

**Peace Talks:  
Towards an Intercultural Bible Study  
On 1 Samuel 25**

By

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## ABSTRACT

This study has the goal of constructing an Intercultural Bible Study on the story of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, with an accompanying workbook, that has its goal the flourishing of communities. The point of departure of this study is the fragmented and culturally isolated communities of South African society, where the church is an important role player. Using a specific congregational context of Blaawbergstrand, the context is described, which forms the background of the study. By recounting the demographic, socio-economic and ecclesiastic circumstances of residents from this community, the contextual integrity of the study is maintained. The description provides insight in this community, which is a sufficient exemplar of a typically South African one. It illustrates the effects of rapid urbanization, the prevailing gap between rich and poor, and the church's failure to contribute to concrete and lasting reconciliation in a country with a racial and racist past. The description, in line with the feminist approach applied throughout this study, also underlines the plight of women in a patriarchal society.

This study moreover offers an in-depth description of the nature and significance of an Intercultural Bible Study that builds on the Contextual Bible Study as applied by the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research. In particular the contribution of Intercultural Bible Study hermeneutics is considered, namely the value of intercultural, interpersonal contact between people, and the benefits of transformative reading, of which cultivating compassion is paramount.

The Biblical text chosen for the development of an Intercultural Bible Study is the story of Abigail, as told in 1 Samuel 25. The female hero of the text, her prophetic words and proactive deeds of generosity, provides the reader with relevant topics for "peace talks": she halts a war with provisions and diplomacy; she intercedes on behalf of others, showing genuine compassion; she acts outside of the demarcated borders expected of a woman of her time. The text is read with close attention to both literary criticism and feminist appreciation. The accent on food as instrument of inclusion is confirmed with the reading, and this is also appropriated in the workbook provided.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie het die doel om 'n Interkulturele Bybelstudie oor die storie van Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 te ontwikkel, met 'n bruikbare werkboek, wat die doel het om die welwees van gemeenskappe te bevorder. Die navorsingsprobleem van hierdie studie is die gefragmenteerde en kultureel geïsoleerde gemeenskappe van Suid-Afrika, waar die kerk nog 'n belangrike rol speel. 'n Spesifieke gemeentekonteks van Bloubergstrand word gebruik as voorbeeld om die konteks van die gemeenskap te beskryf, en hierdie beskrywing vorm die kontekstuele agtergrond vir die studie. Die demografiese, sosio-ekonomiese en kerklike omstandighede van hierdie gemeenskap word beskryf, en hierdie agtergrond dra by tot die kontekstuele integriteit van hierdie studie. Die insig verwerf, verskaf 'n verantwoordbare voorbeeld van die breër Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing. Dit verskaf illustrasie vir die gevolge van verstedeliking, die steeds groeiende gaping tussen ryk en arm, en die kerk se mislukking om 'n reële bydrae te lewer ten opsigte van versoening in 'n land met 'n omstrede verlede ten opsigte van rassekwessies, asook die voortgaande stryd om menseregte in kerk en samelewing. Die beskrywing, parallel met die feministiese benadering van die studie as geheel, verreken ook die betreurenswaardige situasie van vroue in 'n patriargale samelewing.

Die studie bied verder 'n in-diepte beskrywing van die aard en belangrikheid van 'n Interkulturele Bybelstudie wat voorbou op 'n Kontekstuele Bybelstudie, soos toegepas deur die Ujamaa Sentrum vir Gemeenskapsontwikkeling en Navorsing. Spesifiek word die bydrae van Interkulturele Bybelstudie-hermeneutiek ook verreken, naamlik deur die klem op die waarde van interkulturele, interpersoonlike kontak, asook die voordele van transformatiewe leesprosesse, waar veral die kweek van meelewing uitstaan.

Die Bybelteks wat gekies is om die Interkulturele Bybelstudie te ontwikkel, is die storie van Abigail, in 1 Samuel 25. Verskeie faktore van hierdie verhaal verskaf aan die leser relevante materiaal vir "samesprekings vir vrede": die held is vroulik, haar woorde is profeties en haar dade proaktief. Sy verhoed 'n oorlog met proviand en diplomatie; sy tree in vir ander op 'n meelewende manier, en sy beweeg sonder vrees buite die voorgeskryfde grense vir vroue van haar tyd. Die teks word op twee maniere van naby bekyk: literêre kritiek word gebruik, asook 'n feministiese lens. Die klem op kos as metode ter wille van inklusiwiteit word bevestig in die lees van die verhaal, en hierdie element word herhaal in die werkboek wat verskaf word.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>List of Abbreviations</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.1. Background and Motivation</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.2. Research Problem</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.3. Research Focus</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.4. Research Question</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.5. Research Objectives</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.6. Methodology</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.7. Chapter Division</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.8. Demarcation</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2. Towards Understanding the Context</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.1. Geographic and Demographic Context</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.2. Political and Socio-Economic Context</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>2.3. Ecclesiastical and Theological Context</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.3.1. The DRC and Human Rights</b>	<b>30</b>
a) <b>Women in Ministry</b>	<b>30</b>
b) <b>The DRC and the LGBTIQ Community</b>	<b>32</b>
c) <b>Ecumenism and Cultural Isolation</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>2.4. Conclusion</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>3. Towards Understanding Contextual and Intercultural Bible Study</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>3.1. A Critical Appraisal</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>3.2. Contextual Bible Study</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>3.2.1. Core Values</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>3.2.2. Steps in Constructing a Contextual Bible Study</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>3.2.3. The Role of the Facilitator</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>3.2.4. The Role of the Participant</b>	<b>52</b>

<b>3.3. Intercultural Bible Study</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3.3.1. Terminology</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3.3.2. Design</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3.3.3. Multipolar Approach</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>3.3.4. Ecumenism and Development</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>3.4. Cultivating Compassion</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>3.4.1. Transformative Reading</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>3.4.2. The Nussbaum Contribution</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>4. Towards Understanding Abigail (1 Samuel 25)</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>4.1. Introducing the Story</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>4.2. Literary Analysis</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>4.2.1. Structure</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>4.2.2. Genre</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>4.2.3. Characters and Plot</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>4.2.4. Flourishing/Peace in a Context of Trauma</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>4.2.5. Verbal Resistance as Prophecy</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>4.3. Feminist Analysis</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>4.3.1. Character and Plot</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4.3.2. Agency and Resistance in a Man's World</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>4.3.3. Women, Food and Generosity</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>4.3.4. Cultivating Compassion</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>5. An Intercultural Bible Study on the Abigail Story</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>5.1. Introduction</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>5.2. Workbook for Intercultural Bible Study</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>5.3. Analysis of the Workbook</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>5.3.1. Welcome page</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>5.3.2. Who are you?</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>5.3.3. Who are we?</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>5.3.4. Lectio Divina</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>5.3.5. Quiet Reflection</b>	<b>127</b>

<b>5.3.6. Group Discussion (1)</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>5.3.7. With a Friendly Stranger</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>5.3.8. Group Discussion (2)</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>5.3.9. Celebrating Communion</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>5.4. Summaries of Bible Study Movements</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>5.5. Intersectionality</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>7. Appendixes</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>7.1. Word Poster 1: South Africa (Positive)</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>7.2. Word Poster 2: South Africa (Negative)</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>7.3. Word Poster 3: Women</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>7.4. Word Poster 4: The Church</b>	<b>144</b>
<b>8. Bibliography</b>	<b>145</b>

### **List of Abbreviations**

CBS	Contextual Bible Study
ICBS	Intercultural Bible Study
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
URCSA	Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RIV	Revised International Version

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Background and Motivation**

Long gone are the days of “objective” theology – all theology is subjective. All our thoughts and words about God are products of our context: our time, place, history, culture, experiences and relationships. Theology is contextual almost to the point of it being autobiographical (Ackermann 2014: 13).

It seems that the choice is not whether to work contextually or not, but to be honest about it or not. To be truthful about contextuality does not only mean to mention it a few times, but to be profoundly aware of the factors and conditions that produce not only our questions, but also our answers.

To be sincere about context, implies that I, at the start of this study, share at least a few of my labels. To put the entirety of one’s identity on a page is almost impossible; all humans are dynamic beings with shifting identities. For this exercise, however, the labels that I choose to describe myself and my context, will say much about my concerns and commitments.

I am a woman living in a patriarchal society, and have been treated as a member of the lesser and weaker sex all my life. I have become sensitized about this reality at a very young age, but would not have known what to call it. I have had a concern for not only my own, but all of women’s equality and dignity for most of my life, but learned only in my twenties that it is called “feminism”. I attended a conservative seminary in a predominantly Afrikaans (also known for being traditional and patriarchal) community, and was repeatedly called rebellious. Later I realized that it seemed that way to others, simply because I was one of very few female theological students.

I became an ordained minister in the Dutch Reformed Church (hereafter DRC) seventeen years ago, and currently I am ministering in my third congregation. I find that I in this setting am able to live out my theology of praxis, but admit that I am surprised by the pervasiveness of patriarchal beliefs. In my experience, the church at large has been working to keep patriarchy in place, rather than to unsettle it. This is true not only for small churches in the

countryside as could be expected, but also for the suburban and urban communities in which I have ministered through the years.

One more description of a personal kind is necessary: I, together with my fellow South Africans, live in a country that deals daily with the legacy of Apartheid. We have experienced the elation of political freedom in 1994, and we found hope in the rainbow nation. But our young democracy is plagued by corruption, political unrest and economic struggles. Furthermore, on a more local level, our communities and churches are to a large degree still racially segregated – partly because physical neighbourhoods do not change easily, but largely because attitudes do not change easily.

As a result, little has changed for me or my community since the New South Africa was inaugurated – although some may disagree with me on this. I still maintain that communities are almost as culturally isolated as during the Apartheid years, and churches have not succeeded in bridging the gaps between fellow believers. Church members even now carry psychological marks from their pasts, whether it be guilt, shame or anger. We are in dire need of more truth and reconciliation.

I believe that much more can be done. I believe in transformative reading, especially of the Bible which so many people still hold in great regard. I believe in the power of the voice of the individual that was bestowed upon me by feminism. And I believe in the healing that is inherently available in the community of believers, in open and truthful contact with other human beings.

Last observations regarding intersections: in the above, it is obvious that the field of gender studies is of crucial importance to me. Much more will be said later about the feminist approach of this study, the implications thereof and how it will be used throughout the study: in considering the context, in using the hermeneutics, and in matching the methodology to the aforementioned. Suffice now to note the importance of the feminist approach, and to account for the intersection with gender studies as a greater discipline.

The other intersection that requires observation within the comprehensive field of study, is that of health – meant in a general and inclusive way. “Flourishing” has become a buzzword in contemporary theology, and has certainly deserved the attention (Marais 2011: 80). But the concept of health, flourishing, wellness, wholeness – and its synonym in this study, “shalom” or peace, is a well described and expounded theological idea. Nevertheless, it

deserves scrutiny and fresh expression, since it should be the concern of all theology. What has been newly explored in the last timeframe, is flourishing and health as an attribute of a community, not only of an individual (Kelsey 2008: 39). This has also been a contribution of African womanists, who call their modus of working “circle theology”, to denote that the well-being of any individual may not impede the flourishing of the community, or it negates itself (Phiri & Nadar, 2006: 3). Apart from regarding the voice of the individual as important, as any feminist study should, this exercise accounts the wellbeing of communities as pivotal. In this way, the intersection of gender and health is kept in mind throughout the study.

The above paragraphs have given a cursory explanation of the tags that I give myself; but it has not given the rigorous and extensive attention to context that has been promised. In chapter two of this study, much more will be said on the context in which this current study is conducted. In this chapter, conditions and circumstances will be described carefully, organized under suitable headings, in order to dissect the complexity of this reality.

However, to mention but one of the factors that gave rise to this current study that speaks to the research problem this study seeks to address. As minister in the DRC Bloubergstrand, I have increasingly come to realize that our “volkskerk”-heritage is alive and well (Nicol 2001: 137). The DRC, including the congregation of Bloubergstrand, would have to play an intentional role in the formation of racially inclusive communities. The strategies mentioned above and proposed in this study are all on point, and required. But the homogeneity of the DRC is still very much based on the use of language, specifically Afrikaans, and ritualized in the liturgy. Various suggestions are made to promote participation and share power in the liturgy of the DRC, but a multi-lingual approach in an otherwise predominant Afrikaans ecclesiology (Rossouw 2015: 89) seems to be a viable way of practicing hybridity.

## **1.2. Research Problem**

The main problem inspiring this study thus concerns the very real divisions in our still divided communities that prevent us from coming together in a meaningful way. Specifically pertaining to my context, the DRC in Bloubergstrand ministers in Afrikaans only, although no leader or member would hesitate to use English, or any other language they are capable of, if needs be. But one has to calculate the white community’s sense of displacement and loss,

and it becomes visible when people retreat to church to celebrate their cultural roots. In interviews with DRC ministers, Rossouw (2015: 87) found that all those interviewed highlighted their perceptions that for many Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, the DRC has remained “one of the few institutions in the country that appreciates homogenous whiteness”. Strong expectations about Afrikaner heritage related to language and culture are harboured within many of the church members, although clergy is not of the opinion that the church should stay homogenous. There is no reason to believe that the DRC members in Bloubergstrand feel differently. This contributes to cultural isolation, skewed self-perceptions, and difficulties in applying the beliefs they obtain in church to everyday life. All of this illustrate even better: it is time for the believers of this community, across cultural boundaries, to have peace talks.

At the time of the writing of this thesis, there has been yet another storm about white privilege on social media: a certain house of beauty products has made a gigantic mistake. They have advertised, as well as printed on a cleanser bottle, that the product is for “normal to dark” skin. The implication is clear: dark skin can never be normal (Motau, K., 2017). This may seem like a storm in a teacup, but the little hurricane is only the symptom of the great and underpinning weather patterns of racism, pervasive and compelling to the ignorant.

Although racism is against the law in South Africa, and calls for hate speech to be outlawed are mounting, it does rear its ugly head in public occasionally. This often happens on social media, strange how it may seem: people find the bravery to say what they truly think in cyberspace, but not face to face. Examples of this in South African society abound: 2017 started with comments about “monkeys” and “cockroaches” on beaches (Lujabe, 2017), and soon there followed a call to boycott restaurant chain Spur, because of an alleged racist incident (Du Toit, 2017).

Racial tensions are often still the leading theme in party politics in South Africa: from the young and upcoming Economic Freedom Fighters with their land concerns, to official opposition Democratic Alliance who are, despite their leader being black, often accused of carrying white liberal concerns. We may find it tiresome and repetitive, but racial relations are the burden of this country, and its calling. A once-off happening like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, although a watershed event, would never be enough (Magistad, M.K., 2017). Indeed, those who expected it to be over and done, were naïve.

A multicultural society like South Africa, particularly one with the history of hurt that we have, should have a variety of action plans to continuously construct positive racial relations. Even the governing ANC has recently admitted that racial healing is needed (Du Toit, 2017). Apart from political or trade or welfare solutions, intercultural communication on many levels – including the trading of spiritual goods and theological debate in the churches – may be an important tool to be utilized for the flourishing of the country.

My hope is that the urgency of conversation would start to become clear. Multiple avenues cross paths in this study: my personal story as a female minister in a male dominated church; the context and situation of my church, both physical and metaphysical; the identity of that faith community as predominantly white in a multicultural surrounding. Add to this what is still to be connected: the contextually sensitive methodology of Contextual Bible Study (hereafter CBS) and Intercultural Bible Study (hereafter ICBS), as well as the particularly fitting story of Abigail – a woman who takes opportunity to make peace in a volatile situation, by offering prophetic words and life-giving generosity. The goal of this study is thus to help foster an open space for discussion and listening, created for people who urgently need it.

### **1.3. Research Focus**

The research focus of this study can be defined as follow: In light of the very real cultural and social divisions outlined above, I am interested in the question about the potential of an ICBS to bring people from divided communities together. An ICBS creates safe spaces to talk about difficult topics that divide and/or unite communities: violence of all kinds, and especially women's role to break the cycle of violence.

### **1.4. Research Question**

As biblical scholar and pastor, I recognize the transformative power of narratives. Thus, the research question of this study can be formulated as follow: In what way can a story such as Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, read through a feminist hermeneutical lens, offer a creative space for communities to come together, to talk about violence and peacemaking and gender?

A secondary research question pertains to the hermeneutical process involved in constructing ICBS questions that can be formulated in the following manner: What are the hermeneutical considerations that go into constructing “good” questions that may work to bring people from different communities together to have “peace talks”?

### **1.5. Research Objectives**

Related to the abovementioned research questions, this study can be said to have the following three important objectives:

- Firstly, the specific context in which this text will be read needs to be understood. The community that forms the setting for this ICBS is situated in the new democratic South Africa, in the city of Cape Town, in the area of Bloubergstrand and its surrounds. Understanding that context is more than a dot on a map is crucial to this study. This specific context entails communities failing to integrate despite democracy, communities still divided by racism even though many people may not wish it to be so. In particular, this context pertains to communities plagued by discord and violence in different forms. It is communities of faith who read the Bible, and look to God for guidance. All these aspects need to be considered, and may even seem contradictory. However, all of these aspects influence our reading of a text at the intersections.
- Secondly, the text of Abigail needs to be understood, specifically while being read through a certain hermeneutical framework: feminist biblical interpretation. This study will thus engage in a close reading of the text and draw on the most recent exegetical treatments of the story of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. Such a reading will also be done with a distinct aim in mind: to describe what the understanding contributes toward the construction of an ICBS.
- Thirdly, an important part of this study will be focused on reflecting on the hermeneutical considerations that go into constructing an ICBS in my specific context, with specific attention to construct good questions that may facilitate intercultural exchange.

A note regarding the choice of the method to be used to create a Bible study, called CBS. It is explained in the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research's *Manual for Doing Contextual Bible Study* (Revised Version 2015). To my knowledge, here is no existing CBS on this text, which makes the contribution of this study significant. Although the method that will be used strictly can be said to be that of CBS, this study has a slightly different aim. It is thus more accurate to call the approach employed in this study an ICBS set up by the guidelines of CBS. [cf. also the project called *Through the Eyes of Another* (De Wit et al, 2015), that also used the term ICBS as a form of CBS].

## **1.6. Methodology**

The main methodological considerations for this study are the following:

The whole of this project employs the feminist approach, and indeed this thesis in its very essence can be said to be feminist in nature. In Chapter Four of this study, when the Biblical text chosen for this project is interpreted, it is done so in terms of a literary feminist approach. In Chapter Four, the methodological presuppositions of a literary feminist approach will be clarified before engaging in a literary feminist analysis of 1 Samuel 25. Furthermore, a whole chapter will be spent on the methodological aspects of the suggested ICBS. Chapter Three of this study will thus be dedicated to the main components of the ICBS that include questions and steps, borrowed from CBS, in addition to added elements from De Wit et al, and insights from Nussbaum in order to outline the ICBS utilized in this study.

## **1.7. Chapter Division**

The chapter division of this study will reflect the research objectives, as stated earlier.

Chapter One serves as an introduction to the body of the study. Therein is stated firstly the background to the study and the motivation for it. Since the context is to be reckoned throughout the study, the background and motivation describes the inspiration for this project from the author's point of departure. In this chapter, the research problem is delineated, expounding the specific context of the DRC in Bloubergstrand, together with its challenges of cultural isolation and displacement.

In Chapter One, the research focus is furthermore stated, introducing the proposed contribution to make a positive difference within this specific context that centres on the potential of an ICBS to bring people from divided communities together. An ICBS creates safe spaces to talk about difficult topics that divide and/or unite communities: violence of all kinds, and especially women's role to break the cycle of violence. Next, the research questions are listed: firstly, how the Abigail story in 1 Samuel 25, read through a feminist hermeneutical lens, offer a creative space for communities to come together; and secondly, how the hermeneutical process involved in constructing ICBS questions may contribute to bring people from different communities together.

Chapter Two of this study offers an expanded account of the context of the author and the church under discussion. For the purpose of this study, this chapter will briefly describe the geographical and demographical context to demonstrate urbanization, relevant to this context; describing the political and socio-economic context to illustrate the living conditions and especially the prevailing gap between rich and poor; and describing the ecclesiastical and theological context in which members of named church worship.

Rather than chronicling confessions or doctrines, the last section narrates three particular human rights issues and the way in which the church has dealt with them. To demonstrate the DRC's struggle with its racialized past and present, and to relate their ongoing struggle with inclusiveness and dealing with those that are perceived as the "other", the following three examples were chosen to represent groups who share and oppressed past in the heterarchical (patriarchal and heteronormative) past and present of the church. This include the journey of women to be recognized as leaders and contributors in the church; the endeavours of the LGBTIQ community towards safety and appreciation; and the DRC's ongoing cultural isolation and its toil towards racial inclusivity, which influences ecumenism and all other relationships.

Chapter Three of this study outlines the methodological assumptions that inform this study. Chapter Three is a crucial chapter, since mastery of the respected CBS method as chosen path for this study, is a prerequisite for building an auxiliary Bible Study. The method of a previous ICBS is studied, terminology defined, and the contribution of each element appreciated. There is also consideration given to the mechanics of cultivating compassion, since that is the overarching goal of this ICBS.

Chapter Four of this study explores the chosen text for the Bible Study, 1 Samuel 25, in terms of close literary reading, and with a feminist hermeneutical perspective throughout. This chapter offers the exegetical insights that facilitates the use of the text in the Bible Study, and is rooted in the assumption that biblical narratives offers excellent conversation documents for believers. In Chapter Four one also finds reflection on recent perspectives on cultivating compassion (see Chapter Three) and how it pertains to the Abigail story in 1 Samuel 25. These insights will be central for using the text in the workbook, which forms part of the final chapter of this study.

Chapter Five of this study serves as the culmination of all insights from previous chapters: condensed into a complete, functional and feasible ICBS workbook. This chapter is not only presented as an appendix, because an analysis of the workbook is included, referring to the relevant insights from previous chapters with every question and movement of the Bible Study. Lastly, summaries of the Bible Study movements are provided, in addition to some concluding observations.

### **1.8. Demarcation**

I am aware that this study holds much potential for the gathering of empirical data especially considering the contribution of the ordinary reader to reception theology. It would be particularly satisfying to construct a group to physically do the Bible study, and regard the results. Van Der Walt (2014: 67-92) did exactly this in her PhD, developing tools for measuring shifts in ideology, and using conversation analyses to show the power dynamics in a group. The book that offers a reworking of her thesis, *Toward a Communal Reading of 2 Samuel 13: Ideology and Power within the Intercultural Bible Reading Process*, used a “text of terror,” 2 Samuel 13 that tells the story of the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon. Van der Walt’s methodology is particularly well-suited to be used also with reference to other biblical narratives. Moreover, it would be very interesting in such a study so as to see the power dynamics while handling a conversation about peacemaking and the role of women.

Unfortunately, being realistic about the scope of this study has led me, to realize that gathering empirical data is beyond the reach of the limits of this MTh study. It would be a more feasible objective to create a Contextual/Intercultural Bible study that could be used as basis for another study.

Thus, for this purpose of this study, I will be doing the ground work in constructing the ICBS study, and focus my attention on describing the process of getting to a ICBS that in a subsequent study can be tested and also perhaps utilized by other groups.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT**

A central feature of ICBS that forms a variant of CBS, is that it has extensive concern for the context, the circumstances and surroundings, in which and for which this Bible study is crafted. In accordance with the acknowledgement that all theology is contextual, to be able to construct a useful ICBS, a substantial examination of the context is required.

The function of this current chapter is to extricate and evaluate the impact of all worthy facts about the specific context in which the ICBS is to be situated. One could immediately list the risks of such an approach, the most obvious being that context changes, and that a singular spot on a map could be subjected to various influences during the course of, for example, a few years, resulting in numerous changes to the context. It must be noted, however, that the purpose of this study is not to pen down a perennial description of the pertinent context, but rather to attain a good understanding of the present-day context, in order to construct an appropriate Bible study.

The first step in constructing an ICBS on the story of Abigail in 1Samuel 25 is reserved for this rigorous and extensive attention to context. One should note that the following categories under which something of the complexity of the reality is sought to be captured does not mean that I am of opinion that the difficult junctures of lanes or compartments can be easily taken apart. Rather, using these categories is only one attempt to visualize and discuss a moment of the context that has such a profound influence on our lives and theologies. The context envisioned in this study will be discussed under the following headings: geographic and demographic, political and socio-economic, and ecclesiastical and theological context.

#### **2.1. Geographic and Demographic Context**

For this purpose of this study, the bigger Blaauwberg area constitutes a community as a slice, an example of a contemporary South African district. This community includes the following neighbourhoods: Blaauwbergstrand, a West Coast holiday town since the 1900's, later an

established town at the upper end of the property market (Boraine, 2014); lately also Big Bay and to a lesser extent Melkbosstrand (the next town, less than 10km away); the bigger Table View and Flamingo Vlei area (including the more industrialized Milnerton, Montague Gardens, Killarney Gardens); particularly the more recent developments of Parklands and Sunningdale (since the 1990's); as well as the township Du Noon, strategically situated on the nearer side of the N7, and a popular living space for commuters. The area includes Wards 4, 23, 104 and 107 of the City of Cape Town Municipality (Citymaps, 2017). The main reason for their inclusion in this discussion is that they provide members for the congregation of the DRC Bloubergstrand, and in that sense supposedly forms a community.

Using the church building as reference point to the far west, none of the abovementioned areas are more than 20 kilometres away, and should be easily accessible to a reverend with a car, maybe performing a home visit, or to church members via private or public transport. Yet the contrasts they embody are extreme: some residents live close to the sea and enjoy ocean sunset views, while others have never seen a beach.

Tourism is a key factor in this area. International arrivals to Cape Town have grown an unprecedented 27% year-on-year for the first half of 2017. Last year, the international terminal processed just under two million passengers, and this should grow to 2,5 million in 2017 (Wesgro, 2017). Blaawbergstrand is still a popular tourist destination; it sports famous views on Table Mountain and Robben Island. It is ironic that not only the natural beauty of Blaawbergstrand attracts visitors, but also the metaphorical ideal of a location for the New South Africa: the mountain as a unifying beacon of hope, and the island as a solemn reminder of the past. Whether the Rainbow Nation finds one another living in this postcard picture, is a different debate altogether.

According to Statistics South Africa (Provinces at a Glance, 2016) the total population of the Western Cape has grown since the Census of 2011 to the Community Survey in 2016, from 5 822 736 in total to 6 27 730 in total. The City of Cape Town Metropole district, which includes the area under discussion (excluding Melkbosstrand), has grown from 3 740 026 residents to 4 004 793 residents between 2011 and 2016.

The development company Garden Cities is responsible for the extensive residential expansions at Parklands and Sunningdale, east of the R27 (the West Coast road), since the 1990's (Garden Cities in the Media, 2009). It is still one of the fastest growing suburbs in the Western Cape. The following is cited from a property website, published on June 21, 2016:

“The Blouberg area is still booming. Almost the whole of Parklands and Sunningdale looks like a construction site as residential and commercial buildings are going up at a rapid pace. Construction has also started on the new 90.000sqm Table Bay Mall, set to become the biggest mall in the area. Further development plans also include a new R140bn city, called Wescape, almost adjacent to Melkbosstrand. You can only imagine what this is going to do for growth in the area. The best-selling suburbs for now are Parklands and Table View, where almost half of all recent sales were concluded for the full asking price and the remainder at a minimal discount of about 3.2% - 4.1% on average.” (These are Cape Town’s Fastest Selling Suburbs, 2016). The mentioned Table Bay Mall has recently opened its doors, in the beginning of October 2017. This has had a tremendous effect on population density and traffic in the area. In October 2016, the City of Cape Town published a document for public comment, on its suggested Congestion Management Programme (CMP). According to the document, peak morning traffic hours have doubled during the last two years, from 07:00 till 09:00 to 06:00 till 10:00 (5 Ways Cape Town Plans to Solve its Growing Traffic Mess, 2016). Marine Drive, one of the arterial roads of the precinct under discussion, tops the document’s list of “priority routes”, which traffic problems need to be solved urgently. The N1 from Marine Drive to the N7 as well as Parklands are also among the top ten key areas where congestion is a problem.

The addition of public transport, in the form of integrated rapid transit system via bus on designated lanes, has brought some relief for traffic congestion. The first MyCiti buses began operations in 2010, shortly before the FIFA World Cup, by 2013 reached Table View and Blaauwbergstrand, and by 2015 Melkbosstrand. In November 2015 MyCiti carried approximately 60 000 passengers per month (MyCiti History, 2017).

Residential and commercial development, as well as intensely increased traffic contributed to a growing cosmopolitan atmosphere (Steyn, 2015). Residents quickly had to adapt to city-living – even those who were used to describing Blaauwbergstrand as rural.

With growing population density, one could expect a change in demographics, the most notable being the growth of the black middle class in this area. This is visible in the statistics of the 2011 census (Steyn, 2015). In theory, the suburbs under discussion are becoming more racially integrated, but whether social cohesion is fashioned, remains a question.

The other result that social research has shown, is that there is a growing population of illegal immigrants who live and work in the area (Steyn, 2015). For example, residents have noticed

that many high school students travel from all over Africa to live in guest houses without their parents, only to ensure an education which is attainable when living here. This means that social workers and residents notice more foreign-born people living in the area, but it has to be understood that any real data on migrants are notoriously difficult to collect. South Africa's 2011 census shows that an estimated 2,2 million people living in South Africa were born outside the country (How Many Foreigners Really Live in South Africa? 2017). Illegal immigrants cause demographic headaches: few NGO's or mainstream churches can give decisive information about them, and the independent African churches they sometimes belong to, are also not networked with the community. In many aspects, they become drifters: hard to count and therefore hard to care about.

The exponential growth has also reached the closest township. By November 2015, Steve Kretzmann from Groundup (a news agency which is a joint project of the Community Media Trust and the University of Cape Town's Centre for Social Science Research) reported that Du Noon has approximately 14 400 households, of which two-thirds are shacks, and which houses approximately 40 000 people. The area reports ever increasing sewerage and garbage removal problems (Luhanga, 2016). The cause is evidently overpopulation; service providers cannot keep up with the secondary rental of plots in Du Noon. Commuters want to live there, because public transport are available into the city, but unemployment still affects more than half the residents, who earn an average of R2400 per month (Kretzmann, 2015).

The township of Du Noon was recently grouped with the sub-council of Atlantis and now citizens have to travel 35 kilometres to register housing applications or apply for municipal jobs (Furlong, 2016). Du Noon was previously grouped with Table View and Milnerton, and the ward councillor could not understand why the "poor wards" had now been clustered together. This area is still included for this discussion, since many of the residents of Du Noon work in the nearby, more affluent areas (Kretzmann, 2015).

As an example of a South African community, one can already see the contrasts embodied by the residents, by only scrutinizing the demographics. These already provide clues for the economic and social circumstances of residents, which are examined next.

## 2.2. Political and Socio-Economic Context

The Western Cape is governed by the official national political opposition, but has also seen service delivery protests, like any other South African province (Hartley, 2016). With “political context” is not meant party politics nor a discussion thereof, though, but rather the challenges to governance and the examples of unity and effectiveness of the larger collective in solving community problems.

The young democracy operates in a capitalist free market system, and the rules of business and property dictates. Recently, the ruling party, the African National Congress, has expressed its intent to move away from being a pure capitalist state to a state-managed developmental economy (Peyper, 2017). The ruling party is taking a stronger stance against the fact that the economy remains “in the hands of a small white minority”. They are resolved to use the constitution, legislation and regulation, licensing, broad-based black economic empowerment, the national budget, state-owned enterprises and development finances and development finance institutions to change the ownership and control of the economy in favour of especially the poor.

It is not the goal of this study to scrutinize or criticize the supposed redistribution of land, property or assets. Suffice to say that up to now, the sources that supported a few million citizens during Apartheid, now sustain forty plus million; people find creative ways to make a living. Although poverty affects people from all racial backgrounds, black South Africans still suffer the most from being previously disadvantaged, with 46,6% of the 30 million South Africans affected (Statistics South Africa, 2017).

The country is unlikely to reach its National Development Plan’s goal to eliminate poverty by 2030. The upper-bound poverty line in 2015 was R992 per person per month, but that increases with inflation. The number of people living in poverty has increased from 27 million in 2011, to almost 30 million in 2017. Of those, 14 million live in extreme poverty, meaning R531 per month, spending up to 30% of that figure on food. It is also worthwhile to note, from Statistics South Africa 2017, that poverty has a gender bias: if a family is female headed, the depth of poverty increases with a dramatic seventeen percent; also, the majority of South Africans living in poverty are aged seventeen and below (Statistics South Africa, 2017).

For many reasons not to be discussed here, South Africa has not succeeded in closing the gap between rich and poor; indeed, it has increased since the inauguration of democracy (Bond, 2016). It should be clear that the symptoms of our terrible GI coefficient and post-Apartheid exploitation are also visible in the context under discussion: the affluent neighbourhoods become more so, and the poor keeps on battling poverty.

Food security may not be a relevant topic for the more affluent residents in the bigger Blaauwberg area, but for others it is bound to be a harsh reality. After the global economic crisis in 2008, food security emerged as a global problem. The Food and Agriculture Organization reported in 2004 that more than 814 million people in developing countries are undernourished, of whom 204 million live in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa (World Health Organization, 2011). Recent research from the South African Medical Research Council has shown that food insecurity is a reality for millions of South Africans, especially those who live in informal settlements, where up to 70% of households skip meals or eat the same meal every day (Naicker, 2015). Households with children are more likely to face this dilemma. Food insecurity is linked to a myriad of health issues in adults (obesity, chronic diseases and mental health issues) and children (stunting, poor development and decreased academic ability).

The current agricultural situation of drought has contributed to higher prices on food items, especially meat. South Africa's inflation target is 3% to 6%, but the annual inflation rate for meat climbed to 15% by August 2017 (Statistics South Africa, 2017). The severe drought in the Western Cape has, apart from inflation on food, brought uncompromising water restrictions to Cape Town. Although all residents would experience food inflation, it has to be acknowledged that the poor suffer more. The water restrictions have hindered residents to water lawns, wash cars and take baths. Ironically enough, the water restrictions do not hinder the poor, since they seldom have lawns, cars or baths. This is expressed poignantly in a poem by Athol Williams (Williams, A. 2017):

#### Water Restrictions

*The dams are low in the Cape,  
we are told  
not to fill the swimming pool,  
not to water the garden,*

*not to wash the car,  
not to take a bath.  
We've never –  
never had a swimming pool to fill,  
never had a garden to water,  
never had a car to wash,  
never had the privilege of taking a bath  
to soak away the aches and pains  
that flood our cups and bowls,  
otherwise empty.  
Seems the dams have been low  
for us, forever.*

Crime is a popular topic in South African conversations, and because fear of crime, and trauma because of crime, has an influence on people, conversations are not only based on facts, but also on myths and rumours. The following truths may surprise some Capetonians, and particularly the residents of the area under discussion: Cape Town is the murder capital of the country, but other violent crime like house robbery is not prevalent, and Gauteng residents live in much greater fear for crime (Hosken, 2016). People who move here report the lower crime statistics as one of their main reasons, but again it seems that it depends on where one moves. Certain parts of the metropole are much more dangerous because of gang activities – notably the areas Manenberg, Parkwood and Elsies River who have decades-old entrenched gangs, and lately also Khayelitsha and Nyanga (Swingler, 2014).

The area under discussion may not be known for hard crime, but residents fear future gang activities, because of the availability of drugs in the specifically the Parklands and Table View suburbs. Gang activities are notoriously hard to find data on, but police reports support the prevalence of drugs in specifically Parklands. Regard two examples of many: In May 2016, two suspects were arrested in Parklands when police found 17 kilograms of TIK on them, with a street value of R4,5 million (SABC, 2016). And in June of the same year, police raided a dagga laboratory in a Parklands home (Koyana, 2016).

The Table View police report that crimes of theft are usually of an opportunistic kind, and that the most reported crime in the area is domestic violence (Steyn, 2015). For those

combating violent crime, this is a triumph; for a feminist this is horrible news: in my view, domestic violence is no “soft” crime. Another insight about crime in the area the specifically has relevance to this study, is slightly disturbing because of the racism involved: The Table View Neighbourhood Watch and its corresponding public forum on social media plays an important role in fighting crime in the area, according to the Table View Police (Steyn, 2015). Church employees are often disturbed and upset, though, by their racist comments and conduct.

Rapid urbanization always has certain effects, and the bigger Blaauwberg area does not go uninfluenced. There is an ever-increasing circle of homeless people: apart from tens of people living in their cars on the beachfront, there are many sleeping on the streets every night, because the area has no shelters. Providing shelters or support to homeless people has not traditionally been the City of Cape Town’s contribution to provide a solution to this problem. During a meeting on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017, the Mayoral Committee member for Safety, Security and Social Services, JP Smith, admitted that “the City’s law enforcement approach had not succeeded”, and admitted that “social development is the only viable strategy left” (Roeland, 2017). Instead of using fines and by-laws, they plan to create open safe spaces for homeless people, since homeless people resist going to existing shelters, and the city has budgeted for the first eight – but the bigger Blaauwberg area is not included as beneficiary of their initial phase.

Families are, as ever, an important building block of society, and therefore deserve careful observation when studying any social setting. In line with the tendency in the rest of the country (Department of Social Development, 2012), single parent families are ever more present. Latchkey-kids - children who carry housekeys and spend days alone, because their parents work – are in amplitude, and aftercare ministries are run by volunteers from church. Parental guidance and family therapy occupy a considerable amount of the time of the social worker employed at the Bloubergstrand DRC. The congregation decided to appoint a social worker for the benefit of the broader community in 2007 (Notule van die Kerkraadsvergadering, Februarie 2007), since departmental social workers are overwhelmed and rarely available. The office is not equipped to do statutory work, but all other areas of social work are covered.

Education in the area faces both exciting growth and challenges, as one could imagine in the rest of the country as well. Three departmental schools (including Sunningdale Primary

School in 2013 and Melkbosstrand Secondary School in 2012) have been opened in the area in the last few decades, apart from several private schools – with preschool, primary and secondary classes.

The strain and difficulty on poor citizens to obtain education – a basic right – for their children, is aptly demonstrated by the story of the schools in Du Noon. In July 2015, parents of 114 children started teaching them in temporary classrooms after they could not find space in available schools. They have turned to the Equal Education Law Centre for help (Nombulelo, 2015). The empty classrooms were available because the newly built, R40 million state-of-the-art Sophakama Primary School has just been finished, and the school moved to the new premises (Phaliso, 2015). Another school was built, but by September 2016 could not yet be used, because of lack of water pressure, which would render fire extinguishers useless, and pose risks for hygiene for the thousand or more learners. It was estimated that it would take three years to solve the water pressure problem, before the school could be opened (Fisher, 2016).

Health services are also under pressure. A private hospital was opened a decade ago ([www.netcare.co.za](http://www.netcare.co.za), 2017), but apart from the Community Health Centre, opened in 2015 in Du Noon, this fast-growing area has no public hospitals or other health services. Many South Africans continue to pay dearly for medical insurance (with inflation as high as 10,3%) as well as private medical care from doctors and dentists (Statistics South Africa, 2017). But as ever, when considering a sample of South African society, there are those who cannot even begin to afford private medical care. Residents from the bigger Blaauwberg area must travel to have access to public health services.

### **2.3. Ecclesiastical and Theological Context**

Since this is a theological study, the above circumstances' influence on churches is to be considered important. All that happens in society and neighbourhood, is the churches' context, together with events and circumstances in the national and international sphere – and these days, the internet and social media sphere needs to be appraised as well. The bigger Blaauwberg area is, in my view, a demonstration of a typical living space in the new South Africa: rapid urbanization provides many opportunities and excitement, but brings problems – especially of the social kind – that land in the charge of religious leaders. How the

churches and the rest of the religious community deal with all this, could have a determining effect on the lasting character of the community (Hofmeyr & Kruger, 2011).

The paragraphs above show that the landscape in which churches must function, particularly in this area, is progressively cosmopolitan and urban. The family is still to be considered the basic functioning unit, but it looks different from the family of decades ago; many children live in single parent families. Hundreds of members of churches in this area did not grow up here, have no extended family or even friends who live here, and essentially move to Cape Town looking to start a new life. Churches must succeed in building communities from people with diverse backgrounds, who have extended social and spiritual needs, but little cohesion – except maybe their knowledge of the local theology or their like of the pastor.

Churches, including my own, have had to deal with a lot of change in the last few decades, including information overload, paradigm shifts and declining attendance. The search for identity in the post-modern world and especially in the newly formed multicultural, free society of the new South Africa, has reached all South African churches, although it seems that the so-called mainline churches has theorized extensively about identity, while churches from the independent and Pentecostal branch seems to be less concerned with this (Conradie & Klaasen, 2014). In the bigger Blaauwberg area, a wide variety of churches have a distinct footprint: from Catholic and Anglican to Baptist and Methodist. There are independent and Pentecostal churches of all kinds, all of them unquestionably doing their best not only to grow their churches, but also to serve their community.

For this discussion, the Reformed Churches and more specifically, the DRC, will be the focus of attention. The reason for this is twofold: this is the church where I worship and serve, and the church that I know well, in theology, history and praxis; and the extent of this study is not broad, nor long enough, to fairly include any other church in the examination. The DRC is thus used as a further sample of the broad Christian community of this specific neighbourhood. It is not the intention to exclude certain Christians or their theology, nor is it the calculation to be critical towards only one church.

Although the aspiration of this study is to be conducted interculturally, economic use of space available does not allow for a detailed description of the contexts of projected Bible study partner churches – for example the URCSA which is closest, or members of Reformed congregations in Dunoon. Furthermore, the objective is to illustrate the cultural isolation and struggles with racial anthropology of this specific church, namely the DRC, which will

occupy all the space available. To accurately describe the context in which DRC members worship, within a study at the intersection of gender and flourishing, two matters that have relevance need to be considered: the church's history with three examples of human rights issues (women in ministry, the inclusion of the LGBTIQ community, and the church's grapple with racial relationships, embodied by their ecumenism and prevailing cultural isolation in a multicultural country).

The reasons for the above choices is the following: a contextual study such as this is not well suited for a discussion about doctrines or confessions about God, but within the scope of intercultural work, a specific church's anthropology is more accommodating to this study. The way in which church members interact with other people, what they do and say especially regarding minority groups or previously disadvantaged people, should provide clarity regarding the specific research problem of this study. Therefore, official church documents, as well as other sources like news and publications, are used to reflect on the subject and the three examples.

### **2.3.1. The DRC and Human Rights**

It is undeniable that the DRC has a vexed history with human rights issues. The denomination has contributed tremendous work in congregation and faith growth since its inception, but has been ambiguous in its understanding of the rights and privileges of human beings. One cannot do contextual theology and consider only the confessional or liturgical content of a church; in the context of this study, a church's treatment of people and its contribution to social cohesion is of overriding importance.

#### **a) Women in Ministry**

The first example to be discussed of people's rights endeavours to be recognized in the DRC, come from female members. Living in a patriarchal system is not unique to the women of the DRC, but is indeed shared by the majority of women in South Africa (Tobejane, 2015). Historically and traditionally, decisions about women have been made by men, and it is only recently that women's voices have been heard.

Only in 1990 – and after initial negative reaction to the group of women who requested an audience at the Rustenburg Consultation about racial issues – did women succeed in getting women’s issues on the agenda (Landman, 2013: 215). In the same year, the General Synod of the DRC restored the ordination of women as ministers, but according to Landman, it was probably more to “divert attention from their racial position and to counteract their image as conservative and patriarchal”. The decision to ordain women was taken without women, and the real struggle for women’s ordination began in 1990. The first woman minister, Gretha Heymans, was ordained in Bloemfontein as youth worker, but by 2000 the problem of ordained women not receiving calls to congregations was so intense that a conference was held, called Mother Church and her Daughters. This conference led to the events of 17 November 2000, when the DRC formally asked for forgiveness for treating women as “second-class members”. Feminist theology only afterwards began to play its role: Landman recalls her first feminist book being criticised by DRC, as well as by the Circle for Concerned African Theologians (the latter for not including the stories of black women). She rewrote the book, purposely inclusive, and left the DRC (Landman, 2013: 217).

The DRC Bloubergstrand employs two women ministers (from a total of three positions), but this congregation is unique in their circuit: of the twenty-five ministering positions in twenty congregations, three are held by women. It seems that similarities can be drawn between the church processes to ordain women, and the story of gender consciousness in civil society in South Africa: the moment that equality becomes institutionalized, issues of social and economic equality are divorced from that of political equality (Hassim, & Gouws, 2000: 127), or in this case, ordination. It becomes harder than ever to convince the powers that be that there is still much to talk about.

It seems that women in Reformed Churches in South Africa are not isolated in their struggle to be heard; the worldwide Reformed context shares a similar history: The 22<sup>nd</sup> General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Seoul in 1989, emphasised the need for partnership between men and women in the church, and appointed a full-time staff member to address the injustices felt and reported by women in society and the church. In 1992, the Programme to Affirm, Challenge and Transform was formed to promote the full partnership of women and men in church and society. The 23<sup>rd</sup> General Council agreed to create a department as a platform to encourage churches into a “lifelong partnership with God, one another and the earth” (Plaatjies van Huffel, 2014). Their mission statement values diversity, and they wanted to challenge unjust relationships and transform gender relations.

The Reformed group formed part of important gender research in church circles which was documented in 2011 by the All Africa Council of Churches. Surprisingly, it seems that women in Reformed churches had the same gender concerns as women from other denominations in South Africa and even Africa: gender transformation, female leadership in churches, derogatory religious language, and issues that relate to human sexuality such as orientation, abortion, and contraception. The research indicates that there are relatively few women involved in theological education, and it seems that women are still marginalized from decision-making moments in ecclesial structures. Most churches theoretically include women in ordained and other leadership, but few women are “in decision-making bodies where agendas are set” (Plaatjies van Huffel, 2014).

Sexism and discrimination are still very much part of women’s experience of the church, and gender issues are not mainstreamed yet (Plaatjies van Huffel, 2014). The church, Reformed included, should value the contribution of all its members, no matter gender or orientation, and should empower and support both men and women who oppose oppressive structures and cultural practises.

#### **b) The DRC and the LGBTIQ Community**

The second example to be discussed of people’s rights endeavours to be recognized in the DRC, comes from the LGBTIQ community.

While the DRC in 1986 still described homosexuality as a “deviant abomination”, the subject came to the General Synod in 2004 via a report (Verslag aan die Algemene Sinode oor Homoseksualiteit, 2004). The report stipulates the hermeneutic problems regarding the classic Biblical texts, highlights the radical love of Jesus, and gives perspectives from the social sciences. There also followed an official apology for the lack of love that gay members have experienced.

In 2006, South Africa introduced civil partnerships with the Civil Union Act, which also legalised same-sex marriage (De Ru, 2013). In 2007, the Synod accepted a compromise resolution regarding homosexual members, which meant that it was required of gay ministers to remain celibate as a prerequisite to be legitimated. This had a tremendous impact on those involved (Van Loggerenberg, 2008). In 2013, the Synod advised further study.

In 2015, the DRC “crossed the Rubicon” (Oosthuizen, 2016), by acknowledging civil union partnerships, also for clergy – although it would not be called “marriage”. But at an Extraordinary General Synod in 2016, these decisions were overturned. The aftermath of the DRC’s “U-turn across the Rubicon” is still felt: gay members immediately reported not feeling welcome, many members expressed their exasperating disappointment and disbelief (Jackson, 2016), while others described the decision as a victory. A lively debate still subsists on social media and in church communication channels.

In June 2017, eleven members of the DRC, which includes ordained ministers, took the decisions of the 2016 Synod to the High Court in Pretoria, asking them to declare it illegal, and for it to be put aside (Gaum, 2017). In the meantime, all that is left for congregations that strongly supports human dignity, is to create safe spaces where gay people may worship and serve in the church of their choice (Oosthuizen, 2016).

In the DRC Bloubergstrand, this has been the case for decades. LGBTIQ people has been members and employees for many years, and has served as leaders, teachers and musicians in the congregation. Although the congregation has never had a gay minister in a permanent position, guest speakers and preachers have also included gay believers. There have been only a few teaching events on the topic during 2015, mainly explaining hermeneutical stances to church members, and homosexuality has been on the agenda of the congregation’s consistory meetings only a few times: during 2007, to report of open talks in the congregation (Notule van die Kerkraadsvergadering, 23 Augustus 2007), and during 2016, to stipulate why the DRC Bloubergstrand do not agree with the General Synod of 2016’s decisions (Notule van die Kerkraadsvergadering, 22 November 2016). Mention needs be made of Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM), who from time to time supports the congregation with talks, counselling to gay people and their families, and Bible study material ([iam.org.za](http://iam.org.za)).

It seems this specific congregation has succeeded in reasonably successfully navigating this human rights issue. But there is always room for growth: other DRCs in the circuit are not safe spaces for LGBTIQ members, and the congregation under discussion may assist in improving the situation in their larger fraternity. And although the Bloubergstrand congregation has made adaptations to language and liturgy to concentrate on inclusivity, they

may contribute even more to the debate, by empowering gay members to vocalise their embodied theology<sup>1</sup>.

In a remarkable article on engagement between LGBTIQ groups and churches, Gerald West and his co-authors explain that the status quo of church engagement should be continually and increasingly challenged, and preferably from a position of epistemological privilege (West et al, 2016). In the past, the discussion has often entailed the church speaking about gay people, not with them. Although one can trace the development of this theme through the Synod reports above – gay believers in the DRC are voicing their embodied theology ever increasingly, to the point of engaging an arbitrary courtroom – but congregations on a local level has not yet put strategies in place to support this.

### **c) Ecumenism and Cultural Isolation**

The DRC has its roots in the faith of the settlers who came from Europe to southern Africa in the mid-seventeenth century. It has a turbulent history with ethnicity and race relations, which is intertwined with the history of the country itself. The 1857 Synod stated that it is “desirable and scriptural that our members from among the heathens be received and incorporated among the existing congregations” (Gilomee 2003: 218), but resolutions that followed lead to the establishment of the DRC in Africa in 1859 (for black people) and the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (for people of mixed race) in 1881, as well as the Indian Reformed Church in Africa in 1947 (Stefon, 2008).

The DRC supported the government’s Apartheid policy until 1986, even though their theological justification for it was rejected by Reformed Churches in Europe and the United States. The DRC withdrew from the World Council of Churches in 1961 and was excluded

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Christ (2016) explains “embodied theology” by recounting the past without it: theology used to be understood as rational reflection on revealed truths. But as the process of interpretation were increasingly acknowledged, the realization grew that revelation can only be expressed in language, which comes through the minds and bodies and histories and experiences of those who express it. Thus, one of the “hallmarks of good theology” (Christ, 2016) is understanding the importance of the individuals and communities that continually interpret and reinterpret texts. The term is often used as an antithesis for “church theology”.

Julie Clawson writes poignantly about embodied theology’s preoccupation with here-and-now justice: “A theology of embodiment mistrusts all self-made fantasies of the beyond which are engaged in at the expense of the healing of people here and the realization of the kingdom of God on this earth.” (Clawson, 2011).

from membership by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982, while the latter labelled Apartheid a heresy (Nicol, 2001: 133). In 1986, the DRC denounced its former attempts to justify Apartheid theologically, and in 1989 called it a sin. In 1994, talks began in all earnest to unify with the Reformed Church in Africa, as well as the Uniting Reformed Church (previously Mission Church) and the Indian Reformed Church in Africa (NG Kerk, 2017). It is clear that the history of separate churches within the Reformed family in South Africa is directly linked to the history of Apartheid, and that anyone serious about rectifying the heresy of Apartheid, would also be earnestly working toward church unification.

The DRC's own ecumenical project has for decades been focused on achieving unity with its "sister" churches (Hervormde Kerk and Gereformeerde Kerk). But far from moving closer to one another, even more small separations of churches like the Evangelical Reformed church (1985) and the Afrikaans Protestant Church (1987) (Nicol, 2001: 134) were formed – because they disagreed with the DRC's revised policy statement penned in the Church and Society report.

In the Western Cape, which includes the congregation under discussion, the desire to reunite with the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa (hereafter URCSA) has been particularly intense after the end of Apartheid, but attempts have been thwarted time and again. Talks about unity have more than once stopped short just before the acceptance of the Confession of Belhar by the DRC, which the URCSA keeps as condition, since it has been a formal confession of this church since 1986 (Naude & Smit, 2000: 175), which the DRC cannot come to agreement on. The last great disappointment came to pass when a moratorium was placed on talks between the two churches (Modise, 2016) in 2008. In the meantime, congregations are tugging on the strings of unity on circuit and congregational level.

In the congregation of the DRC at Bloubergstrand, members have accepted the Belhar Confession with relative ease after a brief process of teaching and explaining. There is no doubt that people accept this Confession and believe in it wholeheartedly. Whether the church they belong to, the way the church on a daily basis live out its ecumenical witness, and other factors such as language use contribute to reconciliation and church unity is uncertain, since this is seldom practically tested. Demographical considerations make it very difficult for members' honest intentions about church unity to be tested, since the closest URCSA congregation is situated in Philadelphia, the next town to the northwest – with another DRC closer to them, outside of our circuit. The DRC in Bloubergstrand has built a

reciprocally valuable relationship with a URCSA congregation (Wesfleur) in the town of Atlantis, 40 kilometres away, and we help each other with substance abuse support groups, women's groups and preaching. The fact that we share a language makes it easier to keep a good relationship, but the distance makes it harder.

The one terrain where the DRC and the URCSA works together with great gain for everyone, is in mercy ministries. The ministry of Social Services (Christelike Maatskaplike Dienste) is jointly run by the broad family of Reformed Churches (NG Kerk, 2017). For example: BADISA is one of the largest welfare organizations in the country, with a budget of more than 400 million rand per annum, is a juncture between the DRC and the URCSA (Badisa Annual Report, 2016).

The congregation in Bloubergstrand has made tremendous shifts during the last decade towards mercy ministry, and has invested hundreds of thousands of rand in the upliftment and development of the bigger Blaauwberg area. Our social worker ministers in as far as Philadelphia with play therapy and Table View with group therapy. We have community projects run by volunteers: feeding schemes, Bible study and community groups among the poor, job creation projects, vegetable gardens and holiday clubs for children. We have recently invested in Echo Youth Development ([www.echoyouth.co.za](http://www.echoyouth.co.za)), providing intentional Christian community living for vulnerable young people. I have no doubt that the congregation has done this in obedience to the Lord Jesus, and has made a gigantic contribution to the lives and faith of many at risk-people.

This study does not intend to undervalue this benefaction. But what have been discussed up to this point, particularly the DRC's history of ethnic missions and ethnic racial policy, should make it clear that giving and receiving is highly problematic in this context. In a compelling chapter about the link between colonialism and patronage, Chirevo Kwenda describes the problem in human relations "a kind of giving that refuses to receive but takes by force or guile what it wants" (Cochrane & Klein, 2000: 243-268). Kwenda's writing applies to South African civil society, but it is not dubious to administer it to the church context, since the church forms part of that society. The cult of giving and the imperative to receive is not as "progressive" as many would think, and certainly not necessarily spiritual, nor nurturing for Christian relationships.

Furthermore, in a multicultural context, an ethics of respect demands much more than giving, or rather something different. Kwenda explains (in Cochrane & Klein, 2000: 260) that the

minority (whites) in South Africa still feels guilt about slavery and Apartheid, and as a result they engage even further in the cult of giving. In fact, though, aligned with the objective of this study, affording themselves a chance to receive in the form of listening and hearing how the hurt of the past stands in the way of a genuine interpersonal encounter, would better contribute to bringing people together across racial divides.

The DRC is not completely unaware of the racial problems that still plagues it. Apart from the abovementioned guilt, often soothed by giving, there have been shifts in thinking, embodied by two movements: the one regarding the theology of diversity, and the other centres around missional thinking.

Sustained theological thinking about whiteness and privilege, specifically in the DRC, has come from the pen of Cobus van Wyngaard, an ordained minister of the DRC, who claims that whiteness studies, when taken seriously, can assist white people in engaging their blind spots concerning the black “other”, cultivating self-reflection, self-criticism and rethinking identity in a post-apartheid, postcolonial South Africa (Van Wyngaard, 2007). His publications on whiteness and how it challenges youth ministry and responsible public theology concerning violence and crime, on whiteness and the challenge of crossing borders from a privileged position, and on how the language of diversity has superimposed the conversation about race and ethnicity are quite helpful in terms of better understanding the context which this study presupposes.

Diversity came to the agendas of the wider DRC via the 2004 General Assembly’s Commission for Gender and Diversity, which by 2011 was changed to a work group on human dignity (Smith et al, 2014: 158). In this way, “diversity” became an umbrella term for reflections on differences on gender, race, spirituality, disability and age – which, for the discerning eye, quickly outlines once more “the other”. It becomes clear that our whiteness still poses resistance to working through the implications of our racist and racialist past and present. On a positive note, one may claim that at least it gives us language to start a conversation, but on the negative side, according to Van Wyngaard (2014: 157), it fails to draw us into a deeper reflection on our identity. The consequence is that we still have no viable theology that engage with critical issues of race.

In line with developments in many parts of the global church, the term “missionary” is gradually replaced by “missional” in the DRC, is increasingly used, and is seen as a renewed way of thinking about the role and task of the church, breaking the past connotations between

power, privilege and missions. According to Attie van Niekerk from the Faculty of Theology from the University of Pretoria, the term “missional” refers to the church’s role in the local context, and is not limited to any class or culture (Van Niekerk, 2014). The local context of the local congregation in South Africa usually includes all cultures and classes, since it usually denotes a spectrum of communities and residential areas.

The growth of missional ecclesiology over the last few years culminated in a document accepted by the General Synod of the DRC in 2013, prepared by Nelus Niemandt and Piet Meiring that gives a detailed description of the missional ecclesiology of the missional approach. The document states that a missional church is called to restore relationships in a broken world, and to live according to God’s plan for creation (Van Niekerk, 2014). In South Africa, a consensus has grown amongst churches of diverse backgrounds, that the church should be involved with those who suffer, towards a healthy and sustainable society – which begins in the local congregation. Skills, knowledge, funds and resources should be geared in this direction.

Since 2004, much of the focus of *Communitas* and the Partnership of Missional Congregations has been on Continuous Ministry Training and church growth with regards to missional thinking, equipping ministers and volunteers with much needed skills. This resulted in focused postgraduate studies at seminaries (Stellenbosch and Pretoria) and an exciting proponent called Fresh Expressions (with the Church of England) ([freshexpressions.co.za](http://freshexpressions.co.za), 2017).

Missional thinking has offered to many DRC congregations new life and vitality in terms of purpose and preaching, extensive growth in small groups, fresh use of vocabulary with regards to words such as reconciliation, identity and relationships (Ungerer & Nel, 2011). Although the DRC in Bloubergstrand is not officially part of the Partnership of Missional Congregations, missional thinking is part of the leadership corps’ skills and approach, with one of the ministers completing postgraduate studies in this area of study. The congregation has not been guilty of the “bunker mentality”, but has shown courage when transformation is needed (Ungerer, & Nel, 2011). One example is the question of praxis the church board state at the end of their report of social research, in 2015: “We should not only ask “how can we minister to those who attend?”, but also: “how would we minister to those we should reach?” (Steyn 2015: 4).

Missional theology seems to offer an avenue, a space in which the DRC may constructively work with their issues of race and ethnicity. By emphasising *Missio Dei* hermeneutics, the church may be guided towards involvement in processes of reconciliation and the transformation of broken relationships between people of different races (Redelinghuys 2004: 4). In essence, this entails the eradication of the stereotypes regarding “the other”. Redelinghuys also makes suggestions about involving the church in processes of economic justice, by stepping into public dialogue, initiating church dialogue about horizontal reconciliation, conversations about identity, teaching anti-racism, listen and learn from the poor and oppressed, and community development to support economic justice (2004: 52-64). Fourie Rossouw, another DRC pastor and student in missional studies, suggests liturgical listening (intentional, for example in a CBS) to the stories of strangers, to counter the perception of white homogenous identities being loud and disrespectful; as well as “sacred meals in humble spaces” to celebrate our common humanity (Rossouw 2015: 112).

## 2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described a specific community, adhering the contextual integrity proposed for this study, since being contextual means more than mentioning the context. An in-depth understanding of a specific context is one of the strongest motivations for innovative thinking and meaningful engagement.

In the light of these contextual challenges, I propose that a CBS, or more specifically an ICBS, might provide the ideal neutral space for having constructive conversations about our contextual problems. By adhering to the question methodology of CBS, the safe space is guaranteed for participants, and even constructive conflict can be contained, since the goal is not to have happy conversations that make people feel good. After becoming aware of the context of people in this community, it is clear that the racial reconciliation is still absent, and lines of division also run along gender bias and the exclusion of minorities. This is a community who, no different from others in South Africa, needs help in conducting conversations towards inclusion, well-being and flourishing.

In this regard, the story of Abigail as told in 1 Samuel 25 is a good choice, as it offers the opportunity to address many of these themes listed above. Bringing a relevant Bible story, like that of Abigail, to a safe and structured intercultural conversation, is a way in which a

biblical scholar's approach and method may contribute to missional thinking which might help to facilitate the type of intercultural encounters propagated by this study.

With this in mind, in the following chapter I will delineate the main methodological considerations of this study. A thorough understanding of the methodology to be employed is necessary, because constructing an ICBS to be helpful regarding the problems stated above, needs sufficient skill.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING CONTEXTUAL AND INTERCULTURAL BIBLE STUDY**

#### **3.1. A Critical Appraisal**

Community-based Bible study has a rich history, formulated in different contexts from around the world. Since the 1980's, socially engaged Biblical scholars have been creating safe spaces for the sharing of local and academic resources. The list includes the Centro de Estudos Bíblicos (CEBI) in Brazil, the Young Christian Workers and the Institute for Contextual Theology, and the Institute for the Study of the Bible and Worker Ministry Project (now Ujamaa Centre) (Ujamaa 2015: 36).

Material of two of these projects of contextual Bible studies have been chosen to serve as main conversation partners for this part of the study: the *Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research's Manual for Doing Contextual Bible Study* (Revised Version 2015), and the reports of an extensive intercultural reading, edited by De Wit, Jonker and Schipani, published as *Through the Eyes of Another* (2015). Complementary ideas about cultivating compassion by Nussbaum will also be invoked as far as it aligns with this study and its goals.

#### **3.2. Contextual Bible Study**

The first source for methodology on CBS to be discussed, is the Ujamaa Manual. The most attractive characteristic of this manual as study document is that its origins are close to home for me. It is claimed, and true, that Ujamaa has done hundreds of Bible studies in hundreds of contexts – they have extensive experience. They have done this mostly among black South Africans from poor, marginalized communities. Together with all the experience, they have produced the manual, and all the studies in it, through reflection on what and why they do it, and how CBS is an effective methodology. The reader is encouraged to learn by doing, therefore the manual is presented as a pedagogical tool.

The contents of this manual have been produced over more than twenty years; it is deeply respected and widely used. The manual is a product of praxis – doing Bible study but also reflecting on it. For the people who do this, the Bible is a source for transformation, both individual and social. CBS is the method they have developed to do this.

It is understood that the method is not a model, and commendable that the reader is urged to be flexible: one should adapt those that are available and create new ones. This is a way of working, not a fixed formula (Ujamaa 2015: 3).

Although creating a Bible study is the goal of this study, and the creativity and flexibility is exactly what is appealing of CBS, this chapter also has as a goal critical analysis of CBS and its available relatives. The methods leave certain fallows to be ploughed, and this chapter will endeavour to do so.

### 3.2.1. Core Values

Firstly, a short appreciation of the core values employed when doing CBS by the Ujamaa centre, and a drawing of parallels between their underpinnings and those of this study, as explained in chapter one. In intentionally employing the feminist viewpoint and especially as described by Claassens (2015: 3), this study seeks, among other hermeneutic goals, to listen to the voice of the individual, to interrogate power relations, and to constitute community. Using CBS as a point of departure, the differences and similarities to this study present as follows:

**Community** is the beginning and the goal of CBS (Ujamaa 2015: 6). A key commitment of the Ujamaa Centre is to work within the reality of a specific group, as it is understood by that group. What typically happens is that the centre is approached by a group, often organized or existing, to visit the group to participate with them in Bible study and theological reflection (Ujamaa 2015: 7). The Bible study has an impact on the community, and these real-life groups have an impact on the construction of the Bible studies, since these are constructed over a period, in a to-and-fro process between groups and writers.

A study like this do not have the luxury of time, nor of interactivity with real groups of people. But this study is rooted in a context, as chapter two illustrated, and a contemporary, real one as much as any other. This context, which includes the people of the community, has a profound impact on the construction of this study, as described in Chapter Two. The

fragmentary and disconnected attributes of the distinct community considered, is the starting place of this study, albeit a place of friction and frustration. Reciprocally, making a positive contribution to community is one of the main goals of this study. The goal is always communities who are redemptive, full of dignity and abundant life (flourishing).

Although this study cannot claim that communities of the poor and marginalized is the starting point – for its starting point is in an academic environment - this study aligns very much with community as a goal. As named, creating community is one of the explicit goals of the feminist lens used in this study. This also includes the idea that the flourishing of the whole community includes the poor and the marginalized, and implicates that their interests should be served, and their theology heard and mainstreamed, just as in CBS.

The Ujamaa Manual stipulates an interesting thought: they go to accomplish in a group what the group wants (2015: 6). This admits there is a goal, but it is not always explained and stipulated in the material. This admits to a lens, a benevolent (towards a good goal, but still) manipulation. The goal of this study is to be aware of throughout, and admit, but also use the feminist lens, to have it explained and stipulated. The user group and/or facilitator will know to a large extent what the outcome will be, based on the particular angle of incidence.

In social analysis, CBS has underlined that both individuals and structures need change (Ujamaa 2015: 6). The church has emphasised the transformation of the individual, but the Bible – and the methodology of CBS – has much to say about sinful systems and the need to change them. This study should ask how systems – including the church and its beliefs –not only individuals, made our community become fragmented and isolated (see chapter two). It should ask how systems, not only individuals, should change, to serve the community. It should ask how both individuals and systems can serve the community in the future.

**Criticality** denotes being structured and systemic in analytical thoughts. CBS exists in the flow of the critical dialogue between the text of life and the text of the Bible. CBS scrutinizes the self, society, and the Biblical text. The simple tool they use is a range of questions. This is in line with the purpose of this study. An academic project like this is inherently critical, utilizing all the tools of thinking and logic available in the field of study. One important distinction needs to be made, though. While the academic project may be informing to some, the Bible study as such do not have as goal the transmission of facts from a knowledgeable to the ignorant. Therefore, the lens chosen is not the information-thick historical-critical method of theological examination. More explanation can be found in the

anatomy of the Bible study, where choices are made for questions behind, in front of, or on the text. Although most questions are not behind the text, from the historic-critical framework, the questions used are still constructed to be critical, structured and systematic.

The core value of **collaboration** means that CBS begins with work in local communities' struggles, then goes on to include collaborative biblical interpretation and the collective "doing" of theology. As stated above, this study cannot claim to do collaboration in the sense that CBS does. Although the creation of community is of importance for this study, there will be no collaboration with real persons to identify problems, since this is done by doing contextual theology in chapter two. The goal of this study does include collaboration, for in interpretation of the Bible, in planning for the flourishing for this community for the future, collaboration is implied. In a slightly different sense, the word "collaboration" becomes an overarching goal for the fragmented and isolated parts of the community identified in chapter two.

The core value of **change** shows that transformation is to be expected: of the self, society, the church or religious terrain, the structure and system. The reader who has become used to reading "change" as a core value in any academic or semi-academic environment, needs to be reminded how revolutionary this was, and still is. Since the beginning of CBS with its roots in the resistance against Apartheid, it has identified itself as a liberating force. This is not only about change, it is about change for the better of the people, especially the poor and marginalized.

The transforming power of CBS is well suited with the transformative power of the Biblical narrative (see chapter four). It should not be forgotten how CBS, together with other ordinary reader movements, helped to reshape the academic world towards the contextual and reader response theologies. Examples of this are in abundance; as is found in the explanation of Gerald West in the introduction to a book he edited, titled *Reading Other-Wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading with their Local Communities* (2007). West elucidates on the fact that for a previous publication, the board was hesitant to include the voices of African, non-scholarly readers in the response feedback. When the follow-up project was proposed, the board was so convinced of the contribution of the ordinary reader<sup>2</sup> that they

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<sup>2</sup> The theology of Gerald West and other socially engaged biblical scholars may be credited for mainstreaming the term "ordinary reader". Although West often explains it (for example in the introduction to the book *Reading Other-Wise*) (West 2007: 2), the explanation of De Wit in the introduction of *Through the Eyes of Another* (2015: 5-19) deserves credit. He lists four attributes of

wanted to invite such a person to do their scholarship in the interface between the academy and the community (2007: 1).

Change is an inherent desire and goal of every feminist study. Until the voice of every individual, female included, is heard and counted, until the female experience is normalised as an inherent part of the human experience, change must be desired. Until the power relations of the patriarchy are deconstructed and rendered harmless, change must be expected. Until the most vulnerable people in the community flourish, change must be expected. Change is inevitable, and studies like this help to bring it sooner.

The Ujamaa manual recognises that there are many recourses for social transformation (Ujamaa 2015: 7). As is explicated in Chapter Four of this study, the Bible is still considered such a source of authority and power, that communal Bible study has tremendous transformational power. But CBS, and also this current study, wants to include other activities and resources as well, and the user should be creative with these according to their own discretion. The Bible study should make suggestions on music, local art or poetry other resources, as well as common faith material such as worship songs, prayer, and food and communion. The primary terrain for transformation from the perspective of CBS, is the ideological (Ujamaa 2015: 7).

The challenge of doing CBS, as also in this study, is to stay aware of the many layers of **context**, which are also dynamic, and changes all the time (Ujamaa 2015: 8). To keep contextuality as a core value helps participants to do theology that is contemporary and relevant. In the past, many theological studies had theories as springboards, or Biblical ideas, or alluring themes. Those have been shown to be not only often irrelevant, but sometimes even dangerous. Since people credit the Bible with authority, and many theologies claim to

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the term: a) It has a spiritual dimension, as ordinary readers approach the text with expectation, focusing on life, healing and innovation. Reading in this way is more than a cerebral action. b) It is also a technical term in hermeneutics, which denotes an attitude towards the text; one that is naïve, spontaneous and geared towards appropriation. c) In scholarly explanations, “ordinary reader” is a critical term, and overarch the hermeneutics of feminists, liberation theology, black theology, and postcolonial theology. A great deal has been written about the relationship between ordinary readers and scholars and the way it benefits exegesis (2015: 15). d) The term is also used metaphorically, even normatively, because the ordinary reader is seen as a source of wisdom and knowledge. Some even call it a cult, since they are able to show what is hidden, was lost or stolen. The metaphoric use of the ordinary reader is a consequence of the richness of the movement (2015: 17). The ordinary reader becomes an assignment, and even collects soteriological meaning, if our basic assumption is that God is primarily on the side of the poor and oppressed.

be Biblical, people have followed theological ideas that have caused damage to themselves and others.

Be not mistaken: all theology is contextual, even those which have in the past not admitted to it. Better to embrace it promptly, and work with reality as it is, than it is to claim to do theology that is above time and space. Admitting to contextuality takes its own courage, I have found: one can never gauge every depth or consider every angle, even though you try to respect every voice and point of view. Better to state your own clearly then, as was attempted in Chapters One and Two of this study.

The last core value of CBS is named **contestation** – both uncomfortable and befitting – true for every academic study, and ideally true for every Bible study. The CBS works with “struggle” as a key concept in socio-theology, and as a characteristic of reality (Ujamaa 2015: 8). Contestation is also a reality of this study, of the Bible study it will produce, and it is even part of the goal, and the end result, of performing the eventual ICBS. Working towards unity, flourishing and well-being do not exclude or eliminate struggles, nor does it imagine an end-result without it.

The conflict we have to deal with, happens on many levels. Each of us face confrontations of ideas, realities and people within our own contexts, and this is also true of the contexts of this specific study: it is not a rose-garden. Multiple layers of problems exist, and people do not agree on how to solve them. Secondly, we have to recognize that the Bible itself is contested: it includes theologies that bring death and theologies that bring life and help people to flourish. Doing Bible study in a group brings its own confrontations, as people bring their own ideas. CBS and its relatives cannot solve our problems (Anum 2007: 18), and we should not have solving problems as a goal. CBS aims to create a safe space, a sacred and shared capacity, in which to converse about difficult issues and offer additional resources in dealing with them (Ujamaa 2015: 8).

An interesting contribution regarding the contestation within an intercultural group setting, has come from Dion Forster (2017). In an article on Matthew 18: 15-35, Foster demonstrates the complexities of intercultural contact, by concluding that we need a multifaceted understanding of concepts, in this case forgiveness, when we engage in theological discourse in complex social settings, such as South Africa's. To this end, he employs Ken Wilber's integral theory, which suggests that understanding must take account of the internal life, the

external life, the individual and the collective. The use of this theory gives an alternative grid to culture or race, to show the intricacies in the variety of human understanding.

Applied to this study, it means that one should not have a singular expectation from an ICBS group; people comprehend and express concepts with such variety, that both agreement and contestation is to be expected. One of the advantages, though, is that biblical scholarship done in this way, develops new knowledge on the proposed text, and ICBS groups may help to bridge this knowledge to contemporary readers (Forster, 2017).

### **3.2.2. Steps in Constructing a Contextual Bible Study**

The next aspect of CBS which needs dissection, is the process, the steps in the construction of a Bible study. Readers familiar with the see-judge-act method would have already recognized it in the assembly of this specific academic exercise: the chapters of this study mirror a typical see-judge-act discourse. It makes sense, then, that the first three steps of a CBS have determined relevance to this study, although the manual identifies five steps in the construction of a CBS (Ujamaa 2015: 9). Although they are called a guide only and may be improvised upon, for the purpose of this study, the first three will be used as is.

Step 1: Identifying a Theme (See): CBS always starts with the reality of the local community. The Bible study on 1 Samuel 25 in this study will also do this, as illustrated in chapter one. Communities already deal with issues, and organized Bible study groups are often aware of what they are. Otherwise, if they are not aware, the Ujamaa Centre helps with a social analysis. From my own situatedness, Chapter Two has posited the distinct issues that motivated the creation of this study.

Step 2: Discerning a Biblical text (Judge): Once a theme has been chosen, a Biblical text that addresses the theme must be chosen. In Chapter Four, I will explain why 1 Samuel 25 has been chosen specifically for an intercultural conversation; this text speaks into the issues that pains my community. The Ujamaa Centre uses one of two ways to use a Biblical text: when they read a familiar text, they use an unfamiliar approach, or they choose an unfamiliar text altogether. The only reason provided for this is that this allows participants to re-read the Bible, hearing it speak in a new way (Ujamaa 2015: 10).

1 Samuel 25 cannot be labelled an unfamiliar text, although it certainly is not popular. I have not come across a CBS on the Abigail story, and from a feminist perspective, the possibilities

are captivating, since she is such a convincing leading lady. Furthermore, as explained in Chapter Four, the Abigail story introduces engaging conversation topics, especially for an intercultural conversation: power and politics, violence and crime, peace and forgiveness, sustenance and generosity.

The Ujamaa Manual (2015: 11) discusses an idea under this phase of the process, step 2, which they call “linking”. The process of linking involves connecting the lines between the context of the biblical story, the context of the biblical writer, to the context of the contemporary reader. According to the Manual, these links provide valuable clues to which texts are suited for Bible study with which groups, and obviously to discern a specific text for the problem or theme identified by a group. This is true, but an academic discussion like this deserves one more remark. Biblical students often use these “links” as hermeneutical tools. In Chapter Four of this study, the suffering of the characters in the Biblical story and the pain of the contemporary readers living in a fragmented reality, are utilized to discuss flourishing/peace in a context of trauma (see Chapter 2.4.2.).

Step 3: Formulating Questions (Analysing and linking text and context/Act): For Ujamaa, as for many others who create group exercises, it is of utmost importance to ensure the optimal participation of all individuals involved. Much can be said about this: from the engaging nature of contextual theology, to how important the role of the facilitator is. At this stage, however, it is important to state the importance of the technique of using questions. In order to not teach or preach, and involve all participants in thinking and speaking, CBS is built on asking questions (Ujamaa 2015: 11). The type and order of questions have been tested repeatedly, and this method is as reliable as can be. It is important to respect the history and status of this method when constructing any similar type of Bible study. Therefore, the CBS will be used as such when creating the Bible study on 1 Samuel 25, and explained in detail, question by question. For now, it suffices to explain that two types of questions prevail: contextual and textual.

- a) Contextual questions are used to begin and to end the CBS, and because these questions draw on the resources of the community, they are also called “community consciousness questions”. The CBS draws upon the lived experience and the embodied theologies of the participants, and on what participants have experienced in and brought from the church.

- b) Special attention needs to be given to textual questions, which steers the group to constantly engage with the text. Ujamaa also calls this group of questions the “critical consciousness questions”, because they draw on the systematic and structured resources of Biblical scholarship. Not all scholarly questions or ideas are used in this section. No information is added simply because it is interesting or enriching. The questions should engage the Biblical text so that the potential that it has, to address the context of the group, is excavated.

Ujamaa names the well-known three categories of dimensions of a biblical text (Ujamaa 2015: 11), and as underlined by reader-response theories, the second is highlighted (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker 2017: 35). a) The world behind the text – socio-historical context that produced the text; b) The world on the text – which means what comes to the fore as a text is read as a literary composition; c) The world in front of the text, which focuses on the possible worlds the text projects beyond itself towards the actual reader.

Each of the above can be used in the CBS process, although the world behind the text should be handled with circumspection. If questions on this dimension only adds to information and not formation, they should be avoided. The use of all three as possibilities are explained in the following methodology (Ujamaa 2015: 12): Begin in front of the text, asking participants what they think the text is about, and to answer, they have to draw on their own understanding. Then the focus moves to on the text itself, allowing the detail of the text to have its own voice among the voices of the participants. Literary questions are most handy in a process like this, because of quite a few reasons: they are not difficult, and anyone who reads carefully can answer them, therefor they draw everyone into the text. Also, the careful reading that answering literary questions require, slows down the process, which helps with other things: critical thinking, emphasising with characters, and appropriating the context of the text to the reader’s own life. (This explains the attention that literary reading receives in Chapter Four of this study.)

Next, questions on the world behind the text can be carefully used. They often flow spontaneously from questions on the text, but the facilitator may also plainly inform participants by asking questions on the social and historical background – as long as that information is crucial to their understanding or the stated desired interpretation. The CBS always ends again with questions in front of the text, to conclude what the text’s message is today, to the reader.

In this study, the full three-step methodology is used, with more emphasis on questions on and in front of the text, than behind the text.

### **3.2.3. The Role of the Facilitator**

Chapter Four of the Ujamaa Manual gives attention to the role of the facilitator. In the field of practical theology, this is a path walked in many authoritative studies. The implications and influence of an efficient facilitator deserves studies and books on its own, which is far beyond the scope of this discussion. However, the role of the facilitator should be mentioned in a chapter on methodology, because there will be no hand heavier, no voice more lingering, than that of the facilitator. In creating a Bible study on 1 Samuel 25, this study has described not only the context, but also its intentions and lenses, to minimize the dependence on a good facilitator. When questions and their purposes will be described, as little as possible will be left to the inclination of the facilitator, so that the Bible study may reach its purpose. But the task of a facilitator is necessary and will remain, and must be discussed, at least briefly.

Facilitating is indeed cultivated by understanding and practise. The task at hand is to construct a Bible study with as much understanding and wisdom built in, that even an inexperienced facilitator would be comfortable to present. As explained about the context of this study in Chapter One of the Ujamaa manual, the envisioned facilitator of this study may be trained or not, and if, is often a person of clergy who may be more comfortable with directive leadership and teaching, and not used to facilitating. The author should intrinsically consider the principles of facilitating while creating the questions, and not leave this very important aspect completely to the uncertainty of whether a group has a good facilitator or not.

Because CBS is a collaborative process, it requires leadership that facilitates, not dominates. Collaboration means working together, sharing resources and finding some common action. The Ujamaa Manual claims that facilitating is an art and a form of spirituality, not only a technique, and that anyone can do it (Ujamaa 2015: 14). While it is understood that the manual is a practical help book and not an academic resource, this seems very thin. For the purpose of this study, it cannot be enough to say that good facilitating is necessary – although it will still be needed and still be true. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the practical comprehension that the Ujamaa staff have accumulated in facilitating, and have

shortly stipulated in Chapter Four of their manual. Since this is a critical appreciation of the CBS method, their contribution to facilitating is also evaluated.

Firstly, Ujamaa regards doing CBS a spiritual exercise, and accentuates this factor when instructing the facilitator (2015: 14). The God of love is known to love all of humanity, therefore, it is important to carry that belief into one's own anthropology. Facilitators are encouraged to see the image and hear the voice of God in everyone. Equality and human dignity are valued, and the whole of the Manual and the CBS process witnesses this. This emphasis is utterly suited for this study; although this is an academic exercise, the spirituality contained here is one of deep concern for the well-being and flourishing of all human beings, who deserve it equally. Apart from aptly supporting the feminist goals of this study, the valuing of human dignity may be considered an overarching goal. The mechanics of this spiritual posture is contemplated further when the contribution of Martha Nussbaum is discussed, on how to create positive emotions towards other human beings, even when they were previously strangers (see Chapter 3.4.2).

The next value that the facilitator should regard is one of group ethics. The facilitator is recommended to understand the group, how it is constituted and its major concerns, to be aware that everyone participates and joins in discussion, because all the "right" answers are not with only one person, and to remember that the facilitator is only one voice of many in the group (Ujamaa 2015: 14). The facilitator needs to let the group process take place: hold silences, designate roles, manage dynamics, promote turn-taking, keep to the time, summarise results, move the group from reflection to action.

The core value of contestation, previously explained, is also applicable to group work in the CBS context. Sometimes, one needs to manage conflict, which should be considered a failure. The goal of any CBS and any ICBS is not for everyone to get along, but to create a safe space where participants may honestly engage with any topic, including the difficult or divisive ones, and also with one another. Very important is that all participants must be helped to truly engage with the questions (Ujamaa 2015: 15); and when emotions arise, the facilitator should be proficient in debriefing and reflective handling.

All the responsibility for practical arrangements are that of the facilitator, and these arrangements should be done inconspicuously and professionally, even in humble settings. The discourse leader should provide information when requested, and help community members to utilize local reading resources, while being careful not to exclude those who are

illiterate (Ujamaa 2015: 15). Ice-breaking and efficient time keeping seem unimportant, but is very much so. The facilitator should be well prepared and pre-empt every detail: the venue, seating arrangements, handwriting. The management of these elements are also paramount to this study, even more so since it would be a multicultural group, comprised of people from diverse backgrounds, in a country with racial problems. Practical aspects controlled poorly, could easily make a participant feel unwelcome or offended, and could easily be avoided with preparation. The details of the practical implications of this current study is expounded in Chapter Five, after the workbook is presented.

The set of skills alluded to above can be described as a combination of practical preparation (knowledge of the material, participants, venue and setting), spiritual competence (knowledge of the church, embodied theologies, and the development of the group) and interpersonal abilities (handling conflict, debriefing emotions, including and containing all types of personalities).

### **3.2.4. The Role of the Participant**

Chapter Five of the Ujamaa Manual deals with the role of the participant. As with the previous topic of facilitating, reader response theory is also a very large field of study with tremendous implications. It is understood that reader response has to be dealt with in a practical guidebook, and the aspects chosen for discussion in the manual illuminates the most important ideas regarding the role of the participants in an accessible manner. A brief appreciation will suffice at this point of methodology, since reader response is rather handled under headings of hermeneutics in this study.

In any CBS, it is very important that the facilitator is willing to learn from the participants, since it is as much their Bible study. Participants all bring their own contexts when reading the Bible, and this is not wrong, since the Bible itself shows us that God speaks to people within their specific situation.

Ujamaa privileges the perspective of the poor, marginalized and oppressed, because in line with liberation theology, they believe that God is particularly concerned for the poor and oppressed. Ujamaa and their method CBS has indeed made a monumental contribution to liberation theology, especially through their steps 4 and 5 of their praxis: articulating and owning the Bible study, and developing a plan of action, as well as through the academic

work of Gerald West.<sup>3</sup> The reservation arises, though, if CBS is or will be an effective method in a privileged setting, or where participants are from mixed backgrounds, like this study proposes. Some may even ask if others than the poor deserve to utilize the CBS method – not that any attempt could or would be stopped. Many others have done CBS in many ways and contexts, as our next conversation partners will show.

The Manual then concedes that CBS can be done in the more privileged sectors of society (Ujamaa 2015: 19), and that they can be made aware of the plight of the poor and marginalized by sharing contextual readings that have emerged from them. This deserves discussion, because I do not agree that awareness could be enough, or even possible. But this junction is not far enough along on the road yet, therefore the questions regarding awareness and cultivating compassion is reserved for just a few steps further – see under the review of the work of Nussbaum.

A short detour is necessary regarding this intersection of the facilitator and the participant, the scholarly and the ordinary reader. This study has already referred to the importance of the ordinary reader in CBS, especially as a hermeneutical concept. In this study, the contribution of the ordinary reader will not be empirically recorded and reflected upon. It is still expected, though, and of great importance for the goals of this study. This study looks toward an intercultural reading with not only one scholarly facilitator and ordinary reading participants, but with a combination of ordinary and scholarly in unknown quantities. Careful consideration needs to be given to factors which are of importance in a mixed group like this.

In an article titled “Ye Ma Wo Mo! African Hermeneutics, you have Spoken at Last: Reflections on Semeia 73,” this issue is addressed by Eric Anum (2007: 7). Anum contemplates the question regarding which factors need to be considered when developing a hermeneutical model interfacing both the scholarly reader and the ordinary reader?

Historically problematic has been the identification of the scholarly reader, whether explicitly or implicitly, as a western, middle class, educated person, elite or middle class in their context. This person is often the facilitator (Ujamaa 2015: 10). In the ICBS project *Through*

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<sup>3</sup> Gerald West is senior professor at the University of KwaZulu/Natal, at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, with special reference to African Biblical hermeneutics. He has published extensively, especially on that topic. Books include *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation* (1991) *Contextual Bible Study* (2003), and the recent *The Stolen Bible: From Tool of Imperialism to African Icon* (2016). His work regarding biblical interpretation in alliance with the poor and oppressed during and after Apartheid, has earned him the title of foremost South African liberation theologian (West, 2014).

*the Eyes of Another*, because of its global context, scholarly readers in some cases consisted of whole groups, or probably more than one person in a group.

Anum (2007: 13) argues that a traditionally strict distinction between scholarly and ordinary is not necessary. In our postmodern context, scholars have grown to leave their claim to objectivity behind. Both scholarly and ordinary readers are involved in sociocultural readings; both scholarly and the ordinary readers are influenced by their contexts and therefore cannot dissociate or disengage from it while interpreting.

Anum then goes ahead to show some indicators to be considered when a hermeneutical model is developed to be used by both the scholarly and the ordinary simultaneously (2007: 17). Firstly, they both seek meaning, but they have different functions, so scholars need to facilitate, not inform, so that academics do not dominate. Secondly, everyone must be careful of power relations. The challenge, also for this ICBS, is how to address the imbalances between scholarly and ordinary. Much more reflection and study are needed on “reading-with” models to level playing field between scholarly and ordinary readers. Thirdly, Anum (2007: 18) advises the fruitful use of resources available in interface: stories, poems, art, and music. This serves as a reminder for this study to use all material available in the interface – not only Bible study material. Fourthly, scholarly skill may be used (following the opinion of Nolan), but then in service of the ordinary reader, the worker theology. And finally, Anum claims that a skill that all scholars should have, is facilitating

In the end, the challenge remains, directed to all scholars: to offer themselves as hermeneutical servants to the specific sociocultural contexts in which they do their reading. It is an important insight, and indeed a motivation for this study that any socially engaged Biblical scholar is a servant to especially the ordinary reader.

The socially engaged Biblical scholar must be exactly that: socially engaged and committed to the community. They must ideally be linked with organic intellectuals; they must be prepared to cross boundaries (Anum 2007: 17), traditional boundaries of race, socio-economic class or just plain boundaries of geography – all true in the case of South African communities. In crossing boundaries, the socially engaged Biblical scholar becomes a phenomenon slightly different from the standard scholar: he or she chooses to be partially constituted by another. Only when that happens, and only when the ordinary reader is convinced of that, will the hidden transcript of an ICBS be revealed, and the disguised

embodied theologies be unveiled. This is a mutual process that requires much humility from both sides.

Chapter Eight of the Ujamaa Manual is titled “Articulating, Owning and Mainstreaming Local Theologies: A Concluding Reflection on the Potential of CBS”. This provides us with a small segment of information about what could happen when CBS is done and reflected upon in communities. To contemplate this extensively regarding 1 Samuel 25 and the current Bible study in creation, is beyond the scope of this piece of work, although the ideal outcome was stated from the very beginning.

It suffices to visualise the following outcome: there should be a conglomerated articulation of embodied theologies, at least including the theologies of those who are marginalized, as well as embodied theologies from the more privileged who became aware of fellow participants’ plight. Ideally, a combined action plan of a divided community to become one flourishing unit, could be composed as outcome of the Bible study.

It is noticeable that the title of this study does not include the acronym CBS, although the methodology of this study has CBS at its roots, and a critical analysis was necessary. The proposal for this study is rather to be labelled an ICBS, which is also a form of CBS, but with added attributes that will be outlined in the following section.

The Ujamaa Centre privileges the perspective of the poor, marginalized and oppressed, because, as stated before and in line with liberation theology<sup>4</sup>, they believe that God is particularly concerned for the poor and oppressed. This study cannot claim this statement unambiguously. The concern of this study is to include a complete community, representative of a wide socio-economic range. And yet, while calling it something else, and concerned with the transformation of the community as a whole, it becomes clear that the concern for structural violence and the striving for peace and flourishing would preferably

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<sup>4</sup> In a celebratory article, Gerald West updates the terminology developments in the field, while locating Contextual Bible Study within biblical liberation hermeneutics and intercultural biblical hermeneutics (West, 2014). Although contextual wherever it is conducted, not all contexts are given the same epistemological privilege in liberation hermeneutics. In its case, the position of the poor, marginalized and oppressed are favoured. Feminists, postcolonial theologians and black theologians also appropriate liberation hermeneutics. A later inclusion is intercultural Bible study. As one of its chief exponents, Hans De Wit, argues: intercultural hermeneutics does not employ intercultural conversation for the sake of itself, but for “the quest for truth, justice and life”. That is why it may be called intercultural hermeneutics of liberation (West, 2014).

benefit the poor and oppressed. When approached from a different angle, we arrive at the same conclusion.

### **3.3. Intercultural Bible Study**

#### **3.3.1. Terminology**

The focus of this discussion now moves to the second conversation document chosen for this chapter: *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural reading of the Bible* (De Wit et al, 2004). The reader will immediately notice that the terminology has changed from calling the Bible study “contextual”, to calling it “intercultural”. Although it is not the first time that a Bible study has been called intercultural, it is one of the largest projects of its kind delivered up to date, and deserves attention at least for that reason. For the purpose of this study as outlined in Chapter One and Two, the use of the term “intercultural” is of special interest. This discussion will concentrate on the main characteristics of the De Wit study, and the similarities and differences to this study.

The preface of *Through the Eyes of Another* tells of a unique and unprecedented Bible study project, characterized by collaboration, sustained partnership and a unique three-phase plan (De Wit et al 2004: ix). John 4 was read by Bible study groups around the world. Each group exchanged their hermeneutical report with another group from a completely different cultural background, making it possible to read the text “through the eyes of another”, and then followed the last phase of reciprocal response. The book includes colourful descriptions called *tableaux vivants*, case studies, critical analyses and essays that point towards implications. To give a summary of all of these, is far beyond the scope of this chapter; suffice to say that feedback was sweeping, and given in various forms. Some of the highlights of the feedback which are relevant to this study, will be referred to in the following section.

#### **3.2.2. Design**

What is necessary to comment on, is the design of the project. The authors have a uniquely wider than the traditional view of the theological playing field and its recent developments and challenges. They are especially concerned about the gap between rich and poor, created by globalization. The world, in a global sense, is not often used as the preferred context for a

theological project. But considering the poor and marginalized in a global sense still brings to the forefront the contribution that the ordinary reader can bring to this conversation regarding liberation. The result is a new understanding of diversity.

In the words of De Wit et al (2004: 32): “cultural diversity is added as a hermeneutic factor and confrontation is organized”. The basic assumption of the project is that it can have added value when diversity is taken seriously.

Concerning the details of the Bible reading process (De Wit et al 2004: 5), there were no set prescriptions: each group read the story the way they were used to. They did not necessarily use the CBS reading methods; indeed, some groups used a very academic approach, and others a more emotional interaction. The value of this resource lies more in the riches gained by cultural exchange than in reading methodology.

The term “intercultural” can be divided into two as explained by De Wit et al (2004: 25): “inter” and “cultural.”. De Wit et al chose the term “culture” rather than “context”, for a number of different reasons. Firstly, it reflects the global design of the project effectively, holding in regard that individuals are always and inherently of different and unique contexts, but in this case whole groups interacted with each other. They also use the term “culture” because it offers the opportunity for finding a grid, calibration points, which are necessary to discover the differences in interpretations (De Wit et al 2004: 27). In this international modus operandi, using the term “intercultural” legitimizes differences.

The calibration grid the authors allude to, concerns the cultural theory of Hofstede<sup>5</sup>. Although this theory is explained in the introduction and presumably suggested for use in the feedback, I could not find extensive use of it in the book itself. The authors did not equally use the theory’s calibration points so that their work could be compared with each other. Nevertheless, the discussions on the groups, although presented in various forms, do explore general cultural ideas. The result is a book of exuberant variety, maybe more faithful to reality, than would be chapters neatly aligned on a grid.

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<sup>5</sup> In 1980, Geert Hofstede published a book called *Culture’s Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*, and with it provided much material for subsequent dialogue: whether he intended to study culture or not (he studied corporate governance), whether his dimensions may be used in what circumstances. He named dimensions that makes culture measurable, which are the following: the power distance index, individualism versus collectivism, the uncertainty avoidance index, masculinity versus femininity, long-term orientation versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint (Van der Walt 2014: 99).

The theory of Hofstede has been more effectively used by Charlene van der Walt, in her empirical reading project on 2 Samuel 13, *Toward a Communal Reading of 2 Samuel 13: Ideology and Power within the Intercultural Bible Reading Process* (2014). Van der Walt translated the dimensions named by Hofstede into contrasting images on a sliding scale, had her participants choose a side before they communally read the Bible story as well as after, and recorded the differences between the two choices. The result is quite intriguing: a specific way to measure change in transformative reading is now available. She also uses Foucault's theory on power to measure power dynamics during group readings, making a grid on this aspect available as well. Now, scholars can prove what have been suspected: not everything is culture, but culture not only has an immediate impact on the interpretation of Bible stories – the interpretation of Bible stories has an impact on culture as well.

The management of the Hofstede theory, especially in an empiric way, is beyond the scope of this study. For the moment, it is adequate to note that even though this study does not employ the cultural theory of Hofstede, it is still labelled “intercultural” and not “inter-contextual”.

More on terminology: “inter” signifies the desire to go into conversation, interaction, confrontation, and change. De Wit et al (2004: 28) gives a noteworthy explanation on the choice, and how it is different from the term “multicultural”. Important is that the goal of an intercultural Bible study is not to, in a multicultural setup, find the interpretation with the most weight. That is not the collaboration we need, or even have been discussing. That is not the ideal result of the contestation ideals of any contextual Bible study. This is not about survival of the fittest, and there are not supposed to be winners and losers in an intercultural conversation. In order to survive as community, we need to take another step, beyond diversity (De Wit et al 2004: 30). We are in terrible need of a more profound, more enriching interpretation process.

I could not agree more. It is precisely this compelling concept, together with the text of 1 Samuel 25 that served as this inspiration for this study. Even though this thesis is definitely not a project on an international scale, the description “intercultural” fits the goals of this project more than “contextual”. The intent of this project, as explained in chapter one, was from the outset to create a safe space for transformative Bible reading (more on this in Chapter 3.4.1.), as well as for the conversing of believers who are culturally diverse, in need

of connection with one another, and fighting further alienation from their own. The ICBS process is exactly the more profound and enriching interpretation tool that we need.

Although South Africans supposedly share the same culture, that culture is marked by diversity: language, ethnicity, race, religion, orientation, and socio-economic differences. Diversity as a concept is also not uncomplicated, with aspects of culture and customs exchanged continually, in a multicultural society. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Two of this study, the term “diversity” has been stripped of its power by an ecclesiastical conversation within the context of the present study. But, as illustrated above, South Africans should not be satisfied with multicultural exchange. They should be searching for intercultural exchange.

One idea remains uncontaminated, though: even when called “intercultural”, the same lessons as in contextual studies may be expected from the ordinary reader participating in this study. This, together with the question methodology, means we cannot forfeit the CBS foundations for this study.

### **3.3.3. Multipolar Approach**

The sizeable shift which both CBS and ICBS comprise, is a hermeneutical one. This change is discussed perceptively by Rainer Kessler in an essay on the implications of intercultural Bible study in *Through the Eyes of Another* (2004: 452-459). The chapter is titled “From Bipolar to Multipolar Understanding: Hermeneutical Consequences of Intercultural Bible reading”.

The traditional understanding of the hermeneutics of reading any text has always been bipolar, with in the centre always the text, and the writer and reader opposite to each other on the furthest point of a line. Being consistent in this way of understanding, means that the reader ends up being an abstraction. Scholars following this way have engaged in little reflection on the historical conditions of the concrete reader. For modern interpreters, the ‘normal’ reader has been the white European male (Kessler 2004: 453). It becomes obvious why it is necessary to choose a variety of interpretative lenses to broaden this perspective, including the feminist reading of this study.

The new step that intercultural Bible reading takes in reader response, is that the position of the reader becomes plural (Kessler 2004: 455). In the past, even when a group was reading

and discussing the text, the reader was still considered singular. From now on, any and every reading model should be considered multipolar. In an interesting perspective, the ICBS could be called intercultural on more than one level, because the text also has its own voice within its own culture (Van der Walt 2014: 28).

In a convincing article titled “From Multiculturalism to Interculturality: Can Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics be of Any Assistance?”, Louis Jonker uses primarily the work of De Wit et al to highlight the future possibilities of intercultural Biblical hermeneutics. He argues that to only cope with multiculturalism is not a viable option in South Africa (2006: 22), and that employing intercultural Biblical hermeneutics could contribute greatly to a change in perspective and enhance understanding, of both the Biblical text and of one another.

Embracing plurality and reading concretely are some of the integral hermeneutical elements of this study. Any reader is no longer merely confirmed in their singular group, but is challenged by readers who are, by definition, different. The question is not anymore: “Who is right?” It is not even: “Who is more right?” The singular reading becomes only one of many and the reading does not only bring new understanding about the text, but also about each other (Kessler 2004: 458).

The goal used to be, and still is to an extent, that the subject who engages in academic reading must acknowledge his or her position – male or female, white or black, rich or poor, from the centre or the periphery – and bring it to the reading process. In this study, this has been done in Chapter Two. Although there is nothing wrong with this insight, the goal of this study and other intercultural studies move even beyond this. The new message conveyed by intercultural Bible reading (Kessler 2004: 458) is that it is not enough to say who I am as reader of the text. I must also listen to other readers from different contexts. Without their voices, I will not be able to listen to the full voice of the text that I wish to understand. This, in my view, adds to the type ICBS as a technical term. Sensitivity to these goals support the question methodology used in the Bible study created in this project.

#### **3.3.4. Ecumenism and Development**

All of these insights outlined above, have implications for the church, which concerns this study and its context extensively, as explained in Chapter Two of this study. In *Through the Eyes of Another*, a fitting reflection is found on the ramifications of ICBS for ecumenism and mission. We should appreciate the opportunities of this method for enriching relationships of

mission and service between Christians (De Wit et al 2004: 32). Often more concrete and existential than theological debate, intercultural Bible reading turns out to be a space where consensus, balance and identity is sought in a broader ecumenical perspective. The special position of the Scriptures comes to the fore here: returning to Scripture is always turning to the communal future of the separated churches as well. This should be an invigorating anticipation for South African churches, my own most of all, who has carried the burden of the separation from “sister” churches for far too long. As a biblical student, I often muse that the way back to one another may not be through synods and debates, but through simply reading and contemplating on the Bible together.

Although ICBS may have an impact on the church, one should also consider whether the intercultural reading process could play a role in the global context – which would be fitting, since it had such a large-scale start. This is done by Marleen Kool in a feedback section titled “Intercultural Bible Reading as a Practical Setting for Intercultural Communication” (De Wit et al 2004: 360-375). In this article, Kool explores whether the intercultural reading project has a special role in the global context. To what extent can intercultural reading contribute to deepening insight into the relationship between religion and, particularly, development?

People living in different times and places and contexts can attribute different meanings to the same Bible story. At the same time, Bible stories, like all stories, can transcend culture and time, and contain universal aspects. Users must be mindful of both the specific and the transcending truth of Bible stories. Dialogue, communication and participation form the original shape of human development, and traditional storytelling (which includes the use of religious stories) can make a significant contribution towards human development (Kool 2004: 361).

Questions such as the following then becomes useful: How do we enable people to live together in peace? May we consider reading together as a source for living together? But how do we help people to read together? And then the ever-present question: How do we encourage people to get involved in development? May reading together even be a source for that? These are all concerns that lie at the heart of this study, and at the root of communities’ problems, as shown in Chapter Two of this study.

Kool claims that the way we look at other people is bound to how we look at ourselves and constitutes the central question of human development (2004: 363). Can we put ourselves in the situation of the other person? Do we even want to? Does the other person have a face for

us? Development is much more than combating poverty. It is determined by factors such as self-awareness, access to interaction, freedom of opinion and expression, experiencing faith. It involves removing structural injustice and violence, as well as mental transformation – a vast assignment, but all in all it is moving us towards freedom and flourishing.

When we start at our need for transformation and reverse the reasoning process, the relevant question becomes the following: In ICBS, what contributes to transformation? The overwhelming answer in the context of the *Through the Eyes of Another* project, is the second phase, when interaction with other readers is transformative. All communication shows mutual influence (Kool 2004: 364), even if the groups are mismatched (in their own understanding), even when the assignment was not completed, even when people do not agree on everything, even when no new theological insight is gained.

Realizing this is a monumental juncture in the methodological discussion of this study, and one we should not skip over too quickly. It means that the original spark to the flame of this study – the desperate need for interaction of a fragmented society – was indeed a frustration propelling this study in the right direction. Not that a Bible story could be unnecessary, and an appropriate story would be helpful for interaction; but the Bible story is not the be-all and end-all of a study like this. Access to interaction is simultaneously one of the main problems and the main solutions presented by this study. There is already enough proof that when culturally isolated people are granted the opportunity to interact, all communication would show mutual influence, and would aid human development and flourishing.

Interaction with other readers should then become one of the main goals and purposes of any contextual or intercultural Bible study, including this one on 1 Samuel 25. Interaction is always beneficial, as shown above, and always expands skills: perspective is needed to appreciate differences, and inclusiveness is needed to appreciate similarities (Kool 2004: 365).

### **3.4. Cultivating Compassion**

In the same key, although still exploring methodology towards an ICBS, more needs to be composed regarding transformative reading of specifically the Bible. It has been established by the above, that interaction with other readers contributes enormously to transformation. The question arises if the texts are as transformative as have always been thought – or even at all, and exactly how the mechanics of transformative reading work.

Furthermore, the specific goals of transformation need to be named. The lens of this study has been transparently used throughout this study: In intentionally employing the feminist viewpoint and especially as described by Claassens (2015: 3), this study seeks, among other hermeneutic goals, to listen to the voice of the individual, to interrogate power relations, and to constitute community. The heading of this section is a term borrowed from Martha Nussbaum, and her particular contribution to understand transformative reading is discussed shortly. Suffice to say that in “cultivating compassion”, a concept is found that includes the abovementioned feminist goals, and validly describe the intent of this ICBS.

### **3.4.1. Transformative Reading**

De Wit et al (2004: 20) writes eloquently about the power of the story: in the past few decades, a rediscovery of the power of stories took place, also in theology. And what is true about stories, is even more true about religious stories, thus they are often even more powerful. De Wit et al finds the motivation for this statement in the fact that religious stories are often the central components of traditions. Several examples of this may be found in the reading reports of this project. Therefore, in anticipation of the expanded insight that transformative reading gives, celebration should be an important part of liturgical reading, and of any group interpretation exercise, for that matter. In creating this particular ICBS, thought needs to be given to celebration as well, and space for it should be left in the Bible study: whether it be singing and dancing, appreciating local art or humour, or eating together – the last example being suggested by the chosen text of 1 Samuel 25.

The Ujamaa Manual (2015: 7) also recognizes that there are many sources for social transformation, but states that the reason that communal Bible study has such tremendous transformational abilities, is because it is still considered to be a source of authority and power by so many people. This is also true in my experience, and as a matter of course one of the main reasons Biblical theologians use the Bible: we need not create a conversation document and bless it with inherent authority – we have the Bible, which most believers on the African continent regards with respect and love. CBS does not, however, hesitate to include other activities and resources with transformational faculties as well, and asks that the users of their studies be creative with these according to their own discretion.

Further claims are made by De Wit et al (2004: 22) about the capabilities and licences of stories. We all know this to be true: the effect that a story has, is intensified by communal reading; stories are carriers of potential behaviour (De Wit et al 2004: 23); stories are always open, they stimulate the imagination of the reader and challenge them to finish the story (De Wit et al 2004: 24). But the fact that we all know this to be true, does not make it easy to theorize accurately about.

The term “transforming reading” was coined by Anthony Thiselton in his work *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (1992). Since then, many scholars have been working to locate the answers to the following question: When reading, under what conditions does a change of perspective take place – or is it automatic? A variety of factors have been theorized upon in this regard: Jauss developed a theory called aesthetic reception, which focuses attention on the horizon of expectation of the reader, which may include association, admiration and sympathy. Thiselton’s own answer is also that in postmodern hermeneutics, reader response carries most weight (Porter & Malcolm, 2013: 2).

The single hermeneutic assumption of CBS is that knowledge cultivates compassion. Yet Van der Walt (2014: 101) has shown that knowledge is power. In the context of transformative reading, compassion and personal power would be antithetical. In this regard, there is one aspect about the power of stories that seem to evade methodologists of both variants of Bible studies, CBS and ICBS that needs to be discussed. The assumption that knowledge cultivates compassion needs to be interrogated. This presumption should have created much more suspicion up to now, than it did. CBS have established that the embodied theologies of the marginalized can be accessed through a question-driven methodology, while ICBS has shown that interpersonal contact has a greater influence on the change that happens in people when doing a group Bible study, than have been thought.

The Ujamaa Manual encourages throughout, that the focus of those who use the method should be on the side of the poor and the marginalized: this is the roots of CBS, and the single aspect that contributes most to their praxis-based theology. The Manual then concedes that CBS can be done in the more privileged sectors of society (Ujamaa 2015: 19), and that they can be made aware of the plight of the poor and marginalized by sharing contextual readings that have emerged from them.

This indeed was done with some of the groups who took part in the *Through the Eyes of One Another* project: some socio-economically privileged groups exchanged reading reports with others who are poor, and both sides were surprized at the differences in interpretation (De Wit et al 2004: 22). And although both sides are indeed being made aware of the other's plight, and being aware certainly has advantages, the dream that started this ICBS project has a different goal than only being aware: it is about creating community, fostering fellowship, and cultivating compassion between members of a society. Furthermore, as illustrated in Chapter Two of this study, it is a society that is supposed to be one in fellowship and compassion, sharing the same religion and history. We need more than awareness.

### 3.4.2. The Nussbaum Contribution

A central premise of this study is that stories, which include Biblical narratives, are excellent tools for fashioning not only awareness, but also fellowship and compassion. Although there are traces of these elements in the empirical feedback of much of the work mentioned up to now, for example that of Van der Walt (2014) and De Wit et al (2004), excellent theory on the subject is to be found in the work of the political philosopher Martha Nussbaum, and specifically in her 2013 book *Political Emotions*.

Nussbaum's work is not strictly theological, but theology often loans from different disciplines (including philosophy), and the trajectory of this study is distinctly political, which makes the conversation between disciplines important. The following paragraphs will follow Nussbaum's reasoning, and explain how it links to intercultural Bible reading.

Nussbaum argues that all societies are full of emotions: anger, fear, sympathy, disgust, envy, grief, love. Some of these are not private but take as their object the nation, its goals, its institutions and leaders, its fellow citizens. Such public emotions often have consequences for the nation's progress towards its goals. All political principles, good and bad, need emotional support to ensure their stability over time (Nussbaum 2013: 2). Using this would acknowledge that this ICBS, in its interculturality within a single nation, has a political colour. Concepts such as justice and peace and flourishing can be said to political as well as theological - an important insight, considering the fact that the political has long since been considered a characteristic of feminist theology.

Nussbaum names two tasks for the political cultivation of emotion: the first is to create and sustain strong commitment-worthy projects that require effort: such as social redistribution,

the inclusion of the previously marginalized groups, and protection of the environment. Most people tend towards narrowness of sympathy, and people need help to think larger thoughts and commit themselves to a common good. The second task is to keep in check the negative forces: tendencies to protect the fragile self by subordinating others. Disgust and envy must be educated to cultivate the ability to see full and equal humanity in another person (Nussbaum 2013: 3).

Another link that Nussbaum names already seems accustomed: room must be made for subversion and humour (Nussbaum 2013: 7). This theme reminds of the feminist lens of Jackson, as will be explained in Chapter Four of this study. Making fun of the grandiose pretensions of patriotic emotions or fervent anger is one of the best ways to keep things down to earth. This is, for example, what Abigail does with David. Humour is a way to question the Empire and its violence.

One of the main points of Nussbaum's argument in *Political Emotions* is that the major emotions are all eudaimonistic in nature (Nussbaum 2013: 153), meaning that they appraise the world from that person's viewpoint. We grieve for people we care about, not for total strangers. This notion describes my discomfort in the methodological analysis up to this point, for the gap in the discussion on the methodology of Contextual Bible studies. We need more than awareness, because people do not change by knowing things that still are far away from them.

Nussbaum's position as stated above is not egoistic in nature: we may still hold that other people have intrinsic value. But the ones who stir deep emotions in us are the ones to whom we are somehow connected through our imagining of a valuable life, in other words, our circle of concern. If distant people and abstract principles are to impact our emotions, these emotions must somehow enter our circle of concern, creating a sense of our life in which these people and events matter as parts of our *us*, our own flourishing. For this movement to take place, Nussbaum (2013: 11) maintains that poetry and symbols are crucial, as also was encouraged by the methodology of CBS.

This, then, is one of the reasons that interpersonal contact is so transformative to people reading Bible stories together: people who have been far away, who have been outside my circle of concern (whether for lack of access or for political reasons), becomes part of my own story. I contribute to their flourishing, and they to mine. Remarkable is that these other people include story characters with whom I associate. An "us" is created, where there was

none. Of course, the creation of eudaimonistic feelings, the cultivating of compassion for those who were previously strangers, depends on many factors and is not automatically true for every participant.

Since the consideration to cultivate compassion will have a direct influence on the questions chosen for the Bible study on 1 Samuel 25 for this study, further aspects on cultivating compassion deserves notice. Describing more accurately what is meant with compassion, in association with its related terms, helps to clarify the significance of Nussbaum's work for this study. One aspect she emphasizes, is the difference between compassion, sympathy and empathy (2013: 145). She argues that sympathy is of little use in the public sphere, not even psychology regards it significant. Considering the title of her book *Political Emotions*. The use of political emotions for flourishing is thus not an emotional exercise as such. One can cultivate good emotions without being emotionally unsettled (Nussbaum 2013: 146). On the other hand, compassion is often an outgrowth of empathy, although empathy is not sufficient for compassion, since a sadist can use empathy to hurt others. But vividly imagining the other and their circumstances is helpful, though not necessary.

The whole of Nussbaum's Chapter Seven of her book *Political Emotions* deals with radical evil and how to contain it, as an opposite of compassion. Nussbaum offers an excellent exposition on the origins of radical evil. Different religions have different views on the roots of bad behaviour. Nussbaum uses a secular humanist approach, but reaches conclusions that most religious people would agree with. There has been much work done on disgust, peer pressure and other tendencies to help her extract a core of radical evil (Nussbaum 2013: 163). In terms of studies on childhood development, Nussbaum (2013: 176) convincingly shows how moral relationships develop in babies, with love propelling the infant towards creative reciprocity. It is only through trust in an uncertain world that one ever finds the "way out from a smothering narcissism".

Working on creating an intercultural conversation for this study, Nussbaum's ideas on disgust as root for racism is both revolutionary and obvious (2013: 182). Disgust is not inherited, it is taught, and quite late in the scale of survival skills. But history (Nussbaum uses examples from the history of the United Kingdom and India – two great nations who have both strived for justice, although there are many differences between them) has shown that manners, cleanliness, sexuality and other mythical differences between races have been used to create disgust. It is also not hard to see that food and eating has been used as a weapon against

cultivating compassion, and wielded as a tool to exclude. This is quite interesting in the context of this ICBS study, since Abigail uses food to include and reveal her compassion and wisdom; more on food and inclusion in the following chapter.

Apart from radical evil, compassion has other enemies like fear, envy and shame (Nussbaum 2013: 314). Another negative aspect that any creator of a Bible study should also be aware of, concerns the effects of peer pressure and authority in a group setting. This resonates with the statement earlier that places compassion and power on two contrary and opposing sides. Although the purpose of this study is not to study power relations in-group dynamics, one should remain aware that any intercultural conversation should anticipate peer pressure and the use of influence, in whatever way, of commanding personalities. The method of using questions and expecting answers from all participants is still a great vanguard against this problem.

There are thoughts that accompany compassion that could help this from developing: the measure of the seriousness of a problem, the measure of non-fault or blamelessness, the measure of similar possibilities, and the already named eudaimonistic thought. Nussbaum (2013: 191) also uses the work of Winnicott to answer the question of how to develop the trust and confidence needed for compassion. The answer is indeed again both simple and profound, proven by empirical psychological work: the healthy, subtle interplay of childhood is what is most instrumental for this. There is another potential space where play happen when we grow up where roles and options can be tried without the real-life stress: arts and culture (Nussbaum 2013: 181).

The emphasis on art and culture is another paramount theme that Nussbaum develops throughout the book: that art in all its forms carry, inspire, create and render stable emotions – hopefully, when positively wielded – of love, compassion and justice. In this regard, one could argue from both a philosophical and psychological point of view for the essentiality of the narrative, and especially the Biblical narrative as well-known stories in my context, and its use in communal readings. I will return to this point when in the next chapter, I will engage with the work of Claassens so as to show how 1 Samuel 25 can be considered to be a very suitable narrative for cultivating compassion (see Chapter 4.3.4.).

My case for the contextuality of this current study, as stated and augmented in Chapter Two of this study, is strengthened by Nussbaum's argument from the very beginning, that a good proposal for the cultivation of political emotions must be highly contextual (2013: 200).

Nussbaum has argued this point in terms of examples from Tagore and Mozart, and has shown convincingly how both succeeded in evoking positive public emotions. Good public emotions do embody general principles, but they clothe them in the garb of concrete narrative history. For this reason, theory about political emotions cannot be top-down, but must be contextual, aligning well with the general focus of this study. I propose that an ICBS is a helpful avenue for cultivating good political emotions within a nation divided.

Nussbaum asks and answers the question: where are public emotions generated? Evidently in the rhetoric of political leaders, but also through gestures and clothes, artworks, monuments and parks, celebrations, symbols and festivals and songs, even comedy and sports, film and photographs, public education and discussions – in the case of this study, also a ICBS (2013: 203).

With the above in mind, the following chapter will invite the reader into the imaginative space of the character called Abigail, the female hero of the narrative chosen for this study. An ICBS with this story as conversation document is the ideal safe space for honest conversation. Even more than openness, the reader may expect to be inspired to good emotions, since letting Abigail into our world, may even cultivate compassion.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING ABIGAIL (1 SAMUEL 25)**

#### **4.1. Introducing the Story**

It is not incidental which text one chooses to create a safe space to conduct an ICBS where people from a wide variety of backgrounds join around a common text. Choosing a narrative and choosing conversation topics are inextricably bound together. It is noteworthy though that few scholars who engage in contextual bible studies explain their choices, except to say that a specific text lends it to a certain topical discussion. An exception is Van der Walt who lists her considerations for the choice of a text to use in a modern intercultural engagement (2014: 20), which includes the approachability of narrative texts and the extent to which a text lends itself to the unparalleled contribution of feminist hermeneutics. For her project on the value of communal bible study, Van der Walt chose 2 Samuel 13, a “text of terror” with the theme of sexual violence that also appeals to a community ethic - and the conversation topics become clear.

I was drawn to the story of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 for several reasons: the compelling lead character is a woman – a convinced start for a feminist scholar; and because the plot provides a retraction from a volatile situation to a peaceful one, an inversion that sparked my interest and deserved investigation. In spite of the above, the Abigail story is not overly familiar, which makes it ideal for a CBS, or in the case of this study, an ICBS (Ujamaa 2015: 9).

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the story of 1 Samuel 25, to understand the text, to be able to formulate good questions for an ICBS. This goal guides what is to be included in this chapter, and what not: study of any biblical text may occupy the full attention of a scholar, and complete books have been written on the Abigail story. Given the objectives of this study, the focus of this chapter is to gain a comprehensive enough grasp of the story to create good questions for an ICBS.

When exploring a Bible story, applicable themes emerge in the interpretative process of delving deeper into the text. There are many subjects that invite discussion in any given text, which

under different circumstances could supply a variance of results. For this ICBS that employs a feminist optic, four prominent themes were chosen based on the exegetical engagement with the text to provide avenues for questions, and they are listed as such later in this chapter: (1) flourishing in a context of trauma, (2) verbal resistance as prophesy, (3) food and generosity, and (4) female agency in a man's world.

Further motifs that also are explored throughout the discussion concerns the theme of the act of avoiding or overcoming violence, creating peace, the nature and significance of hospitality, and the notion of female agency or initiative – all themes that even in today's context might be equally relevant. At the heart of the Abigail story is the idea that, to steer communities away from volatility, female resourcefulness is needed.

To unearth the main themes and secondary nuances in the story, an in-depth exegetical study is essential. For this study, the exegetical strategy would need to be multidimensional, thus using a variety of complementary viewpoints to interpret the text in a way that is helpful for constructing an ICBS.

In this regard, two approaches will be introduced. First, literary criticism provides the necessary focus on the text itself. CBS draws heavily from insights of this approach (Ujamaa 2015: 11), for good reason: since the text is what every Bible study participant would have in hand, each partaker should be empowered to contribute. To depend on questions from the world behind the text, would have one draw on historic-critical knowledge, and only indulge those who have the specialized information. Literary criticism with its narratological approach, gleans data from the text that supports the methodology of this study as explained in Chapter Three of this study. The details gained from this approach are available to every reader who would be willing to study the text closely.

Questions for this ICBS will be provided mainly by the world on the text, reinforced by contemplation from the world in front of the text, and only supplemented by information from the world behind the text when necessary.

Second, since this study is situated within the intersection of gender and health, the preferred reader response theory is feminist criticism. The concern for the neglected case of women in society and the care for their flourishing, have been explained in Chapter Two of this study, and indeed colours the whole of this endeavour. The now classic statement from Jones (2000: 5) is that “feminist theorists focus on women not because they believe no other group

of persons is worthy of critical analysis or because liberating women is the sole key to liberating the world. They do so because women's lives have long been ignored as a subject of critical reflection and because of a sense of urgency related to the present-day harms being done to women." The preferential option for women in this study is selected with conscientious regard for the well-being and flourishing of the whole community, men included. The denial of women's agency and potential has been detrimental to society for too long, and the playing field includes the church and theology. Feminist interpreters have made inspiring contributions to the understanding of Biblical texts in recent years (Claassens 2016: xxiv) and the insights gained from feminists' work will be helpful in creating a Bible study observant to the flourishing of women.

Before presenting some important exegetical perspectives on this text, it may be useful to survey a summary of the Abigail story. On either side of 1 Samuel 25, in both chapter 24 and 26, David is restraining himself from killing Saul. In chapter 25 though, the future king depends on a woman to stop him from violence. With the very first statement in the Abigail story (1 Samuel 25:1a), the reader is informed of Samuel's death – the last Judge had died. We are then introduced to clever and beautiful Abigail, and her rich but churlish husband Nabal (even his name means "fool") in verse 2 and 3. It is festival time after the shearing of the sheep (verse 4), traditionally a time of generosity. David, is leader of a group of bandits, and he sends men to ask of Nabal a portion of food, since they have been "looking after" the herdsmen and no-one and nothing got lost or stolen (1 Samuel 25: 8-9).

Nabal refuses and David is furious (verse 10). Vowing to kill all, he rides toward the house of Nabal. In the meantime, a servant has told Abigail of all (1 Samuel 25:14-17). She quickly prepares a feast of gifts for David and his men, and rides out to meet him (verse 18-19). When she finds him, she falls on her knees humbly (verse 23) and begs him to not go ahead (her speech comprises the whole of verses 24-31).

He heeds her wise words and accepts her gifts (verses 32-35). When Nabal hears of this, his heart first dies within him, and then he loses his life as well (1 Samuel 25:36-38). The story ends with David sending for Abigail to make her his wife (verses 39-42).

## 4.2. Literary Analysis

Given the fact that 1 Samuel 25 forms part of the narrative corpus of the Bible, and literary questions suit the Bible study methodology of this study, a narratological approach to the text is particularly helpful. The relatively loose definition of the term “narrative criticism” is one that this study would employ, gathering all literary aspects of the text under this one heading (Amit 2001: 13). It is by close reading of the existing text that meaning is found, and by, for example, carefully considering formal and informal structures in the narrative, by discussing characterization and its contributions to meaning, by regarding the language and vocabulary closely. This section furthermore includes attention to structure, genre, character and plot.

### 4.2.1. Structure

The text demarcated for this study is 1 Samuel 25, which is a neat literary unit and occurring precisely in the middle of Samuel (Bach 1990: 41), which makes it a focus point of the larger narrative, and worth dissecting by itself. Before doing that, it is useful to consider the larger textual context of chapter 25. Barbara Green (2003: 2) considers chapters 24 and 26 a part of the unit of 1 Samuel 24 -26, with 1 Samuel 25 thus included. In both chapters 24 and 26, David is presented with opportunity to kill his rival Saul, and in both, David restrains himself, vowing not to lift a hand against the anointed king. The reason for this is that the reverie of chapter 25 provides a sideshadow of the action in its two framing episodes, rehearses representationally what almost happens but which must be avoided. When understood in this way, chapter 25 is suddenly appalling: the murder of Saul by David is a very real possibility. By employing the dynamics of chapters 24 and 26 but inverting the caution, the structure supports the questions asked by the Deuteronomist regarding kingship, legitimacy thereof, how and why failure of it happened. Indeed, when we read chapters 24 to 26 as a unit, the question is not if the demise of Saul will happen, but how.

1 Samuel 24-26 have a common skeleton, shared plot features, the same topic, and share direct discourse from one character, David. When considering them bundled together, the sense of suspense of the narrative heightens, and the threat of violence is underlined by the restraint. It underlines the effect of trauma in the world of the narrative, which would ultimately have effect in the way the reader responds to this text that will impact the choice of questions for a CBS.

Levenson (1978: 13) is convinced that the material on either side of chapter 25 is two alternatives of the same event, showing a good-willed David and a paranoid Saul, who does not appear at all in our chapter. 1 Sam 25:43-44 serves as a neat introduction to a new episode, and there is no reason to believe that the last two verses were ever separated from the chapter, although they are more historical than the rest. Chapter 25 is thus evidently a self-contained literary piece, quite artfully constructed, carrying suspense and with its own strong characters, of whom the woman is the most prominent.

The baroque-like, intricate structure that seems more like literary art than oral tradition, underlines the self-contained unity of chapter 25, according to Biddle (2002: 619). He also explains the internal structure of this chapter. 1 Samuel 25:1-3, 43 and 44 are editorial elements to anchor the narrative in its context and mark it as semi-dependant. The body of the story has three segments, parallel in structure but unequal in length. All three these segments concern messages: sending, delivery, reaction, report, and counter reaction. The second and middle sections of this narrative are longer than the other two and contain duplications and narrative anachronisms.

Knowledge of structure motifs of 1 Samuel 25 has implications for the planned ICBS of this project. Firstly, the structure of chapter 25 as a neat literary unit and complete story makes it suitable for a one-session reading that a Bible study gathering would be. Furthermore, greater awareness of the larger Samuel narrative and especially chapters 24 and 26, sensitises the reader to the proximity of violence and ominousness of Abigail's time. Saul is a doomed king, his feud with David is escalating, and David's exile is only adding to his popularity. The life of the king depends on his successor, and the unstable political situation puts the whole community in volatility. There is also a spiritual void adding to the uncertainty: after Samuel's death, the question arises: who will now speak the will of the Lord?

A central feature of the ICBS concerns the fact that it is the woman Abigail who breaks into the scene with hurried conviction and prophetic words. In this regard, it may well be that the similarities between Abigail's situation and the circumstances of contemporary readers in South Africa, especially women, will find its way into the ICBS. Chapter Two of this study explored the political instability of the context in which specific communities that serve as the inspiration for this ICBS are situated. Moreover, this chapter outlined the spiritual void left by churches struggling with basic human rights issues. Questions for a Bible study should be formulated also considering these factors.

### 4.2.2. Genre

1 Samuel 25 clearly does not purport to be history in its pure form, even though no history may claim to be objective. Green calls the genre of this narrative more representational than realistic (Green 2003: 5). It has features of a parable and the tone of chapter 25 is even more allegorical than that of the surrounding chapters.

Green also suggests a few further ideas concerning genre that may help the reader look at this text from a variety of different viewpoints. Firstly, she points out that this text has the definitive characteristics of a dream or reverie: In the previous chapter, Saul falls asleep, and the material of chapter 25 is in a sense his dream, as the characters behave more didactic than anywhere else, and they enter a space of silent collusion, which could feel dreamlike to the reader. The dream parodies much of what we have seen up to date in the long 1 Samuel narrative, resembling but also strangely inverting what we have become familiar with, just like a nightmare can do.

Secondly, Green uses the idea of a sideshadow (2003: 3), a term usually reserved for literary work with novels, which branches off to sketch laterally what could have but did not take place. A third idea is what Green calls a loophole, which is used by authors to postpone the finalization of a character or event. In chapter 25, the reader gets the sense that all characters, God included, could have done their worst until it is finally avoided in chapter 25, after which it becomes no more an option. Green's observations about genre underlines the benefaction of Abigail. Whether read as a sideshadow or a loophole, the reader gains what could be called peripheral vision: remembering the context of trauma of the bordering chapters (see more under Chapter 4.2.4.) the peace that is prevalent in chapter 25, is made paramount. Abigail emerges as the hero who brings out the best in all the other characters.

In the same playful way that Green works with genre ideas, I would like to suggest that one considers the humoristic elements of 1 Samuel 25 inspired by the work of Melissa Jackson. Jackson claims (2012: 152-160) that several characteristics of the Abigail narratives can be described as comedic, making this a humorous story. Her approach is primarily literary combined with feminist criticism, which aligns her work quite well with this study. Components, features and functions that contribute to comedy are established, and chosen texts (including 1 Samuel 25) are investigated for where they exhibit correspondence to these components, features and functions. It is well worth noting that not every comedic

component, feature or function would produce laughter, but rather promotes a new way of looking, a fresh way of understanding and processing the story.

The first component that contributes to classifying the Abigail story in terms of the comedic genre is the comic plot structure and happy ending (Jackson 2012: 156, 159). The ominous tone of the story is inverted, maybe to the surprise of the reader, by the enterprise of the clever and beautiful main character. David is placated, Nabal dies, and the story ends with a better celebration than Nabal's drunken feast: a wedding celebration. This is typical of comedic stories through all times.

Secondly, the story contains obvious comic characterization, achieved mainly by play on words, description and inversions (Jackson 2012: 153). The very first character introduced is called "Fool", and Nabal is, even worse, a wealthy fool (natural feelings would deny a fool monetary compensation for foolishness). His contrasting character is his wife, called smart, and calling a woman that in the patriarchal context may extort a grin. Nabal's name also contains a play on the word "skin" or "jar", usually the type that holds wine – and the joke may not go unnoticed. Nabal is also a Calebite, a word that shares its root with the word "dog", referencing David's words about "pissing against a wall". Apart from wordplay, the comedic characterization of Nabal continues with name-calling from every other character, including the narrator; it becomes clear that Abigail is better suited with David.

The dialogues in this chapter also display humorous elements: this is exemplified best by the interaction between Nabal and David. They never enter conversation with each other, but is mediated by David's men and Abigail. Their duel escalates quickly and aggressively, and one should either read it with dead seriousness or extreme hilarity: volatile men with egos, attitudes and weapons should extract either. Rather than deal with each other with respect suited to their means and experience, this match becomes a "childish schoolyard shouting" (Jackson 2012: 157). Abigail bests them by displaying her way with words, praising David while ignoring Nabal. Not contradicting the fact that her words are prophetic and employing masterful rhetoric, one must wonder "if Abigail is rolling her eyes" (along with the reader) while hyperbolically describing herself as a servant, making a successful campaign of flattery.

Lastly, the whole narrative is pervaded by irony (Jackson 2012: 161), a comedic technique of the highest standard. David greets them with peace, but his actions quickly show exactly the opposite. Nabal claims that he refused David's request for the good of his own people, but

ironically, refusing David is the very thing that puts his people at risk. Nabal's refusal to part with his property leads him to part with his own life. The final irony in this story is that all his property transfers to David in any case, through his marriage to Abigail – which is probably the most ironic event of the whole narrative (Jackson 2012: 160), apart from the fact that all of the story centres around Abigail, a mere woman.

Using comedy as a device to unlock the narrative, and also encouraging the use of participants' sense of humour, would be a clever application to an ICBS. This should be an encouraging approach for a group, who has to deal with the difficult topic of making peace. If the Abigail story could be considered a joke, which moment would be considered to be the punchline? The humility of David? The death of Nabal? The marriage of Abigail? Other challenges of interest for a group setting would be to apply the similarities of the story to participants' circumstances. Examples in conversation may be questions such as the following: May we laugh at a miser and a fool? Is name-calling an alternative to violence to provide relief? Is it today still funny when a woman saves the day, and should it be surprising?

The intention of treating the Abigail story as humorous is not to make light of her nor her situation, also not of South Africans or their situations. Jackson (2012: 6) rightly points out that comedy has helped human beings deal with difficulties for centuries. Also, South Africans, with their reputation of being a people with a good sense of humour, in the past often has used humour to their advantage through much hardship. Applying comedy in the context of an ICBS in South Africa shows respect for and knowledge of its people, and the deliberate and conscientious use of humoristic techniques may yet serve its people in the future (Black 2012: 6).

#### **4.2.3. Characters and Plot**

The next step in analysing a narrative such as the story of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 would be to understand a storyline and the role players in it. Because plot and characters are so interlinked in the Abigail story and events happen when characters encounter each other, these narrative elements will be discussed together:

## *Nabal*

As often in an allegory, also in dreams and jokes, naming is used as a characterization device. The story opens with the naming of Nabal, whose name literally means “fool”. This word usually describes gluttony and ungenerousness. Scholars agree that there is no other explanation for his name except that it has been invented to describe his character (Von Wolde 2002: 357). It seems that Abigail uses a proverb to describe her husband, of which a variant is to be found in Isaiah 32:6: “For the fool speaks folly, and his mind plots iniquity: to practice ungodliness, to utter error concerning the Lord, to leave the craving of the hungry unsatisfied, and to deprive the thirsty of drink.”

Lest the reader assume this rich man to be a harmless simpleton, Levenson (1978: 13) – in an excellent character study – assures us the narrator means to describe him as a vicious, egocentric, materialistic misfit. If one does not understand this intent of the narrator, the reader misappropriates guilt in the story: if Nabal is not guilty and only simple and backwards, his death seems too harsh a punishment.

But let us not deny the comedy by reading only seriousness: this story’s first introduced character is the wealthy fool, and his name has more play on words than only “fool” (Jackson 2012: 153). The root נבל can also mean wineskin or jar – wine is obviously a problem for Nabal. There is also the root נבלה to be found, which alludes to a corpse, and this pun reeks of gallows humour. Nabal is also a Calebite, which denotes his clan but also shares its root with the word used for “dog”, giving the reader even more opportunity to note the pun: in David’s reference to those “pissing against a wall”, and talking about the way male dogs urinate: he is thus equating Calebites with dogs.

As if David’s insult that describes Nabal is not vicious enough, both his servants and his wife report him as a good-for-nothing and a worthless person. Even before he speaks, the audience has fixed their idea of who he is, and to add to his deficiency in character, his property is described before the man (Levenson 1978: 15). This is also ironic, since this is the story of how a fool and his money came to be parted, of how Nabal’s miserly inclination destroys his potential for peace and prosperity with which David greets him. It is his refusal to give that causes his loss, even his death.

This overt characterization of Nabal gives the facilitator of an ICBS a lot to work with, even more so in a context where the difference between the “haves” and the “have-nots” is so

pronounced. The question is whether holding on to what we have at all cost, is a clever choice.

Apart from his deeds, Nabal's words reflect his lack of restraint and harshness – they are more an outburst than a speech. Von Wolde (2002: 359) points out that whereas David was politely addressing Nabal (through a messenger) in the second person, Nabal replies in only the first person singular: referring to *my* bread, *my* water, *my* meat, *my* shearers.

Nabal's words remind us that eloquent talk does not suit a fool (Proverbs 17:7). Two things are ironic: Nabal changes David's name for himself from *your* son to *Jesse's* son – and who is he? Nabal declares from the start that he refuses to see David as anything else but an outlaw. He also references David's flight from Saul's court as slander, which is ironic, because his own slaves will soon break away from their master. Adding to this, Nabal cites concern for his workers as reason for his refusal to meet David's demand.

Another display of narrator's skill will direct the reader to choose David's side, even before interrogating the political motive of the storyteller. The reader must decide, in this story of gangs and threats, who is out of touch, and who is not; who is trustworthy, and who is not. This helps: when David's men are referred to, in connection with their leader, they are called boys, servants, or men. But when Nabal's men are termed slaves (Levenson 1978: 16), this shows what kind of relationships they have, and what the quality of the respect is for them.

The characterization techniques identified by Barbara Green (2003: 10) deserve notice, even if it is a consequence of her reading chapters 24 to 26 together. Seen in this way, Nabal is linked with Saul: wordplay is also used with the name of Saul for characterization, both are shepherds but men of substantial means, with southern land. The clearest link is the inversion of action and intent: David seems restrained when he has opportunity to damage Saul – restraint that Saul has never shown, in the same way as Nabal. But in chapter 25, David loses his self-control momentarily, and needs rallying from Abigail to return to the wisdom of discretion.

There are echoes in the relationship of Nabal-David to Saul-David: Saul is ever indebted to David, and David never openly lay claim to what has been promised to him; now, in chapter 25, David seems to impulsively demand what would be too dangerous to expect in the context of who is next in line to the throne. And there is a lot to be said for the mirror that is held up to Saul by the description of Nabal: uninformed of the doings of his household,

unpopular with his wife and slaves, incapable of leading despite all that he owns. For this study, though, understanding Nabal is enough, and understanding Saul is an inessential addition.

The next Nabal scene shows him as indulging in a feast fit for a king, becoming drunk to the point of being unapproachable. He never misses his wife; indeed, he has no idea what she has been up to, and the reader suspects that he is incapable of having even the most basic inclination of what it requires to be married, even in ancient times. This is also the moment where the reader recognizes conclusively that Nabal and Abigail is irrevocably mismatched.

The lavish banquet serves an important rhetorical function in this story, Nabal's absence in concern and appreciation for his wife is in complete accordance with how he treats other people. The feast after shearing was traditional in Israel (Von Wolde 2002: 358). What was not accepted was feasting like a king while hungry and thirsty men camp nearby. Nabal does not share his food, but he will have to pay for this inhospitality with another currency. The two people he has neglected will marry each other, after his death – which restores the moral balance in the story.

In a contemporary discussion about this text, one should expect debate about the exact cause of Nabal's death; modern people all have a rudimentary medical knowledge, and would want to know how a man's heart can die before he does. Boyle (2001: 401) warns the contemporary reader to be very careful not to appropriate medical understanding of today to an ancient author. For the people of that time, the heart is not a fleshy pump, but the entire mental and moral activity of the human soul – it is used in that sense more than 800 times in the Bible. The phrase “his heart became like a stone” does not mean he had a heart attack, but that he experienced moral failure causing resistance against the law.

### *Abigail*

The woman of the story stands in direct opposition of her husband, and though her name is not revealing, she is described as both clever and beautiful. The latter seems to be added for the reader's knowledge and likewise David would have noticed. But it is never said that her looks make anything happen in the storyline, contrary to, for example, the story of Bathsheba. Her cleverness and decisive actions contribute to the events narrated in the story.

As Abigail's wisdom is developed in the narrative, so is Nabal's lack thereof. There is a wordplay on a homonym on Nabal: נָבָל, which sounds like fool but is the opposite (Jackson 2012: 155).

Although their first meeting is not passionate, the reader already senses what they maybe do not yet know: Abigail is as well matched with David as she is mismatched with Nabal (Levenson 1978: 18). And, not unlike all the other people who has contact with David – Saul, Jonathan, Michal, all of Judah and Israel – the outcome of their meeting cannot be anything but passionate. The description of Abigail is much like descriptions of David upon his introduction in 1 Samuel 16 and in his military pursuits in 1 Samuel 18 (Jackson 2012: 155). The two successful, intelligent, beautiful people cannot help but meet each other halfway.

Her actions are as much in contrast with Nabal as her words: Nabal's slaves approach his wife for help, after they have heard of David's reaction to Nabal's harsh initial words. They have confidence that she will have a plan to fix the problem. Her relationship with them is much more like David's with his men, than like Nabal's way with people. This neutral witness evaluates the actions of David's men as generous, whereas he connects the bad part to Nabal, and this helps the reader decide who is in the wrong and who not (Von Wolde 2002: 359). Abigail comes to the same conclusion, and now she gets her own phrases in quick succession, preparing food as gifts and preparing herself to ride out. The meeting between Abigail and David gets the narrator's full attention. We look through her eyes; her words and actions are presented as the main storyline.

Her wily wit is clear when she sends gifts ahead in verse 19, allowing her an alone, if not romantic, meeting with David. Nowhere during their meeting is the other men mentioned, neither David's nor Abigail's. The intimacy of their conversation cannot be ignored: she is not just concerned with the safety of Nabal's household: she offers victuals to the men, and to David, herself.

Let us for a moment go back to the start of the action. Nabal shears his sheep, David sends a demand for food, Nabal reacts gratingly, and servants of Nabal run to Abigail, not to Nabal, to rectify the situation. The young man communicates to her effectively the temporal urgency and the need to make haste, and we get to see her take to action (Green 2003: 14). She quickly gives command and prepares food, a tithing of sorts, although not specified by the demand, she seems to know exactly what of and how much is needed to appease. She

gives generously and easily, not arguing about who is right or wrong, and we start to see that she has perspective on the situation that few shares with her.

When Abigail rides to meet David in the shadow of the mountain, she masterly keeps the initiative in hand by acting first and fast. She dismounts and prostrates herself before David, and in the conversation, uses the words “your servant” a total of six times.

Special space needs to be granted to Abigail’s speech, which Levenson calls a rhetorical masterpiece (1978: 19). This is also the truest moment of focalization in this narrative, and in this speech, this is Abigail’s story, more than at any other moment. She first disarms David by taking full blame for Nabal’s irresponsibility. And this is done after being female disarmed him first: if she was a man, David could have killed before a word was spoken. But her words cannot exculpate Nabal, and she dares not appear disloyal to him. Thus, she takes a clever strategy: she intercedes on behalf of Nabal, while conceding that he has no case. While openly defending him, she disassociates herself from him.

The words Abigail uses are carefully chosen, and to appreciate this, one should evaluate the speech on the two tiers or levels in the structure of the speech. There is movement from bribe to gift, from vengeance to promise, from the momentary to the eternal (Levenson 1978: 20). The two levels are representative of the roles that Abigail take on, at least two at the same time: she is both initiator of actions and agent of tranquillity; both woman of deeds and of wise words; both keeper of the house and prophet. Contemporary readers could appreciate this attributes because of the complexity of the character – just like real people, Abigail functions in different spheres at the same time. And just because a woman busies herself with household tasks, does not mean that she may exert no influence in the public sphere. Abigail speaks to our agency, once again.

Von Wolde (2002: 365) shows clearly that the vocabulary in Abigail’s speech is what creates the two levels: the literal and the metaphorical. David/Nabal targets Saul/David, and Abigail herself represents Samuel or even God, as shown by the words she uses which belongs only with prophets. She knows intentions and thoughts beforehand; she endows David with status. Using metaphorical language is typical of prophetic speech.

In marked contrast to Nabal, Abigail recognizes David’s coming kingship. Her words remind of the prophet Nathan, which led the rabbis to name her as one of the seven women in the

Hebrew Bible endowed with the Holy Spirit (Levenson 1978: 20). The narrator does not present her as a prophet in the narrow sense, but she is painted as a woman of providence.

Her words have an effect. David goes in accord with her suggestions, and the reader experiences relief: we have just witnessed the power of diplomacy and negotiation to end violence (Claassens 2016: 28). The fact that these words were from the lips of a female protagonist, should also make us appreciate her insight and willingness to risk.

Berger (2009: 264), amongst others, warns against an overly idealized characterization of Abigail. There are many things about her that one could choose to interpret negatively. Her flattery is false, and her only goal is to ingratiate herself with David, whom she sees as upcoming and ambitious. Was she willing to conspire with David to murder her husband, to further David's career and secure her own future? She seems ruthless, or at least desperate. Since this study is focused upon developing a Bible study that can be used in an intercultural setting, one should keep these critical questions in mind. But the text of 1 Samuel 25 does not allow the reader to ultimately see Abigail as the villain: Nabal is evil, deserves to die, and God takes care of it.

Lest we forget the balance that humour brings into our interpretation, the following from Jackson (2012: 157): through all the admiration for her well-used words, she may be rolling her eyes (along with the reader) as she bows before David, when she calls herself "your servant" six times, in the course of eight verses? She addresses him as "my lord" thirteen times. The repetition definitively serves as hyperbole, and her flattering and made-up humility has the desired effect on David – meaning she was in control. I repeat that remembering the value that a comedic perspective brings, is of great value for a study like this, which is steering towards a difficult conversation.

David accepts from her the payment Abigail has brought, and thus gains from her – without violence – the Nabal heritage (Green 2003: 17). David has succeeded, has gained what he wanted, at least symbolically. He has received the first instalment, being sure of more to come.

The common sense and good judgement of our female hero continue when she returns home. Abigail does not try to explain the obvious to a man oblivious because of drink; and leaves what needs to happen till morning next, seemingly trusting for a good outcome, or maybe not caring because of confidence in the prudence of her own actions. The impact of her news

makes Nabal's heart to die, and ten days later, YHWH strikes Nabal dead, exonerating both Abigail and David from guilt.

In conclusion, keeping in mind Bach's claim that we read Abigail as most important in her own story, two points are worth mentioning. Firstly, it is ironic that, despite the story's demand that Abigail is improperly paired with the fool Nabal, that marriage gave her the power of speech (Bach 1990: 49). Her marriage to David silences her; we never hear her graceful voice again – much to the dismay of any feminist interpreter. Secondly, a similar but different view: Jackson (2012: 159) writes a paragraph which she titles "The Comedy of this Happy Ending". In this, she points to the paradox that David is again saved by a woman, the previous being Michal. One admits that Abigail risks a lot, riding into the domain of men in more than one way, fully expecting to deal with not only David, but also his band of brigadiers. She deals with David, the second fool of this story, and brings the narrative to its happy ending. Through a comic inversion of the way things usually happen, she is the protagonist, not a male hero. Abigail is revealed as a master of men, of timing, and of rhetoric (Jackson 2012: 160). Maybe this is victory enough.

### *David*

Not all scholars consider the character of David to be a major player in the story; he is more of an ideological presence to the author. David is not even considered to be the contrasting figure for Nabal, Abigail is (Berger 2009: 261). But it is important to keep in mind that the intended context for this study is a Bible study, and the participants in this Bible study are quite likely to be believers who love David well. Furthermore, the wider focus of this text warrants more investigation: the whole of the book of Samuel is deeply concerned with the person of David, and sometimes complicatedly so: David is not only portrayed as a saintly shepherd stepping into the promises of God, but also as a wily warrior, a clever politician, a womaniser, and in 1 Samuel 25, as a man quite capable of disproportionate violence and bloodshed.

Thus, there is a need to consider what the text is telling us about David, to arrive at sensible questions for a Bible study, and for a facilitator to be prepared for cross-examination. At this point, a few notes on the history of the text and the proposed author is justified. This is not for extensive use during the Bible study, but for understanding the Abigail story.

From a historical point of view, it is important to note that 1 Samuel 25 forms part of the Deuteronomistic history. Scholars have long noted the close relation in style, vocabulary and content that the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings share. Römer (2000: vii) explains the Deuteronomistic chronology, despite the variety of materials that is grouped together in this way: Moses inhabits the ‘golden age’, Judges the chaotic age, and the portrait of the monarchy is ambiguous. On the one hand, some parts contain the divine legitimization of the Davidic dynasty, and on the other hand, other parts are critical of the monarch who sometimes fail to conform to YHWH’s will.

Scholars differ on the dating of the Deuteronomist’s work, but the consensus, despite confusing debate in recent years (Römer 2000: viii), is that it is an exilic and post-exilic compilation, with or without a single author called the Deuteronomist. The importance of the exile suggests that the Deuteronomists (or at least most of them) were among the deportees of 597 BCE. The entire history is imagined with an exilic perspective, and during the Persian period, the foundation for a ‘real Israel’ myth. Final redaction in the Persian period has the ideological implication that writers and editors during the first part of the period was concerned with themes like segregation, monotheism, transformation from tribes to centralized state, and succession. The Abigail story is one of the most dramatic stories in the Old Testament, and clearly concerned with the destiny of David. The transformation of him as a person and Israel as a tribe to a nation is part of the topics for discussion derived from this text. In the past, 1 Samuel 25 has been regarded as only one story in the many episodes outlining the rise of David.

The traditional early dating of 1 Samuel 25 is questioned by Biddle (2002: 619) on grounds of the text’s artistic literary character, its intertextual dependence on the patriarchal/matriarchal traditions, and the fact that the redactor responsible for inserting 1 Samuel 25 in this place, was not interested in exonerating David. Green (2003: 9) also accepts the latest possible point regarding dating and redaction: the endpoint of the DH narrative which is the release of the last surviving Davidic king Jehoiachin from captivity of sorts. Cyrus is on the throne of Persia, and the possible return of the exiles to Judah brings up the question of leadership.

This historical context offers an added layer of explanation to help one interpret the succession narratives and the ensuing discussion, both positive and negative, of the Davidic characteristics of leadership. The eventual answer to the post-exilic question about

leadership is that kings will not be the new leaders, and a new dispensation begins. Whichever dating is preferred, the ideology of the Deuteronomist is to be regarded when reading 1 Samuel. This information does become important for a Bible study when contemporary readers realize the similarities between the post-exilic situation that experienced great strain concerning the lack of leadership, and their possible own concerns about a leadership vacuum in their own context. Who will speak for peace and well-being? The text should make an appeal to any would-be Abigail figures, to find their own agency for a positive influence in their communities.

We have been introduced to David earlier in the book of Samuel (1 Samuel 16) as the substitute anointed of God in the king's place, Saul's favourite gone awry, and now the leader of men, be they bandits (1 Samuel 22:1-2). The reader senses that the ideological questions being asked, is about kingship, who is to follow and how, and David is in the centre of these questions.

David calls four hundred men to arms, when the refusal of hospitality from Nabal seems all the occasion he needed to plunge into action. And although we have often in 1 Samuel seen David as the action hero, now he seems to be overreacting. His choice of words goes very quickly from "your son David" to "no male will survive" in verse 22 (Levenson 1978: 23). After hearing Nabal's words, David's reaction is instantaneous and enraged. In seven phrases, the narrator describes in quick succession the preparations for battle in verses 13, 17, 21 and 22 (Von Wolde 2002: 359). The reader may have been getting used to the appealing young man with flawless motivation and great courage, and this character will once again emerge in 2 Samuel 11. But 1 Samuel 25 shows us the first shadow in David's immaculate light, the first sign of evil, a man who could kill for a grudge (or money, or a position). Just as Abigail feared, bloodshed will be David's downfall; this episode foreshadows the one with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 11). One cannot read the one without remembering the other: in both narratives, David kills a man and marries his wife. This story becomes a prophetic glimpse of David's fall from grace.

Berger investigates the question whether David's claim to food and drink is legitimate, or if it amounts to extortion (Berger 2009: 263). Maybe no clear yes or no answer is possible; ambiguity is always the mark of an elegant story. When seen against the background of hospitality culture in the Ancient Near East, it is convincing that David should have an expectation, even if it has a political tinge. In an article built on an excellent grasp of the

Hebrew language, Von Wolde (2002: 357) shows convincingly that the absence of modal verb forms (volitives) shows that David's words contain no threat, and that his words contain a humble plea for favour. Nevertheless, a tone of voice and an intention is conveyed by more than one's own words and even one's good intentions; Nabal (and the reader) may still perceive David to be the new mafia kingpin.

One more aspect that does not reflect positively on David is that in the denouement of the narrative, Abigail as the wife who secured him the southern district is named with another wife, Ahinoam. She is none other than the wife of Saul, who helps secure him the throne (Berger 2009: 261). David does not emerge as a moral example, but as an opportunistic, ambitious wannabe.

For the moment, the reader should decide if David has right on his side, and if his actions are defensible and justifiable, or too hasty and extreme. Remember that David has already been compared with Nabal the fool, to David's advantage. In any case, the reader will most likely be as fascinated with David as the Deuteronomist, since a well-developed character gains depth by showing strength and weakness.

#### 4.2.4. Flourishing/Peace in a Context of Trauma

The Hebrew word שלום has multiple meanings; it is a complex idea which encapsulates a general idea of well-being, used as a blessing or a greeting or a parting. *Shalom* typically is translated in two ways: the first meaning denoting prosperity, and the second, peace. Both these meanings are important for understanding the narrative in 1 Samuel 25. *Shalom* is the word that David uses in his message to Nabal in verse 6. And although *shalom* is the traditional greeting at the time, it also takes on layers of meaning and could even be ironic. When read in context in the Abigail story, it raises the following conversation topics: How does Abigail go about creating peace in a context of trauma? How do we? Before positing an answer to these questions, the various layers of meaning with regards to *shalom*, needs closer inspection.

The entire story in 1 Samuel 25 is concerned with material goods, with *shalom* in the sense of prosperity, with the stuff of which a rich man's life is made: his sheep and his goats, his servants and his wife, his table and the food he eats from it. Riches and wealth is thus an important theme in the plot of the narrative, so much so that it can be said to have become

another character. Because material resources are what David wants, even if he has a right to it underscored by divine promise (1 Samuel 16). It is ironic though, that the strong character, the woman called Abigail, the one who influences the chain of events, also in the story, can be considered to be part of the rich man's belongings (that in ironic fashion in the end of the narrative is going to change hands).

Even though Abigail, as the wife of a rich landowner, most certainly cannot be described as poor, she does find herself in a precarious situation (Claassens 2016: 25). Apart from being perceived as a man's property, women in the Ancient Near East could not own property or assert political power within the normal framework of society. If her husband would die, or if all the men in her household were to be slain as David had vowed to do, her situation would worsen exponentially, threatening her very existence. One should not underestimate the gravity of the story only because it has a happy ending.

Abigail is thus also responding from her own sense of precarity. Her action is for the well-being of herself and her household, as much as it is for David and his men. The reader cannot miss the irony in the greeting of David, and may even hear it as a foreshadowing: prosperity to David, and loss to Nabal.

When thinking about the response of the reader to this story, we should remember that every reader comes from a specific economic background. Theologians that embrace a liberation theological perspective have long considered the poverty of the ordinary reader an important hermeneutic key and advantage, since God is on the side of the poor, the neglected, and the powerless (West 2007: 2). Some readers of this story may consider themselves poor, others may consider themselves rich, and the amount of money available to a person is only one of the aspects they use to evaluate their own prosperity. When entering the circle of an ICBS, this is one of the potential discussion topics: some participants may be of a group who experiences a great deal of prosperity, the other may come from a group who has very limited resources. Even though the notion of poverty and wealth may be a difficult topic that may even be described as having the potential to be volatile in nature, questions about poverty and wealth in a greatly divided context, about the role of poverty and wealth in our lives, and also, the damaging effects of both poverty and wealth need to be discussed. Can material goods and wealth be used to contribute to unity and harmony in a community, or is it cursed to forever be a source of division?

The second meaning of *shalom* may be even more applicable in the development of an ICBS that is also indicated by the title of this study: “Peace Talks.” Again, we find the irony in David’s greeting: this story is about bands of brothers fighting, about swords and horses and war. Abigail’s world is indeed, as Claassens (2016: 17) argues, “marked” as well as “marred by violence.” Considering the context of the book of Samuel, we may trace the trail of violent stories easily: almost throughout, King Saul is doing his utmost best to kill his rival, the future King David. In 1 Samuel 22, Saul has commanded Doeg the Edomite to kill eighty-five priests of Nod, just because they helped David. A few chapters later, in 2 Samuel 21, Saul’s descendants will be wiped out when David allows the Gibeonites to brutally kill Saul’s sons and grandsons, leaving their bodies in the open field without a proper burial (Claassens 2016: 18). If Abigail did not take swift action in the narrative of chapter 25, the whole household of Nabal would also have been obliterated. Indeed, readers of ancient literature which includes the Bible, are no stranger when it comes to narratives such as these that are riddled with violence.

But just because violence is abundant in these narratives does not mean that we should give in to the temptation to look away from it. To really apprehend Abigail and her story, we also need to fathom what it means to live in a world like hers. The World Health Organization’s Global Consultation on Violence and Health defines violence as follows: “Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.” (WHO, 2014). This is a broad definition, but one that opens the scope of effects that violence, or the threat of it has on our world.

When considering this denotation of violence, one begins to understand that peace, *shalom*, is not only the absence of violence, but encapsulates wellness and flourishing. And when broadening our definition in this way, we recognize that our world is not that different from Abigail’s.

It is significant to realise, like explained above, the concept of peace/*shalom* in the Old Testament is far-reaching. One more notion deserves attention: the fact that, in the Old Testament, *shalom* as wellness is most often linked to justice and righteousness. Yoder (1997: 6) writes convincingly that our contemporary interpretation of peace should match the

Biblical one: the contrast should not be firstly between *shalom* and violence, but between *shalom* and injustice.

The notion of *shalom* also offers an important intersection of context with the gender, health and theology of this MTh program. In recent years, systematic theologians have helped us find fresh expressions and new metaphors to an urgent contemporary theological discussion on the nature and significance of flourishing. The challenge to theology has lately been threefold: there has been the accusation that God's power implies the lack of human power and flourishing; the question about how theology responds to the violation of the integrity of earth and her ecology; and the challenge to theology on how to deal with the violation of human dignity, so rife in our world (Marais 2011: 2). This study relates specifically to the last of these three.

Christian theology's affirmation that human beings flourish in their relationship with God, provides fertile ground for rethinking theological anthropology (Kelsey 2008: 1). Kelsey has written extensively on this topic, and has a theocentric view on human flourishing, thus he accentuates that blossoming and growing is always a gift from God. For Kelsey (2008: 3), flourishing has no coherence or power apart from the confession that God initiates relationship with humans and then stands in such a relationship. But he also admits and develops the idea that flourishing or thriving means "to have oneself in hand", and used metaphorically for a certain type of human life, it is also theologically appropriate.

Kelsey (2008: 7) prefers not to link flourishing with health or wealth because of the obvious theological pitfalls that such connections have: that would mean that no sick or poor person could flourish, which we know is not true. Human beings reflect the glory of God not only when they are healthy and wealthy. But he chooses to highlight the sociality and responsibility of human flourishing, of persons themselves, their neighbours and their contexts (Marais 2011: 110). Thus, flourishing calls for human responsiveness and responsibility: we also flourish when we act intentionally in an appropriate response to God and other people.

Since *shalom* does not only mean the absence of war, but includes ideas of well-being and peace and especially justice, one can relate the theological ideas regarding flourishing with the Abigail story in a striking way. It is interesting to note that in contrast to some of these other stories in the book of Samuel, 1 Samuel 25 is different in that the outcome contains no bloodshed and a moment of peace. One finds in this narrative that Abigail flourishes in that

she acknowledges her relation to God: she is the only one who speaks prophesy, who has perspective. And she flourishes in that she is appropriately responsive to a threat and takes responsibility to act in the best interest of God and the people around her. Through her action, she gives a household a second chance, and to David a clear conscience. Her gift to them all is a new possibility to flourish, to be alive and reach their potential.

The ideas of flourishing and how it manifests in the Abigail story, also intersects easily with the world in front of the text, offering some important possibilities for an intercultural bible study. The title of this study, “Peace Talks,” thus does not only point to the act of dialogue so that war will be averted (like Abigail). It also acknowledges that communities need to talk about the *shalom*, the flourishing of individuals in communities, and the wellness of communities, as a whole. It acknowledges that we are not only responsible for our own relation to God, our own flourishing and our own health and well-being. We also have to be appropriately responsible for our neighbour’s flourishing.

An ICBS under this heading would ask questions about war. For some people in my community, war is not more real than a news report on a cable news network from a faraway country. But for others on our continent, and even in our community, the fight for survival in a context of robbery, rape and other crime; a context of gangsterism and firearms, is actual. We would need to talk about the systemic violence that caused great deprivation and underdevelopment to some of our people during the era of Apartheid. We would need to talk about the psychological harm that people suffered because of the profound and far-reaching violence of a system of legalised racism.

The multiple levels of pain and its consequences that should be regarded when reading this text with a context of trauma in mind, is explained well by Claassens (2015: 5). We need to consider the violent world in which Abigail finds herself in the narratives of the books of Samuel. It is important to keep in mind that the death of their revered prophet and leader is the point of departure for this story (1 Sam 25:1), which provide a general sense of loss, adding to the trauma. This loss of the prophet furthermore occurs within multiple layers of understanding the context of the author/redactor: during the aftermath of the Babylonian exile, the Jews were also a community processing a history with too much violence. It may be that a story such as the one of Abigail tries to imagine an alternative, a different way, to dream about ways to change the real world (Claassens 2015: 5).

Again, these hermeneutical perspectives intersect the world in front of the text, and could inform reader response in a very specific and exciting way. An ICBS on this story should provide a safe space where readers could share their own experience of trauma and how it impacts their lives. It could be a space of conflict (hopefully constructive) or reconciliation for perpetrator and victim. It could be a space where participants, by telling and sharing, wrench what is left of a full life from the trauma. It should be a space where readers start to dream about a world that is better, a world where they can flourish and help others do the same.

#### **4.2.5. Verbal Resistance as Prophecy**

Abigail's speech has already received some attention in the section that discussed the way she is characterized in the text. The sheer length of Abigail's speech already marks it as a point of reference for female resistance. As previously shown, this speech is written on two levels: the literal and the metaphorical (Von Wolde 2002: 365). Both demonstrates the power of the word to end violence and to exhibit that Abigail is indeed transcending her traditional role in a heterarchal society (Claassens 2016: 27).

Abigail's words are rooted in compassion, just like the act of providing food to hungry men. We have seen that her words, parallel to her deeds, display insight and cleverness, and willingness to risk. Her words make a case for diplomacy and negotiation that even any reader in today's context would note, and possibly could relate to. When entering an ICBS to discuss uneasy topics, this attribute of her words becomes most important: she lays claim to the reader's common sense and compassion, just like she does with David.

The second, metaphorical layer of Abigail's speech can be described as prophetic. She steps into the vacuum that the great prophet Samuel has left with his death (verse 1), acting as a spokesperson of God. The reality of David's life is, at the moment of this narrative, more alike to Nabal's words about him than like anything else: he is an unimportant nobody, he owns nothing, and is running away from the anointed king who wants to kill him. Miscal (1986: 153) constructs a whole discussion on power and restraint in 1 Samuel 25: there are multiple references to master-slave relationships, and David, though muted, lets everyone know that he is the boss. There is wordplay on  $\text{ט}$ , which means "hand", and this underline

what the reader may already know: that this is about who gets to decide, more than anything else.

The only one who seems to understand that restraint is needed in the moment, is Abigail. Self-control is needed for David to secure what would be his in the future, but is not yet for the taking: the throne of Saul, that is. Abigail shows remarkable insight in who David is supposed to be, and calls him נגיד, leader, in contrast to the מלך she uses for Nabal. It is the first time that David is called by this term, not even when he was anointed by Samuel has he received this title.

It is a term of leadership, divinely appointed and committed to the wellbeing of the people; it denotes a priestly king, a shepherd to his subjects. This prophesy of Abigail is later confirmed by Nathan. By using these noble words for David, she reminds him of his true identity, and her call back to it sobers him: it is important that he does not start his reign with blood on his hands. The prophesy she speaks becomes a good illustration of her verbal power (Bach 1990: 49): her words echo and elaborate Saul's of the previous chapter. But unlike Saul's, Abigail's have an effect on David.

In terms of reader response, one could anticipate questions that could engage the Empire. Although we do not live in a dispensation of royal power like in the biblical story, and we rely on what we call constitutional democracy, South Africans have a shared history of power clashes, land grabs, colonialism, racism and Apartheid. We live in a young democracy where many are disillusioned by our chosen leadership. And it is very much needed that we talk about the Empire: is it a legitimate Empire? Is there such a thing? Does it have a right to violence? Why do people condone violence? Can it solve problems? Who may use it? Who are leaders, what is a good leader, and what would be positive ways of utilizing power and restraint?

No matter what conversation would ensue in a Bible study situation, one should be alert and listen attentively, because verbal resistance in a precarious or difficult situation, may always carry divine message.

### **4.3. Feminist Analysis**

Since this project is committed to a consistent feminist approach, the emphasis should now move to using a feminist lens, to attain valuable information applicable to an ICBS. The

value of the feminist approach, according to Ackermann (1993: 25) lies in the concern for a combination of key elements, which manifests in a relational as well as a personal need for liberation, and always respects the personal as political.

The first implication of the above, is that Abigail cannot only be read as an event but as a person. Abigail inhabits her own story, and is not merely part of David's. Since most of the authors/redactors of biblical narratives are male, female characters are often not developed or important. Feminist scholars have developed methods for extracting female voices, for scraping the implied voice from the walls of the text, as explained by Shapira when discussing Tribble's reading of the Miriam's story (Shapira 2010: 7). This seems to not be necessary for the Abigail story, since her voice is heard loud and clear. Abigail's speech is the single longest speech by a female character in the Hebrew Bible, and is only trumped in length by the song of Deborah in the Book of Judges (Shields 2008: 308).

But we need not be presumptuous about the meaning of Abigail's spoken words, even though they are many. Her many words alone cannot save her from the equally many interpretations that want to diminish the female hero. She needs to be considered in all layers of meaning, obvious and less so, to understand the full complexity of the character and to not allow her to vanish in the stories of David. In the next sections, Abigail's character and the events that happen through and around her, is discussed with her as the centre of attention, even more so than in the earlier literary exploration (See Chapter 4.1.3). Subsequently, two themes are chosen for further consideration within a feminist emphasis: agency and resistance in a man's world, and food and generosity as women's goods.

#### **4.3.1. Character and Plot**

A feminist perspective on the person and events around Abigail is informed by Alice Bach's revision of 1 Samuel 25. Instead of evaluating Abigail only in succession theory or as a suitable partner for David, Bach (1990: 41) examines the female influence in the presumably male-authored work. This includes the examination of the author/redactor as male as well. The story lends itself easily to this, because Abigail really is the main character: all the other characters only interact with her, not with each other. Even though the text appears to be about male authority, about men deciding whether to fight or not, female presence shines through.

It is worth noting that the author/redactor of this piece recognizes the autonomy of Abigail's decision (Shapira 2010: 34). Abigail is never criticized or chastised for what she does. This may be considered strange in an ancient collection of books and letters that does not recognize gender equality. Shapira (2010: 7) groups Abigail with other women in the Bible who take initiative in personal decisions, especially those made for the survival of their relatives or compatriots, those women who in Biblical literature present the alternative to patriarchy, who proffer an alternative way, a so-called "otherness", per definition of Ilana Pardes (1993: 2). It is important that we not apologize for the otherness of the text, but utilize it accordingly.

Bach (1990: 42) claims Abigail to be more subversive than previously thought. She has the good sense to control her life verbally while appearing socially dependant and compliant. Her ability to act halts the negative progress of the narrative, and no-one else has been able to do this, not even the young men in the story.

Shapira (2010: 34) includes Abigail amongst the stories of Sarah and Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, Ruth and Naomi and Hannah, the wife of Manoah and the Shunammite woman. Other aspects that add to their "otherness" to be employed in a feminist setting include the following: descriptions of some of these women's relationships with their husbands are brief; the woman is dominant as compared with her spouse or surroundings. (Even though Nabal is described in detail, it is not a favourable description.) These are also women who are centrally involved in the process of survival, because they are concerned with the coming generations. They read reality more accurately than the men, their husbands, and therefore sometimes appear prophetic.

Scholarly readings have often reduced Abigail's story to a mechanical explanation of how David got his second wife and the valuable territory south of Jerusalem. When moving beyond the literary, also including a historical reading, Levenson (1978: 24) admits that the one part of this artistic story that seems genuinely historical, is David's marriage to Abigail. A wife of that name is mentioned elsewhere, in 2 Samuel 2:1. Only this assumption explains the discrepancies in the story: that David's marriage to Nabal's wife was a pivotal move in his ascent to kingship at Hebron. Levenson (1978: 26) spells out what is implied, is that David picked a fight with the rich clan's leader precisely with such a marriage in mind, and that the seemingly innocent tale of a warrior and a lady, hides a political struggle with far-reaching consequences.

But Bach suggests that we place Abigail in the centre of her own story, and a feminist approach demand that we do. The result has effects, even on the ideological analysis of this passage. One immediate outcome is that Abigail emerges as a redeemer whose actions assure the future of David, the divinely chosen monarch. The Deuteronomist permits a woman to be God's helper, to pronounce a crucial prophesy (Bach 1990: 44). Her words help David to avoid any action that would later harm the integrity of his rule. Neglecting to put Abigail in the centre of her drama, weakens her role as God's helper.

When we consider the ideology of the portrayal of all of David's wives, gender politics markedly influences the interpretation of this story (Bach 1990: 44). Each wife is typified by a specific aspect of a person, and is not really considered as complete human being, but as example of a specific need fulfilled for the king. Michal embodies the ideal bloodline-wife, and Bathsheba the ideal sexual partner. Abigail is the good-sense wife, the mother-provider. According to traditional interpretations, this characteristic works towards the advantage of the men that surrounds her – many lives are saved (Nabal's too, initially). Further patriarchal values are reflected when a woman's payoff for virtue is connection to a better husband, as seen in the story's ending.

It is true that one impression of Abigail is that she is the maternal wife of order and control. She sets limits to Nabal's irrational reaction, in her taking action. She calms David with her words of wisdom. It is no coincidence that she stops a war by providing food, like a true mother-provider, in a context where the denial of food is deadly (Claassens 2016: 24), for David and his men, but also for her own household.

But, concurring with Bach (1990: 44), the biblical author does not consider her merely as the good mother. Although she becomes the saviour of her own household, which presumably includes children, she never pleads on their behalf. She is also not rewarded in the text with a long life and a male heir, the patriarchal convention for praising a woman. Abigail steps outside the bounds of role restrictions by exhibiting female ambition.

#### **4.3.2. Agency and Resistance in a Man's World**

We have already established the importance of reading Abigail as the hero of her own story using feminist hermeneutics, in the ideological analysis. We have discovered that she deserves this, as characterization revealed her to be the pivotal person and main agent of the

story. In the section just above, we have unearthed her as an agent of flourishing in a context of trauma. There is a further component to her action that needs to be discussed, i.e., the important theme of resistance.

Claassens' recent book *Claiming Her Dignity* (2016) considers the theme of female resistance in the Old Testament, and highlights the various ways that female characters resist dehumanization. The first manner of resisting is usually raising a voice, but many individuals have found nonverbal ways to make known their resistance to people and actions seeking to deny their dignity (Claassens 2016: xiii). Often resistance is expressed passively, where oppressed individuals choose nonviolent strategies to oppose power structures. Drawing on James Scott's notion of hidden transcripts, these acts of defiance include "everyday ordinary acts like singing and dancing, joking and laughing, cooking and feeding, rumours and rituals" (Claassens 2016: xvi). These create avenues for people in subordinate positions to creatively voice their truth.

The literary analysis of 1 Samuel 25 has highlighted the abundant ironies and wordplay that also point to the comedic aspects of this story. In quite a humorous fashion, one sees Abigail as verbally resisting a threat of war. When we see her rolling her eyes at the men's show of strength and calling herself their servant over and over, we respond with laughter, and in that way, relate to and share in her resistance.

#### **4.3.3. Women, food and generosity**

Another important means of nonverbal resistance in 1 Samuel, is the presentation of Abigail's hospitality (Claassens 2016: 19). Abigail's act of providing food for the hungry is possibly the most mundane of ordinary acts of resistance, since food is our most basic human need, after safety. The quantity and variety of the food she prepares mirrors the feast of Nabal, pointing to the future nobility of David, and to the fact that to uprooted, homeless individuals, food serves as a source of comfort, bringing memories of home (Claassens 2016: 22).

A request – or demand? – for food is the pivot point on which this story turns, according to Mary Shields (2012: 41). Food has many layers of meaning here: it is occasion for feasting, a form of payment, and although it may seem like a demand or threat, food invokes hospitality customs in this context. Since it is such an important part of the story, Shields suggests that

one reads the whole story through a lens of food and drink, linking it to Wisdom, not unlike the approach of McKinlay that will be outlined below.

One concept links resistance through hospitality with resistance with words more effectively than anything else: the way that Abigail names the food she brings. In Chapter 4.1.6., verbal resistance as prophesy was discussed, and those paragraphs have relevance here. In the same way that Abigail uses words to resist her situation, she uses food and hospitality as resistance.

Only in the centre of her speech does she mention the food she has brought, although it would have been visible from the start of their meeting, loaded and travelled. What follows, explains food as a blessing, not as a gift (Shields 2012: 47). בִּוּכָה is used, and not the more usual word for gift. The foodstuff has the possibility of bringing peace and life. In this way, even the action of giving food becomes a prophesy of sorts.

It is very ironic, that when Abigail returns home, she finds Nabal having a feast fit for a king, while she left the real king outside. Food and drink plays a real role in Nabal's demise (Shields 2012: 54). Food acts as a dooming prophesy for him, as well.

There has always been a special link between women and food, and this long history has been well documented. They have used it threefold: as resistance by their sheer resilience, staying alive by ingenious cooking during difficult circumstances; as a way of maintaining one's identity by creating something useful and beautiful; and as a powerful way of caring for others. Where others would destroy life with violence, women have sought to sustain life. All of the above is applicable to Abigail, but it is worthwhile to note that her abundant gifts of food bring life in a context where the denial of it is deadly in more than one way (Claassens 2016: 24). David and his men would probably not yet die of famine, but they would start a swordfight that could get many men of the house of Nabal killed.

Caring and generosity from any character in this story would be antithetical to the miser Nabal, and the character of Abigail is designed to do that. That does not make her or her acts ordinary. Caring is not such a regular discovery in everyday life as we may think. The important question is: what makes it possible for some individuals to step out of the violent script that prescribes actions in their society (Claassens 2016: 20)? Claassens uses Judith Butler's and Beverley Mitchell's work in her argument, stating that for an individual to resist the terrible reality of violence in the world that she lives in – as in the case of Abigail – that person needs to be driven by an understanding of human beings and the world at large, that

makes nonviolence a possibility. Maybe it is Abigail's great imagination that is driving her to the courage to stand up for a better alternative. Maybe it is because she has a frame of reference rooted in the notion of compassion. Abigail, like true compassionate people everywhere and in every time, has the sense to recognize victims of violence as human beings, people with family, feelings and needs – such as hunger, in the case of this story (Claassens 2016: 21).

In a fascinating exercise on intertextuality called “To eat or not to eat: where is wisdom in this choice?”, Judith McKinlay links women, food and wisdom by discussing the similarities and differences between Eve, Woman Wisdom of Proverbs 9, and Abigail (1998: 74-84). She chooses 1 Samuel 25 as one of the texts in which to eat or not to eat is of such life and death consequence that it is obvious: food means more than fuel for bodies. It is a code, a system of communication, a protocol of use.

To unravel this pre-coded message, McKinlay uses the similarities between Abigail and Wisdom, and the reader realizes that this also hints to the godly aspect of Abigail: even David attributes her rescue mission to God. Remember that she is endowed with *חכמה*, the very gift of the fruit, wisdom. Even though supplying food seems like an innocent and even submissive action, within the Abigail story it becomes a riveting account of female agency.

Linking hospitality with wisdom in this way has implications for a ICBS. May we claim our peacemaking efforts as acts of God, acts of wisdom? Is it always the right thing to make peace? Yoder (1997: 2), already in the prologue of his book on shalom, warns that one should guard against a typically western, middle-class notion of peace, as just the absence of violence or war. He states that “those who teach nonparticipation of violence often come from affluent backgrounds or from the middle class. Their affluence is in part the result of the violence of exploitation elsewhere.” He obtained his experience about the practical complexity of peacemaking as a pilgrim in the Philippines, but his statements could just as well be made about the complexity of the South African situation. Nevertheless, this study has chosen to use mutual hospitality in the form of a shared meal – and communion – as part of the praxis of the Bible study. The facilitator should keep in mind that this aspect may be interpreted in a variety of ways by participants. More on this in Chapter Five of this study.

The same sensitivity that is awarded to sharing food, should be kept in mind about the role and perceived value of women in the community where the ICBS would be conducted. From studying the context underlying this study in Chapter Two, we have learned women in South

Africa very much navigate their lives amidst patriarchy. There is a significant gap between rich and poor (see Chapter 2.2.) in this community, but even the affluent women are still payed on average 27% less than their male counterparts, in South Africa (Makou, 2017).

Remembering Alice Bach's warning to keep the patriarchal ideology of the author/redactor in check, the complexity regarding female roles within the heteronormative society needs to be observed, considering something so designated to female domain as the preparation and providence of food. Ironically, the way to escape the subordination of gender socialization for a woman is not only to change what she does, but to transcend it: according to Claassens (2016: 26), Abigail succeeds in taking something from the private sphere – food and feeding – into the public sphere. She does this so authentically that one would think she invented the pillars of feminism. Her peacemaking efforts is epitomized by her acts of hospitality.

The final conversation partner for this heading regarding women and food, comes from Walter Brueggemann's 2001 book called *Peace*. This current study is called "Peace Talks" which has in mind the nature and potential significance of an intercultural conversation within my context. As part of a series called "Understanding Biblical Themes", Brueggemann expands and amplifies this distinct biblical theme with his usual excellence. Although he does not explicitly use 1 Samuel 25, Chapter Six of Brueggemann's book regards the theme of "Ordering and Eating", amplifying the undeniable link between flourishing and food that is found in the Abigail story. Other key concepts also deserve attention, and may help us think in a more nuanced way about shalom/peace and flourishing, which would contribute to better ICBS questions and refined facilitating.

The first part of this book is spent developing a biblical vision of *shalom*. Brueggemann states that "peace" is to be understood in terms of a persistent idea of joy, well-being, harmony and prosperity that is not captured in a single idea or word in the Bible, but that a cluster of words is needed to convey its nuances: love, loyalty, truth, grace, salvation, justice, blessing, righteousness, and includes creation (2001: 14). The links and connections to the term "flourishing" is evident, something that enhances the feminist vision of helping the world to health by regarding every individual voice, and creating community. This vision of wholeness excludes no-one, and is in line with God's will. This vision of peace that can be traced throughout the Old Testament is, according to Brueggemann (2001: 19), perfectly embodied in Jesus. But the Bible is not romantic about it in this regard and moreover, never

assumes that the peace will come automatically. It is important to note that Brueggemann calls the advancement of peace the task and burden of the well-off people in the community.

Chapter Two of Brueggemann's monograph explains the different meanings peace may have for haves and have-nots (2001: 25-36). Shalom/flourishing means different things in different contexts. For the have-nots, Brueggemann traces a theological line through Moses-Joshua-Samuel, according to which deliverance from precarity serves as the dominant idea. For those who have, Brueggemann traces proper management and joyous celebration – also legitimate theological perspectives by means of the theological line of Noah-Abraham-David. Brueggemann (2001: 33) does not argue for one perspective or the other, but suggests sensitivity when we speak about peace. I find this argument enlightening and helpful, since the two lines of theology and miscommunication between them has been a difficult, although unpronounced, issue in my context.

My church, like many other mainstream churches, is caught in what Brueggemann calls a dilemma: we practise and preach salvation theology, but our people live in blessing, and rather have a need for celebration and guidance on management. They also do not realise that good management includes that flourishing and shalom for the have-nots is primarily their responsibility, and a serious one, with no cause for arrogance. Consequently, when in broader ecumenical or social contact, they seem clueless and uninformed.

This articulation of a theological problem may assist in creating at least one question on context for this ICBS, attempting to get the haves and the have-nots into meaningful conversation. The sharing of food at the same table, also at an ICBS, illustrates the meeting of the two streams: that of salvation and providence for the have-nots, and that of celebration and management for the haves. Neither are inferior, but it would take a skilled facilitator to guide.

In Part Three of Brueggemann's book on Peace, one finds a fascinating chapter on food. This chapter claims that contemplating shalom leads us to some serious questions regarding the sociology of power and sociology of value that ask: How are things ordered? How did they get this way? Should they stay this way? (Brueggemann 2001: 76). In other words, if we are serious about the flourishing of all, we should ask who made the current order of things and what we can and should do to change this order, to make it possible for all to flourish. This point is an excellent way of stating the importance of the feminist perspective of this study. We should ask these questions not only of Abigail, but also of ourselves.

Abigail was not afraid to challenge the social order of patriarchy by taking initiative outside its traditional boundaries. Abigail was not afraid to challenge the order of heteronormativity by not accepting a brittle female role of submissiveness towards a foolish husband. In the same way we may ask: do we accept the current order of patriarchy that keeps women poorer than and vulnerable to men (see statistics on female poverty and domestic violence in Chapter Two of this study). Do we accept the current order of heteronormativity that deny women freedom of choice and keeps them in designated roles? It is poignant that Abigail uses the means that she has, food and drink, as a “soft weapon” to resist an order that denies flourishing. In the same way, Bruegemann (2001: 74) asks whether we may use food differently to change the order of things.

Bruegemann (2001: 74) links the order of our lives and particularly our faith to food. Since 1 Samuel 25 is about peacemaking and unity through food, this perspective of Brueggemann is quite useful. I would strongly advocate, even insist, that this ICBS should be conducted over the intimacy of sitting around a table for a meal, or sharing snacks, or should even include communion. Perhaps in the act of eating more than in anything else, we act out our sense of order and our valuing of goods and access to goods. Eating is the most primal event of symbolizing inclusion. Without knowing it, we order our eating most carefully. It is in the elemental act of eating that we make our fundamental decisions about what we mean by shalom. Eating together may even mean more than reading together, in this case.

The Bible often presents eating as a *shalom* event. Biblical images of divine nourishment are celebrated in a landmark publication on the subject by Claassens, titled *The God Who Provides* (2004). The Old Testament gives illustration to these images multiple times, from the creation of food in Genesis, through manna in the wilderness, to unleavened bread of freedom, to the land of milk and honey. Amos 9 and Joel 3 offer us with a vision of utopian nostalgia (Claassens 2004: 68), the story of Ruth shows us how God feeds the stranger and the widow (Claassens 2004: 35), and even universal restoration is dreamed of as a banquet in Isaiah 25 (Claassens 2004: 74). In the New Testament, Jesus feeds thousands of people (2004: 100) and then declares the metaphor of eating a sacrament, with himself as eternal host (Claassens 2004: 104).

Both Claassens and Brueggemann links the wellness, the *shalom* of eating, to the Eucharist and the reality of Lord’s presence at that table. This is a monumental observation, one we

should not bypass too hastily because we may be used to the idea, and indeed a fitting final thought for the whole of this subject.

Serving a meal could also in our contemporary context serve as a deliberate breaking down of discriminatory boundaries. This is not mere anti-establishment talk (Brueggemann 2001: 85). Rather it is a question directed to those who order churches in today's context. We do not always pay attention to how we eat and order our *shalom*. We end up eating and drinking in an unworthy manner (cf. the reference in 1 Cor 11:27 that makes the point that not only does this occur at the Lord's table but at all tables, because Christians then and now often eat not for sharing but for excluding).

The talk, and the table, of this ICBS has as goal a safe space, and primarily so, a spiritual safe space. Believers from diverse backgrounds have the Biblical grounds to depend not only on Jesus as host, but on each other as participants, to be included in *shalom*.

#### **4.3.4. Cultivating Compassion**

Before an ICBS workbook is developed, one more excursion is needed to ensure that the space created for participants is safe and accepting. In the previous chapter, the work of Martha Nussbaum was used to show that stories are a quintessential tool for cultivating compassion, by enlarging participants' eudaimonistic feelings towards the characters and fellow participants.

The link between the work of Nussbaum and the use of Biblical stories to cultivate compassion, has been made by Claassens in her forthcoming article entitled "Cultivating Compassion?: Abigail's Story (1 Samuel 25) as Space for Teaching Concern for Others". The principles that Nussbaum expounds are applicable to art in a broader sense, but it is extremely helpful and illustrative that Claassens uses the same Biblical narrative that this study employs, namely the Abigail story. Using the story of Abigail to appropriate the merit of Nussbaum's argument is thus compelling.

Claassens (forthcoming: 2) uses Nussbaum as a conversation partner when she discusses evil and how to combat it. It is again the safe space of childhood play that produces the imagination we so desperately need. Without healthy imagination, we can never put ourselves in any other person's shoes. For Nussbaum (Claassens forthcoming: 2), it is a

profound lack of imagination that is responsible for the inability of individuals and communities to show empathy with one another – a reality that may lead to hatred and violence. Conversely, the way out of violence is to let the other into one's imagination, fostering a spirit of compassion and love. This proposal relates to Nussbaum's longstanding interest in the role of literature, narratives and other storytelling tactics and the way they help us to cultivate compassion beyond our narrow circle of sympathy.

In this regard, Claassens (forthcoming: 2) propose that narratives pose wonderful opportunities to create space for moral reflection. She also links the world of arts and culture to acts of play, to enact hypothetical possibilities. Narratives offer a window into another world. Along with Claassens, I as Old Testament scholar believe that Biblical narratives offer tools just as useful as any other stories – even more so, because they are still well-known and highly valued in my context.

Translated to this study, the following needs to be said about 1 Samuel 25: we use the Abigail narrative as an imaginative exercise to realise the value of peace and flourishing, the value of women and their agency, and secondarily, the value of our conversation partners with whom we would like to live in peace. The Abigail story is an example of someone who displays compassion in a world bereft of it. Her act of compassion stands in stark contrast to the lack of compassion of Nabal and also of David. This gives a useful space for moral reflection, and should give us clues to possible Bible study questions. Transfused to contemporary circumstances: could a brave woman in my context also be credited for showing compassion, and therewith help end violence, abuse and oppression?

In the stories of the men of 1 Samuel 25, it is lack of compassion and the use of dehumanizing language that makes it possible for them to behave in dismissive and potentially violent ways (Claassens forthcoming: 4). Abigail's compassion, in stark contrast to the men, is for the boys and men with faces and history, of her own house, but also for David's four hundred men. When a young servant came to her, she heard the cry for help, she took to action, and averted a tragedy.

Her deeds are accompanied by powerful words, prophetic in nature. Her words remind David that he must be a true leader, must not have blood on his hands, but he must learn to act compassionately to attend to the needs of his subjects.

Abigail's compassion meets needs, but also has a transformative impact on the future king. Does it extend beyond the narrow confines of 1 Sam 25? The answer is yes if we follow Green (2003: 1) in her understanding of chapter 24 and 26 of 1 Samuel that the compassion and restraint flow over to Saul: David will not kill him. Saul is also transformed: after this he vows to never hurt David. The end of violence is surprising in a violent world.

Claassens (forthcoming: 9) also employs trauma hermeneutics when she discusses surviving in a violent world – just as contentious for our own society as for the ancients. The first readers of the book of Samuel, probably during and shortly after the Babylonian exile, may also have used this narrative as a space for moral reflection. For individuals to step out of the violent script of their community, they need imagination to contemplate how to act peacefully in a violent world characterized by failed leaders. But Nussbaum (Claassens forthcoming: 9) gives us hopeful perspectives when stating that norms are pluralistic, and people are devious – meaning, that people are capable of subverting conventions and creating new possibilities of love and joy. Abigail's hospitality as well as David and Saul's resolve not to do violence, are good examples of this. Through the story, their example reaches our own generation and context, bridging time and space, inspiring better possibilities in all of us. The ICBS created for this text must let Abigail and her actions into our imaginations.

Within the permitted space of this study, the exegetical study above renders informative as well as imaginative ideas for use in the construction of an ICBS. The reader would now know the story thoroughly, and the literary reading have provided ample suggestions for questions on the text, as prescribed by CBS methodology. The feminist reading has placed the character Abigail front and centre in our attention, assuring that we appreciate the gravity and bravery of her actions, inspiring us and Bible study participants. The next step is to construct the ICBS as a space for cultivating compassion, for having "peace talks".

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **AN INTERCULTURAL BIBLE STUDY ON THE STORY OF ABIGAIL (1 SAMUEL 25)**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

In some sense, Chapter Five serves as the culmination of this study. Chapter Two of this study described the context of this study, an imperative for every responsible theologian and a certain requisite for a study with the accent on contextual Bible study. In Chapter Three, all the relevant methodological considerations underlying the construction of an ICBS have been cited. It was shown how the optimal method for this exercise in conversation about peacemaking would be a conglomeration of the CBS method of the Ujamaa Centre and the ICBS method as used by De Wit et al., with selected points of significance added by perspectives from Nussbaum and Bruegemann. Finally, Chapter Four assisted in describing Abigail with clarity, obliging us in appropriating the chosen text as ideal for the identified theme of peace talks

At this juncture, all the above should contribute in some way to the finished product that constitute the construction of an ICBS on the story of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. This current chapter represents the intersection where context, Biblical text and its exegesis, and critically informed methodology congregate. Many studies of this sort present a workbook for the Bible study as an appendix. Since the workbook is in a certain way the pinnacle of the design of this study, it will not be adequate to deliver it as an afterthought. Furthermore, the design of this entire exercise up to now would not allow that; since from the beginning it has been the predilection for this study to be clear about every motive and move. I again make the claim that the hidden agenda of the creator and/or facilitator of a Bible study such as this should be as apparent as the hidden embodied theologies it searches to, in turn, manifest.

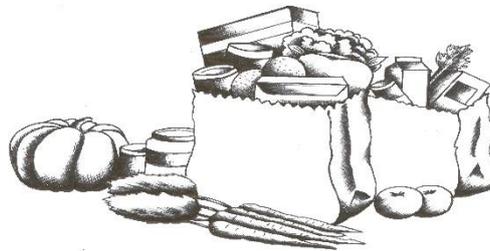
The workbook for the ICBS is thus included in the body of this chapter. The scheme of the chapter is to present the polished product of a workbook, with questions, instructions for participants, sketches and all relevant information. But that will not be left as is: an analysis of the workbook follows, with explanations and references for each question, and instructions and explications for the facilitator, tracing the Bible study movement by movement. This is

the only way in which the work in this chapter could accomplish what it sets out to do: to disencumber the complexities in the intersections of the study. Then follows a summary in table form, compacting summaries for each question with its corresponding methodological consideration and its exegetical background; and lastly, concluding thoughts.

## **5.2. Workbook for an Intercultural Bible Study**

## WELCOME/WELKOM/WAMKELEKILE

to a shared experience of reading and conversation



*“One who eats alone, cannot discuss the taste of the food with others.”* - African Proverb

- May you already feel welcomed and nurtured by the meal we shared. Thank you for your contribution!
- Thank you for your presence. We could not ask for anything more, but that you really be present, with heart and mind.
- Respect and openness are both needed to get the most from this experience.
- The estimated time for this exercise is three to four hours. Thank you for your time!
- Please use English.
- The process has a discourse leader who will facilitate our time together for the benefit of all. Please be aware that there are no right or wrong answers, and that every person’s opinion counts.
- This workbook is yours for the duration of the reading experience. Write notes, draw pictures – whatever you want – but not your name. Please hand the booklet in to the discourse leader at the end of the time, because it holds valuable information.
- Last, but not least, enjoy! Be yourself. May this be an enriching experience.

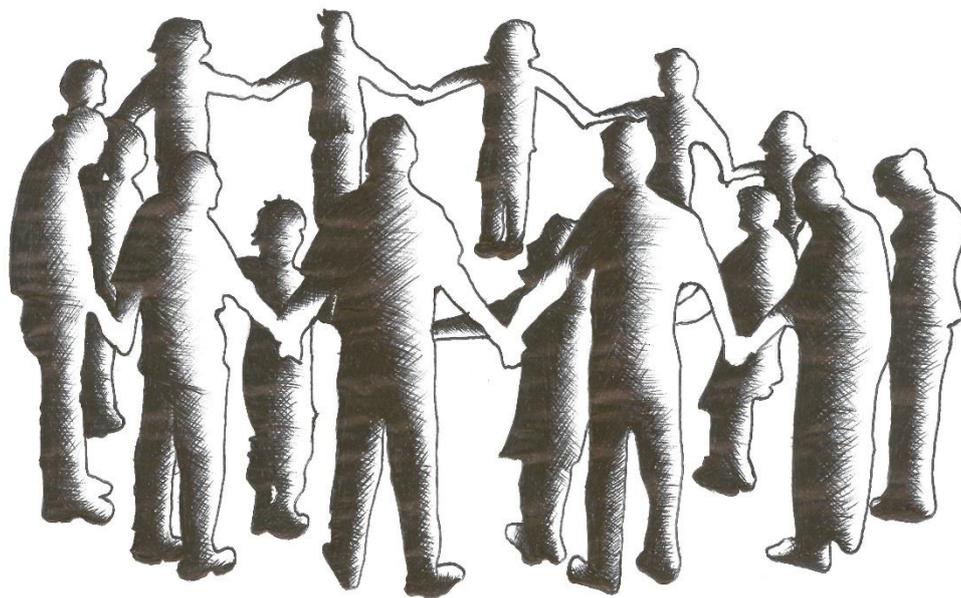
**Who are you?**

Let's take a few minutes and get to know something about one another. Please feel free to make notes about names, faces and other details.




- Word poster four

**Opportunity is given for prayer or singing.**



## 1 Samuel 25

(Listen)

### Death of Samuel

**25** Now Samuel died; and all Israel assembled and mourned for him. They buried him at his home in Ramah.

Then David got up and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

### David and the Wife of Nabal

<sup>2</sup> There was a man in Maon, whose property was in Carmel. The man was very rich; he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. <sup>3</sup> Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. The woman was clever and beautiful, but the man was surly and mean; he was a Calebite. <sup>4</sup> David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. <sup>5</sup> So David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. <sup>6</sup> Thus you shall salute him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. <sup>7</sup> I hear that you have shearers; now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing, all the time they were in Carmel. <sup>8</sup> Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore, let my young men find favor in your sight; for we have come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.'"

<sup>9</sup> When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David; and then they waited. <sup>10</sup> But Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants today who are breaking away from their masters. <sup>11</sup> Shall I take my bread and my water and the meat that I have butchered for my shearers, and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" <sup>12</sup> So David's young men turned away, and came back and told him all this. <sup>13</sup> David said to his men, "Every man strap on his sword!" And every one of them strapped on his sword; David also strapped on his sword; and about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

<sup>14</sup> But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, "David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he shouted insults at them. <sup>15</sup> Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we never missed anything when we were in the fields, as long as we were with them; <sup>16</sup> they were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. <sup>17</sup> Now therefore know this and consider what you should do; for evil has been decided against our master and against all his house; he is so ill-natured that no one can speak to him."

<sup>18</sup> Then Abigail hurried and took two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five sheep ready dressed, five measures of parched grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs. She loaded them on donkeys <sup>19</sup> and said to her young men, “Go on ahead of me; I am coming after you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal. <sup>20</sup> As she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, David and his men came down toward her; and she met them. <sup>21</sup> Now David had said, “Surely it was in vain that I protected all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; but he has returned me evil for good. <sup>22</sup> God do so to David<sup>[a]</sup> and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him.”

<sup>23</sup> When Abigail saw David, she hurried and alighted from the donkey, and fell before David on her face, bowing to the ground. <sup>24</sup> She fell at his feet and said, “Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt; please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. <sup>25</sup> My lord, do not take seriously this ill-natured fellow, Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal<sup>[b]</sup> is his name, and folly is with him; but I, your servant, did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent.

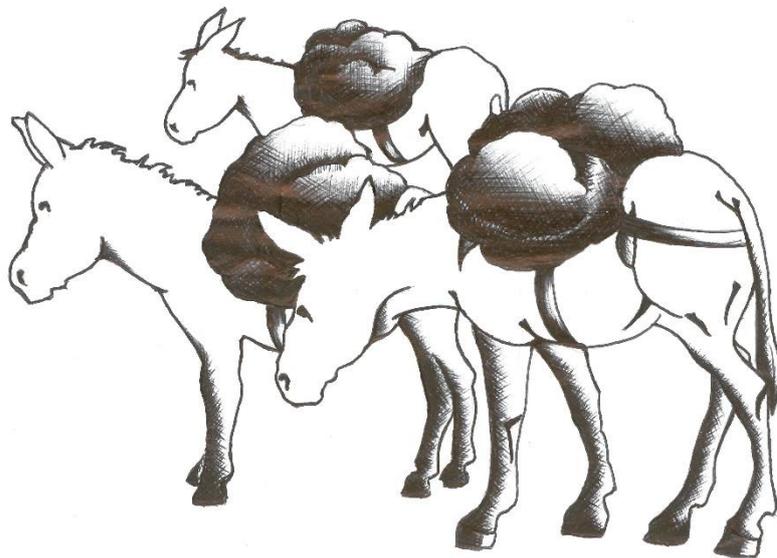
<sup>26</sup> “Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, since the LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt and from taking vengeance with your own hand, now let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be like Nabal. <sup>27</sup> And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord. <sup>28</sup> Please forgive the trespass of your servant; for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD; and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. <sup>29</sup> If anyone should rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living under the care of the LORD your God; but the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. <sup>30</sup> When the LORD has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel, <sup>31</sup> my lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause or for having saved himself. And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.”

<sup>32</sup> David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! <sup>33</sup> Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you, who have kept me today from bloodguilt and from avenging myself by my own hand! <sup>34</sup> For as surely as the LORD the God of Israel lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there would not have been left to Nabal so much as one male.” <sup>35</sup> Then David received from her hand what she had brought him; he said to her, “Go up to your house in peace; see, I have heeded your voice, and I have granted your petition.”

<sup>36</sup> Abigail came to Nabal; he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king. Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunk; so she told him nothing at all until the morning light. <sup>37</sup> In the morning, when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him; he became like a stone. <sup>38</sup> About ten days later the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.

<sup>39</sup> When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Blessed be the LORD who has judged the case of Nabal's insult to me, and has kept back his servant from evil; the LORD has returned the evildoing of Nabal upon his own head." Then David sent and wooed Abigail, to make her his wife. <sup>40</sup> When David's servants came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, "David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife." <sup>41</sup> She rose and bowed down, with her face to the ground, and said, "Your servant is a slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." <sup>42</sup> Abigail got up hurriedly and rode away on a donkey; her five maids attended her. She went after the messengers of David and became his wife.

<sup>43</sup> David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel; both of them became his wives. <sup>44</sup> Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Palti son of Laish, who was from Gallim.



### **Quiet Reflection**

Think about the following questions by yourself, and answer them by writing down your answer:

1. Who is the main characters in this story?

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2. With which character do you identify the most? Why?

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3. What do you consider to be the most significant event in the story?

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### **Group Discussion**

The following questions are for open group discussion. Answer them with the Bible story we have just read, as background:

1. What is this story about?

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2. This story happened in the time of the life of David, about a thousand years before the life of Christ, and about three thousand years ago. What, do you think, was life like in those days?

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3. When people wrote this story down and read it for the first time, they were in exile. They have lost everything and had experienced trauma. Can we relate to them?

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**With a friendly stranger**

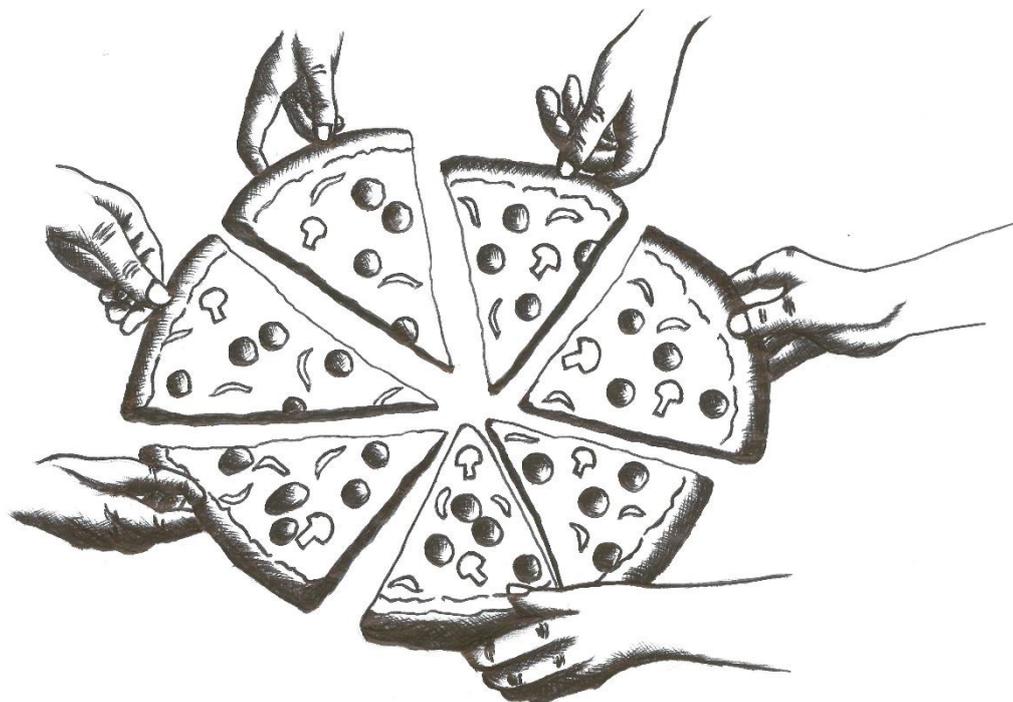
Please take a seat with someone who seems friendly. It should not be someone you know well! Take turns to share your interpretation of the text. Be careful to not show any explicit reaction, or to express any judgment – the other person may understand the text different from you. That is okay. You should concentrate on listening really well, and acknowledge that you understand by reflecting back what you hear. Please write down what happens.

What the other person is telling me	How that makes me feel

### Group Discussion

The last set of questions we will discuss today, must help us decide what to do about this story when we go back to our normal life. Let's talk!

1. Is your community healthy?
2. Is your country at peace?
3. What did the people in this story want to fight about? Was that justified?
4. What do people in your community fight about, or want to fight about? Is that justified?
5. How do you normally solve conflict?
6. Does the story give us ideas on how to deal with conflict?
7. Is it appropriate for a woman to give food?
8. Is it appropriate for a woman to preach?
9. Do you find anything funny in this story (something exaggerated or ironic)?
10. How do you feel after your contact with people today?
11. Can you help heal your community? How?
12. With whom would you like to share a meal?



## Communion

Our shared experience of reading and conversation will be concluded with the sharing of one more meal. Please feel free to take part.



### 5.3. Analysis of the Workbook

Constructing a Bible study is an exercise in the use of more than one distinctive skills. The list of abilities includes knowledge of the Bible and its background, literary prowess, people skills, and an enthusiasm for social change. Participants may come from all walks of life and must feel included and respected. This asks for an exceptional balance in the Bible study: it should not be an academic exercise, but should not underestimate people's intelligence, either; it should regard the whole of the human experience and not only the cognitive or only the emotional.

Condensing all these aptitudes into a few questions is a challenging assignment, and it should be approached with ministration. The previous chapters had as intention exactly that: to exhume all the material needed with which to build a responsible and effective intercultural Bible study. The study was then proposed in this chapter. What follows is a page by page examination of the Bible study on 1 Samuel 25, with all the lines of thought converging: Biblical knowledge, interpretative data, and methodological concerns. Added to the discussion is the projected reader response based on the context (See Chapter Two) and strategies for the facilitator, as well as practical and aesthetical considerations.

The Bible study is simple enough to be appropriated to any context. In fact, just like any other CBS, the hope is that this study will be adapted and used (Ujamaa 2015: 3) by whomever would want to. For the sake of this study, though, contextual detail must be discussed.

Before each page is deliberated, a few remarks about the workbook as entirety is imperative. It has been designed to fit on 12 pages, with the recommendation to print a copy for each Bible study participant, which would form a booklet when done on three A4 pages turned the landscape way, or the numbered amount of A5. No extra front page is added because of this reason, and the workbook thus have no front page except the welcome page. Users of this ICBS could add a front page of their inclination: maybe a local work of art, a recent newspaper clip or social media post reflecting their own context.

The sketches used in the workbook are the handiwork of artist Stefan Jacobs. They have been designed to meet the following criteria: they should be clear, simple and easy to understand; they should be made with black ink on white, to copy easily and cheaply; they

should clarify and enrich the language and meaning of the Bible study; they should echo and emphasize the emotional content, helping the participant to mourn and celebrate.

Apart from the sketches, the discourse leader could use any relevant art or music. Be careful, though, of adding too much: the story of Abigail should be amplified by whatever is used, and not overshadowed or diminished in any way. The story is more than capable enough to provide a transformative experience (Nussbaum 2013: 181). The sketches and word posters are planned and added at specific points, to aid the transformative reading process. There should be more than enough clean space in the workbook of each participant for notes, doodles and drawings of their own, which should be encouraged. Spontaneous singing, dancing, and even praying should be welcomed, but a wise facilitator keeps track of time.

The foremost notice to the facilitator of this study, is to note the ideal of a communal meal before the start of the session, since this needs to be organized beforehand. The meal should preferably be handmade in different homes, for to be representative of each individual attending, and not be made in huge quantities in catering style.

Even if the meal is catered, participants should be left to normal social devices: meet and greet, serving and dishing, and seating arrangements should be left with as little as possible direction and interference. Apart from a quick word of welcome of a host and maybe someone saying grace, the facilitator needs to trust that, even theologically, one of the most substantial transformative experiences that human beings can have, is simply contact with others (see Chapter 3.3.3). The facilitator may set an example in line with the content of the Bible study, by sharing conversation during the meal with a friendly stranger.

It is to be noted that the discomfort of the opening stage of this study cannot be circumvented, and the facilitator must be wary. As explained in chapter two of this study, hosting an ICBS in the fragmented community under discussion, could be challenging precisely because of participants' varying backgrounds. There would be people representative of the "haves", also of the "have-nots", and thought should be given on how this could impact the experience.

The physical space where the Bible Study takes place, needs much consideration. Apart from being spacious enough and furnished appropriately, it need not be luxurious. Furthermore, it needs to be neutral, since guests to a space, which others know well, may start the experience with a handicap. Simply hosting at either church could be an option, but hosts need to be gracious, not haughty, and not fall into the "cult of giving"-trap either. If participants from a

privileged socio-economic background attend with those who are disadvantaged (which is probable in this case, as explained by the huge gap between rich and poor in chapter two of this study), transport needs to be considered judiciously. Maybe public transport as a group would serve as an interesting introduction to a communal Bible study experience, as an alternative to arriving in luxury airconditioned vehicles.

The same mindfulness is needed when preparing a communal meal: how to achieve a balance between generously sharing and boastfulness, could need some discourse and planning beforehand. The facilitator would do well to be especially sensitive regarding the differences between participants, but rather than ignoring it, could use it as a discussion point towards inclusivity during the Bible Study, since the Abigail story resonates the same themes of generosity, resistance and initiative.

It may seem conspicuous, but it makes sense to also stipulate the most manifest instruction for this Bible study: the ideal group should not be homogenous, but diverse, and specifically in culture, since cultural isolation is the main problem identified for this context (See Chapter One). I would imagine that a uniform group would complete the study with satisfactory results, and that facilitators are often invited to existing groups which would not automatically be multicultural (Ujamaa 2015: 3). But if possible, it should be kept in mind that this Bible study is specifically designed to help people bridge the culture gap.

### **5.3.1. Welcome page**

The first word, “welcome”, is printed in three of South Africa’s official languages: English, Afrikaans and isiXhosa. Since this is an intercultural exercise, the initial language use should be inclusive. For the sake of effective group work, English is chosen as language to be used in the rest of the workbook, since it is the second language of most South Africans, and holds the most considerable common ground. The facilitator of an ICBS, like this one, should be attentive to language use. The use of a home language that few others understand, may be exclusionary in a group setting. Language may be a sensitive issue in a multicultural society, but it does seem that many South Africans have settled on English as intercultural language of choice.

Participants are welcomed to a “shared experience of reading and conversation”. They would know that they arrive for Bible study, whether they are Christian or not. But choosing a less

traditional heading than “Bible study”, would hopefully help to dissolve their preconceived ideas of Bible study held by religious professionals – one in which the minister or pastor as the person with all the knowledge talks, teaches or preaches, and the other people listens and learns. This take on power dynamics is not at all the idea of CBS (Ujamaa 2015: 15), and should be avoided at all cost. Even the words in the workbook may not exhibit the notion of the facilitator as the one informed person.

One of the deepest convictions of both feminist hermeneutics and CBS methodology (both approaches used in this study), is that the voice of every individual needs to be heard and counted, and that every person’s – whether male or female, poor or rich, white or black – embodied theology needs to be revealed. It is exactly this belief that constitute one of the main contributions of studies like this: to mainstream precious hidden ideas (Ujamaa 2015: 16). In the group’s presence, the facilitator should explain this, and call herself or himself a “discourse leader” (Van der Walt 2014: 131) – an even better word than “facilitator”, since it has less technical connotations. People are often deeply suspicious of this; they expect to be overruled and superseded at some point. Respect, body language and holding silences often goes further towards inviting them into a process than explaining does. Nevertheless, it still needs to be voiced.

The sketch on the welcome page is of food; for those who have not read the Abigail story, this may come as a surprise or a riddle. As well as intrigue, the picture should invite and celebrate. It also refers to the introductory meal that participants have shared – a clue to the imperative of hospitality that is part of the Abigail legacy. For Christians, shared meals should always invoke thoughts of communion, which adds spiritual weight to the interpretation of the story, as well as to the responsibility of the interpretative outcomes (See Chapter 4.2.3.).

An added nuance of food in the pictures is that they serve to silently question the group’s morality. People who are even moderately socially sensitive would have picked up by now who in the group are “haves” and who are “have-nots”, measured by clothes, possessions, (and in South African society, still skin colour and home language) and the food they have brought to the communal meal. The food theme, together with communion at the end, is progressively asking questions about poverty, inequality, and generosity – just like the Bible study – but without using words.

The African proverb added as a quote provides a contextual anchor: we are not only to consider ourselves South Africans, but also Africans. As explained in chapter two of this study, the western and westernized fragments of the multicultural South Africa often need to be reminded of this. The African context, as well as the content of the quote, serves as a reminder that the space for this exercise is shared. It promises warmth and camaraderie as reward for sincere participation.

A paragraph with bullet points follow, which the facilitator may read herself, or request others to do so, out loud. It accentuates the most important attitudes that characterizes the process. Indeed, contributors to this exercise need no knowledge – Biblical or otherwise – to share this experience. Much more needed is an attitude of openness and willingness to share, mindfulness in the moment, and a teachable spirit. What little method is needed to be followed, is curtly explained: language, the use of the workbook, and the timeframe.

### **5.3.2. Who are you?**

Page two of the workbook is devoted to what is traditionally known as an “ice-breaker”. Given the multicultural complexion of the ideal group for this study, a commencement that suits only one sort of person is not feasible. Care should be taken that games or stories may serve some types of personalities or even cultures, while leaving others vulnerable and uncomfortable. A safe start ensures a start, at least, and seems to be best in this case. Therefore, a simple know-your-neighbour-grid was drawn, and group members should have sufficient time to do the rounds and establish contact with all the others.

The facilitator may let them walk around and introduce themselves while taking notes if they wish. Another possible approach, depending on the number of attendees, is to let each take a turn introducing themselves while seated in a circle or around a table.

### **5.3.3. Who are we?**

The page with this title is intended to establish collective knowledge about the context of the group. The large amount of information condensed in single page poster form, may result in lengthy conversations. To manage time more economically, the instruction is to have the discussions in smaller groups.

There are four word-posters (also sometimes called info-graphs); the discourse leader may prepare printouts for everyone beforehand, or use a data projector to display them on a screen. Whichever is chosen, all words should be clear and legible, otherwise the exercise may be futile. The word-posters are attached to this study as appendixes, in A4 format.

As the creator of the word-posters, I am quite aware that the use of the words is subjective, and that words are included and excluded according to my judgement. Readers may agree or disagree on the utilizing of some of the aspects. I do assess that the meaning of a word-poster is conveyed not by a single word, but by the “picture” that the combination of words engenders. Please note that the whole of a word-poster picture is ambivalent, not designed to be either completely positive or negative, but to incite reaction and conversation. The most important word, the theme word of each poster, is omitted – which makes for a riddle to be solved.

The first one is on our country, and mostly its positive aspects: the date of 1994 is prominent in the centre and is representative of the hope that the birth of the Rainbow Nation brought to South Africans and the world. All the other words symbolize concepts, ideas and objects that unite us and incite positive political emotions. The second one is on our country, and mostly its negative aspects: the legacy of Apartheid which we still struggle against; the tragic happenings at Marikana, the worrisome state capture and corruption allegations; and things like the growing gap between rich and poor, and the statistics about crime and gangsterism.

Word-poster number three is about women and their lives. The date in the middle is National Women’s Day, and hopefully the group will be able to remind one another what happened on that day and why we still find it inspiring. Some of the other words represent roles and struggles of women; female symbols are included (as are a few scant pictures on the other posters); and prevailing negative attitudes regarding women, to stimulate conversation.

The last word-poster, number four, is about the church and Christianity – the other unifying theme of an ICBS group. There are many positive and hopeful words on this poster: gifts and fruit of the Spirit, synonyms of love and development, and symbols of the Trinity. But this theme should quickly show that it does not always consolidate and connect people, it is also responsible for much disconnection and hurt. This is illustrated by using denomination names and church jargon. Again, ambivalence is harnessed on purpose to enhance debate.

There are word posters or aspects of them that fill us with pride, affiliation, and joy; but most of them are designed to incite concern. The reality of our country, our community, our church and context, may be upsetting to some people, especially when they are confronted with statistics and facts, and a number of those arranged on one page to be taken in at one glance.

A spiritual unburdening may be ideal at the end of this section, therefore prayer is suggested. Prayer is an ideal way for Christians to find relief, to process their own shock, to lament if needed. We need to be truly informed about our reality, even if we find it traumatizing, in order to read the Biblical text in a transforming way. One of the important designs of this Bible Study is the context of trauma, i.e., the link that is used to connect the characters in the story, the first readers, as well as contemporary readers (see Chapter 4.2.4.). The discourse leader should not shy away from facts about our context and their effects on people, but use it to create discomfort. That discomfort becomes the energy, used when subsequently reading and interpreting the story.

Prayer is furthermore often the introduction to reading the Bible – the next step in this ICBS – for many believers, and they will interpret it as such.

#### **5.3.4. Lectio Divina**

The Latin for “divine reading” is used in this explanatory part of the study, but it is not used in the workbook, since it is traditional church language for the meditative discipline of Bible reading, and it is unsure if all group members would have been introduced to it.

Nevertheless, it is customary to designate this part of a communal reading in this way (Van der Walt 2014: 101). Because of limited space, only one translation of 1 Samuel 25 is printed, the NRSV, as is used in standard academic projects. Adding more translations is often used to complicate a reading – in a good sense. This is also possible with the Abigail story: the RIV has a few interesting inflections, and the Message has a convenient emphasis on the word “peace”, deeply applicable to this study with its intersections in health and flourishing, as shown in the main title. But I have found the NRSV to be sufficient, and repeated reading of the same text may be used in the reading discipline, if the facilitator desires so.

What is more important than different versions, is the instruction that the first reading should be done out loud (Ujamaa 2015: 20), because one could never be decidedly convinced about the literacy of each member taking part in the reading.

### **5.3.5. Quiet Reflection**

The next section is titled “Quiet Reflection”, but is still part of the previous reading and meditative section. Meditative reading always stands in need of mindfulness, and this assignment aids that process of introspection and truthfulness. The movements through the interpretation process has many group sessions which ideally suits the more extroverted personalities, and allowing this time for solo contemplation will ensure the introverts’ involvement and enthusiasm.

There is, however, an important movement happening in this section: the ICBS shifts from community consciousness questions to critical consciousness questions (Ujamaa 2015: 10). The typical method of CBS is using questions, since this ensures optimal engagement from all group members, and bars the facilitator from teaching or preaching (Ujamaa 2015: 13). This workbook continues to be faithful to this aspect of the CBS method. Up to now, questions have been on community consciousness, pertaining to the participants’ contexts, and sensitizing those who have been ignorant to co-members and the relevant issues. Other CBSs that work with existing groups, will use the first kind of questions to evaluate the context and define a main theme that a Bible study could be done on. In this case, a theme has been decided on beforehand, and contextual questions have a different purpose: so that they engage with their own context, so that they would engage with the Biblical text coupled with the challenges of their real lives.

After the *Lectio Divina*, questions are not personal anymore, but move to the content of the text. Questions are now not on the world in front of the text anymore (pertaining to the reader), but will be on the text. More specifically, these first questions are literary and on the world on the text. Therefore, the first questions are simply about characters, association with a specific character, and plot.

One must be careful to not move to questions on the world behind the text too soon (Ujamaa 2015: 11), or too much. Everyone can read and interpret a story; everything we need is already in words and spaces of a text, and it is not difficult. Knowledge from the world

behind the text are harder to come by. In CBS and this ICBS, we use as little as possible from that category; only that which could truly influence the understanding of a text is relevant. Nothing is added only for interest's sake.

Participants would have sufficiently invested in the process, because they have been personally engaged and treated with respect. They have listened to and/or read a Biblical story which would have amused, entertained or even upset them. They would be willing to do the extra work that is needed to interpret an ancient text. They enter a phase where critical effort is needed, contestation – whether internal or external – is guaranteed, and collaboration required to understand. Change is inevitable, sometimes concerning their understanding of a Biblical story – a guarded ground, for some – and sometimes concerning their understanding of themselves and their context. The last option may even be the hardest.

### **5.3.6. Group Discussion (1)**

The first conversation to happen about the Bible story, should be in the greater group, whether it be six or sixty people. There will be an opportunity for conversations in smaller groups again, which often happens with more ease, since most people find smaller groups less intimidating. There is good rationale for the choice of the large group: at this juncture, the participants need to own not only the group work as their own, but most definitely also the interpretation of the Biblical text (Ujamaa 2015: 22). The questions in this section are formulated to be relatively general and open-ended; the goal is to initiate discourse.

Restraint is demanded from the discourse leader during this movement of the Bible study (Ujamaa 2015: 15). The leader should ask the question out loud, and then wait for any answer, even if it does not air immediately. People are often tentative about their own reading and interpretative skills, and will be hesitant at first. If the facilitator shows respect to each answer and maybe write it down, it shows that every opinion is valuable. If the leader succumbs and starts talking into the silence, she will teach or preach, and therewith confirm participants' suspicions: that professional Bible students in any case knows better. Group members will withdraw their involvement to a more or lesser extent, and the facilitator would have missed the chance to reveal the precious embodied theologies that this method uncovers so exceptionally well.

There are only three questions in this section, but since it is in the larger group setting, may take up more time than the previous page's quiet reflection questions. The first of the three is general, with the intent to initiate conversation. Question number two and three are indeed on the world behind the text – the sort of questions that should be used sparingly. One scant sentence of information is added to each of these questions, and to my opinion it is more than enough. The mere mention of thousands of years is sufficient for readers to recognize that the characters are removed from themselves, and that we should remember not to transfuse our lives directly onto them. Naming the trauma that the exiles would have experienced, on the other hand, is ample to help the reader identify with them or link (Ujamaa 2015: 10) their own human experience of trauma or pain with those of the characters.

Again, a word of warning to the facilitator: the combined knowledge that the group owns, should be more than enough to engage with these questions. Only when the conversation becomes immobile or bewildered, would it be wise to add information from the facilitator's chair.

### **5.3.7. With a Friendly Stranger**

The page titled thus, is a listening exercise more than anything else. The ICBS participants would be ready for a conversation of a different kind. Keep in mind that one of the main goals of this study is not only to study the Bible to encounter transformation, but to encounter one another, since that is one of the main stimuli for transformation in communal reading (see Chapter 3.3.4.). The overarching intent is to grow participants' eudaimonistic thoughts (see Chapter 3.4.2.), to begin to care for those who we previously considered to be strangers or even enemies – for which the imaginative space of stories helps immensely. Telling each other how one understands a story, how one identifies with it, opens a door to relate to each other in new ways, to cultivate compassion (see Chapter 4.3.4.). The purpose is to heal a fragmented community by getting them into conversation with one another, to amplify the flourishing of individuals and the community.

There are no prescribed questions for this movement of the ICBS, only instructions to share thoughts and feelings, and listen. What is of utmost importance is that the discourse leader explains clearly that even if the other person says something that the conversation partner does not agree with or even finds offensive, these are the moments where the true goals of an

ICBS may be realized. The Abigail story gives us topics that may be sensitive, but contestation is part of the character of communal reading, and even conflict may not be viewed as negative.

Examples from this specific context, as described in chapter one of this study, may be the following: members of one culture or group may blame the listener and their culture for being rich, selfish and inhospitable; or criminal and rebellious. All have the option to call the others unchristian and selfish. Debates about the role of women and what should be acceptable is to be expected. This is nothing to flounder from, but the facilitator should be pleased when people feel safe enough to share their honest opinion.

But the Abigail story also gives us themes like hope for peace or at least ceasefire, the agency and actions of decisive individuals that makes positive difference, and the harmony that generosity brings. The discourse leader may not marshal those themes at this point, but it may be engaging to observe whether some of the group members also touch on these.

### **5.3.8. Group Discussion (2)**

The last movement of this ICBS is again into the larger group. Keep in mind that participants may start to feel fatigue; a quick coffee break at the end of the previous section or an interlude of a song or two, may be necessary. This is the last group discussion, which should assist the group in sealing the main themes, reaching certain compromises, and starting to dream about the future. The discourse leader could colour these questions, using smaller discussion groups and feedback to the bigger group, or letting circles buzz about it before answering.

The first two questions pertain to the health and flourishing-intersection; with the discourse about their own context as well as the Abigail story behind them, group members would have an increased comprehension of the width of these issues.

Question Three through Six deals with struggles and other like endeavours. We are a community in strife and a country contesting a better future. People deem different things valuable enough to fight for and about. But the reservation that Abigail brings to our minds, should be whether peace and communication could also be an option. Could we use our creativity to solve disputes and handle conflict in new ways?

Questions Seven and Eight cut to the role and agency of women in society. The feminist perspective of this study is promoting that patriarchy keeps women in restrictive roles: although food has been the traditional terrain of women, initiative, intelligence and prophesy have not been – and Abigail embodies and encompasses all these. She may seem ambiguous, but that makes her life-like. Her ambiguousness is precisely why she challenges us, even to people living today. Should we keep ourselves or our women in restricted space and role play while they have a contribution to bring?

Question Nine seeks to empower the meek by reminding them of the weapons of the weak; just like generosity, humour is much underestimated, and provides us with a coping mechanism, just as it did for Abigail (see Chapter 4.1.2). If readers can recognize the fun in the Abigail story, they may be sanctioned to look at their own situation with new spectacles. Humour adds to our resilience, energises us, and strengthens our problem-solving abilities. It is not a bad choice, to relieve the dead seriousness of religious talk (like an ICBS) with a bit of subversive laughter.

Questions Ten and Eleven intersects transformative reading; it seeks to evaluate if the participants have changed in any way during their communal reading event. It also aids in reflecting agency back to the reader, reminding them that we are all change agents, and that our personal choices have an impact on our families and our communities. Question twelve also invites activity: it suggests something that anyone can, and everyone should do, to make friends out of enemies: share a meal (see Chapter 4.3.3). Abigail leaves us that hint: sharing is including, and generosity may still save the day.

### **5.3.9. Celebrating Communion**

The communal reading experience has an appropriate ending with the celebration of communion. This is the fitting end for an experience that should be inclusive as well as spiritual (see Chapter 4.3.3.).

## **5.4. Summaries**

This section is created on the model of chapter six of the Ujamaa Manual (2015: 32-41), the motivation being that a table provides movement and reasoning of the ICBS in one glance.

In the left column, the specific movement or question of the ICBS is listed, and in the left column, the analysis of it is outlined. This provides the reader with the flow of the Bible study at one take. No new information is added.

1. Movement: shared meal	Suggested by 1 Samuel 25 itself; ideal for meet and greet
2. Movement: welcome, thank you and guidelines	Establishing respect, openness and communication
3. Movement: Who Are You?	Ice-breaker; non-invasive with space for notes, since an intercultural group is probably not pre-existing, and do not know each other well. Community consciousness question.
4. Movement: Who Are We?	Four word-posters designed to illustrate the group members' contextual commonalities, although they also have many differences.
a. Word-poster on South Africa: joys	Community consciousness question; directed towards main theme of "Peace Talks"
b. Word-poster on South Africa: challenges	Community consciousness question; directed towards main theme of "Peace Talks"
c. Word-poster on Women: feminist	Community consciousness question; directed towards main theme of "Peace Talks"
d. Word-poster on the Church: ambiguous	Community consciousness question; directed towards main theme of "Peace Talks"
5. Movement: prayer or singing (ends previous, prepares for next)	Ends community consciousness section, prepares for reading
6. Movement: Lectio Divina	Introduces relevant Biblical text, first reading out loud

7. Movement: Quiet Reflection	Mindful consideration of the Biblical text, movement towards critical engagement with the text
a. Question: Who is the main characters in this story?	Critical consciousness question on the world of the text; characterization.
b. Question: With which character do you identify the most?	Critical consciousness question on the world of the text. Opportunity for diverse answers, but should identify female character as protagonist.
c. Question: What do you consider to be the most significant event in the story?	Critical consciousness question on the world of the text; plot.
8. Movement: Group Discussion (1)	Group takes ownership of the interpretative process; discourse leader must show restraint to not inform or teach
a. Question: What is this story about?	Critical consciousness question on the world of the text; theme.
b. Question: This story happened in the time of the life of David, about a thousand years before the life of Christ, and about three thousand years ago. What, do you think, was life like in those days?	Single sentence with minimum information given. Critical consciousness question on the world behind the text; answers should pertain to violence, precarity, patriarchy and the like.
c. Question: When people wrote this story down and read it for the first time, they were in exile. They have lost everything and had experienced trauma. Can we relate to them?	Single sentence with minimum information given. Critical consciousness question on the world behind the text; answers should be diverse.
9. Movement: With a Friendly Stranger	One-on-one listening exercise with interpersonal contact as goal; Biblical text serves as discussion document. Participants take turns. Allow enough time.
10. Movement: Group Discussion (2)	Start with quick coffee break to fight fatigue; the questions are amalgamation of community and critical consciousness questions; the goal is appropriating the text and theme to their lives and communities, and formulating goals and action plans.

a. Question: Is your community healthy?	Community consciousness question; intersection health and flourishing
b. Question: Is your country at peace?	Community consciousness question with critical consciousness background; intersection main theme “Peace” and health and flourishing
c. Question: What did the people in this story want to fight about? Was that justified?	Critical consciousness question on the world of the text: intersection main theme “Peace” and fragmented communities
d. Question: What do people in your community fight about, or want to fight about? Is that justified?	Community consciousness question: appropriating the previous question
e. Question: How do you normally solve conflict?	Community consciousness question of a personal kind; appropriating the previous two questions
f. Question: Does the story give us ideas on how to deal with conflict?	Community consciousness question; appropriating the previous three questions
g. Question: Is it appropriate for a woman to serve food?	Community consciousness question; feminist approach: unravelling traditional roles
h. Question: Is it appropriate for a woman to preach?	Community consciousness question; feminist approach: unravelling traditional roles
i. Question: Do you find anything funny in this story (something exaggerated or ironic)?	Community consciousness question; empowering the individual by engaging weapons of the weak
j. Question: How do you feel after your contact with people today?	Community consciousness question of a personal kind; intent on retaining the influence of interpersonal contact
k. Question: Can you help heal your community? How?	Community consciousness question of a personal kind; intent on engaging after the study

1. Question: With whom would you like to share a meal?	Community consciousness question of a personal and practical kind; intent on an easy goal of inclusion after the study
11. Movement: Communion	Christian sacrament with the objective to unite, inspire and provide closure.

### 5.5. Intersectionality

In many ways, this chapter serves as the delta for the different streams and torrents of thought introduced throughout this study. It synthesizes contemporary context, Biblical hermeneutics and interpretation, as well as methodological strategies into one creation. All the main conversation partners were saluted, even if their benefactions had to be condensed to a single Bible study question: the feminist insights of Levenson and Bach, the humour of Jackson, the theme of resistance in a context of trauma of Claassens, the methodological crafts of West and Ujamaa and the project of De Wit et al.

If anything could hold this intersection of extremes, it may just be an ICBS: fusing the embodied theologies of real human beings with all the above, may just be the only act that provides enough divination and dexterity to hold everything together. It may seem strangely specific that the culmination of all these diverse theological works could converge in something so simple as a Bible study; but then, that was the purpose from the beginning: to create a responsible and theologically well founded contextual space for a specific community to have an intercultural conversation.

What is true of all contextual theology is also true of this study and the ICBS it constructed: the context was gauged and appraised and appropriated, and this gives the theology a specific foundation. The context may change and probably will. The benefit of the ICBS is that it is flexible in nature; a mature facilitator could easily revise and refashion aspects of the form of the ICBS and still use the content to their own advantage. The detail of this study has been conscientiously noted, even the exact and demanding scruples of a Bible study. But that does not mean that the detail is prescriptive or dictatorial, it only means the study has been done diligently. Flexibility in use is still welcomed and supported.

Another intent of this study has been to show undisguisedly its hermeneutical preferences and motives. Few created studies within the CBS or communal Bible study pattern includes discussions on an extensive scale after the study. This study includes a reflective review of the workbook afterwards, even if on a small scale. The design plan was noted before the workbook, but this chapter reveals the intended message and motive of the study even more explicitly, because of the page by page deliberation of the workbook itself.

The workbook was created in adherence to the CBS prescription of using almost only questions, and underlining the fact that the discourse leader should not apprise or advise too much, but should all the time be aware of the value of the embodied theologies to be revealed through the Bible study. The intercultural aspect was emphasized, as described in Chapter Three of this study, not because groups of a different culture would meet each other, but because a space of respect was created in and with the Bible study for people of diverse backgrounds to meet one another in a safe and creative space.

The Abigail story delivered exactly what it had promised and maybe even more: the possibility to be transformed by reading it with other people. The story gave us conversation topics like fighting and peace, selfishness and generosity, and the extraordinary abilities of women that are still sometimes hidden. Abigail made us think and share, wonder and imagine: what would happen if I were more like her?

Multiple avenues cross paths in this study: my personal story as a female minister in a male dominated church; the context and situation of my church, both physical and metaphysical; the identity of that faith community as predominantly white in a multicultural surrounding. Then was also added: the contextually sensitive methodology of Contextual and Intercultural Bible Study, as well as the sublimely fitting story of Abigail – a woman who takes opportunity to make peace in a volatile situation, by offering prophetic words and soothing generosity. The result is an intersection of safety: an open space for discussion and listening, created for people who urgently need it.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

This study resides in the vast intersection of biblical studies, gender and health. By employing a feminist approach throughout, and choosing a Biblical text that allows a woman to occupy the lead, the field of gender studies is honoured; by using “shalom” as a synonym for flourishing, it keeps concern for the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

The power of the Old Testament narrative to provide transformative reading experiences is saluted by wielding the story of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 in an ICBS. The consciousness of the need for contextual theology is celebrated by both a rigorous description of the context of this study in chapter two, and the use of a context-respecting method, the CBS.

As the research problem statement explicated, the specific community under scrutiny is subject to a racist past and a culturally isolated present, and in dire need of constructive intercultural experiences. This study sought to make a contribution by providing an ICBS notably geared to create a safe space for intercultural contact.

The most apparent contribution of this study is a feasible workbook for an ICBS. It potentially could be used to conduct any Bible study, in a variety to different situations. But the hope remains that the goal of this study, to help believers engage in intercultural contact with one another, would inspire readers to use the Bible study workbook for exactly that purpose.

There are many practical guidelines given in Chapter Five of this study that seek to clarify to the reader that setting up and managing an ICBS need not be difficult, and can be done by any facilitator. The experience of an intercultural exchange promises to be exciting, even if it would shift participants’ thinking. Although the discussions in this project is about the DRC, the workbook is generic, so that believers from any congregation and denomination may find it useful. The hope is that any congregation or organization would use it to have “peace talks”.

This study also provided possible complementary avenues of further study. As explained already in the demarcation (see Chapter 1.8.), this study holds much potential for the gathering of empirical data especially considering the contribution of the ordinary reader to reception theology. It would be particularly satisfying to construct a group to physically do the Bible study, and regard the results, like in the work of Charlene Van der Walt in *Toward a Communal Reading of 2 Samuel 13: Ideology and Power within the Intercultural Bible Reading Process* (2014). Apart from the cultural theory of Hofstede, or the conversation analysis that Van der Walt deployed to show the power dynamics in a group, one could even use the integral theory of Ken Wilber, as suggested by Dion Forster (see Chapter 3.2.1), to analyse empirical data. It is clear that the contribution of intercultural hermeneutics has only begun, and much work may yet be done, to mine what this field of study has to offer.

Other topics that could move from a spark to a flame, derived from this study, are discussed in the following paragraphs. The first would be regarding the DRC, ecumenism and cultural isolation. The work of Van Wyngaard (see Chapter 2.3.1.c) has shown that whiteness and white privilege needs rigorous academic study, to help members of that grouping engage critically as well as constructively with their situatedness. The DRC may gain much from such academic discussion, since the topics unity and reconciliation will be on church agendas for a long time still. But there is no doubt that this field of study may still yield fruitful results for anyone residing in a multicultural community or country, and that this is a topic with global reach, worthy of pursuit. Also in Chapter 2.3.1 of this study, it became clear that missional thinking is a theologically sound and responsible way for the church to engage with ideas about diversity and inclusivity. Missional thinking is an established field of study with many opportunities to pursue.

Regarding the methodology of this study, CBS offers multiple routes for further study, and many biblical texts may yet be married with this method to yield valuable Bible studies. Also, as already mentioned, apart from the fallows for studies that intercultural hermeneutics offer, the work of Martha Nussbaum offers multiple possibilities to bridge political philosophy and theology, regarding themes like good political emotions, patriotism and populism. Nussbaum also contributes towards the thinking about transformative reading, and her work could assist in verbalising the links between the arts and theology (see Chapter 3.4.2.), even better so in the future.

This study employed a feminist lens, but a variety of approaches could be employed to read the same Biblical text, 1 Samuel 25, with a myriad of possible outcomes. An interesting by-product of the work of Melissa Jackson, is a new appreciation of the humorous and comedic narratives, or mere moments, in the Bible (see Chapter 4.1.2.), and further study could be well worth exploring particularly given the socio-political such a reading may have.

Finally, Brueggeman's distinction between salvation theology on the one hand, and the theological need to manage and celebrate on the other hand (see Chapter 4.2.3.), would make an interesting theory to test, maybe even empirically, on congregations in various social settings. While congregations in poverty and precarity certainly deserves liberation theology, it could be interesting to measure whether a shift to good management and celebration (which also includes serving the poor) could help congregations, who live in abundance, in their theologies. The links between food and inclusion, food and generosity, and food and the agency of women, provide some themes that may help interpreters to continue to work toward a world where the goals of liberation theology had (finally) been realized.

This study has proposed an ICBS as one method of many possible, for a fragmented community to have "peace talks". The hope is that it could be a conversation starter; that 1 Samuel 25 could help people connect with one another, to glean the advantages of intercultural contact and transformative reading.

## **7. Appendixes**

### **7.1. Word Poster 1: South Africa (Positive)**

### **7.2. Word Poster 2: South Africa (Negative)**

### **7.3. Word Poster 3: Women**

### **7.4. Word Poster 4: The Church**

**hope truth reconciliation inspiration united born-frees forgiveness rainbow nation**

Let us live  
and strive for  
freedom in  
South Africa  
our land

- Shishanyama**
- Sandton Square**
- Table Mountain**
- Boerewors**
- Wildekus**
- Kirstenbosch**
- Naval Hill**
- Chakalaka**
- Klein Karoo**
- Union Buildings**

**1994**

**MADIBA**



Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika  
Malophakamiso  
phondo lwayo Yizwa  
imithanda zho yethu  
Nkosi sikelela Thina  
lwosapolwayo  
Morena boloka  
sechaba sahesu O  
fediswa dintwa le ma  
tswenye ho O se  
boloke O se boloke  
Se chaba sa hesu Se  
chaba sa South Africa  
South Africa Uit die  
blou van onse hemel  
uit die diepte van ons  
see Oor ons ewige  
gebergte waar die  
kranse antwoord gee  
Sounds the call to  
come together and  
united we shall stand

1,5, million crime incidents in 2016/2017



STATE CAPTURE CORRUPTION NKANDLA GUPTA'S WHISTLE BLOWERS  
NEPOTISM BULLYING FAKE NEWS GANGS DRUGS FIREARMS FARM MURDERS

MARIKANA

Education Health Treasury Agriculture Politics  
Justice Early Childhood Development  
Arts&Culture Fishery National Parks Civility

- \*domestic violence
- \*birth control
- \*child care
- \*maternity leave
- \*family planning
- \*single parent family



blessee

# 6<sup>th</sup> sense

daughter mother

Sugar and Spice



and Everthing Nice



wife

girl

widow

# 09 August 1956

friend grandmother niece colleague

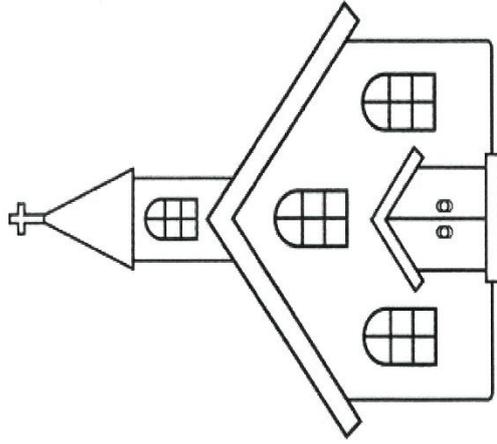
*Place is in the kitchen*

aunt sister

More than 50% of female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner

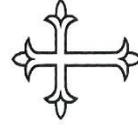
*keep quiet and cover your head*

ZCC Methodist Catholic Reformed Anglican Charismatic Uniting Presbyterian Lutheran



bishop censure confirmation  
pulpit communion vestry priest  
ministry baptism verger  
worship reverend sacraments

develop care generosity tithes uplift love share give



# 86% of South Africans

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