monetary Fund's strict conditions: 50 per cent currency devaluation, substantial government budget cuts, liberalisation of trade, removal of exchange control regulations, privatisation of the economy and retrenchment of civil servants. Nyerere rejected these conditions and introduced austerity measures under the National Economic Survival Programme in 1981/82. However, when he retired in 1985 the new regime agreed to the conditions of the International Monetary Fund, the programmes of which have already been discussed in section 3.2.1 of this thesis (cf. also Davidson 1992:222).

This sub-section has described the practical example of a consistent, comprehensive dialogue with African culture in *Ujamaa* that has resulted in peace, unity, tranquillity, the elimination of ethnicity and the use of one language – *Swahili* – for the country in the last forty years. However, even though these social and political contributions comprise valuable human development assets for a poor country like Tanzania, they have no value in terms of gross domestic product (GDP). Tanzania is among the poorest nations of Africa and the third poorest in the world in economic terms, but it has no match in Africa in terms of peace and unity (cf. also Kobia 2003:35). My brief analysis of a number of reasons for the nation's economic stagnation and eventual decline into a destitute situation from the early 1980s onwards has hopefully absolved the *Ujamaa* policy from the blame of being an accomplice of this economic decline.

In both traditional African society and the *Ujamaa* experiment, proverbs have been used as one of the means of communicating the envisioned ideals of a good life. Consequently, in particular, what is the concept of poverty in African proverbs on the poor? And what is its relationship to the transformation of such people on the African continent? Answers to these questions are proposed in the following discussion of the origin, circulation and influential aspects of proverbs.

3.4 African proverbs on poverty

In search of an African understanding of the issue of poverty, it is important to recognise the contribution of proverbs dealing with poverty as a human condition. Proverbial expressions often correctly represent the attitudes, beliefs, values, history, customs and practices that are common to both the speaker and the hearer of proverbs. Because proverbs are part of the African oral culture, they are orally transmitted in the collective or individual initiation and mentoring rites of social maturity practised by many African ethnic groups. Different values and ideals regarding every aspect of life, that is, the social, religious, economic, educational and political issues of a society, are expressed and inculcated into the people using proverbial language.

3.4.1 Origins/social location/originators

Studies investigating the origin and nature of proverbs have not yet succeeded in finding the precise origin of each proverb. The main reason for this difficulty lies in their intrinsic ‘antiquity’. Although the specific original speakers of the proverbs are unknown, traditionally in Africa proverbs are collectively ascribed to the ancestors. This assumption is evident in typical pre-announcements of proverbs such as ‘those of old said’ or ‘they said’ or ‘they say’ or ‘our people said’ or ‘the elders said’ or ‘the ancestors of our land have said’. These phrases are usually used to introduce the proverb into a speech. In this sense, proverbs reflect life experiences that make them part of the cultural history and worldview of the people (cf. Healey & Sybertz 1996:44), orally transmitted and bearing traditional authority (cf. Owan 1997:164-165). But at the same time, this implies that new proverbs continue to be produced by means of observation, experiences, thoughtfulness and creativity in every generation, while the wording and content remain almost the same. Therefore, poverty proverbs also have their beginning in the living reality of difficult social, religious, economic, educational and political conditions (cf. Mbiti 2002b:1). An initial understanding of the socio-religio-economic and political contexts of the proverbs on poverty has already been offered in section 3.3 of this thesis. The framework suggested is helpful in order to properly interpret information concerning the relationship between the different types of life portrayed by the African proverbs on poverty.

In Africa, poverty is not an abstract or theoretical issue but a living reality in a community. Proverbs about poverty are used more frequently by adults and older persons, because the meaning of proverbs requires a mature understanding. But the youth also use them among themselves as they practise the wisdom they have learnt. People at the grassroots experience, talk, and reflect about poverty using proverbs in their daily conversation at home, in the fields, at work, and during many other encounters in ordinary life (cf. Mbiti 2002b:1). Expressed differently, African proverbs are considered to have popular origins because it is the ordinary people who are responsible for the expression of the truth embedded in the proverbs. Of course, individual persons formulate the words of the proverbs but once they are accepted by society, they become communal property without recourse to the individual author (cf. Mokitimi 1997:52). The available anthropological proverbial collections and research performed in Africa indicate no other source responsible for the origins of proverbs than the grassroots popular social context. Also, no evidence of the existence of an official bureaucracy comparable to that of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia or Israel that can be thought to have functioned as a medium for wisdom in Africa has been found. Even proverbs critical of the failure of political leaders show that it is the ordinary people, who are not part of the state institutions, who are responsible for the production of those proverbs (cf. Golka 1993:15, 1993:27, 1993:36-37, 1993:68; Westermann 1974:149-161). Hence, I concur with Mbiti (2002b:1) that proverbs about poverty as part and parcel of oral cultural tradition in Africa are produced by the majority of people in their daily life activities. I argue that the proverbial material exhibits a communal focus that reinforces and accords the proverbs a high degree of community, authority and authenticity in their performance.

3.4.2 Circulation

Proverbs circulate freely in society. Thus they spread easily and quickly both geographically and historically in different African communities, in various ways and for various purposes. In most African societies proverbs are basically used as an educational learning aid to instil societal values (cf. Boateng 1985:117-118; Shorter 1987:50; Mbiti 2002a:2). In this indigenous educational setting, proverbs play a major role in the socialisation process of children, youth and adults alike to attain maturity,

especially in initiation rituals. Most important, then, from the perspective of the existential challenge of poverty in Africa the emphasis on training is aimed towards full maturity. Human dignity is conceived to be based on and enhanced by strong work principles. Hence planning, diligence, wisdom, skills, honesty, perseverance, self-reliance, communality, enjoyment and rewards are qualities much demanded in the behaviour of a responsible, hard-working person.

The principles of good and hard work have to be internalised in order to enable every person to become a responsible worker. Each person must work for one's livelihood. This approach is expected to lead to a responsible, hard-working person who can contribute to the welfare of the individual and his or her community. In fact, a dynamic social structure is intended to instil strong work ethics, in order for the society to serve the needs of its people adequately (cf. Mungazi 1996:31). Thus by means of proverbs, sayings, proverbial songs and stories concerning the aspects of work, the people are trained and encouraged to learn to observe and compare different experiences of poverty and the good life. Proverbs used in the latter sense praise communal unity, hard work and honesty. In fact, implicitly and explicitly, the requirement of a positive attitude to hard work leads to a condemnation of all societal elements of disunity, idleness and laziness.

Another means by which proverbs are disseminated to the public is that of legal-type discussions in traditional African societies. The juridical proceedings still prevalent in rural areas may take the form of traditional courts, family reconciliation meetings and community conflict resolution debates. Proverbs and proverbial expressions play an important part in these juridical processes because they point out rules of conduct that maintain social and cultural balances between relationships and encourage cohesion in the society. In situations of poverty, the juridical discussions relate to questions of justice and injustice, right and wrong, on behalf of the poor and strangers. The role of proverbs serves a very important social function here because in the African juridical proceedings the poor defendants deserve mercy and leniency regarding violence and abuse by the wealthy and powerful (cf. Ojoade 1988:33-35).

In Africa, prominent also in the circulation of proverbs are the ordinary discourses, arguments and special occasions in daily life, in which the use of the wisdom of the past is the validating authority (cf. also Penfield 1983:8). Proverbs constitute an integral part of language. Their poetic form, widespread appeal and perceived accuracy motivate their frequent usage by adults and the elderly in

conversation. They also encourage the display of one's public speaking capability or of prestige and talent (cf. also Penfield 1983:11). It is normally possible to find at least one proverb being used within each group of several sentences in the course of a speech. In addition, proverbial usage is compulsory during some special occasions, such as betrothals, weddings, funerals, exhumations and circumcisions, to conserve and convey the society's traditions, institutions, values and culture (cf. Rogers 1985:219; Penfield 1983:10). Participation in such events binds a person to the culture. In other words proverbs are used extensively and frequently, with the result that Africa boasts an enormous depository of proverbial material. The estimates range from over a million proverbs in collections (cf. Healey & Sybertz 1996:35; Mosha 2000:56) to at least four million proverbs in African societies overall (cf. Mbiti 2002a:2).

With respect to poverty, proverbs are usually used to express and discuss its concepts, relationships and effects on the individual, family and community. People's attitudes, feelings and values related to poverty are also part of the reflections concerning it that can emerge in their daily conversation. Thus proverbs are also used to show the causes of poverty and its dehumanising effect. Proverbs are used to indicate the various possibilities for coping with poverty in society, such as solidarity, cooperation, friendship, family, generosity, land, charity and justice (cf. Mbiti 2002a:2-14; 2002b:7-12). In terms of the foregoing discussion it becomes necessary to consider the proverbial factors that provoke changes in a person's accepted attitude and behaviour.

3.4.3 Influence on the people

In Africa, proverbs comprise a communal treasure of wisdom, ethics, morals and teaching that has accumulated over many generations. They are therefore crucial in the formation of the social and cultural foundations of society. The oral transmission of African culture causes proverbs to act as an important cultural tool of communication between generations. Hence, the value of proverbs in oral communication lies in providing a participatory framework for creative reflection within which both the speaker and the listener collaborate and contribute. In the communication process, the speaker discovers a deeper insight into a performance

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context that necessitates the use of a certain proverb. The application of the proverb serves as an opportunity for the listener to reflect, thus foregrounding or creating an innovative insight and awareness of a fresh reality (cf. Healey & Sybertz 1996:34-43; Shorter 1996:87-94; Penfield 1983:6-8). In other words, the proverbs are used as a common guide for debates, legal proceedings, entertainment, relaxation, information and teaching aimed at developing the ability to think and apply constructive new meanings to particular human experiences. In addition, the proverb's depersonalisation, its functional property as a form of third party intervention, also promotes effective communication between speaker and audience (cf. also Penfield 1983:6). This function instils a process that develops a feeling and a sense of caring and sympathy for others in order for them to undergo changes with dignity.

On another level the recourse to proverbs is in the cause of innovation because changes in the life of any society are always taking place (cf. Rogers 1985:219). In this sense, the effectiveness of proverbs is utilised by the dynamic community in its process of inculcating cultural education during the entire life of a person. Continuing education in life is necessary to enable the reinterpretation, absorption and adoption of new experiences and one's maturing into full humanness. Thus the concrete situation allows the quotation of proverbs as a tool of social approbation and control to explain, give advice, rebuke, reinterpret, enable and affirm the way of life or the spirituality of the people (cf. Owan 1997:162). This is done in order to extol positive qualities and censure negative attitudes and actions. This approach is important to promote, enlighten and reinforce the moral, ethical and religious orientation of the young and adult alike in order to enable them to play their expected roles in society (cf. Dseagu 1975:88-89).

The use of African proverbs inculcates respect for authority. Hence, citing them comprises an appeal and reminder to both speaker and audience alike to pursue solutions to particular situations which are based on the tradition and authority of the ancestors (cf. Owan 1997:164-165; Penfield 1983:8, 1983:10). The process also integrates into a single unit the living community and the experiences of the forebears of society who have experienced community life. As a result of this unity, a life of mutual interdependence and sharing between all members of the family, clan or kin is highly prioritised in African contexts. This practice takes into consideration the observation that the majority of people in Africa live in rural environments where the communal approach to a large extent is indispensable for survival.

The preceding concept of a corporate personality, exemplified in the family and clan system, basically inspires affective changes between its members, whether positively or negatively (cf. Bujo 1997:197), as they relate to each other. As a living influence, it is vital to the continued solidarity of the community in the eradication of difficult situations such as poverty, because its effects are not limited to the individual. It is in the light of this African corporate mentality that Bujo writes:

Whoever despises the ancestors and elders and rejects the community laws and statutes established by them, chooses death instead of life. And such death will not affect one person alone, but the entire community. As the saying from Burundi goes: "If one family member eats dog meat, all members are dishonoured" (*Umuryâmbwá aba umwé agatukisha umuryango*) (1997:198).

On the one hand, it is evident that living the traditional communal values and social life today in Africa, especially in urban areas, is a great challenge in terms of the individualistic capitalist pressures from the West. On the other hand, the above quoted assertion is a positive prescription for the collective nature of the African worldview. It is a people's way of life that is still being emphasised variously in both urban and rural areas. It comprises the virtues of filial piety, co-operation, hospitality, a sense of belonging, sharing, caring, good wishes, exercise of mutual responsibility and friendship (cf. Healey & Sybertz 1996:118; Kemdirim 1998:75; Magesa 1998:55). Thus proverbs expressing these virtues influence the course of people's lives by fostering a high degree of family and communal solidarity and participation that enables a society to provide and care for its poor. The effectiveness of their corporate sense is evident in the lack of formal institutions to cater for the needs of the poor in African societies. Of importance is the observation that African proverbs on poverty can be transformative. To the latter aspect we now turn.

3.5 The transformative nature of African proverbs on poverty

The question whether African proverbs on poverty can be legitimate agents of change in society rather than essentially a means toward conserving the *status quo*, needs to be accorded more attention. My interest is to shed more light on the former function by considering the liberating and inclusive elements that can enhance the well-being of humanity and society. I understand, for instance, the vexing bias of proverbs and

their presentation of the subordinate being and role of women in our African contexts. These oppressive cultural elements illuminate the role of proverbs as conserving the (patriarchal) *status quo*. In fact they cannot be allowed to continue to limit self-initiated actions of optimism in our societies today. Such proverbs require a re-interpretation by considering the oppressive images that reveal the reality behind them, which is not obvious to their audiences.

Similar to the above-mentioned idea is Wanjohi's (1997:174) comment on the general realistic African outlook on life, that of being industrious and of believing in God, as reflected in the Gikuyu proverbs. His study considers that pessimistic proverbs serve rather as controlling devices for the excessive optimism of the realistic outlook on life. I argue that Wanjohi is right because through the mechanism of proverbs cultural beliefs about transformation and the structure of relationships can be analysed. Such a process generates changes in perception and encourages people's initiative in dealing with the challenge of poverty. In the following discussion I argue that African proverbs on poverty are people-oriented.

3.5.1 Orientation towards people

Any discussion on the orientation of poverty proverbs towards the people must not be considered to be an independent entity divorced from the whole. In fact, the proverb derives its meaning inductively from the whole African cultural setup. Proverbs have, significantly, been used as didactic tools in child-rearing, for linguistic and religious instruction in the community, and in teaching concerning general human experiences. Among the Bena and Swahili speakers in Tanzania, as in many other African ethnic groups, the proper upbringing of a child demanded an intense education, from many years back. Hence, the emphasis of the Swahili proverb: *Samaki mkunje angali mbichi, akikauka atavunjika*: 'Fold the fish while still fresh, if it dries it breaks'. Here the word '*samaki*' (fish) is used metaphorically. In my context it may refer to a 'child' or a 'problem'. And the word '*mbichi*' (fresh) stands for 'young' or the beginnings of a problem. Since education involved an extensive transmission of values, the early stages of child growth and youth were vital to the process. Thus this proverb is considered an effective tool when used to advise the community to emphasise training in the early stages of life.

In another Swahili proverb, caution is expressed about the means of bringing up a child because they shape his/her destiny: *Mtoto umleavyo ndivyo akuavyo*: ‘The way you bring up a child is the way he/she grows up to be’. This warning is important because education is intended to help knit together the complex fabric of relations and interests constituting a proper social life in African contexts. The proverb could also be used to put pressure on irresponsible parents whose child exhibits bad behaviour. Most important, however, is the observation that proverbs proved to be among the most effective instruments for the educational exercise itself. This approach taken by the indigenous education system in Africa was a form of experiential teaching and learning that is life-centred or people-oriented (cf. Boateng 1985:109-122). Such proverbs may continue to play a major role as a pedagogical tool in modern societies, especially among family members and at school.

The traditional method of learning places more emphasis on an autonomous, experience-based and problem-oriented approach to the learner. It is orally transmitted in the course of daily life. It is education in life and not education for life. I therefore hold a view contrary to that of Shorter (1996:92) who holds that the pedagogical use of the rich African heritage of oral literature as expressed in fables, myths, legends, stories, and proverbs treats the listener/initiant as a *tabula rasa* to be inscribed with packaged societal thoughts. According to the understanding of the continuity of life in the African worldview, the community comprises both the living and the dead. In terms of the living, the members of the community include the unborn, whose life is equally sacred. This recognition of the human dignity of the unborn implies that a newborn has powers of thinking, memory, imagination and anticipation, like any other human being. In that case, therefore, the indigenous educational process is applied to those inherent mental and spiritual faculties to create acceptable societal attitudes and behaviour (cf. also Mosha 2000:206).

In the preceding sense the use of proverbs fulfils the four characteristics (the transmission of cognitive, normative, creative and dialogical aspects) of holistic education. The purpose of this holistic method is ethically to communicate good values, and foster creativity and autonomy in the individual in society (cf. Wanjohi 1997:194). In other words, therefore, the educational and communicative power of proverbs in African societies validates the traditional ethics, procedures, and beliefs by a focus on the improvement of human and cosmic life. To achieve the latter, the

collective effort of the society and the community in educating children and adults alike is strongly emphasised in the African proverbial material.

Among the Bena the sense of collective educational effort is found in the following proverb: *Ilifugamilo limwi sililelu umwana*: ‘One knee does not sit a child’. Normally a small child is safely sat down on the two knees or the lap of an adult. Using only one adult’s knee the child may fall down. On the primary level the proverb insists on the co-responsibility of the father and mother in bringing up a child. On another level in the Bena setting this responsibility extends to all members of the family and the clan. The interpretation of this proverb extends to cover the cooperation required among all the members of the entire community in all their activities. In the Bena society, for example, it is believed that a lone person cannot achieve anything of value single-handedly. A similar Swahili proverb says: *Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa*: ‘One finger does not crush a louse’. Indeed, without the finger and thumb coming together, the louse cannot be squashed. Therefore the entire society in its communal setting forms the premise of the educational process. It is understood that the society is older than any individual in it. As a result, the society is the sole owner of cultural education. It has a responsibility to transmit the process from one generation to the next.

Proverbs assist the involvement of all people in action and reflection, as people know the essential principles of life very well. In fact, it is the women (mothers) who educate the young in the basics of language, values and good manners before the role is assumed by other adults in society. The Ashanti saying goes: *Deglefetsu mezia aðonðo ka o. (kawo sÇ gbÇ)*: ‘The thumb alone cannot press down the strings of Adondo drum’. The Mossi proverb remarks: *Bi song yaa ned faal/ biiga; Bi yoog yaa a zagr biiga*: ‘A good child is everyone’s child. A bad child belongs to somebody else’. With regard to living a good human life, how do ordinary people look at the issue of poverty? What do they say by means of proverbs about poverty as they encounter the latter in their daily life context in Tanzania, Africa? We now turn to these questions in the following paragraph.

Poverty is not an absolute condition because it does not diminish a person’s internalised human values of respect, knowledge, experiences, ability to plan, aspirations, visions, talent, humility, strength of character, purity of purpose, resolution, drive, discipline, the essence of friendship and family relations (cf. Mbiti 2002a:3). These qualities are inherent rights or human virtues that neither misfortune

nor despotism can in any way alienate, depress, destroy or enslave. These remain in people and were considered the strongest resources for the eradication of poverty. Such potential virtues are summed up in the Swahili proverb: *Afadhalu utu kuliko kitu*: ‘Humanness is better than a thing’. The word *utu* etymologically derives from the Bantu languages’ *Ubuntu*, which means ‘humanness’. Humanness internalises human values and qualities as the constitutive elements of a proper human being in life. The Swahili word *kitu* in the proverb refers to a material object or wealth. The latter is considered to be of lesser value if it does not enhance the well-being of other people. The proverb thus aims to encourage the cultivation of potential human virtues in order to motivate people to refrain from thinking negatively of themselves. People should stop offering excuses for not using their inherent potential qualities. They must focus more positively on their own abilities than on their disabilities. The proverb is also used as a critique to remind a person about the responsibility of the materially able relatives to be generous in terms of charity and goodwill to their kin and clan members.

Among the Bena the proper use of language to defer a debt or tone down a difficult situation is quite familiar: *Umulomo hijavulilo*: ‘The mouth is a release’. When a person is caught up in an issue, then, the complainant uses the proverb to allow a defence against the action being taken against him or her. Therefore the defendant is provoked to think about and plan a better cause of action to arouse sympathy and leniency from the parties involved. This idea that a person in a dire situation is not unable to think, plan and use language properly, is central to the proverb and can also be gleaned from proverbs in other parts of Africa:

Akan: *Ohiani nni hwee a, owo tekrema a ode tutu ne ka.*

‘If a poor person has nothing else, he/she has at least a [sweet] tongue with which to defer the payment of his/her debts’ [humility, respect, talent, discipline].

Oromo: *Iyeessa boicha hingorsani / innu jal-lise naqaa.*

‘People don’t tell a poor person how to weep; he/she knows well how to weep’ [knowledge, experience].

Sukuma: *N’habi wacha, al’umpanga ati ng’habi.*

‘The dead person is the poor person, if a person is alive he/she is not too poor’ [drive, aspirations, ability to plan, friendship, family].

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Bassa: *Duun-ku-nyon ni se de.*

‘No diligent person can persist in poverty’ [strength of character, purity of purpose, resolution, discipline, respect].

Basotho: *Ho checha ha ramo ha se ho baleha.*

‘When a ram is retreating, it is not running away’ [ability to plan, visions].

Poverty is dehumanising because it wreaks havoc upon the constitutive elements of human dignity in a person. It brings destitution, humiliation, suffering and, dependence to the poor. Consequently, poverty leads the poor to deviate from societal norms and the expected mature moral and ethical behaviour. A Bena proverb sums up the dehumanising effect of poverty on human life by comparing it with the livelihood of a discarded dog: *Uwuhagala vubwa*: ‘Being poor is being a dog’. Though in Bena society the dog is a useful animal for hunting and guarding the house, the connotation of this proverb is derogatory. It speaks of a person who, like an underfed dog, digs in waste pits and latrines, eating garbage including human faeces.

In terms of the nature of the Bena, and most African societies’ communal life and strong family ties, the deplorable social behaviour of such poor persons tarnishes the image of all their relatives and that of society. It also weakens the social relationships of which the poor people are a part. Thus considering the corporeal sense of poverty, the following dehumanising Bena proverb indicates a rather clear moral obligation upon the family and society: *Umujangu ye andzambwidze; kumugongo kusilimiko*: ‘My fellow human being has betrayed me; there are no eyes at my back’. A similar one says: *Pe gafwe amagendo umudaho gwagwikela kulekedza hela amafi*: ‘When the thighs are paralysed the faeces come out freely’. The first proverb lays blame on the other person apart from oneself: the one metaphorically behind someone else. Among the Bena it is the one behind who is supposed to warn the person in front of the unforeseen dangers in the rear. This proverb is spoken to indicate a negative situation that results from disunity in the family or society.

A similar situation is envisioned with regard to the proverb about the paralysed thighs. One’s thighs are meant to enable the person to stop defecating until one has reached a latrine. But in the proverb the person is presupposed to be unable to do this owing to paralysis. One is in a dire condition that needs sacrificial help from others in order to remain clean. Metaphorically, it is uttered to describe a difficult

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situation that has arisen for a family or country after the death of a leader or lapse in a supportive system. The home, for instance, where both the mother and father are still living is deemed a happy one. Such a home is supportive to the children. When either or both parents die, the children are insecure because they lack proper guidance. Such a proverb can be applied to any other person who is alienated from communal relationships. It tells the affected person that he or she will be treated like the faeces, that is, with no respect. Among the Bena the two proverbs are normally spoken to emphasise the family's and society's responsibility to join forces to challenge all the root causes of poverty in individuals. In other words, they admonish the society to become responsible, to recognise, care for and protect the humanity of the poor because the side-effects impinge negatively on the image of the society in question. Therefore, my argument is that proverbs on the dehumanising effects of poverty represent more of a critique to motivate people to work hard in order to enhance their life and livelihood. Similar proverbs can be gathered from other parts of Africa:

Swahili: *Maskini haokoti; akiokota huambiwa kaiba.*

'A poor person does not pick something up; if she/he picks up, she/he is told she/he is stealing' [untrustworthy].

Swahili: *Maskini haulizwi.*

'A poor person is not asked' [lack of choice].

Swahili: *Bora kujikwaa kidole kuliko kujikwaa ulimi.*

'It is better to stumble with the toe than with the tongue' [thoughtlessness].

Akan: *Ohia ye animguase.*

'Poverty is a disgrace' [dehumanising].

Akan: *Wo ni di hia a, wunnyae no nkofa obi nye na.*

'If your mother is poor, you do not forsake her and adopt another' [communal relationships].

Oromo: *Gadi galan jabbi tiksani.*

'The person who is down and out shepherds the calves' [degrading work].

Poverty is a challenge that stimulates resourcefulness and positive activity in seeking a better life. It is not to be viewed as a problem that causes ordinary people to despair in passive idleness and laziness. Hence, the Bena proverb: *Indzala jiwunga*:

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‘Hunger instructs’. The proverb is also used as a common clan name among the Bena. In daily life they use this proverb when they want to explain that destitution in the form of hunger causes people to struggle to find solutions. In the process of facing a challenge people have succeeded in overcoming their problems in life and have become hard workers. The moral teaching of the proverb focuses on developing industrious behaviour as a result of difficult situations. The view held in such proverbs is that poverty, for instance, provokes the poor into creative and sacrificial actions aimed at combating poverty (cf. Mbiti 2002a:12). There is enough evidence of such energy in Africa in terms of rising immorality, crime and prostitution, but, even more, in terms of neutral acts such as urban immigration, street trading, and other related activities leading to the growth of the informal sector economy.

However, the Bena people discourage cheap means of finding solutions in difficult situations of poverty: *Indzala likoko jikoma na jumuhavi*: ‘Hunger is a dangerous enemy it kills even witches’. This proverb warns against playing the fool with what is beyond human comprehension because one might end up in a horrible situation, even death. Witchcraft and mischief in life have limits. The emphasis of the proverb therefore falls on developing a genuine and industrious personality in the use of God’s gifts and talents to deal with the problem instead of depending on superstition, fraud, et cetera. Such proverbs on destitution can be considered as a positive inspiration in fostering the process of conquering poverty in various ways. The priority in terms of eradicating poverty is in the recognition of the importance of work.

Swahili: *Mtaka cha mvunguni sharti ainame.*

‘The person who wants what is underneath must stoop’ [work].

Akan: *Ohia ma adwene.*

‘Poverty makes one think, or causes one to think’ [creativity].

Lugbara: *Alio o’ a eli mudri ku.*

‘Poverty does not last for ten years’ [determination].

Bassa: *Ga! Mon dein konmon gboh.*

‘Agony! It is by you that we began our wealth’ [experience].

Lunda: *Kubabala kufuma hakuchimonahu.*

‘A person is wiser after misfortunes’ [new knowledge].

Since the Bena mostly lived, and still live, in rural agricultural areas and possess no advanced technical equipment for daily activities, they were and are still culturally dependent on one another. In such a context, unity and collective strength are believed to constitute the security of the whole family, ethnic group or village. The belief in cooperation calls for greater participation and responsibility on the part of everybody in the society. In that way, most of their manual labour, such as farming in the fields, building houses, hunting and protecting their sovereignty, was carried out together. Work parties and other numerous free and unconditional communal labour arrangements were the order of the day.

Hence the Bena insist on the benefits of cooperation and solidarity: *Pe wisaka ubitile kyang'ani gende vviyena; pe wisaka ubite pawatali ugende navangi*: ‘When you want to go fast, walk alone; but when you want to go far, walk with others’. The Bena used to travel on foot for both short and long journeys. In most cases they usually asked for an escort because they feared anything could happen on the way and one might need some help. In this proverb they insist that a lone hand can achieve something faster but the results may not be lasting. Yet where people collaborate the results are long-lasting as they are beneficial to the maximum number of people. The emphasis falls on solidarity, cooperation and sharing as a better means for feasible and sustainable human development (cf. also Madumulla 1995:153).

The Bena people also encourage generosity as a means of strengthening communal relationships. The following proverb on generosity is still being used today as a form of blessing whenever a person receives a gift from another: *Ugendale uludodi; ulukafu lwidenyeka*: ‘Always walk using a green walking stick; the dry one breaks’. The green stick is a metaphor for generosity and the dry stick for stingy behaviour. The Bena also discourage individualism by saying that one cannot be identified as an orphan in daytime as there is no empirical proof. All people look the same until they go to bed, when each will sleep alone as an orphan: *Mpina pakilo pamunyi ihanga huwolofu*: ‘An orphanage is at night; in the daytime one is among the many’. The importance of unity and solidarity is also emphasised even in other African societies.

Swahili: *Kuwa watoto wa baba mmoja ni kusaidiana.*

‘To be of the same father is to help one another’ [family solidarity].

Bemba: *Nang'ombe pa bana taya.*

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‘A cow never runs away from her calves’ [family and clan solidarity, cooperation].

Oromo: *Gosi / abbaa namaan naye.*

‘The clan is whoever shows concern for one’s well-being’ [friendship, cooperation].

Luganda: *Abanaku bamanyagana: empologoma bw’erwala, ensiri y’erumika.*

‘The poor ones know each other: when a lion is sick, the mosquito does the cupping’ [solidarity, cooperation].

In short, by being people-oriented the proverbs on poverty provide life-centred teaching and learning in African society. The approach enhances the autonomous human ability to think, remember, imagine and anticipate in everyday life. The following section which discusses the religious orientation of proverbs on poverty is another aspect of the holistic worldview inherent in African proverbs on this subject.

3.5.2 Religious orientation

A dichotomy exists between scholars with regard to the religious orientation of proverbs: on the one hand, there is a position which considers the life-centred proverbs to be free of religious influence. Such an argument is revealed in Shorter’s (1987:53; cf. also Golka 1993:60) assessment of Kimbu proverbs: that they convey less altruism or religious faith. From my viewpoint the preceding idea is somewhat far-fetched because of the holistic nature of the African worldview. The findings of Healey and Sybertz (1996:40; cf. also Mbiti 1997:139-162) affirm my own position. Their analysis indicates the presence of religious faith in numerous African proverbs, to confirm that religion permeates the daily life and experiences of African peoples (cf. also P’Bitek 1972:31; Mbiti 1989:262). A scholarly agreement on Africans’ religiosity is noted even between Mbiti ([1969] 1989:92) and his critic P’Bitek (1971:109): that ‘in Africa God or gods seem to exist’ (Booth 1977:6) for the human being.

On the other hand, some scholars argue that references to religion or God in the African proverbial material could reflect Christian and Islamic influences (cf. Golka 1993:52; Fox 1996:235; Loader 1999:217, 1999:222). My point of contention

with them is that the religious experience of the Divine in Africa clearly antedates the coming of both Christianity and Islam. I concur with those who argue that the latter religions supplemented rather than replaced the traditional beliefs and practices (cf. Booth 1977:9; Ukpong 1999:105). In other words, an analysis of the content of the actual proverbs reveals a typical African traditional understanding of God rather than those of the two foreign religions. Bartels finds the preceding idea to be true of the Oromo when he observes that ‘whether they became Christians or Muslims, the Oromo’s traditional modes of experiencing the divine have continued unaffected in spite of the fact that several rituals and social institutions in which it was expressed have been diminished or apparently submerged in new ritual cloaks’ (1983:15; cf. also Harjula 1969:16-20, 1997:109). Cited by Whybray, Naré (1986) goes further, to assert that in their conversion to Christianity or Islam the Mossi are ‘not conscious of encountering a “new” God but only a fuller revelation. In fact the god of the Mossi has much in common with the Yahweh of Proverbs’ (Whybray 1995:31; cf. also Thorpe 1991:118).

The apparent paucity of African proverbs concerning God and poverty is another reason given for the claim that religion plays a minimal role in African proverbs (cf. Golka 1993:49-63, 1999:8; Mbiti 2002a:13). With regard to poverty, certain scholars argue that the lack of such God-orientated proverbs has caused it to be seen as basically a human made-created problem. Hence the Divine or the gods are neither the cause nor a part of the solution to the challenge of poverty (cf. Mbiti 2002a:13). I wish to argue however that there are numerous African proverbs which mention God and poverty (cf. Kimilike 2000:62-80, 2002:258-260). These exemplify the theology of ordinary people about God as the Creator of human beings, creatures and the world (cf. also Kemdirim 1998:73; Opoku 1997a:194-198). Thus the proverbs on poverty speak about God in creation. The creation motif is an important base for understanding the sovereignty of God. It is also the reason behind people’s belief in equality, harmony, order and justice towards the weak, helpless, orphans, widows and the poor. The latter’s privileges and rights are guaranteed in order to bring about the hope of a better future in a hostile situation. In addition, the belief in the ethical nature of God is communal. As a result, the God-orientated proverbs on poverty belong to the public sphere of life as well. Such an internalised holistic conception enhances the values and welfare of African society.

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Noteworthy is the fact that in Africa, the scarcity of proverbs on poverty which use the proper name of God is based on the following reasons (cf. Monye 1989:62-65):

- The lack of objects that can concretise the abstract image of God.
- The limitations of human knowledge about God.
- Having so much reverence for God that the proper name cannot be used in vain. In Africa even the first name of a person is rarely mentioned. What is common is the use of the surname that refers to the family or clan.
- The lack of metaphors for God that bear a different meaning from the literal sense.
- The internalisation of the belief system and trust in God, to the extent that the pragmatic person in daily life takes for granted most issues, to remember God's involvement only in a dire situation.

I concur with Monye regarding the above-mentioned reasons for the paucity of proverbs using the proper name of God. But I insist that this does not rule out the religious influence in African proverbial material. Instead, these reasons are a warning to the researcher to become familiar with Africa and African culture (cf. also Loader 1999:217) when searching for the equivalent theological proverbs.

The theological aspect is constitutive of the holistic African worldview and exhibits various proverbial presentations either by the direct mention of God, gods, divinities, spirits and ancestors or by an indirect use of language and metaphor. Using African proverbs gleaned from Nussbaum's (1996) updated CD-ROM production of African proverbial collections, studies and bibliographies, Mbiti has analysed two independent themes: the ethical nature of God (1997:139-162) and poverty (2002a, 2002b). Opoku (1997:193-200), using the same source, has analysed God and divinities in the religion of the Akan of Ghana. Owing to space limitation, I present below my own analysis of some significant aspects of the African belief about God's value system with regard to poverty as it appears in some African proverbs.

God is the Creator of all human beings. This understanding of their equality in creation accords a positive dimension to poverty in terms of justice and mercy. A

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Swahili proverb observes God's equal treatment of human beings in the form of the rain which falls on all without distinction of social status: *Mvua hainyeshei mmoja*: 'It does not rain on one person'. Such a perception is usually used to comfort and draw the poor nearer to God in affirmation of their struggle. The creation motif also leads to the identification and recognition of a useful gift of some kind to sustain life in every creature. The Bena experience of this motif encourages people to explore possibilities even in seemingly frustrating conditions: *Inguluvi nyamalanga; umuganga pasi gwinoga*: 'God is creative; even the soil of the earth is sweet'.

Aniocha: *Chukwu ke akakpo ke osowuzo.*

'It is the same God who created the dwarf who also created the robust child' (Monye 1989:60).

Luganda: *Ffenna tuli byuma : twasisinkana mu ssasa.*

'We all are tools [of the same master]: we were all once made in the same smithy'.

Oromo: *Namni Waaqan jiru / wal irra hinjiru.*

'People who before God live, with each other [a superior] there is not'.

Bemba: *Lesa talombwa nama alombwo mweo.*

'One does not ask God for meat but for life'.

Igbo: *Chi kere nwa ogbenye kere amadi.*

'The same God created the rich human being and the poor human being' (Metuh 1981:24).

The sovereignty of God in creation is active in human life by means of aiming at harmony, order and justice in society so as to sustain and protect the poor. Such a belief is prevalent among the Bena because they believe that God helps the poor: *Ikitanga umukiva kikuma kwilangi*: 'That which helps the poor comes from heaven'. According to this proverb they acknowledge their faith in action as being motivated by what God is generously doing to all human beings. An equivalent proverb exists in Swahili: *Mungu amwekeacho maskini hakiozi*: 'What God preserves for the poor does not rot'. At the same time, among the Bena, there is a belief in God's rewarding one's effort to challenge poverty: *Ve munu wikangadzage, Inguluvi yitanga*: 'As a human being one should try one's best, God will help one'.

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- Bassa: *Gedepooh ni zi-kpodo.*
‘God never passes on the side of injustice’.
- Hehe: *Yahelee ingava fidunda, ingava malema pele yapifwiike.*
‘He who created the hills went away, but the Creator of deformities is still at work’ (Madumulla 1995:125).
- Malagasy: *Aza ny lohasaha mangina no jerena fa Andriamanitra an-tampon’ny loha.*
‘Do not count on the fact that you are alone in a quiet spot, for God is above your head’ (Rogers 1985:222).
- Ewe: *Mawue nyaa tagbatsu na lā asikekpo.*
‘God drives away flies for the tailless animal’.
- Ga: *Kē NyҪñmҪ tere bo jatsu lē, ehaa bo tako.*
‘When God gives you a load He also gives you a soft pad to carry it’.

It is against God’s will to despise and mistreat the poor in society. Proverbs therefore criticise humiliating behaviour because it encourages the poor to think of themselves as victims who cannot rise above the injustice of poverty.

- Luganda: *Avuma omwali: ng’avumye eyagubumba.*
‘He who abuses the [unbaked] cooking pot: abuses the one who has made it’.
- Luganda: *Bw’osekerera ekibya: osekerera yakibumba.*
‘If you laugh at the bowl: you laugh at the potter [its maker]’.
- Ewe: *Mawu metsaa didri (apasa) si o.*
‘God does not trade in dishonesty’.
- Mossi: *Wênd n band zôang ki.*
‘God is the one removing the grains of sand from the blind man’s millet’.

Generosity, charity, alms, sacrifice and the community’s spirit of assistance to the poor are emphasised to be in accordance with the will of God.

- Oromo: *Harka waa kennitu / Waaqi dhiphu itt hinaansu.*
‘God never puts giving hands into poverty’.
- Sotho: *Tseyo nako go rata. Ke senotlelo sa legodimo le lerato.*

'Take time to love. It is the key to heaven and love'.

Luganda: *Okugaba kuzibu: okuddiza guba mwoyo.*

'To be generous is not easy: generosity reveals a noble mind'.

Oromo: *Kan iyeessaa kenne / galata Waaqaa argata.*

'The person who gives to the poor receives a reward from God'.

It can therefore be argued that the African proverbs regarding God and poverty are used in the formation of a good and active moral conscience. They inculcate love of God and hatred towards evil. God sees, hears, knows, feels the cry of the oppressed and cares for their problems because nothing can be hidden from him. In this way, ordinary people experience the omnipresence of God in their daily life activities. In these proverbs the people are instilled with a hope for survival that gives them a sense of responsibility in caring for the poor, orphans, widows and children. The people-centredness and religious orientation of African proverbs suggest implications for the elitist approach to the issue of poverty in Africa, as shown in the following discussion.

3.5.3 Challenging the elitist status quo

The elite considered in this thesis comprise a group of persons who by virtue of socio-politico-economic position or education exercise much power or influence in society. Among them are the members of the ruling class, bureaucrats, politicians, technocrats and the intellectuals of the country. Normally, in Africa the elite are a very small minority group consisting of people who are highly educated and occupy a technical sphere of influence. On account of their lofty positions and in particular influenced by their Western-orientated education, such people are identifiable by their individualistic values, aspirations and lifestyles.

The elite assume that a world of good versus evil lies at the root of the nature of people and society. In their view, good represents the *status quo*; and evil represents anything and anybody who challenges the *status quo*. Thus the elite exist to serve and protect the privileged and the reigning class system. The tendency of the elitist methodology of development, then, is usually to mystify poverty by individualising it through stratification. On the one hand, the individual is isolated from community relationships, held responsible and accountable for his or her poor

condition. On the other hand, the elitist approach is not critical of the social and political roots of economic poverty in a society that is structurally unequal. The indigenous society's authority, which is informed by its cultural values and institutions, is not used to question the dominant social and political roots of poverty, because the elite have become the authoritarian representatives of the society's exploitative power structure. Historically in Africa, such structures have taken the form of the colonial administration, state, foreign corporations and Christian missions that do not serve the interests of the majority. At the same time, the elite simultaneously work to deflect such criticism because they perceive poverty through the lenses of the reigning exploitative system of which they are part. Such an elitist model causes the ordinary people to become fatalistic (cf. Freire 1973:3, 1973:6) since they become voiceless and uncritical recipients of the scholars' opinions (cf. Bergant 1997:5).

I contend that relying on this elitist individualistic top-down solution to the challenge of poverty is ineffective in the African context. It perpetuates an increase of poverty by being insensitive to the insights of ordinary people's experiences on the subject. In addition, the elites' lack of solidarity with the marginalised creates competition, maximisation of profit and materialistic principles, which in turn promote job security for the privileged few. This trend has led to the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Among the Bena, such individualistic elites are compared to traitors in the family and community because either they manipulate their poor relatives for selfish interests or they flaunt their wealth without assisting their community in a real sense. In other words, the elites are considered as superficial relatives who show their (laughing) teeth while thinking evil thoughts against their uneducated, poor fellows: *Lukolo pamaho*: 'A person who is a relative only on the face', or: *Muheka pang'ende munumbula lwitema lungi*: 'The mouth is laughing but in the heart is cooking something different'.

Challenging the elitist model are examples from the rural development strategies undertaken by the Mennonite church in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1968, namely, the Programme Agricole Protestante (cf. Ewert 1981:32-43) and the World Vision Malawi development facilitators (cf. Chindongo 1997:125-135). According to Ewert, the Mennonite and World Vision Malawi strategies practically exemplifies the Freirian concept of conscientisation (cf. Freire 1970, 1973) in helping people to develop their own sense of critical consciousness. People learn to perceive,

and take action to solve, their own problems. Whereas in Latin America the human-centred developmental appraisal carried out by Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario (INDAP) used cultural pictures and drawings to raise critical awareness among the oppressed people (cf. Freire 1970:108-111), in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Malawi (as in most rural areas of Africa) proverbs, parables and metaphors in people-centred development programmes are found to be the most effective tools for critical conscientisation.

In rural Africa, the use of analogy and the comparison of proverbs with related folklore have revealed cultural conceptions, regarding the challenge of poverty, as existing in the common knowledge and ability of the people. This approach has raised awareness and increased the possibilities of initiating collective actions by self-motivation and self-reliance, without waiting for external solutions. Hence, the function of proverbs in this respect is like that of parables and metaphors in the critical conscientisation of ordinary people. They create an acute sense of solidarity and community life that facilitates collective actions (cf. Ewert 1981:40-41; Chindongo 1997:126-133). In human development the use of proverbs from below has the capacity to challenge the elitist model of development on the basis of the following strengths:

- They enable and encourage the grassroots to participate, instead of being spectators, in the analysis and identification processes of their own poverty eradication programmes.
- They represent an acknowledged common property that carries cultural authority to deal with difficult situations like poverty.
- They possess a dynamic communication potential because the metaphors and humour used can be modified to re-conceptualise alternative interpretations in various contexts.
- They easily call on the rich imagination and perception of cognitive patterns in traditional African society.
- Their use in discussions provides an entertaining flavour that removes hostile and undesirable conditions to offer the listener a focused and convincing argument.

The use of proverbs then becomes a healthy counterbalance to the elitist phenomenon of a Western individualistic and materialistic culture. This culture, with its high degree of competition, is unhealthy because it destroys certain important African cultural particularities founded on a holistic worldview.

Proverbial contextual explications of the poverty themes emerge from the popular social location, especially from rural areas where the majority of ordinary people live in poverty. Poverty proverbs thus serve the role of enabling the poor to know and acknowledge their difficult situation so as to foster initiatives to eradicate it (cf. Ceresko 1999:42). The process is comparable to that of a doctor-patient dialogue in the process of the treatment of a sickness. Due to the complexity of any disease, neither of them can claim a monopoly over its knowledge. However, the doctor's success in treating a patient depends significantly on the latter's assistance in providing basic information about the illness (cf. Ewert 1981:38-39). My argument is that the proverbs on poverty criticise and challenge the elitist (doctors') conservative top-bottom approach that paralyses the ordinary people's (patients') initiative and dehumanises them. In fact the elitist model is similar to feeding the poor with opium so as to weaken and harm their abilities to transform themselves. The use of proverbs is an innovation from below. It recognises and promotes the otherwise dormant creative, critical and liberating potentials that can contribute enormously to sustainable development processes there. In the following discussion I therefore turn to look at the implications of the foregoing transformative framework.

3.6 The implication of the transformative nature of poverty proverbs for post-independent twenty-first century Africa

The most interesting point to emerge from the discussions on poverty proverbs in the African context deals with the survival possibilities of the poor in a post-independent twenty-first century Africa. Can the transformative insights of poverty proverbs identified within the traditional African way of life contribute to a breakthrough in the challenge of poverty for present day Africa? In particular, can proverbs about poverty still be regarded as worthwhile resources to supply the salt needed for the stew? In terms of the analysis in the preceding sections of this chapter my response to these questions is to a large extent clearly positive.

I therefore support the contention of some African theologians, such as Bujo (1992), that the core cause of Africa's material poverty is 'anthropological poverty'. Expressed differently, this concerns cultural and material damage to, or pauperisation of the African people's identity and dignity owing to colonialism, racialism and tyrannical politics. Therefore, the point of departure in devising feasible and sustainable poverty eradication processes essentially involves resuscitating the positive aspects in the traditional African cultural values (cf. Bujo 1992:10; Martey 1995:96) in order to re-establish the African people's identity (cf. Mudimbe 1988:15). Such a liberative approach calls for an urgent response from all concerned Africans, especially African biblical scholars and theologians who are closer to the social context of the existential challenge of poverty.

The adaptability of proverbs easily re-conceptualises their age-old rural and pastoralist practical wisdom in contemporary, new contexts. Their satire, irony and humour can effectively communicate the cultural morals and values which they contain for a better life in modern society. Therefore proverbs can form an integral part of contemporary education in life. Their integration creates the possibility of reducing the gap left behind by the declining practice of initiation rituals in society today (cf. Sawadogo 1997:121-123). In other words, for instance, the basic structure of the value system or worldview of the African proverbs reveals a unified, liberative approach to life and livelihood. Such an approach challenges the predominant compartmentalised, individualistic and competitive life pattern, stemming from modern education, rooted in Western languages with different worldviews. Such worldviews do not necessarily emphasise the same ideal, of a mature person and social norms, that African society values. Essentially the process of modern education conveys what Golka (1993:14) terms an idealist 'bourgeois-elitist conception' because it emphasises a creative individual personality. The influence of the Western linear culture of deductive logic uproots African children, youth and adults alike from their own dynamic cultures. It also renders the latter passive and frustrated and impoverishes them spiritually, economically, socially and culturally.

One other aspect of the appropriateness of proverbs on poverty concerns their relevance as agents of change in society, especially for meaningful development at the grassroots. It was clear from the approach taken by the development facilitators in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Malawi that the use of proverbial expressions, paradoxes, and exaggerations stimulated the ordinary people's astuteness and

imagination. Consequently they became motivated to participate in reflection, discussion and the initiation of collective action. Africans are known for their circular thought patterns or cumulative logic towards expressing truth. Therefore the ambiguity of proverbial language suits the African thought pattern because it forces the listener to a new critical awareness of issues. Expressed differently, these advantages are liberating as well because they empower the ordinary people to rise to the challenge of poverty and all that accompanies it. The use of proverbs in development projects is inclusive and critical of the elitist model of development from above.

From the perspective of the existential challenge of poverty in Africa today, for example, the proverbs can be used positively to increase the awareness of working hard, taking pride in one's work and finding purpose in life. Their subversiveness also enables ordinary people to overcome the prevalent negative tendencies that are fundamental to the crisis of poverty today. These negative attitudes include a sense of self-pity, an inferiority complex regarding skills and the feeling of being less motivated to work (cf. Aringo 2001:171, 173). I submit that both African society and the church in Africa need a tool of conscience, such as proverbial teaching on poverty, to do away with negative tendencies in order to bring about a feasible transformation in economic terms. The argument here concerns the great need for the church in Africa to teach and practise an interpretation of the Bible text that is meaningful to human existence.

Hence, the African proverbs may represent idyllic principles for better personal, social, religious, moral and spiritual life (cf. Owan 1997:151-152). The dynamics of such principles can provide the substance for a framework for theological and practical reflections on poverty by the church in Africa. By means of proverbs' symbolic suggestions, associations and relationships, it is possible to activate the imaginative awareness of ordinary people, who can then participate in reflection regarding the improvement of their life, through the appreciation and use of the sacredness of positive communal approaches both in theory and practice. Such view is important for the realisation of the role of the African Christian community as a learning institution. The latter seeks and finds practical knowledge that empowers most of its congregants to create wealth and an enhanced life at micro-level or family level (cf. also Akao 2000:54-57). This is a necessary step towards feasible poverty eradication initiatives at the macro-level.

3.7 Conclusion

Summing up, the discussion of poverty and proverbs on poverty in the African context reveals that poverty is an extremely complex phenomenon. It is difficult to discuss exhaustively given the constraints of space. However, some issues pertinent to the theme of poverty as it relates to the ordinary people's daily existential experiences in Africa have been critically re-examined. My consideration and evaluation of poverty-related aspects is an attempt to locate possible internal potential transforming mechanisms in society. The significance of locating such resources within the community is intended to empower those at the grassroots, in order to foster a sense of hope for the future of the poor.

The socio-economic structure of African traditional society is shaped by a holistic, communal and supportive system characterised by interdependent relationships and activities. The inherently egalitarian and corporate understanding of humanity in this worldview is revealed in the supportive modes of resource allocation, production, distribution of welfare goods and services. Such a holistic conception of humanity is a dynamic possibility for transformation. Its societal development processes to a large extent are inclusive regarding the nature of its stakeholders. This approach provides a feasible and sustainable strategy for human development and poverty eradication. I argue that such a view consciously or unconsciously affects the understanding of and attitudes towards the challenge of poverty in the African context. In other words, the intrinsic and inseparable family and societal ties and functions can still play a significant role in facing the challenge of poverty. The *Ujamaa* experiment in Tanzania indicates that the latter can be used, for instance, to define and show a communal sense of poverty in terms of its core content, causes and eradication in modern situations.

A critical analysis of African proverbs on poverty and proverbs in general shows them to be an integral, valuable means of cultural transmission. The proverbs facilitate the effective expression and inculcation of common and acceptable social, religious, economic, political and sound morals. The community's attitudes, beliefs, values, history, customs and practices as represented in proverbs constitute a major educational process. Originating among the ordinary people's daily life, proverbs possess a communal authority and authenticity. In addition, their perceived accuracy, extensive appeal and poetic forms provide for their easy dissemination and circulation

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in various events of socialisation. The latter are aimed at enhancing a proper maturation towards humanness as well as at providing resolutions to predicaments. As significant communication tools, proverbs also influence people to undertake positive changes in their lifestyles, by the integration of the experiences of the forebears into contemporary situations.

Three perspectives regarding African proverbs on poverty reveal that proverbs are the legitimate catalysts of change in society.

- Proverbs provide life-centred teaching and learning geared toward enhancing the autonomous ability to think, remember, imagine and anticipate new knowledge.
- In terms of the African holistic view, proverbs exhibit a religious orientation that enhances equality in human life.
- The use of such proverbs enhances the collective participation of ordinary people. The latter also promotes development from below, vis-à-vis the elitist individualistic model.

In the light of the discussion in this chapter I argue that an understanding of poverty in African contexts is worthwhile. Such an understanding should serve as a starting point for the development of concrete, viable and sustainable strategies for poverty eradication today. Christians and governments alike should strive to make use of these cultural liberating means to communicate effectively concerning meaningful changes in African poverty situations. I am particularly convinced that African proverbs can provide the much needed breakthrough. Can an analysis of the traditional African way of life assist in illuminating the dilemma of poverty in our interpretation of the Old Testament Book of Proverbs? The focus of the next chapter falls on this question.

4 READING THE OLD TESTAMENT PROVERBS ON POVERTY FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

4.1 Introduction

A significant part of the present chapter is intended to offer a detailed exegesis of selected proverbial texts on poverty from the Old Testament, particularly the Book of Proverbs. The major focus of the critical analysis is aimed at determining the meaning of these texts in the light of the suggested cultural insights into poverty in the African context. At the same time, the analysis will also seek to demonstrate in an extensive manner what Bergant refers to as the ‘rhetorical force’ (1997:11): the way in which the proverbs on poverty function in terms of possible modifications of dominant perspectives. Such an approach is used to sensitise one to the issue of poverty in the Book of Proverbs. However, before proceeding, a few words are necessary to determine the crucial aspects of the cross-cultural comparative material used. This is meant to show that the African proverbs on the poor which are to be used have complied with the following six criteria (cf. Wilson 1977:11-18, 1980:15-16):

- The proverbs must have been collected by anthropologists so as to qualify as social scientific material.
- The proverbs must have a correct contextual interpretation.
- The proverbs must exhibit a wide ethnic range.
- The proverbs must be analysed in terms of their own value.
- The similarity between the proverbs and biblical proverbial texts must be authenticated.
- At all times critical awareness must be exercised to control the cross-cultural exegetical study of the biblical text and thereby to avoid *eisegesis*.

The first four requirements above have been critically analysed in detail in Chapter 3. Therefore, this chapter will analyse the fifth criterion in terms of parallels in the following sections while the sixth criterion continues to be observed throughout the thesis.

4.2 A cross-cultural comparison between the Old Testament and Africa

This cross-cultural exegetical study will employ the African view on poverty, derived from the relevant African proverbs on the poor in Chapter 3, in order to interpret Old Testament proverbs dealing with the issue. Such a comparison between the Old Testament and Africa will, hopefully, enable Bible readers to make meaning of the Old Testament proverbial texts on poverty in order to be empowered in their different African Christian contexts. A brief overview of the basis for comparison is therefore necessary to establish the status of similarities between the Old Testament and African proverbial material on poverty.

4.2.1 Reasons for the compatibility between Old Testament and traditional African proverbs

Both the Book of Proverbs and the African lore address the theme of poverty. The preceding fact indicates that the ancient Israelite society challenged poverty (cf. De Vaux 1961:72-73; Gottwald 1985:285-287; Whybray 1990) in its various dimensions. Similarly, the struggle against poverty was and is still evident both in traditional and modern African societies. The theme of poverty as it is addressed in the Old Testament Book of Proverbs and in African proverbs warrants a detailed study on account of the following reasons:

- The message being communicated by such proverbs in both traditions addresses a relevant existential concern for their respective audiences. The message is also of great importance and authority for the socio-cultural contexts of modern society (cf. also Schneider 1990:97; Scheffler 2001:11).
- The study of proverbs contributes to a deeper appreciation of the biblical understanding of Wisdom literature. For many years the study of such literature, especially the Book of Proverbs, has been frustrated by the inadequacy of the historical critical methods for the treatment of proverbial material. The dependence on comparative Egyptian and Mesopotamian

wisdom traditions has also limited the scope of the interpretation of poverty proverbs to the conservative viewpoint of the elite.

- The study of proverbs creates an opportunity for fostering the usage of both literary proverbial collections as tools for the contextualisation of the Old Testament in Africa. In fact, contextualisation is the deliberate background of this study, in order to identify an alternative liberative interpretation. The latter idea is important because the challenge of poverty touches the core of humanity, especially in present day Africa.

Many African biblical scholars comparing between the Old Testament and traditional African proverbs have demonstrated the presence of some common characteristics in terms of their structure, content and language. Without going into details about their arguments in this thesis, I will apply those common proverbial properties already established by scholars such as metaphors, parallelisms, compactness, openness to re-interpretation in changing contexts (cf. Masenya 1989:157-160; Naré 1986; Nzambi 1992).

According to the popular social contexts of Old Testament and traditional African proverbs I am suggesting that these proverbial collections stem from ordinary people with an oral tradition. As part of folklore, then, it can be argued that biblical proverbial literature as well as African proverbs originated amongst real people who lived in real settings (eg, economic, political, ecological, cultural and religious). For the majority these settings helped to shape who they were. In the case of the Old Testament text, however, one is reading an editorial collection, with an intentional ruling-class ideological agenda of domination, stretching from the monarchical up to the post-exilic period (cf. McNutt 1999:66, 1999:102; Mosala 1986:119-120, 1989:16-20). In this case, then, the vestigial elements of the popular social, economic, political and religious values of the ancient Israelite traditions in the Old Testament text are traced by means of details that correspond with the anthropological models of African societies.

The proverbial material in both cultures deals with questions about the economic status of the composers and audiences, their gender, their age, and their place in the community. However, I agree with Schneider (1990:82) that the issues of ordinary people are inclusive in their nature, in that they remain regardless of status and geographical location. Therefore it is possible to search out the ways in which

those questions are reflected in the proverbs on poverty, particularly in their response to the universal underlying challenge of poverty. This is an important contribution of the present contextual study.

- It provides the possibility for an alternative performance background to poverty proverbs.
- New questions on poverty can be raised that provide fresh insights for the interpretation of the selected Old Testament proverbs on the poor (cf. also Fontaine 1982:28-71; Schneider 1990:102-104).
- The approach also focuses attention more on the popular or ‘folk’ authorship of the given proverbs than on the traditions of the sages. The latter have been predominant in Western biblical studies.

4.2.2 Apparent social, cultural, economic and religious similarities

I deliberately employ an African holistic worldview on poverty (cf. the ancient Israelite worldview) as the premise for the exegesis of selected proverbs from the Book of Proverbs. The contextual approach as an interdisciplinary method, as mentioned earlier in my discussion, is important because it bridges the gap between literary contexts. The latter is a necessary step to take in the study of the Book of Proverbs because the study uses African proverbial settings. I therefore support the argument that the relative literary context of the proverbial collections significantly helps one to clearly recognise certain insights in the thinking patterns and daily proverbial expressions of the ancient Israelites (cf. Fontaine 1982, 1985). Naré (1986:303-306), Golka (1993:37, 1993:53), and Westermann (1995:123-128) point to a close similarity in the nature and theological content of the proverbial material on the subject of poverty between the two non-literary Israelite and African cultures. Some examples of the apparent social, cultural, economic and religious correspondences that provide the background for the character of and theological similarities between Israelite culture and African culture follow:

- The Hebrew Bible portrays the holistic worldview held by the ancient Israelites that is similar to the African worldview, because there is sufficient evidence to prove that the Hebrew Bible does not make any distinction in the life of ancient Israel between sacred and secular daily matters. Hence, these aspects are inextricably integrated to shape the belief, thinking and performance patterns in a person into one single realm of life (cf. Mbiti 1989:257; Likeng 1998:226).
- Most of the proverbial linguistic graphics, dynamics, metaphors and imagery, such as the plants and animals used in the Hebrew Bible, are common and in accord with the significance they are given in Africa (cf. Naré 1986; Nzambi 1992; Likeng 1998). This aspect implies that the African reader is much more at home and closer to the original meaning of the biblical proverbial text as well.
- The ancient Israelite culture and traditional African culture indicate a similar thinking pattern that is dynamic, qualitative, concrete, focusing on the human temporal life and stressing on content and function. Hence, in both cultures history is understood in the sense of the practical purpose for which it happens and its final cause. For example, the oral ‘word’ including the ‘name’ of a person has power and is much preferred (cf. Bengtson 1964:10-38; Mafico 1978: 41-42). In fact, both cultures revered the wisdom of the elders because of their long experience of life.
- Both the ancient Israelite and traditional African cultures evidence a similarly optimistic moral and philosophical system that has sustained their survival during various disasters such as slavery, colonialism, exploitation and apartheid, by encouraging economic and social well-being, cultural integrity and identity (cf. Mbiti 1989:257; Makgoba 1998:103). In Sheffler’s words the Bible witnesses the ancient Israelite’s ‘history of bloodshed and turmoil’ with regard to these conditions, attitudes and policies (2001:11).
- The extended family, mostly patriarchal in nature, which cares beyond the immediate family is found to be the basic unifying unit that extends to clans and ethnic groups or nations in both the ancient Israelite society and in most African rural societies today (cf. Scheffler 2001:60-61; Mafico 1978:40-41; De Vaux 1961:20; Gottwald 1979:285-341; Bendor 1996). The worst event in

such a social milieu is for a person to be cut off from the community or family, because one loses one's connection with the ancestors. The latter were believed to connect people with the Creator. Such an ancestral linkage is behind the cultural emphasis on harmonious and orderly relationships among members of the society.

- This strong family mentality also brings about a responsible corporate feeling or community consciousness that can unite a society or communities in facing the challenge of poverty and other life-threatening situations (cf. Mafico 1978:40; Wafanaka 1997:xxii; De Vaux 1961:19-23; Gottwald 1985:285; Bosman 1991:198). In fact, the corporate feeling was founded and nurtured through communal socialisation processes based on egalitarian principles that exhibit no stratified division of labour. From the internalisation of such principles it was possible to sustain solidarity and protect the welfare of the needy members of their respective societies. As a result of this socially supportive approach the two societies did not need to establish formal institutions to cater for the poor.
- Ancient Israel and traditional Africa have had pre-industrial economies based on subsistence agriculture that caused the land to constitute the most vital resource for the well-being of society. The society's daily life was dominated by a struggle for survival by means of working the land through farming and stockbreeding activities (cf. Scheffler 2001:11, 2001:49; McNutt 1999:70; Gottwald 1985:285; 1979:464). In all senses, thus, poverty was an economic challenge which only properly managed, ordered and administered land could eradicate (cf. also Lv 25:23, 25:25-28; 1 Sm 8:4; 1 Ki 21).

The reason behind some of the above-mentioned anthropological parallels may suggest a possible interaction between ancient Israel and Africa. Enough evidence exists in the Hebrew Bible, especially the Cush texts (eg, Gn 10:6-7, Nm 12:1, Jr 38:7, Jr 39:16, Is 37:9, Zph 1:1), to suggest such a hypothetical interaction between Africans and the people of ancient Israel (cf. Felder 1989:12; Adamo 1998). The absence of a physical barrier between ancient Israel and Africa before the construction of the Suez Canal may have facilitated intercultural connections between these two geographical entities. Important to my thesis is that the similarities of anthropological

models can suggest an authentic cross-cultural performance context for proverbs to facilitate the comparison of the theme of poverty in both contexts. I now turn to discuss some of my reasons to selecting the particular proverbs on the poor for exegesis.

4.3 Reasons for the choice of particular Old Testament proverbs

It is not easy to establish a foundation for the selection of poverty proverbs from the Book of Proverbs. This difficulty has been experienced by scholars working with different themes from this Book. It is due to the proverbs' lack of an explicit direct, specific and detailed socio-economic critique of human behaviour and of one's relationships in society (cf. also Boström 1990:47-48; Hermission 1978:43). Moreover, no single cohesive group of proverbs on poverty exists since they are scattered in bits and pieces throughout the Book of Proverbs. The sayings and proverbs included in the present thesis are therefore selected on the basis of their relevance to its topic. Aspects such as theological potential, human insight and literary style were taken into account in this regard.

Ideally, the theological potential of the proverbs relates to the Hebrew terms used. Such terms display a direct reference to the religious background of the text, such as God, Creator, justice, injustice, beliefs, human beings et cetera. Owing to the presupposed holistic nature of the ancient Israelite worldview, the proverbs' human insight is not free from a religious orientation. In my opinion, human insights on poverty are reflected from a literal reading of proverbs in the Hebrew Bible. Such a reading, does not suggest a direct link with the religious influence of the proverbs, except through a deeper analysis of the relevant performance context. Some of the literal Hebrew terms that have been used to discuss human insight in selecting the proverbs on the poor concern human relationships in society, work, possessions or wealth, and public life. The literary style concerns the structure, literary context, and proverbial characteristics of metaphor, parallelism, compactness and openness to re-interpretation in changing contexts (cf. Masenya 1989:157-160; Naré 1986; Nzambi 1992). In order to avoid translational distortions of English versions, I have opted for the Hebrew terms as the basis for the following guiding questions in my selection of the relevant proverbs on the poor from the Book of Proverbs.

- Who are the poor?
- Why are they regarded as poor?
- How do the poor survive?
- How does the religious faith configure or shape the values of the poor, weak and needy (that is, regarding their status as class/es) in the Israelite society?
- How does the religious faith promote the realisation of the welfare of the poor in society?
- What are some of the social aspects linked to the challenge of poverty?
- Which role did Israelite society play regarding poverty?
- What was the role of the family with regard to poverty?
- What was the nature of the economy of the poor?

However, there remains a basic query about the above questions that must be kept in mind: Who defines ‘the poor’? Briefly, as has repeatedly been mentioned earlier in this thesis (cf. sub-section 4.2.1 et cetera), the Old Testament can be regarded as an editorial collection with a ruling class agenda in the struggle for the formation of a reliable order in Israel’s agrarian society (cf. 1 Sm 8-9; Von Rad 1975:307-308). In the preceding process, the elites as part of the ‘official’ structures were responsible for the development of the written biblical text as an ideological means of emphasis in the legitimation of class stratification and monarchical dominance (cf. Whitelam 1989:12; McKane 1965:44; Scott 1969:262-279; Brueggemann 1993a:202, 1993a:207-208; Mosala 1989:118-121). Therefore in order to perceive the significance of this *status quo*-oriented text it becomes necessary to unearth contrasting issues about which the text is silent.

To be more precise, Mosala argues that the ‘central themes of this monarchical ideology are stability, grace, restoration, creation, universal peace, compassion, and salvation; they contrast radically with the ideology of pre-monarchical Israel, which would have themes such as justice, solidarity, struggle, and vigilance’ (Mosala 1989:120). In fact, he further suggests that these contrasting social issues are the concern of social transformation and liberation in society. It is important also to discern them through the experiences and eyes of the oppressed biblical communities

themselves. Since the latter are absent in the biblical text, the contemporary liberation struggles should serve as a viable point of departure towards bridging the gap and gaining a better understanding of the biblical text (cf. Mosala 1989:121). With Mosala's viewpoint in mind, and also the leading questions in the previous paragraphs, my selection of proverbs takes the definition of the poor from the African grassroots context of poverty.

Another crucial question in discussing a holistic worldview is how to attend to every aspect of life and livelihood as a synthetic whole. The basic reason for the difficulty in dealing with the various aspects of human life relates to the dynamic interaction between them. Understandably, none of the social, political, economic and religious life aspects stands in isolation from the others. All aspects of human life are so inextricably intertwined that they cannot be separated easily from each other in an issue like poverty. Moreover, I am aware that the proverbs' openness to re-interpretation in terms of the diverse aspects of human life is yet another factor that complicates the categorisation of proverbs. In spite of these difficulties, the need to 'do justice to every aspect of human life within a holistic framework...[means that one] would be wise to start by distinguishing and selecting categories which appear to cover the divergent aspects of human life' (Scheffler 2001:15). Thus I here follow Scheffler's suggestion in distinguishing the different life components. The distinction is a necessary option only in the apprehension of the dynamic interaction of the diverse factors involved in the interpretation of poverty proverbs. The basic issue for me is to realise the function of the underlying concept of coherent unity throughout the whole process of considering the proverbial texts. It is in terms of the premises of this argument that I have grouped the proverbs into four sub-sections. The criterion I have used to distinguish the groups comprised selective Hebrew keywords. I focused on what appeared to be certain similar and related aspects of poverty in the selected proverbs from the Book of Proverbs. For a reader-friendly English translation the New Revised Standard Version will be used in the present work.

In my exegesis the African perspective informs the reading, based on my own social location as an indigenous Tanzanian person. By this I mean the worldview, intention and set of interests which influence the African reading of the text (cf. also Manus 2003:36). As discussed in the third chapter of this thesis, the criterion for a

dynamic African reading of the Bible by ordinary people assumes strong influences from their holistic worldview. It is basically constituted by three integrated elements:

[T]he unitive view of reality whereby reality is seen not as composed of matter and spirit, sacred and profane but as a unity with visible and invisible aspects, *the divine origin of the universe and the interconnectedness between God, humanity and the cosmos*, and *the sense of community* whereby a person's identity is defined in terms of belonging to a community [italics mine] (Ukpong 2000:16-17).

I have purposely limited the African worldview to the above quoted common components as a starting point for the affirmation of the unity of African culture and history. Such an approach prioritises the necessity of learning to unite these common elements as the basic rule of attaining empowerment. Some African scholars have considered holding fast to diversities as being both irrelevant and a luxury in practical terms (cf. Mugambi 2001:22).

Working for the unity of common African cultural elements, rather than putting emphasis on their diversity will serve the cause of challenging poverty more effectively. In fact it is a necessary step to be taken in terms of such unity as a point of strength, in order to begin defining poverty solutions from within the African continent as a whole. In short, unity in the struggle against poverty is a point of strength than weakness. A Bena proverb supports my stance in this unitive regard: *Pe wisaka ubitile kyang'ani gende vviyena; pe wisaka ubite pawutali ugende navangi*: 'When you want to go fast, walk alone; but when you want to go far, walk with others'. In the same way Mosha contrasts deductive and cumulative logic:

[T]he average modern-educated reader seems to have the view that *the dynamics of the whole can be understood from the properties of the parts*. Indigenous peoples [particularly in Africa], however, know that *the properties of the parts can be understood only from the dynamics of the whole*. For them, all aspects of life and universe are interconnected and interdependent (2000:14).

In other words, I suggest that exceptions to the described common holistic worldview are rather to be found in 'manifestations and endeavours' to show the interconnectedness between the parts than in the concept of the wholistic nature of the parts themselves. Those exceptions to the basic foundations of cultural unity in Africa are rooted in the disempowering divide-and-rule mindset. For the moment the focus

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should fall on the cultivation of a united, responsible and transforming social and moral conscience, finding a common vision against poverty in Africa.

The following proverbs on poverty have been selected for the intended detailed exegetical analysis:

- **Social environment and poverty**

Proverbs 13:7

Some **pretend to be rich**, yet have nothing; others **pretend to be poor**, yet have great wealth.

Proverbs 13:18

Poverty and disgrace are for the one who **ignores instruction**, but one who **heeds reproof** is **honoured**.

Proverbs 19:7

If **the poor** are **hated even by their kin**, how much more are they **shunned by their friends!** When they call after them, they are not there.

Proverbs 21:13

If you **close your ear** to the cry of **the poor**, you will cry out and not be heard.

- **Economic environment and poverty**

Proverbs 13:23

The **field of the poor** may yield much **food**, but it is swept away through **injustice**.

Proverbs 22:16

Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself, and **giving to the rich**, will lead only to loss.

Proverbs 23:10-11

Do not remove an **ancient landmark** or encroach on **the fields of orphans**,
for their **redeemer** is strong; he will plead their cause against you.

Proverbs 28:8

One who augments **wealth by exorbitant interest** gathers it for another who
is kind to the poor.

- **Political environment and poverty**

Proverbs 22:7

The rich **rule over the poor**, and the borrower is the **slave of the lender**.

Proverbs 28:3

A ruler who oppresses **the poor** is a beating rain that leaves no food.

Proverbs 28:15

Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a **wicked ruler** over a poor people.

Proverbs 29:14

If a **king judges** the poor with **equity** his throne will **be established** for ever.

- **Religious environment and poverty**

Proverbs 14:31

Those who oppress **the poor** insult their **Maker**, but those who are kind to **the needy** honour **him**.

Proverbs 17:5

Those who mock **the poor** insult their **Maker**; those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.

Proverbs 22:2

The rich and **the poor** have this in common: **the LORD** is the maker of them all.

Proverbs 29:13

The poor and the oppressor have this in common: **the LORD** gives light to the eyes of both.

In the preceding chapters and sub-sections of the present chapter I have laid the foundation for reading poverty proverbs in the Old Testament Book of Proverbs. In the following sub-sections, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7, I proceed to interpret the selected texts, using the concepts and insights observed earlier in this thesis.

4.4 An exegesis of relevant proverbs on the social environment and poverty: Proverbs 13:7, 13:18, 19:7, and 21:13

The focus of this section is to investigate the place of social supportive structures and networks in the challenge of poverty. The preceding are but some of the human resources available to the grassroots economy to meet the needs of their life and livelihood (cf. also Friedmann 1992:66-69). Normally, however, the social system works in collaboration with the collective perception, which is informed by the cultural thought patterns of the society. Hence, people are born into those specific socio-cultural contexts. In order to bring about social change then, a transformation of people's collective awareness is implied: challenging the predominant cultural thought patterns by alternative innovative ideas regarding some bases of social power

(cf. Nürnberger 1999:142-154; Moila 2002:7476). Informed by the preceding idea, in this sub-section some of the leading questions relating to the social aspects of human life mentioned in sub-section 4.3 of this thesis will be employed as a basis to understand the biblical proverbial text. For clarity and focus, I have sharpened these fundamental questions to read as follows: What kind(s) of socio-economic problem(s) is/are suggested by the text? What are the productive opportunities envisioned in the proverbial text? Are there any restrictive social factors inhibiting people from making use of the possibilities for economic transformation?

Proverbs 13:7

**`br' !Ahw> vveArt.mi lKo !yaew>
rVe[;t.mi vyE**

There are those enriching themselves yet have nothing; others impoverishing themselves yet have great sufficiency. (My translation.)

Proverbs 13:7, like most of the sententious sayings in the second collection, Proverbs 10:1-22:16, is a self-contained entity. Also, somehow a completeness of sense and unity is evident within its stiches. Such an autonomous nature suggests the independent and unrelated oral performance context for each proverb. Therefore it would be tempting to consider each proverb in isolation, depending on its literal theme. Some scholars have opted for such an ‘atomising’ approach by arguing that the collections in the Book of Proverbs are to be understood as being ‘thrown together willy-nilly without any conceptual or literary cohesion’ (Hildebrandt 1988:207; cf. also Whybray 1990:153-154; McKane 1970:413). However, on one hand, there is a growing consensus among many biblical scholars that the collectors, editors and redactors had a deliberate motive in their arrangement of the proverbial material in the Book of Proverbs (cf. Heim 2001). On the other hand, a strong argument for the non-existence of any ‘correct’ method predominates in biblical studies (cf. Barton 1996; Powell 1992:3-19; Le Roux 1992:3-19). The latter suggestion cannot be ignored because it implies that some aspects of literary context may be helpful for one to understand and do justice to the biblical text. Therefore, I submit that the inclusion of a brief closer literary discussion of this proverb is necessary. This approach aims to

shed some further light on the interpretation rendered and also to respect the canonical form of the Scripture of which the relative text in question is a part.

Some commentators have suggested a thematic link, that of riches, between Proverbs 13:7 and Proverbs 13:8 (cf. Murphy 1998:96; Whybray 1994:202; McKane 1970:458). But there is also the possibility of a slightly modified secondary literary context of Proverbs 13:7 to Proverbs 12:9b regarding the odd nature of human behaviour (cf. Whybray 1994:202). Or the ‘social pretence’ in Proverbs 13:7 can be compared with the paradoxical and ambiguous results of scattering and withholding which are proclaimed in Proverbs 11:24 (cf. Murphy 1998:96). Though the resulting prevalent interpretations of Proverbs 13:7 based on such a literary context have indicated the necessity of looking beneath the matters observed, the emphasis is on the literal sense of the proverb. In addition, some legitimate issues related to the implied ethical and moral considerations have deliberately been omitted for the sake of preserving the supposed irony of the proverb (cf. Whybray 1994:202). According to Murphy, Proverbs 13:7 does not list any motives for one to apply the following moral questions:

The nuance of “pretend”, i.e., act differently, is not necessarily to deceive anyone. On the other hand, one can apply moral considerations by questioning the motives of individuals: Does the wealth of the poor person consist in another order of values, such as dependence upon God, or else in being satisfied with his lot? Is the “pretense” in either person a reprehensible act (Murphy 1998:96)?

Using the immediate literary context of Proverbs 13:7, the questions cited above by Murphy have been given various answers. Toy, for instance, on the one hand finds an apparent condemnation of both types of social pretence because the show of wealth or poverty indicates dishonesty. On the other hand he suggests a desire of social irresponsibility towards the poor, as his hypothesis alluded to in the second stich of the proverb (1899:264). However, Murphy’s questions are relevant to Africa where poverty is an existential challenge. The moral issues engage all grassroots people, regardless of time, place or worldview. They cannot be ignored as merely detached paradoxical observations about how misleading appearances can be.

Proverbs 13:7 is inserted between two proverbs that deal with the protection of life. In Proverbs 13:6, righteousness is mentioned as guarding the integrity of the human being, in contrast to wickedness that destroys it. And in Proverbs 13:8 wealth is suggested as helping to save the life of a rich person while courage is said to save

the life of the poor. In my view the immediate literary context surrounding Proverbs 13:7 reveals much of the way in which the said principles (to protect life) operate in the socio-cultural setting. In line with the ongoing discussions, this thesis accepts a thematic alternative context in order to classify Proverbs 13:7 together with Proverbs 13:18, 19:7 and 21:13. The theme that runs through all of these proverbs concerns the different social behaviours of the poor and poverty. In the indicated category of texts, as stated earlier in sub-section 4.3 of this thesis, the Hebrew catchwords about social characteristics and terms for poverty are used. These aspects are literally easy to recognise and identify.

Proverbs 13:7 does present a minor textual difficulty in its translations and transmission according to the critical apparatus of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. In the second part of the second stich the common masculine singular noun **!Ahw>**, ‘*w®hōn*’, of the Masoretic text is replaced by **AnAhw>**, ‘*w®hōnô*’, in the Targum. The latter has a third person masculine singular suffix and is translated ‘his wealth’ or rather ‘his sufficiency’. The substitution of this free translation and commentary conveys no variation in sense. Perhaps it was an attempt at the poetic improvement of the Hebrew text. Therefore, in this case the Hebrew text takes advantage of *lectio difficilior* to be retained as the best text.

Proverbs 13:7 contains an antithetical chiasmus in its schematic structure of ‘**ab // ba**’. The words of the first stich are repeated in reverse order and contrasting sense. According to Watson (1981:147-148) the function of this chiasmus is identified by the use of **1Ko** ‘*kol*’, ‘all’, and polar word pairs, in this case ‘enrich’ and ‘impoverish’, to express merismus in the sense of totality. But in addition the frequent usage of antithetical chiasmus in the Book of Proverbs is intended to emphasise an antithesis or contrast between the senses of the two stiches of the text. In Proverbs 13:7, the contrast will particularly comprise between ‘pretence’ and ‘reality’ (cf. Pr 13:25).

br' !Ahw>

vveArt.mi

1Ko !yaew> rVe[;t.mi vyE

a

b

b

a

In the above structure, the pretence of being rich is contrasted with the reality of having nothing or being poor, while the pretence of being poor is contrasted with the reality of having sufficient means or being wealthy. The common contrast is built on the social act of pretending, whose poetic function is to help the reader to participate in the process of creating an image of the moral attitude which society is expected to exhibit towards poverty. Hence, the pretence of being rich while actually possessing nothing in the first stich is contrasted to the pretence of being poor while actually enjoying great wealth in the second one. In fact, in its written form, it is the only proverb in the Book of Proverbs that speaks so directly about social pretence. The probing question, from the perspective of the ordinary grassroots people in this proverb, concerns the mysterious faces and hidden potentials within society. The preceding aspects, of course, suggest the need for a fresh way of perceiving this proverb in order to discover new and relevant ways of challenging poverty from below. Therefore, according to the literary structure of Proverbs 13:7, I argue that it deals with how to live life to its fullest and best (cf., for a similar paradox, Pr 11:24).

Turning to some of the terminology and its usage might offer further insight into the intended message of the biblical proverb in question. I wish to argue that the message of Proverbs 13:7 was aimed particularly at those who could do something about poverty. I assume that the speaker of Proverbs 13:7 came from among the poor. Therefore I argue that the aim of the proverbial message was to attack the notion of fatalism, in other words that the average poor person was unable to rise to the challenge of poverty. The proverbial message was intended to uncover the power dynamics that inhibited social and economic changes. This message revolved around the conception of social pretence among the ancient Israelites. The present discussion will consequently benefit from a brief discussion of the usage of the terms related to ‘pretence’, which are based on the ‘hithpael’ and ‘hithpolel’ participles of the Hebrew text. However, before I discuss these terms let me comment briefly about the singular used in Hebrew text participles and the plural rendering in English translations.

All of the English translations use a singular participle for ‘pretence’ except the New Revised Standard Version. The latter uses the plural of the participle for ‘pretence’, that is, ‘**Some** pretend to be rich, yet have nothing; **others** pretend to be poor, yet have great wealth’ (Pr 13:7). I tend to concur with this translation because of the collective nature of proverbs as a social phenomenon. This latter aspect gives both

of the singular nouns in the text, that is, ‘rich’ and ‘poor’, a sense of singular collectivity that suggests a quantity such as a group or a class (cf. also Van der Merwe, Naudé & Kroeze 2002:183-184). Though Boström (1990:60) does not list concrete reasons, he supports the idea that the singular ‘poor man’ should be treated in the collective sense during the interpretation of proverbs in the Book of Proverbs (cf. also *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament/2* 1995: 890b). This aspect of collectivity is very important because an emphasis on the individual suffix, as with McKane (1970:473) on Proverbs 14:31, limits the scope of the proverbial context. Subsequently, McKane’s cross-reference to Matthew 25:31-46 to endorse this singular translation of the ‘poor’ on Proverbs 14:31 leads him to deny the existence of the poor as a social group in the ancient Israelite society. Such an individualising of poverty is behind the conservative *status quo* understanding of poverty analysed in the second chapter of this thesis. Such an approach mystifies the social causes of poverty by not calling to moral accountability and responsibility the society’s unequal or exploitative structures. I now consider the terminology relating to ‘social pretence’.

The hithpael participle masculine singular verb **rVe[;t.mi** , ‘*mi^{3/4}±a⁻ψr* ’, is translated ‘pretend(s) to be rich’ (RSV; NJB; NAB; NIV) or ‘maketh himself rich’ (KJV). In addition, the hithpolel participle masculine singular verb **vveArt.mi**, ‘*mi^{3/4}rō⁻ψ-* ’, is translated ‘pretend(s) to be poor’ (RSV; NJB; NAB; NIV) or ‘maketh himself poor’ (KJV). The first group of translations (RSV; NJB; NAB; NIV) derives from one lexical definition of the terms ‘pretend to be rich’ (Holladay 1988:286b) and ‘pretend to be poor’ (Holladay 1988:336b). The King James Version, however, derives its translation from another lexical definition of the same terms, that is, ‘one enriching himself’ (Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:799a) and ‘one impoverishing himself’ (Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:930b). The reflexive nature of both the ‘hithpael’ and ‘hithpolel’ participles causes the relative verbs to be synonymous and interchangeable in their usage between the translation and the lexical definitions. Since the terms referred to have not been used elsewhere, apart from Proverbs 13:7, a direct comparison to establish the context of the text is not possible. Still, with a careful consideration of other biblical texts it may be possible inductively to establish certain ideas, values and outlooks of the ancient Israelite society underlying the proverb in question: What was the motif behind social pretence in the Israelite society? Is the usage in the Book of Proverbs in accordance with the other

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Old Testament traditions of the Israelite society? Was the reader or hearer of Proverbs 13:7 expected to identify the message without any difficulty?

The verb ‘pretend’ is found in several texts in the Old Testament, as an indication that this social behaviour was not uncommon in ancient Israelite society. For instance, King David pretended to be insane at the hands of Achish king of Gath so that he could be set free (1 Sm 21:13; Ps 34:1). In Joshua 8:15 the Israelites pretended to have been beaten and fled into the wilderness as a battle tactic to ambush and conquer Ai and Bethel. In 1 Samuel 13:5-6, Amnon is portrayed as pretending to be ill in order to rape Tamar his step-sister. Similarly, Joab sends the wise woman who pretends to be a mourner to King David at Tekoa in order to talk about the lifting of the ban on his son Absalom (2 Sm 14:2). In addition, the wife of Jeroboam disguised herself as another woman in order to inquire about the fate of her sick son from the prophet Ahijah in Shiloh (1 Kg 14:2-5). From such texts, it thus appears obvious that there is always a moral or immoral motive of some kind behind the social act of pretence. This understanding has a bearing on the situation alluded to in Proverbs 13:7 in the sense that it reflects on a moral situation in which two actors are involved. But the morality is not easily discernible in the Book of Proverbs itself. Neither is it discernible from the Hebrew Scriptures using traditional biblical exegesis. A glimpse into similar situations in traditional Africa may therefore help to indicate some basic motives behind social pretence, giving rise to similar proverbs in African culture.

The verb to ‘pretend’ is the dominant word in both parts of Proverbs 13:7. In fact, it determines the two types of person who may pretend. The act of pretending is, interestingly, also part and parcel of the social system in the African culture. Similar questions are asked: What was the motif behind social pretence in an African society? Is its usage in the African proverbs in accordance with other cultural traditions of such a society? Was the hearer of proverbs about poverty and pretence expected to identify the message without any difficulty? Basically, the word ‘pretend’ means to convey a false appearance of being or possession. The connotation of deception as dishonesty lies behind the word ‘pretend’. It can bring a kind of misunderstanding to the meaning of the action as one of immorality. The latter approach could be one of the reasons why Western biblical scholars have difficulty in comprehending the use of the word ‘pretend’ in Proverbs 13:7. Then: Why pretend to be rich or poor?

A similar issue of social pretence is indirectly referred to in the Bena proverb: *Muheha pang'ende munumbula lwitema lungi*: ‘The mouth is laughing but the heart is cooking something different’. That is, a person physically portrays a superficial pleasure instead of her or his actual feelings. Though outsiders to the culture may judge the latter to be hypocritical, in the Bena culture where a portrayal of any sign of anger is seen as immaturity, pretence may serve as a mechanism for keeping one’s dignity. It is a form of irony in which a person feigns indifference to or pretends to refuse something one desires. But, it may also be a test of fidelity to the communal network of social relationships through patience and devotion, at one’s own cost. Among the Bena the saying exists: *Mukangala pamugove apako pele pagona*: ‘You work harder at the communal farm while your own remains uncultivated’. Similarly the Swahili uses the proverb: *Maskini akipata matakao hulia mbwata*: ‘When a poor person gets something the buttocks fart’. Of course, according to African social customs it is a taboo to fart in public. In other words to do so deliberately is an indication of lack of appreciation of and respect for the generosity accorded.

Among the Bena, it is the normal social custom that even when one approaches another person to ask for help, she or he will not be expected to go empty-handed, because that would be regarded sharply as an impolite request. The request is also put in a language that does not elevate the status of the benefactor but emphasises responsibility on account of the means of survival entrusted to him or her on behalf of the community. In that case, the beneficiary feigns ignorance of the benefactor’s economic condition by using the proverb: *Ndemuafwe vunofu tufwe musale*: ‘If you died well we are dying of hunger’. The respondent then inquires of the need and does what is possible but in the process uses the proverb: *Kifuku kilo kinzila vuvalo*: ‘The rain season is like a night; there is no place to escape’. The implication of the proverb is that just as the night falls on all people, rendering them incapable of doing many things, so does the rainy season, it does not distinguish between the farms. This is because during this season the remaining harvest of the year has been used as seeds. As a result, families do not have enough food left over until the next harvest. So when they provide help they pretend that they do not have much left, in order to save enough for themselves not to starve. Even the month in which the rainy season begins in the Bena context is called *Mupalangulo*, literally ‘famine’.

Among other things, in African culture, boastfulness, self-glorification, self-exaltation and pride are strongly discouraged and regarded as taboos because they are

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considered hazardous to the well-being of the society. In many African societies, for instance, it is a taboo to praise a mother for the beauty of her child because the act is perceived as a curse that might bring sickness or death to the child (cf. also Pr 27:14). For similar reasons in African societies it is also very difficult to record with any accuracy the number of domestic animals and the wealth a person owns (cf. Burton 1981:85; Githuku 2001:114-117). The act of pretending to be poor can thus be regarded as a means of protection against witchcraft. I am of the opinion that the fear of witchcraft has to be seen positively as a control over social stratification which is intended to maintain the egalitarian basis of African communities (cf. also Gluckman 1965:59). The African perspective on similar proverbs about social and economic pretence, especially concerning wealth, is therefore aimed at changing the spirit and attitudes that elevate wealth as a status symbol. Rather, such proverbs on socio-economic pretence comprise an emphatic call to humility with respect to an enhanced livelihood and well-being. The virtue of humbleness is very important for focusing priorities in people's lives: human relationships, community, spirituality and creativity as points of departure for the process of transformation (cf. also Swartz 1966:94). In other words, the proverbial comments express conditional curses when spoken against those with ample possessions but who still deny the needy the expected generosity and courtesy. Further African proverbs on social pretence follow:

- Yoruba: *Abata takete, bienikpe ko ba odo tan.*
‘The marsh [or pool] stands aloof, as if it were not akin to the stream’.
- Umbundu: *A fele viso, mbanje omo vomena muleha.*
‘Pretend trouble in the eye to get a smell at his breath’.
- Setswana: *Ba keledi tsa mathe.*
‘Those who wet their faces to pretend that they are weeping’.
- Sukuma: *Kumugamuga nsatu, ng'hungu.*
‘To hide a sick person is to finally be betrayed by groans’.
- Oromo: *Hoggaa gabbattuun burraaqthu / huqqattuun eege dhaabdi.*
‘When the fat ones (cows) jump with joy, the thin ones raise their tails’.

Using the preceding insights from the African proverbial material, I can visualise the reason behind Proverbs 13:7 as relating to the priority of generosity in a society where

egalitarian principles engage all people. It reinforces family values and clan solidarity and warns against corrupting motives such as pride, which usually threaten stability and peace in society. The aim of Proverbs 13:7, therefore, is to maintain the traditional supportive social network system. Pride and self-glorification undermines humility and interdependence with others in one's society, even God (cf. Pr 29:23; Githuku 2001:116). In the following text the focus is on life-centred training: the developing of an autonomous creative person who is of service to the society.

Proverbs 13:18

ˋdB 'kuy> tx;k;AT rmEAvw> rs"Wm [;reAP
!Alq'w> vyre

Poverty and disgrace result from neglect of training but the preservation of reproof is honourable. (My translation.)

Proverbs 13:18 is found within the second collection of the Book of Proverbs, namely, Proverbs 10:1-22:16. This verse is very difficult because of its self-contained unity of sense, similar to Proverbs 13:7, considered earlier in this sub-section. In his earlier commentary, Whybray skipped Proverbs 13:18 without an explanation (1972:79). Some scholars, however, have suggested a slightly modified context based on the theme of spiritual and character education **ꝝS "Wm**, 'mûs'r' (Holladay 1988:186b; Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:416), and reproof **tx;k;AT**, 'taekauat'. The preceding context places Proverbs 13:18 together with Proverbs 13:1, 13:14, 13:20, and 13:24 (cf. also Whybray 1994a:99; Murphy 1998:99; McKane 1970:453). The latter context can be extended to include Proverbs 12:1, 15:5 and 15:32 that advocate the principle of cautious decisions in life. The two words **ꝝS "Wm**, 'mûs'r', and **tx;k;AT**, 'taekauat', are used more than thirty times in the Book of Proverbs (eg, Pr 3:11-12, 4:13, 15:33; 23:23; 24:32 et cetera) to denote disciplinary exercises and practices which were intended to develop and reinforce morals and ethical behaviour in persons for the benefit of society.

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In ancient Israel the theological basis of discipline was founded in the covenant relationship that God had established with his people during the exodus from Egypt. Thus from the modified educational context, it can be discerned that in the ancient Israelite society, as in every society, there existed a training system. However diverse central goals and methods of nurture and guidance in educational systems are evident, according to the society's world views. In traditional Africa, as in the ancient Israelite holistic worldview, educational systems comprised the oral transmission of established cultural principles. The content of these systems focused on character development, the preservation and promotion of culture, values, heritage and higher living standards in the community. Many scholars in Africa continue to promote this pragmatic African training approach and its integration into the contemporary educational curriculum for development (cf. Mosha 2000:160-168; Bennaars 1993:40-41; Boateng 1985:109-122). Bennaars, for instance, argues:

There was a time in Africa's past when traditional pedagogy was fully operational, and highly functional indeed. It was characterized by an atmosphere of communal care and concern, reflecting the explicit intention, both collective and individual, to make children come of age, to encourage them to be adults, to educate them. A further feature of traditional pedagogy was the pedagogical relation, so eminently present...in ritual and initiation. It was an integral part of the societal action that aims at leading the infant from a natural, original state to the state of adulthood, a cultural state. No doubt, [sic] traditional understanding of education and of educating was truly existential in character, a truly authentic pedagogy (1993:69-70).

In line with the holistic sense of instruction described by Bennaars in the above quote the following question becomes important: Can the literary context shed more light on the significance of Proverbs 13:18?

The literal sense of Proverbs 13:17 concerns the effects of unreliable and reliable social behaviour on people's lives in society. Good communicators, messengers, ambassadors, representatives and envoys play an important part as intermediaries in the struggle for the formation of a reliable socio-economic order in society (cf. 1 Sm 8-9; Von Rad 1972:308). Therefore, from an African viewpoint, I submit that Proverbs 13:17 raises the community's awareness of the need for planning wisely about its future. Such planning is a constituent element in the feasible and sustainable realisation of a credible socio- economic and political service to humanity. Hence, Proverbs 13:18 appears to suggest a following up on the appropriate means of developing a full humanity and fullness in all aspects of societal life. The main strategy for achieving this humanness is training (i e, discipline, reproof) based on

both negative (i.e., poverty, shame, dishonour, abuse, disgrace) and positive (i.e., honour, glory) incentives (cf. also Proverbs 13:17, 13:19, 13:20).

Hence, an evaluation of certain ethical norms involved in the instructions found in the Book of Proverbs reveals both the worldview and historical background of the ancient Israelite community. Von Rad (1972:74-76) recognises the vestigial evidence of threatening socio-economic structural tensions and circumstances in the Book of Proverbs. Perhaps considering his Western context, he cautions that these vestiges are not a familiar phenomenon for (Western) contemporary thought patterns. Therefore I consider him right in suggesting a metaphorical ‘magnifying glass’ based on sociological theories to examine them. However, in respect of the results of his sociological examination one is persuaded to classify his model with the elitist social models. His approach suggests that the proverbial material in the Book of Proverbs stems from the pre-exilic monarchical period with an urban cultural social setting. The social, economic, political and religious conditions are alleged to be extremely static. Such a claim is typical of elitist models because of their tendency to uphold existing systems as ‘good’. Such a pessimistic approach to any changes contradicts the essence of utilising indigenous training systems in African traditional contexts. A traditional African educational pedagogy, on which my own interpretation is based, was life-centred. It was aimed at transformation in all aspects of life.

The following two proverbs also suggest that training for transformation took place in ancient Israel. Proverbs 13:19 suggests vision as an essential facet of sustainable character development. Instructions are goal-oriented in all traditions. They incorporate society’s established norms, values and practices that help to shape identity. Certainly, the crucial objective of developing humanness is clearer in the African indigenous educational system. Such a life-centred education was accessible to all members according to age-groupings regardless of gender. Its credible role was seen in economic development, political necessity and the entrenchment of social equality and justice in the society. These goals for the common good depended on investment in educational training among members at all levels of society. Some of these educational investments can be discerned in Proverbs 13:20.

A dynamic society demands a sound combining of good character with skills that integrates a person’s citizenship into the community. In traditional Africa, as in ancient Israel, the educational demands of society called for the involvement of the wise persons in training (cf. Pr 13:20). These, especially the elders, were well-versed

in all the basic indigenous communication, numeracy and thinking skills. These traditional pedagogical aspects comprised viable tools to transmit the objectives of training. To sum up, the close literary context of Proverbs 13:18 outlines a feasible and sustainable three-step procedure for challenging poverty in society.

- A proper attitude towards eradicating poverty is needed. The challenge of poverty in life should be recognised in its holistic aspects.
- Both the productive opportunities for and inhibiting social factors of the challenge of poverty have to be identified.
- A bold solution that bolsters higher living standards for the majority should be sought because short-circuiting the transformation process is at least an illusion and at worst a deception.

It is no wonder that the three-step strategy of Proverbs 13:18's close literary context focuses on the envisioned aims and content of discipline and reproof. Training aims at neither mere financial success (cf. Toy 1899:274; Jones 1961:131) nor the centrality of economic prosperity (cf. Wittenberg 1986:66; McKane 1970:457). Training is a consistent, successful and forward-looking principle of life, which stimulates the internal potential of one's intellectual and psychological aspects to dynamically develop and contribute to the enhancement of higher living standards. In this case, Proverbs 13:18 deals with ideas concerning the creating of social capital by orientating ancient Israelite training institutions correctly in the battle to overcome poverty. My analysis supports Whybray's assertion, based on numerous similar proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, that 'the point at issue is social approval of (or rejection by) the local community, which has decisive economic consequences for the individual concerned and his [sic] family' (1994:207). In other words, from an African point of view, Proverbs 13:18 encourages a concerted mass effort which is directed towards developing a productive work ethic within the work force, especially amongst the youth and adults in society. This is an indispensable aspect of progressive economic activity, which can lead to the fulfilment of the visions of a better life.

The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* textual critical apparatus suggests an alternative reading of **vyrē** 'rēsh ', 'poverty' to **vrēwOy** 'yōrēsh ', 'dispossessing' (Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:439b) in the first stich of Proverbs 13:18.

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However, there is neither evidence nor improvement of sense to warrant such an emendation. Thus, it is advisable to retain the Masoretic text as it stands (cf. Whybray 1994:207; McKane 1970:456).

Proverbs 13:18 contains an antithetical chiasmus, ‘**ab//ba**’, in the sense of consequence-act-act-consequence.

dB 'kuy> tx;k;AT rmEAvw> rs "Wm
[;reAP !Alq'w> vyre
 a b b a

The polar word pair identifying the chiastic contrast consists of ‘shame’ and ‘honour’. In the antithetical structure the negative results of neglecting discipline are contrasted with the positive results of heeding reproof. A common African social act of training, upon which the contrast is based, aims at engaging the participation of the listener, who is stimulated into a process of critical thinking and creative imagination regarding the expected morality demanded by the speaker on behalf of society. Thus amongst ordinary people in Africa, this behavioural training in daily life was mostly used to facilitate the growth of a mature personality with a sense of responsibility in society. A responsible nature is the fruit of transformative growth. A practical outlook is central in life-centred traditional educational systems. Hence, the adult performance of a person was either praiseworthy or disgraceful to the whole family and community because of the corporeal nature of the system of socialisation. Put differently, the visible results of one’s upbringing in adulthood took into account the quality of parental and community-based responsibility during the process of training. Therefore, a good upbringing in African traditional society was as important as the provision of food for one’s family. Indeed, food and training were taken together, as some of the following African proverbs reveal:

Positive incentive:

Ewe: *TÇmedela meno a ba o.*

‘The one who goes to fetch water does not drink mud’.

Luganda: *Bijjula ettama: bye bikuwa engaaya.*

‘Whatever fills your cheeks: gives you something to chew’.

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Negative incentive:

- Swahili: *Asiyesikia la mkuu huvunjika guu.*
‘The person who does not listen to an elder’s advice gets his/her leg broken’.
- Umbundu: *Ya lemina ka yi loka loka omunu, nda yi ku loka ngongo yove.*
‘If you ignore the warning, when trouble comes you will have yourself to thank for it’.
- Lugbara: *Mva tree kuri zoo 'ba onjiru.*
‘The undisciplined child grows into a bad person’.

The responsibility of parents and community in training:

- Bena: *Umujangu ye andzambwidze; kumugongo kusilimiko.*
‘My fellow human being has betrayed me; there are no eyes at my back’.
- Ga: *Akë kÇmi elëëë bi.*
‘You do not bring up a child on kenkey (staple food) alone’.
- Setswana: *Lore lo ojoa lo sa le metse.*
‘Bend the twig while it is green’.
- Oromo: *Haati waan baratte / intalli waan agarte.*
‘The mother acts on what she learnt, the daughter on what she saw’.

There are numerous African proverbs dealing with positive and negative rewards. These are used in training as warnings to stubborn children and young adults alike who do not take heed of the advice given by their elders. Such proverbs can also be uttered against the elders themselves, the parents or socio-political and religious institutions in the community. When such proverbs are used against the immediate audience, the sense is that of shame and disapproval. They critique the respondents’ irresponsibility in neglecting character development training, that causes moral degeneration of the young generation. Of course the critique of this irresponsibility is also expressed in the insistence of the Haya proverb that: *Ganyebwa omuto gahewa omukuru*: ‘It is the parent who pays up for the child’s mischiefs [sic]’ (Nestor 1978:27). This double application of the character development proverbs indicates the inseparability of discipline as a social asset from the other aspects of the economic, political and religious life in which it was acquired and lived (cf. Boateng 1985:110).

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In the above analysis of Proverbs 13:18, I have consistently regarded the traditional African social model as a key to assessing the social dimensions of character training in ancient Israelite society. In both these ancient societies family relations, friendships, neighbourhoods, religious and ethnic ties embedded in the indigenous educational system constituted significant motivators and influential elements in character development. I can therefore speculate that the training setting of Proverbs 13:18 resembles something akin to the African setting described in the preceding paragraphs. Therefore the training setting envisioned in Proverbs 13:18 is one of a dynamic creative influence which is capable of transforming existential social patterns amongst the members of the society. In terms of the setting, a significant contribution of the multi-purpose nature and function of Proverbs 13:18 is revealed in the corporate mentality of the ancient Israelite community. This proverb thus takes to task the responsibility of both the trainee and the trainer in the community-based educational system. Such a dual application of Proverbs 13:18, especially its concerns about the accountability of the trainer (parents and society), is completely missed in the commentaries written by Western biblical scholars. Given the importance of education for the eradication of poverty in the future, much more data should be gathered on the informal social networks that encourage or discourage children, youth and adults from obtaining quality education in life. The following discussion is focused on the intimate relationships which are basic to ordinary people's survival strategies.

Proverbs 19:7

ׁhM' h̄e-al{ ~yrIm'a] @DER; m. WNM, mi
Wqx]r' Wh[erem. yKi @a: WhaunEf> vr'-
yxea] lk'

All the relatives of the poor dislike them, how much more their friends forsake them. They plead with words to secure them but they are inaccessible. (My translation.)

Proverbs 19:7 is part of the collection of sententious sayings in Proverbs 10:1-22:16. It is comprises three stiches. Many biblical commentators argue that the Masoretic

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text of the third stich of Proverbs 19:7 is too vague and lacks a parallel clause for its meaning to be comprehended (cf. Murphy 1998:141, 1998:143; Whybray 1995:278; McKane 1970:240, 1970:527; Toy 1899:370).

hM 'he-al { ~yrIm' a] @DER ; m .

Literal translation: *One who pursues words, they are not.*

Contrary to the preceding views, my own rendering of the text favours upholding the good sense of the Masoretic text that Proverbs 19:7c completes the argument of the saying. I consider the preceding information of Proverbs 19:6, about the rich using gifts to establish friendships, as an ironic comment on the futile use of words by the poor to secure friendships in Proverbs 19:7c. Hence, from an African perspective the concept in the latter section indicates one of the vital inalienable abilities of a person. It is part of the inherent rights to human values, dignity, knowledge, experience and vision that remain with the people at the grassroots. These rights can be mobilised to eradicate the suffering caused by poverty (cf. also Pr 18:23). The latter idea is suggested in the Akan proverb: *Ohiani nni hwhee a, owo tekrema a ode tutu ne ka*: ‘If a poor person has nothing else, he/she has at least a [sweet] tongue with which to defer the payment of his/her debts’. In other words, Proverbs 19:7 may be interpreted as expressing one of the survival strategies used by poor families and communities. Therefore, it is necessary to pose the following relevant question to Proverbs 19:7 from a survival perspective: What is the revolutionary transforming counter-way of life that is being promoted by the poor at the grass roots level?

The closer literary context of Proverbs 19:7 links the issues of friendship relationships in community with Proverbs 19:6 (cf. Scherer 1997:68-69; Habel 1988:41; Whybray 1995:277; Murphy 1998:142, 1998:147). Although Proverbs 19:6 does not express a direct injunction regarding the benefits of materially-based friendship, one is provoked to ask whether such a relationship can be sustained for a long period with trust and pleasantness. That is, when the affluent donate to the poor (relatives, neighbours, companions), do the beneficiaries experience that economic aid as an expression of love?

I submit that Proverbs 19:7 tackles the issue of the expression of love in society from a non-economic perspective. It is clear from these two proverbs that if mere wealth is behind the fostering of friendship and kinship relations, then obviously they will shrink and collapse with the drying-up of wealth. Murphy (1998:143; cf. also Whybray 1995:277) is unsure about a hypothetical ironic relationship between Proverbs 19:6 and Proverbs 19:7. In my view the previously presumed irony underlies

the question raised again regarding the criteria for true friendship. Even though it is not elaborated, I think Murphy is right to envisage these fragile social relationships as the performance context of Proverbs 19:7 that aims to awaken awareness in the whole community (1998:147).

In the African context value is placed more on the human being than on material possessions. The importance of establishing the maximum number of social relationships for the welfare of a person takes priority, as in the following Akan proverb: *Onipa ne asem. Mefre sika a, sika nnye me so; mefre ntama a, ntama nnye me so.* *Onipa ne asem:* ‘It is the human being that counts. I call on gold, gold does not respond; I call on drapery but it does not respond. It is the human being that counts’. Thus, in my view, in fact, Proverbs 19:7 challenges hearers to honesty, truthfulness, fairness and justice as the basis for establishing social interrelationships. Strong social networks lead into a feasible process of rehabilitating the poor in society.

Thus, in order to achieve such social interrelationships the following saying in Proverbs 19:8 calls hearers to promote the integrity of the human being in matters of knowledge and a better life. The basic African desire for such a life prioritises sound social networks before the improvement of economic and/or material conditions. It refers more to training about matters that enhance and uphold the person’s humanity in society. From the African perspective, the priority is accorded to dignity, experience, morals, character, unity, peace, and harmony in family and community interrelationships, as constitutive of true human progress and well-being (cf. also Sarah 2000:62-63). In other words, Proverbs 19:8 expresses the principle for evaluating the preceding contradictory observations in Proverbs 19:6 and Proverbs 19:7.

In the light of the closer literary setting described above, I concur with certain biblical commentators who have slightly modified the literary context of Proverbs 19:7 to include Proverbs 19:4-7. The modification is based on catchwords such as ‘friends’, ‘poor’ and comparisons between the poor and the rich (cf. Murphy 1998:142). In my opinion Pleins’s inclusion of Proverbs 14:20 and Proverbs 28:3 in the preceding group (1987:67; cf. also Whybray 1995a:133) is acceptable, except for his interpretation thereof. From an African perspective, I disagree with his positing of the extremely hopeless and friendless character of poverty in the said proverbs. It is completely false that there is a lack of socio-economic and political unity among the

poor. Nor does poverty constitute evidence of being uncivilised. Like many Western biblical commentators' approaches to Proverbs 19:7, Pleins's approach is individualistic with a materialist bias. Such an elitist approach elicits the following critical observation from our African viewpoint on poverty:

Doubtless there are people who see the progress of civilization as no more than improvement in the material existence, in professional skills, in increasing food, clothing and shelter, production and consumption, hygiene and education. But is that civilisation? Is not civilisation, before all else, progress of the human person, an aesthetic, spiritual and moral uplifting, a soul's aspiring to the values that hold in high regard [sic] human being's divine origin and kinship? (Sarah 2000:63; cf. also Mveng 1994:154-158; Dickson 1984:226).

In the light of this remark I suggest that the corporate holistic nature of the ancient Israelite society is the better setting in which to consider Proverbs 19:7. Both the closer and extended literary contexts referred to above indicate that social networks are elements crucial for economic and political progress in a holistic society.

Relatives, partners and friends, regardless of social and economic positions, all belong to the person's intimate sphere of life, which comprises a network of relationships, co-operation and mutuality within a holistic approach to life. In the African context the intimate relationship is the foundational principle of the community's corporate living and communalism. The traditional African educational practices of initiation and puberty rituals and experiences strongly instilled the importance of communal and corporate living into the young. As a result similar age groups became 'mystically and ritually bound to each other for the rest of their life: they are in effect one body, one group, one community, one people. They help one another in all kinds of ways' (Mbiti 1989:127). Individual existence in the African cultural context was strongly affirmed collectively, as in the Swahili proverb: *Mtu ni watu*: 'A person is people'.^{*} This proverb denotes that it is only through upholding the community and fostering social cohesion that the well-being of a person can be enhanced and protected. Such an understanding of social relationships, therefore, has both existential and spiritual consequences for the survival of the people at the grassroots (cf. Mugambi 1995:200-201; Shorter 1999:14).

With the preceding African corporate mentality in mind, it was therefore a mistake to think of forsaking a relative or a friend or a neighbour in a destitute

^{*} Mbiti (1989:108-109) expresses this as the fundamental inclusiveness of the individual in African identity: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'. In other words, the individual is only known through one's relationship to the family, clan and society; otherwise s/he is nonexistent.

situation. The social networks, among other things, obligated the more fortunate ones in families and the community to share and assist the less fortunate without expecting a similar material gain in return. Any service given or received bore a communal face rather than representing merely an individual contribution. In addition, sharing what one had gave value to the possessions shared and the position of the giver. The donor believed that the aid given was an investment for the purpose of human support in society. Everyone at certain moments in life needs some kind of social support to cope with different types of calamities, such as death or illness and the like (cf. also Kayongo-Male & Onyango 1984:41-42, 1984:63-64). Failure to fulfil one's expected, sacred social obligations was considered immaturity and immorality that had to be shamed.

In fact, blood ties and friendship in the traditional African social context did not operate in terms of superficiality and untrustworthy intimate relationships. Social networks were established within a framework of permanence. Any sign of disharmony and hypocrisy in a social relationship was dealt with immediately. Whenever it happened to be an irreparable relationship, it was the cause of great anxiety as a seedbed of the possible destruction of the whole community (cf. Shenk 1997:31; Pobee 1979:112-113). Complete dissociation could happen only when the person's moral behaviour and conduct was a risk to the community's relationship structure. Such a structure secured the community. Associating oneself with witchcraft and sorcery, for instance, could lead to social excommunication unless the person repented (cf. Mugambi 1995:200). With respect to the strained communal relationships portrayed in Proverbs 19:7, I repeat the moral question: What is the revolutionary transforming counter-way of life that is being promoted by the poor people at the grassroots level?

Obviously Proverbs 19:7 focuses on poverty. But I argue that this focus should be understood in terms of the above African holistic corporate concept which is similar to that of ancient Israel. Then the emphasis of Proverbs 19:7 falls more on the cause than on the consequence of poverty. This cause of poverty is expressed precisely in the words of Nthamburi:

[P]overty, oppression and subjugation are social sins. They are perpetrated on other humans through neglect, indifference or corruption. When people do not want to become their neighbour's keeper in violation of God's command that they should love and serve one another and they instead make others poor and destitute by promoting unloving and unjust social relationships, then this is a moral question of the highest order (1999:110).

Excluding the poor is opposed to the ideal of the communitarian ethical life of the society. Lack of proper communication between stakeholders, individualism and capitalism spells doom for all members of a community in terms of economic, political and religious progress. Poverty can only be eradicated when it becomes the common concern of the whole community. In this sense, intimate relationships become resourceful social contracts between the members of the society, encouraging acceptable principles that can enhance their capacity to challenge poverty at the grassroots.

Meaningful communication as a ‘tactical strategy’ (cf. Kodia 2005:21), leads to valuable mutual co-operation: that is, it is more vital to and effective in fostering sustainable development than financial grants and loans. Therefore, Proverbs 19:7 is an exhortation regarding the moral responsibility of enabling a fresh start for one’s poor relatives, friends and neighbours, based on the dynamic solidarity and social consciousness which binds the community. It also represents a complaint about the lack of a ‘caring concern that seeks to embrace all, a love that suffers selflessly for others’ (Goba 1988:69). In my view, Proverbs 19:7 transcends the promotion of individualism and self-centredness in society (cf. also Nthamburi 1999:112-113).

Proverbs 19:7 contains a synonymous parallelism which explains the greater social vice that isolates the poor in society. In the first clause, the social vice involves a small number of people, the kinship and the lesser evil of hatred. In the second clause, the social vice of isolation by hatred is extended to involve a large number of people, the friends (cf. also Wittenberg 1986:51; Toy 1899:370).

*All the relatives of the poor dislike them,
How much more their friends forsake them.*

In this proverb **yxeā] ‘μέ**’, ‘brothers of’, ‘relatives of’ and **Wh [erem.** ‘*m®r¢±¢hū*’, ‘friends’, ‘companions’ are brought together as interchangeable synonyms for intimate interrelationships (cf. Pr 17:17, 18:24, 27:10; Ringgren 1974:192-193). In addition, **WhaunEf>** ‘*®n¢°uhū*’, ‘hate’, ‘dislike’, and **WqX] r’** ‘*r’μiqū*’, ‘become far’, ‘become distant’, ‘forsake’ stand at the same level of isolation. Regarding this alignment, on the one hand, Wittenberg (1986:51; cf.

also Whybray 1988-9:332) suggests that the negative sense of poverty does not become very apparent unless Proverbs 19:7 is read in conjunction with the positive sense of wealth in Proverbs 19:6. However, even after considering the two proverbs as a unit, he asserts that they do not pronounce ‘a direct value judgment’ (1986:51). On the other hand, Toy (1899:370) and McKane (1970:526-527) try to distinguish the force of the obligation in kinship and friendship. The former appears to have no other option than to fulfil the responsibility of assisting the poor relatives, while the latter’s bond of intimacy is simply destroyed by the issue of poverty. Both of the preceding arguments become far fetched in the light of the fragile social relationship context underlying Proverbs 19:7, noted earlier by Murphy (1998:147). It is important to observe that in both the African and ancient Israelite contexts kinship and friendship solidarity both assumed a sense of permanence. Intimate commitments between the various kinds of covenanted parties were valued in terms of their durability in times of need (cf. Goba 1988:65-68; Shenk 1997:44-72).

In other words, I argue that Proverbs 19:7 conveys common moral principles that guide the conduct of both those who speak the proverb and those who hear and understand it. In a society where communalism is central, the proverb is used to caution against doing something that can dehumanise another person because the evil result also revisits the perpetrator of the evil as well. A metaphorical example of the foolish perpetuation of evil against other human beings is found in the Dangme proverb: *Apletsi ke e ngē nÇ ko titat nÇ puëë, se e li kaa lë nitsë e hlemi nya në e ngë puëë*: ‘The goat thinks it is messing up someone else’s compound, without realizing that it is messing up its own tail’. Here, embracing individualism breeds division, which undermines the ordinary people’s joint political and economic efforts to eradicate poverty at the grassroots level.

Proverbs 19:7 is thus a call to a communal life that directs the individual’s responsibility to the whole community. In my opinion, Scherer proceeds in the right direction: that the linguistic cohesion of friendship proverbs ‘makes clear that the way of acting towards a friend is a question of moral justice and unjustness....Simultaneously one’s responsibility encloses duties towards the weaker members of society. Dishonest measures, employed to promote one’s own selfish career, are refused’ (1997:68-69). The experience of sharing resources should strengthen the ordinary people’s united loyalty, purpose and resolution to transform their lives as a whole family and community rather than be dependent. Kinship and

friendship are tested by the way they fare during difficulties. If they withstand the pressure of destitution, then they are worthy of these terms. In other words, Proverbs 19:7 is a condemnation of disunity and of exploitative ventures among the poor in society (cf. also Pr 18:19). Among the seven abominations in the LORD's eyes is the sowing of discord between relatives that disrupts the highly-valued communal tranquillity and solidarity, as productive social assets for the economic and political well-being of the whole society (cf. Pr 6:19). Therefore, Proverbs 19:7 displays a socio-religious critical intent which provokes the addressee to reflect and appraise whether all of one's behaviour serves the interests of the communal life for the progress of humanity (cf. Westermann 1995:44-45, 1995:49). We now discuss another proverb in this category, Proverbs 21:13, which focuses on solidarity.

Proverbs 21:13

‘hn<['yE al{w> ar'q.yI aWh-~G: lD'-
tq; []Z:mi Anz>a' ~jeao

Whoever shuts up one's ear to the cry of the poor also will oneself cry but will not be responded to. (My translation.)

Proverbs 21:13 is located in the second collection of the Book of Proverbs: Proverbs 10:1-22:16. The textual apparatus does not indicate any difficulties in the Masoretic text of Proverbs 21:13. Thus my own translation remains as close as possible to the Masoretic text.

The immediate literary context of Proverbs 21:13 comprises the preceding Proverbs 21:12 and the succeeding Proverbs 21:14. Biblical interpreters are divided on the theme of Proverbs 21:12. On the one hand, they argue that the two lines of Proverbs 21:12 exhibit neither a unity of sense nor a clear theme (cf. Whybray 1994:311; Murphy 1998:160; Jones 1961:178). On the other hand, there is the suggestion of the theme of justice, especially supported by the use of the word *qyDlc;* ‘*faddiq*’, ‘just, lawful, righteous’, in Proverbs 21:12 (cf. Scherer 1997:66; Kidner 1964:143). I tend to concur with the latter viewpoint because the theme of justice forms the premise for the immediate admonitions in the following

two proverbs. In addition, the envisioned sense of justice in Proverbs 21:12 is repeated by the use of **QYDIC**; ‘*faddiq*’, ‘just, lawful, righteous’, in Proverbs 21:15. This means that Proverbs 21:13 and 21:14 are focused on the theme of justice, especially its important role in society (cf. also Scherer 1997:66). In very simple terms, justice is faith in action, in the world where we live. Faith and action are inseparable but they can be distinguished from one another. The faith and action relationship underlines justice as representing the socio-political dimension of the religious sphere of life. Justice is solidarity with the marginalised and the poor in our society. As a result, social justice indicates the human maturity of the members of society. The possession and maintenance of humanness, as the common good, is the basic reason for doing justice in the community and its institutions (cf. also Ateek 1989:116).

Proverbs 21:13 exemplifies an act of injustice that denies the poor access to social interrelationships within families, households and the broader society. In the context of poverty eradication, social networks significantly increase the ordinary people’s authority and control over resources and decisions that affect their lives and livelihood means. That is, such networks are a type of social capital that can boost productivity by facilitating efficient coordination and cooperation among members and institutions in society. Proverbs 21:14 therefore names corruption rackets, such as secret gifts and bribes, as the evil results of the denial of just social interrelationships. Openness constitutes a moral demand in the African conception of life. Such a demand means that people have to give and accept gifts in public. Any form of secretiveness in giving gifts, unless permitted, is deemed to be hiding a wrongdoing (cf. Magesa 1998:236; Swartz 1966:89-96). The secretive gifts mentioned previously include corruptive acts of wicked individuals, communities, groups or social networks. Such wicked acts work at cross-purposes, in isolation or narrow-mindedness, to the society’s collective economic, social, political and religious welfare interests. Therefore, it is important to take note of the view of Proverbs 21:15 that accounts for both the virtues and the vices of the social asset portfolio in people-centred development strategies. It also recognises the importance of forging just ties within and across communities in enhancing the capacity to identify and pursue common goals. In short, economic, political and religious progress thrives where there is social stability.

Proverbs 21:13 consists of a single threefold structured sentence in the form **aba¹**. The three parts are thematically interrelated as follows.

- The first section (**a**) concerns the act of not lending an ear in the sense of not listening to.
- The second section (**b**) contrasts the two cries, that is, ‘the cry’ and ‘the call’.
- The third section (**a¹**) repeats the act from the first section, that of ‘not being responded to in the sense of not being listened to’.

According to the above arrangement a mutual relationship is expressed between the ‘cry’ in the first part of the sentence and the ‘call’ because the ‘cry’ corresponds to the ‘call’ in the second part of the sentence. This correspondence causes the two terms to convey a similar sense of distress. That is, they both express the need for a person’s presence or attention. The correspondence establishes an act-consequence syntagmatic connection in the sentence as a whole.

Act: 1D' -tq; []Z:mi Anz>a' ~jeao
Whoever shuts up one's ear to the cry of the poor
 Consequence: hn< ['yE al{w> ar'q.yI
He will cry but will not be responded to

But what standards lie behind the retributive perspective being related by Proverbs 21:13 above? It is only on the ethical basis of the question about the proverb’s setting in life that the envisaged redress can eventually be enforced. Many biblical commentators on Proverbs 21:13 acknowledge its law of retaliation without connecting it to its life setting. Some of them go further, to assert an automatic or inherent capacity of the retributive law to work itself out for the concerned person (cf. Murphy 1998:160; Wittenberg 1986:58-59). This is even more the case in Von Rad’s idea of the act-consequence relationship among the ancient Israelites: that they ‘too, shared the widely-spread concept of an effective power inherent both in good and in evil and subject to specific laws. She [Israel] was convinced that by every evil deed or every good deed a momentum was released which sooner or later also had an effect

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on the author of the deed' (1972:128). Such ideas as those reflected in the preceding notions of the law of retaliation are rather individualistic because they ignore the communal perspective behind the text.

I concur with a few biblical scholars who try to relate the act-consequence pattern of Proverbs 21:13 to a communal perspective. Among the latter group is McKane who groups Proverbs 21:13 together with Proverbs 21:10, 21:21 and 21:26 in the class of proverbs that focus on community concerns. It is argued that the negative attitude described in these proverbs is a manifestation of an anti-social behaviour. Implicitly, the suggestion is that such behaviour has harmful effects on the life of the community (cf. McKane 1970:415, 1970:556). Westermann also supports the communal perspective when he asserts that in the Book of Proverbs, insensitivity toward the poor has significant human consequences. He emphasises that the denial of assistance is 'not merely an issue of omission that is being criticized; rather, the person's whole orientation to life is being characterized' (1995:44). In other words, refusal to provide help is a disservice to the corporate life of the community because it destroys the socio-economic supportive system that guarantees the stability of society.

This argument is well illustrated by some highly valued aspects of African community life. By definition a community is a 'unified body of individuals: people with similar interests living in given geographical areas; a group linked by common purpose and policy; a body of persons or nations having a common history or common social, economic, and political interests' (Mosha 2000:146). In Africa, the community is sustained by the spirit of communalism. This communal spirit is nourished and expressed by means of the central African social virtues of sharing, cooperation, compassion, generosity, hospitality, social interrelationships and communal ownership of wealth. The most important thing in this socially and ethically ruled organism is that it integrates a person into the community and provides the social security that is essential for mental, spiritual, economic, social, environmental, political growth et cetera (cf. Mosha 2000:146-150; 2000:153-157; Muya 2003:128; Bujo 2003:84-85, 2003:113-118). In other words, in the African context humanness implies being there for each other for the enrichment of the society:

Chagga: *Mana mhoo nekyeora mri.*

'A generous child brings prosperity to a household' (Mosha 2000:147).

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- Chagga: *Kirama nyi wawi.*
‘Two people bring forth blessings’ (Mosha 2000:148)
- Umbundu: *Kuli ongombe ka kuli owangu; kuli owini ka kuli oviti. Kuli owini ka ku lingilua emande.*
‘Do not isolate yourself. With the crowd, there is safety’.
- Oromo: *Kan deegaatt roorrise / himbadhaadhu.*
‘The person who is cruel to the poor will never become rich’.

Thus offering help, cooperation, hospitality, sharing, generosity, et cetera, are more than investments. As a matter of fact, these are moral responsibilities. To refuse the disadvantaged access to communal benefits and the accrued collective resources for their livelihood is detrimental to both perpetrator and victim. The denial brings about a dehumanising estrangement of these persons that seriously threatens the survival of the community as a whole. African proverbs criticise the social misbehaviour of avoiding contact or a lack of solidarity with the disadvantaged because ‘one has to know that he [sic] does not become fully human, and that his enterprise will ultimately fail – and precisely when it fails, he will see how necessary the community or other people are for him, in order to become fully a person in the true sense of the term’ (Bujo 2003:115).

- Bahema: *Küdha radi ngu dhedho dzdjo.*
‘Even the hawk returns to the earth, in order to die’ (Bujo 2003:115).
- Barundi: *Umuryâmbwá aba umwé agatukisha umuryango.*
‘If one family member eats dog meat, all members are dishonoured’ (Bujo 1997:198, 2003:115).
- Chagga: *Iura monowomoo nyiipva.*
‘To miss brothers and sisters [communality] is to die’ (Mosha 2000:153).

In the above African proverbs prosperity is interpreted in relation to the assistance rendered regarding the development and enhancement of life in the community. Any avarice such as the hoarding of wealth and selfish use of property could label the person as a sorcerer because it disturbs interpersonal relationships. The ‘witch’ label

also endangers the life of the wicked perpetrator who becomes alienated from the supportive social system.

Such understanding of wealth is at the basis of the African concept of poverty. Poverty is not seen firstly as a relation with material goods, but with human relations. A poor man is one without relatives, i.e. without relations. This is not to spiritualise poverty, but it is an approach open for an option for the poor (Muya 2003:128).

In line with the above African conception of poverty, all people are nurtured towards aiming more at a growth in their quality of life for all members of the community.

In terms of the discussion of the African proverbial performance context of Proverbs 21:13, the interpretation given by McKane (1970:556) seems to make sense. The proverb is critical of an anti-social behaviour that is harmful to the life of the community. However, McKane's admonition, based on the future retaliation law in the same text does not clearly explain the basis for the drying up of the 'springs of mercy within himself' (1970:556). Compared to the African performance context of similar proverbs, his admonition is rather limited in force. Putting a limit on such a gracious attitude has led to the establishment of charitable institutions such as orphanages, hospitals and homes that were non-existent in traditional Africa. I submit that Proverbs 21:13 takes into account the moral obligation of neighbourly love and practical support as a tenacious, dedicated and persistent norm of conduct for communal society. It is a warning against all tendencies that limit the potential of solidarity to challenge poverty by the denial of social access to the community's resources.

My discussion of Proverbs 13:7, 13:18, 19:7, and 21:13 in terms of the social environment and poverty is by no means exhaustive. Employing the African socio-cultural view of poverty, fresh glimpses into a few of the fundamental social questions underlying these proverbs, from the perspective of the ordinary people, have been suggested. The survival strategy of ordinary people is basically founded on human interrelationships. A firm supportive social network system reinforced by social values, such as humbleness, is a vital asset for economic transformation (cf. Pr 13:7). Education for people at the grassroots translates into training in a responsible community-based life. Such an educational approach represents a dynamic creative influence capable of significantly transforming the existential social patterns, with a view to eradicating poverty in society (cf. Pr 13:18). In addition to this kind of

educational approach, the ordinary people's social capital includes intimate social relationships such as friendships, neighbours and relatives. Such relationships are resourceful and valuable assets because they bring about meaningful communication, which is a vital and effective tool for viable, dynamic, sustainable and transformative mutual co-operation and solidarity (cf. Pr 19:7). Finally, the necessary conducive social environment for dealing with the challenge of poverty among ordinary people is the moral obligation of neighbourly love expressed in practical support. The latter as a norm of conduct in the community recognises the potential of solidarity to challenge poverty (cf. Pr 21:13). However, as I have indicated earlier in this chapter, in terms of the holistic nature of the ancient Israelite society, like that of traditional Africa, the social system is embedded in a complex interaction with the economic, political and religious systems. Therefore, I will now proceed to discuss the issue of challenging poverty from an economic perspective. In the following lines, I focus on the economic environment and poverty.

4.5 An exegesis of relevant proverbs on the economic environment and poverty: Proverbs 13:23, 22:16, 23:10-11, and 28:8

Although this section will concentrate on 'economic environment and poverty', sight will not be lost of the holistic worldviews of Africa and ancient Israel. The phrase 'economic environment' will be used in the present section to refer to the use of material resources and services in order to support and expand the welfare activities of existing social structures. In my view, economic activity concerns work. The latter is divinely ordained for the human being's proper existence (cf. also Gn 1:28, 2:15). Therefore, I concur with Goudzwaard and Lange that economic activity or work is an indispensable aspect of worldly human existence because its motive is to fulfill the material and spiritual needs of human beings (cf. also Mbiti 2002b:14; Kimilike, forthcoming).

[H]uman well-being depends a great deal on the quality of work; indeed, the quality of work can make or break a person both bodily and spiritually, as it were. Therefore, economically speaking, we must see labor as more than a means of production. Because it is *human* labor it is an economic object in another sense: it is an object of *care* (Goudzwaard & Lange 1991:56).

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The import of these aspects of economic activities is the understanding that faith and economic activities need to co-exist in order to genuinely contain and achieve the true value and meaning of a better life. Scheffler's penetrating questions with regard to the ancient Israelite socio-cultural dimension of history are worthy of note:

How did ancient Israelites *make a living*? Were they simply *farmers*, or were there forms of trade and *industry*? What about potters, carpenters, fishermen, tent-makers, scribes and tax-gatherers? What was the economic system like? Did *private ownership* exist, or was there a unique form of *socialism*? What was the relationship between *rich and poor* in a given period, and how did this affect the political and religious life of the people? What were the people's houses like? How was the economic life of the country influenced by *judicial* measures (such as sabbatical and jubilee years)? How was the economic life of ordinary people *affected* by the king's internal *policies* (for instance, the extensive economic activities of Solomon and his massive projects and forced labour)? What forms of *agriculture* were practised (such as oil and wine cultivation in Israel)? What measures, weights and monetary units did the Israelites use? How did religious *festivals* (especially harvest festivals) interrelate with the economy (2001:17-18)?

It can be observed that these economic questions interact with other aspects of the same socio-cultural dimension. Consequently, owing to the holistic nature of the ancient Israelite worldview the questions also bear on the political, religious and social dimensions of life in one way or another. In this thesis, I will use the questions in the above quotation as a guide to identify and interpret certain economic ideas and allusions related to poverty in the Book of Proverbs.

For instance, the majority of the people in ancient Israel, as is still the case today in Africa, lived in rural environments. In the rural areas the major economic capital assets comprise land and human power. The land and human labour as economic resources are supposed to function in ways that are supportive of the values and norms of society. In other words, the society's social principles determined the allocation, production and distribution of income or output. Such an economic arrangement operated in accordance with the social and economic requirements and relationships prevalent in a particular society. Therefore, this section investigates the nature of the economy of the poor as reflected in the selected proverbs from the Book of Proverbs. I will attempt to identify in the poverty proverbs possible practices of aspects of justice, mercy and benevolence in productive human life. Subsequently, I hope to reveal possible obstacles that inhibit and thwart transforming attitudes and practices or virtues, as regards economic development, in this Book.

Proverbs 13:23

ׁjP'v.mi al{B. hP,s.nI vyEw> ~yviar'
rynI lk,ao-br'

The new tillable land of the poor yields abundance of food but is snatched away through injustice. (My translation.)

Proverbs 13:23 falls within the second collection of the Book of Proverbs, that is, Proverbs 10:1-22:16. Most commentators express different views concerning the obscure nature of the motif of Proverbs 13:23. It is suggested that the first stich of Proverbs 13:23 in the Hebrew text does not make sense. Also, there is vagueness about the subject of ‘injustice’ in the second stich. As a result, there appears to be no direct connection between the two lines (cf. Murphy 1998:95; Whybray 1994:209; Toy 1899:277). To these textual problems, I will later return.

It is rather difficult to identify a concrete structure of the whole chapter of Proverbs 13. But it is possible to identify some catchwords that may suggest a unity of structure in Proverbs 13:22-24. The unity of the present text may appear to be closer to what Murphy (1998:95) hypothetically calls the ‘future of the wise son’ for Proverbs 13:20-25. I, however, find a connection between verses 22 and 24, based on the terms ~ynIb' -ynEB. ‘b@nê-»'nîm’, ‘sons of sons’, and lyxin>y: ‘yanûil’, ‘inheritance’, (v 22), lk,ao-br' ‘r'-œ%el’, ‘abundance of food’, and rynI ‘nîr’, ‘new tillable land of the poor’, (v 23), and Anb. ‘»@nô’, ‘his son’, and Ajb.vi %fEAX ‘μô'φ% -i»%oô’, ‘withholds the rod’ (v 24). All the words and phrases in quotes, from the close literary context of Proverbs 13:23, stem from the field of economics. I suggest that these economically oriented terms be considered together as an argument for inheritance and the corporate nature of ancient Israel (cf. especially for Pr 13:22-23 also Hildebrandt 1988:217).

Verse 22 mentions the two basic resources for economic development in terms of kinship in ancient Israel. The economics of affection continue to the new generation (cf. Ex 20). The crucial economic resources consist of land and people. In

the text, land is referred to as **lyxinxoy:** ‘yanuîl’, ‘inheritance’, and people are referred to as **~ynIb' - ynEB.** ‘b®nê-»'nîm’, ‘grandsons’ or ‘grandchildren’.

- The basic form of land tenure in Israel was the inalienable **lx; n"** ‘n'µal’, ‘inheritance’ of land for the purpose of economic self-sufficiency and the survival of households (cf. Jdg 21:24).
- An important role of the family was to preserve and transmit the national values embedded in Israelite faith, history, law and traditions in order to sustain the enjoyment of the inherited land (cf. Dt 6:7, 11:19, 32:46f).

Verse 23 defines the ancient Israelites’ understanding of land as the basic resource. In Brueggemann’s words, for ancient Israelite society, land ‘is a physical source of fertility and life; it is a place for the gathering of the hopes of the covenant people and a vibrant theological symbol’ (1977:xii; cf. also Mosala 1991:20). Therefore the new tillable land, referred to in verse 23 as fertile agricultural land, is the valuable inheritance according to verse 22.

Verse 24 discusses the means necessary for the transmission of the strength of character demanded, in the form of personality and ability, from one generation to the other. The required strong discipline is a prerequisite for efficient and responsible human power in economic development. Training in discipline stems from the metaphorical use of the **Ajb.vi** ‘-i»%oô’, ‘rod’, in Proverbs 13:24. Normally, training in the household, in ancient Israelite society, was the responsibility of the father of the house towards his sons. In other words, it was the responsibility of parents towards their children because the mothers were also involved (cf. Pr 29:15). The educational system was life-centred because it aimed towards a sustainable humanity and a positive future for the generation mentioned in verse 22 as well. In fact, this dynamic, life-centred educational approach is even more important for poor people whose means of life and livelihoods are bound to the land and other people. In other words, the loss of land and family was the most grievous disaster, as it implied slavery in the sense of a loss of freedom (cf. also Wright 1992:763b-765b).

Similarly, in the African kinship system, education was traditionally handed down from extended family units, parents, grandparents, elders and other age groups

to children and all members of the community, and eventually to future grandchildren. The traditional African educational approach points towards actions and relations fostering inclusiveness, solidarity and a sense of belonging to the kinship system. In fact, the kinship relations in traditional Africa involved a community sense which included the departed, the living and the yet to be born (cf. Mbiti 1989:105; cf. also Mosha 2000:35-40). One is reminded of the Sukuma proverb: *Idimagi chiza isi, kulwa nguno batang'winhile babyaji bing'we bamubikija bana bing'we*: ‘Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children’ (Healy & Sybertz 1996:324).

The secondary context of Proverbs 13:23 contains an allusion in meaning which is closer to Proverbs 28:19 in terms of land. Proverbs 28:19 considers the high productivity of land on the one hand, and how worthless pursuits lead to poverty on the other hand. But there is no direct clue in Proverbs 28:19 as to how such pursuits result in poverty. In my opinion, the worthless pursuit can be equated with the injustice that destroys meaningful labour, as in Proverbs 13:23. However, I have included Proverbs 13:23 in a modified secondary context together with Proverbs 22:16, 23:10-11 and 28:8, on the basis of economic catchwords as well as of ideas relating to the poor and the challenge of poverty.

The Masoretic Text textual apparatus of Proverbs 13:23 indicates a difficulty in the Hebrew term **~yv*i*ar** ' 'r¹⁰-im', which in the Septuagint was translated as **di,kaioi**. The latter is an equivalent emendation of the Hebrew adjective masculine plural **~yrIv 'y>** 'y[®]-rim', ‘the upright’ (Pr 14:9), but the suggested change is however unsupported in the Book of Proverbs as a whole as discussed below.

At the beginning of my discussion of Proverbs 13:23, I pointed to the obscurity of its motif. Several commentators have thought Proverbs 13:23 to be a permanently corrupt text. The latter argument is based on their suggestion that normally the **V*a*r** ' 'r¹⁰-', ‘poor’, in the Old Testament are totally destitute and do not own any land. Perhaps in that sense, the poor referred to in this text might own pieces of infertile or ‘uncultivated land’ **KynI** ‘nîr’, that could not produce many crops. These commentators however fail to make sense of the subject of the

verb in the second line: the niphal participle masculine singular **הָפֵסֶה**, **סְנִי** ‘*nispeh*’, ‘it is snatched away’. I suggest two reasons for the confusion in the preceding argument:

- The Ancient Versions (eg. Septuagint Greek, Peshitta Syriac, Targum, Latin Vulgate) vary so greatly from the Hebrew text and from one another that the modern commentators are unable to determine the best rendering of Proverbs 13:23 (cf. Toy 1899:277-279; Whybray 1994:209).
- The social location of the modern commentators is closer to that of the translators of the Ancient Versions, that is, middle or upper class. This social context affects their translations/interpretations. The influence of social superiority on these interpreters is noted in the way they widely regard the poor with suspicion. Some of them opt to play down the poor in the text by an emendation made in favour of the high or ruling class. McKane (1970:14), for instance, juxtaposes theodicy with injustice in Proverbs 13:23. In the process, he asserts that **רֹאשֵׁי־עַמּוֹת** ‘*r'ōš-im*’ ‘poor’, should instead be translated as ‘notables’, ‘grandees’, which refers to ‘heads’ and chiefs (cf. also Latin Vulgate; Targum). The playing down of the poor in the text is also observed in the New American Bible (1970) translation which is used as a basic text for the African Bible version: ‘*A lawsuit devours the tillage of the poor; but some men perish for lack of a law court*’ (Pr 13:23).

Another suggestion from the Masoretic text’s critical apparatus for Proverbs 13:23 is to consider the Hebrew term **רֹאשֵׁי־עַמּוֹת** ‘*r'ōš-im*’, as a qal participle masculine plural verb of **רָשַׁשׁ** ‘*rûsh*’, ‘be in want or poor’, whose synonym is **רֹאשֵׁי־עַמּוֹת** ‘*r'ōš-im*’, ‘poor’ (cf. Pr 10:4; 2Sm 12:1, 12:4). Such a suggestion gains ground because in Hebrew the letter **א** ‘*Æleph*’ can be omitted in both the singular and plural, without affecting the meaning of the words concerned. That is to say, **רֹאשֵׁי־עַמּוֹת** ‘*r'ōš-im*’, becomes **רָשִׁים** ‘*r'îm*’, and **רֹאשֵׁי־עַמּוֹת** ‘*r'ōš-im*’, becomes **רָשִׁים** ‘*r'îm*’ (cf. Holladay 1988:336a). I consider the preceding

translation to be a better rendering of the meaning of the Hebrew text of Proverbs 13:23 (cf. also NRSV, RSV, NJB, KJV).

As indicated in the discussion of the closer literary context of Proverbs 13:23, it has been suggested that the theme of inheritance runs through Proverbs 13:22-24. In each of the proverbs referred to previously, one stich states the means to attain material benefits while the other mentions the ways through which people are dispossessed of the same. As a result, Proverbs 13:23 portrays an antithetical parallelism that juxtaposes two contrasting verbal clauses. The emphasis of verbal clauses in Hebrew syntax falls on the action expressed by the verbs in the order of predicate-subject (cf. Wittenberg 1986:53-54; Watson 1985:148). In other words, the chiastic pattern that is used often in the Book of Proverbs (cf. Pr 13:24, 13:25, 10:3, 10:4, 10:12, 12:20, 14:4) in Proverbs 13:23 is a means to heighten the antithesis:

*The new tillable land of the poor yields abundance of food;
But is snatched away through injustice.*

The basic contrast is revealed by two contrasting dynamic events linked to the labour of the poor. However, it is important to note that the two contrasting actions are connected by the conjunction **W>** ‘*w®*’, ‘but’, to form a single result relating to the same poor. In terms of this insight: What is the implication for the consideration of poverty in Proverbs 13:23?

Some commentators use the Revised Standard Version translation (cf. also NRSV, NJB, KJV) to suggest a pessimistic ethical implication of Proverbs 13:23. In my view, a direct condemnation of the impoverishing corruptive process (cf. Whybray 1994:209, Murphy 1998:95, 1998:98) is unlikely. Similarly, to consider Proverbs 13:23 as a fatalistic expression of the ‘futility of life for the poor’ (Washington 1994:182) is too simplistic, while the pessimistic ethical assessment is very close to the literal sense of Proverbs 13:23: *The field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice* (RSV). Brueggemann, however, suggests that Proverbs 13:23 confirms the Israelite monarchy’s neglect of its responsibility to preserve and enhance the land for the solidarity and well-being of society as a reason for losing it (1977:78). In the latter suggestion, the interdependence that can be inferred conveys a sense of the metaphorical use of the proverb. I proceed to investigate this employing the African cultural context.

In order to gain a deeper insight into the ethical and moral implications of Proverbs 13:23, it might be helpful to look into possible real or potential situations that could elicit its citation using the two contrasting verbal clauses. The equivalent text is the Luganda proverb: *Endya lumu: yazisa Mulaijje*: ‘Eating up everything at one sitting: has laid waste to Mulajje’, which metaphorically refers to the lack of planning for the future by the people of Mulajje. After one good harvest they ate everything including the seeds. As a result they could not plant in the following season. They were forced to emigrate from their land to other places owing to famine. One is warned against the short-sightedness of selling land for money instead of developing it. Similarly, the Bena emphasise the development of land as inherited wealth for sustaining the latter by uttering the proverb: *Ilipwela ulimililage*: ‘Inherited wealth needs working on and care’. The equivalent text in Swahili is the multivalent proverb: *Mpanda ngazi hushuka*: ‘One who *climbs* a ladder always *descends*’.* Structurally, the Swahili verb translated ‘climbs’ corresponds to the verb ‘yields’ in Proverbs 13:23. Accordingly, the Swahili verb translated ‘descends’ corresponds to the verb ‘is snatched away’ in Proverbs 13:23. Literally the Swahili proverb is a statement of truth stemming from the observed act of climbing and descending a ladder. However the word ‘*ngazi*’, ‘ladder’, is used metaphorically to refer to the high positions that a person may attain in the course of his/her life. According to the holistic nature of the traditional African worldview, such positions are a fortune being held in trust: wealth which is dependent on one’s conduct and attitude to the society which does the entrusting. In other words, the collective understanding among Swahili speakers is that such social status and power are temporary by nature. They thus exhibit the tendency to corrupt. On the one hand, the proverb is therefore normally used to caution against the possibility of a change of fortune if the person’s behaviour becomes unacceptable to the beneficiaries. It represents the society’s insistence on their valued virtues of humility and restraint in conduct, for the maintenance of good social networks and one’s fortune. The proverb by extension enjoys a divine sanction because the African people believe that it is only with God’s help that human beings make a living. In this respect the Atuot would say: *Piny kuok ke nuer, Decau era thin*:

* The long form of this Swahili proverb is: *Maji yakijaa, hupwa; mpanda ngazi hushuka*: ‘When the tide is high it ebbs; he who climbs the ladder comes down again’. It comprises an epigram drawing an analogy between the two phenomena.

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'The land favours the human-being, with the Creator's presence' (cf. Burton 1981:87).

On the other hand, the above Swahili proverb is normally used by victims of injustice against an oppressive or exploitative system. It is a negative evaluation of a situation that expresses the victims' frustration and resentment, in terms of the hope that the addressee may change their misbehaviour. In this application, the divine authority of this proverb issues an inherent threat to the addressee. The warning is based on the common understanding between the speaker and the listener that a fortune is something that is imparted by the Divine for the benefit of the whole community. Hence, when the proverb is uttered in respect to misbehaving people, it becomes a form of curse. The victim utters the proverb as a prayer for divine intervention in a helpless situation. Indirectly, divine eradication of the injustice takes away the fortune from the misbehaving owner because it is no longer at the service of the common good of the community (cf. Parker 1974:85-88). Some other African proverbs similarly addressing economic issues relating to human existence follow:

- Bena: *Nde avipe vako usitagila ngubi mugunda.*
‘Even if your wife is angry she still belongs to you, you cannot leave the farm to wild pigs’. [family, inheritance]
- Luganda: *Mpaawo kitakya: ntomusulo ku nsiko gukya.*
‘There is nothing that does not come to an end: even the dew on uncultivated land dries up’. [fortune]
- Oromo: *Lafa abbaa ko jette jaldeettiin kattaarratit hafti.*
‘"The land of my fathers!" said the baboon on the rock remaining'. [inheritance, tradition]
- Igbo: *Ogba oso anaghi agba ghara ihu ala.*
(Literal translation: ‘Wherever you run, there is nowhere you don't touch the ground’ [the literal translation is from the CD-ROM].)
‘The ancestors and the sacred ground know whatever you do’.

Therefore with regard to Proverbs 13:23 the suggested similar African proverbial performance context understands land as a divinely bestowed fortune that is intended to enhance human existence and economic well-being. On the one hand, the proverb thus employs the user's responsibility to enhance the productivity of the

land by proper management, orderliness and good administration (cf. also Brueggemann 1977:71; Mosala 1989:103-105). On the other hand, Proverbs 13:23 by implication, from the perspective of the discussed equivalent African proverbs suggests a noble economic ideal: that the benefits of the divine fortune should serve desirable social and economic ends (cf. also Mosala 1986:127). This approach to the ethics of the economic system in early Israel aims at its sustainability by reducing inequality in that society, which leads to the achievement of solidarity and stability as common goods for the poor. In the following discussion another aspect of economics is revealed in Proverbs 22:16.

Proverbs 22:16

‘rAsx.m; l.-%a; ryvi['l. !tEnO Al
tABr>h; l. lD' qve[o

The harsh treatment of the poor makes much for them; giving to the rich will end in poverty. (My translation.)

Proverbs 22:16 is the last verse in the second collection of the Book of Proverbs. Though the Masoretic text does not indicate any textual difficulties with this verse, translators and commentators have reached no consensus on its sense.

- The first disagreement is based on whether the particle preposition suffix third person masculine singular **A₁**, ‘*lō*’ ‘to him, his’ in the first clause refers to the poor or to the rich. In other words: Who becomes ‘rich’ in Proverbs 22:16a (cf. also Murphy 1998:166)? On the one hand, many translations (ESV, RSV, NRSV, KJV, NIV, NAB, etc) and biblical scholars (eg, Murphy 1998:164; Whybray 1994:322; Westermann 1995:22-23) are in favour of translating the word **A₁**, ‘*lō*’ ‘to him, his’ as standing for the rich. Murphy (1998:166) therefore comments that the first clause of Proverbs 22:16 ‘states a *fact*: The oppressor profits from the oppression of the poor. One has to go to extremes to imagine how the oppression can profit the poor!’ On the other hand, a few translations (NJB, JPS) and scholars (eg, McKane 1970:245) favour

translating the word as standing for the poor. The latter approach is based on the evil intentions of various oppressors of the Jews in history. These evil intentions underlay the creation of a strong identity and spirituality for Jewish people that eventually liberated them from bondage (cf. Plaut 1961:230). The Genesis story of Joseph (Gn 50:20) is a case in point.

- The other disagreement concerns the second clause: how the giving to the rich impoverishes and who becomes poor in due course. Whybray (1994:323) suggests gifts (cf. Pr 17:8, 18:16), which Murphy (1998:166) and Toy (1899:420) identify as bribes given to the rich by the poor in order to obtain favours. As the suggested bribes failed to achieve the intended purposes, subsequently the giver became impoverished. On the contrary, other scholars posit the divine impoverishment of the rich. God's intervention on behalf of the poor, to punish the rich by impoverishing *them*, is argued in terms of gifts received from the poor, which, it is suggested, do not originate from love and justice (cf. Toy 1899:420; NJB; Whybray 1994:322; Van Leeuwen 1992:33) but from compulsion.

What can the African perspective contribute to the above hypotheses of biblical scholars? My research has found some African proverbs that advocate the poor people's creativity in developing survival strategies from their struggles against threats to their life and livelihood. In the case of poverty, for example, the African proverbs indicate that the situation is not absolute. Moreover, destitution is not a problem, it is rather a challenging state fostering learning in life. Prominent among ordinary people is a dynamic conception of hunger. In their view, the latter stimulates resourcefulness and positive energy, challenging frustrations and despair. Both the Bena proverb: *Indzala jiwunga*: 'Hunger instructs' and the Fipa proverb: *Inzala ikukomya*: 'Hunger breeds strength for work' (Rupia 1996:32) encourage people to earn something for their living. It is a positive approach, indicating that problems can be overcome through perseverance and hard work.

At the same time, some proverbs speak metaphorically about how the harsh treatment of the weak releases their daring potential, both in spirit and energy, to 'overcome forces and behaviours that diminish life and hope' (Kobia 2003:5). The Swahili proverb observes: *Ukimfukuza sana mjusi atageuka nyoka*: 'If you harass the lizard too much it turns into a snake'. In this proverb the lizard represents a harmless

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creature as against a harmful snake. The proverb is uttered to warn against the mistreatment of the weaker people because there is a limit to everything (cf. Ngole & Honero 1981:55-56). In such a case, the mistreated people's passiveness is too deceptive a method to be taken for granted as surrender. The people's decision to keep quiet is an old technique to reinforce an even greater resistance. In other words, it is a passiveness that inherently suggests a continuing possibility of change at any appropriate time. The preceding idea is also revealed in the wisdom of the Basotho proverb: *Ho checha ha ramo ha se ho baleha*: 'When a ram is retreating, it is not running away'. These available local resources and ability to resist mistreatment, constitute a force that rejuvenated kindred spirits, the political will and determination to eradicate colonialism and apartheid in Africa (cf. Kobia 2003:170-171). Wilfred's brief review of the huge autobiography of Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (2002) seems to authenticate the effectiveness of the preceding approach:

The book fascinated me immensely and made me realize what tapping of local resources means, and how local leaders with utopian dreams are formed and shaped. Apartheid was something unique, and Mandela, this colossus statesman from rural Africa, could mobilize the resources, symbols and strategies from the land to fight an oppressive regime. The way in which this iron-fisted system was loosened and finally dismantled shows us the importance of sustained dissent and protest in confronting systems of power and the efficacy of local resources (2005:90).

In addition to stimulating a daring potential to rise to the challenge, poverty provokes the poor people into inventive and sacrificial measures meant to combat it (cf. Mbiti 2002a:12).

Swahili: *Mtaka cha mvunguni shart ainame.*

'The person who wants what is underneath must stoop'. [work]

Akan: *Ohia ma adwene.*

'Poverty makes one think, or causes one to think'. [creativity]

Lugbara: *Alio o'a eli mudri ku.*

'Poverty does not last for ten years'. [determination]

Bassa: *Ga! Mon dein konmon gboh.*

'Agony! It is by you that we began our wealth'. [experience]

Lunda: *Kubabala kufuma hakuchimonahu.*

'A person is wiser after misfortunes'. [new knowledge]

In the light of the above details from an African proverbial point of view about how the poor can profit from oppressive conditions, I submit that the Al, ‘*lô*’ ‘to him, his’, in the first clause of Proverbs 22:16 refers to the poor rather than the rich. Therefore the first clause of Proverbs 22:16 aims at empowering the poor to arise to the challenge of immoral acts, both in spirit and in economic terms. In line with the previous argument, then, what is the expectation of the second stich of Proverbs 22:16?

A number of African proverbs can illuminate the exhortation of the second half of Proverbs 22:16. I use the metaphor of hunger in an apparently similar Fipa proverb: *Inzala ikuvyal'imboto; n'imboto ikuvyal'inzala*: ‘Hunger breeds plenty of food, and plenty of food breeds hunger’ (Rupia 1996:30). The proverb was based on the observed fact that a year of famine was followed by the blessing of a good harvest. A year of drought meant people used up food stocks without replenishing the granaries. The result was less food. People had to do with meagre meals for the following rainy year in spite of having to double their work in the farm, in order to have a bumper harvest to cover the needs of their current year as well as those of the next year, as a precaution. Thus among the ordinary people the first clause of Proverbs 22:16 emphasises hard work as the only viable route to success even when the going is hard. The focus of the second clause of Proverbs 22:16 warns against the misuse, especially the squandering, of the accrued benefits of hard work and perseverance because such behaviour could lead to continued want. In short, in light of the African discussion presented above, I find the Masoretic text of Proverbs 22:16 as it stands to make sense if approached from the perspective of the people at the grassroots.

Can the literary context offer further insight into Proverbs 22:16? The preceding verse, 15, presents the issue of training the youth by using the ‘rod of discipline’. Some biblical scholars relate this rod to physical punishment (cf. Perdue 2000:188). However, Waltke (2005:215) suggests that the image refers to severe disciplinary action. In any case, I contend that the latter approach to discipline corresponds directly with the results of the harsh treatment of the poor in verse 16. For that matter, verses 17-19 encourage the listener to accept positively all the means and types of instruction that society has established for her or his spiritual and economic development. Although each proverb exhibits a complete unity of sense and

theme, their placement in relation to each other in Proverbs 22:15-19 significantly influences the intention of Proverbs 22:16. Yet it seems as if no direct value judgement can be inferred in Proverbs 22:16. The proverb simply seems to illustrate the positive character of poverty for the purpose of training when read in conjunction with Proverbs 22:15 in particular and with Proverbs 22:17-19 in general.

Proverbs 22:16 contains a direct parallel arrangement ‘**a**¹**b**/**a**¹**b**¹’ in the sense of an act-consequence paradox.

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| rAsx.m;l.-%a; | ryvi['l. !tEnO |
| Al tABr>h;l. | lD' qve[o |
| b ¹ | a ¹ |
| | b |
| | a |

In the above parallelism, the subject of the first act, ‘harsh treatment of the poor’, is paralleled to the subject of the second act, ‘giving to the rich’. Similarly, the consequences are paralleled: that is, ‘makes much for them’ in the first stich corresponds to ‘will end in want’ in the second stich. For some biblical scholars, the arrangement presents a difficult paradox (cf. Murphy 1998:163-164, 1998:166; Whybray 1994:322).

However, with regard to the insights stemming from the discussion of the African proverbs dealt with above, the meaning and purpose of this parallel arrangement makes sense, particularly when the proverb is regarded as a continuous sentence. I refer to the previous explanation, especially of the Fipa proverb: *Inzala ikuvyal'imboto; n'imboto ikuvyal'inzala*: ‘Hunger breeds plenty of food, and plenty of food breeds hunger’ (Rupia 1996:30). There is a correspondence between ‘giving to the rich’ in Proverbs 22:16 and the paradox of how ‘plenty of food breeds hunger’ in the Fipa proverb. This aspect is further explained by the Luganda proverb: *Abaganda mwennyango: bagweyokya balaba*: ‘The Baganda are like the stinging nettle: they sting themselves on it with open eyes’. The latter proverb warns against foolishness in providing hospitality. Hospitality should neither be interpreted to mean the entertainment of thieves and bad friends, nor does it mean entering into a marriage relationship with a known witch. All such foolish acts are risks to the security of life. Of course, richness has a deceptive appearance in its early stages, which can cause people to forget their past difficulties very easily. To avoid falling into the deception

of wealth, a similar caution is sounded in the Oromo Proverb: *Tchaamni ganamaa / tike handaqi irraanfachisa*: '[Because of] the clarity of the morning the shepherd the umbrella forgot'.

Therefore, the parallelism of Proverbs 22:16 contrasts the wisdom of 'harsh treatment of the poor' and the folly of squandering hard-earned profits by 'giving to the rich' (cf. the contrast with Pr 11:24). The former is credible because it creates an opportunity of creativity amongst the poor by taking them to task. In Kobia's words: 'When people act out of hope, they become forward-looking: they are liberated from captivity to the past and fear of a tomorrow that is no better than yesterday. They acquire positive attitudes that free them from reliance on the past as a place of retreat' (2003:4). The act of retreating from the challenge of poverty is discouraged. Such a retreat can be occasioned by frustration and despair at the lack of promising results. Worst of all, retreating disempowers the poor by a deliberate spoiling of their chances to achieve in socio-economic terms through hard work. Therefore in this sense, Proverbs 22:16 utters a call to proper custodianship and stewardship. The following discussion in this category of 'economic environment and poverty' concerns aspects of land, the basic economic resource of ordinary people.

Proverbs 23:10-11

`aboT'-la; ~ymiAty> ydef.biW ~l'A[
lWbG> gSeT;-la;
`%T"ai ~b'yrI-ta, byrIy"-aWh qz"x'
~l'a]gO-yKi

Do not remove the ancient landmark and the fields of orphans do not encroach.

For their redeemer is strong he will contend their dispute with you. (My translation.)

Proverbs 23:10-11 is situated in the first part of the third collection of exhortatory sayings comprising Proverbs 22:17-24:34. The admonitions and warnings about the issue of land boundaries in the former two verses relate closely to Proverbs 22:28. In both situations the conception of corporate life in the economic environment of ancient Israelite society forms the background to the exhortations. In terms of this

sense of corporeality, Westermann (1995:85) also groups Proverbs 23:10-11 with Proverbs 22:22-23:11 and 24:1-29 to suggest that these sayings are ‘aimed at conduct toward one’s neighbour that benefits the community’.

I do not agree with the Masoretic text's textual apparatus that suggests Proverbs 23:10 should read ~ל'א[לְבָגָר ‘g®»*ûl* ±*ôl'm* ', 'ancient landmark', as hn "m' l.a; lWbG> ‘g®»*ûl* °*alm'nâ* ', 'widow's landmark' (cf. Pr 15:25). Neither do I agree with justification of the latter adjustment of hn "m' l.a; lWbG> ‘g®»*ûl* °*alm'nâ* ', 'widow's landmark' by considering the frequent pairing of orphans and widows in the Old Testament as correspondingly vulnerable persons, which it is argued highlights the inclusiveness of the problem (cf. Dt 14:29; Jr 7:6; Job 22:9, 24:3; Ps 146:9). I do not even concur with Washington's justification of the latter adjustment. He assumes that the adjustment reflects an influence by the idea of the removal of boundary markers of a widow's property according to the instruction of Egyptian Amenemope (cf. 1994:187-188). The adjustment can even be made by positing a scribal corruption of ~ל'א[±*ôl'm* ', 'ancient', to obtain a parallelism with Proverbs 22:28. All the three reasons given above are not strong enough to emend the Masoretic text (cf. also Barr 1999:495; Whybray 1995:334; McKane 1970:380). In my view, ‘g®»*ûl* ±*ôl'm* ', 'ancient landmark', more fully mirrors the historical perspective and the extent of the inclusiveness of the problem in the ancient Israelite inheritance system than hn "m' l.a; lWbG> ‘g®»*ûl* °*alm'nâ* ', 'widow's landmark'.

Proverbs 23:10-11 is inserted between two contrasting proverbs about instruction. On the one hand, Proverbs 23:9 is focused on the futility of imparting wisdom to a fool; on the other, Proverbs 23:12 exhorts the hearer to hold fast to instruction and knowledge. In between these two sayings, Proverbs 23:10-11 admonishes the hearer against the removal of ancestral boundaries with the intentions of encroachment. Most biblical commentators have suggested no direct connection, based on the preceding close literary context. In my view, however, Proverbs 23:9-12 reflects the communal background with its concern for a stable and peaceful society. It is for the immediate common good of the society that its members acquire the ability and skills to live in peace and understanding with all people including fools (cf.

also Westermann 1995:85). Proverbs 23:9 therefore emphasises the wise approach to the fool, an approach that will not stir up discord in relationships. In other words, this proverb places some limits on the use of language, as both the speaker and hearer have to refrain from the claim of complete knowledge and perfection. Thus, from the perspective of the wise, a fool is a weak person who does not know him or herself to be weak but whose human dignity should still be protected by society.

Proverbs 23:10 links the issue of stability in society with the protection of the property that belongs to the weak (cf. also Wittenberg 1986:80-81). Land was a primary defining factor of production in both ancient Israelite and traditional African societies. In the traditional communalistic African society, the land was communally owned. As property was inherited from the ancestors, the existing generation was duty-bound to preserve it for the oncoming descendants. Seizing the agricultural land resource by any means from disadvantaged neighbours, orphans and widows caused them to be alienated from communal membership. It deprived them of the benefits of the sacred communal establishment. In other words, in the African traditional sense any form of land encroachment undermined, even as it continues to undermine, both the mystical and the physical (social, religious, economic and political) existence of ordinary people (cf. Magesa 1998:244-245).

Thus, Proverbs 23:11 suggests divine approval as underlying the advocacy of socio-economic justice for the lowly in society. However, this proverb does not offer clear details of how the advocacy principle was implemented. On account of this scarcity of details, I propose that Proverbs 23:12 is closely linked to Proverbs 23:11. The training and orientation demanded in Proverbs 23:12 complements the means of achieving socio-economic advocacy demanded in Proverbs 23:11. Instruction and knowledge in ancient Israelite society included orientation regarding the fear and knowledge of God as constitutive elements of blessing and well-being in society (cf. Pr 1:1-7). The theological basis of this concept was established in the covenantal exodus relationship between God and the Israelite people. Hence, the Exodus event also provides a sound base for the requirement for socio-economic advocacy in Proverbs 23:11. In the words of Ceresko, the ‘covenant served as the way for organizing their society and setting out social, economic, and political arrangements that would ensure a just and life-giving community’ (1999:4) for the ancient Israelite people. It is against the preceding foundational transforming background that the

motive clause %T"ai ~b'yrI-ta, byrIy"-aWh
qz"x' ~l'a]gO-yKi 'For their redeemer is strong he will contend
their dispute with you' should be understood as a significant part of the admonition in
Proverbs 23:10-11. The function of the motive clause is to explicate the intrinsic
authority of the admonition more fully (cf. also Nel 1981:422-425).

With regard to its literary structure, Proverbs 23:10-11 is divided into two parts. Proverbs 23:10 contains a synonymous parallel arrangement that details the topic of violence. In this case the admonition against removing any ancient boundary in the first clause is described and extended to the seizure of the land that belongs to the disadvantaged in the second clause. In the light of the background of Proverbs 22:28 and Proverbs 15:25b, Murphy suggests that the preceding 'prohibition itself goes against a thirst for power and land-grabbing, which the upper class might indulge in, particularly to the disadvantage of the unprotected' (1998:171; cf. also Toy 1988:427; 1 Ki 22:19; Hs 5:10; Is 5:8; Dt 27:17; Job 24:2). In my view the warning against land-grabbing is, necessarily, inclusively addressed to the upper class and to all members in society regardless of status. The land inheritance belonged to the household or family as a common property of all. Hence, it is against the communal norm for any member of the family or society to try selfishly by any means to dispossess the orphan or widow of their land and social rights of subsistence. The notion of such greedy behaviour provokes a reactive resistance, as in the Luganda proverb: *Ebitali bigabane: bwe babyanuka (= babinyaga) biba by'omu*: 'Things which are not divided up (which are [sic] common property of many): become (suddenly) the property of one, when they are stolen (e.g. a piece of land that belongs to three children without consultation and agreement changes over to one creditor)'.

Therefore, from a communal perspective, Proverbs 23:10 emphasises social obligations of reciprocity, sharing, solidarity and redistribution in the making available of both the tangible and intangible goods in society. Land, equally important, also stands for freedom, self-sufficiency and economic advancement as in the following African proverbs:

Oromo: *Namni daari qotuf / namni ollaa Ragaatu / hiniqu.*

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‘The man who over the boundary (of his field) ploughs and the man neighbour to Ragatu (a woman) make no progress’. [economic advance]

Luganda: *W'omutala (= ow'omutala) awe: bw'asanga bw'ayisa (= w'asanga w'akola).*

‘He who lives on his own land: lives as he pleases’. [freedom]

Luganda: *Omutaka ggongolo: olumakabako nga yeefunya.*

‘A landowner is like a millipede: when you touch it, it rolls itself up (remains inactive)’. [resistance, independence, self-sufficiency]

Proverbs 23:11 constitutes the second part of the literary structure of Proverbs 23:10-11. Most biblical scholars have found it to be a single sentence that introduces a divine motive behind Proverbs 23:10 with the use of ɿæəGO ‘gœ°ɸl’, ‘redeemer’ (cf. Wittenberg 1986:80-81; Washington 1994:188; Whybray 1995:334; Murphy 1998: 175; Brueggemann 1977:96-97; Von Rad et al 1972:90, 1972:94). The notion of the redeemer stems from the Old Testament stipulation in the Law that obligates kinsfolk to buy back and restore property which was sold by their poor relatives (cf. Lv 25:25; Ruth 4:1-4). Although it is not stated directly, it is argued that the redeemer referred to in Proverbs 23:11 is God himself because the said orphans ‘presumably have no relative to perform that office’ (Whybray 1995:334). I am not totally opposed to the preceding argument if the divine motive reinforces advocacy for the socio-economic responsibility of society. In other words, Whybray’s earlier argument concerning the lack of redeemers should not lead to a fatalistic situation in which the poor opt for resignation. Neither should God’s active intervention be used to spiritualise violence against the poor by not taking into account the entire exploitative socio-economic structure of a society. In this issue, that is, activating faith as a community resource for challenging poverty, I concur with Nürnberg:

Realism is indispensable to dispel wrong expectations, but it cannot have the last word. It is precisely the role of faith to prevent realism from turning into fatalism. The human being cannot live without a hope that transcends current limitations. Hopelessness leads to paralysis. But faith is not a kind of make-believe utopianism. Faith is protest against apparent inevitabilities. It is faith which detects that fatalism is not realistic; fatalism buries sensitivities for possibilities of the future under the dead weight of despair (1999:159).

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The above quotation argues that the belief in God's intervention does not operate automatically; rather it is in essence the dynamic potential inherent in the socio-economic systems of the communal society. From the African communal perspective, divine approval of socio-economic advocacy is an extension of the kinship obligations. In every respect land was, as it is now, a divine resource of life for everyone: it was held in public trust rather than privately owned (cf. Gbadegesin 1991:226-232; Magesa 1998:63; Moyo 1999:50-56). In other words, the land boundaries were spiritually and communally sanctioned. The holistic sanction of the border created the fear of a curse on anyone tampering with it (cf. Shenk 1997:62-64; Kenyatta 1938:163-174). Thus, the common use of land in such collective ownership settings is central for the preceding divine sanction as a means to sustain life. To deprive somebody of its use alienates the person from the highly valued interconnectedness of humanity and human dignity. In an interview Nyerere acknowledged the grievous error of his government: 'In hindsight it was a grave mistake to collectivize the individual farms, or *shamba*, that families had owned for generations. You can socialize what is not traditional. The *shamba* can't be socialized' (*The East African* September 16-22, 1996). This African concept of land comprises the social location of the following African proverbs on land issues:

- Luganda: *Omwana w'omutaka: akuumma kiggya.*
‘The child of a landowner (ancestor) looks after the (father's) grave’
[ancestral relationship].
- Luganda: *Buliibwa mokalu. (obutaka).*
‘An ancestor's land is acquired by an active and cunning person’
[protection of ancestral land].
- Oromo: *Namni tokko biyya tolchuu dadhaba male balleessuu hindadhabu.*
‘One person fails to develop land successfully, but to destroy does not fail’ [land is developed in unity].
- Sukuma: *Isiga lya ha lubimbi utalibinza.*
‘The grain stalk on the boundary line, you won't break’ [respect for established norms].

Therefore, Proverbs 23:10-11 takes seriously the issue of securing the life and livelihood of every member in the society. It is important to ensure that no one lives in

abject poverty as a result of the self-centred and individualistic deprivation of the economic resources meant for society's common advancement. The security, safety and freedom of the poor have to be protected in political, economic, social and religious terms. Otherwise all institutions that cause any impoverishment have to be condemned in real terms for their immorality (cf. also Deist 1991:255). Hence, the use of Genesis 13:15, Numbers 26:55-56 and Psalm 24:1, for instance, for legitimising land nationalisation in Tanzania's *Ujamaa* (cf. Mussa 1977: 27-28) is far-fetched. Similarly the commoditisation and commercialisation of the land in terms of individualistic methods such as issuing of title deeds is a highly suspect and heinous form of land grabbing in the African context. It fences off the land from the majority of people who use it for their livelihood. Such wickedness creates an explosive device that in the long run will detonate and destroy the cohesion and peace of society that are necessary for socio-economic and political development. In the following discussion of Proverbs 28:8 the issue of interest and discount collection in economic development is focused on.

Proverbs 28:8

‘WNc , B . q . yI ~yLiD ; !nEAxl .
tyBir>t ; b . w > %v , n<B . AnAh hB , r>m ;

Whoever increases oneself's wealth by interest and discount collects it for the one who is kind to the poor. (My translation.)

Proverbs 28:8 belongs to the collection, Proverbs 25:1-29:27. The latter is a group of proverbs which are ascribed to Solomon (cf. Pr 25:1). The textual critical apparatus to Proverbs 28:8 indicates that the Syriac version of the Old Testament and the Targum opted to use *tyBir>t ; b . W* ‘and discount’, instead of the Masoretic text Qere *tyBir>t ; b . w >* ‘and discount’. The word *tyBir>t ; b . W* has Kethib for both the Hebrew particle conjunction *W waw* and the particle *B beth*. As a result of the Kethib, the word *tyBir>t ; b . W* cannot be translated. The Septuagint and the Vulgate translations applied the other option of the Masoretic text,

Qere **tyBir>t ; b.w>**. The latter word **tyBir>t ; b.w>** omits the B ‘*beth*’ from the Kethib **tyBir>t ; b.W**. The second option unites **tyBir>t ; b.w>** with the phrase **tyBir>t ; w> %v , n<<B .**, that translates as ‘interest and discount’, providing one combined sense for the first stich of Proverbs 28:8 (cf. Waltke 2005:395). My own translation tends to concur with the application of the Qere to maintain the unity of sense in the text.

Many biblical interpreters separate chapter 28 of the Book of Proverbs from the preceding chapters 25-27, on account its presentation and content. Chapters 25-27 of the Book of Proverbs contain warnings uttered mainly by means of metaphors and comparisons whereas in Proverbs 28, except for verse 3 and verse 15, an antithetical parallelism is used to draw out moral reflections (cf. McKane 1970:619-620; Murphy 1998:189, 1998:213; Perdue 2000:223). This antithetical parallelism continues to Proverbs 29:27, also forming a thematic unity combining the ideal and practical relationship between the Law, God, leadership and nurturing in society. With respect to the focus of the present research the consensus between many biblical scholars, on themes categorised into four units, significantly relates to matters of poverty. The four themes suggest the important place of submission to training, as well as to God and the leadership, as essential for the welfare of both the individual and the whole community (cf. Meinhold 1991:464; Malchow 1985:239). A detailed analysis of various studies of Waltke’s division (2005:404-405) is exemplified by Meinhold’s suggested topics:

- I. The relationship to Torah [instruction] as a measure for ruling, in particular that of the rich over the poor (28:2-11).
- II. The relationship with God as a measure for ruling and striving for gain (28:13-27).
- III. Rearing and ruling that have proved worthwhile in dealing with the poor and humble (29:1-15).
- IV. Rearing and relationship with God (29:17-26) [Waltke 2005:405].

I will not offer a detailed discussion of the above content and literary structure of Proverbs 28:1-29:27. More important to me is the presence of terms relating to economics dealing with exacting interest and discounts on loans, in Proverbs 28:8. I argue that the words concerned with economics previously noted in Proverbs 28:8 fit into the modified context of Proverbs 13:23, 22:16 and 23:10-11 in relation to poverty

and the economic environment. Accordingly, this implies that Proverbs 28:2-11 can be used as a background for partly understanding Proverbs 28:8. The adapted details of the literary form and structure suggested by Meinhold therefore imply the following theory regarding the immediate literary context of Proverbs 28:8:

- A' Importance of a discerning person (*mę̄n*) / keeping the *tōrā* in the home (v.7)
- B' Lack of discernment: oppression of the poor (*dal*) (v. 8)
- C' Basis of discernment: *tōrā* and God (v. 9) [Waltke 2005:407]

In this context of Proverbs 28:8, ‘discernment’ is a unifying factor. According to the preceding verse, 7, an individual’s understanding (or lack thereof) causes consequences for the whole family. The previously described holistic training in this proverb can be understood if the corporate nature of the ancient Israelite society behind the text is recognised and underscored. The father is representative of the family. The latter formed/forms part and parcel of a clan and a community. In other words, the honour or dishonour accorded to a person is on behalf of the common good of the family and the community. A significant matter underlying this argument is also the fact that ‘instruction’ belongs to the community’s life-giving visions and hope. Instruction as discussed with respect to Proverbs 13:18 elsewhere in this chapter is a liberative educational process. In traditional Africa as in ancient Israel, education was aimed at positive change and reform rather than at maintaining the *status quo* and control (cf. also Ceresko 1999:51). Education integrates a good character with skills in order to enable an individual to develop a dynamic, socially approved attitude and productivity. Therefore, in short, Proverbs 28:7 discerns the source of and threats to a better life in society.

Proverbs 28:8 continues to develop the theme of the source that threatens the sustainability of the better life mentioned in the second stich of Proverbs 28:7. The threat is caused by a lack of understanding of the established communal and egalitarian principles in economic transactions. Demanding interest and usury is a sign of oppressive misbehaviours because they are market-oriented and as such, they commoditise the recipient of the loan. Such constraints attached to loans destroy the human value crucial to the rehabilitative and supportive process and intentions found in the loan systems of communal and corporate societies in ancient Israel and traditional Africa (cf. my discussion of Pr 22:7).

On the one hand, many biblical scholars agree that the first clause of Proverbs 28:8 is based on passages in the Pentateuch and Prophetic literature that forbid the taking of interest and discounts between Israelites (cf. Ex 22:25; Dt 23:19; Lv 25:36-37; Ezk 18:8, 18:13; Murphy 1998:215; Waltke 2005:412-413; Whybray 1995:391). However, such studies do not detail the socio-cultural framework of the ancient Israelites regarding the prohibition on collecting interest and usury on loans. Once again my discussion of the traditional African concept of loan in Proverbs 22:7 above anticipates the motive behind the collection of interest and usury which is forbidden in Proverbs 28:8. Interest and discount rates comprise intentional terms and conditions attached to a loan. Such artificial conditionality constrains the internal rehabilitation potential of the debtor (cf. Nürnberger 1999:127). As a result, exacting interest and usury are considered to be humiliations, with disastrous effects on the perpetrator of the injustice because of the guilt of dominance and also on the victim, who suffers the guilt of dependence.

On the other hand, the second clause of Proverbs 28:8 suggests that the collection of interest and usury creates an advantageous situation for the poor. There is no agreement between biblical scholars on exactly as to how the latter was achieved.

- Whybray (1994:391; cf. also Clifford 1999:244)) proposes the possibility of an expected generous heir who will donate the accrued wealth to the poor.
- Waltke (2005:413) suggests God's intervention, basing his argument on Proverbs 13:22 and Psalm 140:12.
- Toy (1899:499) posits punishment by social laws and the divine law of retaliation.

I find that the main issue dividing these biblical scholars is whether the second part of Proverbs 28:8 is really grounded in life experience. The ideas in the last two suggestions run the risk of being spiritualised, especially with regard to a future-oriented law of retaliation (cf. also Van Leeuwen 1992:33).

Thus Proverbs 28:9 spells out that lacking in instruction is an exact example of matters which are abominable before God and which have adverse spiritual consequences. In other words, my opinion is that the admonition concerning the

immorality indirectly envisioned in Proverbs 28:8 in terms of the evil of taking interest and usury from the poor, is also given a divine injunction (cf. also Perdue 2000:230-231; Van Leeuwen 1992:32) because it is committed out of wickedness. Or it could be said that Proverbs 28:9 underscores a spiritual dimension to the usury and exacting of interest in Proverbs 28:8 (cf. Waltke 2005:413; Toy 1899:499). However, the issue raised above, with regard to Proverbs 28:8 indicating that the taking of interest and usury is eventually advantageous to the poor, is not sufficiently clarified in the literary criticism.

With regard to its internal structure, Proverbs 28:8 contains a synonymous parallelism about obtaining so much wealth through exacting all sorts of interest from the poor that the accumulation will end up serving the poor. Thus the way the clauses contrast the demanding of interest and charity can only be understood properly if the subject of the first clause also refers to the poor. I therefore concur with the assumption of most biblical scholars that ‘the poor’ comprise a common subject in both clauses. As a result, the verbal clause *AnAh hB , r>m ; ‘marbeh hôno*’, ‘increases his wealth’, corresponds with *WNC , B . q . yI ‘yiqb®fennû*’, ‘gathers it’, as synonyms. In the preceding sense the *l . ‘l®*, ‘for’, introduces the simultaneous circumstances under which the common action takes place but with contrasting results. It is clear that the two contrastive results occur simultaneously with each other without a time limit being set. Nevertheless, the major challenge I deduce from the setting of Proverbs 28:8, based on the community’s life-giving visions and hope, is that of transforming the mindsets of the ordinary people in society. Thinking in terms of common humanity, the proverb puts a socio-economic ethical question: Are there margins of profit in interaction or exploitation that are sustainable and equitable?

From an African perspective the contrastive results can be exemplified proverbially in the way the temporal nature of prosperity or wealth is underscored. In the Swahili proverb it is rightly emphasised that: *Mali ni kama maua au umande*: ‘Wealth is like flowers or dew’. Flowers are beautiful and dew originates from drops of rain water, but both are short-lived. Metaphorically, it is implied that prosperity is not a permanent matter in the life of an individual person. In the traditional African supportive system, whoever succeeds in terms of material and immaterial welfare had

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to adhere to the communal principles of property ownership. Responsibility concerning the communal principle of wealth had a two-fold purpose:

- To ensure the contribution of the wealth to the prosperity of all.
- To protect the sustainability of the wealth.

Any form of greed or selfishness is opposed to the African communal ideal of property ownership that prioritises the interests of others, especially the needy members of the family or society (cf. Magesa 1998:242-243; Nyerere 1967:9-10). In some cases amassing wealth creates such a huge gap between the rich and the poor that it results in increased rates of crime and violence. The latter may kill the wealthy or rob them of their wealth and security. Therefore, mean behaviour is strongly discouraged in society because it renders wealth worthless, even as it can lead to destruction on account of its corruptive tendencies.

Swahili: *Mali ya bahili huliwa na wadudu.*

‘The wealth of a mean person is consumed by mites or rats’.

Akan: *Wode nkontompo pe ade mfe apem a, onokwafo de nokware gye wo nsa mu da koro.*

‘If you accumulate (wealth) property for a thousand years with fraud, a truthful person with truth takes it away from you in a day’.

Oromo: *Hori baay-en / abbaa dhiibata.*

‘Much wealth pushes the owner towards death’.

Setswana: *Khumo kgolo e a rama.*

‘Great riches are demoralising’.

To sum up, Proverbs 28:8, from the popular perspective, significantly reminds the hearer of the risk in taking economic advantage of the weak members of society. My traditional African explanation of wealth, above, disagrees with biblical commentators who suggest that the proverbial futuristic promises are problematic (cf. Van Leeuwen 1992:33). The resolution of the conflict between faith and experience is obvious in the Setswana proverb: *Khumo le lehuma di lala mogo*: ‘Wealth and poverty lie together’. In this case Proverbs 28:8 offers a real measure of the

interrelationships required in economic interactions. There is growing evidence to support the assertion that just as colonial powers and political apartheid collapsed in Africa, so too will economic neo-colonisation and a seemingly uncontrollable globalisation be dismantled for the benefit of the poor. Unless the rich accept the responsibility to effect a just reform of the unjust economic order they have propagated, they cannot hope to exonerate themselves of the guilt of exploitation. The unjust economic system stands condemned in real and absolute terms by the poor because it causes them to be less than human beings, which is opposed to the will of God as well.

In addition, generosity and charity in the African perspective denote more than sharing excess wealth. Sharing gives the poor access to communal property, in order to minimise economic inequality in the community. In other words, sharing is aimed at bringing about growth in mature humanness as regards both the donor and the recipient of assistance. I therefore agree with Magesa, that Proverbs 28:8 is ‘intended to prevent attitudes destructive of relationships, such as arrogance and envy. In the moral perspective of African Religion, disharmony must constantly be guarded against, whether it comes from social or economic inequalities’ (1998:242).

To sum up, my lengthy reflection on Proverbs 13:23, 22:16, 23:10-11 and 28:8 regarding the economic context and poverty has not exhausted the theme of liberation. However, some very pertinent economic ways of challenging poverty as contained in the Book of Proverbs have been illuminated from the perspective of the traditional African economic structures. The issue of land and human labour as major assets of economic capital has throughout been argued to exhibit both communal and divine dimensions that are intrinsically integrated. The common desirable social and economic goods and services of land and human labour constitute measures of the morality of principles and practices of transformational development among the ordinary people in society (cf. Pr 13:23, 23:10-11). The challenge of poverty among these people may be perceived as enriching in terms of fostering creativity for evolving survival strategies, perseverance in custodianship and stewardship to achieve eventual success of a better life (cf. Pr 22:16). Finally, the rehabilitative communal loan system is identified as a transformational supportive economic system that is neither market-oriented nor commoditises the debtor. But in addition sharing is an ethical task that is elevated to the same level as generosity, charity and any form of

economic assistance to the poor (cf. Pr 28:8). Once again I wish to return to the beginning of this subsection concerning the holistic nature of the challenge of poverty as transforming the whole of human life, that is, economically, politically, socially and religiously. In the next subsection I therefore examine the ‘political environment and poverty’.

4.6 An exegesis of relevant proverbs concerning the political environment and poverty: Proverbs 22:7, 28:3, 28:15, and 29:14

Poverty is a multidimensional challenge with many constraints, against which the poor are actively involved as regards the sustaining of their lives and livelihoods. In this process the political environment is a major component that determines the fate of such people in their struggle against poverty. Political institutions and groups within society exercise power and influence the course of action to achieve their political aspirations (cf. Ahab’s abuse of power over Naboth – 1 Ki 21:1-29). In other words, in this section on political environment and poverty, I consider the functions rather than the history of internal policy. Thus my concern will be with offices, practices, and people’s access to bases of social power. Such bases include the financial resources, knowledge, appropriate information, skills and the state’s decision-making that enhanced lives in ancient Israelite society (cf. also Scheffler 2001:16-17, 2001:28; Friedmann 1992:66-69). This section will deal with the way the attitudes, beliefs and values underlying society’s political institutions and groups motivate, influence and affect the lives of people at the grassroots in terms of economic development. In the words of De Gruchy, the political environment describes policy, laws and institutions which refer to ‘the *intentional* structures, institutions, formations and contracts that are set in place to regulate social and communal life’ (2003:34).

According to De Gruchy, policy, laws and institutions comprise but one of the three key elements of the wider African context of survival strategies for sustaining livelihoods. The other two elements encompass shocks, stresses and seasonality on the one hand and culture, religion and customs on the other (De Gruchy 2003:32-34). His argument emphasises the overlapping of the political dimension with social, economic and religious institutions because of the holistic nature of most African contexts:

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It is vital to see the asset portfolio of the local household or community in relationship to institutions, organizations, policies, legislation, culture, religion and customs that shape livelihoods. These provide the reality in which the community resides, and which therefore has a direct link to the household, and the asset portfolio. Out of the vulnerability context, with the three elements mentioned above shaping and constraining their possible responses, people make use of their asset portfolio to pursue livelihood strategies (2003:34; cf. also Bujo 1997:19).

De Gruchy contends that the process cited above enhances income and well-being, improves food security and the efficient use of natural resources. Such a holistic approach to the political environment is also envisaged in the worldview of ancient Israelite society (cf. also the religio-ideological dimension of the history of Israel; Scheffler 2001:20). In the following discussion I will therefore reflect on the role and place of the political environment in the transformation of the livelihoods and lives of people on the grassroots. In this category I will begin by looking at the issue of loans in Proverbs 22:7.

Proverbs 22:7

‘hw<1.m; vyail. hA,l db,[,w> lAvm.yI
~yvir'B. ryvi[’

The rich over the poor shall have dominion since the borrower is a slave to the lender. (My translation.)

Proverbs 22:7 forms part of the last section of the second collection, that is, Proverbs 10:1-22:16. This collection is said to contain some of the oldest proverbs in the Book of Proverbs. Its literal sense has been thought to display the universal common-sense facts of life. Loss of independence results from being so poor that the debts incurred rendered borrowers the slaves of their creditors. The literal motif can be inferred from Exodus 21:2-7, where people sold themselves for their debts (cf. also Am 2:6; 2 Ki 4:1). According to Whybray's (1972:124) argument, Proverbs 22:7 leaves open the relevant moral question being addressed. Murphy (1998:165) further wonders whether Proverbs 22:7 might be containing a warning directed to the poor/ordinary people about the negative consequences of indebtedness, such as loss of freedom to their creditors.

However, Murphy also suggests that if Proverbs 22:7 is directed to the rich by the poor, then it conveys a light warning about materialistic tendencies (cf. Murphy 1998:165; cf. also the exposition of wealth and poverty in Proverbs 22:1-9, Murphy 1987a:398-402). But in both positions Murphy does not seem to recognise that the immediate ethical context (cf. Pr 22:8-9) of the awful economic facts of life (cf. Pr 22:7) is a strong warning to the community (cf. Washington 1994:200, 1994:181). Unfortunately even Washington does not make any effort to elaborate further on what I consider is a worthwhile suggestion that might shed more light on relevant moral questions regarding loans within a holistic outlook on life. The idea of the immediate ethical context can, however, be gleaned from Toy (1899:410). He suggests that thrift (v 7), injustice (v 8) and liberality (v 9) comprise unifying themes for the close literary context of Proverbs 22:7, but also does not explain the relationship connecting thrift, injustice and liberality. From the preceding, undecided, ethical discussion on Proverbs 22:7 I infer the issue of loans in rehabilitating the economic conditions of members of society.

As a matter of fact, from an African perspective I submit that Proverbs 22:7 deals with the subject of the spirit underlying the handling of the poor by the rich. Hence, I ask this important question: Does the loan aim at enhancing the productive capacity of the poor? Speckman seems to endorse my concern when he argues the case for the spirit of unconditional assistance regarding a ‘loaned cow’ in an African village:

The recipient is not made a debtor to the giver. Food relief is usually temporary. Long-term assistance is usually given instead, where the less privileged is given a cow to look after, enjoy milk and then keep its offspring when the owner fetches it. That is done in order to enable the less privileged to start his own herd so that he does not have to maintain his family through ‘begging’ for food (2001:19-20; cf. also Speckman 2001:99).

There are similar examples of such dynamic rehabilitative loan systems operating in various parts of Africa. Agricultural ethnic groups have in place seed assistance and loan farms that only call for little tokens of appreciation at harvest season from the debtor. Among the pastoral groups, such as the Maasai of East Africa, there exists an internal dynamic mutual assistance system for the cattle restocking of impoverished families. This collective societal mutual assistance enables the poor family to move back toward self-sustenance (cf. Potkanski 1999:199-200, 1999:206-215). In fact, in light of the African societies’ corporate nature, it then becomes a misnomer to term

such assistance a loan if the artificial constructs attached to it constrain the internal growth potential of the debtor (cf. Nürnberger 1999:127). A loan should at most aim at the rehabilitation and improvement of the standard of living of the poor, rather than make this worse or cause them to be slaves. Succinctly put, the lender in Proverbs 22:7 exploits the debtor and by extension, it may be argued that the rule of the rich over the poor in the first stich is understood to be exploitative and oppressive.

I contend that Proverbs 22:8 critiques Proverbs 22:7 in that the spirit of injustice that forces the poor into destitution will result in their demise, while Proverbs 22:9 offers the positive orientation of the proper objective of sharing wealth with those in need as an ideal for a better life. In other words, the ethical emphasis of Proverbs 22:7-9 is drawn from a common concept of biblical distributive justice operating between the speaker and listener. In that case, the argument of the close literary context is that inequality results from neglecting the morality of loans (v 7). The immorality of loans constrains the growth potential of recipients, and is a form of exploitation (v 8). Such a form of exploitation must be eradicated (v 9), which involves the distribution of the benefits accruing to society, in particular to the needy people as a common good of their society (cf. also Boersema 1999:80).

I also suggest the inclusion of Proverbs 22:6's demand for proper training in the theme of Proverbs 22:7-9. It seems to me that Proverbs 22:7-9 is an evaluation of the subject of proper training in Proverbs 22:6 (cf. also my discussion on training regarding Proverbs 13:23). One of the major purposes of training (v 6) is the development of responsible worker behaviour. Work is essential for self-sustenance as a basis for freedom in living in society. That is, in order to live comfortably in community, indebtedness should be avoided (v 7-9; cf. also Murphy 1998:165). To that end, most African societies have put in place a system of loans or aid, aimed at the rehabilitation of the poor through the enhancement of their production capacity. The rehabilitative process is endowed with the spirit of mutual generosity, help and hospitality that pervades the economic structure of the society. An African person from childhood, into adulthood, is nurtured in such a virtuous social context. Within the latter dynamic social context, it is possible to build one's personal reputation and uprightness, developing a caring and sharing personality for others, including the ancestors; one of offering goods and services (cf. also Gluckman 1965:52). Therefore the many African proverbs about debts, loans and aid morally emphasise a people's

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continued awareness of their responsibilities and obligations by shaming any behaviour demonstrating selfish ends, extravagance and mismanagement of resources:

Dzobo: *Koe dzia ada, ada dzi valem.*

‘Penury usually gives birth to rudeness and rudeness gives birth to defiance’. This proverb encourages hard work as a means of challenging poverty because it is socially disgraceful to fail to repay debts. It leads to rudeness to the creditors.

Oromo: *Liqefatan male / wal diduun hinjiru.*

‘Unless one borrows there are no disagreements’. This proverb warns against any dependence on others that would make one compromise one’s self-respect.

Sukuma: *Ngobo ya kulanda itamalaga buzuka.*

‘Borrowed clothing does not end poverty’. This proverb puts an emphasis on earning a living through self-reliance rather than through borrowed capital as the only means to end poverty.

Luganda: *Ekitta omukwano: kuwola na kwazika.*

‘What breaks up friendship is borrowing and lending (money and things)’. Implicitly, this proverb cautions one about the negative effect of failing to honour debts on close relationships. In other words, the focus is on being industrious and therefore self-reliant in order to avoid disunity in family and community.

From the above African proverbs, it becomes clear that indebtedness implies living beyond the available means. It is argued that such indebtedness risks the security of the society and future generations. Such a sense of insecurity regarding debt has to be halted because it also reduces the ability to act responsibly. Responsibility incurs other serious obligations that enhance the standard of living of people at the grassroots. People, regardless of age, are morally obligated to act responsibly and work towards self-dependence as a sign of maturity (cf. also Speckman 2001:93). Therefore, in light of the African proverbial context considered above, I argue that Proverbs 22:7 is part and parcel of Proverbs 22:6-9 since its close literary context defines certain essentials in the training of both children and adults concerning sustainable living standards.

The optional extended context of Proverbs 22:7 in the rest of Proverbs 22:1-16 could also include verses 1, 2, 4, 9, 16 (cf. Murphy 1998:164) that refer to wealth and/or poverty, to which I have no objection. However, I have included Proverbs 22:7 together with Proverbs 28:3, 28:15 and 29:14 in the theme of the political environment because of the verbal clause catchword **lAvm.yI** ‘*yimšôl*’, ‘shall have dominion’, in the first stich and the nominal clause **db**, [, ‘*e»e¼*’, ‘slave’, in the second stich. The relationship between the two catchwords can be understood by an analysis of the poetic nature of the proverb.

According to Wittenberg (1986:56) the synonymous parallel structure of Proverbs 22:7 mainly seems to be difficult in the way it contrasts the clauses of servitude and power. I agree with the suggestion that **ryvi** [' ' *±šîr*], the ‘rich’, corresponds to the **hw<1.m; vyai** i ‘*oîš malweh*’, the ‘lender’, and **~yvir'** ‘*r'šîm*’, the ‘poor’, corresponds to **hA, l** ‘*lôeh*’, the ‘debtor’. However, the proverb contains a complete chiastic bicola because each element in the first stich displays a corresponding extended or representative element in the second stich, but in reverse order. This can be conceived schematically as **abc/c¹b¹a¹**:

| | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| hw<1.m; vyail. | hA, l | db, [, w> |
| lAvm.yI | ~yvir' B. | ryvi [' |
| a¹ | b¹ | c¹ |
| c | b | a |

The result of the above complete chiasmus is that the verbal clause **lAvm.yI** ‘*yimšôl*’, ‘shall have dominion’, now corresponds with the nominal clause **db**, [, ‘*e»e¼*’, ‘slave’. In the preceding sense the **w>** ‘*w®*’, ‘since’, introduces the simultaneous circumstances under which the action of the principal verbal clause takes place (cf. Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:253a-b; Holladay 1988:85b). As a result, the nominal clause **db**, [, ‘*e»e¼*’, ‘slave’, shifts its function to become the explication of the verbal clause in the first stich, ‘shall have dominion’. This shift in verbal function emphasises the action expressed by the verb, that of a

person deprived of the means of production. The worst result for a person deprived of a means of livelihood is to become solely dependent on the creditor for survival. Hence, the borrower is dominated by the lender in determining his or her livelihood, as the slave is by the master. In other words, the polar word pairs **ryvi** ['±'šîr], the 'rich', and **~yvir** ['r'šîm], the 'poor', in the first stich express the totality of the dominance of the system. This implies that **hA**, l ['lôeh], the 'debtor', and **hw<1.m**; **vyai** ['oîš malweh], the 'lender', in the second stich are representative parts of the **~yvir** ['r'šîm], the 'poor', and the **ryvi** ['±'šîr], the 'rich'. The function of the representative parts is to define in clear terms the nature of the visible symptoms of the total control of the **ryvi** ['±'šîr], the 'rich', over the **~yvir** ['r'šîm], the 'poor'. This exploitative control, from the African moral perspective on loans referred to previously, is specifically due to paternalistic loan transactions inhibiting the productive capacity of the borrower. In addition, the **db**, [, 'e»e¼], 'slave', in Proverbs 22:7 can be used as an ironical allusion to the divine ideal of **db**; ['±'bad], 'work, serve', especially in terms of honestly tilling the land to earn a living (cf. Pr 12:11, Gen 2:5).

In line with the preceding analysis, I would argue that Proverbs 22:7 is neither a mere simple record of the realities of social life (cf. Whybray 1994:320; Wittenberg 1986:56) without any concern for social order in the relationships between the rich and the poor (cf. Westermann 1995:21-22, 1995:169), nor is it a mere exemplification of the advantages and power of material wealth (cf. Murphy 1998:165; McKane 1970:566). Rather, the point of Proverbs 22:7 is critical: it abhors the adverse material and spiritual by-effects of the political constraints attached to loans. My argument here is based on the fact that the loan systems in the ancient corporate Israelite society, like those of traditional Africa, aimed at freeing both the lender and the debtor from the adverse effects of dominance and dependence. Insights into loans, from the African perspective, emphasise progress that facilitates 'the ability of the local community to bring out the potential of its members which in turn moves the

community towards the realisation of the destiny of all' (Speckman 2001:93). The point being made by the text of Proverbs 22:7 is that ordinary people are concerned with the wider context of their social relationships. Such a social context extends to the morality of loans, which should be neither simply privileges nor tickets allowing the by-passing of the humiliations associated with the poor. Servitude and dependence resulting from loans and assistance accompanied by ideological conditions constitute an injustice to the poor. This is what is critiqued by Proverbs 22:7. Community solidarity is so central, especially for the poor, that it cannot be ignored in their daily activities without dire consequences in economic and social terms (cf. also Habel 1988:38).

In the following discussion of Proverbs 28:3 the focus lies on features of leadership relating to the issue of the 'political environment and poverty'.

Proverbs 28:3

‘~x ,l ' !yaew> @xeso rj "m ' ~yLiD;
qve [ow> vr ' rb ,G<

The poor person that oppresses the poor, a beating rain that leaves no food. (My translation.)

Proverbs 28:3 belongs to Proverbs 25:1-29:27, a group of proverbs that are ascribed to Solomon (cf. Pr 25:1). However, Proverbs 28 is marked off from the preceding group, Proverbs 25-27, in presentation and content. The latter mainly uses metaphors and similes to utter warnings. The former employs antithetical parallelism except for Proverbs 28:3 and Proverbs 28:15 to draw out moral reflections (cf. McKane 1970:619-620; Murphy 1998:189, 1998:213). For many biblical commentators the idea of **vr ' rb ,G<** ‘geber r's’, ‘poor man’, oppressing the poor suggested in Proverbs 28:3 is something unusual and therefore an impossibility (cf. Toy 1899:495; McKane 1970:628-629). It cannot be easily grasped how a poor person becomes an oppressor of one's own class. As a result suggestions have been made to emend the Masoretic text by replacing **vr '** with either **[v ' r ' 'r'sh'± ,**

‘wicked, criminal’ (cf. Septuagint), or **VĀRŪ** ‘rə^osh’, ‘head, chief, leader’, by a change of vowel or perhaps even replacing it with **RYV̄I** [' ̄ ' ̄š̄r], ‘wealthy, rich’. Unfortunately no supporting evidence exists for such an amendment. Thus, I submit that the supposed difficulty is basically an outcome of the translators’ and interpreters’ to be in concordial agreement with ‘social context’. Their approach also leaves open the issue of the moral implication of this text.

A few biblical scholars have noted various possibilities where a poor person might afflict poor people in Proverbs 28:3a.

- Exploitation of the poor in Proverbs 28:3 takes place when a poor person is corrupted by power and authority (cf. Waltke 2005:395, 2005:408-409). Perhaps such a chance where a poor person might assume power is suggested in Proverbs 30:21-23 (cf. Murphy 1998:214; Clifford 1999:243). McKane is not of the same opinion but his brief review of studies by ‘Koehler-Baumgartener, Gemser and Ringgren’ suggests that they supported the notion of a poor person being corrupted by power (1970:629). However, I have the impression that the biblical scholars in this group do not take into serious consideration the moral implications of Proverbs 28:3. It is suggested that the poor have no community life (cf. Pleins 1987:67). Gordis comments succinctly on Proverbs 28:3:

But what an irony to see a poor man making life miserable for his fellows and gaining nothing thereby! The observation comes with special aptness from a perspicacious son of the upper classes, who was tired perhaps of the perpetual accusations leveled against wealthy malefactors by prophets, lawgivers and sages (1971:172).

- Some biblical scholars further examine the verb **QV̄I** [' ̄ ' ̄š̄q], ‘oppress, get deceitfully, defraud, do violence’ (Holladay 1988:286b). Whybray, for instance, leaves aside the tyrannical sense of ‘oppress’, often used to indicate the oppressive actions of the rich and powerful against the weak and poor. Instead he emphasises the verb’s notion of the robbery of ‘one’s (presumably equal) neighbour (Lev. 6:2-4 [Heb. 5:21-3]; 19:13) or the cheating of customers by a tradesman (Hos. 12:7). Here for a poor man to steal

food from his equally poor neighbour is singled out as particularly disastrous' (1994:389-390).

The common factor in the second group which considers some possible ways in which the poor person can afflict other poor people is that its members all retain the Masoretic text. My own translation supports this retention with regard to the text because some proverbs in Africa also point towards a similar view. An equivalent argument to the one contained in Proverbs 28:3 is found in the Swahili proverb: *Kikulacho kinguoni mwako*: 'That which eats you is right inside your clothing'. This proverb is prompted by the basic principle of relationality in African life (cf. Mlacha 1985:178; Ngole & Honero 1981:1). There existed complex interrelationships that defined a person and influenced her or his political, economic, social and religious morality as a whole. The latter activities were accounted for by the positive value of egalitarianism embedded in the interrelationship principle. Such a value recognises the leader's political activity without separating it from the other dimensions of life and livelihood. Thus, any positive activities that strengthen honesty, trust and just relationships between the members of the community were considered to be religiously, economically, politically and socially moral, while negative opinions, words, dealings and exclusions that weaken the solidarity, cohesiveness and integral nature of life were considered immoral.

Swahili: *Adui wa mtu ni mtu.*

'The enemy of a human being is a human being'.

Luganda: *Akabi kaliva gy'oli: ng'omuntu akuba n'omusota omokago.*

'The evil comes from yourself (you have only yourself to blame for): like one who makes blood-brotherhood with a snake'.

Though Proverbs 28 does not possess an overarching structure, I agree with Murphy (1998:214) and other biblical scholars who suggest responsible leadership as its main theme, together with Proverbs 29 (cf. Pr 28:1, 28:12, 28:28, 29:16, 29:27). The preceding slightly modified literary context corresponds with my grouping of Proverbs 28:3 together with Proverbs 22:7, 28:15 and 29:14 under the political dimensions of poverty. Thus the closer literary context takes into consideration the political implications that could impart significance to the theme of Proverbs 28:3.

Proverbs 28:2, in spite of a suggested uncertainty of meaning (cf. Whybray 1994:389; Clifford 1999:243), however gives an impression of the causes of instability and stability in society. According to the antithetical parallel arrangement, the phrase ‘transgression of the nation’ as the cause of instability corresponds to the phrase ‘an intelligent person’ as the cause of stability. My impression of the significance of this arrangement is drawn from the corporate nature of the ancient Israelite society. Thus the said transgression of the nation may be that of one leader, with the nation taking co-responsibility for the effects of the transgression. In my view, the issue of the cause of instability is elaborated in Proverbs 28:3. There is a distortion by leaders of the expected principle of mutual responsible leadership established on the basis of egalitarianism. As a result of the political chaos, the society is impoverished, causing much suffering to the marginalised majority. Following upon the previous argument, Proverbs 28:4 begins a proposed solution to meet the challenge of restoring stability. The stability of the nation is manifested by keeping the established law and order (Pr 28:4), understanding the Lord’s righteousness (Pr 28:5), walking in integrity (Pr 28:6) and so forth. The above close literary context emphasises the place of the value of leadership as a communal political aspect. Leadership is a communally-based developmental and ethical system governing the integrative unity of the social, economic and religious structures so as to boost the welfare of people at the grassroots.

Proverbs 28:3 is a single line constructed in the poetic form of a synonymous parallelism. The second stich of the verse uses a simile to repeat the first, widening its range of content.

*The poor person that oppresses the poor,
a beating rain that leaves no food.*

In the above proverb the causes of poverty are treated in isolation, that is, without relating those causes to wealth (cf. also Pr 19:7). Some scholars argue that such isolated cases cannot reveal the author’s intention as regards poverty unless read in conjunction with the immediate proverb that mentions ‘the rich’ (cf. Wittenberg 1986:51). Apparently Proverbs 28:3 does not fulfil this condition. Nonetheless, the truth of the proverb can be understood because of the empirical evidence of the fact that the poor person is oppressing the poor.

The truth of Proverbs 28:3a is based on its structure: the two different observable facts of ‘a beating rain’ and ‘leaves no food’ are connected by the conjunction ‘that’. Of course, scientifically there is interdependence between rain and plants. Harvests are dependent on the amount of rain. Rain is water from above; it is a good servant as a source of life. In the latter sense, as such a source, rain is expected to promote the fertility of the food crops or of the land. Sometimes, however, even if the rain begins with small drops, it can become very heavy (eg, the El Nino storms of the 1990s in Africa). It is in the latter form that it becomes a force of the destruction (a beating rain) of the crops, thus bringing famine. In such a destructive situation the rain can be considered to be useless to the sustenance of life. It diminishes its value to the crops due to the environmental degradation it causes, by destroying the ecological cycle, leading to drought.

In terms of the synonymous parallelism of Proverbs 28:3, ‘the poor person that oppresses the poor’ in the first stich corresponds to the ‘beating rain that leaves no food’ in the second stich. The hearer is being offered a picture that enables a comparison of the actions of the first with the actual actions and results of the second. The synonymous parallelism is not so direct in the Swahili proverb: *Kikulacho kinguoni mwako*: ‘That which eats you is right inside your clothing’, which suggests the necessity of looking in one’s clothing for the cause of the trouble. In the case of Proverbs 28:3 the consequence is not directly discernible from the first part; therefore, the disastrous suffering of the poor has to be inferred from the phrase ‘leaves no food’ in the second part of the verse. In addition to the preceding grievous destitute situation the reference of the proverb extends to its adverse effects in the societally established corporate relationships between the poor oppressing person and the oppressed poor.

To sum up, Proverbs 28:3 from a political point of view attacks leadership arrogance and hypocritical tendencies. In one sense, the message is that the poor should remind and warn their leaders always to realise their humble beginnings in mutual responsibility; otherwise, they risk losing their authority and positions. In another sense, the proverb expresses a message from the poor regarding the betrayal of mutual trust by their corrupted leaders that has resulted in their impoverishment. The implication is that the proverb criticises and calls to account the authority of those in power. I agree with Westermann’s remark that the critical intent of the proverb ‘says something that is designed to make a person think, so that he can appraise himself as to whether his conduct is serving corporate life [sic]’ (1995:44-45, 49). In

poverty situations, Proverbs 28:3 refers to a democratisation process that empowers the ordinary people. In other words, involving them in decision-making is very important for ensuring viable and sustainable development strategies. Kobia emphasises strongly that ‘[a]mid the ideological confusion and chaos in global economies, Africa must re-examine her priorities in the immediate interest and welfare of her people. The people must know and have the authority to recall the power of the state when it ceases to serve the needs and aspirations’ (2003:iv). Lastly, from a general African perspective Proverbs 28:3 is an exhortation to the public to beware of false friendships and relationships in daily life. A proper evaluation is needed of these before one establishes them, as such relationships may eventually become part of one’s fall. In the following discussion of Proverbs 28:15 I address another aspect of leadership that affects the ordinary people’s life and livelihood.

Proverbs 28:15

‘lD’ – [; l[; [v' r' lvemo qqEAv bdow>
~henO-yrIa]

A roaring lion and a charging bear; a wicked leader upon the poor people. (My translation.)

Proverbs 28:15 is located in the fourth group of the Book of Proverbs, namely, Proverbs 25:1-29:27. The Masoretic text does not exhibit any textual difficulties. On account of the proverb’s brevity, however, the comparison particle to juxtapose the unrelated nominal clauses is omitted. Most biblical translators have therefore provided the particle ‘like’ or ‘as’ at the beginning of the sentence to help their readers establish the relationship (cf. NRSV, RSV, NJB, KJV). My own translation has purposely left out the comparative particle in order to maintain greater closeness with the Masoretic text. The latter in my view aims at stimulating the hearer to envision the context of the proverb.

I tend to agree with many biblical scholars who suggest that Proverbs 28:15 is linked with Proverbs 28:16 because they both deal with the consequences of unjust rule (cf. Whybray 1995:393; Murphy 1998:216). This assertion about the exercise of power also represents a political theme that is likewise discerned as a unifying factor

of chapter 28 of the Book of Proverbs (cf. Murphy 1998:213, 1998:218). While it is possible that Proverbs 28:15 could be concerned with the possession and the exercise of power prevalent in Proverbs 28:3, 28:5, 28:16, 28:21, I consider that its placement between Proverbs 28:14 and 28:16 makes a significant contribution towards understanding it. Proverbs 28:14 begins with a stich describing the blessedness of the person who continuously strives for peace, while Proverbs 28:16 ends with a stich portraying a person prolonging his/her days by continuously acting with justice. Enclosed in between these two clauses are the consequences of wickedness (cf. the second clause of Proverbs 28:14, Proverbs 28:15 and the first clause of Proverbs 28:16), which in my opinion could play a double role. The clauses on wickedness name the causes of instability in societies, and criticise the lack of the peace aspired to in order to create awareness and actions conducive to rehabilitative action in communities.

In other words, Proverbs 28:14 expresses the essentials for peace and stability on the one hand and chaos on the other. Though the object of this continuous reverence for peace is not explicit in Proverbs 28:14, the use of the piel participle absolute masculine singular verb of *דָּחַם*; *פָּעַד* ‘*p'uaad*’, ‘deeply dreading (sc. sin)’ (Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:808a), may refer to God’s word or instruction (cf. also Ps 119:161; Is 51:13; RSV). Viewed in the latter sense, it is possible to understand the stubbornness referred to in the second clause as the refusal of instruction, which leads to immoral conduct. In this sense, Proverbs 28:15, then, identifies the potential source of chaos in society as evil political systems and governments as well as the rule of law and judicial systems, including the lack of civil and political liberties, that dominate the poor. In the first part of Proverbs 28:16, the implicit reproach of Proverbs 28:15 is made known (cf. also Kidner 1978:171). The bestial behaviour is defined by the means through which the wicked rulers perpetuate their exploitation and the oppression of the poor. The second part of Proverbs 28:16 therefore reiterates a hate of unjust gain in life as being of the essence in the struggle for enhancing the well-being of society. In short, it is possible to envision a failed political office as a context for the impoverished ordinary people’s proverbial criticism, referred to in Proverbs 28:15 (cf. also Westermann 1995:33-34). The criticism takes its cue from the importance of the state in creating forums in and through which society’s goals for the common good can be identified and pursued. The state’s support in forging

sustainable ties within and across communities for the enhancement of joint acts fostering the ordinary people's development is one of the key roles being advocated.

The synonymous parallelism notable in Proverbs 28:15 is similar to that revealed in Proverbs 28:3, which was discussed earlier in this sub-section. A simile in the first clause is repeated as an illustration of the terrible situation in which wicked rulers take advantage of the poor in savage ways. The carnival-esque characterisation of ~henO-yrIa] ‘^{o|rî-næh&em’}, ‘roaring lion’, and qqEAv bdo ‘/^ææ»-šôq&q’ , ‘charging bear’, is compared with [v ' r ' lvemo ‘mæš&l r'š'±’ , ‘a wicked ruler’, being placed over the lD ' -~[; ‘±am-d'l’ , ‘poor people’. Thus, figuratively [v ' r ' ‘r'š'±’ , ‘wicked’, is explicitly illustrated by qqEAv ‘šôq&q’ , ‘charging’, and ~henO ‘næh&em’ , ‘roaring’, as dangerous and violent acts of oppression by the ruler (cf. also Botterweck 1974:386). According to Stigers the improper motives of leadership that could be exemplified by the given bestial characterisation include cruelty, insensitivity, selfishness and lack of spiritual consciousness (1980:177; cf. also Jones 1961:225). Hence, the characterisation of such behaviour can only make sense if it comments critically on the current tyrannical conditions faced by the poor. As a person who resides in the African context where the majority of the people are poor, it is difficult for me to concur with Von Rad that one must simply adjust to the realities of the aggressive moods of the ruler portrayed in Proverbs 28:15 (1975:84). Rather the issue is whether such behaviour serves the corporate life (cf. Westermann 1995:45). What, then, is the evocative power behind the ordinary simile of the carnival-esque behaviour of Proverbs 28:15? Why is the plight of the poor blamed upon the wicked ruler?

In traditional African and ancient Israelite society, the state and leaders were accorded significant authority, symbolised by carnivores, such as lions and bears. Apart from the bear, which is uncommon in Africa, the lion is an animal that symbolised power and strength (cf. Mbiti 1989:185). Hence, in Africa the lion's skin was used as a robe for leaders because it reflected the way people regarded them. They were more than mere ‘political heads: they are the mystical and religious heads, the divine symbol of their people’s health and welfare....Rulers are, therefore, not ordinary men and women: they occupy a special office, and symbolize the link

between God and man [sic]’ (Mbiti 1989:182). This African understanding of the significance of the ruler as a link between a human being and the deity parallels the ancient Israelite understanding that is discernible also in the Old Testament Wisdom literature (cf. Dell 1998:174-175). Many African proverbs using the regal metaphor of the lion echo the power and strength of leaders but also imply their tyranny and greediness owing to the ferocious nature of the lions:

- Kaonde: *Bulume bwa bokwe kapaji wa mukila ngovu; bokwe wafwile ku muñomba.*
‘The power of the lion, nothing surpasses it in strength; a lion was killed by a ground hornbill’.
- Luganda: *Empologoma ye bba obusolo.*
‘The lion is the Lord and Master of the animal world’.
- Oromo: *Lentchi innyaata / waraabessi jaluma oole.*
‘The lion eats, the hyena gets left-overs’.
- Basotho: *Go bopa ga tau go dirile gore lesaba le tshabe.*
‘Roaring of a lion causes the crowd to run away’.

Obviously the above proverbs are linked to the use of power and strength whether by royalty or by people in any position to exercise authority over others. In my view, such proverbs do not stem from a direct confrontation with the wicked authorities but are typical in the informal networks of ordinary poor people. However, they contain the suggestion of a deeper resistance to authority that is metaphorically expressed in the Oromo proverb: *Kan hamatan lentchaa / hamattun jaldessa*: ‘The one whom he/she slandered is a lion; the slanderer is a baboon’. The Oromo proverb acknowledges the performance context: the political will of the ordinary people. That is, weak people whisper against their strong adversaries. Therefore, from the African perspective the above proverbs have to be considered in terms of the holistic survival of the ordinary people. In this sense the addressee is provoked to reflect on the dynamic values and ideals that create hope for both individual and community. The proverbs call for both an individual and a collective courage to rise to the challenge of political and economic obstacles by rekindling and sustaining the communal values of solidarity, humanness, sharing, cooperation and trusting relationships.

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Subordinated peoples rely on hope which is tied up with moral reason and emancipation. Hope breaks the cycle of reasoning in terms of cause and effect, and creates room for surprises and the unknown. For the subordinated peoples and victims hope is kindled by experience of indignity, suffering, deprivation and injustice. No one believes any more in the unpredictable character of history as the marginalized of our world. This belief leads them to refuse to equate the inevitable with the just....The poor of the earth can live much more comfortably with insecurities, trusting in a different course of history from that of the elites who would like the history to be nothing but the replication of the present, for fear of the unknown (Wilfred 2004:91).

The above argument can be augmented by the presence of many lion figures in African proverbs displaying a ‘unity is strength’ resistance theme:

- Tumbuka: *Mulomo umoza ungapoka nyama ku nkhalamu yayi.*
‘When a lion preys, no one person can rescue the livestock’.
- Akan: *Otwe ne otwe ko, na wohu gyahene a, woko afa na woguan.*
‘When two antelopes are fighting and a lion approaches, they run off together (forgetting their squabbles)’.
- Oromo: *Jibriin waliifi galee / lentcha hidha.*
‘Cotton fibres that are united tie a lion’.

Therefore the fear of wrath envisioned in Proverbs 28:15 that makes poor people hide (Pr 28:12) does not mean giving into despair by avoiding the suppressive leader (cf. Murphy 1998:216). Rather, this fear creates powerful hidden resentments that build up among the exploited majority. Moreover, owing to the corporate nature of the society, the leader’s or any individual’s breach of established law and order and of the moral and ethical codes leads to chaos for the whole establishment and vice versa (cf. Mbiti 1989:206-208; Christensen 1973:517-518; Wittenberg 1986:81-82). In this case, Proverbs 28:15, reinforced by a divine sanction (cf. Pr 14:31, 17:5, 22:2, 22:22-23, 29:13), condemns the abuse of power because the latter threatens the cohesiveness, stability and peace which are the core elements of a progressive society. Political leadership in society is directed towards the promotion of human dignity. Therefore, the leaders of the poor should strive to strengthen unity and togetherness so as to establish politically and socially secure societies. The latter encompasses the leader’s role in creating an environment of respect for all and fostering equal opportunities, peace, love, cooperation and tolerance in politics and religious beliefs in order for the people to emerge as victors in the struggle against poverty. It is a mistake for leaders as such to be identified with the existence of such problems in

society as mis-governance, dictatorial governments, injustice, oppression, mismanagement of national economies, tribalism, nepotism et cetera (cf. also Kodia 2005:17; Pr 13:23, 14:21, 21:13, 22:16, 28:3, 28:7). The following discussion of Proverbs 29:14 appropriately identifies the responsibilities of those who are invested with political powers.

Proverbs 29:14

‘ !AKyI d[;l' Aas.Ki ~yLiD; tm,a/B ,
jpeAv %l,m,

The king who judges with truth the poor his throne will continue to be firm. (My translation.)

Proverbs 29:14 is situated in Proverbs 28-29, forming the final section of Proverbs 10-29. The Masoretic text of Proverbs 29:14 does not display any textual difficulties.

Proverbs 28-29 contains a number of sayings concerning justice in society as related to the king, that is, Proverbs 28:15, 28:16, 29:4 and Proverbs 29:14 (cf. Whybray 1990:45-61; Golka 1993:16-35). The theme of justice and leadership is also integrated with the thematic unity of Proverbs 28-29 concerning the relationship with the Law (instruction), God, leadership and nurturing discussed in Pr 28:8 above. Thus Proverbs 29:14 has been grouped with Proverbs 29:1-15. These comprise proverbs on education and leadership processes that offer worthwhile contributions in dealing with the poor and humble (cf. Waltke 2005: 405; Dell 1998:180; Whybray 1990:53). My inclusion of Proverbs 29:14 in an even larger slightly modified political context together with Proverbs 22:7, 28:3 and 28:15 affirms the basic emphasis on education and leadership found in Proverbs 29:1-15. The catchwords ‘king’ and ‘his throne’ in Proverbs 29:14 in my opinion represent vital political terms that stand for what De Gruchy has suggested are policy, laws and institutions. The latter have been intentionally established to regulate social and communal life (2003:34). Such political institutions motivate, influence and affect economic progress at the grassroots level. Therefore, one ideal function of kingship as an issue of power is to maintain and dispense justice among its citizenry in order to enable them to transform their own livelihoods and lives.

The immediate literary context of Proverbs 29:14 summarises three centres of power responsible for training and nurturing in the community, described variously in Proverbs 25-28 (cf. also Perdue 2000:239). However, like many other biblical commentators, Perdue (2000:240) does not recognise the preceding unity underlying the verses of Proverbs 29:13-15. In my view, though, Waltke's commentary on the same terms used for poverty as linking Proverbs 29:13 and 29:14 proceeds in the right direction. But he does not also take into account the correspondence between the terms for 'God' (v. 13), 'king' (v. 14) and 'mother' (v. 15). However, owing to this correspondence, he does eventually suggest that the 'consonantal sequence of *šô, φ%*' ("judges," v.14) and *šφ»e%* ("rod," v. 15)' (2005:440) makes a weak connection between Proverbs 29:14 and 29:15. This assertion is a contradiction because later on he acknowledges the common ethos behind the two proverbs (cf. Waltke 2005:442). In my view, this ethos, the link between family and community, shows that they complement and overlap with each other in such a way that the latter is essential to the viability of the former and vice versa. In fact, none of the aspects envisioned is less important.

Hence, from my point of view, Proverbs 29:13 establishes an essential theological concept about God as the ultimate source of justice. Justice takes further the moral idea embodied in the granting of life to both the rich and the poor, as it will be discussed later in the sub-section concerning the religious environment and poverty. Proverbs 29:14 considers the king as a 'manifestation of the divine to humans' (Dell 1998:179; cf. also Waltke 2005:441-442), in its use of the term *jpeAv* 'šô, φ%', 'judges', that belongs to the lexical field of justice (cf. also Pr 16:10-15, 24:21-22). In other words, the kingly role exhibits a divine nature. The synonymy between the role of the human king and God's kingship is also imposed by the juxtaposition of Proverbs 29:13 and 29:14 (cf. also Murphy 1998:222). Such an alignment of synonyms is much clearer when viewed from within an African context. In the traditional African context the ideal king, chief, clan leader and parent were considered to be divine. They were believed to be endowed with the divine virtues of generosity, kindness and humility, and they also evidenced respect for the elders, ancestors and fertility. In Magesa's words, these persons in whom authority or ruling power resides, were

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invested *ipso facto* with the power and the responsibility to guard and allocate justly the community goods. This is true of parents and heads of families in caring for their children and also of various chiefs caring for the entire ethnic group. Justice is the deciding factor in their deployment and distribution of resources. This primary belief in African Religion arises out of the conviction that the earth's resources belong to all before they belong to any one individual. So...in African eyes, both the ability to lead and the validity of any leadership depend greatly on whether the leader is fair and just (1998:246).

It is in terms of the sense of justice as described in the above quotation that I find Proverbs 29:15 focusing on the ethos required in the raising of children by their parents, represented by the mother. I think the representative characterisation of the mother figure plays a very positive role regarding the significance of women in the development process. Women, as was the case in ancient Israel or in traditional Africa, are still the basic active agency which affects this process of society throughout Africa as well as in other developing countries (cf. De Gruchy 2003:28-29). This assertion is profoundly reinforced in the following remark:

The changing agency of women is one of the major mediators of economic and social change, and its determination as well as consequences closely relate to many of the central features of the development process....Nothing, arguably, is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of the political, economic and social participation and leadership of women. This is indeed a crucial aspect of 'development as freedom' (Sen 1999:202-203).

In line with this argument, a mother is a highly respected woman in African society, as in the Sesotho proverb: *Mosali ke morena*: 'A woman is a chief'. Thus the parental role of women in Proverbs 29:15 is elevated to be on a par with that of the king in Proverbs 29:14 in terms of a fair and just responsibility, which is a clear sign that the role of a mother in nurturing is in every sense neither minor nor inferior to that of the father, as many biblical scholars try to indicate (eg, Clifford 1999:15; Whybray 1995:402; Waltke 2005:442-443; Toy 1899:511). Rather, both parents' roles in training children are placed on the same level. In the African context, especially, the training responsibility was equally extended to the community as a whole, as discussed with respect to Proverbs 13:18 earlier on in this chapter. In the African setting, both the king and parents are leaders who gain their honour by their wise use of all assets in enhancing the life of the community. The failure of such leaders to act justly brings them the disrespect of the community. Even worse, irresponsibility in training children is considered an immoral act against the ancestors and God (cf. Magesa 1998:246). Therefore, I argue strongly that Proverbs 29:13-15 emphasises

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humility as one of the most important qualities that promote a cordial relationship between the poor and the rich, leaders and citizens, parents and their children.

Proverbs 29:14 displays an internal synonymous structure, with the first clause setting the condition for the second clause (cf. Perdue 2000:242, Toy 1899:511) and without a conditional particle connecting the two clauses (cf. also Pr 29:12; Whybray 1994:402). In this structure the common singular masculine noun **₪ל , מ**, ‘melek’, ‘king’, can be taken in the sense of the ‘leader’ as a person in whom resides authority or ruling power. The preceding nominal sense **₪ל , מ**, ‘melek’, ‘king’, corresponds to **Aas.Ki** ‘*kis°ô*’, ‘his throne’, in the extended sense of ‘leadership’, which symbolises the office or position of a leader, capacity to lead, the act or an instance of leading, leaders. The implication of this arrangement is that the king should not be treated in isolation from the whole system of leadership in society. In the traditional African worldview, the political co-responsibility of community leaders is part and parcel of the value system, which can strengthen and preserve stability, peace, unity and solidarity in the nation. The following African proverbs envision this mutual responsibility in society:

Akan: *Nyina a obotum man hwe no, Nyankopon bo no safohen ma զdze kora dom.*

‘It is God who enstools the talented leader as chief and commits the townsfolk to his care’ (Pobee 1979:155).

Sukuma: *Ntemi akalyaga na mbozu.*

‘The king eats with the rotten one’.

Sesotho: *Matsoho a morena a malelele.*

‘The chief’s hands are long’.

Wolof: *Bour bou amoul y nitte don done bour.*

‘A subjectless king is no king’.

Kaonde: *Kinzanza kyakosela mashiki.*

‘A shelter is strong because of the poles’.

In traditional Africa, political co-responsibility is the principle underlying the above proverbs. This co-responsibility was the democratic way of organising the

transformative political will to challenge the threats of progress. In my view, therefore, Proverbs 29:14 concerns political co-responsibility between leaders and ordinary people in society. For that matter, I consider that Perdue plays it safe by considering that adherence to kingship in protecting justice for the poor (2 Sm 15:1-6; 1 Kg 3:16-28; Ps 72; Pr 16:12, 25:5) can mean ‘the establishment and maintenance of kingship in the social order as an act of God in creation and providence, or even more specifically, the continuation of a dynasty or an individual king’s rule’ (2000:240). Other biblical commentators on Proverbs 29:14 have not taken this wider context of leadership seriously; instead, they have focussed more fully on the king as an individual. Whybray, for instance, suggests that the king must take responsibility for the honesty of all legal judgements even though he cannot preside over each of them (1994:402). Waltke on his part mentions the ‘symbol of the king’s authoritative rule’ without elaboration (2005:442).

An interesting response relates to the reversal of events: that is, instead of leadership favouring the rich and powerful as the expected norm for political stability, Proverbs 29:14 ‘recognizes that ultimate stability comes from the divine patron of the king who looks out for the poor’ (Clifford 1999:253). In my opinion there is nothing unusual in the stance of Proverbs 29:14 because the poor constituted the majority in ancient Israelite society as in our contemporary world, especially in Africa. In fact, the Ewe would say: *Fia mafor/u fe du ðe wògbama*: ‘The town, that is, the chiefdom, of a chief does not talk falls apart’. This proverb emphasises the duty of both a society and its leadership to address the wrong deeds of its members, regardless of status. Talking things out is a traditional African democratic way to avoid a moral degeneration that may lead into political chaos, which in turn could ruin the society’s economic, social and religious progress (cf. also Pobee 1979:155-156; Bujo 2003:45-46). Thus the admonition of Proverbs 29:14 is also opposed to political silence regarding the evils and corruptive tendencies that inhibit the transformation of the poor. Furthermore, the exhortation focuses on the economic planning responsibility of leaders for the sustainability of development and progress in their community (cf. Magesa 1998:246).

The focus on the political environment in Proverbs 22:7, 28:3, 28:15 and 29:14 has a direct bearing on the challenge of poverty. Using the African perspective I have tried to shed more light on the interrelationship of political issues with leadership and loans

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to the poor in particular. Loan arrangements in communal societies underscore promoting the development of production capacity as the measure of a transformational credit system (cf. Pr 22:7). With respect to leadership its political dimension is a humility that enables the sustained mutual responsibility and democratic participation which is necessary for the enhancement of the common good of society (cf. Pr 28:3). Threats by wicked leaders provoke reflection regarding dynamic values and ideals, creating hope and collective courage to rekindle unity in order to challenge poverty (cf. Pr 28:15). Nothing is more important in any political leadership than the moral co-responsibility in the dispensing of justice and fairness in society of all those who are invested with power and responsibility to lead others in one way or another, for instance, parents, clan heads, chiefs, queens and kings (cf. Pr 29:14). Such a holistic political environment should be an efficient means for transforming the well-being of the people at the grassroots. In the following discussion I turn to discuss the next category of proverbs: ‘religious environment and poverty’.

4.7 An exegesis of relevant proverbs regarding a religious environment and poverty: Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, 22:2, and 29:13

In any study of poverty in the Book of Proverbs, it is important to discuss the dynamic interactions between the different aspects of people's lives and their livelihoods. The preceding sections of this chapter have indicated that owing to the holistic nature of life in ancient Israel, it is not easy to make a separation between the social, economic, political and religious aspects. It is also increasingly being acknowledged that the key factor, which in practice integrates and influences all the other dimensions of people's daily lives, in ancient Israelite society as in traditional Africa, is religion (cf. Scheffler 2001:20-21; Mbiti 1989:262; P'Bitek 1972:31; Booth 1977:10). It is interesting to note with some scholars (cf. De Gruchy 2003:34-36; Maluleke 2000:31; Haddad 2001:16) that even in contemporary Africa on the whole, the religious context, that is, beliefs or faith, culture and customs, must be integrated in our attempt to deal with the challenge of poverty in Africa. There is a strong argument for the inclusion of the humanities in poverty eradication strategies as a crucial means for attaining viable results:

It is after all a *spiritual value* to strive for the *eradication of poverty*, to *share* wealth and education with one's fellow humans, to *enjoy human culture* after mouths are fed. History and religion should be *no threat* to material upliftment, but a *means* to it. A serious threat is their downscaling and abolition (Scheffler 2001:11).

The contention expressed above is gleaned from the Old Testament text of the Bible. The Bible records in ancient Israel a significant amount of poverty and many internal and external conflicts, indicating the prevalence of the challenges. But in essence such records are not an end in themselves but, rather, indicate the viable survival approaches at the grassroots. Those ancient Israelite survival strategies are unique when considered in the light of the Ancient Near Eastern cultural, economic, political and religious contexts, because they show 'signs of civility developing amidst their own history of bloodshed and turmoil' (Sheffler 2001:11).

Therefore, my analysis of the religious environment and poverty in the selected proverbs does not deal with the development of religious thought patterns and institutions in ancient Israel. Rather, this section will elaborate on the role played by religion in the given proverbs in the Book of Proverbs. The position I take in this thesis is that owing to the holistic nature of ancient Israelite society, religious beliefs

may have had a profound effect on all spheres of life. Religious beliefs basically configured the evaluation, interpretation and planning of one's daily social, political and economic life activities as one whole. Even though the selected proverbs do not literally exhibit a direct and detailed socio-economic criticism of human behaviour and one's relationship to society (cf. also Boström 1990:47-48; Hermissen 1978:43). I will make an effort to analyse the following questions: How can religion, especially religious beliefs, serve as a community resource for the effective social transformation or enhancement of the livelihoods and lives of poor people (cf. also Kretzmann & McKnight 1993:143)? Precisely, what are the consequences of the belief in God as Creator of human beings and the world for the understanding of the poor in ancient Israel? How does the creation motif in the selected proverbs reflect the value of the poor and needy? Are the latter being dealt with as (a) social class/es in ancient Israelite society? Is the welfare of the poor promoted by the selected texts on religious beliefs? In the following discussion regarding 'religious environment and poverty' I focus on the issue of a common humanity in Proverbs 14:31.

Proverbs 14:31

ׁ !Ayb .a , !nExo AdB .k ;m .W Whfe [o @rExe
lD ' -qve [o

The oppressor of the poor reproaches their Maker but to be kind to the needy honours him. (My translation.)

The Cairo Geniza text of Proverbs 14:31 substitutes (cf. also Pr 17:5) the Masoretic text piel perfect 3rd person masculine singular verb @rExe ‘μέρε,’, ‘reproach, revile’ (Holladay 1988:117b), with the qal participle noun @rExO ‘μαιρέ,’, ‘one who reproaches, taunts’ (Clines 1996:320a). However, the latter does not affect the sense of the first stich but puts emphasis on the pronoun's object, that is, the poor: ‘The exploiter of the poor man is one who taunts his Maker’. In addition the use of @rExO ‘μαιρέ,’, ‘one who reproaches or taunts’, suggests the improvement of the syntactical parallelism by the accusative use of the qal participle verb !nExo

‘*μακένθην*’, ‘to be gracious to’(Holladay 1988:110b), that emphasises the object of the pronominal suffix ‘his Maker’ as referring to the Creator of the poor. Therefore, the *lectio difficilior* is used to retain the sense of the Masoretic text.

Proverbs 14:31 belongs in the second collection, Proverbs 10:1-22:16. Like most of the sententious sayings in this section, it is a self-contained entity. Its individual stiches provide a literal sense of independence, completeness and unity within themselves. This independent character brings with it the risky ‘atomising’ approach that relies mainly on their literal sense. Hence, my repeated mention of various scholars’ views about the suggested lack of an explicit literary context in the Book of Proverbs. However, my approach has considered the literary context in terms of the following two assumptions:

- The growing certainty among biblical scholars that collectors, editors and redactors may have purposefully arranged the proverbial bits and pieces in the manner in which they presently appear in the Book of Proverbs (cf. Heim 2001). The latter point respects the text’s canonical structure.
- The growing confidence among biblical scholars regarding the necessity of a synthesised biblical method as a means of doing justice to the different and variant aspects of the text (cf. Barton 1996; Le Roux 1992:3-19; Powell 1992:3-19).

It is worth noting that within the above assumptions, there are however some signs of reluctance to establish a still closer literary context for Proverbs 14:31 (cf. Murphy 1998:102). There is an inability to place Proverbs 14:31 even within a small tentative structure owing to the lack of catchwords (cf. Whybray 1994:14). Attempts suggest that Proverbs 14:31 is linked to Proverbs 14:29-33 in terms of a variant aspect of the theme of wisdom and folly (cf. Toy 1899:298). A possible closer literary structure for Proverbs 14:31 is the unit suggested by Heim: Proverbs 14:28-35 (2001:186-189). He considers the theme of a king’s *modus operandi* in relation to the poor as the background of Proverbs 14:28-35. Though the unifying sense of such a relation in this group of proverbs is somehow appealing to the present writer, Heim’s explanation lacks sufficient details. Moreover, the theme of kingship falls under the

political context in my thesis, which is not the focus of this section. For these reasons the implications of Heim's suggestion will not be pursued further.

Some biblical scholars, however, have posited a somewhat modified secondary grouping in Proverbs 14. The secondary context is based on their common content, such as humanitarianism. The latter places Proverbs 14:31 together with Proverbs 14:21 and 14:22 (cf. McKane 1970:473). Yet an even wider modified context of the Book of Proverbs is gaining acceptance. In this wider context, Proverbs 14:21 and 14:31 are included within the 'God-language' group rather than within humanitarianism (cf. Whybray 1990:41-42; Washington 1994:198). But there is a dichotomy between biblical scholars' understandings of the implications of the 'God-language' proverbs:

- Either the 'God-language' proverbs were a reinterpretation to accommodate religious piety in ancient Israel (cf. McKane 1970:17, 1970:473). In other words, the proverbs were formerly secular in nature.
- Or the 'God-language' proverbs portray the religious background of the ancient Israelite worldview (cf. Whybray 1990:67; Boström 1990:60; Clements 1989:9; Murphy 1998:107). Though not expressed in very concrete terms, their suggestion favours a holistic approach to life.

In my view, in terms of my own 'religious environment and poverty' category of proverbs, the thematic secondary context of Proverbs 14:31 falls within the second option above. I take my cue from the similarity between the traditional African and ancient Israelite worldviews: the religious life cannot be separated from the whole system of which it is a part. The literal sense of the catchwords 'poor' and 'Maker' or 'Creator' identifies the theme that runs through the selected verses, Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, 22:2 and 29:13, as dealing with creation and poverty.

The complete chiasmus of Proverbs 14:31 contrasts two types of attitudes towards God, exemplified in the act of the treatment of the poor and the needy. Its antithetical chiasmus plays on cause-effect: schematically act-consequence and consequence-act: **ab/b¹a¹**.

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| `!Ayb.a, !nExo | ADB.k;m.W |
| Whfe[o @rExe | lD'-qve[o |
| a¹ | b¹ |
| | b |
| | a |

On the one hand, the chiasm expresses a semantic parallelism that equates lD' ; ‘dal’, ‘low, weak, poor, thin’, and !Ayb.a , ‘ $^{\circ}\text{ebŷon}$ ’, ‘needy person’, with a sense of similarity and interchangeability. On the other hand, the antithesis of the resultant religious attitudes to the poor is heightened by the chiastic pattern of Proverbs 14:31. In the latter, qv, [o ‘ $^{\pm}\text{æs̥heq}$ ’, ‘oppression, extortion’, corresponds to the semantically opposite !n:x' ‘ $\mu'\text{nan}$ ’, ‘be gracious, pity’. Such an alignment reveals the exploitation of the poor to be wicked, folly or sin because their Maker is insulted, while being kind to the needy is perceived as righteousness, wisdom or justice because in that act their Maker is honoured (cf. also Pr 19:17a). In this respect such ideas are identified in the close literary context, that is, the antithetical Proverbs 14:28-35 (cf. Heim 2001:187-189). However, in my opinion, I find that Proverbs 14:31, almost the central piece, expresses the main argument and that the rest of the proverbs define its premises.

A clear example comes from Proverbs 14:30 and 14:32, which contrast two types of human behaviour and their relative consequences in life. The practical results of the different human behaviours from both proverbs are exemplified in Proverbs 14:31. The inferred indirect divine actions regarding the diverse human behaviours in Proverbs 14:31 are physically exemplified in the lives of people, in Proverbs 14:30 and 14:32. Peace of heart is healthy for the body whereas envy is not (cf. Pr 14:30). Again, evil courts disaster for the perpetrator whereas safety is in moral uprightness (cf. Pr 14:32). In short, the immediate literary context of Proverbs 14:31 integrates the theme of poverty concretely, as an admonition in respect of enhancing the well-being of a community.

The qal participle masculine 3rd person suffix singular verb Whfe[o ‘ $^{\pm}\alpha'\text{chū}$ ’, ‘his Maker’, stems from hf' [' ‘ $^{\pm}'\hat{a}$ ’, ‘to do, to make’ (Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:794a; Holladay 1988:284b), that contains the sense of God as

being one who creates. This refers to God's acts of creating the heavens and earth (cf. Gn 2:4; 2 Ki 19:15; Is 37:16; Ps 115:15), part of the sky or earth (cf. Ps 95:5, 104:19, 118:24; Jnh 1:9), people in the collective sense (cf. Is 17:7; Pr 14:31, 17:5, 22:2; Jr 27:5; Job 4:17), animals (cf. Job 41:25) and Israel (cf. Hs 8:14; Ps. 95:6). Job 32:22 refers to the creation of human beings by God using a qal participle as **YnIfe** [O ‘±α’φnî’, ‘my Maker’, like the pual perfect in Psalms 139:15 **ytiyFe** [u ‘±u’‘ēȳiî’, ‘I was being made’. **hf'** [' ‘±’â’, ‘to do, to make’, can be used as a synonym for the technical qal perfect verb **ar'B'** ‘b'r'ō’, ‘shape, create, form’ as an attribute to the Creator (Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:135a; Ringgren 2001:389-403). The account of the creation of human beings uses first **hf'** [' ‘±’â’, ‘to do, to make’ (cf. Gn 1:26), and then three times **ar'B'** ‘b'r'ō’, ‘shape, create, form’ (cf. Gn 1:27). In Genesis 2:3 and Genesis 6:6, the two words appear together, while in Isaiah 45:7, **hf'** [' ‘±’â’, ‘to do, to make’, **ar'B'** ‘b'r'ō’, ‘shape, create, form, Creator’, and **rc;Y"** ‘y'far’, ‘fashion, form, frame’, are used together with equal valence (cf. Is 45:9, 45:11). Hence, the use of the qal participle **Whfe** [O ‘±α’φhû’, ‘his Maker’ in Proverbs 14:31 (and perhaps in the Book of Proverbs as a whole) relates to God's activity in creating the human being that is consistent with other Old Testament traditions. Any early Israelite must have easily identified **Whfe** [O ‘±α’φhû’, ‘his Maker’ in Proverbs 14:31 as a reference to God, together with its implications for the subject matter in question, without difficulty when it was used in proverbs.

Therefore, Proverbs 14:31 deals with one of the implications of a belief in God as the Creator of human beings. The creation motive constitutes the religious and ethical basis that identifies, affirms and enhances the human status and dignity of the poor as needing to be protected (cf. also Whybray 1994:223; Murphy 1998:107). On the one hand, this motive condemns the exploitative or oppressive human behaviour of the rich and powerful regarding the weak party. Such exploitation is found in dealing with transactions (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1995:897a) such as debts (cf. Lv 6:2, 19:13; Dt 24:14) and with the helpless (cf. 1 Chr 16:21; Am 4:1; Jr 5:6) in

early Israelite society. The belief in God as Creator of humanity also challenges the misdeed of ‘common robbery or cheating of “neighbours”, that is, fellow-members of the same intimate community’ (Whybray 1994:223). In other words, any acts of injustice to the poor are considered as a **@rExe** ‘μέρε’, ‘reproach, revile’, that is obscene before God, the Creator of all human beings. According to Proverbs 14:31 **@rExe** ‘μέρε’, ‘reproach, revile’, is equivalent in obscenity to Goliath’s insults (cf. 1 Sm 17) and the scorn of the Assyrian king concerning Hezekiah (cf. 2 Ki 19; Jdg 8:15; Is 37:4, 37:7, 37:23-24). The oppressive acts are believed to be reviling God, just like idolatry in the Israelite cult and Law (cf. Is 65:7). These acts receive the sharp condemnation of Proverbs 14:31. On the other hand, the creation motive in Proverbs 14:31 is an exhortation towards cultivating a positive religious and ethical attitude to the poor. In that case, both the physical and spiritual senses of worshipping God are implied from the subject position of the piel masculine singular participle with the third person masculine singular suffix verb **AdB.k;m.** ‘*m®kabb®¼ô*’, ‘honours him’ (cf. Ps 50:15, 91:15), and the qal participle masculine singular verb **!nExo** ‘μαινέν’, ‘to be gracious to’ (cf. Gn 33:5; Jdg 21:22; Ps 119:29).

Worship refers to the totality of the human response to the free divine gifts of life (cf. Stenmans 1995:19-20): in prayers (cf. Ps 86:9; Is 25:3), cultic sacrifices (cf. Ps 50:23; Pr 3:9) and the real life of a faith community (cf. Ps 15:4). Hence, when **AdB.k;m.** ‘*m®kabb®¼ô*’, ‘honours him’, is the object of **Whfe[ο** ‘‘*α'χhû*’, ‘his Maker’, it actualises the religious attitude of reverence towards God (cf. Ps 22:24; Pr 3:9; Is 24:15, 25:5, 43:20; Clines 1996:351b; Stenmans 1995:16). Conversely, as a result of the latter **!nExo** ‘μαινέν’, ‘to be gracious to’, becomes an object of the **!Ayb.a**, ‘*°ebyón*’, ‘needy’. The converse, referred to previously, interprets the gracious attitude as a realisation of the human kindness of the gracious towards the poor, needy and orphans (cf. Ps 37:21, 37:26, 112:5; Pr 14:31, 19:17, 28:8; Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:336a). As an African Christian I do still pose some further questions to the text of Proverbs 14:31: Is the gracious attitude a one-way street? When the rich donate to the poor, do the latter experience that aid as an

expression of (Christian) love? What constitute expressions of love where people do not need to give donations to neighbours, whether these are poor or wealthy? Are there limits to a gracious attitude?

In the African context, to be poor is sometimes considered similar to an unfortunate disadvantage stemming from birth, grave accidents, diseases or death. Misfortunes such as infirmity, physical deformity, mental disability, et cetera, are things not wished by anyone. No one can be blamed for them because anybody at any time can become disadvantaged through such misfortunes. Traditionally, it was a taboo to despise, taunt, reproach and scorn either the poor or persons with disabilities. Such a treatment of the less advantaged was regarded as injustice. In fact, mistreatment of them was cursed. It was believed that the cry of the poor, stemming from acts of injustice against them, brought destitution and poverty to the community. On account of the corporate and holistic nature of African societies, such a belief made sense. The ethical attitude contained in the proverbs relating to the treatment of the poor is based on the sanctity of creation in the traditional African worldview. In the latter's conception of the world, it was held that all life, whether that of human beings, plants, animals or the earth, has its origin in the divine life. As a result, they all share a definite innermost bond with each other, to the extent of being identified as one with the divine (cf. Magesa 1998:73-74).

The African society, therefore, emphasised many of the finer qualities of humanity, such as gentleness, goodness, kindness, generosity, charity, good will et cetera. Such qualities constituted rights and obligations suitable to every human being, including the disadvantaged of society (cf. Haule 1990:20). This concept has a divine sanction as implied in the Bena proverb: *Ikitanga umukiva kihuma kwilangi*: 'Something that helps the orphan comes from the heavens'. The proverb is a form of both appreciation and blessing, normally uttered by the recipient of assistance to his or her giver. In other words, human beings are sacred, as in the Swahili proverb: *Afadhalu utu kuliko kitu*: 'Humanity is better than a thing'. An attitude of concern and care for the disadvantaged brings more fortune and blessing to both the family and the community. The notion of blessing extolled in the idea of the present two proverbs affords an understanding of humanity's afterlife. The two proverbs can thus be conceived as a confession of faith. In the latter sense, they are used to emphasise the sacrifice of material things on behalf of human dignity. In the African context it is considerably important for both the giver and recipient to keep their human dignity in

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any form of dealings between them. When there is a failure to honour a debt on a given date, the Bena debtors appeal to the creditors' respect for their humanity by the proverb: *Mukungage amavoko amagulu ndigendage*: 'Tie my arms; let my feet walk freely', which means that the person should be allowed to go and find the means to honour the commitment in due course. The use of the Swahili proverb: *Afadhalu utu kuliko kitu*: 'Humanity is better than a thing' is similar.

[I]n such a case as one in which an individual is owed money and the debt is due on a certain date, the proverb may be used to remind someone that neither the money nor the belief that one should pay his debts on time are of any importance when it is clear that the debtor is trying to pay the debt but cannot meet the deadline without making a beggar of himself (Parker 1974:47).

The content of the idea in the above quotation points to the critical attitude and belief regarding life that makes sense of how human existence is understood and enhanced in the African society. In fact, the essence and

foundational "principle"...of African religious life and thought centers on the fact of creation. Created reality, including humanity, exists on account of the will of God. To continue to live peacefully, therefore, created reality must organize itself according to that will which God established for it from the very beginning. God's will for creation is preserved in the instructions of the people and is maintained from generation to generation through instructions of the elders and mystical actions of the ancestors (Magesa 1998:248).

The above assertion describes the performance context of African proverbs that refer to God as Creator of all and also as related to the poor. The focus of the proverbs on the poor is not neutral. They aim to reaffirm significant egalitarian principles, the reality of problems or conflicts and to provide viable solutions to issues in society (cf. also Parker 1974:89; Seitel 1972:5-10). Class distinctions are mentioned from the perspective of ordinary people as a critique of the rich, that is, reminding the latter of their obligations and responsibility towards the poor and needy. In other words, the proverbs foreground solidarity, sharing, hospitality and generosity as virtues important for sustaining and enhancing the whole existence of all people in society.

Igbo: *Chi kere nwa ogbenye kere amadi.*

'The same God created the rich human being and the poor human being' (Metuh 1981:24).

Malagasy: *Ny adala no tsy ambakaina, Andriamanitra no atahorana.*

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‘We don’t make fun of mad people, for God is to be feared’ (Rogers 1985:222).

Oromo: *Gaarummaa hinjibbani / Waaqatu foloda nama umma.*

‘Beauty is not hated. God ugly people made (He made both)’.

Maasai: *Menin Enkai olaisimani.*

‘God never listens to the robber’.

Luganda: *Bw'osekerera ekibya: osekerera yakibumba.*

‘If you laugh at the bowl: you laugh at the potter (its maker)’.

Umbundu: *Epene li vala omene; umbumba u vala kuteke.*

‘God’s displeasure is the serious thing; that of others can be endured’.

To sum up, in terms of the African perspective, Proverbs 14:31 adopts the motive of the creation of human beings as a basis to argue for an equal status and opportunity before God (cf. also Job 31:15; Pr 22:2, 29:13). The belief in God the Creator of all also has a social-critical aspect that condemns all acts of injustice against the poor and needy. However, the creation motif is not fatalistic in its approach towards the poor and needy because it does not intend to sanction their social and economic condition as a destiny. Instead, the concept of God’s creation of humans in Proverbs 14:31 presupposes the basis of a common knowledge of religious beliefs. The latter context was, as it is still now, a reasonable and influential idealistic foundation for social ethics (cf. also Murphy 1998:107; Boström 1990:60; Clements 1989:9; Whybray 1990:67). Therefore, from my viewpoint, Proverbs 14:31 offers no room for scepticism concerning any intentional pietistic or theological reinterpretation of the Yahweh proverbs. Yahwism was inseparably connected with the religious background of early Israelite holistic society that informed the proverbs on the poor, as established in my discussion of Proverbs 14:31.

The significance of the solidarity between the rich and the poor is demonstrated by practical charity and sacrificial options that result in fulfilling God’s purpose for the well-being of the disadvantaged in the community. Within the scope of the African perspective on charity and generosity, giving cannot be translated into alms and hand-outs of left-overs or excesses of wealth. These obligations focus more on equitable sharing in order to achieve and sustain the wealth in society. In fact, the haves possess enough resources to meet the needs of the have-nots to stand on their own feet. For instance, it is within the capacity of the rich to remove the unequal

terms of trade and stop the repatriation of profits on financial transactions, in order to enhance the livelihood of the poor. Freire's words also vividly express the conclusion of such a rehabilitative process:

True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the 'rejects of life,' to extend their trembling hand. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands – whether of individuals or entire peoples – need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work, and working, transform the world (Freire 1970:29).

A necessary question, especially if we are thinking of a common humanity in the above context of Proverbs 14:31, asks: What are the margins of profit in interaction or exploitation that are sustainable and equitable in society? Following my discussion so far I suggest herewith some criteria for setting the margins of profit:

- It should be understood that the existence of poverty is a sign of sin stemming from the lack of love rather than material deprivation *per se* (cf. Pr 14:31).
- The profit margin should account for the moral obligations of neighbourly love and practical conduct in corporate society (cf. Pr 21:13).
- If there are to be profits in the interaction they have to be justified by their rehabilitative contribution to the community (cf. Pr 22:7)
- Any form of economic assistance should lead to a growth in the maturity of the humanness of both the giver and the recipient (cf. Pr 28:8).

The following discussion of Proverbs 17:5 focuses on another aspect of 'religious environment and poverty': communication between stakeholders.

Proverbs 17:5

‘hq<N"yI al{ dyael. x;meſ' Whfe[o
@rExe vr'l' g[e1{

The scorner to the poor is taunting their Maker, being joyful at the disaster will not be exempted from punishment. (My translation.)

Proverbs 17:5 is part of the second collection (Pr 10:1-22:16) of the Book of Proverbs. Its catchwords ‘the poor’ and ‘Maker’ have already been discussed in Proverbs 14:31 above. The Cairo Geniza text substitutes the Masoretic text piel perfect 3rd person masculine singular verb @**R****E****X****E** ‘μέρῃ’, ‘reproach, revile’ (Holladay 1988:117b), with the qal participle noun @**R****E****X****O** ‘μερῃ’, ‘one who reproaches, taunts’ (Clines 1996:320a). The substitution only reinforces the pronoun’s object, that is, the poor: ‘*The scorner to the poor is taunting their Maker*’. The sense of the Masoretic text is unchanged by the substitution. Even the Septuagint translation of **avpollume, nw|**, ‘he who is lost, or destroyed, or ruined’ (Bauer 1979:95a), for the Masoretic text **dyaēl**. ‘לְרֹאֵל’, ‘to the distress, calamity’, in the second clause is made for the purposes of parallelism (cf. Murphy 1998:127; McKane 1970:511; Toy 1899:337, 1899:340; Whybray 1994:255). Thus I retain the Masoretic text of Proverbs 17:5.

Proverbs 17, like other chapters in the second collection (Pr 10:1-22:16), does not exhibit an intentional unity of structure (cf. Murphy 1998:127; Whybray 1994:252, 1994a:110). However, owing to the theme of folly in numerous proverbs in this chapter a thematic structure has been suggested by Murphy (1998:128; cf. also Meinhold 1991):

- Proverbs 17:1-6 Introductory sketch of examples of folly
- Proverbs 17:7-15 First group of examples
- Proverbs 17:16-20 Second group of examples
- Proverbs 17:21-28 Concluding remarks

The above outline and a proposal to consider the catchword ‘crown’ in Proverbs 16:33 and Proverbs 17:6 as forming a unity for the group (cf. Delitzsch 1982) do not illuminate the understanding of Proverbs 17:5 further. Rather, I concur with Heim regarding the theme of justice because ‘ten out of 31 verses in Prov. 16:31-17:28 embody statements related to justice. The main cluster in 17:13-15, but another series occurs in verses 16:33-17:5’ (2001:225). Justice, together with the theme of theodicy (cf. Pr 17:3, 17:15, 17:23), reinforces the religious orientation of poverty in

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Proverbs 17:5 (cf. McKane 1970:511, Heim 2001:231) that leads into the slightly modified creation motif which includes Proverbs 14:31, 22:2 and 29:13.

The close literary context of Proverbs 17:5 is built on communal relationships and the corporeal nature of the ancient Israelite society. Proverbs 17:4 is critical of the evil of gossip that destroys trust among family and society members. In fact, from an African perspective a liar is hated as the worst enemy, more opposed to the unity of the family and community than a witch. It is stated in the Swahili proverb: *Afadhal mchawi kuliko mfitini*: ‘A witch is better than a gossiper’. Many people have fallen into deadly conflict because of gossip. Unlike witches, the gossipers are not easily identifiable as enemies of society because they work from within societal interrelationships. Thus the proverb is normally used against the culprit as expressing both a regret and reproach after exposure.

The criticism of the evil attitude in Proverbs 17:4 is further exemplified in Proverbs 17:5, that is, the sadistic acts of purposely mocking and deriving pleasure from humiliating and dominating others in helpless socio-economic and political situations. Accordingly, both dehumanising tendencies against the poor face a divine objection. Thus a Tiv proverb also warns: *Ka wea tuhwa orimande mom, mbaamandev ve vaa cii*: ‘If one degrades a leper, all other lepers will also cry’ (Bergsma 1970:156). Among the Tiv it is a misdemeanour to humiliate people such as idiots, lepers and the deformed, whom they assume to possess powers to cause injuries of sorts in society. Such destitution is understood to result from having wronged the spiritual powers and ancestors. Among African societies, the ill will of the latter is commonly feared as being aroused when these disadvantaged persons are ‘abused to their faces or in their hearing’ (Bergsma 1970:157; cf. also Parker 1974:74-75). The offensive act of abusing the disadvantaged can arouse their anger and curses. It is believed that the unfortunate’s curse can bring sickness and even death to both the insulting individual and his or her society. My presentation of the Tiv proverb therefore seems to support McKane’s argument regarding Proverbs 17:5:

Nothing more fundamentally destructive than this torturing and betrayal of language can be conceived. It is all the more unforgivable, because a high form of human activity, uniquely adapted to enlarge understanding and to realize possibilities of community, is being deliberately employed to destroy trust, promote chaos and produce dissolution (1990:178).

It is against the preceding background that Proverbs 17:6 suggests a viable solution to avoid a chaotic societal situation. The corresponding words ‘glory’ and ‘honour’ are

antonyms of the disgrace of the punishment meted out in the preceding verse, Proverbs 17:5. Therefore, Proverbs 17:6 calls for humbleness in order to nurture the development of people as teams that can sustain dynamic family unity. Such an ideal intergenerational model of family and community unity contains a transforming potential that enhances people's lives. In this dynamic family ideal, the whole community, including the ancestors, is encouraged to reinforce the established standards of humanness that are ultimately grounded on God.

Proverbs 17:5 exhibits a synthetical parallel structure in the form **ab//a¹b¹** of act-consequence. Since in synthetical parallelism the second clause expounds the first, the sense and degree of the evil acts committed as regards the poor is magnified (cf. also Boström 1990:63-88). The scorning may even include the reproduction of a distressed condition in the poor people in the real sense as explained below (cf. Doll 1985:17).

| | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------|----------|
| hq<N"yI | al{ | dyael. | x;meſ' |
| Whfe[o | @rExe | vr'l' | g[el{ |
| b¹ | a¹ | b | a |

The synthetic parallelism aligns 'the scorner of the poor' on a par with 'being joyful at the disaster'. They both refer to a distressing situation. Thus the alignment expands the sense of mockery to refer to 'malicious joy' (Brown-Driver-Briggs 1999:970b), the act of uttering arrogant joy in someone's face (cf. Koehler & Baumgartner 1995:532b; Barth 1997:11). In the words of McKane, scorn is a 'delight in slander and in words which are calculated to do the maximum harm to those about whom they are spoken' (1990:178; cf. also Pr 16:27, 16:28, 17:4; Am 6:13). The synthetic paralleling of consequences, that is, 'taunting their Maker' versus 'will not be exempted from punishment', confirms the obscenity of mocking the poor, which deserves divine punishment. The implication is that the treatment of the poor is a standard measure to one's response of God (cf. Murphy 1998:129; Whybray 1994:255). In other words, such a socio-economic concern for the poor in ancient Israelite society is intrinsically inseparable from one's faith in God. A similar holistic situation is emphasised in African proverbs in which the human being is understood to be answerable to the Creator. God is believed to know everything and may be

depended on to reward and punish justly. Acts of slander towards the unfortunate and poor neighbour reflect an attitude of wickedness that dishonours God (cf. also Kimilike 2002:259; Rogers 1985:223). The threat of divine punishment implicit in the following African proverbs forms the basis of the dynamic potential that can affect the cruel behaviour of the respondent.

Shambala: *Ukintukana mkomba, wamtukana Mulungu.*

‘If you revile the ape, you revile his Creator who appointed the manner in which he should seek his food’ (Johanssen 1931:535).

Malagasy: *Ny adala no tsy ambakaina, Andriamanitra no atahorana.*

‘We don’t make fun of madmen, for God is to be feared’ (Rogers 1985:222).

Luganda: *Avuma omwali: ng'avumye eyagubumba.*

‘He who abuses the (unbaked) cooking pot: abuses the one who has made it’.

Ewe: *Mawu metsaa didri (apasa) si o.*

‘God does not trade in dishonesty’.

The above African proverbs contain an inherent implicit appeal to God’s intervention on behalf of the afflicted. In the light of the African conviction that God cares about how a person behaves to one’s fellow suffering human beings, the implicit punishment is believed to reverse the situation of the person who abuses the poor to whom the proverb is uttered. I submit that the preceding idea can also relate to the judgment of God, as in Proverbs 6:29, 11:21, 16:5, 17:5, 19:5, 28:20 (cf. also Jr 25:29, 49:12b; Nm 5:28; Ex 21:19; 1 Sm 26:9).

Thus in Proverbs 17:5, the suggested punishment of the oppressors by God is not related to the working out of natural laws under the Divine order of the cosmos (cf. Toy 1899:337). The proverb is a moral exhortation against the violation of God’s principle of justice by the illogical use of language that aggravates poverty conditions. I agree with Russell: ‘No acts of injustice, however patriotic, can pass the judgment seat of God. To pervert justice or encourage injustice is to flout the moral authority of God and deny his right to reign’ (1978:14). On the existential level, slandering creates more undeserved suffering by creating tensions and conflicts in interrelationships, leading to eventual chaos in society. In addition, theologically there is the question of

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sin and God's judgment. An act of oppression in any sense is against the will of God and will not escape God's punishment. Therefore, Proverbs 17:5 uses the justice embedded in the creation motif to define the sustainable relationship between leaders and the ordinary people. Otherwise, the price of separating religion and politics (including economics and social relationships) will be far too high for the poor owing to the resultant moral dislocation in society. I now turn to Proverbs 22:2 within this category of the 'religious environment and poverty'.

Proverbs 22:2

‘hw”hy> ~L’ku hfe[o WvG”p.nI vr’w”
ryvi[’

The rich and the poor encounter one another; the LORD is the Maker of them all.

Proverbs 22:2 is found in the last part of the second collection of Proverbs 10:1-22:16. In Proverbs 22:1-16, the Yahweh catchword can serve as a cue for grouping Proverbs 22:2 with Proverbs 22:4, 22:12 and 22:14 (cf. Whybray 1994:319). McKane (1970:563) includes Proverbs 22:8 and 22:16 by extending the theme of the Yahweh sayings to religious pietism. I contend that the theme of these sayings could also cover humanitarian implications. The humanitarian terms for wealth, rich and poverty linking Proverbs 22:1-2 and 22:16 can be considered in terms of the ancient Israelite belief in the God of creation (cf. Heim 2001:305; Pr 22:4, 22:7, 22:9, 22:16). As a result of the preceding discussion, the inclusion of Proverbs 22:2 in a slightly larger modified context together with Proverbs 14:31, 17:5 and 29:13 is not in conflict with it. Both contexts deal with creation and poverty in the Book of Proverbs (cf. also Boström 1990:48, 1990:65).

The Septuagint, Vulgate and Syriac texts substitute the Masoretic text ~L’ku ‘%ull’m’, ‘the whole, all’, with **aVmfoTe,rouj** ‘amfoterous’, which is equivalent to the Hebrew ~h , ynEv . ‘š@nêhem’, ‘both’ (cf. Pr 20:12). Since the root of the accusative plural masculine **aVmfoTe,rouj** ‘amfoterous’, means ‘both’ and ‘all’ even when more than two people are involved (cf. Bauer 1979:47b), this implies that the proverbial collective sense of the above translation of the Masoretic text is affirmed.

The concern with wealth and/or poverty easily connects Proverbs 22:2 with Proverbs 22:1. In the context of Proverbs 22:1, the goodness of wealth is made necessarily dependent on a person’s good reputation. Human values are rated on a higher scale of virtuosity than wealth in society (cf. Murphy 1998:164, 1998:167; Whybray 1994:318). Then Proverbs 22:2 proceeds to state a fundamental divine element that establishes a relationship between the rich and the poor. The relevant moral of the latter relationship is not clearly discernible from the literal text. Hence, the moral intentions of Proverbs 22:1-2 lead to the admonition in Proverbs 22:3 about

developing an understanding that averts disasters. In short, Proverbs 22:1-3 constitutes an introduction to Proverbs 22:1-16 that describes the basics of a religio-economic theme and of the need of a strategy for a cohesive, stable and progressive society. In the following verses, the admonition is clarified in specifics.

The structural form of Proverbs 22:2 is that of synthetic parallelism (cf. Murphy 1998:164; Doll 1985:18). In the first stich a fact is stated about the rich and the poor, that they ‘encounter one another’, without clarifying the sense of the verbal clause. The second stich completes the latter by focussing the subjects of the first stich on a single Creator of human beings. However, biblical commentators are divided on the meaning of the verbal clause ‘encounter one another’. As a result of the preceding scholarly disagreements, even the moral issue being addressed by the proverb has not been clearly spelt out.

- On the one hand, ‘encounter one another’ is taken to mean the side by side physical existence of the poor and rich in society. It is argued that God deliberately and purposely made them different in status. This comprises a theological defence or justification of the *status quo* in society (cf. Whybray 1994:318; Boström 1990:65; Wittenberg 1986:57). In this line of thought the verbal clause ‘encounter one another’ is figuratively suggested to mean that God bestowed the same human status, as a common possession, on both the poor and the rich so that nobody would be treated as less human. However, the defence of the *status quo* argues that the idea of a common humanity ‘is not a statement about the need for *social* or economic equality: as elsewhere in Proverbs, the existence of the poor is not considered to be disgraceful but is taken for granted as intended by God’ (Whybray 1994:318). These undecided biblical studies of the ‘encounter one another’ clause have left open the moral implications of the common humanity in Proverbs 22:2 (cf. Whybray 1995a:136; Von Rad 1972:76).
- On the other hand, an egalitarian ideal stemming from a suggested axiomatic polar contrast between the ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ in society is taken as a critical ‘reminder directed not just to the rich and poor, but as a general axiom for all to the effect that every person has rights and intrinsic value’ (Boström 1990:66). In this case, the verbal clauses ‘encounter one another’ and ‘the

LORD is the Maker of them all', taken together as explicating each other, create a sense of physical existence that is more than merely living side by side. The common life that God bestows on human beings is without any distinction of social status. But I still perceive only a limited awareness of the egalitarian ideal, based on human equality in creation, in this group of biblical scholars. As in the earlier group of biblical commentators, the latter propose a theological justification for stratification, in the sense that both classes are created by God (cf. Murphy 1998:165). As a result they suggest that Proverbs 22:2 admonishes the rich as 'responsible participants in accordance with the will of God in the process of ensuring that the life of the poor is not a burden' (Boström 1990:66; cf. also Whybray 1990:41; Golka 1993:117; Murphy 1998:165). In other words, the obligation and responsibility of the rich to the poor in such an argument basically favours merely helping the victims to cope with poverty rather than eradicating the injustice itself.

In the light of the transformational approach of this thesis the above viewpoints are rather offhand. Even the above suggested responsibility of the wealthy towards the poor represents an understatement in my view. Both groups of biblical interpreters have not come to grips with the sense of Proverbs 22:2. Rather, they concur that it 'does not attempt to explain how the co-existence of rich and poor is compatible with Yahweh's rule, but it does assert that both are contained within the order which he created and upholds' (McKane 1970:570; cf. also Boström 1990:65; Scott 1965:128).

In my view, both groups of commentators lack serious socio-economic ethical considerations of the emphasis on the common humanity of the rich and the poor, in the light of the whole Book of Proverbs. Washington (1994:198), for instance, merely mentions, without explicating, the significant proverbial motive of the poor as God's creatures in Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, 22:2 and 29:13. I have in mind the African context in which the poor comprise the majority of the people. The same situation probably obtained in ancient Israel. In such cases of poverty, the socio-economic ethical dimension cannot be treated lightly. I submit therefore that Proverbs 22:2 does not simply affirm the truth that the 'rich and poor are found side by side in every community; that the social structures everywhere have this polarity of wealth and poverty' (McKane 1970:569, cf. also Whybray 1994:318, 1995a:136; Von Rad

1972:76). Nor does Proverbs 22:2 sanction the predestination of the two classes or socio-economic systems to the ‘legal background of the city gate where the poor and the rich met in order to settle disputes’ (Boström 1990:66; cf. also Doll 1985:18-19).

In respect of the preceding argument, then, the ‘meet together’ and the ‘LORD is the Maker of them all’ do not refer to mere accidents of birth and situation (cf. Toy 1899:414). To a certain extent they refer to the seriousness of the inequality between the rich and the poor. This should elicit an appeal to the basic common humanity envisioned in the egalitarian ideal as upholding the cohesiveness, tranquillity and peace of society. Such a critical stance on behalf of the poor is vividly stated by Nyerere:

At this time in man’s history, it must imply a divine discontent and a determination for change. For the present condition of men must be unacceptable to all who think of an individual person as a unique creation of a living God. We say man was created in the image of God. I refuse to imagine a God who is poor, ignorant, superstitious, fearful, oppressed, wretched – which is the lot of the majority of those He created in his own image. Men are creators of themselves and their conditions, but under present conditions we are creatures, not of God, but of our fellow men (1974:85-86; cf. also Getui 1999:61).

From the African perspective, I agree completely with the argument that God did not create poor people. Such a critical egalitarian principle, fundamentally present in the African traditional context, is quite evident in the following proverbs concerning the creation of human beings:

Aniocha: *Chukwu ke akakpo ke osowuzo.*

‘It is the same God who created the dwarf who also created the robust child’ (Monye 1989:60).

Luganda: *Ffenna tuli byuma: twasisinkana mu ssasa.*

‘We all are tools (of the same master): we were all once made in the same smithy’.

Igbo: *Chi kere nwa ogbenye kere amadi.*

‘The same God created the rich human being and the poor human being’ (Metuh 1981:24).

In the above African proverbs, the welfare of the poor in society is enhanced by the pervasive belief in God as the Creator of all human beings. In other words, this understanding of the sanctity of life plays a major role in the way the African people conceive and value human life in all its dimensions. The foundational divine

dimension inherent in human life as part of the entire created reality owes its existence to the will of God. This concept plays an important organising role for human life in order to achieve the purpose for which God created it. As a general revelation the will of God for creation is being transmitted anew in the preserved societal instructions to each generation by the elders and the mystical actions of the living-dead (cf. Magesa 1998:248; cf. also Wanjohi 1997:168).

Moreover, in the communal nature of the African society the egalitarian perception, based on creation, denies God's involvement in stratification. God's creation is considered to be perfect. Wealth, as I said earlier, whether independently or obligatorily accrued, is understood to be intended for the promotion of the social welfare of the community. In spite of the ideal, divine, perfect and dynamic socio-economic structure human beings have created wicked means of livelihood that result in the poverty of others (cf. also Nwasike 1976:55; Nyerere 1974:86). As a result, the existence of both the rich and poor has become almost inevitable. This fact of life does not imply that the African proverbs dealing with the common humanity of the rich and the poor intend to sanction the *status quo* in any sense. Instead, these proverbs act as destabilising or debunking agents regarding the absolutising tendencies that seem to develop in society simply because poverty, as an injustice, and peace are in the long run incompatible. Stability is necessary for a people-centred economic, social and political development. In this sense, stability in society does not imply a mechanical respect for the *status quo* but, rather, working to enhance justice (cf. Nyerere 1974:84).

Therefore, from the African perspective Proverbs 22:2 is critical of the growing gap between the rich and the poor, which is a sign of the violation of God's will for the harmony, order and justice which he created for society. For the ancient Israelite as in the African economics of affection, obedience to the will of God, admonished of Proverbs 22:2 in concrete terms, 'means to care for the community, to practice rehabilitative hospitality and to engage in responsible stewardship' (Brueggemann 1997:464; cf. also Collins 1980:1, 1980:1; Von Rad 1972:125; Wittenberg 1986:59). Wealth as a community trust gains more value through generosity or a 'good name' than by the exploitation of the poor. The last text in this category is Proverbs 29:13, that focuses on common actions with divine sanction.

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Proverbs 29:13

ׁhw"hy> ~h , ynEv . ynEy [e-ryaime
WvG"p . nI ~ykik'T . vyaiw> vr '

The poor and the tormentor encounter each other; the LORD gives light to the eyes of both. (My translation.)

Proverbs 29:13 is located in Proverbs 28-29, which forms the last section of Proverbs 10-29. The Masoretic text of Proverbs 29:13 does not exhibit any textual variation in its transmission; therefore, I have also adopted it as it appears to be closer to the original text.

There is no doubt that the text of Proverbs 29:13 exhibits a self-contained thematic unity in its presentation of poverty and God's providence in creation. In addition, Proverbs 29:13 uses the verbal clause WvG"p . nI 'ni,g'sû', 'encounter each other', in the first stich, like Proverbs 22:2. Proverbs 29:13, however, substitutes terms for the rich and for God's gracious actions. I agree with the consensus of most biblical scholars that the substitution of the ḵyvi [' '±'śîr ', 'rich' (Pr 22:2), by the term ~ykik'T . vyai '±iš t@½i½im ', 'the tormentor', in Proverbs 29:13, accommodates the content of the former proverb into the immediate royal literary context (cf. also Whybray 1994:401; Waltke 2005:441; Murphy 1998:222). In fact, the latter suggestion is also reinforced by the use of the term hw"hy> 'ywhw ('dæn'y) ', 'the LORD', together with the contrasting terms for poverty and oppressor that link Proverbs 29:13. This suggestion fits into the modified extended context of religious environment and poverty that unifies Proverbs 14:31, 17:5 and Proverbs 22:2.

Some biblical scholars suggest a thematic link between the three verses of Proverbs 29:12-14 because Proverbs 29:13 has been inserted between the two contrastive proverbs concerning the negative and positive images of the king (cf. Whybray 1994:401; Toy 1899:510-511). However, unlike Proverbs 29:14 that directly credits the long period of the king's governance to his just and fair administration of justice to the poor, Proverbs 29:12 does not directly spell out the effect on the king's rule of his wicked officials. Although not concretely, the negative influence of the

wicked officials can be inferred from Proverbs 29:12 because of the officials' involvement in the perversions of the social order that the king dutifully strives to create and sustain in society (cf. Pr 25:5; Perdue 2000:2400). From the preceding discussion, I consider that the circumstantial clause of Proverbs 29:12 is not strong enough to suggest a short duration for a wicked person's rule even if the possibility cannot be ruled out. Thus I tend to agree with Waltke's (2005:440) proposed immediate literary context for Proverbs 29:13, as Proverbs 29:12-15 based on an ethical motive behind the text. There is a common ethos in the verses in Proverbs 29:12-15 regarding the corresponding three centres of power, that is, God, king and mother. The ethos gains a theological foundation by means of the use of the term 'God' (v. 13). The employment of the term 'king' (vs. 12, 14) explicates the practical application of the preceding ethos for community in general. In the same way the term 'mother' (v. 15) focuses the development of the ethos on the family as the basic unit in community. I have already discussed the details of the preceding ethical relationship in Proverbs 29:14 above.

Proverbs 29:13 exhibits both an antithetical parallelism as in Proverbs 22:2 and a synthetical parallelism as in Proverbs 29:1, 29:5, 29:9, 29:12-14, 29:19-21 and 29:24 (cf. Murphy 1998:220, Toy 1899:511). Synthetically, the word 'poor' corresponds to the verb 'torment' that could relate to the idea of wealth being used as some kind of exploitation of the poor (cf. Pr 22:16 above). In the antithetical parallelism the 'poor' is contrasted with 'tormentor' as his or her opposite (cf. Pr 22:2 above). However, once again, the ethical message of Proverbs 29:13 enjoys no consensus among biblical scholars as the following arguments show:

- The Septuagint and the Vulgate used the narrow terms 'debtor' and 'the creditor' in place of the wider Masoretic text's Hebrew words 'poor' and 'tormentor' to reduce the 'encounter' between the two to a mere legal issue in business (cf. also Whybray 1994:401; Boström 1990:66, Doll 1985:18-19).
- Proverbs 29:13 'about the poor man and the oppressor seems to be the most scandalous: is this said out of cynicism or resignation in the face of reality? Perhaps it is indicative that creation is not mentioned here. "The Lord gives light to their eyes" does mean the granting of existence, to be sure, but it also signifies the dependence and limitations of the oppressor – certainly not his

justification' (Hermisson 1978:45). Hence, it simply states a fact concerning the existence of polarities within the created order (cf. McKane 1970:640; Clifford 1999:252) and a future expected social equality in heaven (cf. Waltke 2005:441). In other words, both the rich and the poor benefit from God's grace in such a way that the rich have to stop exploiting the poor, respect the dignity of the latter and graciously share with the poor their wealth. And the poor should not be jealous of the wealthy because they are also dependent on God's grace for their life.

- Proverbs 29:13 figurative sense of an encounter between the poor and the rich before the benevolent God, an encounter that does not spell out directly the moral implication, unlike Proverbs 17:5 and 14:31, but it expresses a simple concern for the poor. It also represents a low-key renunciation of oppressive conduct (cf. Boström 1990:67; Murphy 1998:222).
- Whybray (1990:41-42) strongly emphasises a figurative sense of encounter between the poor and rich/tormentor before God that does not necessitate the eradication of poverty at all. Rather, the divine element in Proverbs 29:13 (cf. also Pr 22:2) mostly concerns recognition by the rich of their equal common humanity with the poor, so that the latter should not be treated as 'mere inanimate tools to be exploited' (Whybray 1990:42) or even humiliated.
- Considering that each proverb calls for a performance situation, Westermann (1995:123-126; cf. also Washington 1994:198) suggests that Proverbs 29:13 and similar proverbs dealing with God as Creator of humanity, perform a social critical function. By means of communicating the divine reality about humanity the criticism addresses violations of the ideal by certain members of the community, in order to avert disharmony in the cohesion, peace, stability and sustainable welfare of the entire society.

I am not opposed to any of the above points of view because in spite of minor differences in emphasis, they all point more or less to the possibility of the presence of a social critical perspective in Proverbs 29:13. But I tend to think that the significance pointed out by Westermann in the fourth point above, favours the popular line of argument more than the three suggestions preceding it. Therefore, it is important at this point to elaborate further on Westermann's point above because his

approach does not provide enough details of the performance situation behind his critique of Proverbs 29:13.

In my opinion, the masculine singular hiphil participle **ynEy [e-ryaime** ‘*m¢°îr-±ēnē*’, ‘enlighten the eyes, i.e. revive’ (DCH 1993:160b; cf. also Koehler & Baumgartner 1994:24b; Ps 13:3, 19:8; Ezr 9:8), can denote more than having the two classes of people in society being provided with equal opportunities in life (cf. Whybray 1994:401, who suggests this interpretation using Job 3:16 and Ps 49:19). Rather, the divine suggestion in Proverbs 29:13 emphasises the abolition of differences between these classes because they contradict the divine purpose for human beings and their dignity in their belonging together (cf. also Levin 2001:255). This means that the masculine singular hiphil participle **ynEy [e-ryaime** ‘*m¢°îr-±ēnē*’, ‘enlighten the eyes’, should be considered together with the possessive adjective masculine dual construct ~**h**, **ynEv .** ‘*š®nēhem*’, ‘of both’, in emphasising togetherness in all aspects of life and means of livelihood.

In the African context the preceding issue is spelled out in even clearer terms:

The arrangement of the African community’s goods indicates an interest in the common humanity of all human beings and in solidarity and reciprocity. Each person has essential needs for living life. Any individual variations – physical, mental or any others – do not and are not allowed to affect this belief, even if they are recognised and appreciated by others for the way in which they contribute to the solidarity of the community. Thus, any inequalities of human qualities are compensated for by such “mutual supplementation.” This is one of the hinges for the existence of society (Magesa 1998:245; cf. also Dalton 1967a:157).

The African emphasis on a common humanity in the above quotation does not involve a mere membership of the human identity as such that is important in a communal setting. Neither is it a plea for the tormentors to hand out leftovers and excess wealth in order to gain popularity from the poor. Rather, it concerns the common action which has divine sanction that will enhance the humanity of both the poor and the tormentor. In the African holistic worldview, God has provided humanity with common resources, such as land, so that no single person is supposed to abrogate them to oneself in any selfish sense. Even more important, it is against God’s purpose ‘that we should use his free gifts to us – land and air and water – by permission of our fellow human beings’ (Nyerere 1967:56; cf. also Magesa 1998:63, 1998:244, 1998:246). Thus, taking into account that both the poor and the tormentor share a

community with their ancestors and God, any negative action in the preceding lines dehumanises human beings. As a result, the humiliation destroys trust in interrelationships and the solidarity necessary for the development of the community. In fact, it renders the perpetrator of the misbehaviour less human as well (cf. Bujo 2003:114-116). African proverbs on one's common humanity are situated within the community performance context. The emphasis of such proverbs on this theme falls on the rehabilitation of the communal ideals of egalitarianism, solidarity and mutual assistance in society:

- Oromo: *Namni Waaqan jiru / wal irra hinjiru.*
‘People who before God live, with each other (a superior) there is not’.
- Bahema: *Nru si tsu naro nza.*
‘Human beings did not come out of a tree or stick’ (Bujo 2003:115).
- Bashi: *Isu likalaka n’izulu linalake.*
‘When the eye weeps, it makes the nose weep too’ (Bujo 2003:115).
- Luganda: *Ekitta obusenze: buba bunaanya (= bunafu).*
‘A lazy person kills the whole community’.

In brief, in the light of the above African proverbial senses, Proverbs 29:13 functions as a social critique of exploitative situations in the facilitation of the welfare of the poor. The social criticism mentioned previously conveys a communal consciousness that underscores a strong sense of solidarity regarding the common responsibility. In such a case common responsibility inheres in the proper management of the community’s goods and resources, for the enhancement of the well-being of both the individual and the society. The community goods and services that the human beings have been divinely endowed with include material (land, air, water, mineral resources, people, et cetera) and immaterial (ethos, ideals, virtues, spirit, intellect, et cetera) aspects that substantially contribute to a higher standard of living for the majority of families in communities. In this sense of common responsibility, for instance, it is obvious that the results of the indiscriminate ecological destruction of the earth’s resources will not discriminate against the poor and leave the rich behind. All of them will be equally affected adversely as no separate planets exist, one for the rich and another one for the poor. There is a single planet, namely Earth, for the whole of humanity.

A case in point, with regard to the lack of a common responsibility for environmental conservation, is the Katrina hurricane (2005) that is, in my view, the result of the uncontrolled process of global warming. The hurricane did not exempt a wealthy nation like the United States of America which believes that signing the Kyoto Protocol will adversely affect its economy. The unmistakable signs of the hurricane's aftermath, that is the lack of power, fuel, food, communication and the collapse of ordered society in the United States, indicate the corporate nature of civilisation itself. The resultant oil price hikes worldwide also affected the developmental progress of poor countries as well, especially in Africa.

The challenge of holistic development regards the inclusion of religious elements in the other (political, social and economic) public domains of life. My exploration of Proverbs 14:31, 17:5, 22:2 and 29:13 in terms of the interrelationship of the religious situation and poverty was intended to bring into perspective the former's possible integration into the transformation of the society. The African contribution in this subsection strongly affirms the inseparability of the material and spiritual development of the individual and community. A creation theology that permeates the worldview of ordinary people significantly orientates their ethical attitudes towards justice and the sanctity of creation (cf. Pr 14:31). Divine punishment for malicious deeds against the poor indicates that socio-economic concern is intrinsically connected with faith (cf. Pr 17:5), the more so in terms of the significant implication of a common humanity that advocates common action to enhance the humanness of both the rich and the poor. Such action concerns handling the divinely-given common wealth for the benefit of all (cf. Pr 29:13). I argue that religious values must constructively and intrinsically inform the other public domains of life so as to devise an effective and sustainable strategy in meeting the challenge of poverty.

4.8 Conclusion

Briefly, in this chapter I have tried to present, analyse and defend at length the transformational perspective in a few selected poverty proverbs from the Book of Proverbs. The said perspective in the analysis has drawn on certain cultural insights about poverty in the African proverbial performance context. In its own right this

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context enjoys a rich heritage of social morality, egalitarianism and revolutionary ethics that can be adopted and adapted into modernity. Certain pertinent issues, therefore, underlying the challenge to poverty from a holistic perspective have been gleaned especially from the popular setting of the proverbs on poverty in the Book of Proverbs. New ethical questions regarding various popular social, economic, political and religious interrelationships have created fresh insights into the conception of poverty in this material by the application of the African holistic worldview. In my discussion the vestigial elements of the ordinary people's concerns about survival in the selected proverbs have been brought to light, in some cases with very interesting results. Throughout the discussion, I have consistently appealed to the African holistic approach concerning the challenge of poverty in order to reveal the dynamism of the social, economic, political and religious principles underlying the selected proverbs on the poor. Corporation, community, equality, solidarity, stability and peace are collective values embedded in these dynamic aspects of African life. Such collective values and ideals are used as supportive modes for the resource allocation, production and distribution of the common goods and services in order to enhance the quality of life and livelihood among the ordinary people in society.

Hence, human relationships make for the advantages of both quality and quantity in the struggle against poverty because in the collective values of communal societies the relationships are regarded as permanent. Human value is integrated into any economic transaction in the communal society as its most viable and sustaining determining factor. But such a value is also central in political matters, to allow for mutual responsibility and democratic participation in the dispensation of justice and fairness. On the whole, human value enjoys a divine sanction that destabilises any form of totalitarianism in the handling of the common wealth in society. I am convinced that the African traditional way of life has to a certain extent shed light on the ethical dilemma encountered in the Western biblical studies dealing with poverty proverbs in the Old Testament Book of Proverbs. In the following chapter, I will summarise the discussions and present my conclusions.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis was to explore possible ways in which the African view on poverty, derived from relevant African proverbs, can enable contemporary Bible readers to understand Old Testament proverbs on poverty. There were three main reasons for this undertaking:

- A particular concern was to make an attempt towards empowering the poor in African Christian contexts. My attempt was based on the growing assumption that these proverbs originated from a popular social setting. In other words, the proverbial texts on poverty reflect or voice the pains and hopes of ordinary people who experience suffering as a result of injustices. There are extensive implications of the understanding of poverty from such a popular social context for such proverbs. My motivation, therefore, captures the mood of African biblical scholars and theologians engaged in the search for processes of contextualisation.
- I strategically raised pertinent issues relating to poverty in the predominant views expressed by Western studies of the Book of Proverbs that may need some kind of reconsideration and reworking. I argued that these studies emphasised the conservative stance of the book towards the *status quo* regarding the poor and the rich in society. If this interpretation was found to be true, I argued that there could be no hope for any poverty eradication strategy.
- An attempt was made to overcome the prevailing methodological constraints in the study of the Book of Proverbs. This was done by applying a contextual approach that integrates historical criticism, social anthropological criticism and rhetorical criticism. The extension of the methodological spectrum hitherto employed in biblical studies could create a possible forum for dialogue that demands an equal participation of diverse scholars in the relevant theological concerns of the universal church.

5.2 ‘Tying the knot’

In order to grapple with the central question raised in the first chapter of this thesis I decided to lay down a background for understanding the transformational perspective which is notable in the Book of Proverbs. In the second chapter, I undertook a critical analysis of the dominant Western studies of the Book of Proverbs by focusing on how poverty is understood in those circles. The analysis observed the various ways in which the subjectivity caused by the exegetes’ social context affected their discussions of poverty.

- Results revealed that most of these authors’ interpretations of poverty in the Book of Proverbs bore the influential marks of Western economic and political systems. Such subjectivity obtains, regardless of the existing debate over the ‘official’ and ‘popular’ social locations of the proverbs in the Book of Proverbs. Ranking high on the understanding of poverty in Western studies are the marks of individualism, materialist consumerism, moral relativism, insensitivity, exclusivity and obsession with the ‘expert’.
- Western subjectivity stemming from an affluent setting revealed far-reaching implications for the interpretation of proverbs on the poor in the Book of Proverbs. Among the significant results, for instance, is the compartmentalisation that divorces economic issues from the social, political and religious spheres of life. This separation has led to simplistic and problematic poverty eradication programmes. It was demonstrated that in essence such top – bottom programmes basically sanctioned subordination and domination because they tended to neglect the ordinary people’s agency in terms of their own economic change.
- Most of the Western-oriented studies on poverty in the Book of Proverbs took as their point of departure the Ancient Near Eastern wisdom setting. This method posited the inferior cultural contribution of ancient Israelite resourcefulness in comparison to that of its superior neighbours in terms of economic and political development processes. In most of the studies in this group, the approach to poverty issues was found to be relativistic. The results of their relativism favoured the preservation of the socio-economic and

political advantages of the minority privileged class in society. Such a failure to recognise the ancient Israelite worldview underlying the proverbs on the poor revealed the difficulty of relying solely on historical critical methods for biblical interpretation.

There were, however, too few African biblical studies on poverty, especially on the Book of Proverbs, to critically analyse poverty in terms of transformation. Basically the studies in this group are consciously subjective because they begin from a contextual concern. Certainly much of the African biblical literature on the Book of Proverbs significantly contributes to establishing the popular social context of these proverbs. Yet with regard to the implications of the similarities between the Old Testament proverbs and African proverbs in interpreting poverty little has been done. I commend the only available and indeed noteworthy example of the latter argument: the *bosadi* (womanhood) approach on the poem of the ‘Woman of Worth’ (Pr 31:10-31). This reading reveals the presence of numerous empowering possibilities both in the biblical text and in African culture.

Unfortunately the rest of the African biblical studies on the Book of Proverbs show the influence of the Western framework within which the scholars were trained. Stereotypes are present in the preceding studies: for instance, the uncritical wholesale acceptance of the ‘official’ social setting of the Old Testament proverbs, which prevents the African biblical scholars from addressing concerns of oppression, exploitation and social injustice as causes of poverty in the Book of Proverbs. A similar state of detachment from the existential situation is discerned in other African elites dealing with proverbs on the poor from a ‘safe’ distance. In short, three important factors in the analysis of both the Western and the African [biblical] studies include the following:

- No biblical exegete can claim to be purely objective in the interpretation of a text. One needs to be critically conscious of the social context informing one’s framework in the reading of the text.
- All biblical methodologies are limited in certain areas so that they need to be complemented.

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- Poverty is multifaceted in nature. This causes it to be a complex, challenging subject in our contemporary society, especially in the African context, just as it was in ancient Israelite society. Eradicating poverty, however, is not a gesture of charity that does not attack the causes of poverty. Rather it is an act of justice that protects fundamental human dignity and decent life and that leads to true freedom. Thus the need for poverty eradication invites the prioritisation of devising an integrated approach that consolidates social justice, equality and morality in all spheres of human life.

Since the main purpose of this thesis was ultimately to analyse the transformational possibilities of poverty proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, the third chapter led towards the development of an understanding of poverty in African contexts. A social anthropological approach was utilised to evaluate the increasing need for a viable and sustainable socio-economic alternative to the challenge of poverty in Africa. Many Africans and African scholars variously supported a vision of transformation strategies that would take into account the holistic worldview of the African society. Such an emancipating process required revisiting those African cultural values and ideals that could be used to re-define, re-examine, and re-design certain poverty aspects and poverty eradication solutions in the Book of Proverbs. This was undertaken in the fourth chapter of this study.

Several significant characteristics of the African understanding of the challenge of poverty affirmed the transforming possibilities of African proverbs on the poor:

- An inclusive community as the basic organisation and dynamic organism that promotes functional and moral behaviour in society.
- An emphasis on societal and communal mutual obligations and responsibility.
- A vision of a community organisation that encourages meaningful participation and a better life for all members.
- A vision of an egalitarian community that affirms the inherent human equality before God.

- A vision of a community that meaningfully restores the productive capacity of its members so that they can also participate in contributing to sustaining the well-being of the society.
- A life-centred educational process as the central aspect in empowering people with the knowledge and wisdom necessary for life.

Within the above incomplete list of some affirmative transforming characteristics of the African socio-economic setting, the multifaceted nature and causes of poverty were defined. Such a holistic approach also determined how poverty was challenged. The traditional African values and social norms permeated society's life and were a means of inducing change in a meaningful manner with greater effectiveness. For the latter process, proverbs effectively facilitated both the expression and inculcation of the established social, religious, economic and political morals. The methodology of proverbs is life-centred. It calls for collective participation. The proverbs also exhibit a holistic worldview owing to an embedded religious orientation that enhances justice. Thus in an African perspective, a successful developmental process consisted of the mutual reinforcement and innovation of the various spheres of life as an integrated whole over successive generations.

The fourth chapter of this thesis consisted mainly of a re-examination and re-reading of several selected proverbs on the poor from the Book of Proverbs, employing the previously discussed African holistic understanding of poverty. A contextual approach to the texts bridged the gap between myself as an African contemporary reader, the text as literature, the original intended reader and the author(s) of the text. In respect of this approach, similar social, economic, political and religious conditions were presumed to apply in both the ancient Israelite and the traditional African societies. As a result I used the traditional African proverbial context as an alternative to the performance context in order to understand the given proverbs in the Book of Proverbs. Significant results, relevant for the reinforcement of a holistic transforming strategy to poverty in the Book of Proverbs, affirmed my hypothesis regarding the traditional African transforming characteristics. As a result, I am also convinced that the emerging innovative ideas can be integrated into eradication programmes so as to promote a viable and sustainable development process in the African context.

5.3 The need to bring the Old Testament and Africa together

The findings of this research concerning the transformational possibilities of proverbs on the poor in the Book of Proverbs demonstrated the benefit of establishing a cross-cultural link between Africa and the Old Testament. Social anthropological analogies and comparisons provided fresh insights into ordinary people's perspectives on poverty. The people at the grassroots display a hopeful outlook on life as an essential tool of their survival strategies. As a matter of fact, their approaches to the various social, economic, political and religious aspects of oppression and liberation were oriented towards giving life to all members of their society, regardless of gender and status. When this practical African outlook is integrated with the results of historical critical methods and literary criticism regarding selected texts of the Book of Proverbs the benefit is two-fold.

The implications for Old Testament studies include:

- Challenging the falsity of the conservative *status quo* understanding of poverty in the Book of Proverbs, opposed to the possibility of a popular transformational perspective. The latter approach is used in this thesis to demonstrate the argument that the proverbs of the Book of Proverbs 'are not to be lightly dismissed as "popular": they made an essential contribution to the social and political life of Israel, and thus constitute an important element in its thought' (Whybray 1995:149).
- Reconciling the dominant Westernised intellectual voices and peripheral theological voices. The latter are greatly affecting the transformation of contemporary societies, especially in Africa. Such a methodological integration opens a possible forum for dialogue where the two sides can equally participate (cf. Golka 1993:120-122). In other words, the various Old Testament studies can become alive for the purposes of relevant application in Africa. This study has discussed poverty as one of the immediate areas in Africa that opens up for the relevant application of the Old Testament understanding of the poor.

The implications for Africa encompass:

- The affirmation of an African identity in terms of self-perception, community consciousness and solidarity that can also reinforce the necessary human values in the context of the global family.
- The mobilisation of the local potential processes for the rehabilitation of the socio-economic conditions of individuals and communities. This study has identified a dynamic African socio-economic supportive system that can be dynamically harnessed for effective transformation of the lives of poor people. Some of the dynamic resources that can be revived include mutual assistance; socially-centred land, property and wealth; loaned cows and farms; life-centred training and religious beliefs.

The above points indicate the need to bring together the Old Testament and Africa. The cross-cultural approach, for instance, illuminated the understanding of poverty on both sides as shown above. Moreover:

The Old Testament is essentially a story of a small band of people – a people who obviously knew much suffering through conquest by surrounding tribes. Through the power of remarkable spiritual determination to forge cohesion and carve a distinctive identity, they succeeded in liberating themselves. They experienced this power as the children of Yahweh, their only God, who was there almost exclusively for them and was personalized as such. They experienced God primarily through the lens of communal identity, so that whatever did not serve this goal was either eliminated from the story or made subservient to it (Magesa 2004:3).

Therefore, the juxtaposition of the Old Testament and African communal identities provokes fresh reflection on questions of concern to Africa stemming from the biblical text.

5.4 Implications for the teaching of the Old Testament in Africa today

I began this thesis with the following concern: *in what way can the African view on poverty (derived from relevant African proverbs) enable Bible readers to make meaning of or understand Old Testament proverbs on poverty in an attempt towards facilitating the empowerment of the poor in African Christian contexts?* Most of the question has already been discussed in detail, except for the last part. The present sub-

section will deal with it, that is, how to influence the poor in an African Christian context(s)?

Statistics indicate that Christianity is the most prevalent faith in Africa, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (cf. *World Christian Encyclopedia* 2001). Such a dominant force on the continent has to be reckoned with, if one is to bring about economic, political and socio-cultural change. However, in spite of the long history of its presence and the acclaimed enormous growth of Christianity in Africa, its superficial rootedness in African society has concerned African theologians from the 1960s into the twenty-first century (cf. Speckman & Kaufmann 2001; Kwenda 2002; et cetera). In particular, the close similarities between the worldviews of the Old Testament and Africa have led to some misinterpretations and an abusive use of the biblical text. One clear example of the problematic approach to the Bible is observed in the magical use of the Psalms for healing purposes in both mainline and African-initiated churches in Africa (cf. Grantson 1991:363-370). Another example comprises the growing socio-economic injustice and poverty in Africa, resulting from spiritualised biblical teachings. Such teachings tend to emphasise and inculcate a sense of hopelessness, fatalism, relativity and privatisation of faith in believers. As a result, the resource of faith becomes inactive in directing and inspiring transformational visions and strategies in Africa (cf. Nürnberg 1999:156-163). This thesis has also indicated the preceding deficiencies in the *interpretatio Africana* understanding of poverty in the Old Testament (Book of Proverbs) which solely relies on the Western style and culture of biblical interpretation. The Westernised interpretations clothed in African Christianity do not automatically engage meaningfully with the African social, economic, political and religious contexts.

Certainly as warned by Mbiti two decades ago, it is still crucial to note that the

Christian way of life is in Africa to stay; certainly within the foreseeable future....Much of the theological activity in Christian Africa today is being done as an oral theology...from living experiences of Christians. It is theology in the open, from the pulpit, in the market-place, in the home as people pray or read and discuss the scriptures....African Christianity cannot wait for written theology to keep with it....Academic theology can...only come afterwards and examine the features retrospectively in order to understand them (1986:229).

My re-examination of the prevalent form of African Christianity reveals that it has remained foreign to African thought constructs to a large extent, with catastrophic results for societies in Africa. Truly Christianity is in Africa to stay, but it has to be African Christianity. I consider that Mbiti's suggestion in the above quotation that

African academic theology lags behind African Christianity identifies the blame for the adverse effects society has suffered so far. By taking a back seat, African theology has failed to provide the right direction and inspiration to the faith community in addressing reality. So far academic theology has contributed very little, if at all, in the actual sense towards ensuring viable and sustainable transforming socio-economic progress in Africa. Thus, from the perspective of this thesis, the preceding discussion offers more than adequate reason to re-examine and re-design the form and content of the curriculum for the teaching of Old Testament studies in Africa today:

- The pedagogy of the Old Testament in Africa should establish an environment of communal care and concern that enables learners to reflect on and assimilate both the collective and individual intentions of the societal educational system.
- The methods of teaching the Old Testament in Africa should exhibit a pragmatic or life-centred approach in order to promote effective learning and to evidence an existential character which is appropriate and of high quality.
- The methodology of teaching the Old Testament in Africa should be human-centred so as to enable theologians and biblical scholars to integrate the ordinary people's perspectives on reality into their academic, theoretical discourses.

It is in terms of the above synthetic methodological propositions that this thesis submits an Old Testament test case to the twenty-first century African theological task in order to make it 'the African century' (cf. Kwenda 2002:174).

5.5 Conclusion

The impetus for undertaking this thesis was the conviction that the predominant interpretation of poverty proverbs in the Book of Proverbs displayed a conservative outlook. Such a *status quo*-oriented socio-economic outlook was not helpful for the transformation of the life and livelihood of the poor in my African Christian context. On the contrary, such a conservative outlook exacerbated poverty in all spheres of

life. In my view, there is a need for a re-examination and re-reading of the poverty texts in the Book of Proverbs.

Statistics all over Africa, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, portray worsening socio-economic conditions. Many poverty eradication programmes have either collapsed or come to an end. Current solutions proposed by African scholars in all fields indicate the mobilisation of local resources as the basic point of departure. However, the contribution of the African socio-economic structure itself has tended to be neglected in development. Many modern scholars have wrongly considered it to be a conservative, flawed and a doomed mode of development. On the contrary, a critical re-evaluation of the understanding of poverty informed by the traditional African worldview has identified a dynamic, socio-economically supportive system that empowered people for human development.

Using the established similarities between the holistic worldviews of ancient Israel and traditional Africa, this thesis attempted an analysis of sixteen proverbs on the poor from the Book of Proverbs. The shortcomings in the predominant interpretations were revealed at various points in each text. Many ethical and moral issues regarding the proverbs in question were illuminated in terms of the African communal perspective. The essence of justice in creation theology was found to perform a critical function that was elaborated in the light of the African communal perspective. Thus the Book of Proverbs' outlook on poverty was established to encompass a potential for a dynamic transformation similar to that of the socio-economic supportive system of traditional African society.

The implication of this study for both church and society is that the transformational social, economic, political and religious possibilities thus revealed can readily be extended to modern situations. A communal definition of poverty is necessary to understand its core content and causes with regard to devising successful eradication strategies. Proverbs constitute the legitimating catalysts of change in society. As a matter of fact, this thesis is not exhaustive. However it aims at provoking further dialogue in both the subject of poverty and the study of the Book of Proverbs. In other words, this work should further motivate deeper and more widespread application of the abundant social anthropological sources in biblical studies. Africa is replete with proverbs in both written and oral collections. Such rich sources should be used effectively now, while those who know them are still available to creatively bequeath a quality civilisation to new generations. Among the Bena it is

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common to invite further opinions and greater participation in discussion by uttering the proverb: *Amahodzo mugove pawolofu silwijaga lukani*: ‘Ideas are a form of solidarity, in the presence of many people no word gets lost’. It is hoped that this study has not only furthered the discussion but will lead to practical action.

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APPENDIX

List of African Proverbs used in the Thesis.

A. Conventional sources

NB: My own literal translations.

Bena:

- 1) *Amahodzo mugove pawolofu silwijaga lukani*: ‘Ideas are a form of solidarity, in the presence of many people no word gets lost’.
- 2) *Ikitanga umukiva kihuma kwilangi*: ‘Something that helps the orphan comes from the heavens’.
- 3) *Ilifugamilo limwi sililelu umwana*: ‘One knee does not sit a child’.
- 4) *Ilipwela ulimililage*: ‘Inherited wealth needs working on and care’.
- 5) *Indzala jiwunga*: ‘Hunger instructs’.
- 6) *Indzala likoko jikoma na jumuhavi*: ‘Hunger is a dangerous enemy it kills even witches’.
- 7) *Inguluvi nyamalanga; umuganga pasi gwinoga*: ‘God is creative; even the soil of the earth is sweet’.
- 8) *Kifuku kilo kinzila vuvalo*: ‘The rain season is like a night there is no place to escape’.
- 9) *Kwejihumile ngolo kwejibitila nongwa*: ‘It originates from an alarm and proceeds to a prosecution court case’.
- 10) *Lukolo pamaho*: ‘A person who is relative only on the face’.
- 11) *Muheka pang’ende munumbula lwitema lungi*: ‘The mouth is laughing but in the heart is cooking something different’.
- 12) *Mukangala pamugove apako pele pagona*: ‘You work harder at the communal farm while your own remains uncultivated’.
- 13) *Mukungage amavoko amagulu ndigendage*: ‘Tie my arms; let my feet walk freely’.
- 14) *Mupina pakilo pamunyi ihanga huwolofu*: ‘An orphanage is at night; in the daytime one is among the many’.
- 15) *Ndemuafwe vunofu tufwe musale*: ‘If you died well we are dying of hunger’.
- 16) *Nde avipe vako usitagila ngubi mugunda*: ‘Even if your wife is angry she still belongs to you, you cannot leave the farm to wild pigs’.
- 17) *Pe gafwe amagendo umudaho gwagwikela kulekedza hela amafi*: ‘When the thighs are paralysed the faeces come out freely’.
- 18) *Pe wisaka ubite kya ng’ani gende wiyena; pe wisaka ubite pawutali gende na vangi*: ‘When you want to go fast, walk alone; when you want to go far, walk with others’.
- 19) *Ugendale uludodi; ulukafu lwidenyeka*: ‘Always walk using a green walking stick; the dry one breaks’.
- 20) *Umujangu ye andzambwidze; kumugongo kusilimiko*: ‘My fellow human being has betrayed me; there are no eyes at my back’.
- 21) *Umulomo hijavulilo*: ‘The mouth is a release’.
- 22) *Uwuhagala vubwa*: ‘Being poor is being a dog’.
- 23) *Uwuhangala wupyo siiwoneka pamaho, nde ulufihe upye*: ‘Poverty is like heat; you cannot see it, so to know poverty you have to go through it’.

Swahili:

- 1) *Adui wa mtu ni mtu*: ‘The enemy of a human being is a human being’.
- 2) *Afadhalii mchawi kuliko mfitini*: ‘A witch is better than a gossip’.
- 3) *Afadhalii utu kuliko kitu*: ‘Humanness is better than a thing’.
- 4) *Aisisufye mvua imemnyea*: ‘The person who praises the rain it has rained on him or her’.
- 5) *Asiyesikia la mkuu huvunjika guu*: ‘The person who does not listen to an elder’s advice gets his/her leg broken’.
- 6) *Bora kujikwaa kidole kuliko kujikwaa ulimi*: ‘It is better to stumble with the toe than with the tongue’.
- 7) *Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa*: ‘One finger does not crush a louse’.
- 8) *Kikulacho kinguoni mwako*: ‘That which eats you is within you’.
- 9) *Maji yakijaa, hupwa; mpanda ngazi hushuka*: ‘When the tide is high it ebbs; he who climbs the ladder comes down again’.
- 10) *Mali ni kama maua au umande*: ‘Wealth is like flowers or dew’.
- 11) *Mali ya bahili huliwa na wadudu*: ‘The wealth of a mean person is consumed by mites or rats’.
- 12) *Maskini haokoti; akiokota huambiwa kaiba*: ‘A poor person does not pick something up; if she/he picks up, she/he is told she/he is stealing’.
- 13) *Maskini haulizwi*: ‘A poor person is not asked’.
- 14) *Maskini akipata matako hulia mbwata*: ‘When a poor person gets something the buttocks fart’.
- 15) *Mpanda ngazi hushuka*: ‘One who climbs a ladder always descends’.
- 16) *Mtaka cha mvunguni sharti ainame*: ‘The person who wants what is underneath must stoop’.
- 17) *Mtoto umleavyo ndivyo akuavyo*: ‘The way you bring up a child is the way he/she grows up to be’.
- 18) *Mtu ni watu*: ‘A person is people’.
- 19) *Raslimali ya mnyonge ni umoja*: ‘The capital resource of the weak is in unity’.
- 20) *Samaki mkunje angali mbichi, akikauka atavunjika*: ‘Fold the fish while still fresh, if it dries it breaks’.
- 21) *Ukimfukuza sana mjusi atageuka nyoka*: ‘If you harass the lizard too much it turns into a snake’.
- 22) *Umoja ni nguvu; utengano ni udhaifu*: ‘Unity is strength; division is weakness’.

B. African Proverbs CD-ROM, Global Mapping International, Colorado Springs, U. S. A. 1996.

NB: Numbers without brackets, ethnic texts, translations, comments, explanations and bracketed themes are direct quotations from the referred above CD-ROM. For a reader friendly presentation:

- I have numerically bracketed and grouped the proverbs following an ethnic name alphabetical order.
- I have inserted the abbreviation ‘Expl’ to refer to explanations and comments where available or dash (—) where the explanations are unavailable from the CD-ROM.
- Otherwise, I have made no alterations to the actual text and content of material from the CD-ROM.

Akan:

- 1) 1 *Nsem nyinaa ne Nyame*: ‘All wisdom is from God’ Also, all things rest with God.
Expl: The Akan believe that God is the source of all wisdom. They prize wisdom above money, beauty and strength and regard it as a great possession. (*God, wisdom*).
- 2) 36 *Onipa ne asem. Mefre sika a, sika nnye me so; mefre ntama a, ntama nnye me so. Onipa ne asem*: ‘It is the human being that counts. I call on gold, gold does not respond; I call on drapery but it does not respond. It is the human being that counts’.
Expl: The human being has value above all material things. Wealth is not determined by the amount of material things a person has, rather it is measured by the number of people a person has. What makes a person really happy is the amount of attention and love that person receives from others. (*human being, money, gold, drapery, wealth, happiness*).
- 3) 72 *Benkum guare nifa, na nifa guare benkum*: ‘The left hand washes the right and the right hand washes the left’.
Expl: The left hand cannot wash itself neither can the right hand wash itself, but when the hands wash each other, they become clean. Cooperation and mutual helpfulness are the sine qua non of individual welfare and moreover, they make possible the achievement of undertakings which might appear to be difficult, if not impossible. (*left hand, right hand, cooperation*).
- 4) 131 *Wo ni di hia a, wunnyae no nkofa obi nye na*: ‘If your mother is poor, you do not forsake her and adopt another’.
Expl: However poor one’s parents may be, one should not despise them but accord them respect. (*mother, poverty*).
- 5) 251 *Ohia ye animguase*: ‘Poverty is a disgrace’.
Expl: Poverty makes a person do things that may bring disgrace (such as begging). (*poverty, disgrace*).
- 6) 257 *Ohia ma adwene*: ‘Poverty makes one think, or causes one to think’.
Expl: Poverty creates or stimulates resourcefulness by making people use their wits to do a lot with very little. The proverb is the Akan version of the saying: “Necessity is the mother of invention.” (*poverty, inventiveness*).
- 7) 261 *Ohia da na wohu nipa*: ‘You perceive who your true friends are in time of distress’.
Expl: Adversity tests the sincerity of your friends, for those who come to a neighbour's aid in time of trouble are true friends. (*friends, distress, time*).
- 8) 275 *Ohiani nni hwee a, owo tekrema a ode tutu ne ka*: ‘If a poor person has nothing else, he/she has at least a (sweet) tongue with which to defer the payment of his/her debts’.
Expl: No one is bereft of ability, and to be poor or handicapped does not mean to be poor in everything. Every person, whatever his/her condition, has at least some talent which he/she can put to good use. (*poor person, tongue, debts, poverty*).
- 9) 364 *Wode nkontempo pe ade mfe apem a, onokwafo de nokware gye wo nsa mu da koro*: ‘If you accumulate (wealth) property for a thousand years with fraud, a truthful person with truth takes it away from you in a day’.
Expl: Falsehood comes to an end, however long it may last. (*property, fraud, cheating, truthful person, truth, day*).

- 10) 431 *Otwe ne otwe ko, na wohu gyahene a, woko afa na woguan*: ‘When two antelopes are fighting and a lion approaches, they run off together (forgetting their squabbles)’.
Expl: (*antelopes, lion, animal*).
11) 448 *Wuso owo ti a, nea aka nyinaa ye hama*: ‘If you get hold of the snake’s head, the rest of its body is a (mere) string’.
Expl: The snake’s head controls its body and, however poisonous a snake may be, being able to get hold of its head renders it powerless. The proverb shows the power and importance of the human mind, for once it is controlled or brought into subjection, the person becomes weak and ineffective. Controlling a person’s mind is the most effective way to control him/her totally. (*snake, animal, head, string, mind, control*).
12) 539 *Sika pereguan da kurom a, ewo amansan*: ‘If there is a pereguan (a [unit] worth of gold valued at £8.2s) in a town, it belongs to the whole people’.
(British currency was used during colonial times in Ghana up to 1957.)
Expl: —

Ashanti:

- 1) 63 *Deglefetsu mezia aðonðo ka o. (kawo sC gbC)*: ‘The thumb alone cannot press down the strings of Adondo drum’.
Expl: [The] Adondo or condo is a longish wooden drum with a narrow middle and can be played from both ends. Both ends are joined by a series of strings and the drummer plays the drum from under his arm and presses down the strings to vary its tone. Since the strings are many and are arranged in a circular form, it takes more than one thumb to press down all the strings.
Moral Teaching: The lesson of the proverb is this: tasks which seem insurmountable to one person could be surmounted if people work together on them. This proverb, and the ones like it, teach the importance of communal effort which is used to get things done in the village community.

Basotho:

- 1) 86 *Go bopa ga tau go dirile gore lesaba le tshabe*: ‘Roaring of a lion causes the crowd to run away’.
Expl: If you are in the world, check yourself to protect yourself from danger.
2) 402 *Ho checha ha ramo ha se ho baleha*: ‘When a ram is retreating, it is not running away’.
Expl: To retreat is not to be defeated but to plan to attack successfully.

Bassa:

- 1) *Duun-ku-nyon ni se de*: ‘No diligent person can persist in poverty’.
Expl: This proverb praises the success of hard-working people and advises others to be hard-working.
2) *Ga! Mon dein konmon gboh*: ‘Agony, it is by you that we began our wealth’.
Expl: The word "Ga" is pregnant [with many meanings]. It has many meanings. It means agony, suffering, sweat, toil, pain, poverty, tears, or even blood. The word "Konmon" also has many meanings: wealth, riches, affluence, prosperity, or resources.
3) *Gedepooth ni zi-kpodo*: ‘God never passes on the side of injustice’.
Expl: This proverb is about the justice of God. "My God will see you," for example, is one of the major curses of the Bassa against someone who might have

done them an injustice. Sometimes it is true that their God sees the evil doers with some punishments.

Bemba:

- 1) *Nang'ombe pa bana taya*: ‘A cow never runs away from her calves’.

Expl: The self-centred person is not a popular figure. This is especially true if the person happens to be the mother of small children, for there is something contradictory in the mother who looks out for herself while neglecting her children. This Bemba proverb that used the image of a cow and her calves, reveals how strong the maternal instinct is. A mother does not leave her child even at the risk of losing her own life. She is other-centred with a centre of concern that lies outside herself.

- 2) *Lesa talombwa nama alombwo mweo*: ‘One does not ask God for meat but for life’.

Expl: This Bemba proverb is one of many which shows the high regard for life that existed in traditional society. Natural life was prized and guarded jealously, but the constant invocations and rites through which the spirit world was contacted is striking proof that a human being's life was seen to have dimensions beyond the physical. A human being was a deeply religious being living in a religious universe in which almost everything was given a spiritual significance. Life was central, given by God, extending to the spirit world through ancestors, punished or blessed by spirits. Life was something to be prized and one of the things important enough to ask God for.

Dangme:

- 1) 48 *Apletsi ke e ngé nÇ ko tita nÇ puëë, se e li kaa lë nitsë e hlemi nya në e ngé puëë*: ‘The goat thinks it is messing up someone else's compound, without realizing that it is messing up its own tail’.

Expl: Goats walk about while dropping excreta, thus messing up every place. But in the process a goat often soils its own tail.

Meaning: (1) If you pretend, you may harm yourself in the end.

(2) If a wife gossips about her own husband in public, she is only disgracing herself.

Purpose/Occasion: This proverb shows that if one does something in order to destroy someone else, in the end he will destroy himself/herself. It is usually cited when someone has gossiped or told lies about a person as a result of which that person has lost his/her honour, or has been ill-treated. The liar would be shown up for what he/she is, and would lose his/her own credibility.

Dzobo:

- 1) 47. *Koe dzia ada, ada dzi valem*: ‘Penury usually gives birth to rudeness and rudeness gives birth to defiance’.

Expl: Sometimes people borrow money from others, or buy things on credit, and some become rude to their creditors if they cannot settle up their debts. They do this to cover up the shame of their inability to pay their debts.

Moral Teaching: Poverty can force decent and well-behaved individuals to indulge in certain mean and socially disgraceful behaviour, therefore one must learn to work hard to avoid being poor

Ewe:

- 1) *TÇmedela meno a o*: ‘The one who goes to fetch water does not drink mud’.
Expl: Every honest labour is positively rewarded and so one must learn to work hard.
- 2) 90 *Fia mafor/u fe du ðe wògbamá*: ‘The town i.e. the chiefdom, of a chief does not talk falls apart’.
Expl: The expression ‘the chief does not talk’ means the chief who is not prepared to correct the wrong behaviour of his subjects and the chiefdom of such a chief will be morally ruined. The proverb therefore teaches the importance of moral correction. It is the duty of society to correct the wrong deeds of its members.
- 3) 137 ‘*Koklovi fe nya medzÇna le aúakowo de o*’: ‘The chicken is never declared innocent in the court of hawks’ (because the chicken is a prey to hawks.)
Expl: This proverb is advising on how to relate to one’s enemies and the relationship should be one of non-interference in their affairs.
- 4) 482 *Mawue nyaa tagbatsu na lâ asikekpo*: ‘God drives away flies for the tailless animal’.
Expl: The proverb expresses trust in the power of God to care for the helpless and the poor. It is also an expression of hope when one needs help badly.
- 5) 483. *Mawu metsaa didri (apasa) si o*: ‘God does not trade in dishonesty’.
Expl: This is a way of saying that God is righteous and being righteous, he will reward those who do good and punish those who do evil.

Ga:

- 1) *Kë NyÇñmÇ tere bo jatsu lë, ehaa bo tako*: ‘When God gives you a load He also gives you a soft pad to carry it.
Expl: This indicates the belief that the sovereign God can overrule, and that if He allows someone to encounter a problem or be given some heavy responsibility, He also gives the grace and ability to bear or discharge it.
- 2) *Akë kômi eleëë bi*: ‘You do not bring up a child on kenkey (a Ga staple food)’.
Expl: Meaning that training is more important than feeding.

Igbo:

- 1) *Ogba oso anaghi agba ghara ihu ala*: ‘Wherever you run, there is nowhere you don’t touch the ground’.
Expl: The ancestors and the sacred ground (ala) know whatever you do.

Kaonde:

- 1) 56 *Kinzanza kyakosela mashiki*: ‘A shelter is strong because of the poles’.
Expl: The prestige of a chief is built on the strength of his people.
- 2) 182 *Mbalala ya kukanga nayo imena*: ‘Roasted groundnuts can also germinate’.
Expl: It is said by someone who has just been helped by a person from whom little help would be expected, for example, like a mouse helping a lion.
- 3) 603 *Bulume bwa bokwe kapaji wa mukila ngovu; bokwe wafwile ku muñomba*: ‘The power of the lion, nothing surpasses it in strength; a lion was killed by a ground horn bill’.
Expl: No matter how strong someone is, he can be defeated by someone with less strength than he has.

Luganda:

- 1) 0011 *Abaganda mwennyango* : *bagwe yokya balaba*: ‘The Baganda are like the stinging nettle: they sting themselves on it with open eyes’.
Expl: Giving hospitality to thieves, marrying a mulogo, having bad friends (sic).
- 2) 0044 *Abanaku bamanyagana*: *empologoma bw'erwala, ensiri y'erumika*: ‘The poor ones know each other: when a lion is sick, the mosquito does the cupping’.
Expl: Both live in the wilds. - Misery brings people together. "Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows".
- 3) 0154 *Akabi kaliva gy'oli*: *ng'omuntu akuba n'omusota omokago*: ‘The evil comes from yourself (you have only yourself to blame for): like one who makes blood-brotherhood with a snake’.
Expl: Beware of false friends.
- 4) 0689 *Avuma omwali*: *ng'avumye eyagubumba*: ‘He who abuses the (unbaked) cooking pot: abuses the one who has made it’.
Expl: Similar meaning to the English proverb "Love me, love my dog".
- 5) 0954 *Bijjula ettama*: *bye bikuwa engaaya*: ‘Whatever fills your cheeks: gives you something to chew’.
Expl: Planting food keeps one alive. Fruits of training and education (sic).
- 6) 1026 *Buliibwa mokalu*. (*obutaka*): ‘An ancestor's land is acquired by an active and cunning person’.
Expl: A person has to fight for his/her ancestor's land, plead in court, defend his/her possessions.
- 7) 1100 *Bw'osekerera ekibya*: *osekerera yakibumba*: ‘If you laugh at the bowl: you laugh at the potter (its maker)’.
Expl: —
- 8) 1194 *Ebitali bigabane*: *bwe babyanuka (= babinyaga) biba by'omu*: ‘Things which are not divided up (which are common property of many): become (suddenly) the property of one, when they are stolen.’
Expl: For example, a piece of land, undivided, belonging to three children, changes over to one creditor.
- 9) 1405 *Ekitta obusenze*: *buba bunaanya (= bunafu)*: ‘A lazy person kills the whole community’.
Expl: What finishes tenancy is laziness. No chief likes lazy tenants.
- 10) 1407 *Ekitta omukwano*: *kuwola na kwazika*: ‘What breaks up friendship: borrowing and lending (money and things)’.
Expl: —
- 11) 1571 *Empologoma ye bba obusolo*: ‘The lion is the Lord and Master of the animal world’.
Expl: —
- 12) 1594 *Endya lumu*: *yazisa Mulaije*: ‘Eating up everything at one sitting: has laid waste to Mulajje’.
Expl: The inhabitants of Mulajje (Bulemeezi), after one good harvest, ate up everything even the seed. The next year they could not plant and left their place.
Application: Selling one's land to get money, instead of developing it, is shortsightedness.
- 13) 1883 *Ffenna tuli byuma*: *twasisinkana mu ssasa*: ‘We all are tools (of the same master): we were all once made in the same smithy’.
Expl: We are children of one and the same God.
- 14) 2795 *Mpaawo kitakya*: *ntomusulo ku nsiko gukya*: ‘There is nothing that does not come to an end: even the dew on uncultivated land dries up’.

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Expl: It is used as general consolation in trouble.

- 15) 3694 *Okugaba kuzibu: okuddiza guba mwoyo*: ‘To be generous is not easy: generosity reveals a noble mind’.

Expl: —

- 16) 4335 *Omutaka ggongolo: olumakabako nga yeefunya*: ‘A landowner is like a millipede: when you touch it, it rolls itself up (remains inactive)’.

Expl: Passive resistance. - The mutaka considers himself/herself independent, self-sufficient.

- 17) 4455 *Omwana w'omutaka: akuuma kiggya*: ‘The child of a landowner (ancestor) looks after the (father's) grave’.

Expl: The relationship between is seen by the care the child takes about the father's grave.

- 18) 5372 *W'omutala (= ow'omutala) awe: bw'asanga bw'ayisa (= w'asanga w'akola)*: ‘He who lives on his own land: lives as he pleases’.

Expl: —

Lugbara:

- 1) 26 *Mva tree kuri zoo 'ba onjiru*: ‘The undisciplined child grows into a bad person.

Expl: The education of children requires that they be disciplined and corrected.

- 2) 333 *Alio o'a eli mudri ku*: ‘Poverty does not last for ten years’.

Expl: One who is determined can eventually prevail over one's condition of poverty.

Lunda:

- 1) *Kubabala kufuma hakuchimonahu*: ‘A person is wiser after misfortunes’.

Expl: This Lunda proverb contains an insight that runs throughout many human activities and experiences. It is fairly easy to be wise and take the necessary precautions after returning home to find the house stripped bare by robbers, or the car gone from the garage. Ill-advised financial investments lead to more caution in future ventures. The struggle to make a marriage work can be the source of a wisdom and maturity that might not be obtainable in any other way.

Maasai:

- 1) *Menin Enkai olaisimani*: ‘God never listens to the robber’.

Expl: —

Mossi:

- 1) *Bi song yaa ned faal/ biiga; Bi yoog yaa a zagr biiga*: ‘A good child is everyone's child. A bad child belongs to somebody else’.

Expl: —

- 2) *Wênd n band zôang ki*: ‘God is the one removing the grains of sand from the blind person's millet’.

Expl: God is guaranteeing such a justice, his favour goes to the poor and the needy.

Oromo:

- 1) 28 *Haati waan baratte / intalli waan agarte*: ‘The mother acts on what she learnt, the daughter on what she saw’.

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- Expl: Children learn from their parents. (*Children, Learning, Education, Parents*).
- 2) 188 *Harka waa kennitu / Waaqi dhiphu itt hinaansu*: ‘God never puts giving hands into poverty’.
Expl: People that give generously receive generously. (*Generosity*).
- 3) 194 *Kan iyeessaa kenne / galata Waqaqaa argata*: ‘The person who gives to the poor receives reward from God’.
Expl: God rewards those who help the poor. (*Generosity, God*)
- 4) 399 *Gadi galan jabbi tiksani* : ‘The man who is down and out shepherds the calves’.
Expl: Age and poverty bring a person to degrading work. (*Poverty, Age*).
- 5) 419 *Jibriin waliifi galee / lentcha hidha*: ‘Cotton fibers that are united tie a lion’.
Expl: Unity brings great strength. (*Unity*)
- 6) 439 *Liqefatan male / wal diduun hinjiru*: ‘Unless one borrows there are no disagreements’.
Expl: Dependence on others makes one compromise self respect. (*Independence, Quarrel, Borrowing*).
- 7) 506 *Tchaamni ganamaa / tike handaqi irraanfachisa*: ‘(Because of) the clarity of the morning the shepherd the umbrella forgot’
Expl: Don't be deceived by early appearances.
- 8) 704 *Hori baay-en / abbaa dhiibata*: ‘Much wealth pushes the owner towards death’.
Expl: Too much wealth can destroy life. (*Wealth, Death*).
- 9) 709 *Iyeessa boicha hingorsani / innu jal-lise naqaa*: ‘People don't tell a poor person how to weep; he/she knows well how to weep’.
Expl: It is useless to teach a person what he/she already knows. (*Useless teaching*).
- 10) 711 *Iyyeessi abjuun / marqaa nyaatti*: ‘A poor person feeds on porridge in his/her dreams’.
Expl: The poor are full of hopes. (*Hope, Poverty*).
- 11) 718 *Kan deegaatt roorrise / himbadhaadhu*: ‘The person who is cruel to the poor will never become rich’.
Expl: Treat the poor kindly. (*Cruelty, Kindness, Wealth, Poverty*).
- 12) 740 *Torbe deegani / torba horani*: ‘After one week of austerity, one can gain seven heads of cattle’.
Expl: At any time the poor can become rich. (*Success, Poverty, Austerity*).
- 13) 1003 *Kan hamatan lentchaa / hamattun jaldessa*: ‘The one whom he/she slandered is a lion; the slanderer is a baboon’.
Expl: Weak people speak in whispers against the strong. (*Disrespect, Slander*).
- 14) 1027 *Lentchi innyaata / waraabessi jaluma oole*: ‘The lion eats, the hyena gets left-overs’.
Expl: The weak ones benefit from the deeds of the strong. (*Advantage, Strength, Weakness*).
- 15) 1525 *Gosi / abbaa namaa naye*: ‘The clan is whoever shows concern for one's well-being’.
Expl: The person who helps one when one is in need is the person one should hold to as though he/she were family.
- 16) 1700 *Gaarummaa hinjibbani / Waaqatu foloda nama umma*: ‘Beauty is not hated. God ugly people made (He made both’).
Expl: A person does not choose his/her characteristics. They come from nature.

- 17) 1732 *Namni daari qotuf / namni ollaa Ragaatu / hiniyu*: ‘The man who over the boundary (of his field) plows and the man neighbor to Ragatu (a woman) make no progress’.
Expl: The person who harms others does not advance
- 18) 2768 *Namni Waaqan jiru / wal irra hinjiru*: ‘People who before God live, with each other (a superior) there is not’.
Expl: People who fear God live in equitably with others.
- 19) 3930 *Hoggaa gabbattuun burraaqthu / huqqattuun eege dhaabdi*: ‘When the fat ones (cows) jump with joy, the thin ones their tails raise’.
Expl: Poor people try to pretend the happiness that they see others enjoy.
- 20) 4174 *Lafa abbaa ko jette jaldeettiin kattaarratit hafti*: ““The land of my fathers!” said the baboon on the rock remaining’.
Expl: One values one's possessions no matter how meager they look to others.
- 21) 4346 *Namni tokko biyya tolchuu dadhaba male balleessuu hindadhabu*: ‘One person fails to develop the land successfully, but to destroy does not fail’.
Expl: It takes many people to build up a land but only one to destroy it.

Sesotho:

- 1) 101 *Tseyo nako go rata. Ke senotlelo sa legodimo le lerato*: ‘Take time to love. It is the key to heaven and love’.
Expl: —
- 2) 151 *Mosali ke morena*: ‘A woman is a chief’.
Expl: A woman is respectable even in the eyes of a chief who is respected by all.
- 3) 251 *Matsoho a morena a malelele*: ‘The chief's hands are long’.
Expl: A chief is a generous person.

Setswana:

- 1) 24 *Ba keledi tsa mathe*: ‘Those who wet their faces to pretend that they are weeping’.
Expl: —
- 2) 270 *Khumo kgolo e a rama*: ‘Great riches are demoralizing’.
Expl: —
- 3) 271 *Khumo le lehuma di lala mogo*: ‘Wealth and poverty lie together’.
Expl: —
- 4) 311 *Lore lo ojoa lo sale metse*: ‘Bend the twig while it is green’.
Expl: It is said in training the young.

Sukuma:

- 1) 222 *Isiga lya ha lubimbi utalibinza*: ‘The grain stalk on the boundary line, you won't break’.
Expl: Some things everybody respects.
- 2) 413. *Kumugamuga nsatu, ng'hungu*: ‘To hide a sick person is to finally be betrayed by groans’.
Expl: If someone is sick say it out, don't pretend they are not.
- 3) 545 *Mungu wizaga haha wanichenba Waniwilaga bulomolomo*: ‘A man came and stabbed me. He lied to me’.
Expl: To tell an honest person a lie is to hurt him.
- 4) 661 *Ngobo ya kulanda itamalaga buzuka*: ‘Borrowed clothing doesn't end poverty’.
Expl: Don't borrow, but earn.

- 5) 689 *N'habi wacha, al'umpanga ati ng'habi*: ‘The dead person is the poor person, if a person is alive he/she is not too poor’.
Expl: —
- 6) 1449 *Ntemi akalyaga na mbozu*: ‘The king eats with the rotten one’.
Expl: A big man must be friendly to all.

Swahili:

- 1) 32 *Mvua hainyeshei mmoja*: ‘It does not rain at one person’.
Expl: —
- 2) 37 *Kuwa watoto wa baba mmoja ni kusaidiana*: ‘To be of the same father is to help one another’.
Expl: —

Tumbuka:

- 1) *Mulomo umoza ungapoka nyama ku nkhalamu yayi*: ‘When a lion preys, no one person can rescue the livestock’.
Expl: Unity provides strength through which any obstacle can be overcome.

Umbundu:

- 1) 1 *A fele viso, mbanje omo vomena muleha*: ‘Pretend trouble in eye to get a smell at his breath’.
Expl: —
- 2) 10 *Ya lemina ka yi loka loka omunu, nda yi ku loka ngongo yove*: ‘If you ignore the warning, when trouble comes you will have yourself to thank for it’.
Expl: —
- 3) 79 *Epene li vala omene; umbumba u vala kuteke*: ‘God’s displeasure is the serious thing; that of others can be endured’.
Expl: —
- 4) 171 *Kuli ongombe ka kuli owangu; kuli owini ka kuli oviti. Kuli owini ka ku lingilua emande*: ‘Do not isolate yourself. With the crowd is safety’.
Expl: —

Wolof:

- 1) 45 *Bour bou amoul y nitte don done bour*: ‘A subjectless king is no king’.
Expl: —

Yoruba:

- 1) 7 *Abata takete, bienikpe ko ba odo tan*: ‘The marsh (or pool) stands aloof, as if it were not akin to the stream’.
Expl: It is said of people who are proud and reserved, or who pretend to be what they are not.

C. Other published sources

Akan:

- 1) *Nyasa nye sika na woak yekyere asie*: ‘Wisdom is not (like) gold which may be kept in a safe’ (Dzobo 1982:92).

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- 2) *Nyina a obotum man hwe no, Nyankopon bo no safohen ma odze kora dom*: ‘It is God who enstools the talented leader as chief and commits the townsfolk to his care’ (Pobee 1979:155).
- 3) *Onipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obi nnye Asaase ba*: ‘All human beings are children of God, no one is the child of the earth’ (Amoah 1995:2)

Aniocha:

- 1) *Chukwu ke akakpo ke osowuzo*: ‘It is the same God who created the dwarf who also created the robust child’ (Monye 1989:60).

Atuot:

- 1) *Piny kuok ke nuer, Decau era thin*: ‘The land favours the human-being, with the Creator’s presence’ (cf. Burton 1981:87).

Bahema:

- 1) *Kiūdha radi ngu dhedho dzdjo*: ‘Even the hawk returns to the earth, in order to die’ (Bujo 2003:115).
- 2) *Nru si tsu naro nza*: ‘Human beings did not come out of a tree or stick’ (Bujo 2003:115).

Barundi:

- 1) *Umuryāmbwá aba umwé agatukisha umuryango*: ‘If one family member eats dog meat, all members are dishonoured’ (Bujo 2003:115).

Bashi:

- 1) *Isu likalaka n’izulu linalake*: ‘When the eye weeps, it makes the nose weep too’ (Bujo 2003:115).

Chagga:

- 1) *Mana mhoo nekyeora mri*: ‘A generous child brings prosperity to a household’ (Mosha 2000:147).
- 2) *Kirama nyi wawi*: ‘Two people bring forth blessings’ (Mosha 2000:148).
- 3) *Iura monowomoo nyiipva*: ‘To miss brothers and sisters [communality] is to die’ (Mosha 2000:153).

Fipa:

- 1) *Inzala ikukomya*: ‘Hunger breeds strength for work’ (Rupia 1996:32).
- 2) *Inzala ikuyyal’imboto; n’imboto ikuyyal’inzala*: ‘Hunger breeds plenty of food, and plenty of food breeds hunger’ (Rupia 1996:30).

Haya:

- 1) *Ganyebwa omuto gahewa omukuru*: ‘It is the parent who pays up for the child’s mischiefs [sic]’ (Nestor 1978:27).

Hehe:

- 1) *Uluvilo behe vikiimbila availugu*: ‘Do run when others run’ (Madumulla 1995:153).
- 2) *Yahelee ingava fidunda, ingava malema pele yapifwiike*: ‘He who created the hills went away, but the Creator of deformities is still at work’ (Madumulla 1995:125).

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Igbo:

- 1) *Chi kere nwa ogbenye kere amadi*: ‘The same God created the rich human being and the poor human being’ (Metuh 1981:24).

Malagasy:

- 1) *Aza ny lohasaha mangina no jerena fa Andriamanitra an-tampon’ny loha*: ‘Do not count on the fact that you are alone in a quiet spot, for God is above your head’ (Rogers 1985:222).
- 2) *Ny adala no tsy ambakaina, Andriamanitra no atahorana*: ‘We don’t make fun of mad people, for God is to be feared’ (Rogers 1985:222).

Shambala:

- 1) *Ukintukana mkomba, wamtukana Mulungu*: ‘If you revile the ape, you revile his Creator who appointed the manner in which he should seek his food’ (Johanssen 1931:535).

Sukuma:

- 1) *Idimagi chiza isi, kulwa nguno batang’winhile babyaji bing’we bamubikija bana bing’we*: ‘Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children’ (Healy & Sybertz 1996:324).

Tiv:

- 1) *Ka wea tuhwa orimande mom, mbaamandev ve vaa cii*: ‘If one degrades a leper, all other lepers will also cry’ (Bergsma 1970:156).

Table I: Summary of African proverbs used in the research

| Source | Number of Proverbs | Percentage |
|--|--------------------|------------|
| Conventional | 45 | 27 |
| CD-ROM African Proverbs | 100 | 59 |
| Other publishers | 23 | 14 |
| Total [from about 38 African ethnic groups] | 168 | 100 |

An African Perspective on Poverty Proverbs in the Book of Proverbs: An Analysis for Transformational Possibilities.

Lechion Kimilike's methodology is a fascinating approach because he brings fresh African air to a setting which can be regarded as a highly Westernised Old Testament Studies setting in Africa. As he does this, he puts Africa on a pedestal, a necessary move indeed! It is an approach friendly to those on the margins, empowering them to be agents of their own transformation. A relevant approach, not only to the African continent, but to the rest of the world as it addresses a very crucial issue: the social evil of poverty.

'It has been a pleasure to work with a student of your calibre, hardworking, always willing to learn and improve on his work, God-fearing, loving, caring, neat, orderly files and work etc. It is no wonder that you could end up with this type of result where you almost got all the examiners letting your work pass without corrections except for a few typographical errors! That is a REAL achievement, particularly at this level of one's academic life. I am proud of you!' *Prof. Madipoane Masenya, CoD Department of Old Testament & Ancient Near Eastern Studies, University of South Africa, Pretoria, Republic of South Africa.*

I think you have done something very unusual, comprehensive and exciting. *David N. R. Levey, Department of English Studies, University of South Africa (Pretoria, Tshwane), South Africa.*

The candidate's writing skills are appropriate for the level at which the study is pegged. The thesis is written in clear flowing English. The editing was very well done too except for a few errors... *Examiners.*