

**A RE-READING OF 2 KINGS 5: IN SEARCH OF A REDEMPTIVE  
MASCULINITY**

**BY**

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**2014**

## **DECLARATION**

As required by University regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that this work has not been presented at any other University or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal, (Pietermaritzburg Campus) and that, unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text, it is my original work.

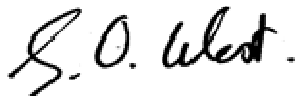


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**2014**

As candidate's supervisor I hereby approve this thesis for submission.



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**PROFESSOR GERALD OAKLEY WEST**

**2014**

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**This thesis is in loving memory of**

**My two Grandmothers:**

**Maria Magdalena Beukes and Wilhelmina Rosina Titus**

**“Julle lewensverhale is my inspirasie en motivering!”**

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## ABSTRACT

The social constructs of “being a man”, often informed by various domains such as culture, religion and even the mass media, have contributed to conflicting views of how men perceive their masculinity and their relationship with women, resulting in many life-denying experiences for women. However, although society and culture play dominating roles in regard to what it means to “be a man”, they do not construct a unified *habitus*. In other words, although society and culture influence perceptions of maleness, these are not without their contradictions: not all men view their masculinity in the same way and masculinity can and does change. The present research was conducted within an African-feminist framework and demonstrates how 2 Kings 5 offered potential resources for redemptive masculinities, applicable to male and female, both in the Biblical text and in the South African context.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BMR      Bureau Market Research

CBS      Contextual Bible Study

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **A RE-READING OF 2 KINGS 5: IN SEARCH OF A REDEMPITIVE MASCULINITY**

#### **1.1 Introduction and Motivation of Study**

One of the most powerful and influential books in the world is the Bible. Within Biblical scholarship it has become important to interpret the Bible in new ways: interpreting it with an awareness of both the theological implications of the Biblical text and the social location of the community within which the text is read (Anderson 2003:24).

Within the African context, the Bible is considered a community book and its message is addressed to both women and men who together form the community of the people of God and who together must form the community of interpretation (Oduyoye 1997:78). My Honours project, last year, was based on a deconstructive, literary analysis of 2 Kings 5 whereby I demonstrated how a particular female character was marginalized in the text. I discussed how marginality induces in women a state of vulnerability, positioning them for exploitation in various ways. The deconstructive reading of the text uncovered how the doubly marginalized slave girl in the story resisted adopting an identity that would leave her disempowered (Beukes 2012:15).

The same text was read with women in my local community using Contextual Bible Studies and an analysis of the data clearly demonstrates the empowering, liberating and life-giving potential of the Biblical text, read in this way. Furthermore and very significantly, my engagement with the women in my community made me realize that women seek not only transformation of themselves, but of their relationships, their cultures and their societies, including their churches. This has led me to the current research in which I focus on aspects of masculinity and on how cultural, societal, and theological conceptions of “being a man” relate to the construction and transformation of a community.

The social constructs of “being a man”, often informed by various domains such as culture, religion and even the mass media, have contributed to conflicting views of how men perceive their masculinity and their relationship with women, resulting in many life-denying experiences of women. Gerald West argues that masculinity is part of patriarchy and as such is interwoven

with many African cultures, impacting on both women and men (West 2010:193). However, West calls attention to the fact that although society and culture play dominating roles in regard to what it means to “be a man”, they do not construct a unified *habitus*.<sup>1</sup> In other words, although society and culture influence perceptions of maleness, these are not without their contradictions: not all men view their masculinity in the same way and masculinity can and does change.

## 1.2 Literature Review

One of the most influential scholars in the studies of masculinities, referred to by many others (including Biblical scholars) is the Australian sociologist Bob Connell. Connell, in one of his books called *Masculinities*, (1995) develops the idea of different masculinities and shows that there is a masculinity that is hegemonic. In other words, there are different masculinities and one that is more dominant than other masculinities. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinities do not only dominate other masculinities but also prescribe the cultural images of what it means to be a man (2001:7). Cited in Morrell, a South African author on masculinities, he states that, although men have oppressed women, some men are in their turn dominated and subordinated by other men. Being a man bestows power, but not all men share equally in this power (2001:7). This seems to suggest that a man’s social status or his location impacts on his masculinity. Robert Morrell (2001) picks up on this idea in his book, *Changing Men in Southern Africa* and discusses how the social, political and economic conditions during the apartheid years have contributed to the shaping of masculinities and how class and race, still today, impact on how men view themselves.

Central to Connell’s and Morrell’s arguments is recognition that not all men are the same. Class for example may play a role. A man who enjoys a good social and economic status may have a different understanding of what it means to be a man from a man with a lesser status. How this, and related analysis impacts on women and men in a particular South African community will be explored in this dissertation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Habitus* refers to what humans or social subjects acquire during their socialization. (See Bourdieu in West 2010: 195)

Within Biblical scholarship, specifically African Biblical scholarship, masculinities is still a developing area of study. Stephen D. Moore and David J. A. Clines are two renowned and influential Biblical scholars who have written about the subject. Clines in his book, *Interested Parties. The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, has devoted a chapter, called: “David the Man: The Construction of Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible”, to an exploration of three questions pertaining to masculinity.<sup>2</sup> In examining the masculinity of David, using these questions, he points out similarities and differences between masculinities in the modern world and the David story and, like Connell, he shows that the Biblical character David incorporates conflicting masculinities. Some of these features are of a more dominant kind, and remain still influential in contemporary society (1995:231). Furthermore, he also argues that social pressures impact on and contribute to the shaping of masculinities (1995:215), a point demonstrated by Morrell with reference to men in the South African context.

Clines presents valid arguments but does not locate his study of masculinity within a specific contemporary community, though he makes sweeping reference to the western society. Locating one’s study within a specific contemporary community helps to root one’s observations in the reality of the ordinary people of that community. I will return to this point after discussing another author, Stephen D. Moore.

Moore is co-editor (with Janice Capel Anderson) of *New Testament Masculinities*, a book that contains contributions by various authors such as Clines, Moore and Colleen Conway, and that provides information pertinent to the study of masculinity. Moore and Anderson (2003:69) illustrate in their chapter called: “Matthew and Masculinity” the complexity and diverse approaches to the subject and discuss the multiple masculinities displayed by cultures. They particularly mention that masculinity overlaps or is interwoven with categories of difference, such as differences in socio-economic status, race and kinship. The Greco-Roman is described as a world that comprised persons of a high social standing such as rulers, the heads of elite households and powerful patrons (2003:69) while at the other extreme there were those “who fall into a receptacle category... labeled *unmen*” and consisting of women, slaves, “effeminate” males and eunuchs (2003:69). Moore argues that masculinity in Matthew is perceived in terms of male

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<sup>2</sup> For further reading see Clines, 1995:212.

kinship. Chapters one and two of Matthew, according to Moore, destabilize fixed valuations of literal fatherhood and patriarchal propagation and promote or opt for a spiritual and fictive kinship, thereby opening the way for an alternative model of masculinity (2003:75).

Moore and Anderson's chapter provides important insights. Like them I use analysis which regards masculinity as being interwoven with categories of difference such as socio-economic status, race and kinship (2003:69). However the idea of a fictive kinship which provides an alternative masculinity requires some reflection. One could argue that such a masculinity adjoins some form of "spiritualized" masculinity which is almost similar to the understanding that men who repent will become transformed men. Repentance is important, but becomes problematic if it becomes an escape from dealing with and confronting such realities as dominance, assertiveness, status and general misconceptions concerning manhood.

Both Clines and Moore (and the literature they use) present arguments that are pertinent to this research. Both draw on socio-historical and literary analyses, the two methods I use in my work. Moore's demonstration of an alternative masculinity, within a text that at the same time presents a hegemonic masculinity, indicates the profitability of re-reading a Biblical text and exploring its different dimensions and narrative gaps in order to penetrate into its contending meanings. However, while he and other Biblical scholars employ a variety of methodological approaches that reveal the complex and multifaceted construction of masculinity in Biblical literature, they do not consider the role that contemporary readers may play in such interpretive practices.

Socially engaged African Biblical scholars have argued that African Biblical scholarship or studies should not be carried out through, or settled by academia alone. This is because all discourses in a community, whether public or private, will affect the meaning of the text. African Biblical scholars should therefore engage with the interpretations of ordinary Africans and their realities (West 2010:29). In fact, African Women's theology is a contextual theology that emerged from the recognition that a theology was needed that is rooted in the realities of African people in general and African women in particular.

### 1.3 The Designated Text: 2 Kings 5

2 Kings 5 is the story of Naaman, an Aramean who is miraculously healed of leprosy. Cheryl Strimple and Ovidiu Creanga (2010) demonstrate in a chapter called: '*And His Skin Returned like a Skin of a Little Boy*': *Masculinity, Disability and the Healing of Naaman*, how the text can be read in the context of disability. They reason that masculinity, like disability, is a contested concept, and Naaman's story uses "disability" to manipulate male identity in order to show and give emphasis to a version of normative Israelite masculinity which maintains or conforms to Deuteronomistic ideas (2010:110-111). In other words, Strimple and Creanga call attention to consider how disabled men (in the Bible) performed masculinity in relation to contested established norms and standards of masculinity (2010:112).

Another Biblical scholar, Cheryl Barbara Anderson, read 2 Kings 5 from an African American perspective in the context of HIV/AIDS. Anderson mentions that Naaman had to cross five different boundaries in order to be healed: age, class, gender, nationality and religion (2003:31). Hence, as Naaman discovered, healing cannot happen unless traditional and long-established boundaries of gender and class are ignored and the voices of those we have labeled as "different/other" are heard (2003:32).

Strimple, Creanga and Anderson's arguments are valuable and contribute to my own reading of 2 Kings 5 in the context of masculinity. However, although their reading and a careful reading of the narrative shows that Naaman is the main character of the story and is considered the main character, present throughout the text, every scene results from the words of a young girl. There is little detail about her in the biblical text and though her appearance is short and her action limited, it is the words of the girl that move the commander to visit the prophet and be healed of his leprosy. What is more, she seems to be responsible for Naaman maintaining his dignified and honorable status as a man, or possibly she is responsible for his transformation into another kind of "male". The text appears to have the potential to address issues pertaining to masculinity. The ideo-theoretical framework used to frame this research - African Women's theology - advocates "the inclusiveness of both female and male in a quest for whole-making and social transformation" (Ackerman 2009:93). Therefore, I read 2 Kings 5 again, but instead of concentrating on women as in my Honours project, my focus shift to aspects of masculinity.

The present research examines whether and in what sense an African-feminist reading of 2 Kings 5 offers potential resources for redemptive masculinities, applicable to male and female, both in the Biblical text and in the South African context. In my view, men need to be redeemed, and to unite with women in the pursuit of social transformation. The search for a masculinity that is redemptive should be an inclusive one.

By examining whether an African feminist reading of 2 Kings 5 offers potential resources for a redemptive masculinity, both in terms of an analysis of the text in its world and in terms of contemporary South African male and female readers, three sub-questions need to be asked.

Firstly, what are the literary and socio-historical resources in 2 Kings 5 for an exploration of alternative masculinities? Secondly, how do ordinary readers, both men and women, appropriate the text for alternative masculinities? Thirdly, what is the capacity of the Biblical text to impact on and transform the dominant socially constructed relationships between men and women as well as between men and men in contemporary South African society? These questions not only encourage and give essence to the research, but will help to accomplish its overall aim, namely to demonstrate that the Bible can be a resource for social transformation and offer new and more inclusive interpretations.

#### **1.4 Research Methods**

The methodological approach of the research is both textual and empirical (see below). Data was compiled from books, electronic databases, journal articles, internet search engine, and from the empirical research conducted in the community. As mentioned above, the Bible in the African context is regarded as a community book with its message being addressed to both women and men who together must form the community of interpretation (Oduyoye 1997:78). Hence, to ensure Biblical interpretations that enhance life and promote the well-being of the whole community, one has to engage with the contemporary South African context and the Biblical text and bring the two into dialogue. This is what African Biblical scholarship is about.

African Biblical scholarship operates within a tri-polar approach. The three key components of African Biblical interpretation are the African context, the Biblical text and the act of appropriation through which they are linked (West 2010:21). African Biblical scholarship

recognizes and correlates with Anderson's above-mentioned statement that the meaning of any Biblical text is influenced by the context of the reader and the reader's ideological and theological lenses of appropriation. This engagement with the reality of the context or the reality of the reader's world is a distinctive feature of the tri-polar approach.

South Africa has a long history of colonialism and apartheid. This year the country celebrates twenty years of political liberation. The role played by religion during apartheid was evident. Many responses to apartheid were based on religious discourses that challenged and confronted apartheid, reaching a prominent moment with the emergence of the Kairos document (Rasool 2002:2). But these responses also point to the fact that South Africa was, and still is by and large, a religious society. Crucial to my perspective is that religion plays a pivotal role in the construction and maintenance of masculinities.

I come from a coloured community<sup>3</sup> in Cape Town, a community that is predominantly Christian and characterized by many socio-economic problems such as alcohol abuse, high rates of unemployment, crime and violence. The Bible specifically plays a vital role in the life of the people in my community and is regarded as a sacred book and the highest authority. How people make sense of their daily lives and how they interpret their living conditions and relationships is often informed and determined by what is written in the Bible.

But the Bible is not alone in determining and influencing how people view their lives and their relationships. Society and the socio-economic and political milieu also have an impact on how women and men understand and see themselves in relation to one another. Thus, the study includes an analysis of the socio-economic conditions of a contemporary community of faith.

#### **1.4.1 Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology**

Being aware of the vital role the Bible plays in the lives and the socialization of women and men in my context (a coloured community in Cape Town), I am convinced that 2 Kings 5 has potentially valuable insights, even liberating dimensions, that may open possibilities for transformation in the lives of women and men. African Women's theology provides the theoretical framework for such a potentially empowering reading.

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<sup>3</sup> I present a more analytical description of my local community in chapter 3.

African Women's theology is a theology of liberation that seeks to free both men and women from all forms of dehumanization so that they may live together in community as partners of equal standing (Okure 1997:77). According to Teresa Okure the message of the Bible is not about gender but about life and the relationship of human beings with God and with one another and with creation (Okure 1997:78). Hence, African Women's theology as the overarching framework and its communal character show the pursuit of finding or deconstructing and reconstructing of masculinities is a collective attempt. African Women's theology includes women and men, the educated and the uneducated, and the rich and the poor, in its search for new inclusive meanings and life-affirming interpretations of Biblical texts. It embraces the dedicated work of both women and men who study and interpret the scriptures (Okure 1997:77). Although Okure argues for, what scholars such as Sarojini Nadar and Isabel Phiri, call a "communal or relational" theology (Nadar and Phiri 2010:98), the notion of a communal identity in relation to women must be treated with some caution in view of women's long history of subordination. The quest for community and finding a masculinity that is redemptive must not be at the expense of women, since African Women's theology seeks the obliteration of all forms of oppression against women through a critique of the social and religious dimensions both in African culture and religion (Phiri 2004:20). This brings me to the methodology to be applied to the proposed research.

Against the backdrop of the literature review and of current debates about masculinities, and within the theoretical framework, I undertake a deconstructive literary analysis of 2 Kings 5. African Women's theology as an African feminist theology approaches the Biblical text with an attitude or hermeneutic of suspicion (West 2010:26). A hermeneutic of suspicion, according to Schüssler Fiorenza invites the reader/ "to examine Biblical texts and traditions as one would investigate a scene where a crime had been committed; carefully tracing and identifying the inklings and imprints in the text in order to prevent further hurt and violations" (1993:11). My literary analysis opens up avenues for socio-historical analysis into the socio-historical context of the text, in order to identify possible continuities between men in the ancient world and men in contemporary society. Such an analysis assist in clarifying how men in ancient Israel understood their masculinity, how they lived as social beings and in what ways their social struggles and

self-interests are expressed, directly or circuitously, in the Biblical text (Draper1991:242). I used published sources to expand on my masculinity-based social analysis.

After analyzing the Biblical text as well as scholarly works on 2 Kings 5 in as far as these relate to the issue of masculinity, I continued to the community and use the Contextual Bible Study methodology to do empirical research within my local community. The Contextual Bible Study (CBS), its format and the questions posed was shaped by the exegetical work outlined above. The aim of the CBS on the whole is to see how ordinary readers appropriate the text for alternative masculinities. Whatever insights the participants expressed were recorded on newspaper print and my own observations of for example occurrences in plenary session, was also written down in my notebook as well.

In addition, my community-based research accessed resources which helped in providing a comprehensive description of the social contexts of the participants, on the basis of a community profile obtained from the social services in my local community. This analysis also contributed to the constructing and organizing of the CBS.

A volunteer, indicated by one of the social workers in the community, assist me to make a random selection of fifteen men from different socio-economic backgrounds who constituted one of the CBS groups. I have also selected a male church member who invited fifteen other male churchgoers to constitute the second Bible study group. The reason I planned to conduct Bible study with a group of males from the community and another group from the church (but also from the same community) was that church members may read the Bible in different ways from men in the wider community. In addition I wanted to make sure that participants are representative of different walks of life and of different socio-economic classes. I also, used a third group, read the text with a group of women to evaluate how women appropriate 2 Kings 5 for alternative masculinities. The results were compared to the men's findings. These women constitute some of the women who attended the Contextual Bible studies last year as part of my Honours project. All the participants were fully informed of the nature of the research and were required to sign a consent form before participating in the Bible studies.

After the Contextual Bible Studies, I critically reflect on the responses of the participants, focusing in particular on the categories and concepts of masculinity studies and theories in order to analyze the data. Masculinity theories question assumptions about the concept of masculinity and how these assumptions have an effect upon men. For example, from a positivist perspective, being a man or the state of being a member of the male sex is signified by the male anatomy. In other words, anatomy is proof of being a man and, aggression, reason, a need for control, competitiveness and emotional caginess are thought to be “natural” attributes for a man (Alderson 1998:1). On the other hand, social constructivist theories of masculinities recognize that gender is attained through and by people and their environment/context. In other words, a social constructionist approach perceives that each society assumes that “given” or ascribed attributes are fixed, although they differ across cultures and between individuals. The postmodern theory continues to strengthen a social constructivist stance that breaks away of any given fixed categories of sex and gender disintegrate altogether and are replaced by “floating signifiers” (Alderson 1998:1). Floating signifiers give no credence to “a sexual identity”: “masculine” or “feminine” characteristics stereotypically assigned to sex or gender. The present research resembles aspects of these masculinity theories.

After paying attention to how participants have appropriated the text, their insights are compared to masculinity analyses. In addition, I reflect on whether the Biblical text has had an impact on the dominant socially constructed relationships between, on the one hand, men and women and between, on the other hand, men and men in contemporary South African society. Finally I gather the various strands of the dissertation in order to assess whether the research objectives have been met to indicate limitations encountered and to make proposals for further research.

### **1.5 Structure of the Dissertation**

The dissertation consists of six chapters. In the first chapter I have introduced the topic and explained the motivation and background of the study as well as the key questions to be considered. African Women’s theology is discussed as the theoretical framework for approaching the research problem. In chapter 2 I present, within the theoretical framework, a deconstructive literary analysis of 2 Kings 5 whereby the literary analysis opens up avenues for a socio-historical analysis of the context of Naaman narrative, in order to identify possible

continuities between men in the ancient world and men in contemporary society. I use published sources to expand on my masculinity-based social analysis.

After analyzing the Biblical text as well as scholarly works on 2 Kings 5 in as far as these relate to the issue of masculinity, I move on to the community and explained the Contextual Bible Study methodology in chapter 3, followed by an analysis of the context in which the research is located. The chapter provides a comprehensive description of the social contexts of the participants on the basis of a community profile, obtained from the social services in my local community, and of some relevant statistical analyses of the South African context. The analysis of my community and the exegetical work outlined in chapter 2 has contributed to the construction and organization of the CBS.

Chapter 4 continues focusing on the community and demonstrates how I used the Contextual Bible Study methodology to do empirical research within my local community. The chapter describes the preliminary preparation of the CBS and introduces the participants. The aim of the CBS on the whole was to see how ordinary readers would appropriate the text in relation to alternative masculinities. Whatever insights the participants expressed were recorded on newspaper print and my own observations of, for example, occurrences in plenary session were written down in my notebook. All the participants were fully informed of the nature of the research and were required to sign a consent form before participating in the Bible studies.

After the Contextual Bible Studies I present in chapter 5 my critical reflections on the responses of the participants, focusing in particular on the categories and concepts of masculinity studies in order to analyze the data. Attention is given to how men (and women) have appropriated the text and their insights are compared and contrasted, or judged on their connections, with scholarly writings on the subject. In addition, I consider whether the Biblical text has had an impact on the dominant socially constructed relationships between, on the one hand, men and women and, on the other hand, men and men in a contemporary South African society.

Lastly, I bring the thesis to completion by summarizing the outcome of the research and by assessing whether the research objectives have been met. The chapter also indicates limitations encountered and identifies and suggests proposals for further research.

In the next chapter I will analyze and engage with the Biblical text.

## CHAPTER 2

### DECONSTRUCTIVE-LITERARY ANALYSIS OF 2 KINGS 5

#### 2.1 Introduction

Mark Powell (2009:44) states that as the Bible is written literature, all methods for studying it could be called “literary approaches”. A literary approach to the Bible has become one of the effective ways to generate and interpret new knowledge from biblical texts. Applying narrative tools and reading the text closely has helped readers to become conscious of and explore the gaps and omissions that exist within the text (Olson 2010:19), providing meaningful insights into its reading and understanding. This is one of the strengths of a literary or close reading of the biblical text: it focuses our attention on the text, reading it as text without relying on historical information and without concern for the redaction history of the text. Meaning, in other words, can be generated by treating the text in its final form.

In what follows, I will attempt a deconstructive literary analysis of 2 Kings 5 within an African women’s framework. My aim is to explore the possibility of finding redemptive masculinities in the biblical text. Gary A. Phillips says “deconstruction takes up the challenge and responsibility of identifying signs (or traces) of the “other” that break through the biblical text and encourage destabilizing and trembling” (1994:287). Thus, it is reading against the grain, unmasking inconsistencies in texts presumed to have a stable meaning (Olsen 2010:15).

While examining the plot, characters, setting, etc., with particular attention to characterization, I will also employ socio-historical tools which take account of the fact that texts are products of *inter alia* social and economic powers. According to Jonathan Draper, a social and economic analysis helps “to recreate the real world in which and by which the text was produced” (Draper in Petzer 1991:242) and as mentioned before, such an analysis will assist in elucidating how men in Ancient Israel understood their masculinity and lived as social beings. Therefore, I will examine three masculinities in relation to 2 Kings 5. The analysis commences, and contributes, to the overall discussion in the forthcoming chapter/s on how in the world of, or behind, the text masculinities were constructed, and to what extent they influenced current shaping of

masculinities, and whether there are connections or possibly continuities between the world of the text for example 2 Kings 5 and contemporary society.

Before I start the analysis of 2 Kings 5 I will give a short description of the historical setting of the text as a means of locating the 2 Kings 5 story within its historical context and also literary context. The literary analysis follows, with special attention to characterization.

## **2.2 Locating 2 Kings 5 in its Historical and Literary Context**

Most scholars seem to agree that 2 Kings 5 within its historical context forms part of the Deuteronomist History. Strimple and Creanga (2010) see the Elisha cycle as unrelated to the DH,<sup>4</sup> yet they observe that the Elisha cycle contains Deuteronomic formulas (see 2 Kings 1:18 and 2 Kings 3:1-3). “It shows considerable Deuteronomistic reworking in the placement of the three victories over Aram and the repeating of Jehu’s revolt, and certain ideas and aspects of language in the Naaman story resonate with themes in Deuteronomy and by extension reinforces the theological worldview of the Deuteronomist” (Strimple and Creanga 2010:116).

2 Kings 5 within its literary context forms part of the Elijah and Elisha sagas (heroic tales), in which the prophets are noticeably meant to be the heroes of the story and, characteristically, are presented as prototypes of all the biblical prophets as rival figures to the kings (Collins 1993:131). The story of Naaman and his healing however stands out against the larger cycle of stories of which it is part (Cohn 1983:172). The length and complexity of the unit stand in contrast to the one-dimensional traditions that precede and follow (4:38-41, 42-44, 6:1-7) (Long 1991:69). According to Robert Cohn “the distinctiveness of 2 Kings 5, in both form and content, suggests that it merits analysis as an independent story” (1983:172). While stories in chapter 4 and 6 describe how simple miracles met the material needs of Elisha’s followers, the story of Naaman’s healing in chapter 5 presses beyond a mere miracle performed. 2 Kings 5 takes place against the background of war between Aram and Israel and the story presents international horizons, dramatic power and characterization of powerful and influential persons (Long 1991:69). It is a text filled with male characters and it affirms David Clines’ observation that the

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<sup>4</sup> Strimple and Creanga draws on the ideas of Martin Noth who considers the Elijah-Elisha cycle as a post-Deuteronomistic addition. For further reading see Noth, M. 1981. *The Deuteronomistic History*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.

Hebrew Bible is a male text. A close examination will reveal where masculinity is inscribed, where masculinity is discernible and how the distinctive characteristics of masculinity are expressed (2010:54). 2 Kings 5 is therefore an ideal text to explore masculinity in the Near Eastern world.

### **2.3 Deconstructive-Literary Analysis of 2 Kings 5**

Reading deconstructively is a reading process introduced and promoted by the French literary scholar Jacques Derrida. A deconstructionist approach requires a careful and detailed studying of a text, highlighting and paying attention to internal complexity and the gaps and omission that may be filled in with a variety of different meanings, many of which may be conflicting and opposing (Olsen 2010:19). In other words, it is reading against the grain, teasing out those details of a text that uphold a “stable” meaning and commitments that are in fundamental conflict with meaning that may appear at the surface of the text. According to Derrida (cited in Olsen) a deconstructive reading “attempts to make non-seen accessible to sight”. It takes up the challenge and responsibility of identifying gaps in a biblical narrative and signs of the “other” (as previously mentioned) that break through the biblical text and encourage destabilizing and trembling (Phillips 1994:287). Moreover, a deconstructionist approach potentially shows how authoritative texts are used by the powerful to silence or oppress the less powerful (Olsen 2010:20). Therefore, justice is an important value and element of deconstructive readings.

A deconstructive-literary analysis is essentially a literary analysis with a deconstructive stance. A literary analysis entails the study of plot, character, setting, point of view, narrator and rhetoric. The reason for focusing on the characterization of the main characters is that character represents one of the most accessible ways into the text for readers in faith communities (Nadar 2003:95). While “character” is narratologically analyzed, readers reconstruct characters too and in ways that may differ from how the narrator interprets them, or how their dialogue or the other characters define them (Nadar 2003:96). This is particularly true in terms of point of view,<sup>5</sup> but more often characterization is accomplished by showing readers what characters are like rather than by describing them. Although this is the main focus of my literary analysis, the other

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<sup>5</sup> Point of view is another literary element and is closely bound to the narrator. The narrator will guide the reader and mediate perspective on the characters and the events of the story (Longman 1987:87)

elements such as plot, narrator, setting and rhetoric will also be referred to as I continue with the literary analysis. In the next section a concise explanation of what constitutes characterization is followed by the analysis of the characters in the 2 Kings 5 story.

### **2.3.1 Characterization**

Characterization is the method by which the author portrays the characters and presents them to the reader (Powell 2009:50). The narrative describes the character's actions, speech, thoughts or beliefs and may even show how a particular character is understood from the point of view of other characters in the story (Powell 2009:50). Important is also the connection between the characters. I focus on character not only because it is an important element of narrative analysis, but also because it is an accessible way for ordinary readers (who form part of my research project) to access the text, for readers often relate to characters in a story. This is clearly explained by Powell (2009:50) when he says that readers relate to characters by experiencing feelings of empathy or admiration, sympathy or antipathy towards them. Empathy, for example, implies that the reader identifies with, or even admires the character in a rational manner and makes him/her experience the story from the character's point of view. In the case of sympathy, the reader may or may not identify with the character, but will feel favorably disposed towards it, whereas antipathy may imply that the reader have negative feelings about the character.

Plot and character are closely related and through studying a character one discerns qualities of the plot. According to Tremper Longman (1987:94), plot refers to the interconnectedness of events, characters and setting. It denotes the progression of the narrative and how events in the various scenes move the story along. Setting is also related to plot and character. Setting provides the physical locality of action and sometimes adds atmosphere or sets the tone and at other times supports the message of a particular passage (Longman 1987:94). Point of view, which is another literary device, is closely related to the narrator<sup>6</sup> who guides the reader in the understanding and interpretation of the characters and actions. But the narrator may also influence and control the reader through his point of view (Longman 1987:87). All these

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<sup>6</sup> The narrator is the one who tells the story.

elements contribute to the interpretation of 2 Kings 5. As I proceed with the character analysis, I will refer to these interwoven elements.

In my (re)construction of the characters I will consider the following steps and questions. The first step is a comparison; looking at the characters' situation in the outset and at the end of the text in order to determine what transformation takes place and why is this transformation desired/desirable. Secondly, the inventory of the actors/characters: are they subject or object? Thirdly, studying the journey of the actors: when does he/she act for the first time and in what situation? The fourth step is to establish the relation between subjects i.e. is there characters who help or who obstruct each other, and to make a "map" of the narrative lines according to hierarchy. This is the main task of the narrative analysis of the text (De Wit 2010:133).

### **2.3.2 Character Analysis**

The information that we get about characters is usually provided by the narrator in the text. All information about a character is important, whether it is plentiful or minimal (Nadar 2003:104). The characters about whom we get plenty information (from the narrator as well as from the other characters) are called round or fully-fledged characters, whereas the characters that are not described in detail are called flat characters (Nadar 2003:107). However, reading against the grain of the narrative can recover or reclaim the significance of the allegedly flat character/s.

#### **2.3.2.1 Characterization of Naaman**

The narrative begins with Naaman's powerful position. He is a commander in the Syrian army and described as a "great man" (*'iš gādol*) (v1). He is respected and important "in the sight of" his king. He is a "valiant soldier" (v1) and portrays a military masculinity that surely is shaped by a manly discipline of orders given and orders obeyed. Naaman is a man of honor and belongs to the highest ranks in the social system. He also is rich. The text does not tell us how Naaman has accumulated his wealth.<sup>7</sup> Possibly the king was its source. Verses 9 and 22 indicate that in monetary terms Naaman is well-off and the economic class to which he belongs contributes to his powerful position. Gold and silver, mentioned in verses 9 and 22, symbolize surplus and the

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<sup>7</sup> Tribute was a mode of extraction and during war treasures were often accumulated from temples and palaces by means of plundering (Boer 2008:41, in *The Sacred Economy*).

fact that he owns slaves or servants attests further to his financial well-being. Thus, Naaman's social standing, his work and his economic wealth render him very powerful. Besides he is a non-Israelite, belonging to the ethnic group that increasingly dominates Israel politically (Creanga 2010:119). Naaman however has leprosy.

From the way the text presents Aram it appears that lepers were not segregated as they were in other countries, for example Israel. According to Jozeph Melkman and S. David Sperling (2008) the term *zara'at* (leprosy) is a non-specific, all-inclusive term, referring to different diseases affecting the skin, including many non-contagious types. However, the same word *zara'at* is used in Leviticus (see below), where leprosy is analyzed in detail. Therefore there is no reason to presume that Naaman's leprosy was not contagious or dangerous. Does this mean that Naaman is a mighty leprous warrior? The use of "but" in the phrase "but he had leprosy" (v1), clearly indicates that there is some tension between being a warrior and being a leper (*gibbôr hayil*).

Melkman and Sperling mentions that medical texts of the ancient Near East tended to ascribe disease to black magic or the sufferer's transgressions, whereas in Biblical texts, whenever an explanation is given for an attack of *zara'at*, it is in connection with "a challenge to a duly instituted authority" (2008:1). For example, Miriam opposes the supremacy of Moses, and Gehazi disobeys the prophet Elisha.

Strimple and Creanga illustrate how priestly and Deuteronomic texts present the body as playing a decisive role in marking out the symbolic system and boundaries of culture. Deuteronomy "constructs as normal the idea of belonging to Yhwh's covenant community where health and ability are signs of loyalty to Yhwh" (2010:118). Those who have leprosy are not allowed to enter a village. They live outside the camp (Lev. 13:46), because their infected bodies make them ritually unclean (Isaak 2006:1264). According to Leviticus 14 only priests can declare a person healed of leprosy and clean and fit to re-enter society. So, "uncleanness" has not only social implications, but also religious ones. For a leper to be allowed back "inside", restored to the community, the priest has to inspect him from head to toe (Wilson 2011:3). Lepers were thus considered as the "unclean" of society. Reaching out to them would entail overstepping the social and religious boundaries and getting "dirty". The fact that Naaman has leprosy, frames his healing (additionally) in terms of Israelite cultic purity: he becomes "clean" (Strimple and

Creanga 2010:114). Naaman's masculinity is therefore, according to Israelite standards of purity, questioned right from the beginning of the story.

The narrator suddenly shifts from a character who fulfills a high position to one who exists at the very bottom of society. We are immediately introduced to the young girl from Israel.

### 2.3.2.2 Characterization of the Israelite Slave Girl

We are not told who she is, except that she was captured by the Syrian army and brought to serve in Syria (v2). We don't learn how old she is and commentaries and scholars refer to her as a "young slave girl"<sup>8</sup> or "little servant girl" (Brueggemann 2001:53). In Hebrew *na'ārāh q'tannāh* refers to someone who is in her teenage years and *q'tannāh* means "little" or "young", so she could be seen as a "little young girl" and she is contrasted with Naaman who is a great man (*'iš gādol*) but whose flesh will after his healing turn into that of a "little young boy" (v14). The NIV which I use for the analysis refers to her as "a young girl from Israel". She is nameless, indicating that she is probably not important enough to be given a name, and therefore must remain anonymous (Kim 2005:53). As a slave she is considered Naaman's property. Possibly Naaman took her for economic purposes, considering that slaves were a means of extraction of surplus value (Boer 2008:32). We are not told how long she has been in the household of Naaman, what her life was like in Syria and whether she is a victim of physical or sexual abuse or not. Women captured in war were made available for sex to conquering soldiers (George in Creanga 2010:72). Therefore, according to Walter Brueggemann, she might have been used and abused before she was employed as a slave to Naaman's wife (2001:53). As a young slave girl she is vulnerable, occupying the lowest position in society and at risk of being exploited in various ways.

Her vulnerability and disempowerment are displayed not only through characterization, but also through setting. She is placed in the house of Naaman, after being dislocated from her country Israel (v2) to Syria and from her parental home to Naaman's house. Since "home" is related to gender roles (see below), she moved from her home where she may have known safety and stability to Naaman's house where she possibly felt partly "at home" in this home, for she

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<sup>8</sup> "Young woman" or "young man" is in certain cases used to indicate slaves/servants. (See Strimple and Creanga 2010:118).

reaches out to Naaman as she might have to her father. On other hand, Naaman's house could have been characterized by instability and insecurity. These are some of the gaps in the story, unstated information that is of importance for an enlightening understanding of 2 Kings 5. She appears only in the first part of the story and thereafter is not mentioned again.

The contrasts between the young girl and Naaman – “great man” versus “little girl” (NIV), “Armean commander” versus “Israelite captive”, “master” versus “servant” – accentuate not only the anonymity of the girl (Kim 2005:52) and the extent to which she is marginalized by the powerful men around her (the men in the text as well as the men who interpret the text historically), but also point to the hegemonic masculinity in the story.

### **2.3.2.3 Characterization of Naaman's Wife**

The wife of Naaman is another female character who is without a name. Little is said about her, but she is important in terms of the plot. No additional information is given about her relationship with her husband except that she is the wife of the commander. In contrast to the young slave girl, she is part of the privileged or elite class and the young girl is in her service. She listens and responds when the young girl communicates information about the prophet in Samaria. We are told that she shares the information with Naaman and we do not hear about her again.

So far, in terms of plot and characterization, the nameless characters have, by means of speech, contributed to the progression of events. The narrator tells us that the young slave-girl informs Naaman's wife about the prophet in Samaria who could cure him of his leprosy (v3). The words of the slave girl and the reaction of Naaman's wife set the sequence of events in motion. The directness of: “she said...” (v3) and “Naaman went...” (v4) give the young slave-girl (and her mistress) real presence. Interesting also is the sequence of “contacts”, and who relates or interacts with whom, and through whom, from below (the slave-girl) to the top (Naaman), with intermediaries. So, Naaman and the young little girl are indirectly connected through Naaman's wife.

As regards the setting, up to here all action occurs in Naaman's house (v2). The house in the ancient Near East is the space where the man is most directly linked to his family of which he

was considered the head of the family. It is also a gendered space. Jerome Neyrey (2003:44) gives an instructive background to the Greco-Roman world,<sup>9</sup> and writes that the ancients “perceived the cosmos as totally gender-divided; male and female worlds, in which certain places, roles, tasks and objects were assigned to each gender”. In other words, gender-specific space related to gender-specific responsibilities and roles. Neyrey says that males in the ancient world would either be engaged in farming or civil affairs, in other words “outside” or “public” occupations, whereas females had three tasks, all associated with “indoors” or “private” space, namely bearing children, preparing food and producing clothing” (2003:44). Females did play no role in formal public spaces and were regarded highly when they were passive and obedient. On the other hand, males were expected to behave boldly and in masculine ways in public and to defend their families’ interests (2003:51). These gender stereotypes in terms of space and location were a redoubtable construct. (Neyrey 2003:53).

Similar to Neyrey is Carol Meyers’s observation about the family households during the early monarchy and the position of women. Meyers also locates the women in the house and states that in the pre-monarchic period, women enjoyed a status that was related more to the influence and wealth of their household than to their gender. And, “although women in agrarian households had some authority, with the emergence of a state system female status and household authority reduced and meant the increasing subordination of women. With permanent male-headed government offices established, public offices were represented exclusively by men” (1998:269).

#### **2.3.2.4 Characterization of the King of Aram**

In the next scene a new setting and the king of Aram are introduced. Naaman reports the slave girl’s statement to the king of Aram (possibly Ben-Haddad). The king announces that he will send Naaman with a letter of foreword to the king of Israel (Kim 2005:53). The “chain of command” is evident: the girl speaks to her “mistress”, the mistress speaks to her “lord”, and her “lord” speaks to his “lord”. Thus the narrator signals a hierarchal pattern of where “power” is

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<sup>9</sup> Neyrey explains the ancient world with reference to the Greco-Roman world. However, the ancient Near East was an all-encompassing context and interacted with the Greco-Roman, Egyptian and Mesopotamian world and was influenced by these cultures through migrations, trade, material culture, etc. ([www.biblicalarchaeology.org/.../ancient.../ancient-near-eastern](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/.../ancient.../ancient-near-eastern) world) [Accessed 25 October 2013]

located. Strimple and Creanga (2010) observe the use of the words “servant” and “standing before” in 2 Kings 5 and how they reveal the structure of male power and hegemony (2010:118). Furthermore, the preposition “before” promotes the same theme: Naaman is a great man “before” his master (v1), the young slave-girl stands “before” her mistress(v2) and Naaman will eventually stand “before” the prophet (v15). These verses establish hierarchal social relationships (2010:119). In addition, a royal letter in the ancient world demonstrates not only the concern of a king, but it also legitimizes a king’s claim to power and serves to appease any insubordinate impulses (Chapman 2004:25). The reference to surplus wealth (v5) serves as an extravagant gift which is part of the culture of the Ancient East, but also part of male posturing.<sup>10</sup> Later Gehazi will ask for only a small portion of the gift. Therefore, the letter to the king of Israel is meant not only to intimidate this king, but the letter also represents the king of Aram as foregrounding his authority over the king of Israel.

As the scene closes with Naaman going to the land of Israel, the narrator reverts to the public symbols of the commander’s status: he carries with him riches and fine clothing which serve as both gifts and a way of displaying his masculinity, presumably to reward and honor the one whom he seeks (v5, 15) (Long 1991:70).

### **2.3.2.5 Characterization of the King of Israel**

Verse 7 introduces the king of Israel who according to scholars may have been Jehoram/Joram. The king of Israel, on receiving the letter, tears his robe - a sign of distress and anxiousness, because of the apparently troubled political situation between Aram and Israel (v7) (Kim 2005:53) and also an expression of male power dynamics.<sup>11</sup> The king interprets the request

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<sup>10</sup> Ten talents of silver were about 750 pounds (340 kilograms) of silver and six thousand shekels of gold was about 150 pounds (70 kilograms) of gold (Motom 2006:448).

<sup>11</sup> Israel suffered many attacks under the Arameans. 1 Kings 20:34 records how Ben-hadad (king of Aram) did not carry out his agreement with former king of Israel, Ahab. Therefore Ahab formed a coalition with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah-Jerusalem against the Arameans to take from the Arameans the city of Ramoth Gilead to the east of Jordan (1 Kings 22:1-4). Ahab died during this war (1 Kings 22:34-37), but this did not put an end to the war against the Arameans. According to Van Zyl in *Israel and Her Neighbors* warfare continued with varying success for both parties (2 Kings 6:8-7, 7:20) and the antagonism lasted for eight years after the death of Ahab when king Jehoram of Israel was still fighting in Ramoth against the Arameans under the leadership of Hazael, the successor of Ben-hadad (2 Kings 8:7-15, 2 Kings 9:14-15) (1979:144-145). During this period the state of Israel was involved in a bitter struggle and circumstances never really improved and Jehoram was finally seriously wounded while fighting the Arameans at Ramoth. While recovering in Jezreel, Jehu revolted against him and killed him just outside Jezreel (2 Kings 9:15, 24) (1979:145).

written in the letter (v6) as some kind of threat and his response signals not only anxiety, but also the tension that exists within hegemonic masculinities. Somehow, the young slave-girl's words become entangled in an "egoistic inhibition of state politics" and male power dynamics (Long 1991:70) (see footnote below). According to Kim (2005:53), the utterance of the king in verse 7 "Am I God, to kill and to make alive..." reflects most likely the narrator's way of mocking the powerlessness of royal authority, but it is at the same time a rhetorical question indicating that he does not have the power to heal. In narrative terms, tension is growing – will Naaman receive his cure?

#### **2.3.2.6 Characterization of Elisha**

In verse 8 Elisha initiates the action (v8) and instructs the king of Israel to send Naaman to him. Again we find direct speech which enlivens the plot and, what is more, direct speech enables direct engagement of the reader with the character, allowing him to form an impression of the character. The king of Israel does not make clear whether he sees Elisha as superior or subordinate to him. Elisha on the other hand is presented as rebuking or ordering the king, rather than the reverse, perhaps indicating a "superior" status. The story does not tell us how he has become aware of Naaman's situation. We may possibly assume that a servant of the Israelite king did communicate the circumstances to the prophet, just like the young slave girl informed her mistress (v3). As in the Elijah-Elisha sagas, Elisha is the major character in the drama, fully in control of the situation, with miraculous power, determined to make a point through his actions: there is indeed a prophet in Israel (v8) (Long 1991:78).

Naaman arrives at Elisha's house (v9) with chariots and horses, symbols of his social status, of his warriorship, and accentuating his masculinity, associated with wealth and privilege (Wainright 2009:109). While Naaman performs his masculinity in public, Elisha does the same, but in a different way by not appearing in public: he does not come out to meet Naaman and remains inside where traditionally the women are located. He sends a messenger to Naaman with instructions what to do. Thus far, "messengers" have gone from low to high status, suggesting, perhaps the narrator is deconstructing monarchic masculinities. Elisha's conduct – not meeting Naaman on his arrival – not only smacks of insult or rudeness, but is a challenge to the commander's masculinity and honor. From a literary perspective, Elisha remaining inside

intensifies the tension in the story and is another complication, especially in terms of male status and shame, since power is linked to the themes of honor and shame.

The narrative pace slows down in verse 11 where the reader gets a glimpse of the thoughts and emotions of Naaman (Long 1991:71). Naaman reacts with anger and frustration (v11) and the infinitive *yāsô*, “come out”, which forms part of the verbal construction, reinforces the tension. Hence the verbal form “surely come out” (v11). This indicates not only tension in narrative terms, but the narrative constructs as “normal” the idea of a man to “come out” and to be “outside”. Naaman may well have expected Elisha to come outside to greet him, because he arrives at Elisha’s house majestically with his horses and chariots, demonstrating his superior status (v9). Thus, Naaman’s performance epitomizes the hegemonic form of masculinity and represents the “ideal” man of the world of the text, whereas Elisha, by not coming out, performs his masculinity in a different and definitely not the “normal” way. Hereby, Elisha’s “performance” adds tension to the narrative and also reflects the tension and anxiety that exist in the kind of masculinity that is not of the “ideal” kind but that exhibits the vulnerability of masculinity, deconstructing the world of the story. Naaman also may have expected direct healing because of his status of great man (Kim 2005:55). Instead he is instructed to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River (v10). Repeated descriptions (v 11a, 12b) of Naaman’s thoughts and emotions (v 11b, 12a) as well as the literary structure and the word order in verses 11 – 12a emphasize Naaman’s state of mind and the chiasmic arrangement of the scene of departure demonstrates the intensification of his feelings (Long 1991:83). After declaring the superiority of Aram’s rivers – implying the superiority of Aram over Israel, Naaman takes steps to end his journey (v12b) (Kim 2005:54).

### **2.3.2.7 Characterization of Naaman’s Nameless Servants**

To get the plot back on track, the servants of Naaman intervene between Naaman and Elisha (v13). Like the young slave-girl, they remain nameless and the narrator gives no information about them, apart from the fact that they are Naaman’s servants and accompanied him to meet the prophet in Israel. They are subjected to labour duties (v23) and, like the young slave-girl,<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> According to Tim Bulkeley (2005), in most biblical texts there are no different words for “slave” and “servant”. Therefore, slavery in the biblical world was not sharply distinguished from other forms of servitude or bondage.

they fulfilled some economic function and may have led subjugated lives. Slaves of institutions such as the temple and the palace were mostly prisoners of war<sup>13</sup> and used in building projects and other duties alongside local laborers (Bulkeley 2005:1, see also 1Kings 9:21). Household servants often led more comfortable lives, but they remained servants. The relationship between them and Naaman seems rather “confidential”. They address him as “father” and dare to speak to him (v13) which makes one wonder what kind of relationship they shared with their master. From a gender perspective, they were men, implying that they had some power, but it was not the same kind of power as other male characters in the story enjoyed. However, they do share a form of power with the female characters. Foucault (1978:102) asserts that power is a “multiple field of force-relations”, in other words that power is located in different ways. Anderson (2008:115) confirms Foucault’s viewpoint and says that even within patriarchy or kyriarchy, any women or subordinate has power, for power may mean control and authority, but it may mean also the ability to resist or disguised power. If these male slaves were to some extent “like women” (see footnote 10), it implies they had power, possibly in certain limited areas of life.

Although Naaman’s powerful status may also have provided his servants with some form of “status”, they were still Naaman’s property, men belonging to another man and they had no choice but to submit to Naaman’s hegemony. Their anonymity in the text can be interpreted as the narrator’s way of “feminizing” them, positioning them at a level with the women in the story who are nameless, unimportant, and who are there merely to fulfill a function in the plot. At the same time this may indicate that men too suffer enslavement and possible exploitation. While in most patriarchal narratives “feminizing” would be seen as negative, here in this case something else is happening. One could cautiously say that the servants’ “feminization” is further displayed in relation to the other men in the story. They refer to Naaman as “father” (as mentioned above) which says something about their relationship with their master. They were not warriors, did not participate in battle, etc., but like the women they were part of the master’s household and their work included domestic duties and fulfilling economic purposes. In contrast to the supremacy of the other male characters and to the military profile of Naaman, these men live in the sphere of “woman”. Being like a “woman” or being feminized meant they had no social prestige or

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<sup>13</sup> During war times it was also common of men to be raped by other men, and this was not merely a form of sexually torture, but rather a way to humiliate and shame them in the worst possible way by casting them in a female role (Creanga 2010:179).

“power” (Haddox 2010:4). Therefore, from a socio-literary perspective they were men, subjected to hegemonic masculinity, feminized and thus marginalized.

But these men plead with their master’s male chauvinism and gently and politely convince Naaman to listen to Elisha (Long 1991:72). They take it upon themselves to speak out, to differ with their master, providing Naaman with good advice, urging him to listen to them, his male servants (v13) as he had previously listened to the advice of the young girl. And Naaman is cured. In other words, Naaman becomes the recipient of the liberative/salvific process that started “in the house”, the woman’s place, and that continues “outside”, thereby offering a possible alternative masculinity in which it is all right for men to collaborate with, and depend on advice from, those in the margins. Such men accept advice from women and men who are different and do not confine themselves to a hegemonic masculinity in order to achieve wholeness and restoration. In so doing they reconstruct masculinity.

The words “he went down” and “he dipped himself” (v14), suggest that Naaman not only lowered himself into the Jordan, but also in submission to the prophet of Israel (Kim 2005:55). Naaman is cured. The characterization of the commander restored in the flesh and restored to his proper and important public role, is incredible (Brueggemann 2001:55). His leprous skin which was broken and unattractive is now healed. Naaman’s character goes from being a leper to being a restored “little boy”. The phrase “like a little young boy”, echoes back to the “little young girl” who actuated the outcome. Robert Cohn validates this statement by saying: “small young boy” forms an *inclusio* with *na’ārāh q’tannāh* (small young girl)” (1983:177). However, “like a young boy” may also reflect the narrator in the act of subtly “feminizing” Naaman.

When Naaman’s flesh is restored (v14), he returns to Elisha and images of material substance reappear (he and all his company). Naaman once again stands before the prophet. This time there is no distant formality but it is a face-to-face dialogue (Long 1991:72) instead of a monologue or a public statement by one character. Naaman is literally standing “before the face of” (v15) Elisha. According to Long, the writer suggests that Naaman’s “turn about” as regards Elisha, has in it a hint of “turning to Elisha’s God” (1991:72). The face-to-face dialogue and encounter may also suggest an alternative masculinity. Men collaborating with other men (and

women), and entering into dialogue with them - aspects that are vital for finding a masculinity that is redemptive.

The preposition “before” in verse 15 highlights the climax: Naaman stands before Elisha (Strimple and Creanga 2010:120). The wish of the little young slave-girl that her master will “stand before” the prophet (v3) is fulfilled. The verb “stand” has throughout the whole narrative contributed to the structuring of male power. Naaman “stood” at the door (v9) of Elisha’s house and Naaman, as a powerful man, expected Elisha to “stand” before him. But, as stated earlier, Elisha asserts his male power by not appearing or “standing” before Naaman (Strimple and Creanga 2010:120). By not coming out and “standing” before Naaman, and speaking to him from “inside”, Naaman is perhaps not being a “proper” man. Proper men “stand”.

However, Naaman quickly falls back into his habits as a commander dealing with practical matters. The person responsible for his healing must receive his payment. Paying<sup>14</sup> well for his healing would ensure that Naaman retains the high ground, upholding his “manly” dignity. From a cultural perspective Elisha’s refusal of Naaman’s gift can almost be interpreted as offensive, while, theologically, encounter and healing are not a matter of business. Healing (salvation) cannot be bought (and perhaps Elisha did not want to be “bought” either), but is a gift. When Elisha refuses payment, Naaman asks for some Israelite soil to offer sacrifice to the God, yet, he will continue to serve his Aramean master as though a devotee to the Armean god, Rimmon (Long 1991:73).<sup>15</sup> Thus, Naaman seeks in advance forgiveness for these inevitable actions. Interestingly, Elisha refuses the gift but accepts the religious compromise offered by Naaman. This undermines a purely religious reading of the story suggesting that the story is about something more than religion.

Whether Elisha’s character offers an alternative masculinity is uncertain. The kings of his lifetime are described in negative ways by the narrator, and, in 2 Kings 5, Elisha is presented as a prophet who prefers to sit at home (v8), performing miracles in the name of the silent Yaweh (Bergen in Coote 1992:136). And, where his predecessor Elijah claimed that “there is a God in

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<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew word used here can be translated as “blessing”, but it is clear that it also refers to material gifts.

<sup>15</sup> There are different interpretations of Elisha’s refusal of Naaman’s “gift” and most scholars reckon Elisha’s refusal indicates that he attributes the healing to Yahweh and not to himself (Cohn 1983:179).

Israel”, Elisha seems to replace this with: “he will know there is a prophet in Israel” (v8) (Bergen 1992:136).

### 2.3.2.8 Characterization of Gehazi

The following verses 19 – 27 are about Gehazi, Elisha’s servant. He is the main character in the final scenes which takes place outside, as if normal male interaction is resumed. The opening encounter is framed by the word *shalom* (vv19 and 21). Elisha sends Naaman off “in peace” and Naaman asks if all is “in peace”. But *shalom* is broken by Gehazi which raises the question what kind of “peace” it is that Elisha has established? Is it a peace that is radically different from the normal hierarchal patterns? Looking at Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza’s notion of kyriarchy that describes the multiple systems of domination and subordination as an “interlocking pyramid” involving gender, power, class, age, education and other factors, one recognizes how systems of inequality work together to harm everyone touched by them (1998:87).

Gehazi is the only servant in the story who has a name. The narrator obviously wants to convey a message about this servant of Elisha. Gehazi’s secret retrieval of Naaman’s gift is not an unimportant event (O’Brien 1996:448). However, I believe that the episode of Gehazi and his actions accentuates other dimensions of the story such as economics and can allow the story to ramify in completely different directions. From the narrator’s perspective, Gehazi is the servant who ran after Naaman, telling him that Elisha sent him to ask for a “talent of silver and two sets of clothing” for two young men from the entourage of the prophets.<sup>16</sup> When Elisha confronts Gehazi with this behavior, Gehazi is struck down with leprosy. Strimple and Creanga (2010) explain that Elisha’s punishment reduces Gehazi to a lower than the now “clean” and faithful Naaman. Elisha’s question in verse 26 judges his actions in light of Deuteronomistic themes and resonates with the language of 1 Samuel 8:14 – 17 where Samuel warns the people about having a king.<sup>17</sup> (2010:121). For that reason, I am in accord with what Strimple and Creanga who argue that Gehazi’s “crime is not one of simple greed contrasting him now with the gracious Naaman;

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<sup>16</sup> The “expendables” during the times of Elisha gathered into groups called: “sons of the prophets” in search for sustenance and refuge. The Elisha stories in particular focus on the practical concerns of a marginal community for food, shelter, tools and healing (Todd 1992:8).

<sup>17</sup> “He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and yourselves will become his slaves.” (1 Sam. 8:14-17, NIV Bible)

his crime consists of the crime of kings who appropriate goods from the people, become wealthy and revere other gods and for that reason get punished severely” (2010:121). The word “clinging” (v27) accentuates the seriousness of Gehazi’s crime; Gehazi did not cling to Yahweh, but to the behavior of wealthy kings (2010:121).

This small section on Gehazi signals various other aspects that asks to be explored such as ethnicity (v20) and, as mentioned above economics, but as my focus is on masculinity, I will now move out of the literary analysis into further socio-historical analysis of 2 Kings 5 from the perspective of masculinity.

## **2.4 A Socio-historical Analysis: Masculinity in 2 Kings 5**

From the literary analysis it is recognizable how masculinity in 2 Kings 5 is played through performances; being physically strong or proving one’s status through wealth and riches. Therefore three masculinities will be examined in relation to 2 Kings 5. Before I discuss these, it is important to emphasize that masculinity is a multi-faceted concept, but even when multiple masculinities are displayed as in the case in 2 Kings 5, one masculinity will dominate or is dominant and more honored. This is called hegemonic<sup>18</sup> masculinity and it promotes a particular kind of masculinity at the expense of other expressions or constructions of masculinity. As noted in the literary analysis, Creanga and Strimple draw attention to how the words “servant”, “standing before” and “master” in the Naaman story reveal the structure of male power. The narrator uses these words to define those who are included in the hegemonic hierarchy (2010:18). Hegemonic masculinity is not only hegemonic in relation to other masculinities, but in relation to gender order as a whole (Connell 1996:4). Those who have the power prescribe the norms of masculinity and determine what it means to be a man.

Continuing my engagement with the text I will indicate how the literary analysis opened up avenues for further study of the socio-historical context of the text.

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<sup>18</sup> Hegemonic derives from the Greek word *hegemon* to describe “leadership or dominance”, especially by one state or social group over others (Oxford Dictionary). The term hegemony is closely linked to masculinities and it has come to describe struggles for power, gender injustices and political leadership.

### **2.4.1 The Warrior Male**

2 Kings 5 seems to suggest that being a man is to be warrior. According to David Clines the warrior male is one of the elementary characteristics of a man in the Hebrew Bible (2010:55). Being a man is to be a fighter, skilled in warfare, and, put bluntly, capable of killing another man and dominating others physically, thereby increasing one's masculinity (Moore in Strimple and Creanga 2010:247). Naaman and the kings in 2 Kings 5 exhibit the masculinity of a warrior. The opening verse of 2 Kings 5 implies, or associates military victory with, idealized masculine virtues (v1). Cynthia Chapman (2004:25) in *The Gendered language of warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter*, speaks about a royal conception of masculinity that is primarily attributes based on strength, heroism and bravery and the battlefield was the testing ground for masculinity. Failure on battlefield is complete failure in the public performance of masculinity, because defeat or failure brought feminization. This brings us to the next characteristic of masculinity in 2 Kings 5.

### **2.4.2 Honor and Shame**

A second characteristic of masculinity discernable in the Naaman story is that a man has honor and avoids shame. It is acceptable to be violent and to kill in defense and for the protection of one's honor. The preservation of implies the avoidance of humiliation and shame. Naaman's character is shown to be that of a man who seeks to maintain his honor. He goes to Samaria to be cured of leprosy and when he wants to bestow gifts on Elisha as payment for his healing, it is not so much to be seen as generous, but rather about maintaining his honor and preventing the appearance of vulnerability, especially within a military context. His wealth and privilege add to his desire to be viewed as a man of honor and masculine power. Hospitality and generosity (Naaman's gift to Elisha) and the ability to protect one's family (Chapman 2004:25) play a role in the concept of honor.

Protecting one's family includes providing them with food and shelter and defending them from attackers (Creanga 2010:173). A king especially had to be a protector of, and provider for, his people. Chapman states this was part of his royal masculine role, similar to the responsibility of a husband towards his family. A husband for example had to provide for his wife, and an adequate provision would include at least three staple items: food, clothing and oil (Chapman 2004:30).

These three items were far and wide used in the ancient Near East. According to Chapman two Middle Assyrian laws instruct that a husband's failure to provide for the physical well being of his wife gave his wife the right to remarry.<sup>19</sup> In other words, a husband was expected by law to provide for his wife and children. Thus, the responsibility of provider and protector was an important aspect in performing masculinity in the ancient world. If a king, or any male, could not carry out these duties associated with masculinity, he began to reveal or exhibit "feminine" characteristics (Chapman 2004:25).

In other words, in the Ancient Near East, the provider and protector role played an important part in the context of masculinity.

### **2.4.3 Feminization**

The story in 2 Kings 5 introduces a third characteristic of masculinity: not to appear feminine. Men who are in positions of power are careful to present an image that coincides with the norms of hegemonic masculinity (Haddox 2010:4). Haddox adds that real men do not act like "women" and they keep away from unnecessary engagement with females except for the necessity of procreation (2010:4). In 2 Kings 5, Naaman communicates the words of the little young slave-girl to the king, but he never has direct contact with her in the text and even his encounter with his wife is never described but is an implied encounter with a life-changing outcome. The story of Naaman also gives us glimpses of male anxiety, of men fearing feminization, for example in the case of the king of Israel. He sees the letter from the king of Aram as a threat and his anxiety is linked to the possibility of being humiliated, the loss of land, failure to protect his people from harm and failure to provide for his family (Chapman 2004:48), which could all be avoided by a victorious performance on the battlefield. Masculinity therefore, in particular in the public arena, represents social, political and economic dominance.

### **2.4.4 Marginalized or Subordinated Men**

As men strive towards demonstrating or accomplishing hegemonic masculinity through their actions, there exists invariably a tension between such hegemonic masculinity and a variety of

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<sup>19</sup> See the citation of these two laws on page 30 in *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter*, by Cynthia R. Chapman.

subordinate masculinities (Haddox 2010:16). Although subordinate masculinities are excluded from the ideal hegemonic masculinity, marginalized and/or subordinated men are not lacking in bravery or in good judgment (as observed in the case of the nameless servants), nor do they necessarily lack any of the other essential characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. But what they do lack is power resulting from social, economic and political privilege (Haddox 2010:17). Masculinity in this sense can therefore be understood as a social construct conflated with economics, personal property, class, etc. Hegemonic masculinity, on the whole, signals the dominant position of a ruling class.

Although men, associated with a subordinate masculinity, are subjugated in terms of social power and prestige, they are not powerless. Any subordinate, male or female, has power; including women within patriarchy (or kyriarchy) (Anderson 2008:115). I referred to Anderson earlier who argues that power may refer to authority or control, but it can also imply the ability to resist, or disguised power. When one considers the young girl who spoke out in a way that was totally unacceptable in terms of social boundaries, her words might be interpreted as a form of resistance. According to Brueggemann the utterances of the young girl encompass her resistance to any Syrian redefinition of her as a slave girl (2001:53). She sees herself as a human being, a woman, one who has compassion for the “other”. Compassion can be considered a powerful attribute that goes beyond the power of warriors and that can lead to the greater well-being of others, including her master.

Also, the nameless servants of Naaman spoke out, unaware that they were cooperating with a female, located in the house, to get their master follow the instructions of the prophet. They acted thus as agents and demonstrated power in the whole story of Naaman’s healing. Like Naaman’s servants, I will argue later in this study, men need to speak out and engage with other men to realize the importance of changing male behavior such as dominating decision-making processes and committing physical abuse, in order to find new and redemptive ways of being a man.

A brief summary of what the deconstructive reading of 2 Kings 5 has taught us follows.

## **2.5 A Brief Reflection on the Literary Analysis**

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, characters are a crucial part of narrative and provide readers in communities with the easiest, yet vital way to access biblical texts (Nadar 2002:172). The deconstructive reading shows in terms of setting, the characters who are located and who were possibly meant to serve in the background of the story (i.e. inside the house) played important roles to the plot and sequence of events. Moreover, the spatial location of the female and male characters opened up the socio-historical analysis and the socio-historical background showed how gendered roles were assigned to space in the ancient Near East and that masculinity or hegemonic masculinity was principally performed outside while a woman's place was inside the house.

From the reading of 2 Kings 5, it is immediately obvious that Naaman is the main character of the story. He is physically present in every scene. The narrative begins by announcing his powerful position. In verses 2 and 3 Naaman's "household" is introduced and the nameless slave-girl tells Naaman's wife about the prophet in Samaria. In verses 4 – 6 Naaman is with the king of Aram who sends him to the king of Israel. The Israelite king sends Naaman on to Elisha (v8) and, after his servants of Naaman convinced him to follow Elisha's instructions, he is cured (vv 10 – 13). Verses 15 – 19 are concerned with Naaman and Elisha and the silent presence of the servants. In verse 19 Gehazi is introduced who follows Naaman and the story ends with Gehazi being leprous.

Although Naaman is considered the main character who is continuously present, every scene was the result of the words of the young slave-girl. She is mentioned only once and though it seems as though the text wants us to overlook or forget her, she is responsible for the story. Little detail is provided about her and this could be seen as a literary device aimed at persuading readers to follow the narrator's point of view. However, not all readers passively accept what is in the text (Nadar 2002:29). Although her appearance and performance may be of short duration and limited, in immediate scope, her impact on the narrative is huge. Reading against the grain shows how her presence usurps the whole text as she is responsible for the sequence of events. The words of the young girl, communicated to him by his wife, are what get the commander to go to the Israelite king (vv5-6). He, in turn, relates the statement of the young girl to the king

(v4). The luminary role of Elisha in this narrative is made possible by the courageous testimony of the young girl (Beukes 2012:12). So, she is essentially, although not physically, present in each scene. Without her testimony, Elisha would never have come into contact with the Syrian commander. What is more, she is responsible for Naaman maintaining his dignified and honorable status as a man; Naaman went from being a leper to the status of a restored man. And, she is possibly responsible for his transformation into another kind of “male”.

By acknowledging the presence and the central role of the young girl, the text is offering us a lens through which to re-read the narrative and pay attention to every single element such as characters and various dynamics concealed in the narrative.

From a religious point of view one might say that if narrative analysis is about transformation in a story, or about the development from A to Z, then the change of the “great” leprous warrior who worshipped a local god, into a “small young boy” who confesses the God of Israel, represents such a transformation. The “great” warrior expected a somewhat impressive cure fitting his great status. Instead he was asked to do something simple (to dip himself in the water). Thus even the concept “great” is deconstructed.

However, while Naaman is “redeemed”, there is no indication of “salvation” for the young girl. Her situation and that of the nameless servants does not change. From an African women’s perspective and based on the deconstructive reading of the text, it is apparent that 2 Kings 5 represents an archetype of the patriarchal world in which the Bible was written. Therefore it needs to be read with a hermeneutic of suspicion in order to discern and critique its patriarchal dimensions as well as, identify a masculinity or masculinities that are redemptive (Reinhartz 2001:22 – 23). Reinhartz states that the absence of proper names was primarily a disgraceful strategy of the powerful male elite to eradicate womankind from the canonical representation of Israel. This is evidently true, because the young slave girl and all the unnamed characters in the story function purely as a means to contribute to the narrative plot and to add detail to the portrayal of the main characters, authenticating the narrator’s point of view (Reinhartz 2001:22). 2 Kings 5 is therefore a male text, and hence to be read with a hermeneutic of suspicion.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The search for redemptive masculinities, within an African women's framework, started with a deconstructive reading of 2 Kings 5. I have demonstrated how the literary analysis opened up avenues for analyzing the socio-historical context of the text. The close-reading brought out the potential of a character, apparently confined to a hegemonic masculinity, for offering an alternative masculinity. The same potential existed in the marginalized male characters in the story. The following chapter will discuss the methodology employed in my reading of the text with men and women in my local community with the aim to explore possible connections between the ancient world and contemporary society.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY PROCESS AND CONSTRUCTING A CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

African Biblical scholarship operates within a tri-polar approach and an essential part of its work consists in engaging and dealing with realities that concern the lives of Africans outside academia, especially those who are living under challenging and demanding circumstances. The Contextual Bible study (CBS) method has the inherent ability to circuitously connect the academic world with the realities of local communities. Chapter 2 dealt with the deconstructive literary exegetical analysis of the Biblical text, which is one of the modes of interpretation in African Feminist hermeneutics (Nadar 2010:26). A deconstructive literary reading is also a reader-centred approach; indicating not only the participatory and decisive role readers take in constructing meaning from texts (Olson, 2010:19), but also the richness of reading the text as text. The text is important because it is the point of contact between the scholar and the communities.

One of CBS' commitments is to read the Bible with and from the perspective of the poor and oppressed. The poor and oppressed are those who are socially, politically, economically, or culturally marginalized and exploited (West 1993:14). They are in other words, the vulnerable members of society who suffer different forms of subjugation, and who are living lives that are characterized by inhumane realities.

The CBS is also a tool that fosters transformation and emancipation. Part of recognizing CBS as an emancipatory tool is recognizing that the “inhabited collaborative connection” between the knowledge of the poor and marginalized, and the critical capacities of socially engaged biblical scholarship which is an important part in the CBS process and a contributive factor for an emancipatory outcome. A CBS is therefore also “a series of interconnected “movements” that shape the collaborative reading process” (West 2014:11). Furthermore, great care is required in determining the construction and the content of a CBS. Both the biblical text and the context of the readers needs to be carefully analyzed. Therefore, this chapter focuses on showing how the

relationship between the literary and socio-historical analysis of the text and the analysis of the South African context contribute to the construction of my CBS. I will discuss what the CBS method entails and, thereafter, I will employ social-scientific methods to analyze the context in which my research is located, followed by a description of my own location as a biblical studies student. Next, I will discuss the formulation of the CBS questions. As I construct the CBS, I will demonstrate how I use literary categories, setting and characterization as a framework within which the text can be closely read and issues relating to power and masculinity can be explored. I also show how the context of readers influences the formulation of the questions in a CBS.

### **3.2 The Contextual Bible Study Method**

Contextual Bible Studies has its origin in the realization that, whatever dialogue is taking place outside academia, is relevant to and informs debates that are taking place in the academic world (Nadar 2003:11). During the years of legalized oppression and violence in South Africa, the Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB) initiated the reading and the study of the Bible with poor and oppressed communities to facilitate dialogue and to work for social transformation in South Africa (West 1993:87). According to Gerald West, although the ISB only began to function in 1990, the need for such a method of studying and reading the Bible has a longer history. Reading the Bible contextually was rooted in an awareness that the way in which poor, oppressed and marginalized communities read the Bible in South Africa, contributes to how God's voice is discern and understand the message God is trying to communicate to South Africa (1993:87). Today Contextual Bible Study is committed to reading the Bible within the South-African context with preference to the poor and the marginalized. Aims are to read the Bible in community, to read it critically by applying critical biblical tools, and being committed to social transformation of communities (West1993:12).

Although there is an emphasis on reading the Bible with poor communities, I believe that this does not exclude reading the Bible contextually with privileged communities. CBS is a space for dialogue which is part of the process of CBS, and studying and reading the Bible in such a way becomes an opportunity to introduce and make the poor present in privileged communities who, in turn, maybe mobilized for working with poor and marginalized communities to promote social transformation.

Having established the importance of a contextual reading of the Bible, a description of my local community follows.

### **3.3 The Context of Readers**

The Contextual Bible Study method encourages readers to read the Bible within their own context and provides a space to engage in discussion with one another, while identifying creative ways to address contemporary concerns in the light of Biblical texts (Riches 2010:3). How the reader reads the Biblical text in her or his context is closely related to her or his socio-economic, religious and cultural background. West points out that we are all, to some degree, shaped by our contexts. Our race, gender, class and culture, affect how we read the Bible (1993:13). Thus, one needs to recognize that readers' lived experiences impact not only on how they will read the Biblical text, but also on which elements of the text they will emphasize to and appropriate. This will undoubtedly result in more than one interpretation of the text. The lived experience of readers is the lens through which they read and make sense of the Bible. The literary reading together with the socio-historical input I will provide in the CBS, that I propose for my contextual reading with the men and women in my community may be helpful in finding a masculinity that is redemptive but their context plays an influential role in how they appropriate the Biblical text. In the next section I will present a short analysis of my local community.

#### **3.3.1 The Community of Macassar**

The Macassar community is located in the Helderberg district, in the Western Cape. According to the census of 2011, the Helderberg district had 229,924 inhabitants of which 40,332 resided in Macassar ([www.statssa.gov.za](http://www.statssa.gov.za) accessed 8 March 2013). Based on the presence of different religious denominations such as Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants and Pentecostal church traditions in the community, and the existence of many house-churches (and mosques) in the area, it is apparent that religion, and specifically the Bible, play a vital role in the life of the people in the Macassar community. How people make sense of their daily lives and how they interpret their living conditions and relationships are often informed and determined by what is written in the Bible.

Macassar was initially established as a colored group area during Apartheid. The inhabitants were people of mixed ancestry, some originating from Indonesia, many of them Muslims, but include these days other racial groups as well. The community profiled by the Child Welfare South Africa, Helderberg (Macassar office) describes Macassar as a mainly sub-economic area where, in some parts, one finds municipal flats, as well as decent family homes, whereas other parts are characterized by Reconstruction and Development housing (RDP) and informal settlements. This signals that these areas are inhabited by, respectively families or persons earning a middle-income wage and those earning a low-income wage.

One of the major challenges in Macassar is unemployment. Low levels of education prevent people from finding decent employment to provide for their families. According to information from the Economic and Human Development Department in Cape Town, the percentage of people living in poverty is about 25.7 % in the city of Cape Town, but in the Helderberg district it is about 36.0 %. Although one might argue that the Western Cape has far less poverty to deal with than other provinces, poverty is still wide-spread and has, according to the Western Cape Provincial Economic Review and Outlook, increased (2012:147). The review describes the number of unemployed males in the province as having grown significantly since the first quarter of 2008, in keeping with the national trend (2012:130). About 54.6 % of unemployed persons in the Western Province have an incomplete secondary education which contributes, as mentioned above, to the problem of finding good employment (2012:131). Unemployment is therefore a serious concern and partly responsible for the social break-down of the community. The Macassar community profile states that the high unemployment rate has led to many social ills such as, domestic violence, homelessness, poverty, drug and other substance abuse, and to crime, for example smuggling prohibited goods (2009:7).

This is the context in which my research is situated. I am convinced that 2 Kings 5 offers potentially valuable and meaningful insights, even with liberating dimensions, which may open possibilities for transformation in the lives of women and men in Macassar. Perceptions of how women and men should behave or should fulfill their roles are drawn from Biblical texts by the community, which are often literally interpreted and applied. “Wives, be subject to your husbands... for the husband is the head of the wife...” (Ephesians 5: 22) is one of the many

verses used to justify and rationalize oppressive behavior and actions of men (Beukes 2013:2). In chapter four I will give a description of participations in the research. They belong to the Macassar community and are essential to this study. Having considered the important role of the readers and their interpretations in the Contextual Bible Study process, I will provide a short description of my own position.

I am a South African coloured woman, born and raised in a Christian home and belonging to a working/middle-class family. I am a member of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) that stems from the Reformed tradition and I am in training to serve as a minister in my church. I am privileged in being the first in my family to have received a university education. I have grown up as a coloured woman in a country where racial differences and class impact on lives and where, to some extent, coloured people continue struggling for a “place” in the democratic South Africa. As Africans, “the shame that is attached to our racial hybridity and the negative connotations with which coloured identity is imbued” (Adhikari 2005:xii) has contributed to problems of identity, belonging, marginality and the building of community. These problems have burdened coloured people with a sense of inadequacy and of being marginalized, leading to many frustrations. My hermeneutical choices are often informed by this background as well as by my introduction to liberation theologies such as African Women’s theology. Therefore, I read 2 Kings 5 as a narrative that not only addresses issues pertaining to masculinity and issues relating to the context of my community, but I also read it in a way that will encourage individual and social transformation of both women and men and affirm the dignity of both so that they may recognize their agentive role in society and develop a sense of individual worth. My CBS is aimed at promoting and accomplishing such an agenda, an agenda which originated from the women in my community and their lived experiences. And, an agenda who is in a confirmation of the statement that “African Biblical scholarship has been driven by both ideological and theological agendas in the dialogue between biblical text and the African context, for the ideo-theological framework enables one to discover detail of the text that has gone unnoticed” (West 2013:19).

### 3.4 Constructing of a Contextual Bible Study

A Contextual Bible Study is not merely a method to read the Bible or a resource to generate knowledge and information from communities. It is first and foremost an emancipatory tool.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, and as previously mentioned, CBS constitutes a series of interconnected “movements” that give form to the collaborative reading process (West 2013:14). In other words, CBS provide an opportunity and a space in which communities can engage with issues that are not always preached about or addressed in other ways in church. It becomes a space and opportunity for ordinary readers<sup>21</sup> or Christians to “do theology”.<sup>22</sup>

Reading 2 Kings 5 within an African women’s framework, in search of a masculinity that is redemptive and transformative, I realize that it is also a text that is imbued with issues relating to ethnicity, religion, class, and even economics. However, for the CBS I chose to focus on issues relating to masculinity and power, which are anyway closely interwoven with aspects of ethnicity, religion, class, and economics. In chapter 2 I focused on literary categories such as characterization, setting and plot within an African women’s framework. According to the literary analysis the female characters were located in the house and the male characters were principally located outside. The socio-historical analysis affirmed this perception and, therefore, from a gender perspective one may argue that the text seems to suggest that masculinity in the ancient Near East was performed outside, whereas a woman’s place and role were limited to the home. This view is still to be tested in the Bible study groups.

The CBS will include the verses 1 – 19a. The following verses deal with Gehazi and because Gehazi’s character and the subplot that is his story would introduce a new dimension in the study which would require a separate CBS to specifically probe issues relating to economics, I chose not to add these verses to the CBS. However, Gehazi will form part of the overall thesis.

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<sup>20</sup> This is one of the fundamental characteristics of CBS according to my supervisor, Professor Gerald West.

<sup>21</sup> Drawing from the definition of Gerald West (2007), by ordinary readers I mean all readers who read the Bible without any training in working with the Biblical text, but specifically readers from the poor, the working class and the marginalized.

<sup>22</sup> See chapter 5, page 97 the reference to incipient theology.

### 3.4.1 The Contextual Bible Study Questions

Traditionally 2 Kings 5 is read - and perhaps even the men in my community will read the text in that way - as a religious text because it is the “Word of God”. However, if one considers Elisha’s refusal of Naaman’s gift and his acceptance of Naaman’s religious compromise (v19a), one could argue that these aspects undermine a purely religious reading of the story, suggesting that the story might really be about something else.

The CBS starts with the knowledge of the participants but includes, and as my Bible study will show, resources of biblical scholarship. The shape of my CBS is as follows.

Text: 2 Kings 5:1 – 19a

1. What is the text about? Briefly discuss in pairs, and then share with the group as a whole.
2. Who are the characters in the story and what do we know about them? Draw a picture that shows the relationship between the characters.
3. *In this Contextual Bible study we focus on questions of what it means to be “a man”. In the ancient world men would ‘perform’ their masculinity in different ways. For example, to be man was to be a warrior, skilled in warfare, capable of killing another man and dominating others physically. Dominating other men in battle was a proof of masculinity. Masculinity had to be continually demonstrated. It was acceptable to be violent and kill in defense and for the protection of your honor as a male, because to be a man meant to maintain one’s honor and to avoid being humiliated and shamed.*

*Naaman’s wealth would have been another sign of his honor and masculine power. Such wealth not only indicated a man’s ability to gather wealth, but it also proved that he could provide for his family and offer generous hospitality to other men.*

*Another key male characteristic was the protection of one’s property, including one’s family. Protecting one’s family included providing them with food and shelter and defending them from attackers. Similarly, a king had the role of being a protector and provider for his people. This was part of his royal masculine role and parallel to the role of a husband with the responsibility to protect and provide for his family. If a king or any*

*other male, could not carry out duties that were associated with masculinity, he would be seen as exhibiting “feminine” characteristics.*

Why do you think the king of Israel responds the way he does in verse 7?

4. *While men in the ancient world publicly performed their masculinity, for example on the battlefield, women in the ancient world and during the time of Jesus had to fulfill their role inside the home, cooking, cleaning, bearing children, etc.*

Re-read verses 2, 3 and 9 to 11. In what ways is Elisha like the female characters? Does this connection in the text suggest an alternative masculinity? What other features of the text make us rethink what it means to be a man?

5. Considering the response of the king of Israel (v7), how do men in our contemporary society feel and act when their position as ‘head’ and ‘provider’ of the household is threatened?
6. What are the main characteristics of ‘being a real man’ in your community and church, and what resources does this text offer for alternative forms of masculinity?
7. Are there aspects of masculinities in our contexts like the masculinities of Elisha and the servants of Naaman (v13)?
8. How could you bring about change in the dominant forms of masculinity in your church and community and how would you go about nurturing these masculinities?

The questions are an important part of the CBS process. They are meant to allow for and inspire discussion in the light of Scripture and to encourage participants to explore the text and their reactions to it (Riches 2010:4). The inventiveness of CBS lies in defining and asking the type of questions that will not only provoke discussion in an attempt to make sense of reality, but that will also help participants to focus critically on the literary and socio-historical detail of 2 Kings 5:1 – 19a. In essence, it is the tri-polar in a condensed form. Therefore, CBS needs to contain what is called ‘community conscious questions’ (questions 1, 5, 6) as well as ‘critical biblical studies knowledge’ questions (questions 2, 4, etc.).

Question 1 was designed to start conversation in the group. It is a community-conscious question that draws on the local knowledge of participants (West 1993:73). It concerns what they already know about the Naaman story or what they heard about the story in 2 Kings 5. Participants simply share their first impressions of the text through single words, comments about the characters and even personal experiences. There is no discussion or analysis at this stage and all comments are welcome and equally valid (Riches 2010:62).

Question 2 serves to slow down the reading process and to stimulate participants to do their own 'literary' close-reading of the text and consider the details. In chapter 2, I demonstrated how through characterization one became aware of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities that exist within the text. Reading about the characters and listing them are starting points for further exploration and discussion of notions of masculinity (Riches 2010:63). Having to draw a picture that illustrates how the characters relate to one another offers participants the chance to handle the narrative creatively and is meant to prompt them to think about and make associations between characters. In other words, I choose to begin with a literary 'critical' question, as this enables all to participate. This question combines critical analysis with creative representation (through the drawing). It is criticality combined with creativity.

After question 2 I offer some socio-historical background to give an idea how masculinity was performed in the ancient world. By providing this background I acknowledge the fact that literary texts are embedded with the social and economic circumstances in which they are produced (Bennet and Royle in Nadar 2003:115). One of the first complications in the 2 Kings 5 story becomes apparent when Naaman goes to the king of Israel bringing the letter of the king of Aram and the king of Israel tore his (the king of Israel's) robe.<sup>23</sup> Naaman leaves. The narrative tension increases when he gets to Elisha's house and Elisha does not come out to meet him. These complications become important in our search for a masculinity that might offer contemporary men an alternative way of "being a man". This consideration led to the formulation of question 3. Question 3 invites readers to draw on the socio-historical background, to consider the behavior of the male characters and to pick up ideas that may help them to make sense of their own experiences and answer the question.

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<sup>23</sup> See chapter 2

Question 4 is another critical-conscious question that compels readers to slow down their reading and to keep returning to the Biblical text in order to re-read it carefully, probing both the text and the gaps in the text. This process will make them pay close attention to how the tension escalates in the narrative and whether this suggests an alternative masculinity coming into play. This question offers the readers the opportunity to engage with the literary detail such as the spatial location of the characters and characterization as discussed in chapter 2, and will probe the participants' thoughts on how men understand their role and place in society. Question 4 has the potential to open these implications of the detail of the text and is design with this purpose in mind (West 2013:14). With question 5 we move back to community conscious questions.

Question 5 is formulated to help participants examine whether there are parallels between the biblical text and their own contemporary context (the tri-polar). It will make participants more aware of their personal understanding of notions of masculinity and re-think what "being a man" is about. Questions 6 and 7 are aimed at stimulating further dialogue and at the identification of those features of masculinity that may be redemptive and transformative in the 2 Kings 5 story.

The last question, question 8, is designed to invite participants to get ready for change and to identify innovative ways for implementing the conclusions they have drawn from both the text and the context, in order to promote a masculinity that is transformative for society. The praxis framework within which CBS operates is captured in the See-Judge-Act process. Drawing from the work of Gerald West (2014) the process can be explained as follows. First we look at our context, our lived realities determining what is going on (See) and an analysis of the context is brought into dialogue with the analysis with our biblical exegetical resources. Then we "Judge" our reality in the light of God's redemptive plan for humanity, and the final step in Contextual Bible Reading is to get into action (Act) where we apply and give expression to the shared knowledge obtained in the CBS in a creative and practical way. CBS is structured for change and the method requires action.

Since the creativity of CBS lies in asking questions that will motivate dialogue and engagement I was, when designing the questions (with my supervisor), aware that questions might change as I began to work with the different groups in my community. However, as the questions in a CBS

are part of the search for a liberative outcome, it is not difficult to adjust them, provided one remains within the CBS framework.

### **3.4.2 The Importance of Safety**

Although the resourcefulness of CBS lies in its ability to unlock readers' abilities and skills and to apply their insights to the text (Riches 2010:xii), participants will bring the text into dialogue with contemporary issues that concern them. These involve often distressing and life-denying realities. When participants experience the CBS as a safe space, they will spontaneously share their personal experiences and this often inspire others in the group to speak out as well. However, for this liberating process to happen, people need to feel safe. Therefore, safety is crucial and contributes to freeing and transforming lives and communities. Riches points out that true dialogue will only emerge when the importance of listening, inclusivity, trust, mutual respect and the valuing of each contribution by each participant is recognized (2010:23). These safety aspects point of the important role of the facilitator.

### **3.5 The Role of the Facilitator**

One of the vital roles of the facilitator is to create a space which encourages mutual sharing: a genuine exchange of views in a conversation that opens up new perspectives and helps participants to see themselves and their lives in new and transformative ways (Riches 2010:8). A CBS is facilitated: the facilitator reads the Bible with ordinary readers without interpreting the text for them. Instead she or he guides the group through a sequence of questions, composed in such a way that participants get to read the text in ways which enable them to hear the different voices contained in it and to discern meanings that link their own context with the Biblical text (Riches 2010:3). West summarizes the role of a facilitator by identifying the following five characteristics, essential for effectively facilitating a CBS. She or he should encourage participation of the whole group. The facilitator should manage conflict and make the group a safe space for member contributions. She or he must teach others to become facilitators. The facilitator should explain what is not clear to the participants and summarize discussions. A facilitator should enable the group to become aware of and be involved in the needs of the community. In other words, she or he helps participants to become empowered, acquire skills and contribute to their communities (1993:24).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In chapter 3 I aim to demonstrate that, no matter how innovative or liberating the concepts proposed or explored in academia are, if they are not shared within and scrutinized by a community outside the academic world, they are in danger of remaining simply techniques, untested by reality. I agree with scholars such as Pobee and Nadar (2003) who argue that scholarly study of Scripture cannot be an island unto itself if it is to be of importance and relevance to the world at large. This is particularly true for socially-engaged biblical scholars in Africa where the Bible is considered a communal book implying that socially-engaged scholars can be held accountable for addressing the hopes and fears of communities in which their research is done (2003:168).

Furthermore, I have demonstrated how the Contextual Bible Study method is an emancipatory tool that can facilitate change and contribute to reducing the distance between local communities and the academic world because, discourses happening in the context of a CBS eventually affect the scholarly work done on Biblical texts. The questions designed for the CBS were framed by the exegetical work of 2 Kings 5 in chapter 2 and the analysis of my local context. I showed how elements of the literary analysis helped in formulating the critical- conscious questions, while the community- conscious questions were prompted by the context of my local community. The Contextual Bible Study method is therefore not only about working with local communities or about mere activism, but involves careful study of text and context and how the two engage with one another in finding meaning. It involves the Tri-polar, creatively applied in a practicable and life-giving way.

In chapter 4 I will discuss the implementation of the CBS process, presented in chapter 3, in my local community and I will explore how ordinary readers read the Biblical text, and to what extent the critical biblical tools I have employed in the analysis of the text can contribute to a masculinity that is redemptive.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FACILITATING AND ASSESSMENT OF CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDIES IN LOCAL COMMUNITY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter 2 presents a literary analysis of 2 Kings 5:1 – 19a with special attention given to characterization on the basis of the argument that characterization offers readers in faith communities one of the more accessible, but critical ways of engaging with the text (Nadar 2003:95). The deconstructive literary exegetical analysis of the Biblical text which is one of the modes of interpretation in African feminist hermeneutics (Nadar 2010:26), is also a reader-centered approach and points to the participatory and important role played by ordinary readers when they construct meaning from texts (Olson, 2010:19).

Attentive to the role of ordinary readers, in chapter 3 I discussed the importance of dealing with issues that touch the lives of these readers, specifically in the case of South Africans outside the academy, and who live in challenging and oppressive circumstances. Furthermore, I explained that Contextual Bible Study is an emancipatory tool, designed for work with marginalized and poor communities. However, the design of such a CBS is very important. I emphasized that it applies the tri-polar approach which is the framework within which African Biblical scholarship operates.

Following these guidelines I conducted the Bible studies in my community. In chapter four I will show how I undertook the Bible studies, taking careful account of points made in chapter 3, “while holding in creative tension the beliefs and the values held by the community” (Nadar 2003:231). This is the longest chapter of my thesis, because in it I analyze, compare and contrast the responses of the groups who participated in the Contextual Bible Studies. (All the sessions were in Afrikaans and have, for the purpose of the thesis, been translated into English). To facilitate this process I will first consider two key categories of masculinity which undergird the analysis of the Bible studies. A discussion of the procedure of the Bible studies and the analysis follow.

## 4.2 Hegemonic and Subordinate Masculinities

In this chapter I examine how the men and women in my community appropriate the Biblical text and how they respond to different ways of reading the text. I also want to determine how the characters in 2 Kings 5:1 – 19a become accessible to contemporary readers during Contextual Bible Studies and whether through characterization and spatial location readers are able to recognize the hegemonic and subordinate masculinities in the story. In chapter 3 I explained how the CBS questions were designed to make readers discover that the literary detail, discussed in chapter 2, in its references to characterization and spatial location of the personae, contributes to identifying masculinities enclosed in the text. A last question to be considered is: did the deconstructive reading of 2 Kings 5:1 – 19a, and the resources offered to the participants, allowed them to take part in such a deconstructive reading, destabilize the hegemonic masculinity and offer potential for finding a masculinity that is redemptive.

Hegemonic and subordinate masculinities are important concepts in the present analysis. They provide a way to realize the extent to which a re-reading of a Biblical text can show that a hegemonic masculinity is a fluid realism and a socially created construct (Anderson 2004:3). Recognizing that masculinities are changeable, presents us with the opportunity to challenge traditional masculinity (and gender) to become reconstructed and transformed. Since I will be using these concepts in my analysis of the CBS, I will now give a concise explanation of how I understand these terms.

In chapter 2 I stated that “hegemonic”, derived from the Greek *hegemon*, means “leadership or dominance” especially by one state or social group over others (Oxford Dictionary). One of the most influential scholars in the studies of masculinities, referred to by many others (including Biblical scholars), is the Australian sociologist B.W. Connell. Connell, in one of her books called *Masculinities* (1995), develops the idea of different masculinities and shows that there is a masculinity that is hegemonic. In other words, there are different masculinities, but one is more dominant than others. Connell argues that hegemonic masculinities do not only dominate other masculinities but also prescribe cultural images of what it means to be a man (2001:7). Cited in Morrell, a South African author on masculinities, Connell states that, although men have oppressed women, some men are in their turn dominated and subordinated by other men. Being

a man bestows power, but not all men share equally in this power (2001:7). Subordinate masculinities refer to men who are excluded from the typical hegemonic masculinity, because they lack the power ensuing from social, economic and political privileges (Haddox 2010:17). Significant in the analysis of Connell and Morrell is the observation that not all men are the same. Class for example, and even a man's biography, genes, culture and education are all factors that help determine how men perceive their masculinity. A man who enjoys a good social and economic status may have a different understanding of what it means to be male than a man with a lesser status. This turned out to be an area of contestation in the CBS that I conducted.

### **4.3 The Preparation of the Bible Studies**

Bible studies are not new to members of my local church or of Christian faith communities in general. They are an accepted way in which Christians interact with the Bible. However, working with my faith community, I was concerned about how participants would respond to a Contextual Bible Study which employs a rather different method from the Bible studies that they are used to (Beukes 2012:15). Contextual Bible Studies are much more participatory and conversational. They are about reading the Bible in a communal, critical way and trying to understand what it says to our context today (West 1993:1).

In preparation for the Contextual Bible Studies I contacted the leadership of my local church and the local social services of the community, Child Welfare South Africa, Helderberg, Macassar Office, to discuss where and when the Bible studies could take place. Doing community-based work was an opportunity to offer the resources that I have obtained during my theological studies to my community. Therefore, the preparation process did not only involve research, but was also concerned with investing in my community. During the preparation phase I met and corresponded frequently with the coordinators of the groups to explain the purpose of the CBS, clarify any possible confusion and establish an appropriate date, time and place to have the Bible studies. The participants comprised three groups of male participants and one group of female participants. The first group (Group A) consisted of twelve coloured men from Macassar. They had no tertiary education, were unmarried or divorced, unemployed or retired, and one man was physically disabled. Group B was formed by twelve other coloured men, who previously lived

in the community but have relocated to an area just outside Macassar. Most of the men in this group (Group B) had a tertiary education. Their occupations ranged from boilermakers and technicians to policemen, etc. The third group of men (Group C) was not from my local community. The person who planned this last meeting had withheld background information about the group and told me only that they were a Bible-study group and were interested in the topic of my research. They were seven white males and one coloured male (who planned the meeting). They met every Monday evening in the apartment of the group leader for Bible study. It was challenging to conduct a CBS with this group as the CBS method did not correspond with their preferred way of reading and studying the Bible. The last group, Group D consisted of twelve coloured women from the community. These were mostly women who had participated in my Honours project and they were part of the motivation for the current research. They wanted me to do a CBS with the men in the community. I included them in the research in order to promote a process of ongoing engagement between men and women in the pursuit of social transformation. It was important to give voice to the experiences of men in as far as these related to the lived realities of women.

All the persons I approached, trying to find an appropriate venue for the studies, were accommodating, especially when I explained the purpose of the study and how it might benefit men and women in the community. The owner of the local gym in Macassar made his gym available for the Bible studies, but the men preferred the hall of my local church (though none of them was a member of the church), because most of them lived within walking distance from the hall. The ideal was to find a space in which the participants would be comfortable, perhaps away from the sordid appearance that characterizes the community, but the groups A, B and C preferred the church hall, except the seven males of group C who met in the flat of the leader of their Bible-study group.

Planning these Bible studies and engaging with communities in this way made me aware of the responsibility of a socially engaged Biblical scholar towards the community. A socially engaged scholar must bear in mind the possible outcomes of such community-based work. The Child Welfare South Africa, Helderberg (Macassar office), was my point of reference in case any

participant in the CBS would need professional counseling and advice on how to deal with his or her particular situation.

Another important aspect of conducting Bible studies in the community was the ethical handling of the research. Each participant was informed beforehand by the group organizers about the purpose of the study and about ways in which their contributions would be recorded and used. Participation in the CBS was voluntarily and participants could withdraw any time they wanted to. All the participants signed the 'informed consent' form after I explained that no information would be used without their consent and that their identities would not appear in the written thesis. All the participants were keen to sign the form and made it known that they felt privileged to be part of the process and contribute to my studies. With most of the CBS sessions over, participants requested more meetings such as these to talk about the realities they are facing. They felt that reading the Bible in this way is not only liberating but empowers and motivates them to take action and become active participants in the transformation of the community.<sup>24</sup>

#### **4.4 The Participants**

Three groups of male participants and one group of female participants, as indicated above, participated in the Contextual Bible Studies which were held during the month of August. Group C was not initially identified as participating in the CBS but, as it happened, requested to take part (see below).

The first group of males (Group A) was from Macassar and we met on Sunday 4 August 2013 in the afternoon. They were not an established group, but they were familiar with each other and they all knew the volunteer of the Macassar community who organized their Bible study group. According to the evaluation form, they were between the ages of 20 and 60 years.<sup>25</sup> Only one of the participants in Group A had finished secondary school and no one had enjoyed tertiary education. This was to some extent a challenge because some felt not at ease with having to do the writing in the sub-groups. The men were, as mentioned above, divorced or single, jobless,

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<sup>24</sup> The outcome of the CBS is further discussed at the end of this chapter.

<sup>25</sup> After each CBS the participants had to complete an evaluation form (see appendix 2) to evaluate the CBS. The form was filled in anonymously and asked general additional information about the participants and their backgrounds.

retrenched, or retired, and one was physically disabled. Basically, Group A was a combination of men who belonged to what the Bureau Market Research (2011) at the University of South Africa (Unisa) refers to as the 'low emerging middle class' and 'low income group'. A low income group's earnings range from R0 to R50 000 pa, while members of the low emerging middle class earn between R50 000 and R100 000 pa. They do not have their own cars, medical cover, or access to bank accounts via internet or credit card, etc. These were generally the circumstances of participants in Group A. The low-level education of some men made it hard for them to secure work generating the kind of income that would allow them to improve their living conditions. Their church affiliations varied from Reformed to Pentecostal traditions.

Group B consisted of men, who belonged to the low emerging middle class but who were 'climbing the social ladder' and living in much improved conditions. They previously lived in Macassar and had relocated to an area, associated with the emerging middle class, just outside Macassar. According to the Bureau Market Research (BMR), the emerging middle class is characterized by higher levels of full-time employment, car use/ownership, ownership of a desktop computer, the use of cheque accounts, retail cards, etc. Their income ranges between R100 000 to R300 000 pa. They were all married except for one participant and their ages ranged between 27 years and 55 years. I was familiar to some and most of them were familiar with each other through their religious affiliation and involvement in the church. The majority of the men in group B had finished high school and enjoyed a form of tertiary education. Most of them belonged to churches that stem from the Reformed tradition while three worshiped in Pentecostal churches and one in the Roman Catholic Church. We met on Saturday 17 August 2013 in the afternoon.

Group C consisted of men who were not from my local community and I was contemplating whether I really should include them in my research. The person who planned the CBS meeting with group C withheld background information about the participants and only told me that they were a Bible-study group and interested in the topic of my research. They included seven white males and one coloured male (who planned the meeting), between the ages of 25 and 31. They met every Monday evening in the apartment of the group leader for Bible study. Our meeting was on the 19 August 2013. As opposed to the men from my community, they lived in a

metropolitan area. They were from a different cultural background, a different race group and could be considered as “realized middle and upper class”, according to the BMR. Members of the realized middle class and upper class reside in metropolitan areas, have savings accounts, account access via automated teller machines (ATM), etc. and earn R300 000 to R500 000 pa. All the men in Group C lived in an urban area, were educated, owned an apartment and had access to medical care. Some of them belonged to the Nederduits Gereformeerde church, one to the Roman Catholic Church and another to a non-denominational church.<sup>26</sup> It was challenging to conduct a CBS with this group. Our different social and cultural backgrounds, and perhaps my gender, were not only possible barriers in having a conversational Bible study, but the CBS method (as mentioned above) differed from their usual and preferred way of reading and studying the Bible. In chapter 3 I argued that CBS is designed to work with poor and marginalized communities and this group of men did not exactly fit into that framework. However, African women’s theology, which frames the overall research, is inclusive of the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated. Therefore I decided to compare their reading of 2 Kings 5 to the reading of the men in my community.

Group D was composed of women from the local community and we met on Sunday 18 August 2013 in the afternoon. They were twelve coloured women and a combination of members of the low middle class and emerging middle class. Most of them had participated in the research project that I conducted last year with women from my community.<sup>27</sup> They were housewives, community workers and teachers and they represented different denominations. In this group the youngest participant was 32 and the oldest was 65 years old. Some of them were single mothers, one was a divorcee and the others were married women. Most of these women carried the financial responsibility for their households. The low level of education of some prevented them from securing work generating sufficient pay to enable them to improve their circumstances.

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<sup>26</sup> All the information is from the evaluation form the participants completed.

<sup>27</sup> My Honors project is titled: *Reading with a marginal character that brings life: A literary analysis of 2 Kings 5:1 – 19a in the context of a contemporary community of faith*. I read the text with the women in my community and through a deconstructive reading of the text it was uncovered how the doubly marginalized slave girl in the story resisted adopting an identity that would leave her disempowered (Beukes 2012:15).

## **4.5 The Bible Study Process**

All the participants were Afrikaans speaking and to ensure the best possible participation I conducted the Bible studies in Afrikaans. I facilitated the Bible studies which was challenging because all the participants were willing to accommodate me for two to three hours only. As a result it was not always possible to give participants sufficient time to study all the questions in sub-groups and I had to be selective about which to engage with in plenary and in sub-groups. The procedure I followed in facilitating the Bible studies with each of the groups is as follows.

### **4.5.1 Setting the Scene**

In each meeting with the respective groups, I arranged the chairs in a circle with a clear view of the flip chart. I tried to create a welcoming, positive environment. I followed the same format with each CBS group. On arrival we sang a few choruses and opened with prayer. At the session of group A, the volunteer from the community who organized the meeting and who was known to all the men welcomed and thanked them for their attendance and for sharing in my research. With Group B and C it was the contact persons that liaised for me who welcomed the men. When introducing myself to the respective groups I was aware of the fact that my gender, my age, perhaps my marital status, education and training for the ordained ministry, might influence the participation of the men. Because the issue of safety and protecting their vulnerability was a priority, I introduced myself to the participants as one who hails from the same community (establishing our commonality); from the same religious and cultural background and who believes that men outside academia have a valuable contribution to make to the academic world. I made it clear that I am aware that they are every day confronted with challenges and often harsh realities, other than those faced by men in much different and improved socio-economic conditions. I stated that I wanted to give voice to those realities and that I was interested in what they feel, in the midst of their specific realities, that it means to be a man. The nodding of heads indicated appreciation and the men were motivated and excited to start because they recognized that they, and their distinctive background, have something to contribute to the discussion on masculinity. In the case of group D I welcomed the women and thanked them for participating in the CBS. My introduction to them was much shorter because

they knew me and were familiar with the procedure of the CBS. However, I followed the same format as with the male groups.

While they may have expected to be mere passive participants rather than active contributors (Riches 2010:48), I explained to each group how different and fascinating CBS is: it entails reading, listening to one another and discussing texts, in order to identify creative insights that promote the common good and social transformation in communities. It involves reading the Bible contextually, collectively and critically (West 1993:12). To get the group warmed up with fun and laughter I introduced an ice-breaker which helped the participants to relax and feel comfortable and free to participate.

After the ice-breaker the Biblical text was read. Most of the participants brought their own Bible and I asked them to follow the reading with me. Then we looked at the first question and, after I recorded their responses on the newsprint, I divided them into three sub-groups, except group C and D who had two sub-groups. I provided each group with an Afrikaans copy of the Biblical text and with the next question. Each sub-group had to identify one person who would write the responses of the group on the newsprint provided and thereafter another person would report back in plenary. The other subgroups would do the same but would highlight the points on which they differed or add details which the previous subgroups had left out in their discussion. I encouraged that, every time the subgroups had to report back, another person would be the reporter in order to promote inclusiveness and to motivate timid participants.

Due to the limited time available, I slightly adjusted my facilitation with Groups B, C and D. Instead of having the participants write down their responses on newspaper print and present these responses in plenary, I provided the sub-groups in B, C and D with pens and writing pads. The scribe in the subgroup had to write down the subgroup's responses and, when they reported back in plenary; I captured their answers on newsprint and added comments made in plenary. I would, while in plenary, encourage further engagement by asking questions to explore and examine participants' interpretations.

During all the Bible study sessions, the eagerness of the men to work in groups was evident. They would arrange their chairs to form smaller circles. Some sat on the floor to write on the

newsprint and in some groups there was laughter as the men tried to analyze their behavior as males, followed by moments of deep reflection on how to make sense of the intricacy of masculinity in contemporary society. This wholehearted participation contributed to a co-operative and inclusive environment. I now turn to the analysis of the Bible studies.

#### **4.6 Analysis of the Bible Studies**

Discussions in all groups began with the question: What is the text about? This community-conscious question was discussed in plenary and designed to allow participants to share without restraint their first thoughts about the text. The most dominant answers in all groups were: the text is about a miraculous healing, obedience, leprosy, kidnapping, and the faith of a young girl. One participant in group B suggested that the text was about power, namely God's power and the power of kings. Interestingly, another participant in this group said that the text was about Naaman who thought that he was too "big" and therefore expected Elisha to come out of his house to meet him. At the outset, the participants referred to the male characters who are the dominant ones in the 2 Kings 5 story. The answers showed how participants shared how they understood the text or how they had heard others understood the Biblical text. In the following passages I will deal with each group separately, in turn, as they engaged with each of the questions. After analyzing the responses of the male participants, I will compare these to the responses of the female group (group D).

After the first question the participants were divided into subgroups to create intimacy and encourage cooperation and further discussion. The division was done through numbering the participants 1, 2 and 3. Each participant got one of the numbers 1, 2 and 3 and all the numbers 1 joined to form one subgroup, etc. Groups A and B had three sub-groups and C and D two. The questions for the subgroups had been typed out beforehand. I read the question aloud and, after each report-back in plenary, every subgroup received a copy of the question. Question 2 did not pose any difficulty and because of the time constraint only group A managed to draw the connections between the characters while, in order to save time, in all the groups the participants simply wrote down how they as a group saw the connections between the characters.

#### **4.6.1 Question 2: Who are the characters in the story and what do we know about them?**

**Draw a picture that shows the relationship between the characters.**

In addition to the CBS question, I asked the participants to note ways in which the text describes the role players and what information it provides on the different characters. I moved between the different sub-groups to clarify whatever was not clear in regard to the question. Group A identified most of the characters and all its subgroups paid much attention to Naaman as a rich and influential man. The subgroups also identified the nameless slave girl in Naaman's house, saying that she was the one who mentioned the prophet that could help her master. As regards the connections between the characters, one sub-group linked Naaman's wife to Naaman as his spouse while another subgroup saw a connection between the slave girl and Naaman's wife because they are both women and nameless, like the servants of Naaman. During the feedback by the different subgroups, one participant commented that Elisha and the young slave girl were connected. He saw them both as playing a role in the healing of Naaman and stated that no man is so big (Elisha) and no woman so small (young slave girl), that God cannot make use of them. Both are used by God and equally important.

This was a very interesting observation, made early on in the Bible study and it surfaced again as the study continued. However, the participant's distinction between "big" and "small", suggests the way in which men often construct their masculinity in relation to women (and other men). They see themselves as physically "big", their gender renders them power and their position as males in society can make them superior, even in relation to other men. The text itself is full of contrasts between elites and non-elites, powerful and powerless, for example the slave girl and Naaman's wife (v3), and Naaman and the servants. But the participant rightfully recognized that women, despite their position or gender, have agentive power too. The participant himself had a disability and depended on his wife to help him and to provide for the household. Therefore, one could say that he was speaking from experience. He certainly made a very insightful statement that will be explored further in the analysis of the Bible studies.

Group B made similar remarks about the character of Naaman and one sub-group added that Naaman was a self-centered person who gave the impression that everything was about him. Another sub-group mentioned the servants of Naaman, emphasizing that they were the ones who

practically reprimanded Naaman and made him listen to Elisha. They could have expected to get into trouble for doing that. While identifying other characters such as the kings, group B saw the young slave girl as the starting point of the whole event while Naaman's wife also played a key role by encouraging him to go to Israel and get healed.

The sequence of verses 3 and 4 bears witness to this observation: the young girl speaks to her mistress and Naaman turns to his lord. As in group A, participants in group B saw the female characters as connected, but also mentioned links between the servants and the slave girl as they all belonged to the household of Naaman. Another connection, made by a sub-group of group B, was that, although Naaman had servants, he himself was a servant as well, namely of the king. These remarks correlate with Creanga and Strimple's observation (mentioned in chapter 2), that the words "servant", "standing before" and "master" in the Naaman story reveal the structure of male power. The narrator uses these words to signal who are included within the hegemonic hierarchy (2010:18). The answers of group B showed that the men were aware of the different social hierarchal structures as revealed in the text.

Groups A and B thus not only identified the role players but also the connections between the characters in the story. They indicated the differences in power-relations, based on gender and social status. Their recognition of the connections between characters also shows their awareness of literary detail while they appreciated the agentive role of the nameless characters as well as the fact that both males and females have agency.

Group C identified and categorized the characters through the links between them. Naaman, his wife and his servants are connected because they all hail from Aram and don't serve the "true" God. Elisha, the young slave girl and the king of Israel are Israelites, belonging to the "true" God. One of the sub-groups in group C added that all the characters are connected by being made in the image of God. Linking all the characters in this way is interesting because it recognizes the connection between male and female, rich and poor, Christian and non-Christian, in short all of humanity. However, categorizing the characters according to their ethnic and religious differences was also interesting and could perhaps indicate that these men understand their masculinity in relation to other men from the perspective of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Their reference to the "true" God and the Israelites suggests the idea that to belong

to a certain religion renders one privileged over adherents of other religions. Perhaps the same applies to ethnicity.

The responses of group D were similar to those of other male participants. They identified all the characters and saw the little young girl, her mistress and the servants of Naaman as connected by being nameless and by “belonging” to Naaman. The women dealt with this question when I did my Honors project and the question was discussed in-depth, therefore they did not see the need to have another in detail discussion about question 1.

When I asked the men in groups A, B and C during the report-back why, in their view, the female characters and the servants had no names, group A answered that the text was about the miracle that Elisha performed. Groups B and C replied that the women were not important, because men played the key roles in biblical times. The women (group D) already knew why the female characters and servants were nameless; because these characters had been dealt with in the CBS they took part in last year. The answers of the male participants indicated their realization that biblical texts are inherently patriarchal. Although they don’t know the terminology used in the academic world, they had a basic idea that the anonymity of women has to do with the world of the text.

Before confronting the men with critical-conscious questions, I provided them with some socio-historical background for 2 Kings 5 explaining how masculinity functioned in the ancient world. I have discussed this background in chapter 3. The information was intended to help readers to answer question 3.

#### **4.6.2 Question 3: Why do you think did the king of Israel tear his robe?**

The socio-historical background hinted at what could possibly have been the reason for the king of Israel to tear his robe. The men in group A reckoned it was because he felt threatened by the king of Aram. Maybe the king of Aram was better equipped and stronger than Israel’s king so that he could attack and dominate the kingdom of Israel. The king of Israel being a man may have feared that he would be unable and powerless to protect his people and family. This was an interesting remark made by the men in the CBS and an important consideration for both ancient and contemporary “coloured” masculinity. Group A said that it seemed as if the king of Aram

was trying to intimidate the king of Israel, almost forcing him through the written letter to heed his request. One of the subgroups argued that the letter was a way of intimidating the king of Israel who may have thought that Naaman presented him with a “trap” set by the king of Aram. Another sub-group saw the tearing of the robe as the king declaring war against the king of Aram.

Group B argued along similar lines. According to group B the king of Israel tore his robe because he felt powerless. He himself could not heal Naaman (v7), and besides, he felt that the king of Aram was challenging him to do battle. Group C added that the king of Israel felt helpless: he might not be able to successfully defend himself if the king of Aram launched an attack against him.

The fact that the words “helpless” and “powerless” were used by the men in all groups might indicate that a lack of control, or a sense of not being in control, was seen as incompatible with being a man. Being a man means being in control of oneself, of others and of situations. On the other hand, it might also indicate awareness that there is a connection or, rather, a tension between control and protection, justice and safeguarding. The women (group D) gave similar answers. They proposed that the king of Israel tore his robe because he was angry and the king of Aram was simply looking for a reason to attack him. In addition, the women believed that the king of Israel’s ego was threatened and that he did not know how to defend it.

All responses indicated that the men (and women) began to recognize tensions in the 2 Kings 5 narrative and that they realized how feelings of powerlessness impacted on masculinity and power relations. They also were aware that feelings of powerlessness, lack of control and a threatened masculinity affect male behaviour. This pre-empted my projected question 5, which is why I added a second part to question 5 (see below).

After question 3, I provided another short socio-historical background (see the information described in chapter 3) related to the fact that, while men performed their masculinity outside, women in the Ancient Near East performed their roles inside. After this briefing on the world behind the text I introduced the next two questions to be discussed in the subgroups.

**4.6.3 Question 4: Re-read verses 2, 3 and 9 to 11. In what ways is Elisha like the female characters? Does this connection in the text suggest an alternative masculinity? What other features of the text make us rethink what it means to be a man?**

Question 4 required participants to re-read verses 2, 3 and 9 to 11 and to establish what Elisha has in common with the female characters and whether in this context he offers an alternative masculinity.<sup>28</sup>

Some of the sub-groups in group A struggled to see Elisha in the house. Instead they interpreted Elisha as an instrument in God's hand, like the women in Naaman's house, which is similar to the observation made in regard to question 2. Only one subgroup in group A saw Elisha inside the house similar to the women but explained that this did not make him less of a man or effeminate. This subgroup enabled the other men in group A to recognize and appreciate that Elisha was in the house where also the female characters were located (see below). He, like Naaman, is respected by his community because he is a man of God. Although he does not serve in battle, he serves God. They agreed with the other groups that Elisha is an instrument in God's hand, just like the young slave girl is an instrument of God in Naaman's house. When I asked the men during the report-back about Elisha's religious compromise (v19a) and deconstructed Elisha's character, they became uncomfortable and did not know how to "recover" the image of "man of God". The reason I asked the question was to compel them to go beyond a mere pious reading and interpretation of Elisha's character. I wanted them to realize that no man can hide behind "man of God" masculinity or behind a position as "prophet" because men, regardless of religious and social positions, are capable of wrong actions. However, their answers corresponded with those to question 2 when one of the participants drew a distinction between Elisha and the young slave girl. The men highlighted once more the agentive power of women and men who can be partners in the quest for social and individual transformation.

When I asked the men in group A whether there is a link between the servants of Naaman and the female characters, one of them answered: "Yes, like the girl the servants told Naaman to listen to the words of the prophet and like the girl they were in the service of Naaman".

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<sup>28</sup> In chapter 3 I explain more fully how each question in the CBS was formulated.

Although group B identified the link in question 2, I asked this question to group A, firstly to invite them to return to the text and, secondly, because poor and marginalized men might find it difficult to identify with the character of Naaman. They may aspire to be able to provide for and protect their families and perhaps to be as respectable as Naaman by having a decent job and a dignified income. The young slave girl and the servants belong to more or less the same class and, although the issue of class may not be the main focus in the story but rather the manner in which masculinity are performed; I do not view any of the nameless characters, male or female, as merely a functional presence in the plot. Therefore, I sought to open up the character of the nameless slaves and make them accessible to not only contemporary readers in general, but specifically to the men in my community who could perhaps identify with these characters. Socially engaged scholars approach the text with a conscience attuned to, and partially shaped by, the needs and interests of the poor and marginalized (West 1993:75). Also, from an African women's perspective I wanted to interpret the roles of these characters in ways that would be liberating and empowering rather than showing them as insignificant and irrelevant. The struggle and challenges of poor and marginalized men and women in the South African context motivated me and, like group A, I wished to emphasize the agency of both women and men, irrespective of race, class, and gender. In doing so, I aimed to demonstrate that both male and female are important in the pursuit of a masculinity that is redemptive.

Group A suggested that the masculinity of Elisha offers an alternative to men. To be a man does, according to group A, not mean fighting, or the use of physical force to prove one's bravery and masculinity, but to recognize that, even if one performs duties that society has assigned to women in a gendered space, it does not make one less of a man - or less of a woman in the opposite case. Instead it marks one as a man who is capable of performing "gendered" tasks in a life-giving way. Furthermore, having the courage to speak out is a form of bravery, like the nameless servants of Naaman spoke out, to an extent risking castigation by their master.

When one of the sub-groups in group A managed to see Elisha inside the house, it was not difficult for group A to accept him as such. Participants in group A were unemployed, retrenched or retired, divorced and one was disabled. They were at home, not by choice but by a combination of circumstances that were out of their control. One could see them as being

excluded from the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Being marginalized and subordinated to others does however not imply that they lack in bravery or good judgment (see the case of the nameless servants) or in other essential qualities “woven into the arras of hegemonic masculinity”. They just lack the power that results from social, economic and political privilege (Haddox 2010:17). Therefore, the alternative masculinity that is provided by Elisha’s character, bestows worth and meaning on these men as individuals and to the space they find themselves in. One of the participants however commented during the report-back in plenary that some men who stay at home simply are lazy and that he respects women who fulfill the role of breadwinners and provide for their households. This man articulated the tension between the dominant version of “being a man” in the Macassar community which implies that, although it is acceptable for men to stay at home, such men are generally considered as lazy and slothful.

Group B saw Elisha as similar to the female characters in the sense that he did not participate in warfare. Like most men who are “head” of their households, he sends his servant to meet Naaman. One of the men in a subgroup remarked jokingly and unexpectedly in plenary that Elisha behaves like a typical man who sends someone else - his child or his wife - to see who is at the door. Group B, in answer to the question whether Elisha’s character offers an alternative masculinity and based on the discussions in plenary and sub-groups, reckoned that there is nothing wrong with a man being at home and carrying responsibilities that are usually assigned to women. They argued that a man who stays at home is still in control. The responsibility to lead, provide for and protect his family remains his. In other words, according to group B being at home does not undermine a man’s position or change existing power relations. Although Group B did not see anything wrong with a man at home performing domestic chores, they still wanted to know why the man stays at home and what he is doing there. Why isn’t he active in the outside world like other men, working and providing for his family? Although these men appeared receptive to the alternative masculinities that the Biblical text offers, they held clearly on to the idea that “being a man” is about providing and protecting one’s subjects: a man’s place is still in the outside world, working and earning money in order to care for his family.

The responses of Group B were in itself a clear reflection of kyriarchy (Schüssler 1992:123) and hegemonic masculinity. Their word choice and their comparison of Elisha's actions to ways in which most men treat their women and children, was not only kyriarchal and showed how men exercise their "privileges" as "head" of the family, but also exemplified a form of intimidation and, what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as, "symbolic violence". Bourdieu delineates "symbolic power" as an "invisible" power which is misrecognized as such and thereby accepted as "legitimate" (1991:23). In other words, the men in group B misrecognize the violence, exerted through their behavior. In their answers they used words such as "head", "lead" and "control", undergirding the view that being a man implies exercising power (Connell in Morrel 2001:7). Thus they reinforced existing power structures that are already "fixed". Their distrust of the reasons why a man may stay at home circuitously points to the tension between a domestic masculinity and a public masculinity, or the tension between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. One of the viewpoints of hegemonic masculinity is that a real man needs to be among other men (and not women) and that he has to meet the challenges presented by the "outside" world because these shape a man. Being in the house secludes him from the demands that other men deal with. It is possible that the distrust of men who stay at home reflects male anxiety, the anxiety of men fearing to be feminized and who therefore strenuously uphold an appearance and image that coincide with the norms of hegemonic masculinity (Haddox 2010:4). Nonetheless, it is such beliefs that cause men to be subordinated by other men and, on the basis of such beliefs interconnected elements of inequality get to work together harming everyone involved. Group B eventually discovered that a man is not defined in terms of his masculinity which is no more than a social construction, but rather in terms of the quality of being human.

Group C answered along the same lines as groups A and B. The stated, for example, that Elisha showed similarities to the female characters who did not participate in warfare. But, although Naaman the warrior had authority and influence, Elisha also had authority because he was a man of God and respected, like Naaman. In plenary, listening to the report-back, I again deconstructed the character of Elisha (as with group A) and asked about the religious compromise of the "man of God" in verse 19. Similar to group A, group C was somewhat uncomfortable with Elisha's compromise and defended it by pointing out that God works in ways that cannot be explained. But Elisha was still a man of God. The group provided pietistic

views in answer to most questions which made it difficult to engage with the realities rooted in context and pertaining to masculinity.

The women provided responses similar to those of the men. Both female sub-groups argued that it is acceptable for a man to be at home (like Elisha), but “*hy moet sy man kan staan*” (Afrikaans for “a man must be able to stand his ground”). He must not be afraid to go out and interact with other men. They accentuated that it is important for a man to go out and find a job and contribute to the household. If he is retrenched or unemployed he must create a job for himself, for example by mowing grass in the neighborhood in order to earn some income and contribute to the household. When I asked: “What if I am a disabled man”, they replied: “That is all right; at least there is some form of income”, referring to the disability grant disabled people receive from the government.

Although the women in my community made clear that households in the community are struggling to make ends meet, they were also to some extent colluding with the cultural and societal expectation that men should provide a regular income and that, if they are unable to do so, there is the alternative of job creation or self-employment. On the other hand, this view may imply that, although society has certain expectations, these may be ignored and feelings of powerlessness kept at bay by finding a creative alternative such as self-employment. Being a man at home is an opportunity to draw on resources that exist within one and to use those abilities in order to contribute to the community.

#### **4.6.4 Question 5: Considering the response of the king of Israel (v7), how do men in our contemporary society feel and act when their position as ‘head’ and ‘provider’ of the household is threatened?**

Question 5 was a community-conscious question and designed to help men pinpoint and articulate how they feel when their position as “head” and “provider” is jeopardized. I added a sub-question to question 5, namely: Is there a relation between those feelings and how men behave towards women? Only groups B, C, and D dealt with this sub-question for it was added after my session with group A. Question 5 inspired the participants to share some of their experiences during the report-back. The question led the men into, what is referred to as, the act of appropriation of the text. I was astonished by the answers, but I appreciated the honesty of the

men. This is what CBS is constructed to do: to create a safe and sacred place where one can share what normally is not revealed in the public realm. Thus, every plenary report-back was productive, interactive and participative.

Without any hesitation, each group said that men feel insecure, especially when wives or women earn bigger salaries. A sub-group of group A stated that men feel embarrassed and a failure, if women have to go out and find jobs while the man – who feels responsible to provide for his family - sits at home and is jobless.

Group B mentioned that men feel threatened, inferior, and become aggressive because women have professional careers today and earn more money and make men feel “less” of a man because sometimes women demand control of their earnings and expenditure. As a result men flee to clubs, turn to alcohol, and commit adultery in order to feel needed and admired. According to group B, some men will, in an attempt to regain respect from society and to feel they are in control of their households, physically abuse their partners. One participant, while reporting back in plenary, shared how he walked out on his marriage and stayed away for months because he felt inadequate and pressurized in his role as a man. When he returned, he had to prove himself worthy of being the “head” of the household by working hard and taking care of his family. This participant highlighted another aspect of masculinity, namely that being a man equals working hard. However, the responses of group B also illustrated the complexity of the topic of men and masculinity by emphasizing that women play an important role in the construction of men’s self-image. Group C added that men who have employment often also see their work as a place of refuge and as the only area where they feel in control.

The responses show that men from differing socio-economic backgrounds have similar experiences of powerlessness and insecurity when their position as “provider” is endangered. Question 5 set in motion a conversation about matters that the participants under normal circumstances not would not have discussed. However, the atmosphere during each session was so relaxed that men did not hesitate to share responses. The feelings they were communicating, point all to a fear of emasculation. Men worried about losing control and feel they need to do something to be and to feel in control again. This dynamic of insecurity and a sense of powerlessness lead to behavior that is harmful to both women and men. Abusive, rude, insulting

and violent males are characteristically insecure and have low self-esteem. For, at its core, according to Steven R. Tracy, domestic violence is the result of the abuse of male physical and often social/religious power (2007:583).<sup>29</sup>

The women in group D stated that women have more rights and that the law protects them. Furthermore, men are no longer regarded as the sole breadwinners, they said, as more and more women earn a living for their families. Women are empowering themselves and have professional careers, leaving men feeling inferior. As a result, some men abuse their partners in order to regain a sense of control, whereas other men look for an escape in alcohol abuse or in a promiscuous life, resulting in divorce, sexual violence and even HIV and AIDS.

In the week that I conducted the CBS with group B, the local newspaper in our community published an article entitled: “Men also victims of domestic violence”. The article related that men are also victims of domestic violence and, because of the stigma attached to abuse of males, men do not easily come forward and speak about their suffering. The article stated: “More and more women are becoming the breadwinners in their homes.... these changing roles of men and women in society play a role in terms of who the victim and who the perpetrator is.” (Booley 2013:1). When I mentioned this article in plenary during report back one of the participants in group B, said that his partner is physically abusing him. I have no doubt that the mutual sharing of experiences and the safe space created, prompted this man to tell his story. He added that, as a man, he was physically stronger than his partner and could hurt her badly, but his upbringing and his love for their children prevented him from doing so. Moreover, as an employee of the South African Police Department he knew that the law is more lenient to women when it comes to domestic violence so that he would suffer severe consequences if she ever filed a complaint against him. As a man he was embarrassed to file a complaint against her and he felt ashamed every time he had to make up a story to explain bruises on his face and neck to his colleagues. .

This story stunned everybody present. I don’t think that anyone of us expected to be in such an immediate and open manner confronted with the reality of a male victim of domestic violence. Some of the men looked down and others stared away from the speaker. Though there was a sense of solidarity amongst the men, there was also an awareness of perplexity: how to make

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<sup>29</sup> See chapter 5 for further reading about patriarchy and domestic violence.

sense of one's masculinity in a society where men are also at the receiving end of abuse. Though we were silenced by the story we were also inspired by the courage of this man to share such a poignant experience, making himself vulnerable in front of other men and risking stigmatization. The silence in the group could also be understood as expressing the feelings of men who are trapped between hegemonic masculinity and finding some alternative masculinity. I thanked him for sharing his experience with the whole group, saying that we respected him for the man he is and for "performing" his masculinity in a humane way that poses a challenge to any man. A man who suffers violence but chooses not to respond with violence because he honors family values, appreciates his upbringing and respects a legal system that might not even offer him protection, needs to be acknowledged and appreciated.

The aspects of moral and family values and the legal component in the participant's response were interesting but also challenging, and as a socially engaged biblical studies student who is passionate about issues relating to gender justice, I am struggling to understand how these aspects relate to finding a masculinity that is liberative for both men and women.

I shared the article also with group C (in plenary) where one participant laughed at the idea of "a man being hit by his partner". When I related the story in group B and explained that it is difficult for men to talk about such experiences because they fear being laughed at, there was silence until one participant remarked that the victim needs help and counseling. Although the participant was right about the need for counseling, a more helpful response might have been: "Let's reflect on the issue...". Instead he excluded himself from the situation by simply "neutralizing" the problem.

When I shared this story with the women they were touched by his conduct and proposed that he must get a court order and go for counseling. In their view both partners needed help. Some women were well-informed about their rights because they had in the past experienced violence. Thus their responses were suggestions on how to find help and how men should deal with conflict situations. Instead of turning to violence or hiding behind their masculine egos, they argued, men must communicate and reach for help. These comments pre-empted some of the responses to question 8.

After question 5 I asked the participants to go back into their sub-groups and I introduced question 6.

#### **4.6.5 Question 6: What are the main characteristics of ‘being a real man’ in your community and church, and what resources does this text offer for alternative forms of masculinity?**

Question 6 was discussed in all subgroups with participants describing what a supposedly “real man” who is respected by society is like.

The dominant characteristic of ‘being a real man’ was according to all groups an ability to lead. Group A said that, although some men exhibit their masculinity through the use of drugs, a real man is respected by the community and is a leader both at home and in church. He leads by example and inspires his wife and children to follow his example. One participant said: “Today one cannot and one should no longer draw a distinction between duties assigned to women and men”.<sup>30</sup> The story of Naaman, they stated, shows that a man’s role no longer is determined by society. I was not sure whether group A was opting for a ‘soft patriarchy’,<sup>31</sup> but their observation about tasks associated with gender roles and the separation of genders in terms of spatial location, is an important one. It shows that men recognize the need to revisit cultural norms and consider whether these are still relevant and that they accept the need for men and women to fulfill together tasks that promote the well-being of the family and society.

Group B said that a man must take the lead or, one might say, take control when it comes to providing and protecting his family and set a good example in order to be assured of the respect of his wife and children. Group B by and large reinforced what is called ‘soft patriarchy’. They were not as outspoken as group A about “men and women together”, but they did agree with shared parenting and shared domestic duties. However, they did not appear to be willing to discard the hegemonic masculinity dimension of providing for and protecting one’s family. Despite the positive aspects of wanting to provide and protect, their use of such a phrase as “take the lead” was an affirmation of male headship. Moreover, such phrases portray patriarchal views

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<sup>30</sup> This comment of the participant relates to what a postmodernist approach would be towards finding an alternative masculinity. See explanation of postmodernism in chapter 1, page 10.

<sup>31</sup> For an explanation of “soft patriarchy”, see chapter 5.

which define male roles primarily in terms of control and power and which would be likely to contribute to violence (Tracy 2007:583).

Group C stated first of all that every perception of what it means to be a man is informed by one's cultural and religious background. They thought that a man must be a good example: "*hy moet die priester in sy huis wees*" (a man must be the priest in his house) and live according to the Word of God, i.e. he must not marry an unbeliever. For the sake of clarity I asked whether living according to the Word of God entails that a man has to be a believer and if such a man represents the kind of men society needs. They responded by nodding their heads and one participant mentioned that Naaman became a convert.<sup>32</sup> He confessed that the God of Israel was the true God, was healed, and became a "new creation". I shared my doubts about the conversion of Naaman (v18) and contrasted Naaman's devotion to the God of Israel and his silence, with the devotion and the courage of the young slave girl. Despite being a foreigner and a slave in her master's house, she told her mistress about the prophet in Israel, thereby testifying about her God in a discreet manner. The group then went back to "spiritual" interpretations in an effort to explain why Naaman was a convert. I decided at this point not to ask more questions but to respect their viewpoints. I used the opportunity however to share different scenarios from my local community concerning how "men of God" rationalize the oppression and subjugation of women. The group listened but remained convinced that men become transformed when they convert.

Also the women participants described the dominant characteristic of a 'real man' as being able to give leadership but not lord it over his wife and children.<sup>33</sup> One participant stated that a good Christian man maintains healthy relationships and what he preaches on Sundays about compassion and love is what he practices at home. All the women agreed with this statement. They appeared to be more relationship orientated. It seemed to me that the women considered "leading" not so much as referring to the exercise of power but rather in the sense of serving

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<sup>32</sup> See my argument about fictive kinship in chapter 1, page 4.

<sup>33</sup> According to a chapter called: Gender and Violence in a Cape Town Township in *Rethinking Masculinities, Violence and Aids*, women construct male identities in relation to the community and these expectations do impact how men perceive themselves (2005:149). In other words, women contribute to what society expects of men and how men construct masculine identities and these expectations are relational and involve seeing men in relation to others.

others (Tracy 2007:592). Occupying a special position in community does not mean that one has the ability to lead (serve) and to maintain good relationships. Thus, instead of being preoccupied with being the “head” of the house, the women said, men should recognize that they exist in relation to others as part of a cooperative unit. The women’s use of the phrase “a good Christian man” perhaps implies that not all allegedly Christian males are good men. This remark may entail an appeal to men to reread and reinterpret Bible teachings and to embrace those Christian virtues that promote life. The women recognized that a masculinity that is redemptive has to be relational. Their comments in plenary during report-back can be summed up as follows. A man exists in relation to others and when one sees oneself in relation to others one discovers that life is a journey that includes others in the exploration of approaches that enhance life. This point was further emphasized when they discussed question 8.

#### **4.6.6 Question 8: How could you bring about change in the dominant forms of masculinity in your church and community and how would you go about nurturing these masculinities?**

Question 8 was discussed in plenary with all groups. I decided not to use question 7 with groups B, C and D because my experience with group A taught me that the answers to question 4 had already covered the full scope of question 7.

One of the ways in which men can change dominant forms of masculinity is, according to group A, with the support of women. Group A reasoned that change has to start inside the house with both man and woman realizing that they need to work together. Although this somehow contradicts their statement that a man must be a leader, I think group A acknowledged that a transformative masculinity is one that appreciates the agentive role of both women and men, as in the 2 Kings 5 story. The whole-making of both male and female, whether inside the house like Elisha and the women, or in the outside world like the nameless servants and Naaman, requires that both women and men are considered agents of transformation. Such a masculinity, group A reasoned, had to start and be nurtured in the home. School and church have to fulfill an important role in this process, by educating young boys and constructing their masculinities.

Group B felt that it would be challenging to bring about change in the dominant forms of masculinity but young boys could be helped by showing them an alternative to the dominant perceptions that society has of masculinity. Influenced by the story shared earlier, one of the

participants stated that men need to be more compassionate towards one another and towards women and that a form of engagement such as a CBS is crucial because it enables men to share opinions and motivate each other. Another participant added: “*Mans moet beseef hulle is ook net mens...*” (men need to realize that they are also just human beings) “...and it is okay to cry and we need to teach this to our young boys, instead of telling them: “big boys don’t cry”. Group B, despite their contentious views on masculinity, identified an important outcome of the conducted CBS and an imperative aspect in the quest for a masculinity that is redemptive. When a man cries, a participant stated, he is not a “sissy” but a man who is not afraid to show his humanity and fragility (as the participant demonstrated through sharing of his story). This realization of our fragility as men and women is a key element: our fragility as human beings helps us discover that to find a masculinity that is liberating and transformative is a venture, an ongoing journey. We need to be modest in our resolutions regarding masculinity, and suspicious of strong claims and rigid definitions of what it means to be man. The men in particularly group A and B showed that dominant perceptions of masculinity can and must change because masculinity is not a fixed identity (Morrell 2001:4). Group C did not spend much time on question 8 and felt that they more or less had covered it in their responses to question 6.

I rephrased question 8, in plenary, wrote the question on the flipchart and asked the women: How can men and women contribute to the development of good perceptions of t “being a man”? The first response emphasized the need for communication between men and women “and if that does not work, they must seek professional help, but they have to cooperate in order to solve problems”. Men and women need to support each other emotionally because they come from different backgrounds and these are often determining factors in how they treat their partners. One participant mentioned that they must show mutual appreciation for one another and not try to dominate. Another participant added that man must know that woman is his “rib”, taken from his side, to be by his side. One participant stated that men and women are equals before God. Hence the man must treat the woman as his equal partner because good partnership unleashes mutual respect. The women were opting for a collaborative masculinity in which both women and men are recipients of goodness and justice.

#### 4.7 Closing Remarks about the Contextual Bible Studies

The responses of participants in the CBS show similarities, particularly those of the male participants in spite of their different backgrounds. There were however also dissimilarities and there was an emphasis on singular aspects of masculinity that was possibly due to differences between the participants in terms of culture, class and racial background. Group C for example, right from the outset of the CBS, pointed out that conceptions of masculinity are informed by culture. Their conviction that a man, on becoming a convert, is a transformed man, as well as group C's pietistic reactions to most questions, corresponds to the Afrikaner concept of masculinity that Kobus Du Pisani describes as "puritan", embracing the image of the simple, honest, steadfast, religious and hard-working *boer* (farmer) (2001:158). Moreover, the male head of the family has to fulfill a priestly function, which is another key characteristic of Afrikaner masculinity (2001:163). While Afrikaner masculinity has become fused with elements of an urban lifestyle and thus been widened, adopting rules and patterns relating to the general West, these "globalizing trends did not lead to the complete abolishment of formal race, class and religious distinctions underlying to Afrikaner culture and masculinity identities" (Van der Watt 2007:108).

Some elements of "puritan" masculinity correspond with responses made by the men from the Macassar community, however, group C considered and emphasized the "priestly" function of men at home as very important. This contrasted to an extent the emphasis on the provider and protector role by the men in my community and is perhaps an indication of how the participants in both groups differed in terms of lived experience, resulting from class, geographical location and race. On the basis of empirical data it is clear that coloured men belonging to low-income, low middle class and emerging middle class groups see their roles first and foremost as providers for their families. This is why man staying at home as a result of loss of jobs, not working, is a problem because such men are either contributing to the poor living standards of the household and the community, or they are simply lazy. When the participants in group C were listening to stories I shared about the realities in my community, some of them appeared perplexed, but others seemed almost relieved that these were not their realities. They were keen to suggest counseling while holding on to their pietistic views of masculinity, including "male-headed"

families and the man's responsibility for the spiritual and material well-being of the family (Du Pisani 2001:163-164). One may argue or have the impression that the facilitator or the CBS was not able to "change" the minds of the participants in Group C or to embrace an alternative form of masculinity. But CBS is not per se about "changing minds". In chapter 3 I explained that CBS is a process and how the process of CBS enables and allows participants to articulate their "working theology" (West 2013:35) or embodied theology to determine whether they yearn for a different kind of theology. In other words, CBS is not to "change" minds but is a process that creates possibilities for change through dialogue and engaging with the issue/s at hand.

Although the participants in all the male groups did not appear to feel as strongly about equality as the women did, there was a genuine wish for change and a desire for active participation on the part of both women and men (Morrell 2001:5). At the end of each CBS I took the participants back to the text. In Naaman's house there lives a young slave girl who knows that her master can be healed if only he visits the prophet. The girl serves the living God and she is not afraid to go against the norms of society, crossing social boundaries of gender and class and overcoming marginalization. Her character demonstrates that she is more than just a functionary of a narrative plot. She is the agent who makes the prophetic performance that lies at the heart of the narrative possible. Without her there would not be a prophetic miracle (Brueggemann 2001:55). Her bravery in crossing social boundaries makes her accessible to contemporary women and men and challenges men to rethink their masculinity. She indirectly challenges contemporary males about social constructions and boundaries such as male "headship" by showing that, when men collaborate with women and vice versa, recognizing each other's agentive role, they become recipients of healing, whole-making and life.

Naaman's healing has its origin in the house, indicating the resourcefulness of a space that is gendered and of which the potential is not always acknowledged. Naaman returns to Elisha's house and, according to the Afrikaans version of 2 Kings 5, he enters and expresses his gratitude to Elisha. Does the recognition of the agentive power of both women and men possibly suggest steps that may lead to finding a masculinity that is redemptive?<sup>34</sup> Or is it rather the realization

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<sup>34</sup> By agentive roles or agentive power I refer to the ability to take action and get things done (From the Ujamaa CBS Resource Manual, 2013:35).

that men, like women, are human beings, fragile and made in the image of God, that points towards a redemptive masculinity? This is the question I will explore in the next chapter.

How does one measure whether a CBS has a liberative and transformative outcome? Transformation is a process and it is hard to determine to what extent my CBS was liberative. However, from the participants' reactions and the responses on the evaluation forms that they completed, it is clear that both men and women felt motivated and empowered. The CBS obviously had an impact on the men in Group A who stated that they felt valued and esteemed. While enjoying refreshments after the Bible study (often a key time for "debriefing" among participants), they requested that I come back and hold more sessions such as these. A direct praxeological effect (De Wit 2008:24) of the reading process was that group B was enthusiastic about starting a Facebook page where men can offer support to each other and that will help men to rethink masculinity and their roles in society and church.

The CBS demonstrated that men need to take time and be given space to explore their inherited forms of masculinity. The men who participated in this research demonstrated that, being presented with a safe space, they have the potential to become transformed.

The group discussions highlighted key themes. In chapter 5 these will be further explored in relation to relevant scholarly works.

## CHAPTER 5

### REFLECTIONS ON THE OUTCOME OF COMMUNITY-BASED WORK: TOWARDS A REDEMPTIVE MASCULINITY

#### 5.1 Introduction

The empirical material analyzed in chapter 4 has revealed the fecundity of the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) method and also how instructive it is to work with ordinary readers in faith communities. The questions led to discussions in which most men and women took part, offering interesting insights into the subject of masculinity. For example the different answers and the debates about the theme of men who are “inside” the house as opposed to those who are in the outside world, indicated how society associates men and women with specific roles, but also how complex the subject of masculinity is. Furthermore, the nuances in 2 Kings 5 were brought to the fore – all this as a result of the experiences ordinary readers shared and the questions they raised during the CBS. Their stories and questions made a profound contribution to the hermeneutic process.

In chapter 3, I discussed the importance of ordinary readers and their role in determining meaning from Biblical texts. I explained that readers’ lived experience impacts not only on how they read a Biblical text, but also determines which elements of the text they will emphasize and appropriate.<sup>35</sup> In this chapter I want to explore how serious and important the contributions of ordinary people are to the exegetical/hermeneutical process. According to Hans de Wit<sup>36</sup> (2008:20), as enthralling and captivating as the stories may be about “how people, the poor” or marginalized communities read the Bible, if the empirical material is not studied and analyzed constructively, it may correspond more to the “the desires of the socially engaged exegete than to the reality”. In other words, De Wit wonders if the socially-engaged exegete/scholar really allow enough spontaneity and space in the hermeneutical process for ordinary readers, or simply imposes his/her agenda on the participants.

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<sup>35</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>36</sup> Hans de Wit is an Old Testament professor at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. I was privileged to work with professor De Wit on my thesis during my participation in the Bridging Gaps programme in the Netherlands.

For this reason, I will reflect on whether my interaction with the men and women in my community has enriched the hermeneutical process and may compel me to go back to my exegetical work, not in order to redo my exegesis, but to demonstrate how the re-examination of the Biblical text, now informed by the experiences and contributions of ordinary readers, can lead to transformative appropriations. This is one of the fruits of CBS, to return to the text while maintaining the community's interests as the primary focus. As the one who analyzed the text, who wants the hermeneutical process to reach full circle and who not only wishes to teach but also learn, I will convert the experiences of the participants into new questions. Chapter 5 in its essence will demonstrate the emancipatory process of CBS for both the ordinary reader and the socially engaged exegete. The chapter will show how the journey of the exegete started with the text (chapter 2), moved from there to ordinary readers (chapter 3) and from the ordinary readers back to the text (chapter 5).

Before I reassess the Biblical text and show how the process led to a masculinity that proposes a masculinity that is potentially redemptive to both male and female, it is pertinent to consider some of the ideas around masculinity that emerged from the CBS sessions in my community. Thus, I will look at the empirical data and reflect on what, according to my community, it means "to be a man" and how this connects with what scholars such as Arthur Brittan and Sara Willot and Christine Griffin have written.

## **5.2 The Role of Provider and Protector: Discussions around Masculinity**

Without doubt society plays a role in shaping masculinities. Based on the evidence of the empirical material, being a man in my community involves the ability to provide and protect. A distinctive characteristic of the provider role is to go out and earn an income. One of the groups in the CBS was very insistent as regards this notion and felt that, although it is not wrong for a man to be at home and perform domestic chores, a man's place is outside, working, earning money in order to care for his family.<sup>37</sup> Another group believed that men feel embarrassed when women go out and find a job while they are at home, jobless. They feel it is their task to provide for their families. What is more, all groups participating in the empirical study indicated that men struggle with feelings of inferiority since nowadays women have professional careers, often earn

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<sup>37</sup> See chapter 4, page 58.

more, are independent and might claim the right to be in control of their earnings and of household expenditure. As a result men escape to clubs and use alcohol, and they may commit adultery to feel needed and admired.

These experiences of male participants in the research indicate that failure to meet the hegemonic criteria of masculinity, or failure to fulfill the role of provider, is perceived as a threat to a man's masculine identity. Although not all features of the particular experiences of men in my community may be shared by men for example the men in group C who were from a different cultural and social background,<sup>38</sup> it would seem that changing patterns of life today have led to, what scholars like Arthur Brittan refer to as the 'crisis' of masculinity. Men in earlier times knew who they were and understood their roles but that has changed. According to "masculine crisis theory", men are no longer sure of their roles because women are challenging them in all spheres and on all levels of life (Brittan 1989:25) and occupy positions in the work place, that were previously held by men, leading to the deteriorating of men's authority (Morrell 2001:6).

One participant in the study described how he walked out on his marriage and stayed away for months because, as a man, he felt inadequate, unsure and under pressure in his role as "head" of the family. When he returned, he had to show himself worthy of being the "head" and breadwinner of the household by working hard and taking care of his family. According to Brittan, the breadwinner's role in particular gives men "a sense of identity of structural location" (1989:187). Brittan emphasizes that unemployment robs men of the time-honored authority they enjoyed as providers. Moreover, unemployed men are less desirable as potential husbands and long-term partners (Willot and Griffin 1996:78). According to the empirical data, men who were at home were regarded as lazy by other men, while women who fulfill the role of breadwinner and provider were praised and admired by some of the participants. A final reason why unemployment is perceived as a threat to a man's masculinity is the tendency to associate the public sphere with men and masculinity, whereas the private sphere is linked with women and children, or to femininity and domesticity (Willot and Griffin 1996:82). Although one can and

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<sup>38</sup> In chapter 4 I provide a comparative analysis between the men of Group C and the men from my local community.

should, no longer adhere to the traditional distinction between female and male responsibilities,<sup>39</sup> the ideological division between men and women in terms of spatial location has a long cultural history (Willot and Griffin 1996:82). This ideological separation might not be as compelling as in the 2 Kings 5 text (2 Kings 5:11) read in my CBS session, and patterns today are changing. Yet, it is a construction that remains fundamental to the definition of hegemonic masculinities in general as well as and to the outlook of men and women in the Macassar community.<sup>40</sup>

The above representations of masculinity by the men in my community show that the empirical data are clearly connected with what scholars have argued about the provider and protector roles, and how changing patterns are contributing to the challenges of ‘being a man’, so that men have to retain their sense of being male and avoid feeling ‘emasculated’.

### **5.2.1 Does the Role of Provider and Protector Promote Life?**

Knowing the cultural and religious beliefs of my community and following the line of thoughts of the participants, I was prompted to ask: If men understand their roles primarily as providers, why do we have a problem or a “crisis”? Does providing and protecting not promote the common good and well-being? For the men and women in my community masculinity as such is not determined by wealth as much as by the fact that a man must be able to provide for his family. This belief is possibly informed by religious convictions and maybe also by the social break-down in society. The religious convictions that I refer to are the Biblical teachings relating to male headship (see below), and the social break-down in society is associated with the socio-economic conditions I have described in chapter 3.<sup>41</sup> The traditional division of roles between women and men becomes problematic when some men are not able to fulfill their role and can, for example, not cope with the demands made by a highly competitive economic and social system (Brittan 1989:187).

In chapter 2 I mentioned that the small section on Gehazi introduces various other aspects that ask to be explored such as economics. I referred to Strimple and Creanga in chapter 2 who argue that Elisha’s question in verse 26 judges Gehazi’s actions in the light of Deuteronomistic

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<sup>39</sup> One of the participants pointed this out in the CBS and believed that men together with women should fulfill tasks that promote the harmony and well-being of all. See chapter 4.

<sup>40</sup> See chapter 4, page 58.

<sup>41</sup> See chapter 3 the analysis of the Macassar community.

themes and resonates with the language of 1 Samuel 8:14 – 17 where Samuel warns the people about having a king. Elisha's question: "Is this the time to take money..." (v26b) can be understood in economic terms. He might be referring to a system where wealth is accumulated by a few and describes an empire of economic injustices and dictatorship, whereas Israel was a communally based society where the community put their goods together to make society strong. Therefore, the verses about Gehazi lift the text to another level by mentioning economic and social systems that contribute to social inequalities, the dehumanization of human beings and the loss of human dignity and honor. While Israel was a communitarian society, Gehazi got contaminated by the disease of the "other" and Elisha's behavior can be interpreted as a warning: "Gehazi, our economic system should not be influenced by Naaman's economic system".

Economic conditions contribute to the shaping of masculinities and class still impacts on how men view themselves. Robert Morrell (2005:33) observes that apartheid affected the shaping of men and masculinity. One of the comments made by Morrell is, that "South African men have confronted and will continue to confront conditions which undermine economic conditions and which are likely to cause them to question their masculinity" (2005:34). Morrell does not elaborate on what he means by "undermine economic conditions", but he foregrounds an important aspect of masculinity and prompts us to consider whether a socio-economic change in South Africa or in local communities such as Macassar could possibly contribute to the transformation of male attitudes in society. Men for example who enjoy a good social and economic status, as the empirical outcomes indicate, emphasize different aspects of masculinity than men from lower and middle class status. Men from a lower economic background are struggling to play a dignified role at home and maintain their masculine honor in society, in the midst of corrupted, inhumane and unjust systems. The point I am trying to make is that the reality of people's lives is not always taken carefully into account when ascribing certain roles specifically to men and that social expectations, when unfulfilled, may lead to abusive behavior towards women and children and the dehumanization of men.

Furthermore, the man's role of provider and protector involves a degree of power and creates a hierarchy and a sense of privilege and supremacy over women, preventing reciprocal relationships. Women in the African context can testify to this reality. Excluded from decision-

making, and in general, positions of influence, they are often marginalized participants in the lives of their family, church and society. Such situations promote male domination and female subordination (Nyengele 2004:36) and are one of the underlying problems in African gender and power relations, promoting an unhealthy model of what it means to be human. Therefore, while changing societal patterns are engulfing men in a “crisis”, they may also lead to different perceptions of what men “should” or “should not do”, and produce a masculinity that is redemptive in allowing men and women alike to stay at home and perform domestic roles.

In chapter 4, I have pointed out that, in spite of their good intentions to provide and protect, men tend to interpret their roles as “taking the lead”, thereby affirming the idea of male headship, and patriarchal views which define male roles primarily in terms of control and power and which most likely contribute to violence (Tracy 2007:583). Control and power as attributes of masculinity form part of the ideology of patriarchy and bring us to the issue of “soft patriarchy”.

### **5.2.2 Soft Patriarchy and Masculinity**

Patriarchal teaching of any kind confirms male authority and supremacy. “Soft patriarchy” is a form of patriarchy that “deemphasizes male authority and control and defines male ‘headship’ in terms of loving sacrificial service to one’s family”, whereby men and women make decisions together, share parental responsibilities and participate both in household duties (Tracy 2007:582). All the groups in my empirical research referred to the importance of male leadership. According to the empirical data, participants feel that the ideal man, respected in society, is the man who is leader in his house and in church. He takes control when it comes to providing and protecting his family and he shares in parenting and domestic duties.<sup>42</sup> But what about the man, mentioned above, who walked out on his family because he felt under pressure in his role as “head” of the family? What about the man who suffers abuse at the hands of his wife (see chapter 4) and who can’t file a complaint because of the social stigma that is attached to male victims of domestic violence and since a strong legal preference is given to women over men?<sup>43</sup> Most men and women, participating in the research, represented church denominations that teach and emphasize the responsibilities related to a man’s position as head of the family and

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<sup>42</sup> For further reading, see chapter 4.

<sup>43</sup> This was affirmed by the women in the CBS who were aware that women have more rights than men. The example of the man is from the empirical material. See chapter 4.

as leader, in other words the patriarchal viewpoint. They did not realize that their viewpoints recreate/reinvent and vivify patriarchy.<sup>44</sup> Teaching male leadership, according to Tracy, without taking into consideration that men may abuse their authoritative positions, or that men who cannot fulfill their roles as expected, may suffer and even become self-destructive, is dangerous and, at worst, morally wrong (2007:592). This kind of patriarchy promotes the mistreatment of women and, although patriarchy is not the central cause of all abuse, patriarchal teaching involves principally notions of power and control and patriarchal views that associate masculinity with “headship” and control are likely to be a contributing factor to domestic violence (Tracy 2007:583). Sarojini Nadar confirms Tracy’s arguments and argues in a chapter called: *Who’s Afraid of the Might Men’s Conference? Palatable Patriarchy and Violence Against Women in South Africa* “that a theology of headship and submission is simply yet another way of encouraging violence in its varied forms through the pernicious and destructive myth that men as the stronger sex need to protect women” (2012:360).<sup>45</sup>

The expectations resulting from patriarchal perspectives present men with challenges: there is a price to be paid for protecting their masculine identity and the two examples mentioned above bear witness to this. Thus, based on the experiences of the men in my community, both men and women are victims of society’s expectations. However, men persistently promote “soft” patriarchy, not counting the destructive effects it may have on both men and women.

### **5.3 Masculinity: Finding the Alternative**

How then should men understand their role in society (Chitando 2012:1)? Listening to the men and women in the Bible study sessions and noting their identification in the 2 Kings 5 story of the agentive roles of both the female characters (the young slave girl and Naaman’s wife) and the male characters (Elisha and the nameless servant of Naaman) suggested to me that women and men together have agency and that both are important and needed in the quest for social and individual transformation.<sup>46</sup> Women have a considerable role to play in nurturing positive and

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<sup>44</sup> With ‘teachings about headship’, I refer to Ephesians 5:22.

<sup>45</sup> Nadar uses the Mighty Men’s Conference (held in South Africa) and its founder Angus Buchan, as a case study and analyzes the Mighty Men’s Conference as a phenomenon of masculinity. For further reading see chapter 12 in the edited volume by Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, *Redemptive Masculinities*.

<sup>46</sup> See definition of agentive power in chapter 4, page 74.

healthy masculinities. One of the women for example stated: “I am his ‘rib’, taken from his side to be by his side”.<sup>47</sup> Other women reckoned that men and women need to work together in order to solve problems. The empirical data shows one of the men saying that no man is too big (Elisha) and no woman too small (the young slave girl) to be useful to God to whom they are equally important.<sup>48</sup> I am in agreement with the men and women in my community who opined, that both women and men must be active agents in reconstructing dominant norms of masculinity. Thereby the concept of agency is of importance as it recognizes that male and female have to play a part in order to produce effects that are redemptive. Doucet (2005:42) asserts the need for “productive and constructive partnerships between women and men” for the transformation of masculinity. In the next section I will continue my discussion on the identification of a masculinity that is transformative and life-giving.

### **5.3.1 Towards a Redemptive Masculinity: The Ordinary Reader and the Interpreter**

Agentive power is a key theme and a liberative element in the 2 Kings 5 text and was recognized as such, and affirmed by the men and women in the CBS. The stories of the participants certainly contributed to the redemptive moment in the study. In other words, the responses to the text by ordinary readers were estimable and led to productive insights, fundamental for the hermeneutics of liberation (De Wit 2004:20).

De Wit (2008:72), in one of his writings, makes reference to, what he calls, the tension that exists between ordinary readers of Biblical texts and those who analyze the texts (2008:72). In this context he questions the interpreter’s commitment to the group and her/his individual interests (2008:72). While conducting the Contextual Bible Studies in my community, I became aware of the tension that De Wit speaks about. In my analysis of 2 Kings 5 I was to a degree guided by the wish to extract a maximally redemptive masculinity and liberative outcome for the participants through the biblical text. The CBS presented a textual space and gave ordinary readers the opportunity to engage with the text around issues of masculinity. The contributions made by the men and women from my community (substantiated by the empirical material), especially experiencing and interacting with them as ordinary readers, was so rich that it

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<sup>47</sup> See page 67.

<sup>48</sup> All the examples are from chapter 4.

contributed to a redemptive outcome of 2 Kings 5. Last year, when I read the text with the women in my community, I focused on the anonymity of the female characters and I discussed how marginality induces in women a state of vulnerability, positioning them for exploitation in various ways (Beukes 2012:15). With this focus in mind and conscious of the discernable vulnerability of women and children in my community and country, I somehow failed to notice the vulnerability of the male characters in the Biblical text, and perhaps even the vulnerability of men in my community. Realizing this during the CBS compelled me to make experiences of men “fruitful for the text and thereby open up the meaning potential of the text as a gift to the text” (De Wit 2008:72). In other words, the insights of ordinary readers are a gift to the text, and they enabled me, the interpreter, to discover new, previously overlooked, features and messages contained in the text. In fact, the motivation behind the title of this research is based on my previous work with the community and led me to a re-reading of 2 Kings 5, enabling me to see other dimensions of the text.

Therefore, attentive to the experiences of ordinary readers, I want to ask new questions about Naaman, a character in the text who embodies the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Is it possible, despite his mighty warrior image, that Naaman could have been a vulnerable man? Could he have experienced prejudice in any form? Was he really transformed and free after his miraculous healing or did Naaman remain bound to the norms and standards that confine a male hegemonic masculinity?

Despite being a leper, Naaman appears in the text (as mentioned in chapter 2) as a man who continues to serve the king, and fulfilling his military duties. Strimple and Creanga (2010:112) who read 2 Kings 5 in the context of disability, argue that a disabled (leprous) man was not necessarily excluded from hegemonic masculinity and classified with women, children, effeminate and homosexual men. This depended on the seriousness of the disability. They explain that, at times, different positions within the hegemonic representation were occupied by disabled (or leprous) men. Positions of responsibility in which hegemonic standards were enforced for example, were often occupied by such a person (2010:112). Hence, Naaman’s employment. However, as leprosy is a skin disease, it was perceived as a distasteful state of being and carried with it a social stigma. Therefore it is possible that Naaman was a stigmatized

man. Naaman's fragility is displayed in the manner in which he had to rely on the advice of a powerless young girl, a foreigner, and a woman. Furthermore, Naaman had to depend on a foreign king (v5) for his healing, and on a prophet who humiliated him in front of his servants by not coming out to meet him (v11). Again in verse 13, he had to take advice from his servants and humbled himself in front of them in the Jordan River (v14). Did Naaman, perhaps according to Israelite purity standards, have to go naked into the water? Although the text does not spell it out, it could be implied.

Naaman may thus be seen as a vulnerable man. His vulnerability cannot be compared to that of the young slave-girl, but nevertheless he also had to cross social boundaries and gender boundaries such as taking advice from women and servants. In addition he crossed cultural and religious boundaries when he went to Israel and confessed the God of Israel (v17). Crossing boundaries make one vulnerable. Yet it was this very vulnerability that led to Naaman's healing. Naaman became a transformed man, healed of his leprosy. As far as his masculine identity is concerned, in verse 15 Naaman immediately returns to his role as commander dealing with practical matters. The person responsible for his healing must have his reward. Paying well for his healing would keep Naaman on high ground and uphold his dignity (Long 1991:73). Back in Aram he continues in his role as a servant to his king and his honorable status does not allow him to become a wholehearted follower of Yahweh. However, the king can now touch him (v18) and it is possible that Naaman was touched for the first time. We do not know whether Naaman offered the young slave-girl her freedom; there is no such evidence in the text. And, despite his miraculous healing, I doubt that Naaman was a free man. He remained to an extent bound to what was expected from a servant of the king and bound to the religion of the king. However, there are valuable insights to be drawn from the vulnerable aspects of Naaman and, hence, from the vulnerability of ordinary men.

When the men in my community shared their experiences, it seemed as if the Biblical story was disappearing and I worried about leading them back to the text. Certainly, it was the text that evoked the experiences, but in the intimacy of mutual sharing of experiences, it did not seem to matter whether the text was central or not. What was important was to find a new production. From a hermeneutical perspective, reading is never a question of mere reproduction but should

be a new production of significance, and never mind if the text disappears to the background: life is more prominent than the text.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, ordinary readers cannot be omitted, from the reading process. The experiences and contributions of ordinary readers must also be received by trained readers. This is one of the affirmations of African Women's theology: the need to be inclusive of scholar and non-scholar (Okure 1997:77) and to be true to the call for the interpretation process to be collective and shared. What implications does this have for the CBS-method? The CBS-method must continue and should remain a constitutive of the community and encourage the sharing of stories of success and failure. Gerald West (2010) captures this idea (I also made reference to it in chapters 3 and 4) when he writes about the Tamar Contextual Bible Study and the incipient and inchoate embodied "theology" of the participants, in a chapter called, *"The Contribution of Tamar's Story to the Construction of Alternative African Masculinities"*, in a book edited by S. Tamar Kamionkowski and Wonil Kim. West discusses the process of CBS and explains how the social space and the CBS questions should allow ordinary readers to "do theology" and articulate their embodied experience. Such articulation can potentially lead to forms of social transformation (2010:194).

Nevertheless, the context of my study, the back and forth movement between text and empirical material has indeed enriched the hermeneutical process. I will now return to the issue of vulnerability.

#### **5.4 The Life-giving/Life-affirming Dimension of Vulnerability**

For an informative discussion about the life-giving dimension of vulnerability it is important to draw once again attention to the "crisis" of masculinity and how vulnerable it has left men. Ezra Chitando (2012:1) says that the "preoccupation with women's empowerment has left men defenseless and vulnerable in the face of gender-based violence". The empirical data authenticate this vulnerability of men that Chitando talks about. However, I want to argue that vulnerability has a positive aspect in that it creates the prospect of discovering a masculinity that promotes life. This perception has been introduced in chapter 4. I am not talking about "unhealthy" vulnerability. Unhealthy vulnerability is in cases where people lack personal power and feel, like

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<sup>49</sup> This was one of the profound comments by Professor Hans de Wit (at VU university, 1 October 2013) when we were in discussion about the role of the exegete and the ordinary reader.

some men in the CBS, the urge to take control of a situation. What I am referring to is a vulnerability that helps men to rediscover their humanity.

African women know the significance of telling stories. In fact, one of the features that distinguish African Women's theology is its narrative character. Mercy Oduyoye (2001:21) says that while sharing the stories of our hurt and our joy makes us vulnerable, it is at the same time an important part in our journey towards healing and becoming whole. Without telling our stories we cannot build community and solidarity. Without diminishing the other stories told by other men, it was the man who shared his experience of abuse and the awareness of this man's vulnerability that created a truly liberative and redemptive experience, whereby men discovered anew who they are. They were in those moments confronted with the oppressiveness of social constructions of masculinity and with the inhumanity of patriarchal views, and they realized that being a man is related to the quality of being human. Scholars like van Klinken and Chitando would call this moment the "interim".<sup>50</sup>

In an article called: *Theology, Gender Ideology and Masculinity Politics*, van Klinken refers to Chitando's use of "interim" in the discourse on masculinity (2010:18). Chitando argues essentially that the deconstruction of the idea that men are protectors and providers can occur in the "interim" and that some patriarchal notions of masculinity can be transformed into perceptions of masculinities that promote respect for the lives of women. Chitando acknowledges that this does not represent the ideal he wishes for, nor does it meet the standard of "fullness of life" that African women theologians desire (2010:17). Van Klinken, on his part adds that the transformation of masculinities takes place in the "interim" where there is space for the fluid understanding of a concept such as 'soft patriarchy' and from that point one can work progressively towards the full recognition of gender justice (2010:18). According to van Klinken the conception of "interim" present theologians with a starting point for more productive engagement with issues such as 'soft patriarchal' masculinities in church and society at large, while maintaining a critical consciousness as regards to gender inequality and a commitment to gender justice. (2010:18).

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<sup>50</sup> The "interim" refers to an intermediary space where dialoging is taking place.

Both Chitando and van Klinken raise important points, and I would like to probe the idea of the interim further by proposing the need for it to function as a space of encounter, because only then, can it become the birthplace of potential transformation. Based on the outcome of my empirical research, the interim cannot be merely a space for dialoguing, but if dialogue turns into honest discussion and into an encounter with who one is in relation to oneself and others, it will become a vulnerable place and generate opportunities for liberation and life.

Vulnerability is one of the deeper expressions of our humanity and helps us to look anew at ourselves and at others. The vulnerability of the participant in the CBS provided other men (and women) with a liberative and redemptive moment – a liberative and redemptive “interim”. Our fragility as human beings, both men and women, is important because it leads to more open and truthful discussion. Vulnerability according to Chris Kyle helps men (and women) to get rid of the veil of shame and fear, so that they experience a deeper connection, solidarity and relatedness, which give life to relationships and promote individual and communal well-being (2013:1). Community and relationships affirm the human dignity of men and women and both are agents of, and co-responsible for, the well-being of the whole community (Oduyoye 2001:72).

Vulnerability, thus, brings forth a humane quality of understanding the anguish of others and wanting to do something about it, because in the “exposed and broken parts of ourselves we see our own humanity which moves us to greater empathy with others” (Kyle 2013:1). It is in our fragile moments that we find God like Naaman did. The transforming power of sharing our experiences and stories makes us vulnerable, but also provides us with a greater ability to accept and respect one another while, at the same time, challenging us to let go of beliefs and practices in our cultures, religious teachings and social expectations that are not life-affirming.

## **5.5 Concluding Reflections and Summary**

I once again quote De Wit who captures the essence of what I wanted to say in chapter 5. “The interpretation of the Scripture involves a rich, never-ending process, a continuous interaction. Authentic interaction requires vulnerability and the willingness to arrive at new insight” (De Wit 2004:11). In this chapter I demonstrated how my interaction with ordinary readers guided me back to the Biblical text, because they had made me more aware of the complexity of the subject of masculinity. Authentic interaction indeed requires the willingness of the person who analyzes

the text to be vulnerable in order to arrive at a more meaningful interpretation of the biblical text. The vulnerability of the participants motivated me to reconsider my study of Naaman's character, and it was their vulnerability in the CBS that opened up the vulnerability of Naaman's character in the text.

I have discussed the life-giving dimension of vulnerability and how the fruitfulness of the text promoted a life-affirming experience to both men and women. Women wanted to help men and men reached to each other.<sup>51</sup>

The expression of hegemonic masculinity includes the rejection of vulnerability, because men tend to fear that such weakness will compromise their male identities. This misconception of vulnerability harms and dehumanizes men and may lead to inhumane behavior towards women. In other words, it denies men the chance to be fully human. Humanity is woman and man equally in the image of God and in relationship with one another (Ackerman 1994:98). The women in the study recognized this aspect and proclaimed that the concept of masculinity, in order to be redemptive, has to be relational. People (men) exist in relation to others and have to realize they are part of a cooperative unit.<sup>52</sup> A redemptive masculinity therefore, implies the recognition that being fully human entails to acknowledge our fragility as human beings. In giving expression to our humanity, we ought to do so in a way that promotes wholeness and community, because life is a journey and together we continue to discover what it means to be a man or a woman. A holistic understanding of Scripture is one that takes into account the full humanity of all people, and both women and men. Any interpretation that denies the full humanity of women (and men) is deficient (Nadar 2004:22).

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<sup>51</sup> For further reading, see chapter 4.

<sup>52</sup> See chapter 4, page 67.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **FINDINGS/SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

After describing in the previous chapter my journey aimed at finding a masculinity that is redemptive, I present in this final chapter my conclusion and the impact of Contextual Bible Studies on ordinary readers, as well as possible implications of the study for socially-engaged biblical scholars, working with local communities and using Contextual Bible Studies as an emancipatory tool. But first I provide a summary of what my study entailed.

#### **6.1 Summary of the Topic**

The aim of this research was to investigate whether, and in what sense, an African feminist reading of 2 Kings 5 offers potential resources for redemptive masculinities, both in terms of an analysis of the text in the context of its world and in relation to contemporary South African male and female readers.

In chapter 1, I explained why my research would employ a tri-polar approach, why a deconstructive literary exegetical analysis of the Biblical text was an ideal methodology for the research, and how it perfectly fits into the theoretical framework of African Women's theology. I further asserted that the literary mode of analysis was appropriate because it is also a reader-centered approach and the least complicated "way into" the text for ordinary readers.

Having established my aim in chapter 1, I focused in the second chapter on the chosen text and examined whether 2 Kings 5 offers any literary and socio-historical resources for the exploration of alternative masculinities. I presented a deconstructive literary analysis of the text with special emphasis on characterization, arguing that the study of character is not only an accessible way for the community to become acquainted with the text, but that readers often relate to characters in a story.

In Chapter 3 I discussed the CBS-method. The chapter shows how the relationship between the literary and socio-historical analysis of the text and the analysis of the South-African context contribute to the construction of the CBS. I discussed how the context of readers influences the formulation of the questions posed in a CBS and I explained that each question designed for my

CBS was an outcome of the exegesis I presented in chapter 2. In the formulation of the CBS questions I consciously chose to focus on masculinity and used literary categories, setting and characterization as a framework within which the text can be closely read. The literary analysis opened up socio-historical analysis and fostered the exploration of issues relating to hegemonic and subordinate masculinities. I showed that the Contextual Bible Study method involves a careful study of both text and context and that these engage with one another in determining meaning.

Having sketched the community that I worked with, and the construction of the CBS questions, I analyzed in chapter 4 the Bible studies. Chapter 4 is a lengthy chapter. It describes my engagement with men and women from my local community and it shows how ordinary readers appropriate the text and identify alternative masculinities. The questions did evoke discussions in which most men and women took part offering interesting insights into the subject of masculinity. The chapter points to the pivotal role of ordinary readers in the pursuit of social transformation as well as in interpretation process. The chapter also shows the affluence and emancipatory character of CBS. It depicted the dialogue between scholar and non-scholar, men and women in the search for social change.

In Chapter 5 I continued with the appropriation process which I had started in chapter 4 and endeavored to discover what impact the Biblical text has on changing the dominant perspectives about socially constructed relationships between men and women as well as between men and men in contemporary society, especially in my local community. In order to do so, I looked at the empirical data and reflected on what, according to my community, it means 'to be a man' and how this connects with what scholars such as Arthur Brittan and Sara Willot and Christine Griffin have written on the subject.

Aspiring for the hermeneutical process to be complete, I converted the experiences of the participants into new questions and brought Hans De Wit into the discussion with his insights regarding the seriousness and importance of contributions made by ordinary people to the exegetical/hermeneutical process. I demonstrated how my interaction with ordinary readers guided me back to the Biblical text, because they made me aware of the complexity of the subject of masculinity and they showed that authentic interaction requires of the person who

analyzes the text a willingness to be vulnerable in order to arrive at a more momentous interpretation. The vulnerability of the participants motivated me to reconsider my study of Naaman's character. It was their vulnerability in the CBS that, in turn, opened up the vulnerability of Naaman's character in the text. Chapter 5 demonstrates the journey of the exegete, starting with the text (chapter 2), moving from there to ordinary readers (chapter 3), and from ordinary readers back to the text (chapter 5). The chapter also shows that CBS is an emancipatory process, both for the community and the socially engaged scholar. The empirical data evidenced the potential of CBS to change people's lives. In chapter 4 I mentioned some outcomes of the CBS, based on participants' responses on the evaluation forms. A CBS creates a safe space for collective engagement and conversation, communal action and communal conversion. For example, the personal vulnerability shown by one participant when talking about masculinity made other men reconsider their masculinity. Young men expressed appreciation towards older men for sharing their experiences and found the stories instructive and helpful to better appreciate what it means to be "a man" and how to be better partners to their wives and families. This contributed to one of the groups wanting to start a social networking page in order to connect with other men and encourage and offer support to one another as they continue to learn what being "a man" is all about.

Although the participants or the community identify what action they will take in response to a CBS, it will be good and should be part of what CBS is, to go back as the socially engaged scholar to these groups/communities and see the effect the study had on the lives of ordinary readers. A CBS allows men and women to name, engage with and confront life-denying realities while at the same time bring to fore the resourcefulness of a local community in finding life-giving and transformative alternatives. CBS enabled me the facilitator and socially engaged student to share the experiences of the men in my community with other men from a different community, showing the resourcefulness of CBS – to link and bring groups of people, from different backgrounds, into dialogue in the quest for social transformation.

## **6.2 The Implication of the Study**

Without doubt the CBS method fosters not only a fruitful engagement of participants with the text, but also contributes to liberative and changes in dominant perspectives relating to

masculinity. However, careful consideration needs to be given to the tension between, on the one hand, the relationship of the interpreter and the text, and, on the other hand, the role of the ordinary reader. To ensure a liberative, dialectic process, and to prevent the socially-engaged exegete from imposing her/his ideas on readers, the exegete has to be absolutely open to the interpretations of ordinary readers. The study, therefore, states the importance of allowing enough space for ordinary readers to articulate their incipient “theology” (West 2010:194) and to go back to the text to re-read it and ask questions that may further a “coherent process for interpreting the text” (De Wit 2010:20) and ongoing dialogical engagement with the context of ordinary readers. CBS is not just centered on the content that it generates but is rather concerned with the process of engagement.

As regards Biblical hermeneutics in an African context, the study confirms what Gerald West asserts, namely that interpreting the biblical text is never an end in itself (2010:22). This underlines the importance of empirical research but also the importance of converting the experiences of ordinary readers into significant contributions to the hermeneutical process. West says: “African biblical hermeneutics is accountable to ordinary African interpreters of the Bible who constantly call on African biblical scholars to share their resources with them in order to address their contextual needs” (2010:29). One of the ways in which several African biblical scholars demonstrate their accountability to the community is through CBS. What happens at the empirical level is fundamentally important and the encounter between the text and its readers asks for an analytical system that will do justice to the readers’ interpretations. Exegesis is only one part of the hermeneutical process. If we can analyze how people read the Bible and to what extent these processes are life-giving or life-denying, we might be able to develop a method of reading the Bible that leads to openness and transformation and start considering the Biblical text not as an object but as a place of encounter.<sup>53</sup> CBS as an emancipatory tool and the process create space for engagement and has the potential to become a place of encounter. Furthermore, the insights of ordinary readers are important and should be documented, but so is the process. The process, for example the discussions in the sub-groups, enable and lead the participants to engagement and transformative encounters.

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<sup>53</sup> This was a statement by Hans De Wit (at VU University, 7 November 2013) in one of his lectures on analysis of spontaneous reading.

The research and the story of 2 Kings 5 contribute to our perceptions of liberation. African liberation hermeneutics emphasizes the economic and political dimensions of African life. This focus on politics and economics is a classic distinctive of liberation theology. According to Itumeleng Mosala (cited in West), the hermeneutical starting point of liberation hermeneutics/theology is the “social and material life of the black struggle for liberation” and race and class are the critical categories of liberation hermeneutics (2010:24). Although African feminist hermeneutics shares certain elements with liberation theology, especially its suspicion of the (patriarchal) ideology of the text (West 2010:26), African feminist theology desires the well-being and wholeness of women and men (and children). Denise Ackerman affirms this, saying that the kind of liberation we need is that which make free and promote wholeness of both women and men (1991:94). But how do we examine and determine whether our readings of Biblical texts have indeed contributed to liberation and produced liberative outcomes (as mentioned above) in the lives of ordinary readers and communities?

The story in 2 Kings 5 is deeply liberative. However, the process of liberation in the story does not start with a protest or a revolution (although what the girl does could be considered as a protest and a revolutionary act), but by a kind, small deed by a young slave girl, that has a big impact on a man (and on contemporary men). A commander (Naaman) had carried the girl unlawfully away from her country. Yet, in the midst of the massive masculine scene portrayed by the story, the little girl is listened to. This underlines that the commander was a wounded/vulnerable man. Otherwise, he would not have paid attention to her. 2 Kings 5 therefore could also be considered as the story of a man being wounded and vulnerable. The girl opens up possibilities for the “other” (the oppressor or the non-Israelite) to be noticed and appreciated. Her “submission” and his (Naaman) “collaboration” set in motion the freeing of her master. Although there is no movement or no mention of the commander acting with regard to the young girl (the text does not say whether Naaman sets her free after his healing), it is the slave girl in the 2 Kings 5 story who was able to affect Naaman’s liberation, because she had compassion.

Therefore, the story invites us to approach the liberation process modestly with respect to how and with whom it starts and to carefully consider one’s position when engaging with and

discussing liberation. When we read the Bible for praxis of liberation, it should not simply be understood as part of, or measured against what occurs at the meta-level of politics. On the contrary, one should focus on recognizing the small gesture that might be the beginning of something new and of which no one knows where it might end (De Wit 2010:67). When men in the CBS reached out to each other and women identified the alternatives available to men who are victims of abuse, it was a liberative moment. It is the small actions (such as the gesture of compassion made by the young girl) and the acknowledgment of our fragility as human beings that may lead to change in society (De Wit 2010:23) and to moderation of dominant masculinities. The “little” ones or the marginalized in 2 Kings 5 remind us to not overlook what is modest and to value small efforts such as the offering of a word of encouragement and to appreciate the sense of belonging and love, provided by a community. These are starting points of new perceptions that have the potential to lead to individual and social transformation. Most importantly, the connection between text and praxis asks us to recognize that we are dealing here with a process that may be long-term, but that is salvific.

The 2 Kings 5 text has a lot more to offer with regard to biblical hermeneutics and the exploration of its liberative potential will be an unending process. What I have done in my exegesis of 2 Kings 5 is surpassed by the richness of the text. The text always offers more as it is full of nuances and it refers to issues that relate not only to the subject of masculinity but to many other fundamental concerns that have not been explored in this thesis. Thus, within the area of masculinity more work is required to research moments of male vulnerability. Men need to voice the problems surrounding hegemonic masculinity as well as alternative, different ways of being men. Another question that needs further consideration is how an intercultural reading of 2 Kings 5 could contribute to the subject of masculinity.<sup>54</sup> Although mention is made of more than one cultural group in the current research, the role of culture and ethnicity in the discussion of masculinity needs further analyzing. The issue of economics (as mentioned in chapters 3 and 5) and its impact on how a man sees himself and understands his role in highly competitive economic systems is equally fundamental for an understanding of masculinities.

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<sup>54</sup> For more on intercultural reading, see Hans De Wit on Intercultural Bible reading and hermeneutics. In De Wit, H., Jonker, L., Kool, M. and Schipani, D. (eds). *Through the Eyes of Another. Intercultural Reading of the Bible*. Amsterdam: VU University. Institute of Mennonite Studies.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

The Bible contains stories of genocide, texts of terror, of wound and patriarchy. Moreover, the Bible speaks with more than one voice. Scholars, particularly within the African context, have argued that the Bible represents both liberating and dominating discourses and it takes detailed and thorough work to distinguish the marginalized voices in the text (West 2014:14). However, despite the inherent oppressiveness of the Bible, the Bible is also a book that liberates. What is important is to find the liberative voices among the more oppressive ones in scripture (West 2014:15). When we read the Bible in a way that promotes life it may influence and change society in terms of values and norms and promote the well-being and whole-making of all. Reading the Bible must always be done in an emancipatory way. This research has shown that while the text is a gift to the reader, the contextual Bible reading within an African feminist interpretive framework, has the potential to offer resources for redemptive masculinities and new possibilities for living, changing and growing.

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## APPENDIX 1

### CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY: Afrikaans version

#### KONTEKSTUELE BYBELSTUDIE: 2 Konings 5

1. Waaroor gaan die teks Bespreek dit kortliks in groepies van twee en deel dan met die groter groep.
2. Wie is die karakters, en wat weet ons omtrent hulle? Teken 'n skets wat die verhouding tussen die karakters uitbeeld.
3. *In hierdie kontekstuele Bybelstudie fokus ons op vrae wat handel oor wat dit beteken om “'n man” te wees. In die antieke wereld het mans hul manlikheid op verskillende wyses gedemonstreer/beoefen. Byvoorbeeld, om man te wees, was om 'n vegter te wees; bekwaam en dapper in oorlog en vegterye. En, as man moes jy die vermoë gehad het om dood te kan maak en ander manne fisies te domineer en intimideer. Met ander woorde, om ander mans te domineer was een van die maniere en wyses waarop mans hul manlikheid bewys het. En manlikheid moes voortdurend bewys word, so geweld en doodmaak was aanvaarbaar omdat dit was ter verdediging en beskerming van jou manlike eer en aansien. So, om 'n man te wees is om jou eer en aansien te behou en om enige vorm van vernedering en skande te voorkom.*

*Naaman se rykdom byvoorbeeld was ook 'n teken van 'n man met aansien en 'n man met mag. Sy rykdom was 'n teken van 'n man wat die vermoë gehad het om welvaart te bekom, maar ook 'n man wat oor die vermoë beskik het om vir sy gesin te sorg en om vrygewige gastvryheid aan ander mans te toon.*

*Nog 'n belangrike manlike eienskap was om jou eiendom te beskerm; en dit het ingesluit jou familie. Om jou familie te beskerm het behels om vir hulle te sorg deur kos en skuiling te bied en om hulle te beskerm teen gevaar. Selfs 'n koning het hierdie verantwoordelikheid gehad; om te beskerm en om te voorsien in die behoeftes van sy mense; dit was deel van sy koninklike manlike rol en was min of meer dieselfde as die pligte van 'n man wat sy gesin moes beskerm en onderhou. Wanneer 'n koning of 'n man*

*nie hierdie verantwoordelikhede as 'n man kon uitvoer nie, dan begin so 'n man "vroulike" eienskappe toon.*

Hoekom dink u tree die koning van Israel so op in vers 7?

4. *Terwyl mans in die vroeëre wereld hul manlikheid in die openbaar (buite) getoon het, byvoorbeeld op die slagveld, het vroue in die vroeëre wereld en tydens die tyd van Jesus hul vroulike rolle binne-in die huis uitgeoefen deur te kook, kinders grootmaak, skoonmaak, ens.*

Lees weer verse 2, 3 en 9 tot 11. Op watter manier is Elisa soos die vroulike karakters? Is dit moontlik dat hierdie verband/konneksie 'n alternatiewe manlikheid voorstel?

5. Wat beteken "manwees" in u gemeenskap en kerk en watter ander eienskappe in die teks help ons om weer te dink wat dit beteken om man te wees?
6. Dink aan die reaksie van die koning Israel (v7), hoe voel en reageer mans in vandag se samelewing, wanneer hul posisie as 'hoof' en 'voorsiener' bedreigd word? Is daar 'n verband tussen hierdie gevoelens en hoe mans teenoor vroue optree?
7. Is daar sulke mans soos Elisa en die dienaars van Naaman in ons konteks (v13), en hoe word hulle beskou deur ander mans?
8. Wat kan ons doen om die dominante persepsies van manwees in ons die kerk en gemeenskap te verander, en hoe kan so 'n tipe van manlikheid bevorder en ontwikkel?

## APPENDIX 2

### KONTEKSTUELE BYBELSTUDIE

#### EVALUERINGS-VORM

1. Ouderdom .....
2. Beroep .....
3. Huwelikstatus .....
4. Kerkverband .....
5. Skoolopleiding .....
6. Hoe het u van die Bybelstudie gehoor?  
.....
7. Was die Bybelstudie leersaam en wat het u die meeste geniet omtrent die Bybelstudie?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....
8. Hoe kan die Bybestudie verbeter word?  
.....  
.....  
.....
9. Maak 'n kruisie in die blokkie wat volgens u die Bybelstudie die beste beskryf?

Uitstekend	Goed	Gemiddeld	Swak
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