

South Africa, in which local churches will be provided with resources to recognize, recover, and revive Tamar's story.

Even before the Bible is opened, the 'unopened' Bible as symbol and icon creates a sacred space within which believers gather. The contextual Bible study process honours this space by providing a range of resources with which ordinary 'readers' of the Bible, together with the socially engaged biblical scholars they have called to read with them, can use to locate themselves and their daily experiences in the biblical tradition. The contextual Bible study process provides a safe (and sacred) space, and a place, for owning and articulating working theologies of survival, liberation, and life - theologies which in turn form the foundation of social transformation. Which explains the second part of my title for this essay. "When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we (Blacks) had the land. The white man said to us 'let us pray'. After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible". This is true; but the contextual Bible study process is a South African resource, among many others, for reclaiming and regaining land, dignity and identity (see also Maluleke 1998: 62, Mosala 1987:194).

Polluting Your Ground? Woman as Pollutant in Yehud: A Reading from a Globalised Africa

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Who Pollutes What?

A mere hearing of the word "pollute" arouses negative feelings in the listener because it is a negative concept. That which pollutes makes unclean. From a cultic point of view, that which pollutes must of necessity be purified because it has failed to comply, with the requirements for a clean environment and/or context. A pollutant is therefore this "other" in an otherwise clean or pure environment.

The present text seeks to investigate "woman" as pollutant in the post-exilic period. This will hopefully be achieved by examining the image of Woman as Strange in this period. The Book of Proverbs, particularly the first nine chapters, will serve as the main resource for this study. The paper seeks to investigate the role which Woman Stranger, a woman who pollutes, played in the socio-historical context of her time and how the image of woman as strange continues to play a role in an African-South African setting today. My focus will be on the contradictions experienced by a globalised African Christian woman as she interacts with the Bible and her context. This is a woman who does not accept the authority of the Bible indiscriminately, an exercise which exacerbates her position, as a polluting other in her context.

It is argued that the post-exilic period in Judah was typified, amongst others, by an identity crisis which further marginalised the women of the time, in this crisis, even those who were deemed by others as being not "true"/pure Jews

were marginalised, becoming the pollutants of the pure Jewish race. In the case of the latter, their ethnicity and/ or race (cf. in particular Blekinsopp), rather than their gender made them pollute. We can regard these as pollutants of the pure Jewish race. It is argued with Camp (1991) that the internal religio-political-economic struggles of the Judean men in this period were all projected onto the symbol of woman as strange, that is, woman as the main pollutant or woman as the main source of sexual pollution! Therefore, the understanding of woman as pollutant in this text will not be restricted to the traditional understanding of woman as one from whom bodily discharges occur, but woman, as the wholly other, woman as the pollutant in an environment alien to her.

It is interesting to note that those who are usually deemed pollutants, that is, those who are viewed as "others" by the status quo, are in most cases regarded as being far away from God. They are therefore viewed as needing a purification of some sort in order to be able to access God and thus live. Perhaps it is no wonder that in Israel, female purification tended to last longer than that of males, (for example, a woman who had delivered a girl needed more time for purification than she would need if the child born were a boy. Even in my context, the ritual that has to be undergone by a widow is more rigorous than that undergone by a widower). Woman therefore, as the main pollutant in the patriarchal religion, needs more purification, a situation reminding one of colonial (South) Africa. A non-White person needed some "purification" because s/he was not a member of the "pure race". African people had to be given White/Western, so called Christian names, in the place of their African heathen (polluting) ones in order for them to be recognised as Christians. This implies that in terms of salvation, Blacks (as opposed to Whites) needed more grace because more cleansing had to be done as they were not members of the pure race. As can be expected, those at the top, determine who the pollutants are. The question we need to ask at this stage is, What made Woman Stranger to be a pollutant in her period? Unless such texts are studied and understood, the work of contextual theology in the area of womanist issues will have no impact on the church.

Why does Woman Stranger Pollute? Pollution, Sex and Defilement

As one reads the passages on this female figure (cf. Proverbs 2:1-22; 5:1-23; 6:24-35; 7:1-27; 9:1-6, 13-17, Perdue 1977:146; Camp 1985:115-116), one agrees with the general observation by scholars that of all the traits that are used to disparage Woman Stranger, the sexual slur is the most conspicuous one. Washington (1994) holds: "Due to her composite nature, the figure has no consistent identity, and sexual slur is only the most conspicuous of a variety of tactics used to disparage her". In the same way, Camp (1985:118) argues: "In the context of the whole book of Proverbs, however, especially with the inclusion of chapter 31, the interpretive stress of the strange woman imagery in 1-9 falls decidedly on her status as an adulteress". In Camp's view, it was the aspect of deviant sexuality that gave her the power to function as an "archetype of disorder at all levels of existence" (1985:119). Woman Stranger in the book of Proverbs is a full blown force of evil, an evil which manifests itself in the form of sex. She accosts, deceives and seduces (1991:25,26). Perdue (1977:146) argues that in each case of the passages on this woman, the Woman who is unfamiliar is described as a seductress whose sexual promiscuity ends up entrapping wisdom students, an exercise which would ultimately lead to their death.

If we note with Wegner (1992:39) in her study of cultic pollution in the book of Leviticus that the paramount pollution results from illicit sexual behaviour (18:6-23; 20:10-21) including adultery, incest, homosexuality, bestiality, and intercourse with menstruants, we might perhaps understand why the sexual slur is the most conspicuous in the attack against Woman Stranger. That would however, not be satisfactory because in the textual context of Leviticus, both men and women are deemed as pollutants. What concerns us for the present discussion is the observation that the wisdom teacher attacks a woman and not a man for illicit sexual behaviour. In my view, it is a strange situation that a woman is portrayed as initiating sexual advances towards a man, given the male-oriented context of the time, though we

must hasten to add with Ezkenazi (1992), that women in post-exilic Yehud were more liberated than their predecessors. I would argue that if Woman Stranger was a real woman, she was probably a powerful one. So powerful was she that her presence necessitated that she be included in the male-oriented syllabus of the day, albeit in a negative way. In all of these texts, this strange woman serves as a potential danger to the male student. She is the type of woman that a student should guard against at all costs. Though her seductions might appear to be attractive for the man who is being lured, she is a symbol of death. A wisdom male student must choose life by embracing Woman Wisdom and reject Woman Stranger.

As one reads these passages with their strong language against sexuality, one might even be tempted to argue that the sages had a negative view of sex. In his article "Why does sexual intercourse defile" (Lev. 15:18) Wenham (1983:434), in grappling with this difficult and controversial question argues that this was the case, because any one who lost the "life liquids", whether it was blood or semen, manifested less than physical wholeness, and as such, they had an aura of death about them. If his thesis is correct, in the case of sexual encounters with the strange woman, it is interesting to note that she, rather than the man, is the one who brings death; she is the pollutant. If Wegnam's thesis is correct, it reveals that under normal circumstances, it would be a man who due, to the loss of semen, would be the pollutant in the sexual act, the unclean one, the one who brings death. This however is not the case with Woman Stranger; she brings death. Another interesting reversal that one notes as one reads these passages, is the fact, already observed, that it is the woman who seems to initiate the sexual advances, a rare occurrence in that patriarchal context one would think! A further question that we need to ask as we grapple with this mysterious figure is the identity of this woman, in order to understand why she is the cause of pollution: Who is she?

From the preceding discussion we will be correct to argue that what is at issue in these texts about the strange woman is not sexual relations per se, but the sexual partner of the wisdom student. As a matter of fact, in Israel, there was an apparent acceptance of, and even rejoicing in sexuality (cf.

Song of Songs) and tolerance of some deviation from the norm (cf. the case of harlots and prostitutes). The question worth asking at this stage is: Seeing that the Israelites did not view sex in a negative way (cf. Wegner 1988:41-42), which women were viewed as "others" or "pollutants" in their sexual encounters with men? The answer to this question is simple: Those women, who though their sexuality legally belonged to the men who owned them, chose to live outside the defined social boundaries. Wegner's (1988:41) observation about the Mishnaic laws in this regard is revealing:

Mishnaic laws governing the matrimonial bond, particularly those involving conjugal relations, have one common denominator- an underlying perception of the female as a sexual chattel whose biological function may be acquired, controlled, and disposed of by the male for his own advantage.

One would therefore argue that polluting women were married women who decided to engage in what can be called deviant sexuality. Perhaps it is no wonder that most of the passages about Woman Stranger designate her as an adulteress. It is worthy to note, with Wegner (1992), that polygynous cultures like that of the Bible applied a double standard to women because they confined the definition of adultery to cases where the female partner was a married woman. However, a married man who had relations with an unmarried woman was not found guilty of adultery. It is no wonder that there was no reason to treat prostitution as a sin or a crime (1992:41). It can therefore be argued here that, that which is at the stake; is the control of the bodies of women by the powerful. Men thus, on the basis of their own interests, determined the kind of sexuality that "pollutes": Sex is polluting if it is engaged with a woman whose body is not legally controlled by a man (cf. Prov. 6:25-26 below). Van der Toorn's observation is worth noting:

The nokriyya is the "outsider" not on the national level but in respect to the married couple. Her adulterous actions, not her country of origin, make her a stranger (1989:199).

We are here reminded about Tamar's story. We recall how severe Judah's judgement was on his daughter-in-law before he knew the owner of Tamar's pregnancy: 'Judah said, "take her out and let her be burnt"' (Gn. 38:24). However, when the signet, cord and staff that Judah gave to the "harlot" revealed that Tamar and the harlot were one and the same person, Judah's judgement was changed. He acknowledged Tamar as the mother of his children-to-be! According to Niditch, "...her position in society is regularized. She now becomes a pure member of the patriarchal clan" (1979:148). In other words, Judah has determined that Tamar is no longer a pollutant! She has been purified (though he was unaware of it) by having a sexual encounter with the "right" man.

Washington (1994:218) argues that for the wisdom teacher of Proverbs 1-9, any woman who exercises her sexual powers outside the male governed arrangements of marriage and family, is construed fundamentally as strange. In Niditch's view, such women were much more severe anomalies and they had to face destruction (1979:146).

While a prostitute, whose sexuality is not owned by any man, can cost only a loaf of bread according to the sage of the book of Proverbs, the wife of another, this woman whose sexuality is the property of her husband, can cause the man who commits adultery with her to forfeit, his very own life! A prostitute can be classified within three classes of women whose sexual function did not belong to any man and hence could be used as these women pleased: widows, divorced women and adult single women (Wegner 1992: 42; Niditch 1979). We can then argue that, in a patriarchal setting, the concern was no more with the morality of the adulterer, neither was it with the negative repercussions which the encounter could have on the woman; it was rather with the "loss" by the owner of her body. The jealousy aroused could not be quenched by a bribe; a man who slept with another man's wife could even die. In Proverbs 6:25-26 we read:

Do not desire her beauty in your heart,
and do not let her capture you with her eye-lashes
For a prostitute's fee is only a loaf of bread,
but the wife of another stalks a man's very life.

In my view, the concern seems to be more on retaining the purity of the lineage than on fulfilling the commandments of Yahweh against adultery. This view is endorsed by Phillips when he contends:

The purpose of the legislation prohibiting adultery was therefore to protect the husband's name by assuring him that his children would be his own.... There is no thought of sexual ethics as such, but of paternity (1970:117).

In Wright's view, adultery was not only an offence affecting a particular Israelite household, it affected the whole nation. While from the general perspective of biblical sexual ethics, adultery is an act of immorality which was condemned on the basis of the biblical concept of marriage, however "from the particular, historical perspective of Israel's relationship with Yahweh and the central importance of the household to it, adultery acquired an additional dimension of gravity which transcended private sexual morality and raised it to the level of national concern" (1979:123). In Wright's view an attack on the stability of the household was a potential threat to the relationship between the nation and God with consequences on the relationship between people and the land. Perhaps it is no wonder that a wisdom student is exhorted in Proverbs 2, (one of the passages about Woman Stranger) to walk in the way of good (away from the attractions of a strange woman) because:

... the upright will abide in the land,
And the innocent will remain in it;
But the wicked will be cut off from the land,
And the treacherous will be rooted out of it
(verses 21-22).

While Wright's views on the socio-economic importance of the family make sense, particularly in view of the revival of the family's significance in the post-exilic period, one would still argue that what is at stake in the passages on Woman Stranger is not more about the socio-economic theological significance of the family (though as we will later observe, these concerns were important for the Judean men of the time), but the control of the bodies of married women.. If that was not the case, adultery could have been condemned

irrespective of whether it was committed with a married woman or a harlot and widow. The sage could also have been concerned not only about a strange woman, but also about a strange man.

The discussion in the preceding lines has partially answered the question of the identity of the 'ššā z rā / 'ššā nokriyyā. We have noted that Woman Stranger symbolised a married woman, a woman whose sexuality was the property of her husband. Is she a real woman or is she a metaphor? If Woman Stranger is a metaphor, which function did the metaphor play in the socio-historical context of its time?

A Woman with Different Faces: Woman Stranger in Yehud

The designation of Woman Stranger as 'ššā z rā / 'ššā nokriyyā, which simply means strange woman, is one of the main reasons why it is difficult to identify her. Which meanings do these words have?: The Biblical Hebrew adjective z r denotes 'otherness', it refers to that which is outside the field of recognition or of legitimacy. The adjective nokriyyā has the same range of meanings as those of z r. Z r can indicate 'strangeness' with regard to the household (Ps 69:9), however, as a social designation, nokriyyā typically denotes foreignness by reason of nationality or ethnicity (Ex 21:8; Dt. 17:9; 29:21; Judg 19:12; 1 Ki 8:41; Washington 1994:229-230).

Camp (1991:17) gives the following helpful categories:

The terms z r / nokri have different and at times overlapping meanings in the Hebrew Bible:

- 1) Persons whose nationality is foreign.
 - 2) Outsiders to one's family household.
 - 3) Persons who do not belong to the priestly caste.
 - 4) Deities and practices which fall outside the covenant relationship with YHWH (cf. her detailed list of biblical references for each of these categories, 1991:301).
- Snijder's conclusion about the meaning of the term nokriyyā is suitable for the present discussion: The word nokri

does not always mean foreign in an ethnic sense. It can therefore be applied to an Israelite who is an "outsider, one who has become estranged from the natural corporate setting of his life and has, as a result, severed the relationships which would normally shape, guide and determine his behaviour (1954:63, 78, 89). Applied to Woman Stranger, we would argue with Camp (1991:26-29) that Woman Stranger symbolises not a foreign wife but an Israelite wife who has become strange because she has decided to take control of her sexuality. Woman Stranger has therefore, by her deviant behaviour, ostracised herself from the community. She therefore fits in with McKane's definition of nokriyyā and ššā nokriyyā: she is the woman who is beyond the pale.

... because she is beyond the pale, is both desperate and uninhibited-desperate because she suffers ostracism and insecurity, and uninhibited because she defies religious and social sanctions and conventions and is a law to herself. As such she is particularly deadly to young men who become embroiled with her (1977:285).

In our attempt to get a clearer picture of the function of the metaphor of Woman as Strange in Yehud, we will take a look at the views of some scholars in order to get a fuller appreciation of what she stood for.

As we have noted earlier on, according to Washington (1994:218), for the wisdom teacher of Proverbs 1-9, any woman who exercises her sexual powers outside the male-governed arrangements of marriage and family, is construed fundamentally as strange. The woman is strange because, as a married woman, she has decided to operate her sexual powers outside the defined social boundaries. In his view, the attacks against Woman Stranger should be linked with the identity crisis that was experienced in Yehud. In this crisis, the leaders of the post-exilic community had the decisive word in the debate over the identity of the true Israel; who would belong to its temple and who would possess its land. In the volatile situation of the early post-exilic period, any unauthorised disturbance of the genealogical integrity of the beth aboth would have been an economic threat. Such a disturbance could easily occur if Judean men, the members

of the *golah*, married the wrong (or rather strange) women. In Washington's view, these were the women who were outside the *golah* community. They, like their male counterparts, had been defined by others as the "not-pure-Jews". As a result, they were not entitled to the Judean property.

According to Japhet, true Israelites are those who experienced the exile. It is interesting to note how those who experience the exile usually come back with a feeling that they are more superior than those who remained in the land. There appear to be striking parallels between the situation in early post-exilic Yehud and the situations in colonial and apartheid periods in South Africa. The returnees found people (fellow Jews and others) in the land and claimed superiority over them, even to the extent of defining who the true Jews were. This situation reminds us of some of the Black South African returnees (from exile) in the early nineties. They claimed superiority over those who remained in the land, although the only people who were seriously involved in the political struggle were the exiles.

The overpowered Jewish returnees therefore became strangers in their own land. The same situation was faced by Africans in South Africa. Colonists came into the land and annexed territories, disowning the native inhabitants of their land, relegating them to so-called homelands or Bantustans and even defining their identity for them. A true South African was a white person. The native inhabitants of the land only came to be recognised as true South Africans after the first democratic elections of 1994.

It is interesting to note, with Washington, that though the post-exilic rules prohibit marriage to either men or women outside the community (Neh. 10:30; 13:25; Ezra 9:12), Ezra-Nehemiah (like Proverbs), focuses on women outside the community: a threat to the real property holdings of the Judean collective because within the patrilineal land tenure system, women could inherit property (1994:235). As we have noted, with Ezkenazi earlier on, women in this period of the Jews were not disempowered. Women could own property, inherit property and in some instances, a genealogy could be in a woman's name. That however, should not imply that legitimate power was in the hands of women. It was still a

world of men, even the picture we are given in the biblical text about women, is given by strangers to women's world.

In the same way, Joseph Blenkinschopp (1991), examines the figure of Woman Stranger, what he calls an Outsider Woman in the context of the exogamy-endogamy issue in the early Second Temple Period. He contends that there was a socially and economically dominant elite in the early Second Temple period. He attributes the origin of the language on the Outsider Woman to the anxiety of the elite to preserve its social status and economic assets (1991:473). Thus, marriage with the insider woman would have benefited the men concerned, both politically and economically.

In Camp's view, Woman Stranger is a multi-valent symbol. When she comments on Woman Stranger as portrayed in Proverbs 7, she argues that we are not dealing with a social reality of wanton women but a socio-psychological reality of men threatened by a multiply stressed social situation (we recall Washington and Blenkinschopp's views above):

- 1) internal religio-political power struggles (cf. the struggles between the Temple community and those who did not belong to it, the *golah* versus the *non-golah* community).
- 2) economically oppressive foreign rule (the Jews were still under Persian rule, for example their preference for endogamy rather than exogamy could have been motivated by the Persian policy (cf. Blenkinschopp 1991:472-473).
- 3) pressures of avoiding cultural assimilation (cultural assimilation that could have come easily through marriages).

The need to maintain familial and social stability amidst enormous disruptive forces frightened the male leaders and thinkers of the community, they had a fear of chaos which was projected into an external, but nonetheless imaginary, object of fear, the woman who goes strange because she had decided to stand outside the family structure as defined by its sexual roles and restrictions (Camp 1991:21). In Camp's view, Woman Stranger is not a non-Israelite woman. She is an Israelite woman who is designated as strange because she has refused to operate her sexual powers within the confines of the allocated social boundaries. We are reminded with Camp, that woman as defined in these chapters (chapters

1-9 of Proverbs), is defined from a male perspective: "one with whom one has some form or another, socially sanctioned or not, of sexual relationship" (1991:23).

Though we agree with Camp (1991) that Woman Stranger is a metaphor, the information in the preceding discussion has hopefully revealed that metaphors do not occur in a vacuum. In the case of this female figure, we have noted that the social reality of the volatile situation in post-exilic Yehud has prompted the teachers to remind their audience that they have a responsibility to control their wives' bodies. As we have noted, it was not a reciprocal situation; it was one-sided and, as can be expected, the interests which were basically promoted were those of the powerful, the elitist, "pure" Judean men. The men who are not regarded as members of the *golah* are pollutants because they are not the members of the pure Jewish race. Their women counterparts are a double jeopardy: Apart from their exclusion from the pure Jewish race, they are more polluting because their gender is an alien one in a male-oriented context. It is in this same context that they are viewed as the property of particular men depending on what their relationship was with these men.

In my view, Woman Stranger, whatever she stands for, reveals that women in that context, were not chattel; they were a major force to reckon with. If this had not been the case, the sage would not have dedicated so much space in the Book of Proverbs on female imagery, whether negative or positive. Although women are viewed as property, they have the power to frustrate the patriarchal lineage if they so wish. Even though they are viewed as secondary, the human lineage, and in particular the preferred male lineage, cannot continue without them.

The question worth asking at this stage is this: How does the metaphor of Woman as Strange speak to me or to women in an African-South African context? Do women in this context have the capacity to pollute more than men would have?

Stranger on My Own Ground? Woman Stranger in an African-South African Context

As an African woman in a South African setting, the metaphor of Woman as Strange attracts me on the following grounds:

1) The past political history of South Africa has designated Africans as strangers, and ironically in their own land. Until recently Africans had no right to full citizenship in South Africa. As we know, the issue of land (land to be restored to legitimate owners) has not yet been resolved.

Many of us still have a feeling of foreignness. Even our culture has been made to appear strange and foreign to us.

2) It may not be an exaggeration to argue that African females in a South African setting appear to be doomed to strangeness almost for the rest of their lives. This has been typical in our traditional setting: a girl who is born into a family is already viewed as a stranger or a visitor from the moment of her birth. In other extreme instances, her future marriage partner could be decided even before she has been born.

3) Though girls are viewed in terms of marriage in our African traditional communities, marriage does not seem to relieve them from their strangeness. At her new home, the bride is also viewed as a stranger, as is evident from the following proverb: *Tshipa ge e etile, molato o rerwa ke peba* (When the wild cat is away, the mouse will play; Ziervogel & Mokgokong 1975:1506); its underlying meaning is: If the owner of a family is not around, serious issues pertaining to his family must be attended to by his relatives, particularly his elder and younger brothers (my italics). It should be noted however that back at her father's house, she assumes some status as a *kgadi* (father's sister) and she may be called in to attend to some serious matters pertaining to her own family.

4) We may also argue that an African woman in a South African setting is a stranger to what has been considered the "normative" race and its culture as well as stranger to

the "normative" sex. This woman, like Woman Stranger of the post-exilic period is a pollutant in alien context.

5) Even in this context, a woman is this polluting other, a problem to live with: despised yet valued, rejected yet embraced, feared yet needed, this "other" in a man's world. Her pollution in this culture is due to two main factors:

- 1) Her natural bodily secretions and
- 2) Her inherent inferior and evil nature. Many examples can be given of how woman is treated as other due to her inherent capacity to pollute the patriarchal environment.

In this section I will argue that the issue of the control of women's bodies is not only peculiar to post-exilic Yehud, it also obtains in African contexts. Let us take a look at an African-South African setting.

Control of Women's Bodies

Several studies have revealed that there are similarities between the Old Testament and Africa (Masenya 1989; Adamo 1989; Burden 1982). The above analysis on the reflection of the relationship between men and women in marriage in the post-exilic period reminds one of the marriage relationships in an African-South African setting. My focus will be on the Northern Sotho context because that is my own context. However, due to the similarities between various African contexts in South Africa, the Northern Sotho context will hopefully shed more light on the general African context. In order to show some of the contradictions experienced by Bible reading African women, I prefer to focus on the life of a Bible reading, Bible believing Christian African woman in a globalized South African setting.

A comparison between my situation and that of Woman Stranger in the preceding discussion reveals the following similarities with regard to marriage relationships:

As in the situation in Israel and in Yehud, once a woman is married in my culture she becomes the "property" of the man. By marriage I am referring to a traditional custom in which *lobola* is given out in order for a daughter to be given

in marriage. In my view, though the *lobola* can be empowering in some sense, it helps to reinforce the patriarchal authority structure. Though the Northern Sotho people do not regard *lobola* as a means of "purchasing" a person (unlike in Old Testament times when a wife could be acquired (*qaneh*) like any other property), in actual practice, the woman for whom *lobola* has been given out comes to understand that she has actually been bought! In this new setting, she is no longer her own person, she belongs to the man and his family, obviously, even her sexuality belongs to the man. However, his sexuality in this culture (as in Israel) does not belong to him only. As a matter of fact, it is understandable in the Northern Sotho culture that a married man's sexuality can be shared with other women outside the family, but this does not apply to married women. A variety of proverbs bear witness to this:

Monna ke thaka, o a naba, literally, "A man is like a pumpkin plant, he spreads". A married man can have many concubines.

Monna ke tšhwene, o ja ka matsogo a mabedi, literally, "a man is a baboon, he eats with two hands". This means that though a man is married, he can have other women outside the marriage to satisfy him sexually. It can thus be argued on the basis of these observations that in the Northern Sotho culture a married man can engage in sex outside marriage without "polluting" anyone or without being deemed a pollutant. It is normal. It is moreover sacred (cf. the fact that it is endorsed by the words of the ancestor). On the other hand, a woman who complains about such a man will be reminded that *ga se more, ga o fehlwe*, "literally, she is not a tree, she cannot be eaten up by a moth". The underlying meaning: A woman must not be worried by the absence of her husband, one day he will come back and will find her still intact. One would not want to think about the severe repercussions of such a lifestyle on the women concerned, particularly in view of the high incidence of HIV Aids in the country.

A married woman who engages in extra-marital relationships is designated *nonyana* which means a bird, a humiliating term indeed. She is thus deemed a pollutant. On

the other hand, it is not surprising in this context (like that of Yehud) that a married man who engages in sexual relations outside marriage does not have any derogatory names! One therefore becomes a polluting agent not on the basis of what one does but on the basis of what one is in relation to the status quo! We are here reminded of the situation in Yehud about patriarchy's prerogative to control women's bodies. Those in power determine not only the kind of sexuality that pollutes, but also the kind of woman who pollutes, a strange woman. The following proverbs also reveal something of patriarchy's distaste or rather fear for woman in the Northern Sotho culture:

O se bone thola boreledi teng ga yona e a baba. Do not be deceived by the smooth appearance of a beautiful fruit, it is bitter inside

Botse re lilela boswana, bošwanyana bo a lahletša

Beauty we strive for a darkness (a darker complexion) Lightness (a lighter complexion) leads astray. Do not be deceived by a lighter skin complexion in a woman, she could be a bad personality, rather opt for a woman with a darker complexion who could have a pleasant personality. A proverb reminding one of the words about the Woman Of Worth in Proverbs 31:30: Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain! The above proverbs are warnings for young men to make sure that they make the right choices for marriage partners, warnings against strange women!

The married woman must bear her husband children, particularly sons for the continuation of his lineage. She must leave her father's house for the husband's father's house. She must be an industrious woman. In Israel, the dowry that was given to the father of the daughter was meant to buy the sexuality of the daughter. Wegner (1988:42) notes that the procedure for acquiring a wife treats marriage as the formal sale and purchase of the sexual function of the woman, a commercial transaction in which the man pays for the virginity of the bride just as one would for any object of value. The Book of the Covenant provides ample evidence that a woman had no independent legal status. She was treated as the personal property first of her father, and then of her husband (Phillips 1970:351).

It then makes sense for an African Christian man who reads the passages about Woman Stranger to resonate with the patriarchal ideology portrayed in there. This is even more dangerous for many men who will read these passages as Word of God, many of whom cannot appreciate the ideological nature of biblical texts. A globalized African Christian woman will read these texts with suspicion and resistance. As she does this, she will experience a contradiction between the liberating power of the biblical traditions and the patriarchal African and Israelite cultures. For example, her identification with woman Stranger as a force to reckon with in the world of her time may empower her to continue to seek the liberation for women, a necessary exercise in post-apartheid South Africa. However, she will also be aware that the Bible does not offer her a full picture of the situation of the time (particularly about the womenfolk) because as it is also the case with stories in her culture, these are usually handed down by men.

By a globalized African woman I am referring to a woman who though she wants to remain faithful to the African culture and embrace it as far as she can, acknowledges that this culture does not remain static. She is willing to embrace liberating elements not only of her own culture but even those of other cultures.

Though she is proud of her culture, she resists those elements in her culture and in other cultures that are oppressive. In a nutshell, she is a woman who is conscious of her rights as an individual human being. The contradictions experienced are as follows: According to the traditional African custom, *lobola*, which we argued can to a certain extent be empowering, has been given out for her. Then in this culture, her sexuality no longer belongs to her. Such a view is cemented by the androcentric biblical hermeneutics she receives both in the academy and in the church. Her Christian community, therefore, cannot be helpful in bringing her out of the predicament. It is in this community that she will be reminded to always be available to her partner because the apostle Paul has warned: "*le se ke la hlokana*" literally, you must always be available to each other for sex (1 Cor 7:5). This implies that, even if the female partner has no interest,

for the sake of her husband, she is supposed to be available. Her body no longer belongs to her but to him. The reverse situation does not seem to receive equal attention, if it ever does. A problematic situation for an African woman because if "you are because I am", the *botho* (humanness) mentality, it means that the husband who is committed to this spirit, particularly in a globalised setting, cannot afford to allow his wife to lose herself to him.

We assume that she understands the ideological nature of the text, a position that will ultimately prove to be more dangerous because, though she does, her husband may not. The male church elders may not. The important question is: How is this woman supposed to find her way in this situation, one which is not temporary? It is a life time problem! Looking from the outside, one would simply advise her to opt out of the marriage. She is not likely to embrace such a view again on the basis of her African culture and her Christian faith. In both cultures, one's status as a person is determined by one's marital status. A Northern Sotho proverb goes: *Lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* which literally means: The grave of the woman is at the husband's place. In a nutshell the proverb teaches that divorce is not acceptable in this culture. As a matter of fact, most of the women who attempt to imitate men by taking control of their sexuality are faced with a choice between two forms of "purification": an unhappy marriage which may ultimately lead to divorce, or death!

It would not be an exaggeration to argue that the African-South African woman portrayed above is actually a stranger in her own context, because of the contradictions she experiences in her everyday life. Like Woman Stranger, such a woman is a deviant, a pollutant, not only because of her knowledge and an unfamiliar world view, but because, she is a woman, this different "other" in a world that is strange to her. As I conclude, I wish to warn those who continue to marginalise her, I am referring here to the pollutants in a woman's world, with the words in John 8:7:

Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her!

Part Four: Personal Testimonies on Topical Issues