

ABSTRACT

## Reading the Esther Narrative seMadzimai: An African Womanist Exploration

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While there have been numerous studies on various aspects of the Esther narrative, scholars such as Anne-Mareike Wetter (2016) readily acknowledge that there has not been consensus on its meaning. Even though investigations on the book of Esther, and indeed on other ancient biblical texts, have employed various methodologies, for centuries these studies have largely been from Western perspectives. As such, there have been requests by scholars mainly from the global south for more studies presenting other cultural perspectives. In this research I seek, in my identification as a Zimbabwean woman and scholar of the Bible, to employ womanist perspectives in analysing the experiences of female characters in the book of Esther. The aim of the study is to establish points of intersection between the images of women in the patriarchal ancient Persian context in the text of Esther with those of women of patriarchal modern Zimbabwe. Womanism is a general term encompassing a variety of strands of literature focusing on issues concerning the experiences, perspectives, and interests of women of African descent. African female scholars recognize that, in addition to some biblical texts, “African cultures remain vibrant and authoritative texts in the lives of women...” (Dube, 2001, p1). Hence, they call for approaches and reinterpretations that are liberating for women and their communities. This oral presentation is an overview of my literature review of Esther studies from various African contexts. Crucial to this outline will be the establishment of hermeneutical approaches employed as well as the addressed key themes. It concludes with a proposal of seMadzimai, a womanist and Zimbabwean interpretive approach to reading the Bible which I am currently formulating. SeMadzimai in the Shona language means 'as/like/with women'. Once formulated, seMadzimai will be employed to interpret the Esther narrative while drawing from the Zimbabwean cultural context.

## References

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- Wetter, A-M. (2016). Bodies, boundaries, and belonging in the Book of Esther. In D. N. Fewell (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of Biblical narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.