AOSIS

# Biblical discourse as a technology of 'othering': A decolonial reading on the 1840 Moffat sermon at the Tabernacle, Moorfields, London

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In his sermon to the directors of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in London in 1840, in 'othering' the Batswana (Africans), Moffat engages in biblical discourse. He uses biblical descriptions to 'other' them and the land they occupied. This article analyses the 1840 sermon by Moffat, and in it I will argue that through his sermon, Moffat engaged in biblical discourse and performed epistemic privilege in his exposition of the Batswana to his audience, namely the directors of the LMS. At the same time, he used biblical texts and imagery to create in the mind of his listeners an image of heathenism and uncivility. In doing so, I argue that he further located the Batswana within the realm of the 'damnés'. In the article, I apply two analytical lenses, namely decoloniality and critical race theory, as hermeneutical tools.

Contribution: It is argued in this article that in doing so, Moffat further located the Batswana within the realm of the damnés.

Keywords: othering; biblical discourse; critical race theory; epistemic privilege; heathenism; biblical imagery.

Introduction

Reflecting on the effects of colonisation, civilisation and conversion of the colonial subject, Mbembe (2001) stated the following:

> We may now examine the third case of divine libido, the phenomenon of conversion. At the beginning and at the end of conversion we always find language. Language first appears in preaching – that is, in a way of using the power of persuasion. (p. 227)

In analysing the 1840 sermon by Moffat, I locate the text within the 19th century literature. As a colonial subject, I locate myself within decolonial thought. In so doing, I take the invitation by Gloria Anzaldúa seriously, namely that I should locate myself clearly in my writing, thinking, doing, knowing and understanding. Mignolo (2012:42) argued that 'it is within this social and epistemic location that decolonial epistemologies found their dwelling'. For that reason, my analysis of the 1840 sermon by Robert Moffat cannot be disconnected from the fact that I am a colonial subject, a black Motswana, and I continue to be haunted by his theological outlook of the Batswana (Africans) and the imagination of the divine duty of the West to colonise, civilise and convert the Batswana. He did this through forms of denigration of Batswana as heathens and descendants of Ham. This included the application of technologies to bring about cultural change through the translation of, firstly, the New Testament and, subsequently, the entire Bible into the Setswana language. This resulted in the colonising of the linguistic heritage and demonising the cultural treasure of the indigenous people, performing an act of rewriting and manipulation to necessitate rupture and cultural change (Mothoagae & Semenya 2015:44–62).

I engage with the sermon of Moffat with a sense of commitment and responsibility to critically raise the various biblical imageries applied in the sermon. At the same time, I acknowledge that the article touches on only certain aspects of the sermon, as a detailed analysis of the sermon would require several subsequent articles. The aim of the article is to spark a conversation and a debate on sermons that probably apply a similar approach and structure within biblical scholarship. In short, analysing such texts would also highlight the modalities and technologies that missionaries used to convert, civilise and colonise the indigenous people and their languages. In this regard, Mojola (2004) referred to:

Postcolonial approaches to translation […] as well as the role of translation in processes of cultural domination and subordination, colonization and decolonization, indoctrination and control and the […] hybridization and creolization of cultures and languages. (p. 101)

The London Missionary Society (LMS) was constituted on 21 September 1795 at a meeting that was regularly held on the first night of the week in London. One of the tenets of the Society was 'to spread the knowledge of Christ among heathen and other unenlightened nations' (Lovett 1899:38). Robert Moffat, a missionary who belonged to the LMS, preached his sermon to the directors of the LMS in 1840. The sermon also mentions the 'endeavours' of the missionaries who were stationed outside Europe. Above all, the sermon marked the first translation of the New Testament into the Setswana language. The translation of the New Testament was done by Robert Moffat, in collaboration with the British and Foreign Bible Society, published the text in 1840 – the same year that the sermon was preached.

Mignolo (2012:25–26) reminded us that 'decolonizing epistemology means, in the long run, liberating thinking from sacralized texts, whether religious or secular'. He further stated, 'The first task of decolonizing epistemology [and I will say more about "epistemology" below] consists in learning to unlearn in order to relearn and to rebuild'. (p. 26)

The intention of this article is to argue that, as a colonial subject when analysing the 1840 sermon and the 19th literature, I have to understand, analyse, and ascertain how to de-link from the coloniality of power. Thus, by applying a decolonial lens in such an analysis entails what Mignolo (2012:19) refers to as 'decolonising epistemologies' and 'de-linking the colonial subject'. In order to de-link and move forward, decolonial epistemologies are needed. Succinctly put, it is the task of the colonial subject to critique the epistemological privilege and the coloniality of power in these literary works through the use of alternative epistemologies. It does not entail halting what cannot be halted (Mignolo 2012):

[B]ut how to move away, to be in and out, to de-link, from the colonial matrix that will continue to be in place, flexible as it is to adapt to changing circumstances. (p. 41)

The following section analyses the ideological location of the preacher, namely Robert Moffat.

The ideological location of the author: Contextualising the 1840 sermon

Mignolo (2012) reminded us that:

Modernity is a discourse defining its interiority by creating the difference to be marginalized and eliminated. The rhetoric of modernity has an abundant vocabulary to mark the difference, to create exteriority spatially and temporally: pagans, barbarians, primitives, women, gays, lesbians, Blacks, Indians, underdeveloped, emerging economies, communists, terrorists, yellows, etc. (p. 26)

In 1840, Robert Moffat preached his sermon to the directors of the LMS, philanthropists and the various other sectors of society. He (Moffat 1840) used Isaiah 9:2 as a theme for his sermon, which stated the following:

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death: upon them hath the light shined. (p. 2)

In analysing the above citation within the context in which it was cited, the following key concepts are emphasised: darkness and light. This biblical imagery is used in the sermon to draw the attention of the listener. The dualism of darkness and light is one that is applied to point to those spaces that have been viewed and constructed as spaces consumed by darkness; it is in these spaces that evil and Satan reign supreme. Moffat (1840) stated the following:

In this discourse I propose to consider, first the Condition of those who are described in the text as walking in darkness, and dwelling in the land of the shadow death; and, Secondly, the Condition of such a people after they have been visited with the day-spring from on high. (p. 6)

The notion of darkness, as cited above, creates in the mind of listeners a sense of agent and agency. As agents, the missionaries went out to preach the 'good news', at the same time performing agency in that they saw this as a fulfilment of their own calling. Furthermore, as agents, they had an important task, namely the task of preaching the 'good news' to those living under the spell and conditions of darkness. Thus, their task, as subjects, was to facilitate the bringing of the 'light of Christ' to those who were 'cursed' and are subjects of darkness.

While performing such agency, they have regulated themselves into fulfilling and undertaking the enormous task of living in accordance with the norms of the 'gospel', believing that they had been commanded to perform such a task. Moffat (1840) stated:

We are now constrained to say, that their [*fathers and founders*] love for the perishing heathen, and their faith in the promises of God, and their zeal for the Lord of hosts, during the infancy of Missionary enterprise, must have been of the most exalted description; and their names will, to the end of time, be embalmed in the delightful recollections of friends of Missions both at home and abroad. They laboured, and we have entered into their labours. They often sowed in tears, but we now reap in joy. (p. A2–4)

Thus, the notion of light and darkness becomes a form of biblical discourse in which the missionary exalts the founders of the Missionary Society. He further acknowledges that they will not be rewarded, but their sweat has led to the reaping of joy. This form of discourse becomes a vehicle for colonial

imperialists, who considered this as their divine right and as an ordinance or command sanctioned by God to perform and live by. I would argue that in the above citation, the two notions of agent and agency become evident. This is because it creates the idea in the mind of the listener that Europe had a divine blessing to convert, colonise and civilise those whom it deemed to be heathen, barbaric and living in the shadow of darkness. The binary of agent and agency became the key principles to which they (i.e. missionaries and colonial imperialists) would normativise, and they used it as a criterion, namely that conversion, colonialism and civilisation were avenues that they could use to bring the 'light of Christ' to the non-European countries. This view can be surmised in Mignolo's (2012) argument that:

> But to the extent that the civilizing mission and conversion to Christianity has been always present in the ideological conception of conquest and colonization, colonized 'males' are also judged from the normative understanding of 'man', and colonized 'females' are judged from the normative understanding of 'woman.' The priests and the church overtly presented their mission as transforming the colonized animals into human beings through conversion. (p. 73)

Thus, they 'othered' them, not only through preaching but also through literature. For example, the author of the book *Mr Moffat and the Bechuanas of South Africa* (1842) begins chapter one of his book with the following statement: 'Dear Children, – you often hear of the missionaries who go across the sea in ships to teach the poor heathen to know the true God' (Moffat 1842:1).

The author of *Mr Moffat and the Bechuanas of South Africa* links the notions of agent and agency in relation to the missionary enterprise with privilege. According to him, the missionaries not only risk their lives by travelling to unknown parts of the Earth; they also do something special, namely teach the heathen about the 'true God'. Such a statement creates the impression in the mind of the reader and listener that not only does the 'other' not know that there is a 'true God', but they appear either not to have a religion or to believe in something that does not contain 'truth'. Put differently, the 'other' does not have a sense of the divine – and if they do, such knowledge lacks truthfulness. The notion of truthfulness exists within the idea of epistemic privilege. In his article, Grosfoguel (2013:74) interrogated the notion of epistemic privilege and argued that the idea that the monopolisation of knowledge is provincialised is disguised under a discourse about 'universality'. Grosfoguel (2013) further stated that:

> The other side of this epistemic privilege is epistemic inferiority. Epistemic privilege and epistemic inferiority are two sides of the same coin. The coin is called epistemic racism/sexism. (p. 76)

Based on the argument by Grosfoguel, epistemic privilege is not founded on the ideological premise of equality but rather of universalisation and exportation of not only their religion but also their cultural norms. In contrast, those who are on the other side of the coin possess epistemic and religious inferiority. Hence, that which they possess cannot be regarded as knowledge or religion. Accordingly, the conclusion by Grosfoguel that 'the coin is called epistemic racism/sexism' because of reducing anything non-European to the category of 'other' can be further observed in Kilgour's book, *The Bible Throughout the World: A Survey of the Scripture Translations* (1939). In it, Kilgour (1939) made the following remarks:

> AFRICA, THE DARK continent, though very late in receiving the Bible in any of her own tongues, already outstrips all the others in the number of languages possessing Scriptures. With no ancient literature of her own, and no indigenous characters in which to record her rich folklore, she has, almost entirely during the last half-century and mostly within the last few years, rapidly added the 'Best of Books' to her meagre stock. In almost every case she has adopted Roman letters, often with special signs and modifications, as her form of writing. In earlier ages she had borrowed scripts from other lands. (p. 33)

In the above citation, the image of darkness appears linked with the vernacularisation of the Bible. Not only is Africa 'dark', but Kilgour further suggests that African languages did not have their own alphabets. Here again the universalisation of knowledge and truthfulness is linked with the conversion, colonisation and civilisation of the 'other'. Not only does Kilgour present us with the two sides of the coin; he further suggests that the knowledge systems that Africa has are 'borrowed from other lands'. Such an implication conveys the idea of epistemic inferiority and that the missionaries and colonial imperialists perceived Africa as being devoid of all forms of knowledge.

I would argue that such literature was the only source of information to which the readers and listeners of that time had access. They could not verify the authenticity and the factuality of the claims made by missionaries, travellers, 'explorers' and agents of the colonial enterprise. Consequently, I would contend that the depiction of Africa as the 'dark continent' and her children as heathens and barbarians was based on epistemic privilege. This notion could be observed in Marrat's book titled *Robert Moffat, African Missionary* (1884), Chapter four, entitled 'Trials of Missionary Life', opens with the following poem by Montgomery (Marrat 1884):

> I sing the men who left their home,
> Amidst barbarian hordes to roam.
> Who land and ocean cross'd,
> Led by a loadstar, marked on high
> By Faith's unseen, all-seeing eye, –
> To seek and save the lost;
> Where'er the curse of Adam spread,
> To call his offspring from the dead.
> Strong in the great Redeemer's name,
> They bore the cross, despised the shame,
> And like their Master here,
> Wrestled with danger, pain, distress,

Hunger, and cold, and nakedness,
And every form of fear;
To feel His love their only joy,
To tell that love their sole employ. (p. 42)

The above poem epitomises the divine ordinance that the West perceived as their calling. It is against this background that the sermon of Moffat will be analysed. I would argue that such a sermon not only maps the colonial missionary activity; it also locates the epistemic and social location of the author of the sermon (Robert Moffat), including the *geosociopolitical* conditions in which the sermon was composed. Foucault (1994) rightly argued:

In the course of the 19th century, there appeared in Europe another, more uncommon, kind of author, whom one should confuse with neither the 'great' literary authors, nor the authors of religious texts, nor the founders of science. In a somewhat arbitrary way we shall call those who belong in this last group 'founders of discursivity.' (p. 217)

I assert that the argument by Foucault can be observed in the sermon by Moffat. In other words, we cannot pacify or negate the role of the author. In this context, the author does not invisibilise himself. Rather, throughout the sermon, he engages with the audience, as will be demonstrated later in this article. This is because such a sermon does not take place in a vacuum; rather, it celebrates something more than the importation of Western Christian ideological empiricism expressed in the 1611 King James Bible, which functioned as a source text in the translation of the Bible into Setswana. It also entailed the importation of Western values and norms.

Furthermore, we need to locate the sermon within the broader scheme of colonialism, conversion and civilisation. The sermon was preached in the year that the entire New Testament was made available in Setswana (1840). Interestingly, the same 1840 English–Setswana New Testament was printed in London by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Therefore, the sermon is significant in many ways because it marks the imprinting of Western values through the technology of translation. Hence, failure to locate this historical event within the broader scheme of things will limit the type of analysis we do. Just as Foucault (1994:206) argued, I contend that it is in this sermon that we can observe the exemplification and perpetuation of the immortality of the hero – in this case, the missionary named Robert Moffat.

I would further argue that such a sermon is what Foucault (1994:212) referred to as 'an act placed in the bipolar field of the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous'. The sermon also highlights the ideological status of the author, which decolonial scholars would refer to as the epistemic and social location. The two poles locate the ideological space within which the author – in this instance, the preacher of the sermon – is located. The following section analyses the sermon from a decolonial perspective.

Analysing the 1840 Moffat sermon

Mbembe (2001:70) drew our attention to the following in relation to the technology of conversion – or what Foucault (1982) refers to as 'pastoral power and disciplinary power'. Mbembe (2001) made the following remarks:

Along the Atlantic seaboard, as well as inland, a large number of independent political units disintegrated under the burden of external debt and domestic tyranny. In the course of the nineteenth century, these dislocations led to major cultural realignments marked by mass conversion to monotheistic religions, acute crises of witchcraft, appearance of numerous healing cults, transformation of refugee communities into mercenary bands, and a number of uprisings in the name of Islam. The fall-off in demand for slaves did not lead to a reduction of tensions; on the contrary, the peoples and ethnic groups that had successfully maintained their privileges as brokers and secured their domination over the great commercial nodal points accentuated their demographic expansion and supplied themselves with guns. (p. 71)

The sermon of Moffat, as I will demonstrate in this section, needs to be contextualised from the perspective of what Mbembe (2019:1) referred to as '*image ontology*'. It is argued that it is in this sermon that Mbembe's notion of *image ontology* becomes identifiable, namely in the way the preacher describes and locates Africa. Moffat began his reflection as follows: 'Africa! thy name has aroused the noblest energies of our nature, and called forth the tenderest sympathies of the British heart!' (Moffat 1840:14).

Following Mbembe's notion of *image ontology*, it can be argued that the above citation illustrates how *image ontology* is applied and performed by Moffat in his categorisation of Africa. Moffat (1840) further stated:

Africa! how vast, how overwhelming thy burden! How *numberless thy wrongs*, the prey of *fiendish men*; *the world's great mart of murder, rapine, bondage, blood, and souls of me*! On no part of earth's surface, in no state or *condition of mankind*, can we find a parallel to *thy woes!* (p. 15; *author's added emphasis*)

In the above quotation we observe how biblical language is used as a vehicle to perform a technology of erasure. It also highlights the interplay between the politics of interpretation, power, knowledge and regimes of truth. This is seen in the way that Moffat describes Africa as a village: above all, he demonstrates his location in terms of his interpretation of Africa, applying Western norms as a rubric to measure Africa and locating it within the Third World order. Such a description illustrates his epistemic privilege. This is demonstrated by his assertion that Africa is a burden, compounded by wrongs and a victim of evil men. Moffat's categorisation can be epitomised by Mbembe's argument of *image ontology*. For Mbembe, *image ontology* emanates from the concept of perceptions and prejudices that a person has about the 'other', based on facial appearance and skin colour.

Using biblical discourse, Moffat performs *image ontology* as a technology to arouse in the minds of the listeners the idea

that Europe (Britain, in particular) is owed a great debt by Africans. In so doing, Moffat 'others' Africa and its inhabitants. Using biblical imagery, he laments the 'conditions' in which he claims some of the categorisations of Africa. Moffat (1840) stated:

> How long, O Lord, how long? 'Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? But thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children.' Yea, her day is drawing, and her redemption draweth nigh. Already her ransomed sons in our western isles are raising their hearts in songs of blest anticipation. Yes, Africa is stretching forth her hands unto God! (p. 15)

In his use of biblical imagery, Moffat was not only engaging in the performance of pastoral power and disciplinary power; he was also engaging in the notion of whiteness through his use of biblical texts in 'othering' that which was perceived to be outside of Europe. Thus, biblical texts became the basis on which Africa was not only 'othered' but categorised and rendered invisible or absent, while Europe (whiteness) was rendered 'visible or present', in the words of Wilderson III (2008). While scholars such as Mignolo (2007:455) and Quijano (2000:345) have located such an approach within what they refer to as 'the colonial matrix of power', they rightly argue that we need to understand the colonial matrix of power within the specification of what the term 'colonial world' means – both at the local structural level and within its historical transformation. Mignolo (2007:480) thus states that racism and the coloniality of being are one and the same cognitive operation entrenched at the philosophical level in the colonial matrix of power. The colonial matrix of power gives a historical depth and a logical consistency to Frantz Fanon's notion of the '*damne's*' as a theoretical concept grounded in the history of the colonial matrix of power. The racial classification that constitutes the modern/colonial world (through the imperial and colonial differences) had in theology and the theo-politics of knowledge its historical and epistemic foundation.

I further contend that it is in the above citation that we can observe how whiteness is performed within the 'colonial matrix of power' in its use of biblical discourse to construct and 'other' that which is not or does not conform to the norms and standards of whiteness. The observation by Birt (2004) becomes essential in how we are to analyse and interpret sermons such as the one penned by Moffat. Birt (2004) raised a pivotal question in the title of his chapter, 'The Bad Faith of Whiteness'. He further stated that:

> Whiteness is the bad faith identity of the racially dominant. The bad faith of whiteness is the self-deception of the privileged, the inauthenticity of dominant people within a racialised social hierarchy. To embrace whiteness is to embrace the bad faith of privilege. Whiteness is the privilege of exclusive transcendence. But it can lie as such only through the denial of the transcendence of an Other, the reduction of that Other to an Object, to pure facticity. (p. 58)

In his sermon, Moffat uses biblical texts in the 'othering' of non-Europeans. I contend that the miscategorisation of Africans exemplifies the notion of whiteness, which could not exist without the 'other', as argued in the above citation. It is for this reason that Mbembe (2001) reminded us that:

> Whether dealing with Africa or with other non-European worlds, this tradition long denied the existence of any 'self' but its own. Each time it came to peoples different in race, language, and culture, the idea that we have, concretely and typically, the same flesh, or that, in Husserl's words, 'My flesh already has the meaning of being a flesh typical in general for us all', became problematic. The theoretical and practical recognition of the body and flesh of 'the stranger' as flesh and body just like mine, the idea of a common human nature, a humanity shared with others, long posed, and still poses, a problem for Western consciousness. But it is in relation to Africa that the notion of 'absolute otherness' has been taken farthest. (p. 2)

What Mbembe is raising in the above citation can also be observed in the sermon, including the use of biblical texts to describe Africa. In other words, the missionary and colonial enterprise were actualised in the colonial conquest and the construction of the so-called heathen. Mbembe (2001) further argued:

> Instead, the emphasis should be on the logic of 'conviviality' on the dynamics of domesticity and familiarity, inscribing the dominant and the dominated within the same episteme. (p. 110)

This view of Mbembe is corroborated by Wilderson III (2008:98) to analyse properly the technologies of power expressed or that reside in the space of whiteness, we first need to locate whiteness within what can be referred to as the cartographic presence. I would argue that in his sermon, Moffat performs similar technologies of power within the cartographic presence of whiteness. Wilderson III stated the following: 'Thus, Black "presence is a form of absence" for to see a Black is to see the Black, an ontological frieze that waits for a gaze'. Wa Thiong'o (1981) held that:

> The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance [*of the colonised*] is the cultural bomb. The effect of a bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. (p. 16)

The sermon was preached to an audience that had probably never been to Africa. It can be assumed that they knew of Africa only from the perspective of the literature that was published at the time. The sermon also functioned as a geographical oppression of black people, as the preacher created a narrative and perceptions of Africa, thus necessitating the need to maintain the missionary enterprise. It can be argued that what he did to the audience is what Wilderson III and Birt have argued, namely that blackness becomes present because the preacher makes it so. Through his sermon, blackness becomes visible in the minds of the audience because it is rendered so – not because cartographic space is constructed

for blackness to be present; rather, because whiteness in the process becomes visible and dominant because of the 'other'. 'Otherness', then, becomes a point in which whiteness as a power–knowledge connection is able to produce new forms of knowledge, i.e. through the use of biblical texts, the preacher creates or constructs 'knowledge about Black people, that are productive of new forms of "subjects"' (Yancy 2004:107). The latter author further argued as follows:

> On this reading, whiteness, as a power/knowledge nexus with respect to black 'selves' and black bodies, produces a *philosophical, epistemological, anthropological, phrenological, and political discursive field* that 'enables a more continuous and pervasive control of what people do, which in turn offers further possibilities for more intrusive inquiry and disclosure'. (p. 108; *author's emphasis added*)

The argument by Yancy is clearly observable in the 1840 sermon, as well as in the various works of literature that were written by missionaries and the 'adventurous'. For example, in the journals and letters of Robert Moffat and Mary Moffat, both give an obscure description of the Batswana. In a letter to Mr and Mrs Robert Moffat senior, Inverkeithing, dated 06 February 1827 (Moffat & Moffat 1951:233–234), we can observe the arguments by scholars such as Mbembe, Wa Thiong'o, Birt, Wilderson III and Yancy. Moffat and Moffat (1951) states:

> Robert Moffat to Mr & Mrs Robert Moffat, senior, Inverkeithing Lattakoo[1]
> 6 February, 1827
>
> Since the house was finished, I have relinquished the public work and applied myself to the language, and will do so until I am completely master of it, when an extensive field will open mental operations. Of course, I have to attend to a round of little engagements of a domestic nature, unavoidably connected with my situation. I hope now to make rapid progress in the most important part of the work. With that object in view, I intend shortly to proceed to a tribe about 200 or 300 miles in the interior, where it is my intention to stop a month or two, in order to become perfectly familiar in the language, by associating exclusively with the savages, entirely alone, without an individual who can speak a word of either English or Dutch. (pp. 233–234)

In both the sermon and in other literature cited above, Moffat (1840:16) drew his audience into an anthropological space by stating that 'there is not the shadow of an idol god, nor the slightest belief remaining that there is a creator, preserver, or governor of all things!' (Moffat 1840:16). In this way, he suggests that because there is no image of the divine, there can be no knowledge of the divine. Whereas at an epistemological and philosophical level, he makes the following claims:

> [A]s the last rays of tradition have sunk beneath their intellectual horizon, the invisible things of God from the creation are no more seen and understood by the things which are made. (p. 16)

The assertion by Yancy from the Foucauldian perspective becomes observable in that Moffat performs or constructs knowledge by performing and exhibiting epistemic privilege

1. Cf. C.A. Archives, M./9/1/6. Doc. 1/1827.

over his audience in his construction of the black body. Yancy (2004) further stated that:

> Seeing the blackness is sufficient. Judgment has already been rendered: Guilty! Take the white woman on the elevator. She looks with eyes that are informed by white *mythos* and structured through white historical power. The black body is therefore always already *codified.* She then begins the *ritual* of clutching at her purse. This ritual is not simply an effect of mythos and codification. Rather, the ritual is generative; it reinforces the reality, solidity, and 'truth' of the context. Through mythos, codification, and ritualized behavior the black body is then *ontologized*; its being gets frozen into something that should be avoided, a thing rendered suspect a priori. (p. 10)

This can further be observed in the following assertion by Moffat (1840):

> However startling this may be to you, and however some may doubt of my ability to prove these assertions they are as notorious as they are humbling to man for it only proves what the Scriptures affirm, that man, by nature, is like the wild ass's colt, wise to do evil, but to do good, he has no knowledge; and thus man is only a religious creature in proportion to the knowledge he possess of divine things. (p. 17)

By arguing that Africans have no knowledge of the divine, including the ability to determine and assess right from wrong, Moffat not only applies his epistemic location but he also applies a biblical imagery to convince his audience that the missionary activity is a noble enterprise. Moreover, that what he is asserting is the 'absolute truth', based on the rubric of the criterion of the Western epistemic location of privilege. In other words, he applies the regimes of truth and Western norms. He uses biblical imagery as a form of a measuring tool to persuade his audience. He applies the language of persuasion to drive the idea that missionary enterprise is not just an enterprise for its own sake; rather, it has a divine authority and obligation to spread not only the gospel, but its value code as well. In the words of Yancy (2004:108), it can be argued that he universalises the 'value code' by creating values, norms and epistemic frames of reference, in this instance, the Scriptures and Western norms, to unilaterally affirm their many modes of representation – religious, political, institutional, aesthetic and so forth.

The representation through the epistemic frames of reference can be identified in his 'othering' of Africans by labelling them as sons of Ham. Here again, Scripture becomes a 'value code', as Africans are not only located within the realm of heathenism but are regarded as the descendants of a 'cursed' ancestry. Mbembe (2001) reminded us:

> To convert the other is to incite him or her to give up what she or he believed. Theoretically, the passage from one belief system to another ought to entail the submission of the convert to the institution and the authority in charge of proclaiming the new belief. In actuality, every conversion has always been, if only covertly, an operation of selection, has always required, on the part of the convert, an active exercise of judgment. (p. 228)

Therefore, the conversion of the African involves not only bringing forth cultural change, which is perceived to be a hindrance to the light of Christ. The light of Christ as a

metaphor for biblical imagery and biblical discourse, then, plays a role in removing the 'curse', namely that Africans have descended from Ham and consequently carry a generational curse. Conversion then becomes a form of power. I would argue that this form of power is described by Foucault (1982) as 'pastoral power':

> This is due to the fact that the modern Western state has integrated in a new political shape an old power technique which originated in Christian institutions. We can call this power technique the pastoral power. (p. 782)

This generational curse is expressed in the religiocultural practices that, in the mind of the liberator, require a form of exorcism. This form of exorcism is based on the conversion and the submission of the convert to the institution and the authority in charge of proclaiming the new belief. Moreover, the removal of the curse necessitates what Foucault refers to as 'disciplinary power'. It is here that I would argue that the intersectionality of both powers takes place. In other words, pastoral power has morphed, yet it has essentially remained the same. This is the type of power that Foucault denotes as 'disciplinary power'. He applies a contradistinction between these powers by arguing that disciplinary power emerges from sovereign power. Additionally, he applies the notion of disciplinary power to delineate the various modes of power, or what he calls 'biopower', and he views power (biopower) as a major source of societal discipline and conformism. Foucault (1982) argued as follows:

> This form of power is salvation oriented (as opposed to political power). It is oblative (as opposed to the principle of sovereignty); it is individualizing (as opposed to legal power); it is coextensive and continuous with life; it linked with the production of truth – the truth of the individual himself … In a way, we can see the state as a modern matrix of individualization or a new form of pastoral power. (p. 783)

In other words, following Foucault's description of both powers (pastoral power and disciplinary power), it can be argued that conversion as a form of power is salvation-oriented, while at the same time it becomes a mechanism of subjectification, a mechanism of exploitation and domination (Foucault 1982:782). The literary work of Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968) becomes important in understanding the notion of the conditions of the 'damned' [*damnés*] and how these powers are performed within the zone of nonbeing. This is the condition that exists within the zone of nonbeing; it is a space of geographical oppression and violence. At the same time, the notion of conversion becomes key in understanding how the *damnés* are perceived and how disciplinary power is performed. This is observable in Robert Moffat's 'persuasive' description of Africa and its inhabitants. At the same time, through his portrayal of the heroism of the missionary enterprise, he performs the politics of custodianship in the minds of his listeners, as well as that of conversion in the importation of Western value codes through the universalisation of Christianity and the vernacularisation of the Bible. This implies that their generosity was not in vain; rather, it has brought the light of Christ into the world of the heathen and has 'improved' the conditions of those

living under the 'shadow of darkness'. The objective championed in the founding documents of the LMS is 'to spread the knowledge of Christ among heathen and other unenlightened nations' (Lovett 1899:38).

In conclusion, I would argue that the sermon by Moffat (1840:4) encapsulates the missionary enterprise in the following words: 'They often sowed in tears, but we now reap in joy'. Consequently, it is my contention that the 1840 sermon of Moffat cannot and should not be analysed outside the geopolitics of the time in Europe and in Africa, particularly in South Africa. Additionally, the context in which the sermon was preached is significant in relation to the publication of the first complete English–Setswana New Testament translation (1840) in Britain by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Sugirtharajah (1996:9) reminded us that translation is more than a simple linguistic enterprise: It is a site for promoting unequal relationships among languages, races, religions and peoples. It brings into focus the manipulative position of a translator. He further raised the question of privilege, arguing that written texts are privileged as a valid medium of sacred communication. This is seen in the missionary translations devaluing orality and the rhetoric of hearing. This is also observable in the Moffat sermon (1840), in which he stated the following:

> [*A*]lready the everlasting Gospel has been translated into many languages; already the angel flying in the midst of heaven has scattered the seed over many nations; the bearers of the torch of Divine truth have entered her temples. (p. 32)

The sermon was preached to mark the philosophical, epistemological, anthropological, phrenological, political and linguistic colonisation of the Setswana language, including the importation of the Western norms (value codes). At the same time, the sermon used biblical imagery and discourse to locate the Batswana within the realm of the 'other'. Soja (2010:1) argued that the consequences of geographical injustice contain not only geographies of physical and political boundaries but also the geographical mappings of ideas, images and normative structures. Hence, the sermon highlights the impact of the geographical injustices orchestrated against the receptor culture with the aim of cultural change and foreignising that which is familiar to the 'other', based on the premise of phrenology – or what Mbembe referred to as '*image ontology*'. Mbembe (2001) reminded us:

> By divesting himself or herself of previous beliefs, the neophyte is supposed to have shifted his or her center of gravity. A test or ordeal of defamiliarization and disorientation, conversion distances the convert from family, relatives, language, customs, even from geographical environment and social contacts—that is, from various forms of inscription in a genealogy and an imaginary This distancing is supposed to allow the neophyte to situate himself or herself within an absolutely different horizon – a horizon that paganism, in its horror, can no longer attain or recuperate. In other words, thanks to the act of conversion, the subject is supposed to attain a kind of alterity from the self and, in a spectacular shift

of identity, thus arrive at his or her very being, whose function is to make. (p. 229)

This observation by Mbembe is heightened in Moffat's 1840 sermon by emphasising the availability of the Setswana version of the 1611 King James Bible. It is also seen in the appropriation of the image of the gentile in relation to the Batswana, while those of European descent are located epistemologically, anthropologically, religiously and politically within the realm of the 'we', as an exclusionist term. In short, the 'we' appropriates a Jewish biblical identity of being a chosen nation with the authority and duty to spread the gospel of light. At the same time, however, it centres and constructs the normativity of whiteness. In other words, as I have demonstrated, in Moffat's sermon the characters are the white evangelist and white adventurer, both of which are simultaneously examples of a deeply distorted Christian imagination of social existence but also of a concealed imagination of Christian intimacy. Through religious practices and theologies, colonial imperialists – in collaboration with the missionary enterprise – have played a central role in the mystification of imperial tactics and have served to justify forms of physical, economic and social violence against the *damnés*, the 'other'.

I would contend that for biblical scholarship in the Global South to engage critically with the biblical texts, it needs to take into consideration the multilayered heritage that has led to the vernacularisation of the Bible and the standardisation and colonisation of indigenous languages. Thus, the study of the 19th-century missionary enterprise and colonisation should rather be a study in undoing a 'distorted relational imagination', including decolonising the biblical discourse in which the missionaries engaged. Such an analysis should be about cartographies of a neutral table. As Mignolo (2012:26) has rightly argued, 'the first task of decolonizing epistemology consists in learning to unlearn in order to relearn and to rebuild'.

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