

**A POSTCOLONIAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE BABYLONIAN EXILE AND THE
SUFFERING SERVANT IN ISAIAH 52:13-53:12: A PATH FOR REFLECTION ON
THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS IN NIGERIA.**

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the three most precious gifts in my life; ‘Doubra and Dorothy, my daughters, and Folahan, my wife, companion, and soul-mate of inestimable value.

ABSTRACT

The text of Isaiah 53 is one of those areas of study that has attracted a wide interest among Old Testament scholars. In this field of study, historical criticism has been generally applied to the study of Deutero-Isaiah with the Babylonian exile as the historical context, and specifically the Suffering Servant text of Isaiah 53. The historical critical approach seeks to understand the text by establishing a singular, objective, and dispassionate meaning of the text and its context, thereby excluding alternative voices from the conversation. In contradistinction to the historical critical approach, this study uses postcolonial criticism to allow for multiple voices in the reading of the text, so that socio-cultural issues can be addressed in order to inspire communities towards social transformation and justice.

This dissertation, therefore aims to apply a postcolonial reading strategy to the text of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 in order to address a specific socio-political problem in the Nigerian society, namely, the Niger Delta crisis. The significance of the postcolonial interpretation is that it helps to highlight the issues of power relations and domination. Such a reading strategy demonstrates the interpretation of the Servant as an active and subversive figure that carries relevance for resolving the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria. It concludes that a postcolonial engagement with the Servant text calls for a re-configuration of theological concepts and the appropriation of the Servant leadership model in a manner that inspires justice and social transformation in the Nigerian society.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DH	The Deuteronomistic history or Deuteronomistic historian
<i>DI</i>	Deutero- Isaiah
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
<i>JSOT</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
VT	Vetus Testamentum

INTRODUCTION

THE AIM OF THE THESIS: This thesis presents an analysis of one specific text relating to the Suffering Servant against the background of the Babylonian exile narrative from the perspective of postcolonial criticism. The aim of the critical analysis is to use this as a foundation for further critical reflection upon the current postcolonial crisis of the Niger Delta minority communities in Nigerian. My objectives therefore in this thesis are fourfold. First, I briefly explore in broad terms the meaning and relevance of postcolonialism to biblical studies. Postcolonialism or postcolonial criticism may be described as a hermeneutical approach that focuses on the realities of imperialism, colonialism, and other forms of domination in the production of the biblical text, and in the reading of the biblical text on the part of modern readers. It is a reactive and resistant critical tool that seeks to decentre Western hegemonic reading of the biblical text and to re-inscribe alternative voices from the margins; namely, those who have experienced colonization and subjugation. Therefore, the purpose of this brief exploration is to establish postcolonial criticism as a theoretical framework for an engagement with the biblical text of the Suffering Servant. My argument is that the application of postcolonial theory and perspectives are vital for a critical reading of the exile narrative and the Servant Song in order to reflect on the Niger-Delta crisis

Second, the thesis needs to place the message of Isaiah 52:13–53: 12 in its historical, social, and political context. For this reason, my assumptions are twofold, first is that the message of Deutero-Isaiah and the text of the suffering servant can be reasonably placed within the historical context of the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century B.C. Second is that the exile narrative lies within the ideological narrative of the Deuteronomistic history. In accordance with the focus of this dissertation, I argue that the text was composed within an imperial and colonial context that resonates with the situation of the Niger Delta minority communities in Nigeria.

Thirdly, I aim to provide a brief critical assessment of the historical critical approach to the study of Isaiah 40-55. The assessment is to further highlight how the reading of the text of Isaiah 40 -55 has been examined largely through the purview of scholars caught up within a time-capsule of Western imperialising culture. The effect is that other voices were silenced and were regarded as being on the outside of the discourse, on the ‘margins’ and not at the centre. Hence, a postcolonial reading of the Babylonian exile narrative attempts to allow other voices to be heard and to show the colonizing force of the text. The postcolonial assessment of the historical critical approach to the study of Isaiah 40-55 highlights the inadequacy of the traditional method, especially when faced with reading such a text in the situation of the contemporary Niger Delta crisis.

Fourth, this thesis takes a particular look at one of the Suffering Servant texts in order to see how such a narrative resonates with the marginalised when considered from the vantage point of postcolonial critical concerns. It takes a look at some of the issues and themes that have preoccupied the attention of historical critical scholars. Such themes are later re-examined from a postcolonial perspective with a view to proposing an oppositional and subversive reading of the themes. The effect is to provide a basis to suggest a reconfiguration of theology in the Nigerian church in view of the deleterious legacies of colonialism and the current consequences of neo-colonial struggles associated with nation-building. In other words, the theology suggested in this study aims to achieve social, political, and economic transformation for the good of all in the Niger Delta and in the Nigerian state.

The thesis is in agreement with the historical critical position that the text of the Babylonian exile has the same historical context of the Servant Songs. However, the paper also fractures the Western view of the history of the exile. The traditional Western approach to biblical studies is well illustrated in the historical critical study of Second Isaiah and the notion of the Suffering Servant. This interpretative approach aims to provide an objective analysis of the

text, and to reconstruct the ancient historical context of the original author/editor(s) as well as the original audience. By so doing, those who use this method assume it is the ultimate method and it is the most superior. As such, they are unaware of their ideological position. They do not acknowledge that their claim to objectivity leads to a Western cultural and academic hegemony.¹

Consequently, this paper attempts to demonstrate the need for Africans, and especially the Nigerian church, as a colonized people to do theology and to read the biblical text in response to the social, economic, and political challenges of their times. It is a challenge to read the biblical text in a way that addresses their postcolonial conditions of being the ‘Other’. This research provides a critical argument for a change in the reading of biblical text and in employing theology to inform the struggle for social change in the postcolonial Nigerian society; to see the biblical text through a postcolonial optic.

Furthermore, this dissertation offers a re-reading of certain themes in the fourth Servant song including the notion of suffering and theodicy, Servanthood, justice, nation, redemption, and servant leadership. The re-reading of Servanthood proposed here is such that goes beyond the traditional Western interpretation. Western scholarship generally perceives Servanthood as a model of passive suffering and as a path to spiritual redemption for mankind. My argument here is for an interpretation of the Suffering Servant as a model of subversive and active leadership. The effect is a postcolonial reconfiguration of the Suffering Servant as an example of subversion, liberation, and an agent of social transformation. It is such a postcolonial reconfiguration of the work of the servant that is offered here as a path for reflection and challenge on the role of the church in the Nigerian society, and in the Niger Delta crisis.

MOTIVATION FOR THIS THESIS:

¹ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Defending the Centre, Trivializing the Margins” in *Reading the Bible in the Global Village* (Helsinki: Atlanta, SBL, 2000), pp. 29-48., p. 28 -30.

My motivation for doing this research on the servant song in Isaiah 52: 13- 53: 12 can be stated as follows. I have always found the book of Isaiah to be a fascinating book to study. The attraction is basically its various messages of comfort and hope (40-66). These messages have in turn been a source of encouragement and inspiration. Isaiah's prophecies resound with words of hope and comfort not only to his immediate audience in their historical, political, religious, and social situation but I believe also to us in our present religious, social, and political experience: In a world, and in a nation where life is characterized by domination, distress and frustration as well as in a land where leadership seems to be bereft of the needed wisdom and political will to bring comfort to her people, the message of Deutero-Isaiah is highly relevant. This is because the message of comfort and hope from the prophetic voice of Deutero-Isaiah is always, and will always, resound with echoes of encouragement that all is not lost; that there is an unfailing hope; a hope of a greater future by the power of Yahweh- the Redeemer.

Reading through the oracles of Isaiah, one could experience a fresh inspiration in faith. Faith in God becomes enlivened and revitalized by the prophet's insistence that the future belongs to Yahweh and not the powerful elites. The message of the book makes it clear that God's covenant people must look beyond their present circumstances. They must lift up their eyes of faith to behold the salvation of the Lord, and the various ways by which that redemption will be made manifest for all people. This is what makes Isaiah an attractive and compelling Old Testament book to read. (In this study, the term 'Old Testament' will be used interchangeably with the abbreviation OT).

Again, in view of the fact that historical criticism has for long prevailed on the scene of studies in Deutero-Isaiah, I feel motivated to write this thesis as an alternative interpretation, and to raise an alternative voice from the margins of dominant scholarship. I seek to provide a reading

based on the experience of an ethnic, ‘subaltern’² group doubly colonized and currently experiencing a postcolonial situation. We need to bear in mind that the stated approach represents a radical change in interpretative orientation for this writer. Years of seminary training has convinced me that the historical-critical and exegetical interpretative method is adjudged to be the most justifiable method. The commencement of studies for postgraduate work brought me face to face with postcolonialism as a critical tool in biblical studies and for doing theology in our present time. Consequently, I have been motivated and challenged by postcolonialism as an interpretative theory and analytical tool that addresses my ‘subaltern’ condition as a member of a minority group within the Nigerian state. The challenge has called for looking through a postcolonial optic to view and examine the message of the Suffering Servant in relation to our contemporary socio-cultural and religious context.

Why Nigeria and the Niger Delta? First, I am a Nigerian. Secondly, I am from the Niger Delta belonging to one of the oppressed communities in that area. The need for a relevant theological approach becomes pronounced in the postcolonial condition of Nigeria. Nigeria is the most populous Black nation in the world today. It is the fifth largest exporter of crude oil and it has a heterogeneous population of one hundred and fifty million people with over three hundred dialects. The wealth of the nation in the last five decades largely depends on the exploration, exportation, and marketing of crude oil and other derivable products. The irony is that in the midst of the abundance from the oil wealth, Nigeria still remains one of the poorest nations on the earth. More pathetic is the fact that in the midst of the abundance from the oil wealth of the nation, the Niger Delta communities, the oppressed national groupings, from whose domain the nation derives its wealth, still live in abject poverty and squalor. They are the ones who pay the ultimate price for this wealth. The price they pay include loss of economic sustenance due to

² Subaltern, meaning inferior, is a term used in postcolonial criticism to refer to those who are subject to the hegemony of the ruling class. Hence, it refers to those who are dominated by the ruling class or group. See for further details Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffith, “Subaltern” in *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.215-219

environmental pollution and degradation on a destructive scale, ill health, lack of good education, and health services.³ Coupled with this increasing list of woes is the near absence of a leadership vision to engage the Nigerian society, and to mobilize her oil wealth for the collective well-being of the citizenry.

Additionally, in recent times, the deplorable situation in the Niger Delta has led to violent armed-struggle, conflicts between the oil producing communities, the international multinational oil companies, and the Nigerian government. The killings in ‘Ogoni’ land⁴ in 1993 and in 1995, the emergence of the ‘Egbesu’ cult as a militia group among the ‘Ijaws’, the destruction of oil exploration equipments, and other acts of violence, all attest to the desperate situation that exist in these communities.

However, the question here is: in the midst of all these conflicts and instabilities, the imbalance of power, the exploitation and suppression of minority communities that find itself within a dominating geo-political arrangement called the Nigerian ‘nation’, what is the role of the church? What kind of theology are we propagating in order to contribute to a just and fair society? Indeed, it needs to be asked: Whose side are we on as a church; that of the oppressed or the oppressor?

What seems to be glaringly obvious is that the church to some extent has distanced itself from the socio-political challenges facing us as a nation. The abeyance from the socio-political challenges could be attributed to the influence of European colonization, on the way in which the church formulates her theology. The Nigerian church carries on, almost unabated, the

³ Ike Okonta, and Douglas Oronto. *Where the vultures Feast; Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta*. (London: Verso Press, 2003). Cf. Kenneth. Omeje, *High Stakes and Stakeholders: Oil Conflict and Security in Nigeria*. (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006.).

⁴ The Ogoni people refers to an indigenous minority located within the oil producing area in southern Nigeria .See for details: Eghosa Osaghae, “The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State”, *African Affairs* (1995), pp.325-344. On the Niger Delta see Hassan Tai Ejibunu, *Nigeria’s Niger Delta Crisis: Root Causes of Peacelessness*”; Internet material: www.aspr.ac.at/epr/research/rp_0707.pdf accessed on 12/11/10.

doctrines and theology it inherited from the colonial masters.⁵ Consequently, such a colonial-Western theology has created, to a large extent, passivity or non-engagement with the structures of power. It is a theology that is largely done in the Western fashion brought to us by our colonial masters, and which protects imperial interest; it is made in the West for the consumption of the 'Rest'.⁶

The issue therefore is that we have failed to acknowledge that Western theology, biblical interpretation, and all production of meaning of 'text' is a cultural product. In other words, Western theologies and hermeneutics are shaped and influenced by the issues that confront the Western societies and served the interest of imperialization and colonization. Hence, such theologies and reading of the biblical text should not be transported *in toto*, to our own African cultural experience. In other words, there is a need to 'decolonize'⁷ our approach to biblical studies and theology as Africans and as a colonized people.

Therefore, postcolonial criticism in relation to biblical studies promises to be relevant in the process of decolonization, "a process of overturning the dominant ways of seeing the world, and representing reality in ways which do *not* replicate colonialist values".⁸ Thus, postcolonialism is helpful in creating a radical view of theology as it interrogates the biblical text. This is because postcolonial criticism interrogates and investigates the underlying assumptions, omissions, and silences regarding issues of colonization and domination in the Western traditional historical-critical method.⁹ The historical critical approach held sway since the beginning of the 19th century and has been accorded a universal status. However, since the 1960's there has been an emergence of theories in relation to biblical studies, of which

⁵ Kwok Pui-Ian, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World: Bible and Liberation Series* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), pp.20-31

⁶ Musa Dube, "Reading for Decolonization: John 4:1-42" in *Semeia* 75 (1996), pp.37-57, pp.38-40.

⁷ Decolonization basically refers to an awareness and a resistance strategy to imperial domination and the search for alternative ways of liberating interdependence between nations, races, gender, economies, and culture. See Dube, *Ibid.* p.38.

⁸ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 2nd (ed.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.25.

⁹ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, p.13.

postcolonialism is playing a major role.¹⁰ This paper attempts to contribute in this direction by reading the Servant Song in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and the Babylonian Exile narrative from a postcolonial perspective and as a path for reflection on the Nigerian ethnographic-political crisis namely, the Niger Delta.

METHODOLOGY:

A postcolonial reading of the Suffering Servant figure against the background of the Babylonian Exile is aimed at asking how such a reading approach can be relevant to addressing a specific social political issue in Nigeria, which is the Niger Delta crisis. The text of the Suffering Servant has been largely examined and interpreted by Old Testament scholars from a Western scientific approach exemplified in historical criticism and its variants such as form criticism and source criticism. The remit of such a critical approach is to provide an objective interpretation of the biblical text. However, the problem with this approach is that it is an extension of the cultural world view of its practitioners. In other words, the historical critical reading of the biblical text is typically an extension of the cultural location of those who use it. Furthermore, it is equally argued that the origin and development of the traditional historical method of interpretation coincides with the emergence of Western imperialism and colonial explorations of other parts of the world, and as such, it ignores the crucial issues of domination or power relations in the reading of the biblical text by modern interpreters and in the contemporary world. Thus, the historical critical method was given a hegemonic status by excluding other voices in the interpretation of the biblical text.

As a result, this dissertation attempts a postcolonial engagement with the Suffering Servant text and the Babylonian exile in order to reflect on the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria. Hence, this study examines the exile narrative, the study of Deutero-Isaiah, and the Servant text through a

¹⁰ Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2001), p. 58.

postcolonial optic; away from the traditional historical method in order to address the focus of this dissertation. The methodology employed is essentially a literary review of relevant texts on the historical critical approach and postcolonialism.

Consequently, this dissertation provides a brief exploration covering the emergence and development of postcolonial criticism as well as its relevance in collaboration with biblical studies in general, and in the reading of the Servant text in particular. This exploration is done in order to provide a framework for applying a postcolonial reading strategy to the Servant text and the Babylonian exile narrative, and to allow the voices of the dominated communities such as the Niger Delta, to be inscribed in the conversation, and to appropriate the text from their own social-cultural experience. It posits a reading of the Servant figure as a subversive and resistance figure within the context of colonisation and domination. This reading approach is shown to carry significant implications for addressing the Niger Delta crisis.

Secondly, the dissertation engages the Babylonian historical context of the Servant text from a postcolonial perspective. In order to implement a postcolonial engagement with the Babylonian exile the methodology employed here is to interrogate the selected text in 2 Kings.23:30–25:30 from a postcolonial perspective. This interrogation is done by raising certain questions based on postcolonial concerns reflecting on the notions of the ‘poor’ and the ‘land’. The purpose of this engagement is to underline the colonizing effects of the exile narrative and the hegemonic power relations it betrays. The methodology also involves the interrogation of the reading of the exile narrative by modern scholars as seen specifically in the Deuteronomistic theory. The set of postcolonial questions applied to the Deuteronomistic history are: the question of the Exiles, the question of the exile narrative as a master narrative, and the question of the features of imperialism in the text. The works of selected postcolonial scholars and Feminist theologians appropriating postcolonial criticism, and theories of postcolonial Travel Writing are drawn upon in the interrogations. The significance of these set of questions is that in the

first place they are questions that move away from the traditional historical-critical approach to the exile narrative. Again, these interrogations form a trajectory into the study of the exile context of the Servant text in a way that underscores the issues of hegemony and domination, and consequently, provides a space for a liberating reading of the Servant text within the context of colonialism and subjugation of the ‘other’. Hence, this approach allows the interpretation of the Servant text in a way that is relevant to contemporary issues such as the subjugation of minority communities like the Niger Delta people in Nigeria

Therefore, a postcolonial engagement with the Babylonian exile helps to underscore the issue of colonisation, domination and resistance, and this in turn provides the space for addressing the focus of this dissertation. A postcolonial engagement with Babylonian exile narrative, thus, provides the space for reading the Servant message to the exile audience within a context of domination and resistance similar to the Niger Delta communities in the Nigerian society.

Thirdly, the dissertation engages with the literary context of the Suffering Servant using postcolonial criticism. Here, the historical critical method and concerns in the study of the Deutero-Isaiah as the general literary context of the Servant text is also examined through the postcolonial optic by pointing out the various dimensions in which the historical critical approach fails to address the situation and experience of marginalised and subjugated communities such as the Niger Delta. The methodology involves a postcolonial assessment of the traditional approach in order to demonstrate the failings of the latter in that it ignores the issues of power and domination. This assessment reveals the necessity for a postcolonial reading strategy in engaging with the text of Deutero-Isaiah as well as the Servant. The effect is that a postcolonial engagement with the historical critical study of the literary context of the Suffering Servant underscores the need to read the text from the perspective of those on the “margins”, those suffering under the throes of colonisation and neo-colonisation. It allows an interpretation of the Servant figure as a subversive and resistance figure within the context of

domination. Consequently, such a postcolonial reading methodology gives practical relevance to the message of Deutero-Isaiah and the Suffering Servant in order to interpret the text in addressing a specific social-political problem; the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria.

Fourthly, the dissertation problem is further addressed by engaging the text of the Suffering Servant using a postcolonial critical approach. The approach here is to first outline the areas of interest in the historical critical studies of the text, and to highlight how the proponents fail to recognize that they were looking at the text and themes from the prism of their own cultural location which represents a Western Christian world-view. This is a necessary step because biblical studies in Africa and especially in Nigeria, is still largely done within the historical critical model. Therefore, in order to implement a postcolonial engagement of the Suffering Servant text in addressing the Niger Delta issue, the methodology adopted here is to propose a postcolonial theological reading of some of the themes derived from the text with a reflection on the Niger Delta situation in Nigeria. Additionally, the methodology adopted involves drawing analysis from other liberating theologies such as Liberation theology, Black theology, and Womanist theology. Furthermore, the methodological approach also outlines how a subversive Servant leadership model can be appropriated in addressing the issue of the marginalization, domination, and injustice in the Niger Delta. In this respect, the study specifically exhorts the church in Nigeria to re-configure her theology to respond to the postcolonial conditions of the Niger Delta communities rather than persisting in the monolithic traditional approach that tends to ignore or spiritualize the critical social-economic and political challenges confronting dominated minority communities such as the Niger Delta people within the Nigerian state.

OUTLINE OF THESIS CHAPTERS:

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief exploration into the meaning, emergence, and scope of postcolonial criticism as a critical tool. The chapter argues

for an appropriation of a postcolonial optic for biblical studies, and for an engagement with the Babylonian Exile narrative as well as the Servant Song in Isaiah 52:1-53:13.

Chapter 2 then critically engages with a postcolonial reading strategy of the Babylonian Exile within the Deuteronomistic historical context as suggested in the preceding chapter. This engagement with the Babylonian Exile narrative is significant because one cannot come to the Suffering Servant songs without an understanding of the historical context in which they are located. Therefore, an analysis of the Babylonian Exile itself is a pre-requisite to the discussion, and as this event is narrated in the latter chapters of the Deuteronomistic history, then that narrative falls within the purview of this dissertation. Hence, this chapter presents a summary of the events of the last days of the kings of Judah and the subsequent invasion of the land and deportation of the people into exile. The chapter further engages with the exile narrative from a postcolonial perspective in order to highlight its imperializing and colonizing force against which the specific poetry of the Servant Songs has to be set. The postcolonial engagement of the exile narrative as a result shows how the narrative carries relevance for a postcolonial reading of the Servant text and in reflecting on the Niger Delta situation.

Chapter 3, therefore, examines the historical critical approach to the study of Deutero-Isaiah in general and attempts to highlight the limitations of the historical critical approach through the optic of postcolonial concerns. The purpose of the discussion here is to foreground the role of the social-cultural location of the readers of text. It corroborates the point that the Niger Delta communities needs to interpret the text of the Servant in relation to their experiences as a colonised, subaltern or dominated people.

Chapter 4 is to some extent an extension of the preceding chapter in that it critically examines how historical critical studies engage with the Servant text specifically. It outlines some of the areas and themes that preoccupy historical criticism in the study of the text. The chapter seeks to provide a re-reading of some of the identifiable themes and proposes a reconfiguration of the

Servanthood concept from a postcolonial perspective. Such a reconfiguration also offers a reflection on the issue of the current subjugation of the Niger Delta people in postcolonial Nigeria.

The concluding chapter provides a summary of the preceding studies and a restatement of conclusions. It also gives indications of further directions of investigation that this dissertation has opened up for future researchers. Finally it points out the areas in which this dissertation will contribute to scholarship.

CHAPTER ONE

POSTCOLONIALISM: AN OPTION FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES.

1.1. INTRODUCTION: AIM AND PURPOSE.

A postcolonial engagement with the Servant Song in Isaiah necessitates a discussion on postcolonialism or postcolonial theory. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the critical importance of postcolonial theory in relation to my engagement with the Servant texts in Isaiah as a path for reflecting on the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria. The purpose of the discussion is to argue for postcolonial criticism as a theoretical framework for engaging the concept of the Servant in Isaiah within the context of colonisation and domination. The chapter therefore seeks to present a general definition of postcolonialism for the purposes of this study. I will attempt to describe its emergence, general remit and concerns. Finally, I will also attempt to draw out the possible values that postcolonial criticism offers for biblical studies and its application to the study of the Servant concept in Deutero-Isaiah, in order to address a specific social-political problem in Nigeria, namely the Niger Delta.

1.2. A DEFINITION OF POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM.

An attempt to define “Postcolonialism” is by no means a simple task.¹¹ The term Postcolonialism and postcolonial criticism could convey different meanings in spite of their similarity. However, I shall attempt to clarify the terms in order to arrive at a working definition. The term post-colonial refers to the period that followed the independence of the colonized nations. It signifies a watershed periodization or the period of independence from the domination of the imperial states namely: France, Britain, and America. Postcolonialism, however, may be considered as an all encompassing term that describes the reactive resistance of the colonized towards the imperial powers and their colonizing activities. Following the long

¹¹ This is because the field is observed to be highly diverse and conflicted. See Fernando Segovia for a detailed explanation regarding the definition and circumscription of ‘postcolonial’ analysis. Fernando F. Segovia, “Mapping the Postcolonial Optic” in R.S. Sugirtharajah, (ed.), *The Bible and Postcolonialism* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), pp. 23 – 78.

period of European colonization up till the end of First World War, and the subsequent period of decolonization especially the British colonies starting with India in 1947, the postcolonial era in the twentieth century is presently comparable to the different kinds of anti-colonial struggles in those countries recently occupied. The postcolonial describes indigenous peoples in border territories seeking independence, or those tribal peoples who seek their own survival, or those forcibly transported under colonial occupation – or those suffering from social stigma of caste exclusion (*the Untouchables* in Indian, *the Burakumin* in Japan), the disadvantaged ethnic minorities and impoverished classes in most countries of the world.¹² The foregoing thus indicates that the postcolonial era is still characterized by the experiences of domination of one group by another in various locations in the world today.

The term ‘postcolonial’ theory seems to suggest a concern with the national culture after the departure of the imperial power. This is because the term has been equally used to distinguish between periods before, and after independence. Therefore, Bill Ashcroft, et al, considers the use of the term “to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day”.¹³

In this study, therefore the terms ‘postcolonialism’ and ‘postcolonial criticism’ will be used interchangeably. The foregoing definitions of postcolonial criticism lead us to consider postcolonialism as a critical engagement with every form of resistance to domination in the world – social, economic or political. It is a critique of the knowledge and assumptions that impose an imbalance of power among communities and nations; a revisit and an examination of those cultural productions configured to represent the superiority of one culture over another; dominant and marginal, centre and periphery, dominant and minority.¹⁴

¹² Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (London: Blackwell, 2001), p. 4.

¹³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, (eds.), *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post- Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 2.

¹⁴ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, p. 13.

The Remit/Concern of Postcolonial Criticism: It can be said that postcolonial criticism as a cultural criticism involves the reconsideration of the history of colonialism which symbolically began in 1492. This history includes the history of slavery, of untold and unnumbered deaths from oppression or neglect, enforced migration and diaspora of millions of peoples – Africans, Americans, Arabs, Asians, Europeans, of the appropriation of territories and land, of institutionalization of racism. It includes the destruction of cultures and the imposition of other cultures. Postcolonial cultural critique takes its remit from the reconsideration of the history of colonialism and its consequences, particularly from the perspective of those who suffered its effects, together with a defining of its contemporary social and cultural impact. Postcolonial theory therefore is directed towards the active transformation of the present out of the grip of the past. It is concerned with colonial history, not to privilege the colonial powers, but to highlight the effects of that history on contemporary power structures.¹⁵ Hence, postcolonialism contends for the right of all people to material and cultural well-being in a world of gaping inequality between the West and the rest of the world.¹⁶

So, postcolonial criticism is concerned with the current issues confronting the recently independent nations who have relatively moved from direct to indirect colonial rule. Such issues border on hunger and poverty, gender equality, good governance, economic and social development.¹⁷

Postcolonial theory focuses on the forces of oppression and coercive domination operative in the contemporary world. Its terrain is defined by the politics of colonialism and Neo-

¹⁵ Young states it thus: the extent that that history has determined the configurations and power structures of the present. It is also to the extent that much of the world still lives in the violent disruptions of its wake and to the extent that the anti-colonial liberation movements remain the source and inspiration of its politics.” Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, p.4

¹⁶ Ibid. Young affirms this point thus “: ...Postcolonialism involves first of all the argument that the nations of the three non-western continents (Africa, Asia, Latin America) are largely in a situation of subordination to Europe and North America, and in a position of economic inequality. Postcolonialism names a politics and philosophy of activism that contest that disparity, and so continues in a way the anti-colonial struggles of the past.

¹⁷Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, p. 23.

colonialism, race, gender, nationalism, class, and ethnicities.¹⁸ Hence, it is a relevant tool for addressing the ethnic minority issues of the Niger Delta communities because it is an intellectual commitment that seeks to develop new forms of engaged theoretical work that contributes to the creation of dynamic ideological and social transformations. It constitutes a directed intellectual production that seeks to articulate itself with different forms of emancipatory politics and to synthesize different kinds of work aimed at the realization of common goals including; the creation of equal access to material, natural, social, and technological resources, the contestation of forms of domination be it economic, cultural, religious, ethnic, or gender, and the articulation and assertion of collective forms of political and cultural identity.¹⁹

Major Proponents of Postcolonial Theories: Postcolonial criticism as the later development of postcolonialism can be attributed to a number of late nineteenth century scholars and literary productions of Said, (1985, 1993), Gayatri Spivak (1988, 1990), and Homi Bhabha (1994), who are regarded as the forerunners of postcolonial theorization. These trio provided the theoretical framework that led to the later formulation of postcolonialism .They provided a collection of theorization and discourse which enabled postcolonial criticism to uncover the ways in which colonial powers have constructed and controlled the identities of subjugated people, and its shaping of the postcolonial experience.²⁰ Their works and thoughts are thus regarded as intricately related to the formulation of postcolonial criticism.

The inspirational and founding work in this respect is Edward Said's *Orientalism*. *Orientalism* refers to a "systematic way of conceptualizing 'the other' based on ontological and epistemological differences between Eastern and Western economic as well as religious

¹⁸ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, p.11.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Bradley L Crowell, "Postcolonial Studies and the Hebrew Bible", *Currents in Biblical Research*, 7.2 (2009): pp. 217-244, p.218.

mentalities”²¹ Orientalism functions by way of stereotyping ‘the other’. It also projects the ‘other’ as incapable of dispassionate analysis. The key argument in *Orientalism* is the manner in which the production of knowledge by the West is inescapably tied to power; the control of the ‘orient’, -‘the other’- not only in economic and political terms but also in cultural terms.

The work of Gayatri Spivak (1988, 1990) in relation to postcolonial studies is to challenge the precepts and applicability of critical theory outside the west. Her essays are generally engaged in enunciating the ways in which imperialism constructed the narratives of history, geography, gender, and identity.²² Spivak problematized the subject of ‘representation’ and homogeneity in relation to historical writing especially, India’s history. These concepts are articulated in her works including the study titled “*Can the Subaltern Speak?*”²³ Homi Bhabha (1994) – Bhabha engages with the issue of identity in colonial discourse. He complicates the subject of identity of both the colonizer and the colonized and introduces the concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry.²⁴

1.3. THE EMERGENCE OF POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM :

Postcolonialism as a criticism as well as a theory describes a variety of reading and writing practices across various disciplinary fields in different institutional locations around the world such as Europe, and North America,²⁵ and especially, the formerly colonized communities. These varieties of practices were already in place before the term ‘postcolonial’ gained currency, and were later considered retrospectively as expressing continuity and congeniality with what is generally known as postcolonial modes of cultural analysis.²⁶ The above stated

²¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), pp 985 – 259.

²² Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1997), pp.157 -158.

²³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp. 66 -111.

²⁴ Homi Bhabha, the *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

²⁵ Sugirtharajah, “Charting the Aftermath” p. 8.

²⁶ Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso. 1997), p.5.

situation therefore makes it difficult to actually assign a particular period of emergence to the rise of Postcolonial studies. However, I shall attempt to provide a brief description of the environment from which postcolonial criticism developed and gained currency as an analytical tool.

While the difficulty of identifying a starting point is acknowledged, it can be said that postcolonial studies developed out of the experience/encounter with empire and its aftermath.²⁷

It also emerged from the engagement with the empire on the part of those communities who had been colonized and subjugated especially in Africa and Asia and other colonial/imperial locations.²⁸

Encounter with the Empire: Postcolonialism arose out of the grim encounter with imperialism, colonialism and its aftermath, and in those societies that experienced asymmetrical power relations; political, social, gender, and economic discriminations, through the political elites.

An important observation is the fact that knowledge in various fields was mobilized to justify European imperial and colonial expeditions. Writing during this period was done by ‘representatives’ of the imperial power. Such writings were regarded to be inadequate and privileged the centre, emphasizing ‘the metropolitan’ over ‘the provincial’ or ‘colonial’. These imperial writings also claim to be objective, while in fact their claim to objectivity simply served to conceal the imperial discourse within which they were created.²⁹ Therefore, there was the need to challenge the knowledge and assumptions in the writings produced by such imperial representatives.

Engagement with the Empire: Postcolonialism emerged especially from the former colonized communities as an intellectual response to the colonial conditions. It is the conscious awareness of the colonized articulated especially through literary productions in order to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ See Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, p.10.

²⁹ Ashcroft, *et al*, *The Empire Writes Back*, p. 4-5.

expose the misrepresentations of the colonized people.³⁰ Despite their special and distinctive regional characters, a common factor among postcolonial writings is that they emerged in their present forms out of the experience of colonization and the attempt to assert themselves by foregrounding the tension with the assumptions of the imperial power, and by emphasizing their ‘difference’ from the imperial centre.³¹ It emerged out of the struggle by the colonized to engage with the empire in order to recover and to re - image their identity and culture, which had been ignored or distorted by the colonizers to justify the colonization and oppressive enterprise. A major expression of this engagement is through literature emanating from the formerly colonized societies as a way of resistance and recovery.

Such resistance activities were not peculiar to postcolonial criticism as may be seen in the earlier nationalist struggle. However, they drew their inspiration from earlier nationalistic thoughts such as the development of Negritude in the 1930s, which was most closely associated with the Senegalese poet-president, Leopold Sedar Senghor. The impact of this concept was that its decision to embrace African culture can be considered to be a crucial step in developing a nationalist, anti-colonial consciousness.³² A brief enumeration of the related concepts of imperialism, colonialism, and Neo-colonialism as antecedents to the emergence of postcolonial criticism will be helpful to gain an appreciation of its character and the value it offers for a relevant reading of the Servant text in addressing a specific socio-political issue in Nigeria.

Colonialism: Colonialism can be defined as “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods”.³³ Edward Said, a major proponent of postcolonial criticism, describes the term as “almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant

³⁰ Crowell, ‘Postcolonial Studies and the Hebrew Bible’, p.218.

³¹ Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, , *The Empire Writes Back*, p.2.

³² David Murphy, “Africa: North of the Sub – Saharan” in John McLeod, (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, (London: Routledge, 2007), p.65.

³³ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.2.

territory“.³⁴ It may be said that both colonialism and imperialism involve forms of subjugation of one people by another.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the geographical character of the world had changed with the discovery of navigational aids and the building of ships.³⁵ Later, colonialism developed as a practical strategy by the empire for settlement by individual communities or for commercial purposes by trading companies. Thus, colonialism may be seen as being pragmatic while imperialism was typically driven by ideology and financial reasons and bureaucratically controlled from the metropolitan centre. Colonialism was a practical strategy designed to fuel European capitalism.³⁶ On the other hand, imperialism is generally concerned with the assertion and expansion of state power.³⁷

The advent of both World War I and II, subsequently led to the rejection of Western capitalism, and consequently, Western ideologies or ideas of cultural superiority.³⁸ These events can be said to have inspired nationalistic spirit in the colonized states especially in Africa and Asia. These nationalists in the colonized states began to draw on the concepts of Marxism in order to challenge Western assumptions and writings about the former colonized states. The writings and ideas of these nationalists and a melting pot of theorisation in the 1960's such as liberation, Black theology, feminist theory, gay, and Lesbian theory informed the emergence of what is now referred to as Postcolonialism or postcolonial criticism.³⁹

However, it needs to be noted that the generalization of colonialism is problematic. This is because the formation of colonial regimes varies in specific locations.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the response to this criticism is that the experience of colonialism as a form of domination was a

³⁴ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Books, 1993), p.8.

³⁵ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, p.14 – 15.

³⁶ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfield (Boston: Beacon Press), p.149. See also Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.2

³⁷ Young, *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction*, p16.

³⁸ Ibid. pp.55-61.

³⁹ Ibid. pp.44-45, 58-61.

⁴⁰ Anne McClintok, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term Post-colonialism', *Social Text* 31/32 (1992), pp.84-98, p.86.

general experience from the point of view of the colonized.⁴¹ Another factor is concerned with the question of the possibility of discussing colonialism as a system. Here the work of Edward Said can be considered as providing a general theory for colonial discourse. In his work, Said demonstrates that the habitual practices and the full range of colonialism and the colonized territories and their peoples could be rightly analysed conceptually and discursively. It is such discourse that partly created the crucible of the academic field of postcolonialism and enabled such a range of subsequent theoretical historical works⁴² However, it has been pointed out that one of the problems with Said's discussion here is his lack of distinction between colonialism and imperialism and its varied forms.⁴³ Furthermore, it is alleged that Said seems to assume a homogenous or unified character of the Western discourse on the Orient, and fails to reflect on hegemony as a process involving counter-hegemonic thought.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the impact of Said's influence on postcolonial criticism is unquestionable. Various factors are responsible for the advent of colonialism. These factors are basically a combination of the search for riches and commercial profit as well as religion.⁴⁵ But importantly are the effects of colonialism on the colonized communities. A basic effect is the transformation of indigenous economies as well as the dehumanizing effects of colonialism on the colonized people in psychological and subjective terms. Franz Fanon points out such effects in his definition of colonized people as not just the exploitation of human resources but those "in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death of his local cultural originality"⁴⁶ Therefore, postcolonial

⁴¹ Franz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967).

⁴² Edward Said, 'The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions', *Critical Inquiry* 4: 4: (1978) pp. 673 -714.

⁴³ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* p.18.

⁴⁴ Dennis Porter, "Orientalism and Its Problems" in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (eds.) *Postcolonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Prince Hall, 1993), pp.150 -161, pp.150 -154.

⁴⁵ These include the search for a shorter route to other great civilization such as India, China, and Japan. The search also includes religion viz. the Catholic Inquisition, the invention and development of Ocean going ships and navigational aids. Riches and commercial profit was also a major drive. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* p.14-15.

⁴⁶ Fanon, 'Towards the African Revolution', p.18.

criticism seeks to identify with the anti-colonial activists who raised resistance against the effects of colonialism in all its forms.⁴⁷

Imperialism: The term imperialism originally describes a political system of actual conquest and occupation, or in a Marxist sense of a general system of economic domination, with a direct political domination being a possible but not necessary adjunct.⁴⁸ Imperialism can also be regarded as the drive for colonialism. Typically, it is a deliberate product of a political machine that rules from the centre, and extends its control to the furthest reaches of the peripheries.⁴⁹

Imperialism is characterized by the exercise of power either through direct conquest or through political and economic influence that effectively amounts to a similar form of domination; both involve the direct practice of power through facilitating institutions and ideologies. However, the term has generated contestations from liberal and Marxist critics in the West and the East. It became a very useful concept in the anti-colonial struggle in the early 1900's. While the British had operated a policy of direct and indirect approach of imperialism, the French had a policy of assimilation. However, the experience of imperialism as a general political concept of domination attracted those in different constituencies to create a common front against the imperial oppressor. Imperialism motivated the anti-colonial struggle to draw on the resources of a common anti-imperial politics to develop and co-ordinate popular support and to increase pressure on the occupying imperial power. Consequently, it is the resistance to British, France, and American imperialism generally that produced the foundation for postcolonialism as a theoretical and political practice.⁵⁰

Neo-colonialism: it is a term describing the immediate set up of the postcolonial epoch. It describes the situation where though the formerly colonized territories had been granted

⁴⁷ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, p.19 – 23.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.26.

⁴⁹ Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p.8.

⁵⁰ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, p.31.

political sovereignty, such territories nevertheless remained subject to the effective control of the major world powers which constituted the same group as the former imperial powers. Neo-colonialism also describes a situation whereby the postcolonial state remains in a situation of dependence on its former masters and that the former masters continue to act in a colonial manner towards formerly colonized states.⁵¹

The term was introduced in 1961 and elaborated in theoretical terms by the Ghanaian leader, Kwameh Nkrumah. The concept of Neo-colonialism essentially:argues that the state which is still subject to it is, in theory, independent and had all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus political policy is directed from outside.⁵²

One of the problems with Nkrumah's definition is that in his elaboration of neo-colonialism he fails to draw a sharp distinction between imperialism and neo-colonialism. However, this observation is overcome by the explanation that Nkrumah considers neo-colonialism as a continuation of traditional colonialism by another means.⁵³ In addition, the term can be regarded to be useful, in that it insists on a primarily economic account of the postcolonial system from a broadly Marxist perspective. It has therefore enabled anti-colonial analysts to critique the continuing effects of colonial cultural domination within the framework of an economic argument.⁵⁴

The limitation of Neo-colonialism, however, required a redefinition that led to postcolonial criticism. The concept of neo-colonialism perhaps tends to mask the ignorance of, and the lack of curiosity about the diversity and range of real contemporary material conditions as well as the material and political conditions that might have produced them. As a result, Neo-

⁵¹ Ibid., p.45. See also Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, pp. 162 -163.

⁵² Kwameh Nkrumah, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Nelson, 1965), p. ix.

⁵³ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, p.48

⁵⁴ Ibid.

colonialism has witnessed a process of redefinition and development, and postcolonial critical analysis emerged out of that process.⁵⁵

Postcolonialism: The term ‘postcolonial’ has been the subject of protracted and sometimes ingenious discussion. Young suggests that many of the problems in the definition can be solved if the postcolonial is defined as coming after colonialism and imperialism in relation to their original meaning, as direct rule domination but still positioned within imperialism in its latter sense of a global system of hegemonic economic power.⁵⁶ Hence, Postcolonialism is concerned with the politics of domination even among independent states. This domination arises from the fact that at independence, power was passed on to native bourgeois elites produced during the period of colonialism. This class of rulers adopted many Western presuppositions such as the idea of a nation-state⁵⁷. The homogeneity of the nation state constructed and enforced at independence was immediately challenged by ethnic nationalism, for example, the Dalits in India, and the various minority nations in Nigeria such as the Ijaws in the Niger Delta area.⁵⁸ This is why postcolonial interpretation of the Servant text is significant to the focus of this dissertation. However, it should be noted that the ‘post’ in postcolonialism implies that postcolonialism is a critical and theoretical tool rather than an historical marker.⁵⁹

Furthermore, it needs to be noted that postcolonial criticism has been criticized by some scholars.⁶⁰ The criticisms are essentially concerned with, first, the issue of periodization which gives over-emphasis to the significance of the impact of colonialism on the colonized societies

⁵⁵ Ibid. p 52.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p 57.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.59

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.59.

⁵⁹ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, p. 12-13.

⁶⁰ For example, Ella Shohat, “Notes on the Post-Colonial, *Social Text*, No. 31/32 (1992): 99 – 113; Anne McClintok, ‘The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term Post-colonialism’, *Social Text* 31/32 (1992):84-98; Arik Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura”, in Padmini Mongia, (ed.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 294 – 321.

in the past.⁶¹ The second is the issue of the location of foremost proponents of postcolonialism as First World intellectuals with their origins in the Third World which produces the tendency for the study to become hegemonic because it projects the subjectivities and epistemologies of the First World; *a comprador intelligentsia*.⁶²

Despite the above criticisms, postcolonial criticism still remains a relevant theoretical and interpretative tool for those who are under socio-political domination such as the Niger Delta people in reading the Servant text. This is because postcolonialism is engaged with the present in view of the advent of imperialism and colonialism which carried global repercussions in the contemporary world. Thus, the ‘post’ here could be seen as more than an historical marker or periodization, or as a “space clearing” gesture as Anthony Appiah allegeded.⁶³ It can be argued that the ‘post’ actually implies a counter discourse as in other similar sets of theories such as post-modernism or post-structuralism.⁶⁴ Therefore, postcolonial criticism as a theoretical tool for engaging with the structures of power at the cultural, economic and political levels, both in the past and present, highlights its relevance for contemporary societies especially in reading the Servant text in order to address the situation of dominated groups such as the peoples of the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

1.4. Postcolonial Criticism in Collaboration with Biblical Studies:

The preceding discussion provides a brief exploration of the meaning, development, and remit of postcolonial criticism as a theory and an emergent critical tool. The focus of this dissertation is how to apply postcolonial criticism to the study of the Suffering Servant text within the context of the Babylonian exile in order to reflect on the Niger Delta crisis, therefore, I will

⁶¹ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, p.60. See also Aijaz Ahmed, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), pp.43-71.; Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura”, p.311.

⁶² Kwame. Anthony Appiah, ‘Is the Post in Postmodernism the Post in Postcolonial?’ in Padmini Mongia, ((ed.)), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Arnold, 1996): pp.55 – 71, p.62.

⁶³ Appiah, ‘Is the Post in Postmodernism the Post in Postcolonial?’,p.58-59.

⁶⁴ Childs and Williams, *Post-Colonial Theory*, p.3-4

now highlight the appropriateness of adopting postcolonial criticism into biblical studies and in reading the Servant text.

The formation of postcolonialism as a cultural critique asserts the cultural and intellectual traditions of the ‘tricontinental’⁶⁵ world as a body of knowledge that can be effectively deployed against the political and cultural hegemony of the West. It involves the decentring of the intellectual sovereignty and dominance of Europe by challenging the limits of Western ethnocentricity, especially the assumption that the white male Western point of view is the norm and the truth⁶⁶

Postcolonial theory in relation to biblical studies takes a similar position. Postcolonial criticism attempts to subvert the Eurocentric hegemony in the interpretation of the scriptures. This is achieved by arguing for a space for those regarded as being on the ‘margin’ of Western scholarship. Biblical critics perhaps began to deploy critical tools and insights from postcolonial theories to the study of the Bible in the 1990’s involving in this process a critical use of various tools available to biblical scholars with a commitment to drawing out the interpretative energy of postcolonialism.⁶⁷ The following discussion outlines the significance of postcolonial criticism in collaboration with biblical studies as a framework for a postcolonial engagement with the Suffering Servant text and the Babylonian exile in addressing the Niger Delta problem.

⁶⁵ The term ‘tricontinental’ is similar to Third World. However, Young argues that the term ‘Third World’ underlines the list of woes, such as poverty, debt, famine, and conflict, often associated with the phrase. However, the term ‘tricontinental’ refers to the geographical, locational, and cultural descriptions of the three continents, namely, Latin America, Africa, and Asia. In this dissertation both terms will be used interchangeably. See Young, *ibid.*, pp.4-5. For a different view See R.S. Sugirtharajah, (ed.), *Voices from the Margin, Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (London: SPCK, 2002), p.2-3.

⁶⁶*Ibid.* p. 65. Similarly, this process is what the African novelist, Wa Thiongo’o Ngugi refers to as “decolonizing the mind” and moving the centre”. See Wa Thiongo’o Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind* (London: James Currey, 1981); *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (London: James Currey, 1993.).

⁶⁷ Uriah Y. Kim, ‘Postcolonial Criticism: Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?’ In Gale H Yee, (ed.), *Judges and Methods: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 161 – 182. p165. See also Kwok Pui-Ian, “Making the Connections: Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp.45-63, p.46.

First, an extensive space for collaboration between postcolonial criticism and biblical studies is the postcolonial struggle for emancipation, the dismantling of imperial institutions, and all forms of dominating structures.⁶⁸ For example, cooperation can be enabled in the areas of: race, nation, translation, mission, textuality, spirituality, representation, plurality, hybridity, and matters of post nationalism, and identity categories. These areas beg for collective concern on the part of biblical scholars and Postcolonialism. The postcolonial optic involves an analysis of the reading and interpretation of the text of the biblical text with a strong consideration of the broader socio-cultural context of the West, namely, the reality of empire, imperialism, and colonialism of the last five centuries. Segovia corroborates this point by stating that: “such a reality ...further colours and affects, directly or indirectly, the entire artistic production of both centre and margins, the dominant and the subaltern, including their respective literary productions.”⁶⁹ It is this continued reality of domination that makes the collaboration of postcolonial relevant to reading the biblical text of the Suffering Servant within the exile context in reflecting on the socio-political crisis of the Niger Delta.

Secondly, postcolonial criticism foregrounds the fact that the biblical text as well as traditional interpretation emerged from a colonial and imperial context. Therefore, it necessitates a call for liberation.⁷⁰ Postcolonial theory as a critical tool is valuable because it examines the cultural and historical processes that brought the biblical texts into being and how traditional Western criticism reads the text. This is part of a process of decolonization of the biblical text.⁷¹ The process of decolonisation in biblical studies involves a wide spectrum of stances and positions developed with an awareness of the interplay of imperial forces and the accompanying domination and resistance strategies. Decolonisation of biblical studies aims at exploring

⁶⁸ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, p.25-26.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* , p. 128

⁷⁰ Musa. W Dube, “Toward a Postcolonial Feminists’ Interpretation of the Bible”, *Semeia* 78: 1997: pp.11- 25. p. 15; J.Punt. ‘Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in South Africa: Some Mind and Road Mapping’ *Scriptura*, 37(1), 2003: pp. 58-85.

⁷¹ Pui-Ian ‘Response to the *Semeia* volume on postcolonial criticism’ *Semeia* 75 (1996), pp. 211-217, p.213.

alternative positions and practices to foster” liberating interdependence” between nations, races, genders, economics and culture.⁷² Postcolonialism pursues the process of decolonisation because the Bible has been implicated in Western imperialism and colonialism.⁷³ It recognizes the tendency for the Bible to be used as a text of terror against dependent groups. The process is necessitated by the fact that the traditional method fails to engage with the readers’ concrete socio-political problems or experiences. In addition, the effect of the traditional approach to biblical studies by which Western hermeneutical productions gained hegemony and relegated other interpretations to the periphery necessitates the process of decolonisation. Postcolonial biblical studies, however, insists that the social-cultural location of real-readers significantly influences the reading of the biblical text. Therefore, postcolonial criticism seeks to inscribe the voice and experience of real- readers in the hermeneutical discourse.

Thirdly, biblical studies could also benefit from Postcolonial criticism in the aspect of the place and function of criticism in the contemporary world.⁷⁴ Biblical scholarship has been for too long an ivory or ebony tower mentality with no palpable engagement with the burning socio-political issues of the day. The discipline has become “enmeshed in the labyrinth of textuality, and obsessed with professionalism and specialization”.⁷⁵ The concomitant effect of this state of affairs in biblical studies is that the field has become isolated from the concrete socio-political issues that affect the vast majority of contemporary society. Sugirtharajah aptly states this observation thus: “...the world of biblical interpretation is detached from the problems of the contemporary world and has become ineffectual because it has failed to the status quo or work for any social change”.⁷⁶

⁷² Punt, *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in South Africa: Some Mind and Road Mapping*’ p.61, See Dube, 1996a, p.68.

⁷³ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, p.25.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Therefore, a collaboration of biblical studies with postcolonial criticism will give the discipline a reconstructive character which in my opinion will further result in relevancy in the reading of the Servant text in addressing a particular socio-political problem in the Nigerian society. However, certain tasks will need to be accomplished in applying postcolonial criticism to biblical studies. This task is essentially to scrutinize the biblical documents or text for their colonial entanglements. The Bible needs to be investigated because it comes from various colonial contexts.⁷⁷ The advocated collaboration will demand a vigorous examination of the biblical text so as to bring to the fore the colonial tendencies and assumptions which informed and influenced its production and interpretations. Consequently, it will give attention to issues of nationalism, ethnicity, and identity which emerged at the dawn of colonialism. For example, a postcolonial reading of the Book of Esther re-examines the historical account in order to unveil its ideological and cultural assumptions. The net effect of the application of postcolonial criticism to the study of the Book of Esther is well described by Sugirtharajah as follows:

“The book of Esther encourages largely a strategy of assimilation, endorses conformity and has little relevance for liberative purposes or for that matter for the present day diasporic communities who live in alien context seeking to negotiate an identity which will both celebrate their own ethnicities and embrace the cultural heritage of the foreign countries in which they are settled”.⁷⁸

Thus, the unveiling of the colonising tendencies in the text makes a postcolonial reading of the biblical text relevant to contemporary readers because it attempts to answer to postcolonial concerns of the day such as identity, social and economic inequalities

Fourthly, a postcolonial biblical interpretation will involve a reconstructive reading of the biblical text. It will reread the biblical text from the point of view of postcolonial concerns such as liberation struggles of the past and present, and it will take cognizance of subaltern or the

⁷⁷ Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Pre-colonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 251.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.252.

powerless and their struggle for liberation in the text. Such a reconstructive reading will engage in an interaction and reflection “ on postcolonial circumstances such as hybridity, fragmentation, de- territorialization, and hyphenated doubled, or multiple identities” ⁷⁹ For instance, a postcolonial biblical analysis of the confrontation between Elijah and the priest of Baal on Mount Carmel generates a radical meaning entirely and one that captures postcolonial concerns. Mainstream biblical scholarship will basically interpret this event as “a clear theological conflict between two deities, one virtuous and the other evil, extrapolate it to denigrate Asian and African religions as idolatrous, superstitious and evil and see the victory of Yahweh as proof of the superiority of the biblical God.” ⁸⁰ The implication of such mainstream reading interpretation is to impose one cultural identity over another group that is regarded as inferior. Postcolonialism has a deep concern for the perspective of persons from communities outside the hegemonic power structures. It is interested in both the oppressed minority groups such as the Niger Delta people whose “otherness” is crucial to the self-definition of the majority groups. But it also takes a particular interest in placing such minority or subaltern groups in a position to subvert the authority of those who wield hegemonic power⁸¹ Therefore, the application of postcolonial criticism to the reading of the biblical text is vital to those who are regarded as minorities and inferior within the larger Nigerian society. It allows such groups to read the Suffering Servant as a subversive agent in the struggle for identity and social-economic change.

Lastly, postcolonial criticism offers a space for those outside the West to read the Bible on their own terms and challenges those who insist on interpreting the Bible from the perspective

⁷⁹ Ibid., 253.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Mabilia Justin-Robert Kenzo, *What Is Postcolonialism and Why Does It Matter: An African Perspective*, internet material www.amahoro-africa accessed 22/05/2011, p.5. See also Homi K. Bhabha, "Unsatisfied Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism" in *Text and Nation: Cross Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*, (ed.) Laura Garcia Moreno and Peter P. Pfeiffer (Columbia: Camden House, 1996), pp.191-207.

of the West, which invariably serves the interest of the West at the expense of the Rest.⁸² Postcolonialism as a result, brings fresh voices and invigorating perceptions into the hermeneutical and exegetical field. This is because postcolonialism recognizes the nexus of relationship between postcolonial theory and biblical exegesis. Therefore, it produces an oppositional reading that challenges the theological method in the Western academy. A hermeneutic of suspicion results because traditional biblical exegesis is implicated in Western imperialism and neo-colonial relations in various geopolitical contexts. Thus, a multiplicity of interpretative voices needs to be heard rather than the universalised, objective meaning of the text. Hence, the voice of the people of the Niger Delta can be heard in the reading of the Servant text from their own location as a community under a new form of colonisation in the present Nigerian state.

It is difficult to clearly describe how postcolonial theory engages with biblical studies.⁸³ However, this approach can be seen in the set of questions and concerns that postcolonial criticism applies to the biblical text. Such questions have been suggested by Uriah Kim, who points out that postcolonial critical study of the biblical text involves raising certain questions addressed to three levels: The level of the biblical text, the level of modern interpreters, and the level of contemporary interpreters.⁸⁴ The questions raised in postcolonial criticism regarding the three levels touches on context, concerns, identity, ideology, power relations, liberation and oppression, as well as the question of ethical responsibility on the part of modern scholars in relation to sustaining unequal relations today. This is illustrated in the historical critical search for an objective and universal meaning of the biblical text such as in the study of Deutero-Isaiah. The effect is that marginalized and oppressed people may not be able to inscribe their cultural and political experiences in the interpretation of the biblical text.

⁸² Kim, 'Postcolonial Criticism', p. 162.

⁸³ Crowell, 'Postcolonial Studies and the Hebrew Bible', p.220.

⁸⁴ Ibid, Kim, p.167 -169.

However, it needs to be noted that the application of postcolonial theory to biblical studies carries some limitations. The basic limitation seems to be in taking for granted a homogenous view of culture, rather than recognizing its specificity and diversity. Since postcolonial criticism is concerned about cross-cultural dynamics of people in the Bible times and in the postcolonial era, it perhaps runs the risk of anachronism and ethnocentrism.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, as a critical hermeneutical tool, it promises liberation and hybridity or multiple voices in the interpretation of biblical texts. A few examples will buttress this point.

For example, Esther Mensaya, an African scholar from South Africa, presents a postcolonial feminist re-reading of Queen Vasthi in the book of Esther to highlight her womanhood. She foregrounds her socio-political context to critique the position of women in post-apartheid South Africa, where women have been doubly colonized by the colonizing circumstances and by the patriarchal system.⁸⁶

Another example can be seen in other biblical scholars who use the biblical text to grapple with their postcolonial contexts. The postcolonial reading of A. C. C. Lee is an example of this approach. Lee presents a reading of Third Isaiah through the lens of his postcolonial situation in Hong Kong, which was returned to China by the British in June 1997 as a ‘Special Administrative Region’ of China. The result is that the people of Hong Kong now have a hybrid identity; a people who are Chinese by culture but living under the legal, administrative, and economic structures imposed by the British. Lee draws a similar experience from the account of the returnees from the Babylonian exile having a hybrid identity. The result of Lee’s rereading is that it demonstrates the common tension between the returnees and the majority

⁸⁵ Childs and Williams, *Post-Colonial Theory*, p.3. cf.: Abdul R. Jan Mohamed, ‘The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature’ *Critical Inquiry*, 12, 1(Autumn, 1985), pp. 59-87. Van Zanthen Gallagher. ‘Mapping The hybrid world: Three postcolonial motifs’ *Semeia* 75, (1996): 229-240.p, 230.

⁸⁶ Madipoane Masenya, “Their Hermeneutics was Strange! Ours is a Necessity! Rereading Vasthi as African-South African Women” in Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, (eds.), *Her Master’s Tools*, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 179 – 194.

left in the land and the situation in Hong Kong, and to point to the potentials of rebuilding new identities during this transitional experience.⁸⁷

The foregoing discussion on the meaning of postcolonial criticism, its concerns as an oppositional and resistance reading strategy, and its possible integration with biblical studies therefore provides a framework for an attempt to study the servant model in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. The application of the postcolonial optic to the study of the Servant model will involve, first, an attempt to engage with the traditional Western scholarship approach engages with the historical context of the songs namely, the Babylonian exile, in view of the Deuteronomistic theory. The purpose is to situate the text within its geopolitical context, that is, the Babylonian exile. This is with a view to identifying the imperial and colonial forces at work in the composition and reading of the narrative, and how this resonates with the experience of the Niger Delta people in Nigeria.

A postcolonial reading of the Servant text requires that the exiles as a community under imperial domination and colonisation should be seen as the audience of the message of the Suffering Servant, as a figure of resistance and subversion of the imperial power or those having hegemonic power as mentioned earlier. Such a reading of the exile as a site of imperialism, colonisation and resistance will carry relevance for contemporary readers. This means that a postcolonial engagement with the exile narrative establishes its power relations and as a site of resistance carries a relevant message for engaging the Niger Delta crisis in contemporary times.

Second, the study will also engage with the historical critical reading of the DI text as the literary context of the Servant text. A postcolonial approach will assess the historical critical approach to the study of DI in general as the literary context of the text in focus. As discussed above, such an engagement will generate an oppositional view to the study of the text. This is

⁸⁷ A.C.C. Lee, "Identity, Reading Strategy and Doing Theology", *Biblical Interpretation* 7.2 (1999), pp. 197 – 210.

because postcolonialism disputes the goal of the historical critical approach for an objective and universal meaning of the text, and as such its hegemonic assumptions. Hence, a postcolonial engagement with the traditional study of DI, emphasises the inadequacy of the latter in addressing the issues of power relations in the production and reading of the biblical text. It also highlights the failure of the historical method in engaging with matters of contemporary importance relating to postcolonial concerns that seek an alternative arrangement in colonial and oppressive societies such as the case in the Nigerian society.

Lastly, I will attempt to engage with the reading of the Servant text. This is done by applying postcolonial critical concepts and concerns to re-read some of the identifiable themes in the text and their relevance for inspiring socio-political transformation in the Nigerian society. A postcolonial reading of the text also creates the space to challenge the theological approach of the church in Nigeria. A postcolonial reading of the Servant text calls for a reconfiguration of the theological reflections by the Nigerian church away from the Western Christian mode and towards a more relevant postcolonial theology that engages with the structures of power in Nigeria. It challenges the church to reconfigure the concept of Servanthood and to appropriate the example of the Servant as a figure of resistance, subverting the *status quo* in seeking justice and social, economic, and the political well being of all in the Nigerian state, especially the marginalised communities of the Niger Delta.

CHAPTER TWO

A POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF THE BABYLONIAN EXILE

2.1. INTRODUCTION:

This chapter implements the application of the postcolonial optic discussed in the preceding chapter. Given that the Babylonian exile narrative is generally regarded as the historical context of the Servant song in Isaiah 53, I consider it fitting to engage this narrative from a postcolonial perspective in accordance with the remit of this dissertation. I have selected the exile narrative found in the text in 2 Kings. 23:30-25:30. This text is chosen because it provides an account of the events that led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent deportation of the people of Judah to the land of Babylon. Hence, this text forms the background to the period of the ministry of Deutero- Isaiah and the Servant text. The primary aim of this chapter, therefore, is an attempt to identify how unequal power relations are inscribed, authorized, and legitimized in the exile narrative as contained in 2 Kings. 23:30-25:30 in a manner that betrays its colonising implications.

A postcolonial engagement with the exilic account demands an examination of not only how the ancient Jewish communities understood the biblical account, but also to identify the possible socio-political forces acting on the author/editor of the text. The discussion intends to underline the imperial and colonial context of the exile to which the Servant message was addressed. The concern here is to underline the colonizing influence on the composition of the text and in the reading of the text by modern readers as articulated in the Deuteronomistic historical theory. In addition, a postcolonial engagement with the Babylonian exile narrative provides the space for reading the Servant message to the exile audience within a context of domination, resistance, and conflict similar to the Niger Delta communities in the Nigerian society.

My discussion in this chapter, therefore, will be articulated from two major angles. One is to present a postcolonial engagement with the Babylonian exilic experience within the selected text, namely, 2 Kings.23:30-25:30. This section implements a postcolonial engagement at the level of the text, and demonstrates how the Babylonian Exile narrative might have impacted the theological, social, and political understanding of the intended readers in the early Judahite community. It is almost a given that most scholastic commentaries on Deutero-Isaiah⁸⁸ generally takes the Babylonian exilic narratives as the possible historical background for the message of DI.⁸⁹ The general view is that DI must have conducted his ministry among the exiles in Babylon. It must be mentioned that other commentators, however, have challenged this position with the possibility of a Judean locale both for DI's residence and his prophecies.⁹⁰ However, in this paper the Babylonian exile is assumed to be the immediate context for the message and ministry of DI.

The second angle will present a postcolonial engagement with the Deuteronomistic historical⁹¹ account of the exile. The postcolonial critique will attempt to highlight the gaps and omissions that traditional hermeneutics ignores or fails to recognize in juxtaposition with the postcolonial agenda. The task is to apply a set of questions that postcolonial criticism raises apart from traditional Western approach to the DH account of the exile. It is an effort to bring to the fore the ideological motivations behind the exilic account and to demonstrate its relation to imperialism and colonialism and its relevance to the Niger Delta situation in postcolonial Nigeria.

⁸⁸ Deutero-Isaiah will from now on be referred to as DI.

⁸⁹ See Claus Westerman, Isaiah 40 -66: A Commentary, *The Old Testament Library* (London: SCM, 1969), p. 3, John L. Mckenzie, Second Isaiah, *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1968) p. xxiv. R. N. Whybray, Isaiah 40-66, *New Century Bible* (London: Oliphants, 1975), pp, 20-25, Joseph Blenkinsopp, Isaiah 40 – 55 *The Anchor Bible* (London: Doubleday, 2000), .pp.92-120.

⁹⁰ See details of the debate among various commentators in Michael Goulder, "Deutero-Isaiah of Jerusalem" in *JSOT*, 28.3, (2004), pp.352-362.

⁹¹ The Deuteronomistic history or Deuteronomistic historian will from now be referred to as DH. DH in this paper refers to the contents of that part of the Hebrew Bible starting from the Book of Deuteronomy to 2 Kings.

With regard to the foregoing tasks, two major scholarly works will provide a theoretical and rhetorical framework for the postcolonial engagement of the exilic narrative. One is the work by Musa Dube, a South African Feminist theologian, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*.⁹² The second is the scholarly work of Uriah Y. Kim, “Postcolonial Criticism: Who is the ‘Other’ in the Book of Judges”.⁹³ Both works are considered to be relevant to the subject at hand because they exemplify the shape and contours of postcolonial engagement with biblical texts. In addition, my choice of these works is informed by the practical framework both bring to the academic conversation. Additionally, the biographical features of the authors add an interesting flavour to their work in decolonizing the different biblical texts and issues they have to deal with in their writings. Musa Dube writes from her experience as a female South African who experienced what it is to be a colonial subject in Apartheid South Africa. As such, she identifies, on very palpable terms, the all pervading effects of colonialism in all its varied forms in our world today. Uriah Kim, an Asian American, on the other hand, writes as one who has experienced what it is to be the “object” of the colonial conversation. He identifies with what it is to be described as the “other” in the colonial discourse both in the biblical writings and in our present world.

The anticipated result of the study undertaken in this chapter, therefore, is that it will demonstrate how postcolonial theory can shed light on the biblical account of the Babylonian exile. It is expected that such a postcolonial engagement will offer a contrapuntal reading of the narrative.⁹⁴ Such a re-reading might be helpful to underline the possible power relations embedded in the exile narrative which this chapter aims to bring to the fore.

⁹² Musa M .Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Missouri: Chalice Press, 2000).

⁹³ Uriah Y Kim, Postcolonial Criticism; Who Is the Other in the Book of Judges? in Gale. A. Yee, (ed.), *Judges and Methods: New Approaches Biblical Studies* (Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 161 – 182.

⁹⁴ A contrapuntal reading is “a term coined by Edward Said to describe a way of reading the texts of English literature so as to reveal their deep implication in imperialism and the colonial process”. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, “Contrapuntal reading” in *Key Concepts In Postcolonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 55.

2. 2. A. SUMMARY OF THE DEUTERONOMISTIC ACCOUNT OF THE EXILE 2 KINGS. 23: 31—25:30.

This section presents a brief account of that part of the Deuteronomist narrative regarding the events leading up to the exile. The Deuteronomist historian recounts the fall of the Judean state after the end of the supposedly glorious reign of King Josiah. Following the reign of King Josiah, the next line of kings failed to sustain the unity and prosperity Josiah achieved. Four kings reigned after Josiah in addition to an imperial surrogate. This account is relevant to the focus of this dissertation because it attempts to paint a picture of how imperial and colonizing forces come into play on this occasion of Judah's history. It is also a necessary background to a postcolonial engagement with the exile narrative.

The summary presented here provides an overview of the reign of the kings within their various socio-political contexts. The overview is intended to initiate a postcolonial conversation with the exilic account within the stated pericope in the biblical text. Rather than follow the traditional historical approach, I shall attempt to identify some postcolonial trajectories regarding the DH account in the text.

According to the DH, the supposed glorious rule of Josiah was brought to an abrupt end as a result of his death. Josiah met his untimely death when he attempted to come in-between the Egyptian power and the Babylonians at the battle of Carchemish in ca. 604 BCE. His son Jehoahaz was installed in his place as the king of Judah. In the days of Jehoahaz, Judah became a victim of foreign imperial conquest and subjugation by Egypt. The Deuteronomist attributed the defeat of Jerusalem to the various forms of misconduct on the part of the King Jehoahaz. There is an implied affirmation of imperial power because the narrative is silent over the matter of imperialism.

Eliakim, the son of Josiah, was next in succession (2 Kings. 23:34–24:7). He became king by imperial intervention according to DH. The imposition of heavy taxation reveals the basic

motivation of imperialism to be the acquisition of gold or the plundering of the resources of people in distant and inhabited lands. The imposition of an excruciating tax regime is characteristic of imperial institutions.⁹⁵ I shall revisit this point later in this section.

During this period, the Babylonians invaded Judah. Again, the cause of the invasion was attributed to Jehoahaz's evil conduct without any condemnation of the foreign imperial powers. It was the sin of Jehoahaz that was basically responsible for the fall of Judah to the hands of the Babylonians. In 24:2 the Deuteronomist points out that it was Yahweh who allowed or sent the coalition of Babylonians, Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonite raiders against Judah.

This whole idea of attributing the fall of Judah to the atrocities of the ruling kings may be considered as an attempt to turn the focus away from the imperial power so as to create a basis for the future re-occupation of the land according to the purpose of the same God who showed mercy. Such an ideology may well reflect what Mary Pratt describes as 'autoethnographic' literary strategy. This refers to a literary strategy by those who were once colonized in order to write themselves as deserving powers by creating myths that justify their right to dominate and dispossess people of distant lands.⁹⁶ This point will be further enunciated later in this discussion.

The account moves further to the period of king Jehoiachin in 2 Kings.24:8ff. The Babylonians invaded Judah in the days of king Jehoiachin. According to the text, this time there was no resistance on the part of the king and the people. Eventually the king and his family were deported to Babylon perhaps as prisoners of war; an act of displacement of persons by imperial powers. Again, this defeat in the hands of the Babylonian powers was considered as an act of the divine will. It is this ideological strategy of the text that betrays the anaesthetic effect it was

⁹⁵ Jon L. Berquist, 'Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives For Canonization' in .Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reader*, pp. 78 – 95, .p.80.

⁹⁶ Mary Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturalation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 7-9. For example the Exodus narrative, written by those who were once subjugated, provides a good model for imperialism over the centuries and well beyond their original authors and readers. See Musa W Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Missouri, Chalice Press, 2000), p.51-52.

designed to have on the intended reader. The plausible implication is that the intended reader is not expected to query further when the victims become the victor and oppressor in the nearest future by the same divine decision, and by the mercy of Yahweh.

The invasion this time resulted in the plundering of the temple at Jerusalem. DH informs the reader about the carrying away of all the articles of gold in the Temple (2 Kings.13-14). It has been mentioned earlier that one of the motivations of imperialism is to plunder the inhabitants of the subjugated land both of their human and material resources.⁹⁷ Judah similarly was plundered of her gold and precious resources. Yet the text does not express any decisive condemnation of this act of imperial oppression. A plausible reason could be that it was intended to elaborate the intensity of their victimization in the hands of the divinely appointed oppressors personified in the Babylonian army. In addition, it is characteristic of the colonizers to want to express in the strongest terms possible the magnitude of their victimization. The narrative also tells us that the land was stripped of her human resources as all the elites were carried away to Babylon along with the king, leaving behind only the “poor of the land”, נְלָת עַם-הָאָרֶץ (2 Kings. 24:13-17).

The Notion of the ‘Poor’.

At this point, we need to pay brief attention to the concept of the poor in the OT especially in reference to the text at hand. Our text employs one of the various words for poor/poverty in the Hebrew OT.⁹⁸ The Hebrew word used here is derived from the word לָלַד, לָלַד the etymological meaning is “scanty or poor”. The occurrence of the root in other cognate languages attests to the nuanced usage in the Hebrew. For example, the Ugaritic form means “thin or sparse” while

⁹⁷ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, p.58 see Berquist, ‘Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization’, p. 80.

⁹⁸ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, לָלַד in *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: E.J.Brill, 1994), p.221-222. See also David J Clines, ((ed.)), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 2: 437 – 440.

the Syriac refers to that which is “little, or few” and the Arabic *dāllil* means “low” or “despised”. The term is used in Jg.6.15 to describe “a family”, and in Is.53.3, “Helpless” (Ex.30:15, Lv.19:15, I Sam.2:8, and Am.2:7etc.), or “powerless” in Ex.23:3 and “insignificant” or “small,” (in Jer.5:4, 39:10, Isa.26:6.). Important to our discussion, however, is the feminine form, *הלל*, which refers to the “unimportant”, the poor population in relation to the land as in 2 Kings.25.12, Jer.40.7, 52.16. Again, when this form is used in the construction, *עַם הָאָרֶץ* it describes “the poorest people of the land”. Another form of the word, *לל* also connotes the reality of oppression as a result of being poor or unimportant translated in Isaiah 38:14 “to be weary”. John D Pleins provides an interesting point in explaining the terms for poor/poverty. He points out that “in the prophetic text, therefore, the term *לל*, depicts the politically and economically marginalized elements of society”.⁹⁹ It is also observed that the narrative literature of the Pentateuch is unconcerned with the issue of poverty, and similarly the DH does not take up the topic. However, a related term, *dāllā*, *ללה* occurs twice in 2 Kings and thrice in Jeremiah, and refers to the poor peasant farmers forced to work for the Babylonian conquerors. Thus, it seems the ‘poor’ in the prophetic texts relates to the lower class, those who are marginalized economically and politically both within the Judahite society and the imperial setting of the Babylonian conquerors.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, one can possibly assert that the text here clearly betrays a binary inclination where some are considered as the poor of the land while the others are considered noble or elite. Consequently the “poor of the land, (*הַלֵּל עַם-הָאָרֶץ* - the poor, weak, or helpless one) are the ones who do not have a voice, an identity, or even a defence. This later connotation further resonates in The New English Bible translation of the Hebrew phrase as “the common people”. This simply shows a basic colonizing strategy whereby the colonized ‘other’ is described in such a way as to justify their domination. Similarly in the Nigerian society the Niger Delta people are referred to as a ‘minority group’

⁹⁹ Ibid. pp.5: 402-414.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. pp. 5:406 – 407.

which implies their domination by the majority group in the nation¹⁰¹ Having made this brief comment on the concept of the poor, I need to continue the survey of the events leading to the exile as presented in the biblical text.

The eleventh year reign of Mattaniah ended in another invasion by Babylon. The reality that his name was changed to Zedekiah, perhaps points to a colonizing act. The invasion again is attributed to the evils of the king Zedekiah. It was the Lord's anger that led to their defeat, "He threw them out of his presence". His presence here could refer to the Land of Judah which was given to them by divine provision. So again, it is not the imperial power of Babylon that is most significant in the turn of events but that it is the will of Yahweh that is accented. It also suggests a silence over some of the adverse effects of imperialization and colonization, and therefore making the text suspect. Why does it fail to address imperial power? Is the text an accomplice in imperialization, creating a "hermeneutic of suspicion"? Questions like these cause one to consider the power of the empire behind the textual production or narrative. In my opinion, the Deuteromistic account of the exile should be suspected of what Mary Pratt refers to as 'autoethnography'.¹⁰² Additionally, it is also perhaps because the whole narrative was concatenated to justify the ideology of the ruling empire either that of Babylon or Persia.¹⁰³

Zedekiah eventually rebelled against the king of Babylon under the pressure of the pro-Egyptians incurring the wrath and invasion of the Babylonian king (2 Kings. 25:1-24). This time around, the Babylonians under the commander of Nebuzaradan destroyed the temple and carried away the elites of the Judahite state leaving behind the "poor of the land" (2 kings.

¹⁰¹ The term 'minority' is problematic because it is used as a descriptive device for domination. It is an appellation inherited from the British colonial indirect rule policy in Nigeria and employed by the political elite since 1947 during the constitutional debate. See Rufus.Y.Akinyele, "Ethnic Minorities and the Nigerian History" in Toyin Falola, (ed.), *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century* (Carolina, Carolina Academic Press, 2002), pp.497-506,p.497-498. Cf. Craig W.McLuckie and Aubrey McPhail, (eds.), *Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2000),pp.109-125,p.110-111.

¹⁰² See p.40 above. Cf. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation*, p.51.

¹⁰³ Berquist argues for the colonial influence of the Persian Empire on the Yehudite canon. See Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization", pp. 78, 89-93.

25:12). Thus the accounts relate an important feature of imperialism; the plundering of people and their resources of distant and inhabited lands for the benefit of the imperial power.

This section of the narrative ends with an emphatic conclusion: “so Israel went into captivity away from her land”. The reference to land here is crucial because it perhaps indicates an absolute claim to the land of Judah and betrays the colonising effect of the text. This is an important point for locating the Servant text in such a colonial context which is similar to the neo-colonial condition of the Niger Delta communities.

The Notion of the Land:

The notion of the land may be regarded in this narrative as a way of claiming hegemony on the part of the elites among the Judahite community in Babylon on their return to the land of Canaan. There are two important features of this account on the invasion of Jerusalem. One is the reference to the land. The other is the description of those who were left behind.

Firstly, the subject of the land in the life and faith of Israel has been examined by some scholars such as Keith Whitelam and Michael Prior.¹⁰⁴ The important point to note is that there seems to be no single doctrine or teaching about ‘the land’ in the Old Testament that is clearly detailed and articulated.¹⁰⁵ However, one needs to note that “changes in Israel’s fortunes inevitably entailed corresponding changes in the manner in which the land was perceived”.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the land traditions of the Old Testament have always been appropriated to justify the conquest of lands in different regions and in different times.¹⁰⁷ As a result, some scholars like Michael Prior and Keith Whitelam in recent times have called for a moral critique of the

¹⁰⁴ Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996); Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁵ Eryl W. Davies, “Land: its rights and privileges” in R.E. Clements, ((ed.)), *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological, and Political Perspectives*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 349.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique*, pp. 11– 46.

subject of ‘the land’ in biblical studies. I am of the opinion, therefore, that biblical scholarship needs to embrace such a critique and to give it a louder voice.¹⁰⁸

Secondly, the account excludes other inhabitants of the land whose voices are silenced. The claim by the returnees to the land further raises the question of who were the exiles. If one assumes that it was the later generations of those who were taken into Babylon that returned to lay claim to the land, then what about other groups or tribes in the land? What about the Canaanites who were also in the land?¹⁰⁹ These questions are vital because they help to discern the ideological implications of the text by silencing other voices as a strategy for gaining hegemony. Keith Whitelam provides a discourse about the silenced history of the ‘Palestinians’ over the years. The reason for this silenced history is largely due to ideological and political motivations in matters of history as presented in the Hebrew Bible and by its later appearance in the various ‘histories’ of Israel.

Therefore, the foregoing observations serve to emphasize the colonial tendency consciously or unconsciously inscribed in the text. The reference to ‘the land’ and those who were left behind seems to lay an ideological foundation for a hegemonic claim to the land on the part of the returned exiles later on.¹¹⁰ A similar situation can be seen in the Niger Delta situation in Nigerian where the question of the land ownership and the control of its resources are largely responsible for the perennial subjugation of the people in the oil producing areas. For example, it has been shown that the Land Use Act 1978 is biased in favouring the oil companies at the expense of the village communities in the oil producing areas. Thus, the Land Act is framed in

¹⁰⁸ See Eryl. W. Davies, “The Morally Dubious Passages of the Hebrew Bible: An Examination of Some Proposed Solutions” in *Currents In Biblical Research*, 3.2 (April 2005) : 197 – 128. He highlights Michael Prior’s argument about the reluctance of biblical scholars to question the morality of some OT passages which includes passages relating to the promise, conquest and settlement in the land.

¹⁰⁹ See Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*, pp. 11-70 see also Henry Cattán, *The Palestine Question* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), pp. 3-9.

¹¹⁰ See similar view in Carroll’s exploration of certain Old Testament texts to demonstrate an understanding of the social background and ideological activities of those texts in relation to the issue of land exchange. Robert P Carroll, “Textual Strategies and Ideology in the Second Temple Period” in P.R Davies, (ed.), *Second Temple Studies 1: Persian Period, JSOT Supplement Series* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991): pp.108-124, p109 -115.

such a manner that guarantees the exploration and capitalistic interest of the oil companies and the ‘rentier’¹¹¹ interest of the Nigerian state. Having said this, I shall return to the account of the closing days of the next phase of the events that led to the final demise of monarchic Judah. Lastly the account of Gedaliah’s reign as imperial representative or as an administrative agent of Babylon shows that there were resistance groups within the colonized state of Judah; “the people of the land” (2 Kings. 25: 22-26). “The people of the land” here, might refer to the locale of power struggle in Judah. It is perhaps a reference to a faction; that stratum in society involved in the political and economic power struggle of the day.¹¹² Patricia Dutcher-Wells carried out a socio-political analysis of the late pre-exilic period in Judah which attempts to identify the social location of the Deuteronomist. She employed a social analytical model of agrarian and aristocratic societies in antiquity. One of the conclusions in her study is that power struggles in late pre-exilic Judah involved not a particular vocational group such as Prophets, Priest, soldiers, etc. Rather, it involved a mix of elites that cuts across various groups.¹¹³ It is further demonstrated that the Deuteronomist constituted one of these factions. Also, the study highlights the Deuteronomist as a coalition of professional groups, joined in a political alliance so necessary for power in the factionalized politics of aristocratic states.”¹¹⁴ In addition, the phrase, ‘people of the land’, possibly shows that there might have been some influence of the empire in the composition of DH because it attempts to portray a benign empire. A possible

¹¹¹ The term ‘rentier’ describes the interest of the Nigerian state in extracting taxes and ‘rents’ largely in the form of oil revenues from foreign companies, rather than from ‘productive’ activity. See Jedrezej Georg Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: Conflicts and Litigations between Oil Companies and the Village Communities* (Hamburg, LIT VERLAG, 2000), cf. p.27. Cf. Christian Akani, (ed.) *Corruption in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Experience* (Enugu, Fourth Dimension, 2002), p.xiv, Maria S Steyn, *Oil Politics in Ecuador and Nigeria*, Unpublished Phd Thesis. Internet material accessed on 08/052011. For more details on the subject see Douglas A Yates, *The Rentier State in Africa: Oil Rent Dependency and Neocolonialism in the Republic of Gabon* (Trenton, NJ, Africa Press, 1996).

¹¹² This has been a widely debated subject. For details see; Paolo Sacchi, *The History of the Second Temple Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) Eskenazi reconstructs the resettlement in Yehud during the Persian period as marked by leadership tensions. See Tamara C Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra and Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), pp 48 -51; See for some critical review of the debate. Lisbeth S Fried, University of Michigan, *The House of God who Dwells in Jerusalem.*, 2006. internet material accessed 09/11/10. www.lizfri((ed.))com.

¹¹³ Patricia Duthcher-Walls, “The Social Location of the Deuteronomist: A Sociological Study of Factional Politics in Late Pre-Exilic Judah”, *JSOT* 52 (1991) pp. 77-94.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 92.

pointer to this observation can be seen in the plea of Gedeliah that the people should serve the Babylonian, the imperial power (2 Kings. 25: 24.).¹¹⁵

The DH account comes to an end with perhaps a positive pointer to the future of the Judahite nation. However, it needs to be mentioned that the ambiguity of the end of 2 Kings cannot be ignored in reconstructing the events reported therein. This last passage narrates the release of king Jehoiachin from prison in Babylon and the favourable condition he was accorded by the Babylonian king, Evil-Merodach (2 Kings.25:22-26). The understanding of the last event reported in 2 Kings is varied due to its observable ambiguity. On one hand, the account of Jehoiachin in the Babylonian court could be regarded as a positive one. On the other hand, one could regard this last account as ambiguous or as a negative comment. For example, D. J. Wiseman considers the end of Kings as a positive reminder that all hope in the continuation of the Davidic dynasty is not lost. He reports that: “some see this as intended to end the history on a hopeful end, perhaps even of a ‘messianic’ revival”.¹¹⁶ Similarly Iain Provan explains that the account of Jehoiachin implies that all is not necessarily lost after all. The destruction of the last family of Judah does not mean that there is no member of the house of David left. Provan further expresses the hopeful end of Kings thus:

Jehoiachin represents at least the potential for the continuation of the Davidic line. These verses express the hope that grace may in the, triumph over law... These verses look back beyond Kings, in fact to Samuel, and they hold tenaciously to words of 2Samuel 7: 15-17; ‘my love will never be taken away from him...your house will be established forever’.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Kari Latvus, “Decolonizing Yahweh: A Postcolonial Reading of 2 kings 24-25” in Sugirtharajah, *A Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, pp.186-192, p.189.

¹¹⁶ Donald J Wiseman, *1&2Kings, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), p. 317. This discussion had been initiated earlier by G von Rad OT theology discussion. See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, D.M.G.Stalker, trans., vol.1 (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), pp.343-346.

¹¹⁷ Ian Provan, *1 & 2 Kings, New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), pp.280-281.

Richard D Nelson recognizes the possibility for a return of the Davidic dynasty reflected in the text. He states that “such a possibility, however, depends on God’s promise not on repentance”. However, Nelson acknowledges the ambiguity of the end of Kings. He says: “Jehoiachin’s experience becomes richly ambiguous rather than merely negative”.¹¹⁸ Similarly, David Janzen’s recent study of the end of Kings reiterates its intentional ambiguity with regard to the future of the Davidic dynasty based on a critical examination of the subject of dynastic punishment in Kings.¹¹⁹ However, it needs to be mentioned that Noth thought that DH did not consider any hope for the future of Judah despite the good fortunes of Jehoiachin in exile.¹²⁰ While the ambiguity of the end of the narrative is recognized, it remains plausible that such an ambiguity could be a tacit pointer to the hope of restoration.

Again, from a postcolonial optic, we find in this narrative of the exile a plausible representation of a benign empire that releases a rebellious king from his prison. One could consider the possibility of a positive ending, which puts the Babylonian king in favourable light. This positive editing may be subjected to suspicion. The suspicion here could be regarded to account for the influence of the empire in the production of the text. The positive ending could also suggest the subordinated attitude of the writer. Such an attitude is perhaps evidenced in the attempt to show that the imperial regime was not totally a bad one in the final analysis.¹²¹

The foregoing overview requires some summations. In the first place, the DH narrative of the events leading to Judah’s exile and the whole idea of the exile can be considered as an ideological strategy to explain her defeat and captivity. Secondly, it arguably portrays a positive outlook to the future in the hope that she will be restored to the land by the will of

¹¹⁸ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), p. 268.

¹¹⁹ David Janzen, ” An Ambiguous Ending: Dynastic Punishment in Kings and the Fate of the Davidides in 2 Kings 25.27.-30” in *JSOT* 33.1, 2008, pp. 39-58.

¹²⁰ Martin Noth, “The Deuteronomistic History”, in *JSOT, Supplement Series 15*(Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), pp. 142 – 143.

¹²¹ Latvus, “Decolonizing Yahweh”, p.189.

Yahweh. But reading the text using the historical imagination¹²² that is, a counter-reading approach, the ideological intent and the influence of the empire can be discerned. Perhaps its political intent is, under the influence of the empire, to elicit the co-operation of the Judahite population under the Babylonian and Persian imperialism since literary production and imperialization and colonization processes are not mutually exclusive. This point is vividly illustrated in the work of Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. The intricate relationship between literary production and imperialism stands as the central burden of Said's work where he laboriously extrapolates on the thesis that writing serves a cultural purpose which also explicitly or implicitly promotes imperialism and colonization among Western societies as well as in any situation of domination.¹²³ .

While the narrative seems to reveal some of the characteristics of imperial enterprise, it fails to show a strong and clear stance against imperialism. The basic motivations of the imperial enterprise are quite obvious in the text. This is evidenced by the subjugation of people of distant lands in order to exploit their human and material resources for the benefit of the colonizing power. The account seems to evidence imperial actions. It tells us that the Temple was plundered for all the articles of gold. The population was displaced with the carrying away of the nobles or elites of the land and leaving behind the voiceless and powerless people of the land. The whole process of imperialization seems to be exhibited in the narrative such as extraction, conquest, and taxation.¹²⁴ Rather than demonstrate a strong stance against the empire and imperialism, the narrative shows complicity with imperialism by representing the empire as benign and benevolent as in the case of the release of king Jehoiachin and his family from prison in Babylon. Thus, a critical implication is: how much can we trust such a partial

¹²² Uriah Y Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah: Towards a Postcolonial Reading of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), p.ix.

¹²³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, Vintage Press, 1993), pp. xii, xv,7, 12, 14. Note that similar literary productions served as a means of resistance to imperialism. See pp. xx, 230 – 340.

¹²⁴ Berquist, "Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization". pp. 79-80.

text? However, our major concern here is not so much the historicity of the narrative. The primary aim here is to highlight the ideological character implicit in the narrative, stated above, within the purview of a postcolonial reading. We have seen that the narrative comes short of a clear stance against imperialism, and provides the grounds for later colonization of the land in modern times. Further, it seems to represent an ancient claim to the modern land of the whole of Judah; an autoethnographic composition to justify the claim of the Yehudites at a later period over the whole of the land later called 'Palestine'. Not only that, the exile narrative attempts to secure the innocence of Israelite imperialistic control of Palestine by showing the reader that they were once victims of imperialism and colonization. Therefore, one can suggest that the whole idea of the exile be seen as ideological and even political betraying an imperial and colonizing influence.¹²⁵

2.3. POSTCOLONIAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DEUTERONOMIST ACCOUNT OF THE EXILE.

The task in this section is to interrogate DH from a postcolonial perspective in order to bring to the fore the ideological motivations behind the exilic account, and to demonstrate its relation to imperialism and colonialism as well as its relevance to the Niger Delta situation in postcolonial Nigeria. My aim is to highlight issues of imperialism and colonialism that are inscribed in the exile narrative within which the message of DI and the Suffering Servant text are set. This in turn makes it possible to reflect on the Niger Delta crisis with a similar context of colonization and domination. Therefore, the methodology I want to adopt here is to raise certain questions that are germane to postcolonial concerns in relation to the text of the Exile. The reasons for this mode of enquiry is the fact that the understanding of a text will be greatly influenced by the set of questions that both scholars and interpreters bring to the text.

¹²⁵ See, for instance, the discussion on the notion of the 'empty land' as serving a political – ideological purpose. Robert P. Carroll, 'The Myth of The Empty Land' in *SEMEIA* 59 (1992): 79 -93.

Consequently, the mode of enquiry is drawn from, but not limited to, both Uriah Kim and Musa Dube's discussions on articulating a postcolonial position with respect to biblical texts.¹²⁶ Both studies will assist us to engage with the biblical texts from a postcolonial perspective.

These enquiries will address three areas; one is the question of the Exiles, the second is the question of the exile narrative as a master narrative, and the third relates to features of imperialism in the text. These sets of questions are significant to my discussion because they provide a crucial hermeneutical trajectory for a postcolonial engagement with the text.

2.3.1. The Exiles: Who were the exiles? Who were included or excluded in this group identity in the narrative? How were they portrayed in the text? The Deuteronomist author at various points in the narrative shows the reader that the major victims of the exile were the priestly family, the royal family and official court members and staff. On the other hand, the poor of the land were doubly victimised. They were left leaderless and classless, and were treated unfit to go anywhere, and they were read out of the history. As the Deuteronomist account shows, during the invasion under Jehoiachin, it was members of the royal family, nobles, landowners, military leaders, and elders of the people, artisans, priest, and prophets that were exiled along with king Jehoiachin and the prophet Ezekiel (2 Kings. 24:14 -16, cf. Jer.24: 1, 27:20, Ezk.1: 1-3).

Those who were excluded in the deportation and depreciation of Judah were the poor- the peasant labourers¹²⁷; those who do not deserve to be mentioned in the narrative. Furthermore,

¹²⁶ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Uriah Kim, "Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?" in Gale A Yee, ed., *Judges and Methods: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995), pp.161 -182.

¹²⁷ It is noted that the use of the term לָלוּחַ in the Psalms occurs less frequently. Here the occurrences are mostly in relation to God's care for the 'poor'. It is only in Ps.41:2 that it deals with a person's relation to the poor.. On the whole, it is observed that the use of the term here is vague in defining physical poverty. The reason for this vagueness might be that it is more related to its social- political reference, as seen in the use in narrative texts such as Ruth and DH where it basically refers to 'poor peasant farmers' confirming promises of a blessing. Most of the occurrences are observed to be in reference to God's concern for the 'poor'. See J. D. Pleins, "Poor", in, David Noel Freedman, (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* , vol. 5 (London: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 402 – 414, pp.406 – 407.

they were not even described in any other way, except we are told that they were poor. The implication of the text could be that the poor were not as important in the Judahite society as the others who went into exile, because the accent seems to fall on the “the basket of good figs”-“the people of the deportation”. They are “the holy community who must separate themselves from the people of the land.”¹²⁸ .

Thus, a ‘they/us’ binary was introduced within the fabric of the community by the writer. This whole idea about the voiceless and hapless poor of the land perhaps was intended to create a prominent space for the elites or for the royal Davidic tradition in view of the prominence given to the deportation and later restoration or rehabilitation of king Jehoiachin. In other words, it can be argued that the hope or indication of a restoration was all about the elites and not ‘the poor’ or the underclass. Itumeleng Mosala illustrates this observation in explaining how liberation theologians have often failed to recognize the oppressor in the text because of their commitment to biblical hermeneutics in appropriating the promise in Isa.61: 1-7. He explains that it is because Black theologians ignore the class basis of the text, that they could not comprehend the fact that it is the liberation of the elites that the text has in mind.¹²⁹ The point is that if the story of Jehoiachin’s restoration was meant to inspire any hope, that hope was perhaps not meant for the poor, but for the returning *gōlāh*, who were most likely a hegemonic class during the exilic period.¹³⁰

Furthermore, the narrative seems to suggest it was the poor that were left behind at the first deportation and who were probably expected to establish a new society and a new royal court, and to recruit a new army under imperial supervision.¹³¹ Regarding the running of the affairs of the society, the reading of the story requires that “the poor” were able to run the society.

¹²⁸ Robert P. Carroll, ‘The Myth of The Empty Land’ in *SEMEIA* 59 (1992): pp.79 -93, p.85.

¹²⁹ Itumeleng Mosala, “Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology” in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, (eds.), Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley (Mary knoll: Orbis Books, 1993),pp. 61-68.

¹³⁰ See for further details Thomas C Romer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Social, Historical and Literary Introduction*. London: T&T Clark, 2007.p.168.

¹³¹ Kari Latvus, “Decolonizing Yahweh”, p. 188.

According to Latvus, “From among ‘the remaining poor’ emerges a more or less established society including political groups, representatives of royal family, and officers of forces”.¹³² He further makes a significant comment that the “remaining poor” seems to be a very flexible expression as a synonym for all those who are not worth mentioning.¹³³ Following the destruction of Judah, the poor were not given a prominent space as victims of the same devastation as the rest of the Judahites. One could consider the description of the ‘poor’ as the “less important of the population” not as a purely sociological description¹³⁴ but as a colonial ‘Other’. The colonial ‘Other’ emphasizes ‘the poor’ as objects of domination and colonization. Thus, a more relevant description of this social class from a postcolonial optic will be to see ‘the poor’ as “just an unnumbered, unnamed, and non-located group somewhere.”¹³⁵ This observation is a clear pointer to the effects of colonization on the part of the authors/editors influenced by their social experience of class-power relations among the inhabitants. The point is that the reference to ‘the poor’ or the unimportant is, implicitly or explicitly, a self-legitimizing rhetoric on the part of the Judean elites in their claim to power. Naming the ‘other’ as ‘poor’ therefore is a way of legitimizing their domination by the Judean elites.¹³⁶ In DH, despite the sympathetic descriptions of the poor, the tendency to regard the poor as the colonial ‘Other’ is discernible. This is because in the exile narrative the naming of the ‘Other’ as ‘poor’ is perhaps a way of legitimizing the domination of the lower class by the elite group.¹³⁷

2.3.2. The Exile Narrative as a Master Narrative: Do the non-Israelites or non-Judahites speak? Who speaks for them? Are we given access to their point of view? These questions are

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid, p.188.

¹³⁴ Berquist, “Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization”, p.79.

¹³⁵ Latvus, “Decolonizing Yahweh”, p.188.

¹³⁶ See an example in post-biblical period as explained by Mayra Rivera, a postcolonial scholar. She identifies with this type of social designation or naming the ‘Other’ in her postcolonial engagement with the idea of ‘Sophia’ (Wisdom) in the text of Proverbs. She asserts that the reference to the ‘Other’ in the post-exilic biblical narratives is tantamount to performing a typical colonial scene.¹³⁶ A typical colonial scene usually begins with naming the other in some inferior way.

¹³⁷ See for a similar view of the post-exilic situation in Judah. Rivera, ‘God at the Crossroads: Sophia’, p.241.

important because they point us to the realities of power relations within the text.¹³⁸ These questions become very significant, given that it is characteristic of a colonizing text to define the image of the colonized in terms that privileges the colonizers thereby silencing the voices of the subjugated class. For instance, Berquist demonstrates that the Hebrew canon was influenced by the Empire–Persian in this case. Therefore, it was probably an ideological tool – that is, the use of knowledge, values and beliefs in a way that privileges the dominant class. It is a means of gaining hegemony or control in the control of the Yehudite/ Jewish in community in Judah. Berquist aptly illustrates this point as follows:

Who constructed the text in colonial Yehud? The empire funded the writing of a self-justifying ideological metanarrative that overlays and attempts to organize the canon. Those who wrote the texts occupied a peculiar social location, partaking of the world views of the colonizer and the colonized at the same time. They were the scribes and the officials of Yehud, a class created and supported by the imperial powers...They were a ruling class within the colony, situated along the chasm between colonized and colonizer.¹³⁹

This is a true mark of colonialism. It is the centre that produces the meta-narrative or ‘master narrative’ of history without a space for alternative voices. The rest of the inhabitants or the non-Israelites are not given a voice. Thus, postcolonialism will perhaps suggest that the exilic account could possibly be considered to be a biased narrative that privileges the ruling class. Postcolonial criticism will consider the narrative as an account of the past by a dominant class, ‘*the gōlāh*’, such as the scribes/ruling elites among the returnees who seek to silence alternative voices.¹⁴⁰ This reveals the ideological intention of the author(s) or editor(s) or narrator/s of the story. According to Whitelam in his discussion about fractured history, he cautions that:

the realization that accounts of the past are invariably the products of a small elite and are in competition with other possible accounts, of which we may have no evidence, ought to

¹³⁸ Kim raised similar questions in a postcolonial approach to the study of the Book of Judges. See Uriah Y Kim, “Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?”, pp. 161 -182.

¹³⁹ Jon L. Berquist, “Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives For Canonization”. p. 90, 80 -92.

¹⁴⁰ Keith.W.Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel*, p.12.

lead to greater caution in use of such accounts to construct Israelite history.¹⁴¹

Therefore, postcolonial criticism seeks to highlight the silences in the narrative. It examines the exile narrative from the perspective of those whose voices are not heard in the narrative.

The closest voice we hear in the text is that of a brief and un-sustained voice of opposition. The narrator gives a peculiar instance of the voice of opposition in the story. The text reports the assassination of Gedeliah organized by Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and ten other men (2 Kings 25:25-26). However, Berquist, in addition, points out the need for caution when dealing with biblical text even where it seems to reflect an oppositional stance against the system. We need such caution in order to discern the voice of the non-Israelites or the marginalized ‘other’ This is because sometimes such voices of opposition are actually a way of supporting the interest of the dominant class.¹⁴²

A postcolonial concern from the foregoing is that the exile narrative betrays a silencing of the alternative voices. This is because it seems the dominant class appropriated the exile narrative to assert their hegemony and dominance in Judah.¹⁴³

2.3.3. The Features of the Exile Narrative as an Imperializing Text: the imperial characteristic of the exilic narrative can be evaluated within certain literary terms /concepts associated with travel writing. These terms are: “anti-conquest” ideology and the “contact zone”. These concepts were originally derived by Mary Louise Pratt in her book; *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. The term “anti-conquest” is confusing since at a glance it seems to mean “against conquest”.¹⁴⁴ However, Pratt defines ‘anti – conquest’ as a

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 33.

¹⁴² Berquist, “Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives For Canonization”. pp.88-89. See a similar explanation by Gareth Griffiths, “The Myth of Authenticity: Representation, Discourse and Social practice” in *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*, (eds.), Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.70 – 85, p.75.

¹⁴³ Carroll, ‘The Myth of The Empty Land’, pp.79 -93.

¹⁴⁴ I actually contacted Uriah Y Kim on this subject for clarification and in applying it to a biblical text. See Kim, ‘Is there an Anti-Conquest Ideology in the Book of Judges?’ in Roland Boer (ed.), *Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible* (Semeia Studies; forthcoming).

term which is used to refer to the strategies of representation whereby the European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony. In other words, anti-conquest ideology describes the strategies whereby the hegemonic group justifies its domination of the other. Also, the contact zone may be defined as:

...a way of referring to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, racial inequality, and intractable conflict.¹⁴⁵

Thus, the contact zone describes the experience/s that takes place in the colonial encounter. It is interesting to know that these concepts have also been adopted by Musa Dube in her critique of the Exodus and Joshua 1—12 where she examines the narratives against the grain of traditional interpretation.¹⁴⁶ However, the difference here is that, as earlier stated, I shall apply the anti-conquest ideology and the contact zone concept to the account of the Exile to highlight its imperializing features. Each of the concepts calls for a different set of questions. In addition, the terms will be reflected upon within the overarching concern of postcolonialism and the socio-political situation in Nigeria.

The Exile Narrative as anti-conquest ideology:

As defined earlier, anti-conquest ideology is a strategy on the part of the hegemonic group to justify their domination of other group/s. Therefore, in applying the anti-conquest paradigm to the exilic account, it is pertinent to raise certain critical questions. First, does the text reflect a clear stance against imperialism? Second, how does the text represent an ‘anti – conquest ideology as a means for legitimizing or justifying imperialism?

With regard to the first question, the response is that the narrative seems to stop short of any attempt to condemn imperialism. Instead, what is discernable is collaboration with the imperial

¹⁴⁵ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 6. Cf. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, p.60-66.

¹⁴⁶ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, pp. 57- 80.

centre situated in Babylon. One, this collaboration is reflected in the articulation of the imperial activities of Babylon in Judah. Latvus lends credence to this point when he explains that one of the features of the colonization process on Judah can be linked to the manner in which the military activities of Babylon are described in the exile story. According to Latvus, another dimension of the colonizing process is linked with the deeds of Babylon. Cruelty and killings committed by Babylonians are articulated on several occasions in the story but always in connection with a reminder that Israelite rebellion is an original cause of the act.¹⁴⁷

Thus, the description of the cruelty and killings perpetrated by the Babylonians were regarded not to be acts of imperialism but a divine orchestration of events as a matter of retribution or punishment for the sins of Judah.¹⁴⁸ The plot of the story in every instance shows that the murderous invasions of Babylon are preceded with a reminder of the original cause of the act. This original cause is frequently phrased thus: “he did evil in the sight of the lord”.

This is the case especially with the last three kings of Judah in the narrative, who were apportioned the blame for the calamity that befell the nation by the hands of the Babylonians. Jehoiakim is reported to have rebelled against Babylon. Consequently, Yahweh sent Babylon and a coalition of nations against Judah (2 Kings. 23:36- 24: 1- 3). Jehoiachin suffers a similar judgement; “He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father had done” (24: 9). Lastly, the account of the horrendous devastation executed by the Babylonians during the reign of Zedekiah in 587/586 BCE was preceded by a similar connection to an original cause. Zedekiah’s rebellion against Yahweh is identified as the cause of the calamity; “He did evil in the eyes of the Lord”, just as his father Jehoiakim had done”. DH goes further to state the consequence of this rebellion; it was because of the Lord’s anger that all this happened to Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence (24: 19 – 20).

¹⁴⁷ Latvus, “Decolonizing Yahweh”, p. 188.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Thus, the reader is made to understand that Judah became a victim of imperial power because of her rebellion against Yahweh. However, a postcolonial optic gives us an opportunity to underline the power relations in the narrative. My argument here is that the narrative, as it stands, is symptomatic of colonial influence. Latvus' discussion on how colonization impacts theology captures the point I have made above concerning the theological explanation for the fall of Judah. He says:

On every occasion where the Babylonian empire uses violence or destroys the royal palace or temple, on every occasion when Babylon carries away the treasures or valuable things, there is always a preparatory section in the plot of the story where responsibility or the actual cause is pushed into the Israelite hands.¹⁴⁹

Therefore, the position of the narrative in relation to imperialism is perhaps that of collaboration rather than resistance. The effect of the rhetoric of the narrative, in a sense, is an accommodation of the imperial power of Babylon not as an evil institution but as a benign empire. It implies that "actually Babylon does not look so bad at all, but is only a loyal servant in the mechanism of the inevitable larger historical logic".¹⁵⁰ Such collaborative stance is typical of colonized people. Musa Dube's observation confirms this point in her description of collaboration. She states that:

Often the colonized are forced to collaborate with the colonizing powers at various stages of their suppression. They begin to advance the agendas of the oppressors and to proclaim their superiority by choice or by the mere fact of living under the ruling institutions of the colonizer.¹⁵¹

Secondly, concerning collaboration, an identifiable element that betrays imperial character in the exilic account is the writer's subordinated attitude especially in the last verses in 2 Kings 25: 22-30. The subordinated attitude of the writer refers to "a positive understanding of the

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.189.

¹⁵¹ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 50.

colonial power”.¹⁵² Although, such a positive view is debatable, as Noth explains, this may not negate the statement made above in relation to the influence of the Babylonian empire and the later Persian Empire.¹⁵³ However, a pointer to this subordinated attitude could be seen in Gedeliah’s words to the people wherein Babylon is praised as a new master, and thus the people should not be afraid and Babylon deserves to be served.¹⁵⁴

There are three critical observations that are pertinent to my discussion. One is that in this passage, it is not Yahweh that the people are called upon to serve but the foreign imperial nation. This point seems to stand in opposition to the main thrust of DH’s interpretation. The second is that the key words operative in this passage are focal deuteronomistic expressions reloaded with a new focus, namely, a positive attitude towards the colonizing power. Hence, Latvus concludes that:

It seems as if the Deuteronomistic Yahweh talk had been transferred into a new context to create loyalty towards the colonial power, as if it would be the divine. Imperial power is seen and described by divine notions in order to underline how good it actually is”.¹⁵⁵

Third, the report of the release and rehabilitation of Jehoiachin can also be considered to affirm the colonial characteristic of the Babylonian exilic account in the text. Traditional historical criticism largely considers this last paragraph as indicating a nationalistic hope or an optimistic end to a sad narrative. Others see it differently. For example Richard D Nelson sees the last verses as emphasizing the need for the exiles to be open to God’s surprises of grace as seen in Jehoiachin’s case.¹⁵⁶ John Gray opines that the last episode illustrates a superstitious belief

¹⁵² Latvus, “Decolonizing Yahweh”, *ibid.*

¹⁵³ Berquist actually demonstrates how the Persian regime used the exile narrative as an ideology to justify their imperial interest.. Berquist, ‘Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization’, pp.81 – 82. Noth, “The Deuteronomistic History, p 142-143.

¹⁵⁴ Latvus highlights a number of phraseologies employed in this passage.

These phrases are ‘to serve’, “it shall be well with you” and also “do not fear”. These phrases resonate with the theology of Deuteronomy where these expressions are used in relation to Yahweh.(Deut. 4: 40, 5: 16, 26; 6:3, 18; 12: 25, 28; 22: 7, 1:21; 20: 3; Jos. 10: 25, etc. Latvus, “Decolonizing Yahweh”, pp. 189. – 190.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*,p.190.

¹⁵⁶ Richard, D Nelson, *First and Second Kings, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), p. 2.

which imposes a positive plot upon a story with a sad end.¹⁵⁷ On the contrary, a possible viewpoint insists that the final episode in 2 Kings is a reflection of colonial influence. Therefore, a postcolonial optic allows for identifying the gaps in the interpretation of the passage in terms of power relations; a contrapuntal reading of the text.¹⁵⁸

The point I am making is that this last episode possibly further reflects colonial influence on the text. The text reports that Babylon was good to Jehoiachin and his household in Babylon. It presents the imperial power under Evil-Merodach to be an understanding and good regime. King Jehoiachin is rehabilitated and restored. He was given a high rank in the imperial courts, and ate from the hands of the imperial powers. Thus the imperial empire is presented as benevolent.

One would acknowledge the classical dilemma involved in reading this passage as stated above. The interpretative divide has been to interpret it as conveying a nationalistic hope or a mere rhetoric to append some optimistic tone to a sad story but the colonial force of the text is indicative. Latvus conclusion is apropos. He says:

The end of 2 Kings is not merely a pessimistic conclusion of the book, nor is it an expression of nationalistic hopes, but it is a sign of the inner colonization of the writer. The main message of the writer focuses on the good relations between the empire and subordinate.¹⁵⁹

The effect of the foregoing is that the exilic narrative seems to exhibit features of inner colonization. The author/s writing from his/their stand-point as victims of imperialization seems to have manifested the concomitant psyche of a colonized people. This is because the story fails to present a clear stand against imperialism. It shows collaboration with the imperial centre of Babylon rather than a resistance or repudiation of imperial acts in the land of Judah.

¹⁵⁷ John Gray, I and 11 Kings, *Old Testament Library* (London: SCM, 1964), p. 705.

¹⁵⁸ That is, an oppositional view to reading a text. See Ashcroft, *et al*, "Contrapuntal reading" in *Key Concepts In Postcolonial Stud*, p. 55.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Latvus, "Decolonizing Yahweh".

The second question is: In what ways does the text represent an anti-conquest ideology? Here, Dube's definition will be useful. According to Dube, anti-conquest ideology is described as "the literary strategy that allow colonizers to claim foreign lands while securing their innocence"¹⁶⁰ This strategy is grounded on certain literary-rhetorical depictions which is essentially a strategy that authorizes travel from one land to another with the purpose of exploiting its resources. Consequently, I will attempt to outline how the exile narrative exhibits this imperializing element mentioned above by raising two rhetorical questions.

First, does the narrative authorize travel to distant land in order to dispossess and plunder its resources? A reading of the text in view of the preceding line of enquiry will show that the response to the postcolonial questions raised can be answered in the affirmative. In the first place, the invading Babylonians came into Judah during the latter's imperial enterprise in the region. The travel that brought the Babylonians into Judah is considered to be the consequence of Judah's broken relationship with Yahweh. The text states that "...in the nineteenth year Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem". (2 Kings.25: 8). Thus the 'travelling to' was followed by the destruction of the temple and the royal palace as well as the plundering of the temple of its precious items (2 Kings 25: 13ff).

Second, how does the text authorize this travelling? As I have discussed earlier, the calamity that befell Judah in the hands of the Babylonians was considered to be an inevitable repercussion for the sins of Judah against Yahweh. The present political reality necessitated a renewed theological explanation of the events. The travelling to Judah by the Babylonians could be justified because the people had disobeyed their God. Latvus affirms this point when he points out the relationship of Yahweh in the final days of Judah in three basic dimensions in

¹⁶⁰ Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, p.60. See for similar questions Kim, "Postcolonial Criticism; Who Is the Other in the Book of Judges" p. 175; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 18.

the story.¹⁶¹ Judah sinned against God (24:9, 19), Yahweh permitted colonial military invasions according to his will (24:2, 3, 13) and the whole episode was motivated by the anger of Yahweh (24:20; cf.24: 3). Responsibility for the imperial invasion and plundering of Judah was laid not at the feet of the empire. Rather, DH laid the blame squarely at the door steps of the people of Judah and her kings. Thus, the text evidences colonial and imperialistic influences. From the wider perspective of the exile and return, the narrative as an anti-conquest literary strategy attempts to secure the innocence of the returned exiles in dispossessing other groups in the land.¹⁶²

Is it not the case with the Niger Delta communities in the Nigerian state? The continued subjugation of these communities has always been hinged on the necessity of a federal system for a united Nigeria. Yet, under this federal system the exploitation of the people and their resources continues unabated with all viciousness.¹⁶³

The Contact zone: The contact zone has been described earlier as a space of conflict, domination or compromise between the coloniser and the colonized or the encounter between the dominating group and the dominated minority. The question here is how does the exile narrative construct the contact zone? How is the contact zone depicted in the exile narrative? Is it depicted as a dialogue and mutual interdependence, or condemnation and replacement of all that is foreign? Dube further describes the contact-zone as an unavoidable stage of colonialism.¹⁶⁴ In imperial text, the characteristic methodology is the desire to take control of a foreign land, culturally, economically, politically, and geographically.¹⁶⁵ In the narrative, we

¹⁶¹ Latvus, "Decolonizing Yahweh", p. 190.

¹⁶² Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens, *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question.*(London: Verso,1988), p.1-3

¹⁶³ See Arthur A Nwankwo, 'Political Economy of Corruption in Nigeria in Christian Akani, (ed.) *Corruption in Nigeria:The Niger Delta Experience*, pp7-28.p.25-26. Cf.Rob Nixon, *Pipe Dreams:Ken Saro-Wiwa, Enviromental Justice and Micriminority Rights* in Craig W McLuckie and Aubrey McPhail, (eds.), *Ken Saro-Wiwa:Writer and Political Activist* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp109-125, p.110-111.

¹⁶⁴ Dube, , *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 67

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

find Babylonians coming into contact with the Judahite community with the desire to subdue and take control politically, economically, and geographically.

Furthermore, in 2 Kings 25: 27-30 we find another instance of the contact zone. Jehoiachin was released from prison; he was brought into contact with the imperial king, Evil-Merodach of Babylon, and was maintained from the imperial purse. At this point the contact-zone is constructed to reflect an acceptance of imperial policies rather than resistance. The literary strategy seems to affirm the benevolence of the imperial power. This contact zone obviously is that of accommodation of imperial policy, and it seeks to illustrate the benevolence of the empire. Dutcher-Wells illustrates this type of imperial accommodation with regard to the Deuteronomistic group who could be identified as a mix of elites cutting across the strata of society.¹⁶⁶ If we accept the argument, as stated earlier, that it is possibly the priestly group of the Deuteronomist party that might have been responsible for the various stages of the redaction, it is most probable that this elite group exhibit a proclivity to accommodate imperial policies.¹⁶⁷

Again, in the narrative during the time of Ezra, The exiles or the returnees were prohibited from marrying foreign women from the neighbouring regions. In fact the matter called for a national resolution led by Ezra and the leaders of the returned exile (Ezra.10:1ff). Those who had married these foreign women were required to separate themselves from them and their people. The key phrase is: “separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives” (Ezra. 10:11). Why is this contact-zone constructed in this manner? One could opine that the contact-zone was so constructed to create a binary of identity; a we/they dichotomy. While the ‘other’ is regarded as despicable objects, ‘Israel’ is projected as the

¹⁶⁶ Dutcher-Walls, “The Social Location of the Deuteronomist”, p. 91.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

superior subject or the superior class. The ‘other’ does not deserve integration into the new restored community.

An important question here is what is the possible motivation for this exclusion of the others in the contact zone? One would think the response to this from a postcolonial optic is that it was intended to create a hegemonic identity for the “Israelites ” or the returned ‘Exiles’ upon their arrival to the land of Jerusalem.¹⁶⁸ The struggle to create an identity is characteristic of people who have experienced displacement and dislocation as stated earlier.¹⁶⁹ Also, the particularity of a restored community in the larger narrative of the exile and return presented a contact zone that emphasized an exclusive national identity.¹⁷⁰ This tendency to emphasize exclusiveness is also characteristic of imperializing texts, and much of the Hebrew Bible as Kwesi Dickson, an African theologian, has argued.¹⁷¹ As such, the exilic account attempts to justify Israel’s hegemony over other inhabitants as well as over the land both in the past and in the present times. This point is buttressed by P. Carroll, who argues that:

The second Temple community was to be constituted by the ‘people of deportation’ only...Much – in some sense perhaps all– of the literature of the Hebrew Bible must be regarded as the documentation of their claims to the land and as a reflection of their ideology.¹⁷²

Therefore, the analysis of the text within the concept of the ‘contact zone’ leads us to concede the point that the exilic story resonates with imperialistic and colonial ideology.

The discussion so far has demonstrated the fact that the exile account cannot be taken at face value. Thus, it suggests that the exile text betrays imperial and colonial influences. The

¹⁶⁸ See a similar argument in Kim, “Postcolonial Criticism; Who Is the Other in the Book of Judges?”, p.175. See a current discussion on Ethnicity in The Hebrew Bible by James C. Miller, “Ethnicity and the Hebrew Bible: Prospect and Problems” in *Currents in Biblical Research*, 6.2 June (2008), pp.170-213.

¹⁶⁹ See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, (eds.), *Key Concepts In Postcolonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 73-74..

¹⁷⁰ Later on this paper the subject of national identity will be discussed further.

¹⁷¹ He examined both the inclusive and exclusive attitudes of the Hebrew Bible, and concludes that the exclusivist attitude is predominant. See Kwesi Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission: Christianity and Exclusivism* (Maryknoll, N.Y. Orbis Books, 1991), p. 3

¹⁷² Carroll, ‘The Myth Of The Empty Land’, p. 85.

presence of collaboration with the empire causes one to suspect the text of complicity with imperial ideology. Whatever might have constituted historical elements in the exilic account, it may not preclude the fact that it is a historical narrative, that is, history in the service of culture; cultural identity.¹⁷³ This kind of history, and especially the Babylonian exile account, seems to betray the colonization of the author/s or editor/s inner mind.¹⁷⁴ A postcolonial engagement with the Babylonian historical context therefore helps to underscore the elements of colonization, domination and resistance, which in turn provides the space for addressing the focus of this dissertation. Consequently, the foregoing discussion provides the space for reading the Servant message to the exile audience within a context of domination, resistance, and conflict similar to the Niger Delta communities carrying out various forms of resistance to their domination by the Nigerian society.

At this point, another pertinent question needs to be raised. The question is: if the Babylonian exile is largely an ideological text in the service of the elites in order to gain hegemony over the rest, is the concept of the Servant in Deutero – Isaiah not geared towards a subversive and resistance purpose? This trajectory of enquiry will be our focus in the subsequent chapters where I will engage both the historical critical study of Deutero – Isaiah followed by that of the Servant song in Isaiah 52: 13 – 53:12 from a postcolonial perspective as a path of reflecting on the socio-political situation of the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

¹⁷³ Romer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, p.110., Linville, , “The Past as a Project of Social Identity”, p.78.

¹⁷⁴ Latvus, “Decolonizing Yahweh”, p. 189.

CHAPTER THREE

DEUTERO-ISAIAH STUDIES: A POSTCOLONIAL ENGAGEMENT

3. 1. INTRODUCTION: In addition to the discussion on the Babylonian exile, a very critical area of discussion in the study of Isaiah is also the issue of the literary context related to Suffering Servant text. This chapter aims to attempt a postcolonial engagement with the literary context of the Sufferings Servant text to show how modern readers interact with text of DI. This is relevant because the historical critical approach still holds sway among scholars and teachers in Africa as well as in the Nigerian church. Consequently, this chapter aims to show the failings of the historical method in addressing the issues that confront those that are on the underside of history such as the Niger Delta communities in Nigeria, and to highlight the necessity for a postcolonial reading of the Servant text in line with the remit of this dissertation. To accomplish the stated aims, I will pursue the following objectives.

First, I will provide a summary of some of the major trends in the historical critical study of Deutero-Isaiah¹⁷⁵ so as to highlight the major interests and motivations in the historical critical research of the text of DI. The second objective is to attempt to provide an assessment of historical critical approach to the study of Deutero-Isaiah from the perspective of postcolonial concerns and the postcolonial conditions of the Niger Delta.

3.2. A Summary of the Historical Critical Study of Deutero-Isaiah.

Historical - critical study of the Deutero-Isaiah over the centuries has witnessed the application of various developments of critical research. This basically took the form of literary criticism, Form criticism, and Redaction criticism. In general, literary criticism is understood as a method of examining the Bible as a literary composition. Hence, it deals with determining the sources of biblical writings, the date of origin, and as far as possible, matters of authorship.¹⁷⁶ This method has been applied to the study of DI over the centuries beginning with the work of J. C.

¹⁷⁵ Deutero – Isaiah will subsequently be abbreviated to DI in this study.

¹⁷⁶ See David Greenwood, “Rhetorical Criticism and Formgeschichte: Some Methodological Considerations”, *JBL*, vol 89, 4 (Dec., 1970), pp.418 -426, p.422.

Döderlein (1775). The application of this method led to the debate on the multiple authorship of Isaiah and the consensus on the Babylonian exile historical context of DI. A major motivation in this method is the attempt to discover an original meaning and context of the prophetic text. The effect is that scholars become unaware of the imperializing/hegemonic effect of their discourse. This is because the tools of interpretation remain largely in the hands of the Academy: European and North American males, thereby shutting out other voices in the interpretation enterprise.¹⁷⁷

Again, another variation of the historical critical approach to the study of DI is form criticism. This was initiated by H. Gunkel – blocking out antecedent developments in scholarship. Gunkel’s major contribution to the study of the OT literature is his recognition and analysis of the forms of the prophetic literature.¹⁷⁸ This rediscovered awareness indicated that the original form of prophecy must have been spoken forms. In summary, form criticism essentially focuses on the text in order to identify and classify the units of oral material. It seeks to relate such materials to their presumed sociological setting in the life of the ancient community, and to determine how their function in the sociological settings has modified or shaped the tradition¹⁷⁹. Therefore, it attempts to gain entrance into the world of the prophet in order to achieve an original meaning of the prophet’s words.

Also, there is redaction Criticism which introduced a shift in the research to the role of the redactor(s) who were no longer necessarily seen as ‘cut and paste’ scribes but editors with their own ideologies and compositional skills. Redaction Criticism studies the contribution of the editor and the ideology, prejudice, and creativity he reflects in the text.¹⁸⁰ In relation to DI, for instance, McKenzie argues that the oracles were preserved by a group of disciples and scribes who copied, studied, and interpreted the oracles of the prophets, and who continued the

¹⁷⁷ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “Defending *the* Centre, Trivializing *Bible in the* Margins”, *Reading the Bible in the Global Village* (Helsinki: Atlanta, SBL, 2000), p. 32.

¹⁷⁸ Hermann F. Gunkel, *Die Propheten*, (Göttingen, 1917)

¹⁷⁹ Edgar Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p.51.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 39 - 51.

Isaianic tradition.¹⁸¹ Therefore, the major goal of this approach apparently is to secure a coherent reading of the text of DI as a whole. Consequently, this approach brings us back to the role of the reader/redactors. Such editors appear not to be a ‘cut and paste’ redactors. Rather, they must have compiled the text in view of their ideologies and theological positions.¹⁸²

However, there is the likelihood that redaction criticism could become useful for postcolonial criticism because of its emphasis on the role of the reader. Nevertheless, postcolonial criticism goes beyond identifying the contribution of the reader to argue that the reader/redactor is actually influenced by the social- political context of his time. Postcolonial criticism also argues that those who apply this approach are unaware of the hegemonic and imperial context of their thoughts.¹⁸³ Thus, the social location of the reader becomes paramount in engaging with the biblical text.

3. 3. Historical Criticism As Seen through the Postcolonial Optic:

The preceding summary of the historical critical study of DI does not totally negate the value of the method. This is because the method contributes to our knowledge of the text and its historical context. One of such contributions is that historical criticism has helped us to gain an understanding of the material and ideological background of the biblical text. According to Pui-lan, “...much of the work of historical critics contributes to the understanding of the “worldliness” of the text, that is, the material and ideological backgrounds from which the texts emerged and to which the text responded”.¹⁸⁴ Thus, postcolonial criticism can appropriate the insights gained from historical criticism.

However, the potential value of historical criticism stated above does not ignore some of the concomitant problems. The historical critical method in reading the text of the Old Testament

¹⁸¹ John L Mckenzie, *Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, *Anchor Bible*, vol.2. (London, Doubleday, 1968), pp. xii- xxiii.

¹⁸² Collins, *Mantle of Elijah*, *Ibid.*,p32-34.

¹⁸³Daniel Patte, *Ethics of biblical interpretation : a re-evaluation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995),p. 1-4, 25-30.

¹⁸⁴ Pui-Ian, “*Making the Connections: Postcolonial Studies and Feminist Biblical Interpretation* p.46.

and the study of Second Isaiah carries certain problems from a postcolonial perspective that must be highlighted in view of the focus of this study. These are discussed as follows:

3.3. 1. It is a Reading with Critical Limitations:

The context of the Problem: Since the end of the so-called ‘Second World War’ in 1945, powerful political, social, economic, and spiritual-religious developments have been underway. Currents of anti- colonial movements swept through the Third World which succeeded in removing colonial rule.¹⁸⁵ The Western world experienced major changes in social and cultural dynamics as a result of the various social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The world has witnessed population explosion, and become threatened by Nuclear and biological weapons. Along with these, corporate capitalism has grown exponentially. The Western world continues to rely heavily on information technology while the gap between the rich and the poor is widening everywhere. At the same time, institutionalized religious traditions, especially the established Christian churches, began to witness a decline in power in the West, among others.¹⁸⁶

Yet, the field of historical biblical studies seems to be disconnected from these changes in our world.¹⁸⁷ This point is illustrated by Scholz who states that despite the crises in our world, established biblical scholars on both sides of the hemisphere are not expected to relate to social, political, economic, and religious developments in our societies. The probable reason for such detachment is the dominant methodology in biblical studies, specifically historical criticism. Scholz states it thus:

Historical criticism allows interpreters to position biblical literature in a distant past, far removed from today’s politics,

¹⁸⁵See also Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (London, Free Press, 2006), pp. 17 – 137.

¹⁸⁶ Susanne Scholz, “Tandoori Reindeer’ and The Limitations of Historical – Criticism” in Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd Penner, (eds.), *Her master’s tools? : Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of historical-critical discourse* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), pp. 47-69, p. 46. See also Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (London:Routledge, 1996), p.23. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, p.2.

¹⁸⁷ Scholz, “The Limitations of Historical – Criticism”, p. 47.

economics, or religion...biblical scholars continue to using historical criticism in a way that keeps the Bible separate from today's world.¹⁸⁸

Opposition/Resistance from the Margins: History attests to the fact that the situation described above did not go unchallenged within the last few decades on the part of those on the margins. The word 'margin' here needs to be clarified. The word does not only imply the general sense of a position of weakness or self-depreciation. Neither is it merely an oppositional site with regard to the centre or a state of peripherality, but as Sugirtharajah re-images the word; it is a centre for critical reflection and clarification.¹⁸⁹ It is from such margins that oppositional positions have emerged.

Hence, such oppositions from the margins emerged in response to the dominance of historical criticism. A sustained and strong opposition to historical criticism as an adequate method for biblical exegesis has emerged from among scholars marginalized by ethnicity, race, or continental location¹⁹⁰ The identifiable motivation is essentially "their view of historical criticism as a Eurocentric tool that facilitated Western imperialistic practice and distanced the academic field of biblical studies from the issues of our time"¹⁹¹ Thus, historical criticism is seen as being fraught with obvious limitations as an exegetical tool. This is because historical criticism as an exegetical method was developed in Europe and its validity is thus limited to the European cultural-philosophical context, namely, the scientific worldview. In other words, the contention is that the method is a Western endeavour and thus belongs to a particular geographical context. Therefore, historical critics have been reminded to accept or acknowledge non-Western worldview into their exegetical repertoire.¹⁹² Thus, it may be stated

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁸⁹ R.S. Sugirtharajah, (ed.), *Voices from the Margin, Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (London: SPCK, 2002), p.2.

¹⁹⁰ Scholz, "The Limitations of Historical-Criticism", p.52. See also Pui-lan, "Making the Connections", p. 46- 47.

¹⁹¹ Scholtz, 'The Limitations of Historical-Criticism', p.52.

¹⁹² Ibid.

that historical criticism is limited because the method prevents researchers from making the much needed connections between biblical literature and the challenges of our time.¹⁹³

It is such a disconnection with contemporary challenges that creates a gap. This point is illustrated by William H. Meyers, an African-American exegete. Meyers has similarly questioned the usefulness of historical criticism because it distances scholarly work from contemporary issues.¹⁹⁴ Again, the historical critical method has been subjected to severe criticism because it has been found to mute the message of the text while focusing on the history of the text. Justin S. Ukpong collaborate this view. *He* states that:

The historical critical method has come under heavy fire. It has been criticised for muting the text by focusing on its historical context, ...In the African context, it has also been argued that since biblical studies in Africa are interested in the message of the text, historical criticism, which is interested more in the history of the text than in its message, should be abandoned¹⁹⁵

Further, it is observed that scholars from Asia and Africa are among the most vocal critics of traditional historical-critical method. This is because “some of them regard the method as a politically, religiously, and economically powerful tool of past and present imperialism of industrialized nations.”¹⁹⁶

3.3. 2. It is a Nationalistic Reading:

Uriah Y Kim, in his engagement of the DH from a postcolonial optic, asserts that the Eurocentric view of historical criticism in relation to Western mobilization of history is to

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ William H. Meyers., ‘The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student’ in C.H.Felder, (ed.), *Stony the Road We Trod* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991),pp. 40 -56, p. 24. . It needs to be mentioned that other African scholars hold a similar view on the matter. See also Justin S. Ukpong *Can African Old Testament scholarship escape the historical critical approach?* Newsletter on African Old Testament Scholarship - Issue 7 (November 1999) Online edition: ISSN 1500-7383, consulted on May 4th 2009. Louis Jonker, “Towards a “Communal” Approach for Reading the Bible in Africa” in *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa, Papers from the Symposium on Africa and the Old Testament* in Nairobi, October, 1999, Mary Getui, Knut Holter, and Victor Zinkuratire, (eds.), (New York, Peter Lang 2001) pp. 77-78.

¹⁹⁵ Ukpong, *Can African Old Testament scholarship escape the historical critical approach?*.

¹⁹⁶ Susanne Scholz, “The Limitations of Historical – Criticism”, p.53. For instance, Bradley Crowell in an article on “*Postcolonial studies and the Hebrew Bible*” states that “throughout the history of Western imperial expansion, the Bible was at the centre stage of the ideological colonization of subjected groups”. Crowell, ‘Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible’, p. 221. Similarly Kwok Pui-Iian, states “emerging during the expansion of Europe’s powers, the historical critical method gathered momentum as imperialism and colonization reached its zenith in the late nineteenth century”. Pui-lan, ‘Making the Connections,’ p. 47.

create a national identity that privileges the West. Kim opines that what goes unnoticed in their politics of interpretation is that they have been engaged in the politics of identity which legitimates the West while it negates the ‘rest’ such as Asians and Africans.¹⁹⁷ For the West, history is, *inter alia*, an identity discourse. It legitimates the West; asserting the superiority of Western culture.¹⁹⁸ Kim clearly points out that the West considers DH as the first and archetypical Western history because it describes the creation of an all-Israelite state in Palestine as the bringer of proper civilization to the region. This Eurocentric view seems to have been appropriated in historical-critical study of the Bible. It is this kind of understanding that reflects the legacy of “Orientalism” which refers to a typical Western manner of representing others in a manner that devalues them. This manner of representation is an accomplice in the politics of identity which legitimates the experience, history, destiny, and aspirations of the West.¹⁹⁹

Furthermore, the intellectual production of modern culture is described by Margaret Wether, as a “politics of representation”; a situation where a hierarchy is formed in which the model of representing the world (it objects, events, peoples, etc.) or even text gains primacy over others.²⁰⁰ Consequently, certain relevant questions are raised in this regard that is important for a postcolonial engagement with historical criticism. “How have some meanings/ interpretations become dominant, and whose interest do they serve? The crucial point is the recognition that control over discourse is a vital source of power.²⁰¹ Therefore, it can be said that the hegemonic nature of historical criticism serves as a tool for nationalism in creating a binary composed of the West and the Rest.²⁰² This point is made clear in Kim’s observation that the

¹⁹⁷ Uriah Y Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah*, p.5.

¹⁹⁸ In other words, history became a vehicle for asserting European racial and cultural superiority over other nations. *ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Margaret Wether, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J Yates, (eds), *Discourse Theory and Practice; A Reader* (London, Sage Publications, 2001), pp. 344 -345.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, cf. Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah*, p.5.

historical critical reading of the DH is in the likeness of modern history. And modern history becomes an instrument of European racial nationalism.²⁰³

Leela Ghandi, a postcolonial scholar, elaborates the foregoing view by pointing out that the Enlightenment emphasizes the rationality of man. This in turn generated a binary imposed on humanity where Western societies are regarded as matured/civilised while others are ‘non-adults’ and ‘inhuman’.²⁰⁴ Ghandi asserts that it is this perception of the colonised culture as fundamentally childlike or childish that feeds into the logic of the colonial ‘civilising mission’ and concomitantly the constraint of nationalism.²⁰⁵ Thus, it can be said that one of the effects of historical criticism is that it seems to create a cultural and racial hegemony.²⁰⁶ The foregoing, therefore, suggests that the use of the ancient biblical narratives in forging European nationalism is undeniable. Therefore, such a reading approach fails to address the situation of oppressed and dominated people like the Niger Delta communities.

3.3. 3. It Negates the Possible Power Relations in the Text.

Studies in sociolinguistics have come to recognize the significant role that human beings play in the production of meaning in various fields of discussion. Hence, the meaning of text/discourse cannot be reduced to its paradigmatic and syntagmatic possibilities.²⁰⁷ That is, the meaning of words cannot be restricted to the way they are constructed in relation to shared models of interpretation and assumptions. Meaning, it is argued, is a social-cultural action/interaction.²⁰⁸ This later view stands in contrast to the character and nature of knowledge expounded during the Enlightenment, which claims objectivity and certainty of truth. Therefore the power relations and ideological underpinnings in the production of the

²⁰³ Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah*, p.5 – 6.

²⁰⁴ Ghandi, Leela, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1998), pp.30-32.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.32.

²⁰⁶ This point is illustrated by David Aberbach, a Hebrew and Comparative scholar, who provides an exploration of the primary role of the Bible (and English literature) in forging English nationalism. David. Aberbach, *Nationalism and the Hebrew Bible, Nations and Nationalism II*, vol. 2 (2005), pp. 223 – 242. pp. 232- 235.

²⁰⁷ Gunter Kress, , *From “Saussure to Critical Sociolinguistics”* in Margaret Wether, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon J Yates, *Discourse Theory and Practice; A Reader* (London, Sage Publications, 2001), pp.20-39, p.33.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.37.

text/discourse need to be underscored. It is this social/cultural element that is consciously or unconsciously ignored in historical criticism. That is to say, historical criticism consciously or unconsciously negates the power relations in the reading of the biblical text such as the exile account in 2 Kings 23:31– 25:30, which I had examined earlier. I had pointed out that historical critical studies engage with the event of the exile and establishes the context of the narrative. But the interplay of power between the writers/editors of the text and the plausible influence of the Babylonian and imperial powers in the narrative is apparently left without mention; silenced. It is for this reason that the ‘ideological suspicion’, that is, a suspected interest in power - becomes a critical tool in postcolonial hermeneutics.²⁰⁹

However, the paradigm for a disinterested/objective reader has been scrutinized by emerging cultural studies. Cultural studies shift the focus of the production of meaning from the text to the real readers.²¹⁰ Hence, Cultural studies share a similar concern with postcolonial criticism because both fields insist on the ideological and political character of all composition and texts as well as all reading and interpretation.²¹¹

One can readily observe, therefore, that it is this neglect of a cultural and ideological foregrounding in biblical interpretation that creates a yawning gap in the historical critical method discussed above.²¹² This point is further reflected, among others, in the work of a Liberation German scholar, Luise Schottrof, who says:

We use the term ‘socio-historical’ in order to point to a basic methodological weakness of German or Western biblical science

²⁰⁹ For example see, Jose Miguez-Bonino, “Marxist Critical Tools: Are they Helpful in Breaking the Stranglehold of Idealist Hermeneutics?” in Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin*, p.59. See also the Historical critical reading of the text of Esther assessed from the perspective of liberation hermeneutics. Itumeleng J Mosala, “The Implications of the text of Esther” In Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, pp.134 -141.

²¹⁰ According to Segundo: “For this still emerging paradigm of cultural studies, then, real readers lie behind all modes of interpretation and all reading strategies, all creation of meanings from texts and all reconstructions of history... “. Fernando F Segundo, Cultural Studies and Contemporary Biblical Criticism: Ideological Criticism as Mode of Discourse in Fernando F Segundo and Mary Ann Tolbert, (eds.), *Reading from this Place, Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, vol. 2, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 2: 1-17 .p.5.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* , p. 8.

²¹² See Luise Schottrof, “Working for Liberation: A Change of Perspective in New Testament Scholarship” in *Reading from this Place*, p.185

that we wanted to rectify: dominant biblical science relies on the history of ideas and disregards the social reality behind the biblical texts as well as the social reality of the contemporary interpreters of the Bible.²¹³

Therefore, the place and purview of postcolonial discourse in the study of Deutero – Isaiah would be a conscious attempt to give a voice to the reader of text and the attendant concrete socio-political realities. According to Kim, “postcolonial criticism works towards connecting biblical studies to the real socio-political issues of the world with a view to providing an alternative arrangement.”²¹⁴ This type of reading must also be informed by a critical use of the experience of the colonized in contrast to an objective, dispassionate, and disinterested reader/interpreter. Reflecting on the Niger Delta, the church in Nigeria needs to be informed about appropriating a postcolonial reading of scriptures and doing theology. This is because postcolonial biblical interpretation promises to be more relevant in connecting biblical studies to real socio/political issues of the Niger Delta such as the economic injustice the people are being subjected to by the Nigerian state.²¹⁵

My discussion so far on the postcolonial engagement with the historical study of DI has attempted to present a postcolonial assessment of the historical critical approach highlighting its limitations from a postcolonial perspective. However, the potential strength in the historical critical interpretative approach should not be wholly negated because of its identifiable contribution to our knowledge of the text²¹⁶ Thus, it can be suggested that historical criticism can work together in harness with postcolonial criticism. Historical critics, similarly, can develop more of a postcolonial awareness in their work so that it recognizes alternative voices.²¹⁷ Therefore, it can be suggested that applying postcolonial criticism to biblical studies

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah*, p.6.

²¹⁵ See Ejibunu, *Nigeria's Niger Delta Crisis: Root Causes of Peacelessness*.

²¹⁶ See Pui-Lan, “Making the Connections” p.46.

²¹⁷ It might be safe to say that the process of decolonizing the Biblical text does not entirely exclude the use of the tools of historical criticism. See Segundo, “Biblical Criticism and Postcolonial Studies: Towards a Postcolonial

will help to apply the Servant texts as a subversive text. As a result, it will also assist in connecting the biblical interpretation of the Servant message to the socio-political realities of oppressed people such as the Niger Delta communities.²¹⁸

Consequently, in the next section, I shall be engaging the Suffering Servant texts from a postcolonial perspective in order to provide an alternative reading of the text and to underscore its potentials, among others, as a subversive text. Such a subversive reading will be more applicable to addressing the Niger Delta issue in postcolonial Nigeria.

Optic” in Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, pp.33-44, and Crowell, “Postcolonialism and the Hebrew Bible”, p. 233 -235.

²¹⁸ See for a similar approach in J. Severino Croatto, “Exegesis of Second Isaiah from the Perspective of the Oppressed: Paths for Reflection” in Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert , (eds.), *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp.219-236.

CHAPTER FOUR

A POSTCOLONIAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SUFFERING SERVANT SONG IN ISAIAH 52:13—53:12.

4.1. INTRODUCTION:

In the preceding chapter, I have attempted to engage with the strategies of historical criticism in relation to the study of DI as the literary context of the Servant text. While the critical study of DI generally has made some contributions towards our understanding of the text, it is still apparent that the questions addressed are largely of Eurocentric interest and does not provide relevance to concrete socio-political issues such as the Niger Delta crisis in postcolonial Nigeria.

Therefore, the foregoing shows the necessity for proposing a re-reading of biblical texts in addressing a specific socio-political crisis in Nigeria. Here, postcolonial interpretation enables a recovery of the meaning of the biblical text for colonized societies within their socio-politico experience, and in their memory of subjugation. It is my considered opinion that the church in Nigeria, and in the Niger Delta particularly has been incapacitated in the struggle for a just society because she is still proclaiming a ‘colonized God and a colonized Bible’. The failure to decolonize or engage in a postcolonial approach to the biblical text has distanced the church from actively engaging the structures of power. Or as James Cone puts it, the church has failed to ‘speak truth to power’.²¹⁹

Focus/Aim: This chapter is an attempt to propose a re-reading of the Servant text from a postcolonial perspective to foreground the perspectives of those who have experienced colonization, subjugation, and marginalization. Hence, the aim is to give relevance and practicability to the study of the Fourth Servant Song by proposing an appropriation of the

²¹⁹ Manning Marable, “Black Leadership, Faith and the Struggle for Freedom” in *Black Faith and Public Talk; Critical Essays in James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power*, Dwight N Hopkins, (ed) (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), pp.77-88,.p.78.

Servant text to a specific socio-political problem, namely the post-colonial communities of the Niger Delta regions in postcolonial Nigeria.

In order to implement the aim and focus of this chapter, the discussion will be divided into two major sections. The first section will focus specifically on the Fourth Servant Song. The reason for this limited focus on the Fourth Song is essentially spatial. It needs to be noted, as mentioned earlier, that there other areas/ themes in DI that will interest postcolonial studies such as the oracle to the nations, oracles on Cyrus, oracles against idolatry, and the proclamation of justice.²²⁰ However, for the purpose of this dissertation, I am narrowing my interest to the Suffering Servant text and the related themes.

In this section, I will engage with the historical-critical interpretations of the Suffering Servant, by examining those who are proponents of the aforesaid viewpoints, using the optics of their influences and the period in which they wrote and where necessary show how their beliefs and emphases were merely examples of people who were reading through the lenses of Western hegemonic culture. I will engage with some of the themes that they have proposed, indicating the contributions of postcolonial readings. This in effect will point out the inadequacy of the traditional interpretation in addressing the socio-political issues of exploitation and marginalization of the Niger Delta communities.

Secondly, this chapter will propose a postcolonial re-reading of the themes in the Servant text in accordance with the focus of this dissertation. This will be a critical engagement of the identified themes within the theoretical framework of postcolonial interpretation and concerns. Apart from interpretations, I wish to propose a re-reading of the Servant theme/model reflecting on the reality of the postcolonial Nigerian society, especially on the crisis of the Niger Delta. Thus, the application of the postcolonial reading of the Servant Song is an attempt

²²⁰ Isaiah 41:ff, 44:1ff, 45:1ff, 46:1ff

to contribute to the struggle for finding a lasting solution to the lingering crisis, and to inspire the liberation of the people from the stranglehold of neo-colonialism.

It is my considered opinion that the task in this section will require drawing from a mixture of liberation theologies, given that postcolonial interpretations are part of a mosaic of liberation theologies emerging from the “underside of history”, that is, from the experience of the oppressed. Consequently, at times I will draw analysis from Black, Womanist and Liberation theologies to substantiate my arguments. This multi-disciplinary approach will be done with the awareness of the limitations of these theologies and their points of convergence with postcolonial concerns, namely, the struggle for liberation and the transformation of human society.²²¹

4. 2.2. Key Themes in the Servant Song in 52: 13 – 53: 12.

One of the areas historical critical studies engage with is the attempt to identify the various themes apparent in the fourth Servant Song in particular. The task here is to enumerate some of these themes and to point out how they work for historical critical studies. These themes are enumerated as follows:

Suffering/Theodicy: It is observable that the theme of suffering and theodicy occupies the attention of biblical scholars in the study of the fourth servant song. Mowinckel’s conclusion on the servant’s sufferings obviously raises other questions for those who find themselves in an oppressive and afflicting situation. In his exegesis of the text, Mowinckel implicates Yahweh in the affliction of the servant by admitting that Yahweh decreed the substitutionary sufferings and affliction. He affirms that it is “...God’s pleasure in his clemency to establish a purpose or

²²¹ See for an explanation of the relationship between the liberating theologies and postcolonialism. Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner and Mayra Rivera, (eds.), *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (Missouri, Chalice Press, 2004); cf. Lasare S Rukundwa, *Postcolonial Theory as a Hermeneutical Tool for Biblical Reading*, Internet material accessed on 14/05/09.

plan by which a redeemer is to bear the burden of guilt which would have been too heavy for the people”.²²²

The above statement clearly implicates God in the suffering of the Servant. In addition, in the exegesis of 53: 4 the innocence of the sufferer can be recognized. For instance, Barry Webb explains that the description therein is of a person subjected to all kinds of pain even though the sufferer is innocent.²²³

My contention however, is that even if we assume God’s sovereignty to allow the punishment of others on the servant, mortal men do not enjoy similar sovereignty when by their actions and decisions they impose sufferings on others. Furthermore, Baltzer’s explanation of ‘the arm of Yahweh’ in 53: 1 reflects an ambiguity of the role of Yahweh in the sufferings of the Servant. It is argued that Yahweh’s arm is associated with the Exodus deliverance (as in Exodus. 15.). Yet it appears in verse 10 that the same Yahweh becomes an accomplice in the oppression of the servant.

The innocent suffering of the servant raises the whole question of why the innocent suffers in view of the reality of the existence of a good God. The response to this question is often articulated in the discussion on theodicy. However, as I will show subsequently, the formulation of theodicy as a theological reflection remains inadequate for those on the underside of history. The problem is that the questions that are raised in theodicy and the responses it seeks to provide are largely relevant to the Western cultural context that has been endowed with universal application.²²⁴ Postcolonialism, therefore, seeks to provide an alternative reading of theodicy by giving the voiceless and the dominated, such as the Niger Delta communities, a voice in the discussion within the context of their own experience.²²⁵

²²². Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, Trans. G.W. Anderson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1959), pp. 209-210.

²²³ Barry Webb, *The Message Of Isaiah; On Eagles Wings* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press 1996), p.211.

²²⁴ Tamez, “The Hermeneutical Leap of Today”, p205. cf. J.Ukpong, “New Testament Hermeneutics in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities”, *Neotestamentica* 35 (2001), pp.146 -167.

Justice/judgement (Heb. *mishpät*, מִשְׁפָּט)

The theme of justice runs through the four songs.’ Justice or *mishpät* in 49:1-6 can be seen as a reference to the Servant’s ‘cause’. The use here is personalized with reference to the Servant.²²⁶ In 50: 4 – 11, the term is used in a personal sense to show the faith of the servant in entrusting his cause (*mishpät*,) to Yahweh; the one who will vindicate him. But in 52:13-53:12, Leclerc notes that the term is capable of various interpretations. However, he concludes that:

As this fourth song briefly suggests, there is a great difference between God’s justice and the justice of the world. Between those two worlds stands the Servant, who in the cause of justice, is simultaneously vindicated by God (*masdiqi*, 50:8) and condemned by people (*yarsi eni*, 50 :9). Although his opponents saw his death as the end, but his disciples know differently.²²⁷

Therefore, *mishpät* in our text arguably underscores the reality of injustice in the world.²²⁸

One important question for us here is the political character of *mishpät* in relation to the work of the Servant. The response is twofold. One view sees *mishpät* in this regard, as the declaration of God’s sovereignty over the nations by the hand of the Servant. On the other hand, *mishpät* in the songs most likely implies a pursuit of ethical justice as the task of the Servant. For instance, North claims that in the fourth song, a definite and specific political situation has disappeared, although, the captains and kings are there.²²⁹ This view signifies the reluctance of critical studies to engage with power relations in the text. While North is ambivalent on a possible political concern in the text, postcolonial criticism addresses it. Ironically, North himself reluctantly concedes the fact that the restoration referred to in 49: 1- 6

²²⁵ Lazare S Rukundwa, *Postcolonial Theory as a Hermeneutical Tool for Biblical Reading*: Internet material accessed: 14/05/2009. 13:14.

²²⁶ Thomas. L Leclerc, *Yahweh is Exalted in Justice: Solidarity and Conflict in Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 113 – 115.

²²⁷ The seeming application of this text to Jesus Christ shows that a similar perversion of justice led to his death. This fact is a feature highlighted in all the four Gospels. (For example, Matt. 26:59 – 61; Mark. 14: 56 – 57; cf. Luke 23:2). Ibid. p.124

²²⁹ Christopher R North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah 2((ed.))* (London: Oxford University Press 1956), p. 207.

cannot exclude political rehabilitation.²³⁰ The fact is, that the term carries not only judicial implications, but it also carries both salvific/liberative and eschatological implications that emerged from the experience of oppression by the Jewish people under imperial powers during the Babylonian exile and Persian rule.²³¹

Therefore, it can be stated that the mission of the servant in its entirety cannot exclude a political element. Similarly, the mission of the church in the Nigerian society must not end with the proclamation of spiritual restoration to the exclusion of the pervading social/political issues, especially the case of the Niger Delta.²³²

Redemption/Salvation: It is generally agreed among biblical scholars that what the Servant accomplished was redemption on behalf of Israel. This can be seen from the confessional section of the poem in 3v-5v, where it has been observed that a number of metaphors are used in describing the redemption accomplished by the servant.²³³ Furthermore, scholars consider the redemption in the servant text in relation to the OT sacrificial system. The work of the servant apparently reflects the OT sacrificial tradition. For instance, Mowinckel points out that the Servant's accomplishment seems to re-enact the OT sacrificial system and the role of the "redeemer" (Heb. *ga'al*, גָּאֵל).²³⁴ The vicarious suffering of the servant exhibits the ancient

²³⁰According to North, "...it is difficult to see how any prophet, especially in the condition of exile could conceive of a spiritual restoration apart from the political rehabilitation of his nation. Ibid. , p.146.

²³¹ Richard Beaton, *Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel*, Society of New Testament Studies, 123 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 158 – 161.

²³² Walter Houston corroborates this point by saying: "If we recognize Jesus of Nazareth in the suffering Messiah, we are enabled thereby to recognize ourselves in the speakers of 53: 1 – 9. The passage represents repentance as a vivid reality which takes place before our eyes; more than that, it enables it to take place when the readers thus identify themselves with characters in the drama. And this opens the door for justice to be established on earth in the midst of injustice." Walter Houston, "The Kingdom of God In Isaiah Divine Power and Human Response" in *The Kingdom of God and Human Society*, Essays by Members of the Scripture, Theology and Society Group, (ed.), R. S. Barbour (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993).,p. 40.

²³³ For example, Baltzer-points out that DI's emphasis on Yahweh as sovereign over the whole world (42: 10 -12) leads to other *topoi* or literary themes or traditions comprehended in the concept such as: redemption/liberation of Jacob/Israel (44:23), Yahweh's righteousness (45:25), his comfort for his people and his compassion on the wretched/oppressed (49:13).²³³ Given the pervading presence of the Exodus theme in the fourth song, it is argued that the fundamental experience for DI in common with the Exodus is liberation. Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah. A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*. Trans. M. Kohl. Hermeneia. (Minneapolis: Fortress. 2001), p. 44.

²³⁴ Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, pp. 209-210

belief that an offence can be atoned for by a vicarious payment of compensation, “guilt – offering” (Hebrew, *âśām*, אָשָׂם) similar to Job’s sacrifice on behalf of his children. Thus, “it is in this way that the one who makes atonement becomes the redeemer (Heb. *ga’al*, גָּאֵל) of his kinsman.”²³⁵

From the above, it is evident that the emphasis in the historical critical study of the meaning of the servant’s sufferings is in relation to the divine – human relationship. Specifically, it focuses on the relationship between Israel and Yahweh. What is left unaddressed is the ideological potential discernable in the redemption the Servant offers, although this redemption has been hinted at in Baltzer’s emphasis on redemption as liberation.²³⁶ However, there is a need to look at the redemption the Servant offers through the lenses of postcolonial criticism and the subjugated condition of the Niger Delta people in order to discern the socio-political implication/s that the term “redeem” (redemption) holds in such context.

In Second Isaiah the term is transferred onto a religious plane and applied to the relations between Yahweh and Israel, but its connotations are social and political this because the one redeemed is the Israel of the exile and the “*diaspora*”.²³⁷ Therefore, it can be argued that redemption/ salvation in the context of the exile experience of Israel implies liberation. Again, all the titles bestowed on Yahweh are related to the proposal of liberation from captivity and oppression.²³⁸ Therefore, the concept of the *ga’al* (as in Lev. 25:23–24, 47–55) can be considered to have social and political connotations. A postcolonial reading of the concept of redemption will lean towards such social and political implications of the term. But beyond

²³⁵ Ibid. p 209.

²³⁶ Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*. p35.

²³⁷ J. Severino Croatto, “Exegesis of Second Isaiah from the Perspective of the Oppressed: Paths for Reflection” in *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective*, (eds.) Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp.219-236,.p. 224.

²³⁸ This is illustrated by the title ‘Saviour’, which Croatto, for instance, argues has nothing to do with sin or any other interior and individual dimension of human beings but rather with the situation of slavery faced by the people. Ibid.p,224.

that, the universalized interpretation can be contested in view of postcolonial concerns. In the subsequent section we will attempt to present a postcolonial reading of redemption.

Nations: Balzer points out that the servant has a function to perform for the “Islands and the “Nations”.²³⁹ The content of the servant song in 49: 1-6 is entirely in reference to the nations and this is built around three sentences or three stages of development in the text.²⁴⁰ Similarly, in 49:1-6 and 52: 15 it is stated that the servant will bring salvation to the nations. In the former and in the latter passages the nations will be astonished at the servant’s exaltation and that they will understand something they had never dreamed of.²⁴¹ In effect, the nations are put in an inferior light, and in desperate need of ‘civilising’.

The notion of the nation again is relevant to my discussion, because it carries the potential for justifying the subjugation other groups. Such implication is pointed out in the work of Rikke Watts, an Old Testament scholar, in his exploration of the understanding of the nations in Israel’s traditions²⁴² The understanding of the nations in effect is that they can participate in Yahweh’s salvation.²⁴³ It needs to be noted that the salvation for the nations is to be mediated through submission to Yahweh’s Chosen, and now restored agent, Israel. But in what sense is this submission? It is pointed out that this submission necessarily means political submission. Therefore, Israel as the servant of the Lord becomes a light to the nations as seen in 42, 49, and 52--53.²⁴⁴

The destiny of the nations as explained above reveals certain concerns. The role of Israel as a light to the nations and submission to Israel as a prerequisite for salvation for the nations seems

²³⁹ Baltzer, *Deutero – Isaiah: 40– 55*, p. 19.

²⁴⁰ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*: p. 207

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

²⁴² Rikke E Watts, “Echoes from the Past: Israel’s Ancient Traditions and the Destiny of the Nations in Isaiah 40-55”, *JSOT* 28, no.4 (2004): pp. 481 – 508. He explores the role of the nations within Israel’s traditions partly to demonstrate the ambivalent attitude towards the nations in DI. It is argued that Isa. 40 – 55 draws on older traditions of Israel to show the destiny of the nations; a destiny that is both negative and positive. Negatively, the destiny of the nations is alleged to be in the hands of Yahweh, who renders judgement/destruction for their rebellion. Positively, the nations have the opportunity to participate in Yahweh’s provision of salvation.

²⁴³ *Ibid.* pp. 481 – 505.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 501 – 504.

perspicuous. The issue here is that the perception of the nations in this manner potentially provides grounds for undue nationalism and the subjugation of the 'Other'. Not only that, this view grants Israel a 'civilising mission' to the nations. This could become a clear basis for imperialism, and the domination of the voiceless by the dominant group. It is this concern that calls for a proposal for a postcolonial re-reading of nation/nationhood in order to apply this theme to the subjugated conditions of the Niger Delta people. This re-reading will be seen in the subsequent section.

4.3. A Postcolonial Engagement with the themes in the Servant Song.

This section attempts to propose a postcolonial re-reading of the themes in the Servant song as enumerated in the above discussion. It seeks to argue for a shift in the understanding of the themes through the optic of postcolonial criticism. It is also an attempt to appropriate these themes from a postcolonial perspective in relation to the Niger Delta socio-political crisis in Nigeria. Furthermore, the postcolonial reading of the themes in the fourth song is followed by a proposal for appropriating the Servant leadership model as a necessary solution to the socio-political problem in Nigeria, specifically, the Niger Delta minority crisis.

As mentioned earlier, I will be drawing my analysis from a multi-disciplinary approach drawn from liberating theologies with the awareness of the shared concern between these methods.²⁴⁵

A common factor between these discourses can be considered to be an engagement in a common struggle for the liberation of humanity and the ultimate transformation of society.²⁴⁶

The themes are namely; suffering and theodicy, Servanthood, justice, nation/nationhood, redemption/salvation, and Servant leadership.

²⁴⁵ See example, a detailed explanation of the relationship between Liberation hermeneutics and Postcolonial Criticism. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, p.103-123.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.117,-122

A Proposed Postcolonial Re-reading of Suffering / Theodicy:

Even Westermann, as a historical critical scholar, concedes the point that God had all along being on the side of the suffering servant.²⁴⁷ However, the crucial issue is that God is active in vindicating the oppressed; God is on the side of the oppressed people. The servant text here describes his sufferings within the context of the witnesses in 53:3-10. In the end, the servant is vindicated by Yahweh (53: 11-12). The description of the servant has led to the suggestion that the song is a kind of theodicy emanating from the context of the exile.²⁴⁸ Theodicy in Western discourse is an attempt to provide a logical argument for the explanation of the contrast between evil and God by querying God's existence. Theodicy attempts to rationalize human sufferings in view of a good God and an all-powerful God. This approach may be described as God-Talk.²⁴⁹

Postcolonialism, however, considers theodicy as a Western formulation that answers to questions relating to the Western thoughts. One implication of theodicy is the tendency to suggest submission to suffering rather than resistance.²⁵⁰ Postcolonialism on the contrary is concerned with modes of resistance. This is because postcolonial criticism foregrounds the reality of domination and the sufferings as seen in the Babylonian imperial invasion of Judah as well as in contemporary times. In addition while theodicy, or God-talk, in the face of human sufferings is a complex subject in Western theological discourse. On the other hand, it is the reality of human suffering and the conviction of the existence of an "Omni-God" that inspires the theodicy of the colonized. The theodicy of the colonized and the oppressed affirms Gods

²⁴⁷ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, p. 267.

²⁴⁸ For example, M.D Hooker points out that DI offers the portrait of the Suffering Servant as a theodicy, an attempt to justify the Israel's suffering during the Exile. Morna D Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of DI in the New Testament* ((London: SPCK, 1959), pp45-48. Cf. Victor Matthews demonstrates in his work that the servant songs serve as a theodicy. See Victor Matthews, *The Social World of the Hebrew Prophets* (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), pp. 147-148.

²⁴⁹ Cheryl A Kirk-Duggan, "African-American Spirituals: Confronting and Exorcising Evil through Song" in *A Troubling In My Soul: Womanist Perspective on the Evil of Suffering*, Emile Townes Maureen, (ed.) (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), pp.150-171. p.158.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.164.

existence and holds human choice responsible for personal and institutional evil.²⁵¹ It is this challenge of the reality of suffering resulting from human choices and institutional evils that liberation theology addresses and repudiates; a reality which is embedded in traditional philosophical thinking.²⁵²

Furthermore, there is the view that evil can be resisted and transformed by the Christian community by providing various actions such as forgiveness, thoughtfulness, and friendship.²⁵³

Therefore, it can be stated that while divine sovereignty is acknowledged, there is room for man to cooperate with God in order to transform human society. The experience of the Servant however, shows that God is involved in the sufferings of man. This is because in the end Yahweh vindicated the Servant (53:10 -12)

Therefore, a postcolonial re-reading of theodicy affirms the reality of suffering in our world and underscores the role of empires and colonizing powers in imposing sufferings on human societies. Consequently, postcolonial criticism here, allows the subjugated to engage in theodicy on their own terms, and from their own experience of 'subalternity'/oppression. The reason is that postcolonialism argues that theodicy is a theological argument formulated by the west and accorded a universal validity for the 'rest', and is therefore inadequate²⁵⁴ in addressing the plight of oppressed people such as the Niger Delta people. The plight of this community is well illustrated by the sufferings inflicted on them and the environment as result of intense oil exploration and gas flaring. The pollution of the rivers and land is not only a destruction of the natural means of subsistence but also the destruction of the means of

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² The foregoing view of theodicy is shared by similar contextualized theologies such as Liberation theology. For an example, Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Liberation theologian, working in a similar context of oppression and domination, expresses the preoccupation with human suffering in the theology of liberation. He says: "Human suffering, involvement with it, and the questions it raises about God are in fact one point of departure and the one central theme in the theology of liberation.

²⁵³ John Swinton, *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), pp.1-6, 69-247.

²⁵⁴ Kwok Pui-Ian, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-biblical World: Bible and Liberation Series* (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), p.9.

communal solidarity and social identity.²⁵⁵ Hence, the implication of Western theodicy discourse is an indirect cover-up of the realities of human sufferings²⁵⁶ as John Sobrino clearly states: “The Western world has willingly ignored and covered up the reality of the sufferings of masses of people, whom he described as ‘the crucified people’”.²⁵⁷ Such a reality is well illustrated by the domination and exploitation of the Niger Delta tribes through repressive military dictatorship and legislature, the multinational oil companies, and unjust socio/economic policies of the Nigerian state. The killings in *Ogoni* land is a specific example of such exploitations.²⁵⁸

This disaster needs to be described accurately so as to reflect its full meaning. The present language that describes the masses of suffering people as “Third World”, “The South”, and “developing countries” is a colonizing strategy, an interpellation that tacitly describes the subjectivity of the colonized/subjugated. On the other hand, it could be suggested that, and agreeably so, that such people be called the ‘crushed’ people just like the Servant or the ‘crucified people’. This is because the other designations are alleged to attempt to identify that something is wrong but avoid showing how wrong it is.²⁵⁹ The need for a more encapsulating language is therefore desirable. Sobrino states:

Therefore we need to speak of crucified peoples: metaphorical language. Of course, but language which conveys much better than others the historical enormity of the disaster and its meaning for faith. At any rate, it is much better at avoiding the cover-up operated by other languages.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ See F.O. Ayodele-akaakar, “Appraising the Oil and Gas Laws: A Search for Enduring Legislature for the Niger Delta Regions”, Internet material accessed 30/05/11)

²⁵⁶ Such indirect cover-up is well expressed by John Sobrino, a Liberation theologian writing in the context of a similar oppressive situation in Latin America in his study of the Servant of Yahweh. John Sobrino, “The Crucified People: Yahweh’s Suffering Servant Today” in *The Voice of the Victims*, Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizondo, (eds.), *Concilium Special*, 6, (1990), pp.120-129, p. 20.

²⁵⁷ Sobrino, “The Crucified People”, *ibid*.

²⁵⁸ See Anthony Agbali, “Politics, Rhetoric and Ritual of the Ogoni Movement” in Falola, (ed.), *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century*, pp.507-529, p.511-512.

²⁵⁹ 121 Sobrino, *The Crucified People*, p.121.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*. For a critique of the theodicy of the ‘crucified people’ see William R Jones, *Is God A White Racist? : Preamble to Black Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), pp.24-78.

This description, “crucified people” is justifiable at three levels. First, the ‘poor’ are those who die before their time in the process of resistance when the poor threaten unjust structures.²⁶¹ Secondly, to die crucified means to be put to death. The Niger Delta people could be seen in a similar way because they also have been ‘crucified’ or even ‘crushed’ to death by various regimes of governance, past and present. Thirdly, at a religious level, the term acquires relevance because on the cross Jesus suffered death, his death involved/invokes sin and grace, condemnation/salvation, human action/God’s action, in a similar manner to the Servant in Isa.53.²⁶²

The emphasis on the tragedy of suffering is clearly illustrated by the sufferings of the exiles under imperial powers through the devastating invasion and deportation into exile as seen earlier in the DH account of the exile. In contemporary times, ‘the crushed people’ is equally applicable to the people of the Niger Delta as a people ‘exiled’ within their own land and environment, and ‘crushed’ by the repressive military and civilian regimes of the federal government of Nigeria with the assistance of the multinational oil conglomerates operating in the land.²⁶³ The capitalist character of the Nigerian state makes profitability the ultimate goal. Consequently, to achieve this goal all obstacles must be crushed.²⁶⁴ It is a fact that every time the Niger Delta people protest against their marginalization and the degradation of their environment they have been faced with brutal repression; extrajudicial killings, rapes, arrests and beatings of protesters in Ogoni land and other Ijaw communities orchestrated by the major oil companies.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Sobrino, *The Crucified People*, p.121.

²⁶² Ibid, p. 122.

²⁶³ See Agbali, “Politics, Rhetoric and Ritual of the Ogoni Movement”, p.514-517.

²⁶⁴ Christian. Akani, (ed.) *Corruption in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Experience*, (Enugu: Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Publishing, 2002), p. xiv. See Claude Ake, “The Nigerian State: Antinomies of a Peripheral Formation” in Claude Ake, (ed.) *Political Economy of Nigeria*, London, Longman, 1985.

²⁶⁵ Such repressive actions are well documented by the Human Rights Watch (HRW 1995). cf. See Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria*, p. 54-57.

The question at this point is: is it possible to relate ‘the crucified people’ to Yahweh’s Suffering Servant? This question is important in appropriating the servant metaphor to the experience of colonized communities. The response to the question above could be in the affirmative. This is because the possibility of the identification of the ‘crucified people’ with Yahweh’s Suffering Servant has been put forward by some Third World theologians who argued that the ‘crucified people’ are the actualization of Christ, the crucified, the true Servant of Yahweh.²⁶⁶

However, another important point is that the suffering of the Servant implies his saving role in history. This is because “Yahweh’s suffering includes not only the servant as victim which people in other situations can understand – but also the servant’s saving role in history”²⁶⁷ Therefore, my proposal is that theodicy must bear the seed of hope for salvation. Although Sobrino writes from the perspective of liberation theology, and employs Western theological categories to address socio-economic issues, my point of departure is that I want to apply a postcolonial reading to theodicy which goes beyond a homogenization of ‘the poor’ or the ‘crucified people.’²⁶⁸

Therefore, a postcolonial application of the ‘crushed people’ in Isaiah 53 should focus on the whole issue of domination in various forms and among different classes of the society rather than in terms of a binary of rich/poor.²⁶⁹ Such a reading points to the fact that Yahweh suffers with the Servant as well as ‘the poor’ - as discussed earlier - and accomplished deliverance through him. Therefore, one can propose that a postcolonial formulation of a theodicy must reveal hope for sufferers and the victims of evil rather than submission to it. Postcolonialism foregrounds a constructive theodicy that rejects the rationalization of human suffering. It is a

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ See for postcolonial critique of such homogenization. Joerg Rieger, “Liberating God-Talk: Postcolonialism and the Challenge of the Margins” in Catherine Keller, Michael Nausner, and Mayra Rivera, (eds.), *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (Missouri, Chalice Press, 2004), pp.204-220, p.214-215.

²⁶⁹ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, pp.103-123

reading of theodicy that has in its purview a healing transformation.²⁷⁰ A postcolonial reading of theodicy, unlike the traditional theodicy, argues that even though sufferings and oppression reigns in the world, God is on the side of the oppressed and the oppressed must resist all forces of domination wherever they exist. The reason is that, as Franz Fanon rightly observes, the inescapable powers of religion can be mobilized to pacify the colonized.²⁷¹ Hence, a postcolonial reading of theodicy seeks to create an inspiration for resistance rather than a passive submission as a mark of piety or an anticipation of a greater good.

Proposed Postcolonial Re-reading of Servanthood.

The second theme that I will be engaging with is that of Servanthood. A Postcolonial re-reading of Servanthood first aligns with the subversive character of the concept. The servant image in traditional interpretation has always been regarded as a model of submissiveness that coalesces with unresisting humility. My brief presentation here is intended to underline the point that the Servant concept also carries subversive potentials in view of the conceptual world from which it emerged.²⁷²

Traditional exegetes such as Eugene R Eckbald, state that both the servant and Jesus are said to have accomplished their mission by humble means.²⁷³ Eckbald's view is representative of readings that posit a submissive servant. This viewpoint is undoubtedly influenced by Christian readings that see the servant as a precursor of Jesus Christ. The effect of such a view is that it fails to recognize the subversive aspect of the Servant's character.²⁷⁴

The re-reading of the Servanthood is needed because the traditional reading as stated earlier, has been largely influenced by a Christian reading. The Christian reading of Servanthood over

²⁷⁰ Kirk-Duggan, "African-American Spirituals", p.166

²⁷¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Richard Philcox, Trans., (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p.28.

²⁷² Paul D Hanson, "The World of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40 – 55" in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, pp.9 – 22.

²⁷³ Eugene R Eckbald, *Isaiah's Servant Poems According to the Septuagint: An Exegetical and Theological Study* p. 209. Mckenzie expresses a similar view in his exegesis of 42: 1-4 " Mckenzie, *Second Isaiah*, p. xxxix.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. See Beaton's argument on the same view. Beaton, *Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel*, pp. 177 – 191.

time has been appropriated for oppressive purposes. This point is illustrated by Jacqueline Grant, though she writes for a Black American female audience as well as from a Womanist theology perspective, she discusses issues that resonate with postcolonial concerns. She argues that: “the Christian notion of Servanthood has been fused with and confused with the oppressive, unjust, social and political designation of Servanthood which in fact has meant servitude”.²⁷⁵ One can say that Servanthood is thus tantamount to servitude in connotation, as imposed by oppressive socio-political structures.

An interesting observation here is that the fusion/confusion of the Servanthood with servitude is historically illustrated in the institution of slavery through the brainwashing of the slaves often camouflaged as religious indoctrination : “the masters intended that the slave would understand his/her Servanthood status not only to be ordained by God, but also to be of God”.²⁷⁶ Again, later on, institutionalized slavery evolved into domestic service. Domestic service became the place where the reality of Servanthood continued in all its corrupted formulations. Grant states that: “The notion of Servanthood, as we have come to use it, has in fact become a mechanism for perpetuating evil and suffering among the people because of race, gender, class, or other categories”.²⁷⁷ The effect of the foregoing notion of Servanthood demands decolonisation.

Therefore, the images of Jesus and God must be formulated, totally apart from that of the servants of the world because “our images of God are totally unlike those whom we have historically relegated to the servant arenas of life”.²⁷⁸ This point is buttressed by an exploration of the theme of Servanthood within the socio-political context of Black-American women in the church and society which shows that the development of institutionalized domestic service

²⁷⁵ *ibid.* Jacqueline Grant, “Servanthood Re –visited”: A Womanist Explorations of Servanthood Theology ” in *Black Faith and Public Talk*; Critical Essays in James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power, Dwight N Hopkins, ed (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), pp.126-137, p.126.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.* , pp. 126 -127.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.* , p. 127.

reveals the malignant appropriation of the notion of Servanthood. Blacks were expected to remain subservient to their white masters; relegated to the so-called Christian notion of Servanthood was used to express a basic religious calling.²⁷⁹

Consequently, the Western appropriation of the concept of Servanthood as a colonizing tool leads us to raise two major questions relevant to a postcolonial reading of the servant notion. First, a pertinent question from a postcolonial concern is: how has the dominant class applied this notion? As explained above, the notion has been used as a mechanism of control. Black slaves were indoctrinated through the catechism to accept their situation in life, and that they were created to be servants of Whites.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, Blacks were given to believe that it was not only their worldly duty but also their Christian and heavenly duty to obey their white masters. In other words, Christian Servanthood and socio-political Servanthood were taught to be the same".²⁸¹ Therefore, it is alleged that Servanthood language is designed to gain and maintain that control since the critical factor in the use of the concept is control.²⁸² A re-reading or decolonizing of Servanthood therefore, is imperative, in order to give it a broader and liberating connotation and perhaps align it with the subversive-active function that a postcolonial reading proposes. Consequently, the idea of Servanthood requires a revisiting in order to have applicability to the Niger Delta socio-political and economic crisis. The second question from a postcolonial perspective is the suitability and unsuitability of the master/servant model in the human/God relationship. Is the Servanthood model an adequate one for leadership in a situation of subjugation/ marginalization as in the experience of colonized or subjugated people as the Niger Delta? The response to this enquiry calls for a recognition of

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid. , p. 135.

²⁸² Ibid.

the oppressive elements that have dogged the history of Christianity.²⁸³ It also demands a radical rethinking of religious ideas.

However, it needs to be stated that there are no simple answers to the kind of questions raised above.²⁸⁴ Yet, certain observations may suffice for the moment. One is that the Christian history is largely fraught with an oppressive nature as a direct consequence of distorted doctrines of humanity. This situation is unlikely to change so long as some people are always more ‘servant’ than others.²⁸⁵ Secondly, the needed transformation of religious notions will remain almost impossible so long as they are held captive to the limitations of human sinful need for control and domination; indeed, “...we will never be able to liberate humanity, Jesus Christ and God”.²⁸⁶ In other words, we need to decolonize the concept of Servanthood. In such a state of intellectual inertia, this kind of liberation or decolonization of Servanthood from its colonizing effects could be difficult. Nevertheless, postcolonial criticism calls for a theological reflection that engages with realities of power because Jesus as ‘a servant of the Lord’ shows us what it is to be a true servant through his solidarity with the victims of power,²⁸⁷ just as the servant in Isaiah 53 stood with the people in his suffering.

Hence, Servanthood is not submission to the powers but a subversion of hegemonic structures. It is not some inactive figure but one that is politically and radically active in the struggle for social transformation. A good example of such servant leadership is Saro-Wiwa, an activist and leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), who was hanged.²⁸⁸

²⁸³ Ibid.p135.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid. A similar distortion occurs in the field of African philosophy. See Sirkku K Hellsten, *Philosophy, Culture and Values: African Philosophy and the Ideal of Development*. Web material: accessed 22/09/10.

²⁸⁶ Grant, “Servanthood Re –visited”. Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Richard Bauchman, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*. London, SPCK, 1989). The author emphasizes the wisdom for the powerful in terms of solidarity with the powerless. He provides a Christological reflection in relation to political power. Jesus as a servant of the Lord shows us what it is to be a true servant through his solidarity with the victims of power. p. 50 – 53.

²⁸⁸ Agbali, “Politics, Rhetoric and Ritual of the Ogoni Movement”, p. 507-508.

A Proposed Postcolonial Re-reading of Justice:

The Old Testament provides a clear call for justice within the Judahite community as well as among the nations. Indeed the mission of the Servant is unequivocally declared to be a proclamation of justice to the nations (Isa. 42:1-9.). The servant is also reported to have become a victim of injustice: “he was taken by injustice” (53:8v). The concept of justice as mentioned earlier is generally considered both in terms of political meaning and ethical implications. Historical scholarship sees *mishpāt* / justice more in relation to the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh, but it is arguable that *mishpāt* also implies a salvation or restoration of the well-being of those who have been denied their humanness or well-being.

However, a postcolonial reading of *mishpāt* foregrounds its ambivalent possibilities both in political and ethical terms. This view is based on two factors. First, is that given the Babylonian imperial milieu of the prophetic ministry of DI, the oracles calling for justice needs to be seen in political terms. It is a call for the foreign powers to restore the people of God, to recognize their right to existence as an independent and sovereign entity.

Secondly, *mishpāt* in an ethical sense addresses the imbalance of power in, and among the newly formed community of the returned exiles. The class struggle between the returned exiles, and those who remained in the land plausibly constituted a space of power struggle. Therefore, the call of justice is proclaimed in order to address the rancour within the Judahite community.

Postcolonialism recognizes the location of power struggle to which the prophet addressed his oracles, and highlights it. This means that postcolonial reading of justice in the servant text takes cognizance of the imperial colonizing context that necessitates such a call. The attempt to read justice largely in ethical terms can be accounted for by the possibility that most Western commentators were consciously or unconsciously evading the imperial thrust of their own culture. Thus, biblical theology has been implicated in Western imperialism because its

emergence coincides with the period when Western imperialism was at its zenith.²⁸⁹ Consequently, postcolonial criticism provides an alternative and oppositional reading to the standard notion of justice. It aligns itself with the process of deconstructing a universalized notion of justice limited to the relationship of the believing community to Yahweh's covenant law. Postcolonialism, further calls for both a distributive justice as well as a restorative justice among every community, irrespective of class, gender, or race.

The call for distributive justice is hinged on a postcolonial celebration of 'hybridity', a phenomenon within the contact zone where both the colonizer and colonized meet. Hybridity contends for acceptance of difference and the pursuit of distributive justice across the binary of colonizer/colonized, ruler/ruled, and the dominant/subaltern. Hence, postcolonial criticism calls for not only distributive justice but also restorative justice.

Similarly, the call for restorative justice could be based on the reality of the postcolonial violence; the Servant of Yahweh was taken by violence and injustice (Isa. 53:8). Imperialism and colonialism, as mentioned earlier, is not only a disruption of the colonized in material terms but also in the disruption of the mentalities of the colonized and the identity of the colonized. Hence, the colonial violence is a disruption of the cultural originality of the colonized.²⁹⁰

Thus, postcolonialism is engaged with the retrieval and restoration of the dignity and identity of the colonized or the oppressed. Hence, justice in postcolonial terms is the restoration of the identity of the subjugated, the restoration of the dignity of those confined to the periphery, and

²⁸⁹ Musa Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, p.15: cf. Crowell, *Postcolonial Studies and the Hebrew Bible*, p.221

²⁹⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Towards the African Revolution*, Haakon Chevalier, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p.18.

transformation of structures of power that promotes equity for all; colonizer and the colonized.²⁹¹

The import of the foregoing is that the church in church in the Niger Delta needs to adopt a liberating approach that coalesces with postcolonial concerns in the theological enterprise. This liberating approach demands to be given expression in the church through her teaching and preaching. Such an approach provides a basis for postcolonial criticism to contend for the freedom of the victims of power and domination, in order to recover their dignity. The position of Lazar S Rotunda, an African Theologian, clearly adumbrates the theological engagement advocated here. According to Rotunda.

The work of liberation theology is a noble achievement, as it stages campaigns against poverty and socio-political injustices in Latin America and in Africa. Postcolonial theory builds on these very campaigns to enlarge the scope of justice and freedom, whereby the marginal persons recover their dignity. A postcolonial reading of the Bible is a war against sin: colonialism, neo-colonialism, dictatorship, corruption and social injustices in every aspect of society, regardless of their agent.²⁹²

What this implies is that a postcolonial re-reading of the Servant Song foregrounds the irreducible necessity for the pursuit of justice among human societies, especially in the Nigeria. I contend that this discourse is not a matter of historical accusations, but a committed search and struggle for decolonization and liberation of the oppressed people of the Niger Delta.²⁹³

A Proposed Postcolonial Re-reading of Nations/ Nationhood:

What is the meaning of nation/nationhood? This section attempts to present a re-reading of the notion of the 'nation' and 'nationalism'. We had earlier pointed out that the use of the idea in the Servant Songs implies that the Servant had a civilising mission to the Gentile nations. (Isa. 42:1-4, 49: 6). The text shows that the nations are seen as being in darkness and needing the

²⁹¹ See Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, Howard Greenfeld, trans. (London: Earthscan Publications, 1974) pp'134-197;cf Susan V. Gallagher, *Postcolonial Literature and the Biblical Call for Justice* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994).

²⁹² Rukundwa, Postcolonial Theory and Biblical Criticism, Internet material www.jstor.com accessed on14/05/09.

²⁹³ Ibid.

light of the Law/ Torah in order to share in the salvation of Yahweh through His servant. (42:4, 49:6) More than that, in the fourth song the nations are appalled, or shocked by the suffering of the Servant as the path for the redemption of the exile community. (52:13-15). The nations in the Servant text therefore, may be seen as a construction of the 'other' which creates a we/they binary. It perhaps creates a hegemonic identity that privileges the *gōlāh* community during the exilic period. The issue here is that such a view of 'the nation' prevailed in the dominant reading of the text, and promotes a way of imaging the 'Other' that encourages imperialism and domination of other peoples. Therefore, there is need at this point to re-read this idea in the light of postcolonial concerns.

First, postcolonial criticism argues that the idea of the nation is a Western construction. It is considered as a Western concept that has been universalized.²⁹⁴ Modern scholars have also co-opted the biblical narratives of Israel to bolster the idea of the modern society as a nation.²⁹⁵ However, the idea of a nation has received critical attention of theorist such as Ernest Renan, a French Philosopher and Theorist, famous for his 1882 Essay – *What is a nation?*²⁹⁶ He argues that the nation did not originate from antiquity but is derived from modern empires.²⁹⁷ The modern idea of the term 'nation' is based on the principle that a particular culture/people and a particular polity /state belong to each other from primordial times. Identity of the people is marked by various means such as race, ethnicity, history, and culture. This general view of the defining elements in the concept of a nation has been debated. For instance, the view that a nation is formed based on race, a common language, a common geography, and a common historical past has been shown not to have historical corroboration.²⁹⁸ These elements in themselves do not create a nation but it is the will of the people that establishes a nation as in

²⁹⁴ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 2nd (ed.), (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.81

²⁹⁵ Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah*, p. 5-6

²⁹⁶ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", in Homi K Bhabha, (ed.), *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 8-21.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p.8-19.

modern European nations.²⁹⁹ Similarly, Benedict Anderson a political scientist, and the author of the influential theory of the “*nation as an imagined Community*” provides a critique of the concept of the nation.³⁰⁰ In his famous study of the concept of the nation, Anderson corroborates the mythical nature of the idea of the nation by defining the nation “primarily as an imagined political community,” because members only carry in their minds the image of their communion,³⁰¹ and it is sustained in the performance of national traditions and a fabricated sense of shared history.³⁰² Thus, “nations, like narratives, lose their origin in the myths of time and only fully realize horizons in the mind’s eyes”.³⁰³ Hence, the notion of the nation is a myth. A postcolonial reading of the idea of the nation problematized the claim to homogeneity. Homi Bhabha in particular contends that the concept of the nation is ambivalent. He argues that the notion of the nation is an ambivalent narration that holds culture at its most productive position, as a force for subordination, fracturing, and diffusion.³⁰⁴

Secondly, the notion of the nation has been critiqued as an ideological tool for domination. The ideology of the nation is employed to construct a modern idea of nation-state with all the instrumentalities of state power such as the military, judiciaries, educational systems and political assemblies are subsumed and legitimized as an expression of the unity of history and culture.³⁰⁵ It is a Western construct that has been used as a tool for domination.³⁰⁶ Thus, imperialism became an extension and a consequence of national formations hinged on the unifying signifiers of language and race. The imperialising and colonizing force of the idea of the nation is a concern for postcolonialism.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p.19-21.

³⁰⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), .

³⁰¹ ibid., p.6

³⁰² McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p.82

³⁰³ Homi Bhabha, . “Introduction: “Narrating the nation,” in Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, pp.1-4.,291-322, p.4, 299.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p.3-4.

³⁰⁵ Ashcroft, et al, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* p 152. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* p.45

³⁰⁶ It has been clearly argued that the connection between the emergence of the nations –state and the imperial-capitalist economies of the post-Renaissance Europe is inescapable. Bhabha, Ibid.

Thirdly, the notion of the nation is also critiqued for its failure to recognize differences. Indeed, the nation defines itself in opposition to the difference which the 'other' represented.³⁰⁷ Hence, it can be said that the idea of the nation negates hybridity, the celebration of difference. This point forms a major part of Bhabha's exploration of the notion of the nation. The effect of the reality of hybridity is that there is no longer anything as a pure race, pure language, or pure nation. There is a space of the in/between that ruptures any meta-narrative. Hybridity and the space of in/between create a space for those in the margins of the nation to inscribe a narrative of their own.³⁰⁸ Thus, the notion of the nation is subject to instability and ruptures as opposed to the stability and continuity character in the general understanding of the concept.

The foregoing critique of the nation becomes clear in relation to the nationalism of the former colonized societies. The anti-colonial movements inherited the idea of nation/nationhood in the struggle against colonialism. While the nationalist movements remain valuable for raising the consciousness of the colonized to stand up against Western domination, its endeavours soon began to suffer from the ruptures latent in the concept they worked with- 'the nation'. In other words the anti-colonial nationalists found the idea of the nation as a convenient tool with which to galvanize collective resistance against imperial domination.³⁰⁹ However, after the achievement of independence most of the decolonized societies began to suffer political implosions. They discovered that the national unity was a mirage; the homogeneity of the nation was the construction of the former colonial masters and can potentially exacerbate conflicts within the newly independent nations.³¹⁰ This is the case with the Nigerian state and the so-called minority groups. A major challenge for the Nigerian state is that of national integration of its constituent multiethnic groups. The root of the problem is traceable to the

³⁰⁷ Bhabha, Introduction: Narrating the Nation,; *DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation.*, In *Nation and Narration*, p.4, 299.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p 300-305.

³⁰⁹ Amilcar Cabral, "National Liberation and Culture" in Williams and Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, pp.53-65.pp.54-5. cf. McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, pp.53-65, p.90.

³¹⁰ See McLeod, who also cites post-independence Nigeria as an example. McLeod, *.Beginning Postcolonialism*, p133-134.

political structure inherited from the British colonial arrangement, which was essentially aimed at serving imperial economic interest but has become problematic in the postcolonial state.³¹¹

The result of the situation of the Nigerian state is the political and economic marginalization and deprivation of the minority groups that has led to the crisis in the Niger Delta.

Postcolonialism, therefore problematizes the notion of the nation, because the concept is so often based on precarious unifying factors. To remedy this situation, postcolonial thinkers suggest the creation of national consciousness. For instance, Frantz Fanon argues that creating a national consciousness is one of the ways out the quagmire. According to Fanon, “national consciousness, which is not nationalism, is alone capable of given us an international dimension”.³¹² Consequently, postcolonialism is concerned with the idea of the nation not as effecting domination and defining differences. It re-reads nationhood as a celebration of difference, and of all peoples: that is, a space of ‘liminality’.³¹³ This perception of nationhood will help in national integration and equitable justice.

Proposed Postcolonial Rereading of Redemption/Salvation:

The re-reading of the concepts of redemption and salvation will involve some sort of ‘deconstruction’ of the Western dominant understanding of the concepts. It is generally affirmed that redemption or salvation was accomplished by the Servant on behalf of the believing community. The question here is what is this redemption/salvation for a colonized people? We will first look at the concept of redemption in DI to identify the general

³¹¹ This situation has been rightly observed by experts in Nigerian socio-political history. For instance, Agbali in his analysis of the failure of the federal system in nation building concludes that “the problem with the Nigeria is that the colonialist structured Nigeria seems to embody the seed of disintegration, an awareness of which calls for radical restricting through dialogues involving the discrete nationalities and diverse interests” Agbali, “Politics, Rhetoric and Ritual of the Ogoni Movement”, p.523

³¹² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 179. Cf. Lowell W Barrington, ed., *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, internet material: www.press.umich.edu. Accessed on 28/08/2010. According to Bhabha, the international dimension here can be regarded as that which provides a space/ a voice for those on the margins of the nations, and within the boundaries of the in-between among nations and peoples Bhabha, *Narrating the Nation*, p.4

³¹³ *Ibid*, p.300. Cf. McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, p. 139 -142.

understanding of redemption/salvation in DI, and in the servant text. This will be followed by a postcolonial reading of the concept as a colonized people.

Redemption in the servant song:

The terms for redemption/salvation do not occur directly in the fourth servant song. However, commentators interpret what the Servant accomplished in the light of the meaning of redemption and the achievements of the Servant's suffering described in 53:3-5 constitutes the whole idea of salvation as healing, happiness, peace, and righteousness.³¹⁴

Thus, the redemption in DI and in the fourth song is in accordance with the general use of the term as release from bondage. Redemption and salvation in the context of DI refer basically to the release of the captives from the Babylonian exile.³¹⁵ It is also generally accepted that the term for redemption alludes to the function of the kinsman-redeemer, who had the duty to help a relative who had fallen into indebtedness or even sold into slavery. The kinsman is expected to help the one who is helpless.³¹⁶ The term is used in reference to Yahweh in DI probably because of his personal connection with his people. (42:22-25; 43:1ff; 44:23). Therefore, the fourth song is a message on how Yahweh will save his people as earlier proclaimed by DI.³¹⁷

Furthermore, Western theologies take on the meaning of redemption in view of the New Testament interpretation and application of the term to the mission of Jesus Christ. The result is that the term acquired an emphasis on salvation as deliverance from sin and guilt. In so doing, redemption/salvation is distanced from the Old Testament meaning as that which deals with predicaments of those oppressed under a socio-political situation.

Hence, the prevailing idea about redemption/and salvation in the servant song is that of release from the guilt of sin in relationship with God or in other-worldly relations. From a postcolonial perspective, such an interpretation is inadequate and ignores the Hebrew connotation of the

³¹⁴ Arvid S Kapelrud, "The Main concern of Second Isaiah" in *VT*, vol.32 (Jan. 1982), pp. 50 -58, p.57.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.53.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.54.

³¹⁷ Salvation and redemption is reoccurring theme in DI. See Arvid, "The main concern of Second Isaiah", p.52

term. Redemption in Hebrew thought has to do with liberation from social and physical situations, and not from sin alone.³¹⁸ A postcolonial perspective on the theme of redemption/salvation is therefore pertinent to enrich the hermeneutical possibilities of the term.

Postcolonial Reading of Redemption:

A postcolonial reading of redemption/salvation first concerns itself with a critique of Western formulations of theological thinking. The notion of redemption that limits its meaning to salvation from the eternal consequences of sin, while theologically sound, could be regarded as a distortion, as well as ideological; serving the interest of the dominant class. For instance, Olin P Moyd, a Black Theologian who has presented an exploration of the meaning of redemption as a central motif in Black Theology, argues for an extended meaning of redemption from the perspective of Black theology which carries relevance to my discussion.³¹⁹ He makes two important comments on the above statement. One is that Christian theologians, preachers, and custodians of the faith have participated in the development of the cult of a single interpretation of the many dimensions of redemption. Thus, the impression is that redemption is singularly concerned with salvation from the eternal consequences of sin. However, it is noted that major Christian theologians have acknowledged the many dimensions of redemption. Yet, few treatises have been forthcoming on this-worldly liberation element of redemption.³²⁰ The second observation is a reminder of the ideological context of the interpretation of the concept of redemption. He says:

It ought to be remembered, however, that Western theology unfolded in the midst of colonizing nations where, in fact, the states are superior to the church. Thus the church has been passive in the area of developing a theology that would be antagonistic to the social, economic, and political practices of the state.³²¹

³¹⁸ Olin. P Moyd, *Redemption in Black Theology* (Valley Forge, Judson Press. 1979), p.36-38.

³¹⁹ He states, “This approach was not only a distortion of the original meaning of redemption, but also it is alleged that it was specifically designed to keep the oppressed from rising up and claiming their God-given rights to freedom from oppression”. Ibid. , p. 39

³²⁰ Ibid., p40.

³²¹ Ibid., p. 40. (The Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer is cited as an exception).

Here, postcolonial theology resonates with a similar critique of systematic theology in view of the reality of imperialism. For instance, Sugirtharajah observes that the practitioners of systematic theology have been reluctant to address the relation between European colonialism and the field of theology.³²² Consequently, the interpretation of redemption exclusively in spiritual terms is problematized. Therefore, postcolonial criticism attempts to criticize and reconstruct religious/theological concepts taking into account issues of colonization.³²³ Hence, postcolonial reading of redemption/salvation foregrounds the Hebrew understanding of the term as deliverance from oppression. But it goes further to see such deliverance in application to every socio-political and economic configurations among nations, societies and communities where there is domination.

Secondly, postcolonialism as part of the mosaic of hermeneutical approaches adopted by ‘others’ outside of Western metropolitan theologies, to some extent share a similar understanding of redemption/salvation with Liberation theology and Black theology as stated above. For instance, Moyd explains that Black theology elaborates the multi-dimensional meaning of redemption. The Hebrew witnesses and theologians have understood redemption to be both this-worldly as well as otherworldly. Redemption meant salvation from oppression as well as salvation from sin and guilt”.³²⁴ However, the sombre observation is that Western Christian theologians in spite of their awareness of this-worldly dimension of the concept have exhibited a proclivity for accenting the other-worldly dimension of redemption.³²⁵

Thirdly, a postcolonial reading of redemption will be based on the function of the term as deliverance from the evils of all structural dominations among all human communities.

³²² R.S. Sugirtharajah, “Complacencies and Cul –de-sacs: Christian Theologies and Colonialism” in Catherine Keller, Michael Nauser, and Mayra Rivera, (eds.), *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire* (Missouri, Chalice Press, 2004), pp.22-38. p.22.

³²³ For example the works of Kwol Pui-Ian, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-biblical World: Bible and Liberation* (New York, Orbis Books, 2002); Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics* (New York, Routledge, 2000).

³²⁴ Moyd, *Redemption in Black Theology*, pp. 58 – 59.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Redemption then must include the total restoration of the identity and dignity of the colonized, essentials which were affected by colonial violence.³²⁶ A major aspect of postcolonial theory is the idea of hybridity in explicating the colonial experience in contemporary times. Hybridity describes the point of contact where the colonizer meets the colonized. It is an argument of identity that insists that the binaries of modern thought can no longer exist *in toto*. In other words, postcolonialism contends that there is no longer a pure demarcation of race, culture and people. The identity of the colonized is hybridized. Not only that, the space of hybridity is where differences are collapsed, contested, and celebrated. Hybridity is the place of *in between*; a place of contestation where those on the margins rupture the metropolitan narratives and ideas in order to recover their identity and free themselves of domination. It is the liminal interstice which generates a highly productive space of new meaning attributions and identity constructions achieved in the performance of cultural signs.³²⁷ In other words, on the basis of hybridity, a Western theology of redemption can be contested by those on the margins of the hegemonic systematic theological discourse. A postcolonial reading of redemption will address the specific needs of specific people: both the colonized and the colonizer.

The foregoing provides the inspiration for ‘Third World’ or ‘Tricontinental’ theologians to insist on re-reading the concept of redemption from their specific experience and specific locations.³²⁸ For example, Sergio Torres³²⁹, a Tricontinental Theologian, buttresses the above reading of redemption by pointing out that Western theological discussion about God, Jesus

³²⁶ Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p.189-198.

³²⁷ [...] liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, [and] becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither [...], the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), p.4.

³²⁸ Rukundwa, *Postcolonial Theory and Biblical Criticism*, Internet material www.jstor.com accessed on 14/05/09.

³²⁹ Sergio Torres, Opening Address, *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan – African Conference of Third World Theologians*, December 17 – 23, 1977, Accra Ghana, edited by Kofi Appiah –Kubi and Sergio Torres.

Christ, and salvation were abstract concepts divorced from the historical Jesus, who identified with the poor of his time. Therefore, Torres concludes that: “European theology, with a few exceptions, played an important role of ideological legitimization of an economic mode of production that has caused many injustices both in Europe and in the Third World”.³³⁰ In a similar vein, Mercy Oduyoye, argues that salvation for us in Africa is holistically aligned to African religious concepts where the dichotomy between the material and metaphysical spheres of human existence is recognized”.³³¹

Therefore, there is need for us as Nigerians to re-read the concept of redemption / salvation in the context of our own experience. Redemption must be read against the background of the experience of colonization, and neo-colonization of those in the margins. The oppressed must read redemption not in terms of Western theology but on their own terms, to address their experience of socio-political and economic exploitation in contemporary times.

Therefore, this dissertation proposes a holistic dimension to the concept of redemption as used in the Hebrew. Redemption cannot be only spiritual but also a deliverance from the oppressive structures in the society. It can be said that the promise of redemption for the exiles in DI was not only in spiritual terms but also in terms of the physical and political freedom of God’s people from the stranglehold of imperial powers. Likewise, redemption for the people of the Niger Delta must be holistic, addressing the economic and political iniquities inflicted upon the oil producing areas and its inhabitants. Redemption for the people of the Niger Delta must be freedom from the stranglehold of the federal system to which they have been held hostage since the exploration of oil in commercial quantity in 1957 at Oloibiri.³³²

³³⁰ Sergio Torres, Opening Address, *African Theology En Route*.

³³¹ According to Mercy Oduyoye, “Our salvation theology has to feature the questions of racism and liberation from material need....above all, salvation is to be seen as salvation from evil, both individual and structural. Mercy Oduyoye” The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology” in *African Theology En Route*, pp.109-116. .p.115.

³³² Ejibunu, Nigeria’s Niger Delta Crisis: Root Causes of Peacelessness”; Internet material: www.aspr.ac.at/epu/research/rp_0707.pdf accessed on 12/11/10.

4.4. A Postcolonial Appropriation of the Suffering Servant Figure and the Niger Delta Crisis:

4.4.1. *The Servant as an Agent of Liberation:* DI clearly declares that a major function of the Servant is the liberation of the people from the bondage in exile. The expectation for liberation is necessitated by the fact that the exile was described as a bondage from which they needed to be free from.³³³ Again, the proclamation of freedom from the prison of the exile is a prominent feature in DI's message. Hence, the expected Messiah in the person of the Servant will be anointed for this purpose. Therefore, one cannot see how the release of the exiles can only be in spiritual terms without a physical dimension as some scholars such as North has argued.³³⁴

Consequently, the message of the servant should inspire the struggle for liberation for those in the condition of 'exile'. I had earlier pointed out that exile is not only a physical dislocation but it is essentially a feeling of annihilation. The reference to *the hand of the Lord* and what the servant accomplished should provide an impetus for those in similar situations to emulate. In 53:1, the *hand of the Lord* implies His saving activities. It also indicates the Lords' interest in saving His oppressed people. It is *the hand of the Lord* that will redeem the suffering exiles. In other words, the proposed reading of redemption as freedom from oppression, as argued earlier, points to the fact that the function of the Servant and the purpose of his sufferings was the return of the exiles / their liberation from the bondage of imperial domination.³³⁵

In relation to the Niger Delta crisis, the Suffering Servant text should serve as a message of liberation for those who are oppressed and annihilated, exiled in their own land, at home but homeless. Hence, there is the need to mobilize the oil communities for self- liberation and self-determination. A good example is the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, one of the tribal groups in the Niger Delta (MOSOP). As a social movement, it articulated and

³³³ See Croatto, "Exegesis of Second Isaiah from the Perspective of Oppressed" , p.234.

³³⁴ Christopher R. Noth, *The Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary to Chapters -LV.p,21-22*

³³⁵ See discussion on redemption in 4:3 in this paper.

propelled forceful schemes counter hegemonic to the pre-existing hegemonic order in the Nigerian society.³³⁶ Thus, it seeks liberation through resistance against the dominating and enslaving powers of the state. Therefore, the Ogoni Bill of Rights³³⁷ establishes the basis for Ogoni agitation and resistance against the structural *status quo* that is responsible for their coercive domination, degradation, and forces antithetical to Ogoni environment and total existence.³³⁸ The movement therefore stands as an organized liberation movement. Reading the Servant as an agent of liberation therefore gives practical relevance to the situation of readers in a concrete socio-political situation such as the oppressed people of the Niger Delta.

4.4.2. *The Servant is an Agent of Restoration:* Whybray provides a summary of the message of Isaiah regarding the restoration of the Judahite people. He states that:

...the message which DI believed himself to have been called by Yahweh to deliver to the Jewish exiles was essentially a simple one: the complete restoration of the Jewish nation to independence and prosperity in their own land and to a position of dominance over the other nations was about to begin. The exiles have served their sentence; now they were to be recipients of every kind of good fortune, which Yahweh would unsparingly pour upon them; and nothing would ever disturb this life of unalloyed happiness.³³⁹

Therefore the restoration of Judah was guaranteed by divine promise. The exile was also a temporary separation because of the sin of the people. Hence, the message of DI is that the separation of Yahweh from his people was only temporary, and that the city of Zion shall be restored.³⁴⁰

Consequently, regarding the restoration promised, the Servant text makes it abundantly clear that the Servant is an agent of restoration. In 5v-7v, the text states that the servant restored

³³⁶ Anthony Agbali, "Politics, Rhetoric and Ritual of the Ogoni Movement" inpp.507-529: p.507

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ R.N. Whybray, "Isaiah 40 -66", *New Century Bible* R.E. Clements and Matthew Black (eds.), (London, Oliphants, 1975,p.30.

³⁴⁰ Christopher R. North, *The Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary to Chapters XL - LV*.p.19.

‘peace’ and healing, or well-being at the price of his vicarious sufferings on behalf of the people. The restoration of the exiles back to their home land is thus a prominent message in DI, and which is somehow accomplished by the Servant in 53. Similarly, postcolonialism is concerned with not only with the reality of domination under imperialism and colonialism but also in the continued forms of domination. Hence, it is concerned with the struggle of oppressed societies in order to recover their cultural identity and to restore their well-being.

As a result, the oppressed communities of the oil producing areas should read the Servant text as a message that inspires the struggle for restoration of their well-being, culture, and subsistence which had been decimated by the exploration of oil and gas in their land. The advent of oil raised expectations for enhanced subsistence and improved well-being. On the contrary, rather than experience enhanced subsistence the people have been served with brutal repressions, especially on the Ijaw and Ogoni communities along Bayelsa State, whenever they protest against the deplorable state of the communities and the degradation of the land due to intensive oil exploration activities.³⁴¹ For over forty years, the Niger Delta communities have suffered an unimaginable damage to their environment that has completely annihilated them from their native habitation³⁴². Therefore, the Servant text can only offer practical relevance when interpreted from this postcolonial perspective. In this contact zone, we see a site of conflict and a struggle by the powerless and subjugated people to liberate themselves, their culture, and environment from degradation and marginalization. Consequently, the Servant’s work in this text can only be appropriated by subjugated people as that which liberates from a concrete socio-political and economic oppression in order to be meaningful and relevant.

4.4.3. *The Servant as an agent of Justice*: the message of DI is very loud with the call for justice. An integral part of the Servant’s mission is the proclamation of justice (*mishpät*,) to the

³⁴¹ Ayodele-akaakar, “Appraising The Oil & Gas Laws: A Search For Enduring Legislation For The Niger Delta Region. Internet material:www.jsd-africa.com accessed 02/062011103:25 see also Agbali, , “Politics, Rhetoric and Ritual of the Ogoni Movement.”, p507,513.

³⁴² Ejibunu, “Nigeria’s Niger Delta Crisis: Root Causes of Peacelessness”.

nations, as earlier stated (Isa.42: 1-9). Justice, as pointed out earlier, can be seen against the Babylonian exile background at two levels; political and ethical. At the political level, justice entails the political liberation of the exiles from the domination of imperial powers. In DI, according to North, "...it is difficult to see how any prophet especially in the condition of exile could conceive of a spiritual restoration apart from the political rehabilitation of his nation"³⁴³ The fact is that the term carries not only judicial implications, but it also carries both salvific/liberative and eschatological implications that emerged from the experience of oppression by the Jewish people under imperial powers.³⁴⁴ Therefore, *mishpāt* could refer to the restoration of the exiles to their homeland by recognizing their right to existence as a sovereign entity. Also, justice at the ethical dimension addresses the imbalance of power between the ruling *gōlāh*, and the poor of the land that privileges the hegemonic structure.

In the same vein, reflecting on the Niger Delta, the main cause of the unrest and instability in recent times is clearly traceable to the peoples' struggle for justice as explained above. This struggle for justice is informed by the economic injustice inflicted upon the people in relation to oil wealth as F.O. Ayodele, a Nigerian political historian, rightly points out that:

"The federal government's ownership and control of oil resources, has caused deep bitterness, resentment and a sense of majority oppression of the minority producers of oil. The fact is that people of the oil producing areas feel cheated and exploited by a policy under which the wealth under their lands is carted away, leaving them with nothing but a polluted and a devastated environment".³⁴⁵

Consequently, The Niger Delta crisis is also a struggle against economic injustice and marginalisation meted to them by the skewed federal system of the Nigerian society. As one member angrily queries? "You produce the oil from our lands, but we get no benefit from it.

³⁴³ North, *The Second Isaiah*, p146.

³⁴⁴ Richard Beaton. *Isaiah's Christ in Matthew's Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.158-161.

³⁴⁵ Ayodele-akaakar, "Appraising The Oil & Gas Laws:A Search For Enduring Legislation For The Niger Delta Region** internet material:www.jsd-africa.com accessed 02/062011. See also Osaghae, "*The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of Nigerian State*" internet material www.afraf.oxfordjournals.org accessed 12/10/2010.

Look around. Does this look like an oil-producing community? Does this look like Saudi Arabia?”³⁴⁶ This question simply implies that the oil producing communities have nothing to show for the immense oil wealth that is derived from their soil.³⁴⁷

With increasing revenues from oil and gas worth over \$400 billion since the early 1970's, it has not improved the plight of the generality of the people. It has been shown that unlike other oil producing communities in the US, the oil wealth of the Niger Delta has basically produced nothing but abject poverty and extreme sufferings.³⁴⁸ In spite of efforts to review it, the revenue sharing laws have also failed to address the persistent and pervasive economic and physical development of the Niger Delta communities.³⁴⁹

Further, in terms of ecological injustice, the severity of the injustice inflicted on the minority people and their environment is deeply pitiable. It is not an exaggeration that the environmental degradation of most parts of the Niger Delta has rendered the land inhabitable.³⁵⁰ It is such an experience of environmental degradation and the lack of adequate compensatory schemes³⁵¹

³⁴⁶ Okonta and Douglas. *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil in the Niger Delta*. London: Verso, 2003, p.196.

³⁴⁷ See Osaghae, , *The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics*. See for further details in Rose Ngomba-Roth, *Multinational Companies and Conflicts in Africa: The Case of the Niger Delta-Nigeria* (Hamburg, Lit Verlag, 2007.), pp.106-114.

³⁴⁸ see Ejibunu, "Nigeria's Niger Delta Crisis: Root Causes of Peacelessness". Another political scholar describes the situation thus: "While oil wealth had activated progressive development and economic well being, ours had become our Achilles' Heel", Arthur A Nwankwo, "Political Economy of Corruption in Nigeria" in Christian Akani, (ed.), *Corruption in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Experience*, p.16; For further details and understanding of the impact of oil in extractive economies in other parts of the world see A. A. Iken, *The Impact of Oil on a Developing Country: The Case of Nigeria* (Praeger, New York, 1990).

³⁴⁹ See Osaghae, "The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of Nigerian State".

³⁵⁰ The severity of the phenomenon is best captured in the words of a member of one of the oil producing communities: he says: We in Dere today [1970] are facing a situation which can only be compared with our experiences during the civil war. This village of no less than 20,000 inhabitants produces the greatest oilfield this country has... It is nearly two weeks now when suddenly we were told that there was an explosion on this oilfield and that people should be on their alert. ..Since then an ocean of crude oil had emerged, moving swiftly like a great river in flood, successfully swallowing up anything that comes on its way. These include cassava farms, yams, palms, streams, animals etc for miles on end. There is no pipeborne water and yet the streams, the only source of drinking water is(sic) coated with oil... You cannot collect a bucket of rain water for the roofs, trees and grass are all covered with oil. Anything spread outside in the neighbourhood is soaked with oil as the wind carries the oil miles away from the scene of the incident... We are thus faced with a situation where we have no food to eat, no water to drink, no homes to live in and worst of it all, no air to breathe" Sam Badilo Bako as quoted in K. Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria: the Ogoni tragedy* (London, Saros International, 1992), pp. 58-59.

³⁵¹ Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria*, p. 94-99.

that informed the massive violence in the Niger Delta which reached murderous heights in the 1990's with the killing of Saro Wiwa in November 1995.

Indeed, a postcolonial reading of the servant as an agent of distributive and ethical justice is the most appropriate to make it relevant to people in an oppressive economic and socio-political situation such as the Niger Delta. This is because postcolonialism translates a deep concern for the perspective and social-political location of persons from regions and groups outside the hegemonic power structure³⁵². For this reason, the Servant's message could stand as a clear reminder that all hope is not lost, that God is on the side of the oppressed, and He is a God of justice. As a result, the struggle must continue by all peaceful and meaningful means.

4. 5. A Proposed Postcolonial Re-reading of Servant Leadership and the Niger Delta:

This section attempts to provide a re-reading of the notion of Servant leadership in view of postcolonial concerns. The postcolonial re-reading of the Servant leadership is based on the texts of the servant songs, and its interpretations. More importantly, is the attempt here to show that the Servant leadership model is of subversive and active character in contrast to the generally held notion of submission and passivity and carries relevance to the Nigerian situation

The Suffering Servant As a Model of Leadership:

First, it can be said that the Servant figure in the fourth song could serve as a model calling for imitation in contemporary times because of some of the characteristics which the Servant exhibits in the texts. This point is aptly expressed by Balzer, who states that:

The servant as a model is a call to *imitatio*. He shows exemplary virtues such as the renunciation of outward renown, the readiness to bear misunderstanding, not to repay evil for evil, the avoidance of violence and deception, intervention for others to the point of surrendering his life...³⁵³

³⁵² Mabiala, Justin-Robert Kenzo, *What Is Postcolonialism and Why Does It Matter: An African Perspective*, internet material www.amahoro-africa accessed 22/05/2011.

³⁵³ Balzer, , *Deutero – Isaiah: 40— 55*, p. 429.

In other words, the servant portrait may be said to provide a call for contemporary leadership to imitate or emulate his characteristics.

Secondly, the servant model suggests an active approach to leadership in relation to the dynamics of power. Balzer, in his exegesis of the servant text in 53:12, is instructive. He comments that the servant becomes an intercessor, an advocate for “the many” as one who is just in God’s sight, and who at the same time, is in solidarity with human beings.³⁵⁴ One can reasonably infer from this comment that the church, as God’s servant in the world ought to stand in strong solidarity with people in the struggle for liberation. There needs to be an active and unequivocal position against any system or social/political-economic structure that imposes suffering/oppression on others; the powerless, the minority, and the voiceless as the case in the Niger Delta.

Thirdly, the servant leadership model suggests a subversive characteristic in contrast to that of a slavish submission. This view is supported by Balzer’s exegesis of 53:9. Here, apart from conceding the difficulty of the text, Balzer comments that the verse is probably intentionally mysterious for plausible political reasons. He states that: “Ambiguous texts that have to be read between the lines are often indicating political pressure”.³⁵⁵ This point suggests that the ambiguity/mystery of this text is perhaps for subversive purposes against the political/religious powers of the day. This is purported to be during the political tension between Nehemiah’s leadership and Tobiah, the Ammonite. Although Balzer interprets this text against a contrived background during the days of Nehemiah, his comment carries serious significance for my argument³⁵⁶: that the servant paradigm in the fourth song is potentially subversive.

The Nigerian state had experienced on some occasions the emergence of few subversive servant leaders. For example, Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian novelist and poet, exhibited a

³⁵⁴ Ibid. , p. 428.

³⁵⁵ Ibid. , p. 417.

³⁵⁶ Sommer refutes the proposition that places DI in the fifth century and connects its writings to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, Benjamin D Sommer, Review of Deutero – Isaiah: A Commentary On Isaiah 40 – 55 by Klaus Balzer. Online material: www.jstor.com: RBL 02/2003, accessed 03/08.09. p. 5.

subversive servant leadership through his literary activities and political activism. Achebe provided a voice for the voiceless in Nigeria by speaking the truth to the oppressive political structures and policies in Nigeria. He also declined the award of the highest honour in Nigeria in 2004 in protest to the sorry state of the nation which includes the injustice and genocide committed in the Niger Delta by the federal government.³⁵⁷ Also, in 1966, a young military Colonel, Isaac Boro took a bold step to declare the cessation of the Ijaws in the Niger Delta from the Nigerian federation in resistance to the annihilation and exile of the people from their land. The action was a clear a case of subverting the domination and economic marginalization of the Ijaws in the oil producing areas.³⁵⁸

4.6. Appropriating the Servant Leadership Paradigm in Postcolonial Nigerian Society: Politics and Crisis in the Niger – Delta.

This section inevitably follows the preceding discussion. The aim here is to invite the Nigerian society and the church specifically to adopt the model of the servant as a paradigm for leadership in contemporary Nigerian society. Such a call is important because it has been clearly stated that a major problem with postcolonial Nigeria is the absence of good leadership.³⁵⁹ However, it is my considered opinion that the servant- leadership paradigm stands to be a fruitful approach to leadership in resolving the current crisis in the Niger Delta as a result of the politics of oil.

My objective in this section therefore is to present a discursive *locus* for the appropriation of the servant leadership model. This is implemented by providing a deconstruction and reconstruction of certain notions of the servant leadership so as to challenge the church in postcolonial Nigeria to develop a resistant position to oppressive policies and practices in the socio-political spheres. The reconstruction suggested here involves: re-imaging the servant

³⁵⁷ James Ogunleye, *Creative and Inspiring Cultural Leaders in Nigeria: Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka* Internet material www.slideshare.net 03/06/2011.

³⁵⁸ Agbali, Politics, Rhetoric and Ritual of the Ogoni Movement”,p.510, Osaghae, The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of Nigerian State”p.326.

³⁵⁹ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1983), p.1.

model, re-focusing the Servant's accomplishment, and re-configuring the hermeneutic of the Cross and Service.

Re-imagining the Servant Model: Looking at Balzer's exegesis of the Fourth Servant Song, one sees a sample of how the image of the servant has been perceived. Specifically, Balzer concludes that the interpretation of the servant text makes it clear why the Suffering Servant became in typology a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. In the language of this text the Christian community could communicate its own experience.³⁶⁰

While I am cognizant of the vigorous debate going on concerning the application of the suffering servant image in Isaiah 53, I raise issues with the manner the image has been applied. In the first place, the question is why a Suffering Servant, and not a 'liberating servant'? Suffering, as noted earlier, only marks the process by which the servant passed through to accomplish his purpose. I want to suggest that a conceptualization of the Servant should be that which invokes and accentuates the liberating character of the Servant; a "liberating servant". This is because this description puts the emphasis on his core function and accomplishment. The prevalence of the "suffering servant" coinage perhaps could be attributed to the hegemonic interest of Eurocentric scholars whose preference to underscore the suffering of the servant might have been motivated by the desire to suppress the liberating potential and inspirations of the oppressed/colonized. This view is illustrated in the case of the Black American slaves and their masters³⁶¹ Therefore; I suggest a re-imagining of the servant as a liberating servant.

Refocusing the Servant's Accomplishment: Westermann in his exegesis of the fourth song, points out that the restoration of the servant in 53:10 – 11a is only stated in general terms and taken from Israelite tradition.³⁶² However, the result of the intervention is that the servant

³⁶⁰ Baltzer, , *Deutero – Isaiah: 40– 55*, pp. 428 – 429.

³⁶¹ See Jacqueline, "Servanthood Re –visited: A Womanist Explorations of Servanthood Theology pp. 127 – 134.

³⁶² Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, p. 267.

obtains 'life', which in the OT implies life which is happy and blessed.³⁶³ This interpretation of the servant's achievement can be seen as an attempt to depoliticize the work of the servant.³⁶⁴

My observation here is that while the servant obtains restoration in general terms, I take a point of departure in that the oppressed need restoration in specific and liberating terms. For example, the people of the Niger Delta's communities need a servant leader with a new focus. We need a leadership who can obtain intervention and restoration in specific terms for the people; bringing life- happiness and the physical and material enjoyment of the blessings of our land. This yearning in the hearts of the colonized or the dominated is well expressed by Fanon who says: "For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity".³⁶⁵

Unfortunately, this sort of Western view of the work of the Servant, as stated earlier, is insufficient from my position as a subjugated person. It is such apolitical interpretation and theology in general that has paralysed the church in Nigeria for too long from reassessing her theology. This state of affairs could perhaps be traceable to the fact that the African church has far too long remained a mere duplication of the European church and theological thoughts. Ngindu Mushete confirms this observation by saying: "I would only point out that the theology of church implantation has given rise to paralytic Christian communities. Mere copies of the European model; they have shown no initiative, creativity or originality".³⁶⁶

However, it has been pointed out that African theologians are becoming aware of the fact that theology, and even biblical studies is culturally and socially positioned.³⁶⁷ It needs to be reiterated that "there are points of contact and intermingling between the word of God and human society, between theological elaboration and social analysis; and it is better to be aware

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Christopher R North,

³⁶⁵ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 9.

³⁶⁶ Ngindu Mushete, "The History of Theology in Africa: From Polemics to Critical Irenics", in *African Theology En Route*, pp., pp.23-34...p. 26.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 29.

of them than to ignore them or feign ignorance”.³⁶⁸ The postcolonial optic as an interpretative paradigm adopted in this paper stands as an expression of such an awareness of the contact between the text of the Servant Song and the realities of our society.³⁶⁹ Such a perspective significantly connects with the present realities in such an oppressed community as the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

Re-Configuring a Hermeneutics of Service: An appropriation of the servant leadership model will also require a reconfiguration of the hermeneutics of service. The pertinent question here is: what is the essence of a Servant leader? My response is that at the heart of servant leadership is service. Servant leadership like the imaging of the Cross in the New Testament is not submissive suffering. A point of departure is that the Cross is also an inevitable consequence of a provocative life; “a life that challenges the systems or structures of oppression. It is lived in solidarity with the poor, the downtrodden, the marginalized; those who live on the periphery and to whom the kingdom of God is proclaimed. It is the crowning of a life dedicated to pay any price in the service of those it loves dearly.”³⁷⁰ The foregoing suggests the essential characteristics of what Servant leadership is all about. It is an intense commitment to serve those who have been relegated to the periphery of society, the marginalized, and oppressed. Therefore, in practical terms Servanthood inevitably entails subversion, an engagement with the structures of power, and the systems of injustice and oppression in our world; in Nigeria, and among the people of the Niger Delta. Examples of such leaders are not farfetched such as Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu both of

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Wole Soyinka in one of his works describes the painful realities of postcolonial Nigerian as “*pekemes*”. (‘peculiar mess’). Soyinka works are a response to the evils of the postcolonial military regimes in Nigeria. The same military stands as tools of the colonizing masters even in the so-called post-independence era. See Biodun Jeyifo, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics, and Postcolonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. internet material accessed on 20 – Jun 09 16:38.)

³⁷⁰ Yacob Tesfai. ((ed.)), *The Scandal of a Crucified World; Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), p. 13.

South Africa who engaged the injustice of the apartheid regime in South Africa, and especially Ken Saro-Wiwa³⁷¹ from the Niger Delta.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for the church to review and renew her theological model in order to engage the structures of oppression in present-day Africa and in particular the Nigerian society. This is essentially due to the fact that our theological thoughts have been shaped and inscribed by Western thoughts which basically answer to the issues of Western culture and society.³⁷² It is thus, imperative for the church to review her theological practise from a postcolonial perspective. It is a call to re-configure our hermeneutics of the service and the cross in the New Testament that shifts from the metropolitan paradigm.³⁷³

The theological reconfiguration called for above, requires a critical theological framework. Cone provides us a possible framework in Liberation theology that can assist in this direction. It is reported that African-Americans in their struggle turned to three texts in re - formulating a theology from their own location/ experience.³⁷⁴ These are namely, the Exodus, Psalm 68: 31, and the Jesus story. First, the Exodus provided the belief that God is the liberator of the oppressed. Secondly, Psalm. 68:31 gives us a promise to redeem Africa.³⁷⁵ Thirdly, in the Jesus story, African-Americans identified with the ministry of Jesus to the poor.³⁷⁶ In Jesus' death, "poor Blacks saw themselves, and they unleashed their imagination in describing what they felt and saw".³⁷⁷ Further, His death was a symbol of their suffering, their trials and

³⁷¹ Saro Wiwa's trial speech exhibits the sacrificial character of his servant leadership when he states that: "In the quest for justice for my people neither prison, nor the threat of death, nor death itself could ever deter me". See Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1999), p. 171

³⁷² J.B. Chipenda, an African theologian supports this view by observing that: "Christian theology in Africa has represented the views of the dominant cultures and created incentives for Africans to fit into the accepted stereotypes" Jose. B. Chipenda, "Theological Options in Africa Today" in *African Theology En Route*, p.71.

³⁷³ A similar paradigm shift is engaged in Third World literary intellectual response to imperialism. See Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination: Literature In Africa and Black Diaspora* (Oxford University Press, 2001. 296 pgs., p.73. online material www.questia.com accessed on 2010-02-19).

³⁷⁴ James Cone, "An African-American Perspective on the Cross and Suffering" in *The Scandal of A Crucified World*, pp 176-186. p. 51.

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 52.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

tribulations in an unfriendly world. It is because Black slaves knew the significance of the pain and shame of Jesus' death on the Cross; they found themselves by his side.³⁷⁸

The church in Nigeria needs a similar hermeneutical re-configuration of the Suffering Servant. Again, we are not only to recognize our solidarity with the suffering of the Servant or Jesus Christ, but we must also share in the victory- the exaltation of the Servant and the resurrection. Hence, the resurrection event symbolizes hope for those who suffer.³⁷⁹ Similarly, the vindication of the Servant in Isaiah 53 should be taken as a solid platform for a theology of hope for the suffering masses in Nigeria, especially the Niger Delta peoples.³⁸⁰

Such theological reflection will require both a new starting point and a renewed focus on the central message of the gospel. The starting point for the theological re-configuration should be one that insists that theology should be defined by people at the bottom and not those at the top of the socio-political economic ladder.³⁸¹ Not only that, we need to recognize that an essential part of the central message of the gospel is God's liberation of the poor.³⁸² Though postcolonialism rejects the totalizing and hard classifications such as rich/poor/ oppressor/oppressed, it shares a similar concern for the dominated in a broader sense with other liberating theologies.³⁸³ However, Cone's comment on a liberating reading of the cross is appropriate to the discussion here. He states that:

But when the poor of Northern America and the Third World read the passion story of the cross they do not view it as a theological idea but as God's suffering in solidarity

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ This is because, as Cone points out, the cross was not the end in God's drama of salvation, *ibid*,p.52.

³⁸⁰ See Tesfai, *The Scandal of a Crucified World*; p. 5.

³⁸¹ Ibid. p. 5.

³⁸² According to Cone, Black theologians,—and Nigerian theologians—must focus on God's liberation of the poor and the dominated as the central message of the gospel. Elsewhere, James Cone has argued that there are common concerns as to engender dialogue between the two theological perspectives- Black Theology and Liberation Theology on the bases of a common historical option and a common faith. Cone, "An African-American Perspective on the Cross and Suffering, *ibid*, 57–58 See also Sergio Torres, Opening Address in *African Theology En Route*, 5.. James Cone, "A Black American Perspective on the Future of African Theology" in *African Theology En Route*, pp. 176 – 186.

³⁸³ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*, pp.67, 110-123.

with the victims of the world. Jesus' cross is God's solidarity with the poor, experiencing their pain and sufferings.³⁸⁴

Therefore, a postcolonial re-reading of the Sufferings of the servant and the cross is such that de-emphasizes Western theological traditions and affirms our historical experience. It is a reading from our cultural location; rooted in our memory of centuries of slavery, imperialism and colonialism and now, neo-colonialism, and global capitalism. Cone's argument buttresses this point when he says: "...theology cannot achieve its Christian identity apart from a systematic and critical reflection upon the history and culture of the victims of oppression".³⁸⁵ Likewise, as Africans, we cannot spare the memory if we are to retell the gospel event in order to hear the narrative of the passion of the Suffering Servant or that of Jesus Christ in the specific places where the concrete and historical dimensions of the African imagination are rooted. This is specifically in our history of suffering; past and present.³⁸⁶ Archbishop Desmond Tutu further affirms this reality of our painful memory. He states that: "Liberation theology more than any other kind of theology issues out of the crucible of human suffering and anguish".³⁸⁷ Similarly, postcolonial theology emerged from the grim brutality of colonialism and its legacies: subjugation, ethnic conflicts, under-development and the poverty of the "rest". Postcolonial theology must address the failure of the nation-state such as Nigeria in order to raise a social and political consciousness of the people in the struggle towards nation building.³⁸⁸ As a colonized nation, our theology needs to engage strongly with oppressive structures; the regime of administrations and policies that perpetuate the division

³⁸⁴ Cone, An African-American Perspective on the Cross and Suffering, in *African Theology En Route*, p. 58.

³⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 59.

³⁸⁶ Jean Marc – Ela, "The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ, in *The Scandal of the Cross*, pp. 18, 22 – 33.

³⁸⁷ Bishop Desmond Tutu, "The Theology of Liberation in Africa" in *African Theology En Route*, p163

³⁸⁸ Fanon,, *Wretched of the Earth*, p.144. The foregoing discussion attempts to provide an exhortation for the Nigerian church towards adopting the Servant model of leadership. Above all, I have attempted to elucidate the theological and practical postures that I deem pivotal to achieving true Servanthood. In other words, the theological engagement demonstrated here, is one that takes into account our historical experience not only as Africans but also as a colonized nation. Cone, "An African-American Perspective on the Cross and Suffering", p. 59. See Jean Marc – Ela, "The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ", p. 21. Cf. The summary of the communiqué of the conference on Third World Theology in *African Theology En Route*, p. 11.

the people into dominant tribes and minority peoples. According to Cone, relevant and ongoing theological efforts for selfhood and indigenization should not occlude the social –political issues. He says: “...selfhood and indigenization should not be limited to cultural changes alone. There is a political ingredient in the Gospel that cannot be ignored if one is to remain faithful to biblical revelation”.³⁸⁹ But this theological effort should not be mistaken for Romanticism with the realities of our socio-political malaise. Rather, it is a call to serve the helpless, the wretched, and the voiceless such as the despoiled and helpless people of the Niger Delta. It is a commitment not only to the poor but to transform all forms of dominations in human societies.³⁹⁰

Finally, the import of the foregoing discussion is that Servanthood is a commitment to subversion and service to those severed from the centre of well-being. It is an option for the poor and the dominated.³⁹¹ It is a resistance to the forces that are responsible for their sufferings.³⁹² Kofi Appiah-Kubi clearly expresses this perception of the dire necessity for this kind of commitment in Servanthood argued for in this paper. He states it thus:

In our theological task, our orientating principle should be the poorest of the poor in our communities. The challenging question posed by millions of poor people to present-day Christianity, and therefore to theology, is: Where is the “abundant life” – for they see nothing but abject poverty, hunger, disease, ignorance, discrimination, torture, rejection, and dehumanization all around them. If our theology is to have any message of hope for the majority of our population, it must learn to be the soul of the soulless and the voice of the voiceless.³⁹³

³⁸⁹ Cone, “A Black American Perspective on the Future of African Theology”, *African Theology En Route* p.p. 181.

³⁹⁰ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, *ibid.* cf. Jean Marc – Ela “An African-American Perspective on the Cross and Suffering”, p. 59. See

³⁹¹ See for further comment on the “option for the poor”. Joerg Rieger, *Liberating God Talk: Postcolonialism and the Challenge of the Margins*, in *Postcolonial Theologies*, pp.204-220. p.218- 220

³⁹² *ibid.*, cf. Tesfai, (ed.) *The Scandal of a Crucified World*; p. 7.

³⁹³ Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *African Theology En Route: Papers from the Pan – African Conference of Third World Theologians*, December 17 – 23, 1977, Accra Ghana, edited by Kofi Appiah –Kubi and Sergio Torres. p. viii.

A postcolonial theology of the Servanthood therefore becomes more relevant to those on the margins of the society, the voiceless minorities like the Niger Delta communities in Nigeria. As such, the servant model provides a voice for the voiceless and an example of an agent of social and political mobilization for the collective good of the people of the Niger Delta and the Nigerian state.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has attempted a postcolonial engagement with the text of Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 as a path for reflection in addressing a specific socio-political problem, namely, the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria.

Summation:

In the first chapter, I have argued for an application of postcolonial criticism in relation to biblical studies and the reading of the servant songs. Here, a brief exploration of the meaning, emergence, and scope of postcolonial criticism shows that it is a critique of the modern approach to the production of meaning and knowledge. The modern approach to biblical interpretation is criticized for its universalizing of meaning and totalizing character. Postcolonial criticism, and its ally, cultural criticism, argue that all production of meaning or interpretation of text is shaped and influenced by the cultural context of the interpreter, and that there is no value-free or disinterested reader/ interpreter.

In addition, I have attempted to highlight some of the concerns of postcolonial criticism. Postcolonial criticism is concerned with the power relations between a hegemonic culture/class and those on the margins. Based on such concerns, I indicated my interest to adapt the postcolonial optic in reading the Servanthood texts in Isaiah so as to reflect on a specific socio-political issue in the Nigerian society, that is, the oppressed and suppressed people of the Niger Delta as a minority group within the Nigerian state.

Chapter two presents an attempt to read the Babylonian exile narrative from a postcolonial perspective. Historical critical study of Second Isaiah, which also contains the Servant Song, generally agrees that the messages of DI can be set against the background of the Babylonian exile. However, I have sought to show that the historical critical reading of this narrative does not acknowledge its own ideological assumptions and the possible ideology of the narrative. In

order to implement a postcolonial engagement with the Babylonian exile narrative, I have attempted to interrogate the narrative within the theoretical framework of postcolonial concerns. This took the form of theories from travel writing and questions from a postcolonial perspective. The effect is that a postcolonial engagement with the exile narrative underscores the colonial influences under Babylon imperial power as well as the issue of domination within the exile community. The notions of the 'poor' and the issue of the land suggest the oppression of a minority under the hegemonic class in Judah. Thus, one could conclude that the situation resonates with that of Niger Delta socio-politico experience in Nigeria. Hence, a postcolonial engagement with the Babylonian exile provides relevance in setting the Servant text within a similar context of colonialism and domination in addressing the Niger Delta situation.

In chapter three, I sought to provide a postcolonial critique of the historical critical study of DI in order to demonstrate its limitations as a critical tool for interpretation in engaging with Servant text in order to address the socio-politico situation of the Niger Delta. A brief survey of the development of historical critical studies of DI is presented followed by a postcolonial assessment. The summary covers a brief history of the interpretation of the DI spanning through literary criticism to rhetorical criticism. The discussions are concerned with matters of authorship of DI; single, dual, or multiple authorships. These issues are demonstrated in the traditional, modern, and redactive views on the authorship of DI. The date of composition also forms another area of the debate in the historical critical study of DI.

However, an assessment of the traditional approach from the purview of postcolonialism still leaves certain questions unanswered; questions which create a hermeneutical gap in the interpretation of DI. Such questions border on the possible effects of the reality of the empire; Babylonian or Persian. Or how do these oracles speak to the political situation of the people at the time? These questions subsequently led to the attempt to examine the methodology, historical criticism, from a postcolonial perspective/optic so as to point out some of its

limitations. Such limitations, as I have observed, include the apparent disconnect between biblical scholarship and the realities of postcolonial and ideological reading of texts. I observed that while historical criticism gained ascendancy up till the twentieth century BCE, a strong opposition began to arise from the former European colonies, “the margins”; a centre for critical reflection and clarification. The point that is made here is, that at the back of Western European scholarship is a drive for Western nationalism; an attempt to provide a voice for their racial, cultural and intellectual superiority as against the non-Western peoples, who are considered inferior, brute savages that needed to be educated. The section also highlights the fact that traditional historical-critical approach to DI negates the possible power relations in the biblical text because of its emphasis on an objective meaning of the biblical text. However, postcolonialism argues that the emphasis on an objective universal meaning of the text fails to recognize the power relations and the cultural ideology underpinning both the composition of the text and the interpretation of the text. Postcolonial criticism insists that both the composition and the interpretation of the biblical texts are culture bound. Therefore, the study of DI and the interpretation of the Servant text should allow for other voices to be heard. It also argues that readers/interpreters of the biblical text must reflect their socio-cultural experiences in the reading of text. Therefore, my conclusion is that the postcolonial criticism provides relevance in the interpretation of the Servant message in DI in addressing the socio-political problem on the Niger Delta.

In view of the Postcolonial engagement with, and the assessment of historical critical study of DI, the question then is; do we still need the historical critical method in re-reading the text of DI? My response to this question is that despite the alleged limitations of the historical critical study of Second Isaiah, the method should not be wholly abandoned. I pointed out that the historical approach still has a place because it helps us to gain an understanding of the biblical text. Nevertheless, I also pointed out that biblical studies of DI will need to go beyond the

historical critical issues, and to identify the impact of the social-economic and political-religious forces acting on the composition and use of the texts. This could be done in such a way that can inform intelligible analogy for contemporary interpreters. Therefore, my conclusion is that postcolonial criticism provides relevance in the interpretation of the Servant text of DI in addressing the socio-political problem in the Niger Delta people. It is such an approach that will inspire justice and social transformation.

Chapter four, consequently, builds on the preceding discussion and implements the application of a postcolonial critical approach to the interpretation of the text of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12. The chapter aims to first show an awareness of the historical-critical issues involved in the analysis of the text. It also aims to give a practical relevance to the study of the servant concept in the fourth servant song by applying the text to the socio-political issues of the Niger Delta minority communities within the Nigerian state.

First, I attempted to enumerate some key themes including: suffering/vicarious suffering, suffering and theodicy, justice, and redemption. These themes together constitute the major focus of historical-critical engagement with the Servant text.

Secondly, the chapter engages with the above themes from a postcolonial perspective by proposing a re-reading of such themes within the parameters of postcolonial interest in order to give relevance to the study of the Servant text in addressing the socio-political problem of the postcolonial communities of the Niger Delta in Nigeria. Therefore, this section proposes a postcolonial re-reading of the following themes: Suffering and theodicy, Servanthood, Justice, Nations/ nationhood, Redemption, and Servant leadership. I proposed a re-reading of suffering/theodicy that rejects the passive implication of the traditional understanding, and creates inspiration for challenging the structures that impose sufferings on others. Therefore, the Niger Delta communities must find active ways of engaging with the structures of power responsible

for the degradation of their environment and the economic exploitation of the resources in their land. Further, I proposed a re-reading of Servanthood that is subversive of hegemonic powers, and a re-reading of justice to include both distributive justice and restorative justice in order to challenge the present injustice meted out to the oil producing communities in Nigeria. In addition, the theme of nation/nationhood is addressed such that calls for celebration of differences and equitable justice. Furthermore, I propose that redemption should not be restricted to the spiritual realm but should be given a holistic meaning, that is, applicable and relevant to the socio-political situation of oppressed people as in seen in the Babylonian exile narrative as well as the minority people of the Niger Delta. In addition, effort is made to present a discussion on appropriating the servant leadership paradigm for the Nigerian society in resolving the Niger Delta crisis. The effect of the exploration here is to create a platform to challenge the Nigerian church to appropriate servant leadership in order to make the text relevant to the Niger Delta crisis. The postcolonial engagement with the concept of Servanthood therefore provides a basis to challenge the Nigerian church to engage with the structures of power so as to achieve liberation for the suppressed people of the Niger Delta and to achieve social transformation in general. The exhortation for appropriating the servant leadership model, as reconstructed in this paper, is essentially an invitation to re-examine certain theological themes in order to inspire practical involvement with the structures of injustice and oppression in the Nigerian society. I, therefore, argue here that the church needs to come out of her slumber by re-imagining the servant model. This re-imagining needs to be done in antithesis to the traditional view of Servanthood, taking into serious account the reconstruction of the servant as a 'liberating' agent. I therefore call for a servant leadership model that is active and liberating in contrast to the traditional Western (Christian) passive understanding of the Servant.

Secondly, the church is challenged to re-focus the Servant's accomplishments as seen in the postcolonial engagement with the Servant text. The achievement of the Servant in suffering unto death should not be confined to the theological realm and depoliticized. My contention is that a postcolonial reading of the Servant's accomplishments, especially in terms of justice and redemption, should not be applied solely on general spiritual terms. However, the Servant's achievement should inspire a leadership model that will provide intervention and restoration in concrete socio-economic terms for the Niger Delta communities. Such leadership will strive to bring life – happiness as well as physical and material enjoyment of the blessings derivable from their land.

Thirdly, the Nigerian church is exhorted to appropriate the Servant model by re-configuring her hermeneutics of service. In the traditional view of the sufferings of the Servant as exemplified in Christ's sufferings, it is generally accepted that the cross is an emblem of suffering. Such a view of the cross has the potential to encourage passive suffering and inaction towards political and economic structures that engender suffering in the society. Therefore, I argue that the church needs to adopt a subversive view of the cross in proposing a hermeneutics of service. A postcolonial reading of the cross, drawing on Liberation theology and Black theology, provides the needed path for a subversive approach to theological reflection that agrees with a postcolonial interpretation of the Servant text. This will help to create a subversive and resistant understanding of the cross and Christian service. Such a re-configured hermeneutics takes into consideration the social, political, and economic experience of the Niger Delta people; people struggling under the throes of the legacy of colonialism, and subjugation as a minority group within the dominant ethnic groups.

Lastly, the effect of the postcolonial engagement with the Servant notion can be said to be an inspiration for a commitment to service to those who are displaced from the centre of society and the economic wealth of the state. It is a challenge to turn from a passive position towards a

transformative leadership for the Nigerian society at large, and for achieving liberating consequences for the Niger Delta.

In summary, using a postcolonial optic on the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, I am asking the Nigerian church to revisit the idea of justice, the ideas and the reality of the poor, the situation of restorative justice, the need to see themselves in the mould of a liberating and subversive servant, to adopt a postcolonial position on salvation, and reject the traditional approach which demonises political involvement and emasculates the church in the process. I am also asking them to be on the side of the poor and the dispossessed and reject the status of being the elites, left behind by the colonialists to continue impoverishing the poor and dominating the voiceless. Finally, the challenge is to be hermeneutically relevant and real to the plight of the communities of the Niger Delta whose voices are being lost in the hunt for riches for the elite and whose protests are met with violence at every turn. It is my considered opinion, that it is only a postcolonial optic that can enable this to the enrichment of both church and the congregation of the oppressed in the Niger Delta.

Limitations/ Recommendations: The major limitation is basically that of focus and word requirement of this study. But for such limitations, I would have explored the modes of leadership in pre-colonial times in the traditional Niger Delta communities and examine how the colonial encounter affected such leadership modes. The result will then be compared with the servant leadership proposed in this dissertation. The significance of such investigation I believe is the possibility of informing a renewed articulation of a leadership strategy to mobilize the Niger Delta communities for liberation from the present socio-political situation and promote socio-economic development.

Furthermore, I would want to recommend that the theological notion of Servanthood should be given an increased attention by the Nigerian church. The current situation marked by passivity

and non-engagement with the structures of power needs to be challenged. The challenge can be provided through pedagogical avenues of the church focusing on the re-imaged and reconfigured notion of Servanthood. Again, I believe it will be worthwhile to carry out an assessment of how Nigerian Christian preachers and teachers actually interpret the Servant notion across various denominations, especially in the Niger Delta. Consequently, I will also recommend that this study be taken further by including an ethnographic conversation through a field research on how the text of the suffering servant has been interpreted and appropriated by preachers and teachers within the Niger Delta ethnic communities in informing their resistance or passivity to current postcolonial conditions. The ethnographic conversation will include a brief film documentary to capture a live description of the Niger Delta situation and views of the people.

Lastly, postcolonial criticism and biblical studies should be given increased visibility in the training of African theologians and teachers. The potential result is that such emphasis will raise awareness of the Christian community concerning their involvement with the powers and the policies responsible for social development, collective well-being, and a free and just society. The Nigerian Delta communities will be better served when the Church is able to speak truth to the powerful elites in society.

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