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Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Intertribal Hermeneutics in the Context of Myanmar
A Study of Roles and Functions of Jeremianic Female Imagery

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad Doctor of Philosophy
aan de Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,
op gezag van de rector magnificus
prof.dr. V. Subramaniam,
in het openbaar te verdedigen
ten overstaan van de promotiecommissie
van de Faculteit Religie en Theologie
op vrijdag 16 november 2018 om 11.45 uur
in de aula van de universiteit,
De Boelelaan 1105

door

M. La Rip

geboren te Bhamaw, Myanmar

promotoren: prof.dr. J. Dubbink
prof.dr. J.H. de Wit

Dedicated

to my beloved parents,
the late Rev. M. Awng La and Sarama Kaba Lahpai Nang Awn

to my beloved wife,
Lahpai Nang Bawk

and

to my three children,
Grace Nan Shawng Marip, Joy Seng San Marip, Sunday Gum Ja Awng Marip

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	1
Table of Contents	2
Illustrations, List of Tables, and Figures	8
Abbreviations	9
Introduction	11
1. The Description of the Problem	11
2. The Main Research Questions and Sub-questions	12
3. The Thesis Statement	12
4. The Methodology	12
5. The Structure of the Thesis	12
6. The Significance of the Research	15
7. The Main Focus, Inclusion, and Limitation of the Research	16
PART I. IN SEARCH OF THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF JEREMIANIC FEMALE IMAGERY	17
Chapter 1. In Search of Female Imagery in the Book of Jeremiah	17
Introduction	17
1.1. Analysis of the Compositional Material of the Book of Jeremiah	18
1.2. Analysis of the Compositional Structure of Jeremiah 1-25	21
1.3. In Search of Female Imagery in the Composite Units of Jeremiah 1-25	23
1.4. Recapitulation of the First Framework	26
1.5. Analysis of the Compositional Structure of Jeremiah 26-52	27
1.6. In Search of Female Imagery in the Composite Units of Jeremiah 26-52	28
1.7. Recapitulation of the Second Framework	32
Summary	32
Chapter 2. Understanding Female Imagery in the Setting of the Ancient Near East	33
Introduction	33
2.1. A Study of Daughter Language and Its Frequency	33
2.2. A Study of Daughter Language in the Setting of Ancient Near Eastern Literature	35
2.3. A Study of Daughter Language and Its Formulaic Expressions	38
2.4. A Study of Marriage Imagery in the Book of Jeremiah	42
2.5. A Study of the Origin of Biblical Marriage Imagery in the Setting of the Ancient Near East	45

Summary	51
Chapter 3. The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 13:20-27	53
Introduction	53
3.1. Analysis of the Literary and Theological Context of Jeremiah 13:20-27	54
3.2. Analysis of Text, Structure, and Unity of Jeremiah 13:20-27	58
3.3. The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 13:20-27	61
Summary	69
Chapter 4. The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 4:29-31	71
Introduction	71
4.1. Analysis of Text Structure and Literary Unity of Jeremiah 4:29-31	71
4.2. The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 4:29-31	76
Summary	82
Chapter 5. The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 31:15-22	85
Introduction	85
5.1. Analysis of the Placement of Jeremiah 31:15-22	85
5.2. The Possible Date of Jeremiah 31:15-22	88
5.3. Analysis of Text, Structure, and Literary Unity of Jeremiah 31:15-22	89
5.4. The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 31:15-22	89
5.4.1. The First Stanza (Jeremiah 31:15-17): The Weeping Mother Rachel	91
5.4.2. The Second Stanza (Jeremiah 31:18-20): The Compassionate Mother God	95
5.4.3. The Third Stanza (Jeremiah 31:21-22): The Returning Virgin Israel	99
Summary	101
Summary of the Exegetical Study of Jeremianic Female Imagery	103
PART II. RE-READING JEREMIANIC FEMALE IMAGERY FROM MYANMAR INTERTRIBAL READING PRACTICE	105
Chapter 6. Stretching the Hermeneutical Framework for the Interpretation of the Jeremianic Texts: From Exegesis to Hermeneutics	105
Introduction	105
6.1. Definitions of Exegesis and Hermeneutics	105
6.2. Establishing Hermeneutical Framework	106
6.3. The Demands of Wider Hermeneutical Framework in Myanmar Context	113
6.3.1. The Problems of Social-Religio-Political Situation in Myanmar	113
6.3.2. The Problems of the Ambiguity of the Bible	115
6.3.3. The Problems of Interpretation Theories	119
6.4. The Legitimacy and Necessity of the Empirical Hermeneutics	121
Summary	124
Chapter 7. Intertribal Bible Reading Methodology and A Pilot Experiment of Myanmar Intertribal Reading of Jeremiah 13:20-27 in the Netherlands	127
Introduction	127

7.1. Methodology of Intertribal Reading of the Bible	127
7.1.1. Phase Zero: Preparatory Phase	128
7.1.2. Phase One: Spontaneous Reading of the Bible	128
7.1.3. Phase Two: Exchange of the Reading Reports	129
7.1.4. Phase Three: Exchange of Perspectives	130
7.1.5. The Role of the Socially Engaged Exegete in the Reading Process	130
7.2. A Pilot Experiment of Myanmar Intertribal Reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22 in the Netherlands	132
7.2.1. The Kachin Women's Group's Portrait and Spontaneous Reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22	133
7.2.2. The KCNL Male Youth Group's Portrait and Spontaneous Reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22	134
7.2.3. The Women's Reading of the Youth's Report	138
7.2.4. The Youth's Reading of the Women's Report	139
7.2.5. The Women's Looking Back on the Entire Process	140
7.2.6. The Youths' Looking Back on the Entire Process	140
7.3. Analysis of the Hermeneutic Components	141
7.3.1. Analysis of the Spontaneous Reading	141
7.3.1.1. Analysis of the Motivations of the Groups	142
7.3.1.2. Analysis of the Group Dynamics	142
7.3.1.3. Analysis of the Reading Attitudes of the Groups	143
7.3.1.4. Analysis of the Focalization of the Groups	143
7.3.1.5. Analysis of the Explanation Strategy of the Groups	144
7.3.1.6. Analysis of the Reading of Characters in the Text	144
7.3.1.7. Analysis of Appropriation Strategies	145
7.3.1.8. Analysis of Appropriation Content	145
7.3.1.9. Analysis of Appropriation Dynamics	145
7.3.1.10 Analysis of Praxeological Effects	145
7.4. Analysis of Exchange of Perspectives	146
7.4.1. Analysis of Interaction with the Partner's Profile	146
7.4.2. Analysis of Hermeneutic-exegetical Aspect of Interaction	146
7.4.3. Analysis of the Effect of Interaction	147
Conclusion	147
Chapter 8. Re-Reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22	149
Case Study on Myanmar Intertribal Hermeneutics of Jeremiah 31:15-22	
Introduction	149
8.1. Analysis of Social Situation of the Myanmar Reading Groups	150
8.2. Analysis of the Group Dynamics	153
8.3. Analysis of Interpretation Process	158
8.3.1. Analysis of Focalization of the Group	158
8.3.2. Analysis of the Interpretation Methods of the Groups	161
8.3.2.1. Analysis of Interpretation Methods of the Groups	162
8.3.2.2. Analysis of Central Messages of the Groups	164

8.4. Analysis of Appropriation	166
Summary	170
8.5. Analysis of Exchange of Perspectives	170
8.5.1. Analysis of Interaction with the Partner's Profile	171
8.5.2. Analysis of Hermeneutic-exegetical Aspect of Interaction	172
8.5.3. Analysis of the Effect of Interaction	175
Conclusion	176
Chapter 9. Re-Reading of Jeremiah 13:20-27	179
Case Study on Myanmar Intertribal Hermeneutics of Jeremiah 13:20-27	
Introduction	179
9.1. Analysis of Group Compositions and Social Situation of the Groups	180
9.1.1. Analysis of the Group Composition and Social Situation of Group A	180
9.1.2. Analysis of the Group Composition and Social Situation of Group B	181
9.1.3. Analysis of the Group Composition and Social Situation of Group C	181
9.1.4. Analysis of the Group Composition and Social Situation of Group D	182
Summary	183
9.2. Analysis of the Interpretation Process	183
9.2.1. Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group A	184
9.2.2. Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group B	187
9.2.3. Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group C	190
9.2.4. Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group D	192
Summary	193
9.2.5. Analysis of Exegetical Aspects of the Reading Process	193
Summary	195
9.3. Analysis of Re-contextualization	196
9.3.1. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group A	196
9.3.2. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group B	198
9.3.3. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group C	200
9.3.4. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group D	202
9.4. Analysis of Exchange of Perspectives	203
9.4.1. Analysis of Interaction with the Partner's Profile	203
9.4.1.1. Analysis of Interaction between Group A and B	203
9.4.1.2. Analysis of Interaction between Group C and D	204
Summary	205
9.4.2. Analysis of Attitude towards the Partner Group	206
Summary	207
9.4.3. Analysis of Hermeneutic-exegetical Aspect of Interaction	207
9.4.4. Analysis of the Effects of the Interaction	211
9.4.4.1. Analysis of the Effects of the Interaction between Group A and B	211
9.4.4.2. Analysis of the Effects of the Interaction between Group C and D	212
Conclusion	213

Chapter 10. Re-reading of Jeremiah 4:29-31	217
Case Study on Myanmar Intertribal Hermeneutics of Jeremiah 4:29-31	
Introduction	217
10.1. Analysis of the Socio-cultural Context of the Myanmar Readers	217
10.1.1. Analysis of the Group Composition and Sociocultural Context of Group A	218
10.1.2. Analysis of the Group Composition and Sociocultural Context of Group B	219
10.1.3. Analysis of the Group Composition and Sociocultural Context of Group C	221
10.1.4. Analysis of the Group Composition and Sociocultural Context of Group D	221
Summary	222
10.2. Analysis of the Interpretation Methodology of the Myanmar Readers	222
10.2.1. Analysis of the Interpretation Process of Group A	222
10.2.2. Analysis of the Interpretation Process of Group B	224
10.2.3. Analysis of the Interpretation Process of Group C	226
10.2.4. Analysis of Interpretation Process of Group D	227
Summary	228
10.3. Analysis of Re-contextualization Strategy of the Myanmar Readers	229
10.3.1. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group A	229
10.3.2. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group B	232
10.3.3. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group C	233
10.3.4. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group D	234
Summary	235
10.4. Analysis of the Intertribal Interaction between the Paired Groups	236
10.4.1. Analysis of Intertribal Interaction with the Partner's Profile	236
10.4.2. Analysis of Hermeneutic-exegetical Aspect of Interaction	238
10.4.3. Analysis of the Effects of the Interaction	240
Summary	241
Conclusion	242
Chapter 11 Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations	245
11.1. Summary	245
11.2. Conclusions	246
11.2.1. The Roles and Functions of the Jeremianic Female Images	246
(1) The Roles and Functions of the Disrobed Woman Jerusalem	246
(2) The Roles and Functions of the Compassionate Mother God	247
(3) The Roles and Functions of Crying Mother Rachel	248
(4) The Roles and Functions of the other Characters among Jeremianic Female	249
Imagery	
11.2.2. Intertribal Hermeneutics in the Context of Myanmar	250
(1) Identifying with the Characters in the Text	250
(2) Using Contextual Situations and Scientific Exegesis	250
(3) Using Methods of Re-contextualization	251
(4) Engaging in Praxis	251
11.3. Recommendations	252
(1) The need of a liturgical moment in reading the Bible in Myanmar context	252

TABLE OF CONTENTS

7

(2) The need of exploration of the social context of the readers	253
(3) The need of contribution from scholarly exegesis	254
(4) The need of re-contextualization that overcomes the distance between the biblical period and the present time	255
(5) The need of interaction with other readers	255
Conclusion	256
Abstract	257
Samenvatting	259
Bibliography	261
Tables	269

ILLUSTRATIONS

TABLES

- (i) Frequency of the daughter language in the prophets
 1. Analysis of the Motivation of Kachin Women Group
 2. Analysis of the Motivation of KCNL Male Youth Group
 3. Analysis of the Group Dynamics of Kachin Women Group
 4. Analysis of the Group Dynamics of KCNL Male Youth Group
 5. Analysis of the Reading Attitude of Kachin Women Group
 6. Analysis of the Reading Attitude of KCNL Male Youth Group
 7. Analysis of the Focalization of Kachin Women Group
 8. Analysis of the Focalization of KCNL Male Youth Group
 9. Analysis of the Explanation Strategies of Kachin Women Group
 10. Analysis of the Explanation Strategies of KCNL Male Youth Group
 11. Analysis of the Kachin Women Group's Reading of Characters in the Text
 12. Analysis of the KCNL Male Youth Group's Reading of Characters in the Text
 13. Analysis of the Kachin Women Group's Appropriation Strategies
 14. Analysis of the KCNL Male Youth Group's Appropriation Strategies
 15. Analysis of the Appropriation Contents of Kachin Women Group
 16. Analysis of the Appropriation Contents of KCNL Male Youth Group
 17. Analysis of the Appropriation Dynamics of Kachin Women Group
 18. Analysis of the Appropriation Dynamics of KCNL Male Youth Group
 19. Analysis of the Praxeological Effects of the Reading in Kachin Women Group
 20. Analysis of the Praxeological Effects of the Reading in KCNL Male Youth Group

FIGURES

1. Kuntillet 'Ajrud - Pithos A
2. The diagram of the stanzas and strophes of Jeremiah 31:15-22

ABBREVIATIONS

Am	Amos
ANE	Ancient Near East
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts
BDB	The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
<i>BIOSCS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
Chr	Chronicles
DSS	Dead Sea Scroll
Dt	Deuteronomy
ESV	English Standard Version
Ex	Exodus
Ez	Ezekiel
Ezr	Ezra
Gn	Genesis
GNT	Good News Translation
Hos	Hosea
Is	Isaiah
Jb	Job
Jer	Jeremiah
Jgs	Judges
Jo	Joshua
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
KBC	Kachin Baptist Convention
Kgs	Kings
KJV	King James Version
Lam	Lamentations
Lv	Leviticus
LXX	Septuagint
MBC	Myanmar Baptist Conventiion
Mi	Micah
MIT	Myanmar Institute of Theology
MT	Masoretic Text
Mt	Matthew
Na	Nahum
NAB	The New American Bible
NAS	New American Standard Version (1977)
NAU	New American Standard Version (1995)
NEB	New English Bible

Neh	Nehemiah
NIB	New International Version (British)
NIV	New International Version (American)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJ	New King James
Nm	Numbers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
Prv	Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Ru	Ruth
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
Sg	Song of Songs
Sm	Samuel
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
Zec	Zechariah
Zep	Zephaniah

INTRODUCTION

“I myself will lift up your skirts over your face
and your shame will be seen.” - Jeremiah 13:26 (NRS)

In this introductory section, I will describe the problem of the research, the research questions, the thesis statement, the methodology, the structure of the thesis, the significance of the research, and finally, the main focus, inclusion, and limitation of the research.

1. The Description of the Problem that the Research Will Investigate

The book of Jeremiah contains several forms of female imagery such as daughter, bride, unfaithful wife, adulteress, prostitute, and mother. These imageries have either positive or negative roles in their literary contexts. For example, Rachel, Yahweh, and virgin Israel have positive roles in Jer 31:15-22 but daughter Zion in Jer 4:29-31 and wife Jerusalem in Jer 13:20-27 have negative roles. The negative role of wife Jerusalem is vivid in Jer 13:20-27 where Yahweh publicly strips off the skirt of his wife Jerusalem and exposes her sexual organs. These Jeremianic female imageries have challenged biblical scholars and ordinary readers of the Bible, subsequently. Several exegetes like Exum, Brenner, and Abma have reflected on the implications of the used imageries.¹ Exum has labelled such texts as ‘prophetic pornography.’ Brenner has suggested to expose the unbalanced sexuality of male and female and then to reject such texts for they are hopelessly negative, whereas Abma suggests not to focus only on the gender issue in the interpretation process. In any case, the variety of scholarly discussions on the Jeremianic female imagery left several hermeneutical problems for Myanmar ordinary Christians who read the Bible as Holy Scripture and who look for appropriate messages from any biblical text. Therefore, the research project will not only investigate exegetically the roles and functions of Jeremianic female imageries but also analyze how Myanmar ordinary readers read and appropriate these texts in their current sociocultural context. Finally, I will answer the question how the interaction between exegesis and understanding of Myanmar ordinary readers could be mutually enriching on a hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological level.

2. The Main Research Questions and Sub-questions

My main research questions are what roles and functions Jeremianic female imageries have in their literary context and what Myanmar ordinary Christians do when they re-read the literary units of Jeremianic female imageries in their sociocultural context. How can the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the approach of ordinary readers on the one hand and the exchange between ordinary readers themselves on the other be mutually enriching on a

¹ J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*, ed. David J.A. Clines et al. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 101-28; Athalya Brenner, “Pornoprophetics Revisited: Some Additional Reflections,” *JSOT* 70 (1996), 63-86; Richt Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodical Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)*, *Studia Semitica Neerlandica* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999), 26-31.

hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological level and contribute to a new contextual, intertribal hermeneutics in the context of Myanmar?

3. The Thesis Statement

Different kinds of Jeremianic female imagery occurring in the whole book of Jeremiah play both passive/negative and active/positive roles, and subsequently these female images in the Myanmar sociocultural context have empowered the Myanmar readers to perceive theological implications and to re-contextualize the texts by means of allegory, typology, and parallelism of terms.

4. The Methodology

In order to explore the meanings of Jeremianic female imageries in their literary context and in the current Myanmar sociocultural context, I will first analyze the Jeremiah text synchronically and diachronically by using rhetorical criticism, historical criticism, and feminist criticism. Following the exegesis of Jeremianic texts, I will analyze the empirical data of Myanmar ordinary readers' approaches to the same texts. The empirical data are collected by means of intertribal reading of the Bible which is an adaptation of the intercultural Bible reading model.² Intercultural reading of the Bible is a way of reading in which the same biblical text is read by different groups of people from different social-political-cultural backgrounds. The groups first read the text in their own context and then get involved in a dialogue about its significance with a partner group. This reading methodology can be found as a new biblical empirical hermeneutics in current biblical scholarship. This methodology was initially designed by scholars from the Netherlands, Africa, and Latin-America in 1998. The method has been tested by an international group of scholars within the framework of the world-wide project *Through the Eyes of Another*, which results have been documented as a book in 2004. In order to guide the interpretation process of the Jeremianic texts of Myanmar readers the researcher has offered two sets of sequential guideline questions. The first set of guideline questions is related to the communitarian reading of the group itself and it contains questions about themselves and about the text in order to help and invite them to connect their lives with the text. The second set of guideline questions is related to the exchange of reading reports between the partner groups and it contains questions about their interaction. The detail methodology of intertribal reading of the Bible is mentioned in Chapter 7.

5. The Structure of the Thesis

I will be developing my thesis with the following research questions. What are the roles of the women and functions of female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah? Do the Jeremianic females play active roles? Or do they play passive roles? How do they function in their respective literary contexts? How are they presented in the texts? Is there any hint of unbalanced gender bias in the text? What is the impact of the portrayal of female imagery on female and male audiences/readers? What will happen if the Jeremianic female images are read through the eyes of Myanmar? Until relatively recently, many commentaries on Jeremiah disregard the

² Hans de Wit, and Louis Jonker et al eds., *Through the Eyes of Another* (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Press, 2004).

important roles and functions of female imagery. Therefore, the aim of this study is to discover the roles and functions of female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah through scientific exegetical methods and through Myanmar contextual hermeneutical exegetical perspectives hoping to contribute to the articulation of an intertribal hermeneutics and a more in-depth reading of the text of Jeremiah. This study is divided into two major parts.

In the first part, this study argues that female imagery occupies the whole book of Jeremiah, with female images appearing in various forms. There are four main kinds of female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah. First, Jeremianic daughter and mother images serve as the mediators between the people and the deity. Second, Jerusalem, Judah, and Israel are personified as sexually abused females and carry a message of doom through a portrait of the so-called 'prophetic pornography.' Third, the dying daughter Zion symbolizes the fate of the Judeans. Fourth, Yahweh plays not only the role of a male but also the role of a female, namely a compassionate mother. In order to achieve my goal, this part is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1 explores the compositional materials and the compositional structure of the Book of Jeremiah in search of Jeremianic female imagery. In this study, the roles and functions of the female imagery are detected in each macro-structural unit. In the first macro-structural unit (Jer 2-6), females play the role of once-loyal-bride, unfaithful wife, adulteress, prostitute, 'daughter my people,' daughter Zion, Yahweh's divorced wife, a woman in childbirth, a wild vine, and a swift young camel. In the second macro-structural unit (Jer 7-10), the female images observed are daughter my people, the mourning women, and the worshippers of the queen of heaven. In the third composite unit (Jer 11-17), the female imagery observed includes not only the virgin daughter but also a victim of sexual abuse, and a woman in childbirth. In the fourth composite unit (Jer 18-20), the virgin Israel plays the role of the one who rejects her insider-status and the one who chooses the outsider-status that is beyond Yahweh's blessing and protection. In the fifth composite unit (Jer 21-24), a female imagery is detected as a woman in childbirth. In the sixth composite unit (Jer 26-36), the female images detected are a virgin daughter, virgin Israel, faithless daughter, Rachel the mother of Israel, and a woman in childbirth. In the seventh composite unit (Jer 37-45), the female worshippers of the queen of heaven are seen as the ones who play a leadership role. In the last composite unit (Jer 46-51), the daughters of other nations and a woman in childbirth are detected.

Chapter 2 explores the fact that Jeremiah's use of daughter and mother imagery is influenced by the motifs of the weeping goddesses in Ancient Near Eastern literature and that Jeremiah has appropriated the ancient precursors in his own tumultuous situation. This study shows that Jeremianic females – daughters and mother play the role of the ancient weeping goddess and the role of mediators between the people and Yahweh. As the sufferings of the Mesopotamian goddesses represented the sufferings of their people, the sufferings and pains of Jeremianic daughters and mother Rachel are found as the personifications of the sufferings and pains of the whole Israelite people. The vulnerabilities of the daughters represent the endangerment of the people. The crying of the females in these images is amplified by other female imagery such as fear, pain, panic, anguish, and the distress of a woman in childbirth. Although the weeping of Jeremianic female images invokes divine intervention in the crisis, at some points, the daughters are accused of their transgressions of Yahweh's commandments. The negative role of the female is more vivid in the study of marriage imagery where the partner of Yahweh is publicly stripped, sexually abused, and even raped by Yahweh himself. This

portrait of sexual abuse is observed to be the consequence of the influence of the Hittite vassal treaty and Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths upon the biblical idea of covenant presented through marriage imagery. Especially, the ancient curses, such as the betrayer of the treaty becoming a prostitute, the wives of the betrayer being stripped like a prostitute, and the rape of the wives by the enemy, are observed as possible background ideas to the covenantal curses and divine punishment in the Book of Jeremiah. This study of the historical background of the covenant relationship attempts to explain why Israel is portrayed as the sexually abused female partner of Yahweh as a consequence of the breach of the relationship.

Chapter 3 revisits the portrait of Yahweh's sexually abused partner by considering three different layers of the specific text (Jer 13:20-27): literary and theological context, gender bias rhetorical strategy in the text, and the historical background of covenant relationship represented as a marriage relationship between Yahweh and his people. In this study, Jerusalem is found to be personified as an objectified, naked, humiliated, degraded, and raped female. Her suffering is seen as the sufferings of a woman in childbirth. Thus, this portrait in Jer 13:20-27 is considered to be a scene of 'prophetic pornography.' In this 'text of terror,' female Jerusalem carries a message of doom through her passive representation.

Chapter 4 studies Jer 4:29-31 and observes the roles and functions of Jerusalem personified as a woman and daughter Zion. This pericope depicts a scene of the Babylonians' invasion of Judah. Against the background of destructive war, the narrator presents Jerusalem as a courtesan who beautifies herself incongruently, who wears luxuriant garments and decorates herself with ornaments of gold, and who paints her eyes to be attractive to her lovers. This woman is presented to the readers, but she is killed by her lovers as her lovers have despised her. Her pain, cry, and lament are again depicted through the imagery of the cry of the daughter Zion. Daughter Zion cries like a woman in childbirth; she gasps for breath; she stretches her hands for help; but strangely, Yahweh does not help her. Therefore, this pericope is suspected to be a product of misogyny. In this chapter, the need for ideological reading is highlighted. Nevertheless, the female imagery in this pericope carries the prophetic message of doom through its mournful images. The fate of woman Jerusalem symbolizes the fate of the Judeans and the agony of daughter Zion represents the suffering of the people.

Chapter 5 presents the positive portrayal of women in female imagery by analyzing the literary, rhetorical, and theological contexts of Jer 31:15-22. In this study, three female images are observed – mother Rachel, mother Yahweh, and virgin Israel. Rachel, the eponymous mother of Israel, plays the role of the weeping goddess who calls upon the deity to intervene in the crisis. In response to the weeping of mother Rachel, the compassionate mother Yahweh identifies with the weeping mother Rachel, and Rachel's missing children become Yahweh's own children whom mother Yahweh brings back from the land of their enemy to their own land. The personification of the missing children is shifted from Ephraim, the son, to virgin Israel, the daughter, who is earnestly commanded to return to her cities, for women need to take the leading role in the reconstituted society.

In order to find out the roles and functions of the female imagery in the first part, I will utilize rhetorical criticism, historical criticism, and feminist criticism. In other words, the texts will be studied through the lens of synchronic, diachronic, and ideological criticisms.

After having studied the roles and functions of Jeremianic female imagery at the academic level in the first part, I extend my study from scientific exegetical interpretation to

contextual hermeneutics hoping to contribute to the articulation of an intertribal hermeneutics and a more in-depth reading of the text of Jeremiah. Chapter 6 presents a discussion about why it is necessary for me to extend my hermeneutical framework from exegesis to contextual hermeneutics by showing my contextual social-religio-political problems, the ambiguous nature of the Bible, and the problems of interpretation models as the major demands for fruitful interpretation at the hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological levels.

Chapter 7 demonstrates how an intercultural reading method works. This intercultural reading method is adopted for intertribal reading of the Bible when Myanmar readers read Jeremianic female imagery from their contextual situation. In this chapter, I carefully observe how the youths and the women's groups read Jer 31:15-22. Their reading reports are analyzed to find out their motivations, group dynamics, reading attitudes, focalizations, reading of characters in the text, explanation strategies, appropriation strategies, and praxeological effects. This empirical research is taken among diaspora Myanmar people who are living in the Netherlands. This chapter serves as pilot project for Myanmar intertribal hermeneutics that I study in Myanmar.

Chapter 8 presents a study of how the same text (Jer 31:15-22) is read by groups of Myanmar who are living in Myanmar country. I pay attention to the readers' social contexts, group dynamics, focalization, interpretation process, appropriation methods, and exchange of perspectives to examine how the reader's social context is constitutive for the interpretation process and what exegetical methods are applicable for the groups in their interpretation of the text.

In Chapter 9, I re-read Jer 13:20-27, the so-called 'prophetic pornography' through the Myanmar intertribal reading practice. In this chapter, I study the different reading practices between Myanmar readers and biblical exegetes in terms of reading attitudes, heuristic keys and focalization, exegetical methods, and re-contextualization methods. I also observe how groups' exchange of perspective with the partner group can improve their hermeneutical process.

In Chapter 10, I re-read Jer 4:29-31 from a Myanmar inter-tribal reading perspective. In this chapter, I examine how the reader's life experiences are important in the interpretation process, how Myanmar contextual interpretation methods other than exegesis are applicable in contextual hermeneutics, and how original references can be appropriated with a new in new context.

In the concluding chapter, I synthesize my findings and answer my main research questions such as what roles and functions Jeremianic female images have in their literary context and the Myanmar context. What do Myanmar readers do when they read the literary units of Jeremianic female images in their sociocultural context? How can the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the approach of ordinary readers on the one hand and the exchange between ordinary readers themselves on the other be mutually enriching on a hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological level and contribute to a new contextual and intertribal hermeneutics in the context of Myanmar?

6. The Significance of the Research for the Chosen Discipline and for Theology in General

The significance of this research is to contribute to a new way of Bible reading to Myanmar contextual hermeneutics in which both the text and the re-reading of the text have a

prominent place. In the last part of this research, reading strategies and resources of Myanmar Bible readers will be brought to the academic setting in order to examine what Myanmar ordinary readers do when they read the previously mentioned texts. Then I will study in what manner and under which conditions the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the approach of ordinary Bible readers on the one hand and the exchange between ordinary readers on the other can be mutually enriching on a hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological level.

7. The Main Focus, Inclusion, and Limitation of the Research

In my study of roles and functions of Jeremianic female imagery, I mainly focused on three specific texts such as Jeremiah 4:29-31; 13:20-27; and 31:15-22, while I seriously paid attention to all kinds of Jeremianic female imagery in the whole book of Jeremiah.

In my study of intertribal hermeneutics in the context of Myanmar, a total of 67 people from 12 different ethnic groups participated. In terms of gender, 36 are males and 31 are females. In terms of ethnicity, the participants are from Kachin, Kayin, Chin, Shan, Mon, Bamar, Lisu, Lahu, Akha, Wa, Naga, and Chinese background. In terms of Christian denomination, the participants are from Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, Assembly of God, Church of Christ, and Lisu Christian Church of Myanmar. The ages of the participants are between 20 and 70 years. The participants include jobless, disabled, day laborer, military pensioner, retired, police officer, school teacher, music teacher, nurse, accountant, NGO worker, pastor, Church minister, seminary lecturer, Church moderator, deacon, deaconess, religious organization worker, evangelist, day care, night care, students, seminarians, and housewife. The empirical data for my pilot project was collected in the Netherlands while the main data were collected in Yangon city and slum areas of Yangon during 2011 and 2012. Modestly, this research cannot cover all the reading practices of all Myanmar people. In any case, this endeavor will be a substantial research for doing hermeneutics in the context of Myanmar.

PART I
IN SEARCH OF THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS
OF JEREMIANIC FEMALE IMAGERY

CHAPTER 1

IN SEARCH OF FEMALE IMAGERY IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

“Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together, for I will turn their mourning into joy and will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow.” Jeremiah 31:13 (NAU)

Introduction

In order to search the female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah, I will first analyze the compositional materials and the compositional structure of the Book. Then, I will study the composite units of the book and I will hunt the female imagery in each unit.

In the following, I will discuss about eight macro-structural units as the composite units of the book. I will first find out the two major divisions in the Book of Jeremiah – chapters 1-25 and 26-52. Then, I will argue that the first division consists of five macro-structural units and the second division consists of three macro-structural units. Then I will discuss that these macro-structural units are again found as theologically arranged composite units of the Book of Jeremiah – from destruction to restoration. Consequently, I will argue that female imagery, including both negative and positive depictions, is detected in each unit.

The aim of this chapter is to discover Jeremianic female imagery and its roles and functions in its respective unit.

In order to study the compositional structure of the book of Jeremiah, one has to raise the necessary questions. Is there only one version of the book of Jeremiah? If there is more than one version, which version will be treated in this study?

Interestingly, one finds three different existing versions of Jeremiah (two complete and one fragmented) – the Masoretic Text MT (Hebrew), the Septuagint LXX (Greek), and four fragments of the texts of Jeremiah in the Dead Sea Scroll DSS (4QJer^a, 4QJer^b, 4QJer^c, and 2QJer). Differences between the MT Jeremiah and the LXX Jeremiah can be found if one compares the two versions. The comparison shows that the MT Jeremiah is one-seventh (3000 words) longer than that of LXX Jeremiah and the order of the arrangement is also significantly different from each other. While the MT Jeremiah puts the oracles against the nations at the end of the book (chapters 46-51), the LXX Jeremiah sets them in the middle of the book (chapters 25:14-31:44) in a different order.

Since the LXX Jeremiah is shorter than the MT Jeremiah, Jerome viewed the LXX Jeremiah as an “abridgement” of the MT Jeremiah.¹ Unlike the view of Jerome, Janzen and other scholars like Tov argue that the LXX Jeremiah is both an older and a superior text to the MT because the translated shorter LXX Jeremiah text is close to that of the shorter Hebrew text of the DSS 4QJer^b which has been considered as the basis *Vorlage* for the Book of Jeremiah.² However, Janzen’s thesis is challenged by Sonderlund who argues that the LXX translator who follows the shorter Hebrew *Vorlage* also abbreviates his work.³ No one can assert either the shorter or the longer as the original because the shorter could be the abridgement of the longer but the longer could also be an enlargement of the shorter. No one can ascertain the truth. Therefore, instead of overemphasizing the importance of the relationship between the MT and LXX, scholars have suggested to pay attention to each in their own literary and theological integrity.⁴

In fact, the long standing “two-edition” theory has been widely noticed among the modern Jeremianic scholars.⁵ Recently, O’Connor has properly argued that “the LXX and MT must represent two separate recensions, arising in different circumstances to meet different communal needs. At the very least, the differences between the versions show that the text received complex and lively scribal attention, and this is testimony to the significance accorded to the Jeremiah tradition.”⁶

Since the MT Jeremiah and the LXX Jeremiah are different from each other in both word length and textual arrangement, this study will select the MT Jeremiah as “a version of Jeremiah with its own literary and theological integrity.”⁷ Before I analyze the compositional structure of the Book of Jeremiah (MT), I will first analyze the compositional materials of the book.

1.1. Analysis of the Compositional Materials of the Book of Jeremiah

The Book of Jeremiah is found to be a collection of different materials. According to Bright, the Book of Jeremiah comprises three separate ‘books’ and a series of biographical narratives.⁸ First, Jer 25:1-13a mentions that the messages of Jeremiah delivered to the people of Judah from 627 BCE (the thirteenth year of Josiah) to 604 BCE (the fourth year of Jehoiakim) are written down in a ‘book’ where Jer 25:1-13a is situated as a part of the elements of the book. If one observes the verbal and thematic similarities between Jer 25:1-13a and Jeremiah 1, the two chapters will be seen as companion pieces: Jer 1 as the beginning of the ‘book’ and Jer

¹ Richard C. Steiner, “The Two Sons of *Neriah* and the Two Editions of Jeremiah in the Light of Two *Atbash* Code-Words for Babylon,” *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 46, Fasc. 1 (Jan., 1996), 1.

² J.G. Janzen, *Studies in the Text of Jeremiah* (Cambridge, Mass. 1973); Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd Revised Ed. (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum bv, 1992); J.G. Janzen, “A Critique of Sven Sonderlund’s The Greek Text of Jeremiah: A Revised Hypothesis,” *BIOSCS* 22 (1989), 16-47.

³ Sven Sonderlund, *The Greek Text of Jeremiah: A Revised Hypothesis* (Sheffield: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1985), 193-248.

⁴ Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, ed. John Barton and Robert Muddiman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 489.

⁵ Steiner, “The Two Sons of *Neriah* and the Two Editions of Jeremiah in the Light of Two *Atbash* Code-Words for Babylon,” 1.

⁶ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 489.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ John Bright, *Jeremiah*, The Anchor Bible, 21 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), lviii.

25:1-13a as the ending of the ‘book.’ The argument for the division of the ‘book’ at this point is clearer when one takes the LXX Jeremiah into account. In the LXX Jeremiah, Jer 25:1-13 ends at vs. 13 and a huge block of Jer 46-51 is placed immediately after Jer 25:13. Therefore, Jer 1-25 is viewed as a ‘book’ of Jeremiah. Second, as the block of Jer 46-51 appears in the LXX at a different location and in a different arrangement, Jer 46-51 is thought to be another separate ‘book’ that contains the oracles against the nations. Third, another introduction, “Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book,” is found in Jer 30:2 as an introduction for another ‘book,’ namely Jer 30-33 that encompass the message of hope and sometimes are labeled as “The Book of Consolation.” This “Book of Consolation” is again seen as a separate block that stands out in the midst of the series of biographical narratives – chapters 26-29 and 34-45. Finally, the last chapter of the Book of Jeremiah, chapter 52, is assumed to be a historical appendix that reports the fall of Jerusalem and repeats the material found in 2 Kgs 24-25.

Although the above blocks of materials are seen as the simple compositional materials of the Book of Jeremiah, Bright warns the readers of his commentary that when all the collections are viewed as a whole in the present form in the Book of Jeremiah together, it causes difficulty for the readers because it lacks chronological order.⁹

Bright says that “no part of the Jeremiah book is arranged in chronological order.”¹⁰ For example, while the ‘book’ of Jer 1-25 generally refers to the time span of 627-604 BCE, Jer 21:1-10 and 22:24-23:8; 24 refer to later periods.

Moreover, Bright argues that the topical arrangement is also not consistent.¹¹ For example, while Jer 1-25 is mainly concerned with warning and judgment, it also contains prophecies of hope (Jer 3:11-18; 16:14-15; 23:1-8); while Jer 30-33 provides the message of hope, it also contains a message of doom (Jer 32:28-35). Therefore, Bright says that “one finds no trace of inner coherence.”¹²

In addition, the Book of Jeremiah contains various types of poetry (the so-called A tradition), biographical prose (the so-called B tradition), and prose discourses (the so-called C tradition) that are not arranged together according to their literary types. As they are found to be commingled, Bright describes the Book of Jeremiah as being in ‘grand disarray.’¹³ Therefore, Bright sees the Book of Jeremiah as “loose collections without any plan of arrangement.”¹⁴

Like Bright, many scholars have acknowledged that reading the Book of Jeremiah is difficult. O’Connor also remarks that “modern readers often find Jeremiah difficult. Its wide variety of literary materials, contradictory themes, and abundant imagery create the impression of chaos and dissymmetry. Poetic oracles, prose narratives, and prose sermons overlap, contradict, and interrupt one another. Chronological confusion compounds literary and thematic disarray. Although the book contains occasional headings that date events to reigns of particular

⁹ Ibid., lix.

¹⁰ Ibid., lix.

¹¹ Ibid., lix.

¹² Ibid., lix.

¹³ Ibid., lx.

¹⁴ Bright, *Jeremiah*, lix. Also see William A. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah 1-25* (ICC, 1; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), xlvi; McKane also does not see any editorial work and theological tendency in the Book of Jeremiah; rather, he sees it as ‘complicated, untidy accumulation of material, extending over a very long period and to which many people have contributed’.

kings, these dates do not follow chronological order.”¹⁵ However, O’Connor also argues that one should not overlook the literary arrangement of the text in its theological context. O’Connor says that “[W]hile it is evident that the book is vastly complex literature composed over a long period of time by many hands, the text’s unreadability may be overstated in some theories of composition. By concentrating on the origins of texts and placing greater historical and theological value on the oldest texts, interpreters often overlook theological and literary power embedded in the text as it stands.”¹⁶ Therefore, O’Connor suggests that readers of the Book of Jeremiah read the text synchronically, while diachronic reading is also maintained because that approach can help the readers discern the editorial theological arrangement of the present compositional structure of the Book of Jeremiah and the text’s relationship to the historical background.¹⁷ O’Connor’s suggestion is quite relevant in recent Jeremianic scholarship that has paid attention to the theological compositional structure of the Book of Jeremiah. For example, scholars like Clements and Stulman have argued that the different composite literary units in the Book of Jeremiah are discernibly organized in a meaningful theological structure.¹⁸

Although Bright has argued that the commingling of poetic sayings, biographical prose, and prose discourses in the Book of Jeremiah creates a ‘chaotic appearance,’ scholars have long noticed the functional role of prose discourses in the Old Testament. They rarely appear without any theological meaning.¹⁹ In fact, in their studies of prose discourses in the Deuteronomistic History, Noth and Wolff have observed the function of prose discourses to provide clues to the rhetorical, contextual, and theological intentions of the editor.²⁰ As Stulman takes the notion of the relation between the Deuteronomistic History and the Book of Jeremiah into account along with the functional role of the prose discourses in the Book of Jeremiah, one can discern how the macro-structural units are theologically arranged through the function of the prose discourses.²¹ Thus, these scholars’ treatment of the compositional structure will be discussed in the following sections.

In contrast to the view of Bright, it is argued that the different materials found in the Book of Jeremiah are not ‘without any plan of arrangement’ but they are intentionally organized with theological purpose. In other words, all the composite units are arranged as integral parts of the whole Book of Jeremiah. Indeed, the different literary types situated in their present places participate in developing the theological messages of the Book of Jeremiah – from

¹⁵ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 488.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 489.

¹⁷ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 489. Also see Kathleen M. O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1-25* (Georgia: Scholars Press, 1988), 154-155. To review the paradigm shift of Jeremianic scholarship, see Louis Stulman, *Order amid Chaos* (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 14-17.

¹⁸ Ronald E. Clements, “Jeremiah 1-25 and the Deuteronomistic History,” *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honor of George Wishart Anderson*, ed. A.G. Auld (JSOT Sup, 152: Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 93-113; Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*.

¹⁹ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 24.

²⁰ Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOT Sup, 15: Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 5; Hans Walter Wolff, “The Kerygma of the Deuteronomic Historical Work,” *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*, ed. Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff, trans. F.C. Prussner (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 83-100; cited in Louis Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 24.

²¹ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 24.

destruction (chapters 1-25) to restoration (chapters 26-52).²² In order to see the meaningful arrangement of the composite units in the Book of Jeremiah, I will analyze the compositional structure of the Book of Jeremiah in the following sections.

1.2. The Analysis of the Compositional Structure of Jeremiah 1-25

The Book of Jeremiah has two major divisions: Jer 1-25 and Jer 26-52. Jer 1 and 25 are seen as the brackets that enclose the other five consecutive macro-structural units in the first division. The function of these two chapters as *inclusio* and functional framework can be discovered if one observes the thematic links between the two chapters.²³ First, both chapters state that the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic activity was in the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign (Jer 1:2; 25:3). Second, both chapters are dated as in the time of King Jehoiakim (Jer 1:3; 25:1). Third, as the prophet is appointed to be "a prophet to the nations" (Jer 1:5) and "to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer 1:10), the prophet announces the message of destruction against Judah and all the nations (Jer 25:9, 11-15, 17). Fourth, Jer 1 anticipates opposition to the prophet's messages and Jer 25 reports the rejection of the messages. Fifth, both chapters explain that the reason for destruction is the disobedience and apostasy of Judah, including the kings, princes, priests and all the people of the land. Sixth, both chapters mention the agent of the destruction from the north, King Nebuchadnezzar, although Jeremiah 1 mentions it only in cryptic terms. Seventh, both chapters present the same targets of the destruction – all the people of Judah, and all the cities of Judah. Last, while Jer 1 predicts the destruction, Jer 25 concludes the corpus by announcing the fulfillment of the destruction. In short, Jer 1 introduces all the major themes while Jer 25 ends with the fulfillment of the programmatic introduction of Jer 1.²⁴ In order to see the major themes within this framework, I shall turn my focus to other scholars' treatments of the compositional structure of Jer 1-25.

According to O'Connor, the composite units of Jer 1-25 are as follows.

Jer 1	Introduction: The Call Narrative
1. Jer 2-10	Jeremiah's Appeals to the Nation
2. Jer 11-20	Jeremiah's Final Appeals and Rejection
3. Jer 21-24	Appendices Concerning the Situation After the Fall of the Nation
Jer 25:1-13	Summary ²⁵

Clements' analysis of the compositional structure of Jer 1-25 is as follows.

²² Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 17-18; Brueggemann has properly entitled the two divisions of the Book of Jeremiah – To Pluck Up, To Tear Down (Jeremiah 1-25), and To Build, To Plant (Jeremiah 26-52). See Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1-25* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Walter Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 26-52* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

²³ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 36-38.

²⁴ The section of Jeremiah 1-25 is often categorized as judgment section. For example, Rudolph describes Jeremiah 1-25 as "Judgment Sayings Against Jerusalem and Judah." See Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremiah* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1947); cited in Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 26.

²⁵ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 118.

Jer 1.1-19	An Introductory Call and Commissioning of the Prophet
1. Jer 2.1-6.30	Judah's Culpability is Greater than Israel's
2. Jer 7.1-10.16	An Accusation of Idolatry and the Predicted Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple
3. Jer 11.1-20.18	Judah's Rejection of Jeremiah as God's Covenant Mediator and its Consequence
4. Jer 21.1-24.10	The Condemnation of the Davidic Dynasty for Breach of Covenant: A Conditional Interpretation of the Royal Office
Jer 25.1-14	A Synopsis of Jeremiah's Prophecies ²⁶

Stulman's study of the compositional structure of Jer 1-25 is as follows.

Jer 1-25:	The Dismantling of Judah's 'First Principles'
Jer 1.1-19:	The Functional Introduction: God's Sovereign Plan Regarding Judah's Newly Defined Place Among the Nations
Jer 2.1-6.30:	Macro-Unit One. Judah's Departure From Yahweh: The Basis for Guilt and Penalty of Death
Jer 7.1-10.1-16:	Macro-Unit Two. Dismantling of Temple Ideology
Jer 11.1-17.27:	Macro-Unit Three. Dismantling of Covenant Ideology
Jer 18.1-20.18:	Macro-Unit Four. Dismantling of Insider-Outsider Understandings
Jer 21.1-24.10:	Macro-Unit Five. Dismantling of Royal Ideology
Jer 25.1-38:	The Functional Closure: The Fulfillment of God's Sovereign Plan Regarding Judah's Newly Defined Place Among the Nations ²⁷

Among the above analyses of the compositional structures of Jer 1-25, a general consensus is observed that Jeremiah 1 and 25 serve as the beginning and ending of the division. In other words, all three scholars view Jeremiah 1 and 25 as the editorial framework for Jer 1-25. Within the bracket of Jer 1 and 25, it is observed that the three scholars' structural divisions are slightly different from each other. While O'Connor divides Jer 2-24 into three macro-structural units, Clements uses four and Stulman five respectively. While O'Connor sees Jer 2-10 as a macro-structural unit, Clements and Stulman see this unit as two separate macro-structural units – 2:1-6:30 and 7:1-10:16. While O'Connor and Clements see Jer 11-20 as a macro-structural unit, Stulman views it as two distinct units – 11:1-17:27 and 18:1-20:18. Yet, all treat Jeremiah 21:1-24:10 as a single unit.

In my observation, Stulman's division is preferable to the other two. To begin with, O'Connor sees Jer 2-10 as a macro-structural unit because the unit is composed overridingly with poetry unlike the macro-structural unit of Jer 11-20 which is dominantly composed with long prose accounts.²⁸ Based on this view, she sees the theme of a cultic condemnation prose sermon in Jer 7:1-8:3 as the common theme of Jeremiah 11-20 and that does not affect the progress of the tone of the materials in the macro-structural unit: that is the progress "from

²⁶ Clements, "Jeremiah 1-25," 94-107; cited in Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 30-31.

²⁷ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 31-32.

²⁸ O'Connor, *The Confession of Jeremiah*, 123.

conciliation and warning to judgment and impending punishment.”²⁹ Furthermore, O’Connor compares the two accounts of the Temple Sermons, Jer 7 and 26, and points out the absence of human response in Jer 7. Therefore, she argues that the function of Jer 7 in this macro-structural unit is no more than to “exhort the nation to repent and to threaten them with disaster for failure to do so.”³⁰

However, it is argued that the coming of the people from the north in Jer 6:22-30 can be seen as the closing point of the progress of the tone that develops from warning to judgment so that it is not necessary to see Jer 10:22 as the final conclusion of the unit. In fact, O’Connor seems to over-read the incongruity in this unit. The intrusive interruption of Jer 7 in the poetic setting should not be deposed. The integrity of this basic indicator of structural division in Jer 7:1 should not be disregarded.³¹ The most significant discrepancy between Jer 7 and the preceding chapters is the shift from the people of Judah clinging to other gods to clinging to the Temple. In Jer 2-6, the people are portrayed as the ones who abandon Yahweh and cling to other gods. But in Jer 7, the people are depicted as the ones who cling to the Temple for their life and security. The condemnation of the ideology of reliance on the Temple in Jer 7 again parallels the polemic against the idolatry of the nations in Jer 10.³² Thus, Jer 7 develops the message of judgment dismantling the temple ideology in the subsequent chapters 8-10 – the people’s reliance on the Temple is nothing more than apostasy as they do not obey the word of Yahweh. Therefore, following Clements and Stulman, Jer 7-10 should be treated as a separate macro-structural unit.

Similar to the above case, O’Connor and Clements seem to over-read the peculiarity of the structure of Jer 11:1-20:18. As Stulman has pointed out, the indicator of structural division: **אֲשֶׁר הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֶל-יְהוָה מֵאֵת יְהוָה לְאָמָר:** appears in Jer 18:1 as in Jer 7:1; 11:1; and 21:1.³³ All the structural division indicators are followed by the distinct prose stylistic structure comprising the so-called word-event introductory formula, an imperative speech to the prophet, and the description of “the action or message communicated.”³⁴ Stulman’s observation is obviously correct since one can discover that Jer 18 continues its own potter/pottery motif throughout chapters 19-20 “with no disturbance to the storyline.”³⁵ Therefore, it is proper to treat Jer 11:1-17:27 and 18:1-20:18 as separate macro-structural units.

As a consequence, the following study will deal with the five macro-structural units (2-6), (7-10), (11-17), (18-20), and (21-24) as they develop within the bracket of Jeremiah 1 and 25.

1.3. In Search of Female Imagery in the Composite Units of Jeremiah 1-25

In this section, I will search Jeremianic female imagery in each of the five macro-structural units of Jer 1-25 such as (2-6), (7-10), (11-17), (18-20), and (21-24).

²⁹ Ibid., 125.

³⁰ Ibid., 126.

³¹ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 32

³² Ibid., 43-44.

³³ Ibid., 32.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 45-49.

(1) The First Macro-Structural Unit (Jeremiah 2-6)

In Jer 2-6, the major theme of the unit – Judah’s departure from Yahweh – is portrayed as an unfaithful bride’s departure from her faithful husband. While Yahweh is personified as a faithful husband and provider (Jer 2:20-25), the Israelite people are personified as an unfaithful bride who has forsaken her loyalty to her husband (Jer 2:20a; 3:1, 8, 11, 20), as a harlot who has lain down “on every high hill and under every green tree” (Jer 2:20b; 3:2, 6-10), a wild vine (Jer 2:21), a guilt-stained person (Jer 2:22), a swift young camel (Jer 2:23), a wild ass in heat (Jer 2:24), daughter my people (Jer 4:11; 6:26), daughter Zion (Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23;), and Yahweh’s divorced wife (Jer 3:1-5; 4:16-18).³⁶

All the female imagery in this macro-structural unit is utilized to blame and accuse the Israelite people of their infidelity and apostasy. Therefore, O’Connor has convincingly argued that “even though some passages feature male figures (Jer 2:14-19; 2:26-28; 4:1-4), female images tie the units together in a potent rhetoric of blame.”³⁷ In describing the sin of the Israelite people, the accusation intensifies its personification from the human imagery of a loyal bride (Jer 2:2) to an unfaithful bride (Jer 2:20a) and then to a harlot (Jer 2:20b) and even to the non-human female imagery of a wild ass in heat (Jer 2:20b). Since the consequence of the sin of the people has affected the well-being of the land through drought (Jer 3:3), the pollution of the land (Jer 3:9), and the loss of the flocks, herds, and the people (Jer 3:24), Judah is found guilty of infidelity and apostasy and Yahweh’s punishment is unavoidable (Jer 2:9, 29; 5:6, 9, 29; 6). Although the faithless Israel and Judah are called to return to Yahweh (Jer 3:11-18), their betrayal demands the invasion from the north and the punishment will be inescapable. The cry of daughter Zion will be the cry of a woman in childbirth (Jer 4:31; 6:24).

(2) The Second Macro-Structural Unit (Jeremiah 7-10)

By recalling the preceding theme of the people’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh, this macro-structural unit forms a new theme – the dismantling of temple ideology. The so-called Temple Sermon warns the people that their seeking refuge in the Temple is not possible (Jer 7:4, 10-15) because they have unfaithfully departed from Yahweh and they do not execute justice for one another, rather, they oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and shed innocent blood, and go after other gods (Jer 7:5-7). The accusation of idolatry becomes more emphatic when the worshipping of the queen of heaven is employed. Yahweh accuses whole families of being involved in that idolatry. Jer 7:18 reads “The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the

³⁶ Many recent Jeremianic scholars have challenged the conventional translation for the personified daughter language. Conventionally, for example, the Hebrew *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* is translated into English as ‘daughter of Zion.’ Likewise, other personified daughter languages such as *בַּת־עַמִּי*, *בַּת־יִשְׂרָאֵל*, and *בַּת־בָּבֶל* are translated as ‘daughter of my people,’ ‘virgin of Israel,’ and ‘daughter of Babylon,’ and so on. However, in my opinion, the translation without the preposition ‘of’ is more accurate translation for these personified daughters in their literary contexts. The details will be discussed in Chapter Two, section 2.3. under the subtitle of “A Study of Daughter Language and its Formulaic Expressions.” See Christl M Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008); Karla G. Bohmbach, “Daughter,” *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible. The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books. And the New Testament*, ed. Carol L. Meyers at el. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 518-519; Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 171.

³⁷ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 170.

fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to spite Me.” As O’Connor has observed this accusation is expanded in Jer 44 and the text in Jer 44 “makes women the direct cause of the nation’s collapse.”³⁸

The people “steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and go after other gods” (Jer 7:9) and have confidence in the Temple as their refuge. The text asserts that this ideology is immoral and the Temple will be destroyed as Yahweh has destroyed the sanctuary in Shiloh (Jer 7:10-15). Due to the punishment of Yahweh, “daughter my people” suffers (Jer 8:11, 19, 21, 22). Yahweh himself weeps for the “daughter my people” (Jer 9:1, 7). Due to the judgment of Yahweh, the mourning women and wailing women are called to cry for the people who are about to die (Jer 9:17-18). Because death has come to the nation, women are asked to teach their daughters wailing and dirges (Jer 9:20-21).

(3) The Third Macro-Structural Unit (Jeremiah 11-17)

This unit is bracketed by two prose discourses concerning covenant observance (Jer 11:1-17; 17:19-27) delivered to the people of Judah and Jerusalem (Jer 11:2; 17:20).³⁹ Reasonably, the main theme of this unit is seen as the Deuteronomic covenant theology – blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. Jeremiah proclaims the covenant messages to the people, but they consistently disobey the messages. Therefore, Yahweh’s inevitable judgment will fall upon the people (Jer 11:8-11). As the Israelite people break the covenant, the promise of the Sinai covenant cannot save the community. The people will face killing in war (Jer 11:15), rape (Jer 12:7), drought (Jer 14:1-6), famine and sword (Jer 14:15-16), and dishonorable death (Jer 14:16; 15: 3; 17:4). In this devastation, the genitals of the female nation are abusively exposed (Jer 13:22, 26) and the virgin daughter has been crushed and wounded (Jer 14:17). The pain of Judah will be like the pangs of a woman in childbirth (Jer 13:21). Jeremiah prays to Yahweh for divine judgment on the wicked people three times in this unit (Jer 11:18-12:6; 15:10-21; 17:14-18). These are well known as the first, second, and the third confessions of Jeremiah. The fourth and fifth confessions of Jeremiah will be found in the next macro-structural unit – Jer 18-20 – specifically in Jer 18:18-23 and 20:7-13(18).⁴⁰

(4) The Fourth Macro-Structural Unit (Jeremiah 18-20)

In this unit, Jeremiah is commanded to go to the potter’s house and to observe the work of the potter (Jer 18:1-4). As the prophet witnesses that the potter creates and recreates a new vessel with the spoiled clay in his hand, Yahweh will remold the Israelite people (Jer 18:6). Once, the Israelite people had been Yahweh’s chosen people (Dt 7:6; 14:2) but “such insider-status, the text asserts, is not an unconditional claim.”⁴¹ At any time, Yahweh can destroy (Jer 18:7) and build up (Jer 18:9) the nations according to their responses to the divine words. If a nation repents of her evil and obeys the commandments of Yahweh, the nation can access the insider-status (Jer 18:7-8). If the insiders refuse the prophetic word, they will become the outsiders (Jer 18:9-10). In this unit, it is evident that the virgin Israel (Jer 18:13) has rejected

³⁸ Ibid., 172.

³⁹ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 44.

⁴⁰ O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*.

⁴¹ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 46.

her insider-status and chosen the outsider-status that is beyond Yahweh's blessing and protection (Jer 18:15). Therefore, even Jeremiah, who has once interceded for the people, asks Yahweh to throw divine judgment upon the people (Jer 18:18-23; 20:7-13, 18 i.e. the fourth and the fifth confessions of Jeremiah). The dramatic destruction of the clay jar in Jer 19 reveals that the destruction of Yahweh is irreparable. All the Israelite people including the ruling class will be killed by the swords of their enemies and their dead bodies will be devoured by the birds of the sky and beasts of the earth (Jer 19:7). Even the parents will kill their children for food in the time of the siege of the city (Jer 19:9). Therefore, as Brueggemann has observed, "this is the point of no return."⁴² The previous understanding of insider ideology is dismantled.

(5) The Fifth Macro-Structural Unit (Jeremiah 21-24)

In this macro-structural unit, Jer 21 and 24 serve as the functional framework of the unit, and it encapsulates the major theme – the collapse of royal Davidic ideology. Both chapters share the same motif of Yahweh's rejection of Davidic kings for their failures. In Jer 21:1-7, Yahweh has rejected Zedekiah's plea for security when the Babylonians besiege the city. In Jer 24:1, Yahweh has given Coniah/Jeconiah/Jehoiachin over into the hands of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Within this framework, the contents make clear the conditional nature of the Davidic dynasty. While the Israelite people have a conviction that their Davidic line is everlasting, Yahweh does not allow them to do misdeeds. Therefore, Yahweh will punish them for their misdeeds, injustice, and disobedience to the commandments (Jer 21:11-23:8). Although Yahweh promises the future Davidic dynasty in Jer 23:5-8; 24:1-10, the focus of the unit is on the termination of Davidic ideology. As Stulman says, "the traditional and conventional claims of dynastic immutability have been subverted; hope is no longer extended to the historical dynasty or the royal city."⁴³ Since Yahweh has rejected the people, the enemy will capture the people and the pain of the people will be like a woman's pain in childbirth (Jer 22:20-23).

1.4. Recapitulation of the First Framework

In sum, the female imagery in Jeremiah 1-25 is utilized to portray the people's unfaithfulness and their disobedience. As a result, the female images in this first division of the Book of Jeremiah are observed to be the victims of Yahweh's destruction.

In the second division of the Book (Jeremiah 26-52), however, female imagery is detected not only as the victim of destruction but also as the receiver of Yahweh's mercy. In order to see the portraits of female imagery in the second division of the Book of Jeremiah, I shall first analyze the compositional structure of Jeremiah 26-52. Then, I will shift my focus to searching for female imagery in the composite macro-structural units of Jeremiah 26-52.

⁴² Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1-25* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 169.

⁴³ Stulman, *Order amid, Chaos*, 49.

1.5. Analysis of the Compositional Structure of Jeremiah 26-52

Concerning the compositional structure of Jer 26-52, most scholars agree that the prose introduction (Jer 26) and prose conclusion (Jer 52) bracket three major macro-structural units.⁴⁴ However, defining the literary boundary between the first and second units in Jer 26-45 is an unsettled problem among scholars while all agree that Jer 46-51 is the third component unit, the so-called oracles against the nations. For example, while Wilhelm Rudolph treats Jer 26-35 as a unit of “Prophecies of Salvation” *Heilsweissagungen*,⁴⁵ Nicholson treats Jer 26-36 as a unit of “a history of the word of God proclaimed by Jeremiah and rejected by the nation.”⁴⁶ Stulman has observed this disagreement and he thinks the problem for this disagreement may be due to the nature of “the text’s ‘internal’ and intentional ambiguity.”⁴⁷ Therefore, he argues that Jer 36 can be seen not only as the conclusion of the first macro-structural unit of the second division of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 26-35) but also as the functional chapter that links the first and second macro-structural units of the second division of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 37-45).⁴⁸ According to Stulman, Jer 36, on the one hand, shares the similar settings of time, space, audience, intention, genre, and structure with Jer 26. On the other hand, Jer 36 functions as a framing chapter for the Baruch narrative (Jer 36-45).⁴⁹

Stulman’s evidence for this argument, however, has some flaws. Although both Jer 26 and 36 are dated as in the reign of Jehoiakim, one must not over-read this as Jer 35 is also dated as in the reign of Jehoiakim. In addition, although both chapters share the spatial setting of the temple, the speakers are different persons. Jeremiah is the speaker in Jer 26, but Baruch is the speaker in Jer 36. Therefore, Stulman’s argument is not without its shortcomings. It seems to me that Jer 36 belongs with Jer 26-35 “much more than it does with Jer 37-45.”⁵⁰ The different reigns of Jehoiakim (Jer 26:1, 35:1, 36:1) and Zedekiah (Jer 37:1) can be found as the most striking textual evidence for the separation of the two units.⁵¹ Moreover, the concluding function of Jer 36 has long been noticed by scholars. As Stulman has observed the concluding function of Jer 36, Carroll has properly argued against the division of Rudolph by pointing to the concluding function of Jer 36 that summarizes the macro-structural unit of Jer 26-36 and concludes what has been said in Jer 26.⁵² In Carroll’s view, Jer 26 “raises the question of turning” and Jer 36 concludes with “the rejection of that possibility.”⁵³ This remark is similar to the observation of Nicholson who comments that Jer 26 introduces the theme of the macro-

⁴⁴ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 72-73. Ernest Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52, The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible*, ed. P.R. Ackroyd et al., 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14-15. The three units that O’Connor treats in the second division of the Book of Jeremiah are Jeremiah 26-36, 37-45, 46-51. See O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 487-527.

⁴⁵ Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, xvii; cited in Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 72. Also see Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, Handbuch zum Alten Testament I, 12, 3rd ed. (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1968), 168; cited in Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1986), 510.

⁴⁶ Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 14.

⁴⁷ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 84.

⁴⁸ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 84.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 84-88.

⁵⁰ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 510.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 509.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 510.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 510.

structural unit of Jer 26-36 which reaches its climax in Jer 36.⁵⁴ There is a tendency to diminish other elements in the unit, and it is difficult to agree with Carroll and Nicholson although I agree with them in dividing the units (Jer 26-36 and Jer 37-45). In fact, as Stulman has shown in the chiastic structure, the climax of the unit can be found in Jer 31.⁵⁵ According to Stulman the macro-structural unit of Jer 26-36 can be seen as follows:

- 26 Reaction to the Word in the Temple – conflict with upper tiers – Jeremiah’s life is spared (v. 24)
- 27 the nations are presented with a choice to serve Nebuchadrezzar⁵⁶ and live or perish
- 28 Hananiah dies because he speaks ‘rebellion against Yahweh’
- 29 Shemaiah is sentenced to death and his descendants will not ‘see the good that’ Yahweh plans for his people (vv. 30-32)
- 30 emergence of hope from the ruins of exile
- 31 new life and a new covenant for the house of Israel and Judah
- 32 emergence of hope from the ruins of exile
- 33 David, the Levitical priests, and the offspring of Jacob will live and enjoy a place in the age to come (v. 17-18, 23-26)
- 34 Zedekiah threatened with death, although his sentence is mitigated in vv. 2-5
- 35 Rechabites will live... ‘Jonadab...shall not lack a descendent to stand before me for all time’ (v. 18-19)
- 36 Reaction to the Word in the Temple – conflict with upper tiers – Jehoiakim is refused a place in the new era (vv. 30-31)⁵⁷

The above chiastic structure has demonstrated that the climax of this macro-structural unit is reached in Jer 31 forming the theme of “new life and a new covenant for the house of Israel and Judah.”⁵⁸ Therefore, Jer 26-36 can be treated as the first macro-structural unit of the second division of the Book of Jeremiah that reaches its climax in Jer 31. As a result, the so-called Baruch Account (Jer 37-45) and the Oracles against the Nations (Jer 46-51) will be treated respectively as the second and third macro-structural units of the second division of the Book of Jeremiah.

1.6. In Search of Female Imagery in the Composite Units of Jeremiah 26-52

In this section, I will search for Jeremianic female imagery in each of the three macro-structural units of Jer 26-52 such as (26-36), (37-45), and (46-51).

⁵⁴ Nicholson, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 14.

⁵⁵ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 86.

⁵⁶ Stulman uses Nebuchadrezzar, not Nebuchadnezzar like MT and most translations. He seems to prefer the LXX reading.

⁵⁷ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 86.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

(1) The First Macro-Structural Unit (Jeremiah 26-36)

Unlike the preceding macro-structural units, this unit presents hope for the people of Israel and Judah. As I have mentioned above, the chiasmic structure of Jer 26-36 shows “new life and a new covenant for the house of Israel and Judah” as the climax of the unit.⁵⁹

Following the lifting of Jeremiah’s death sentence in Jer 26, Jer 27-29 present a message of hope concerning the Babylonian exile. The Prophet Hananiah prophesies that all the vessels of the Temple and all the exiles including the Judean king Jeconiah will be brought back to Jerusalem within two years (Jer 28:1-4) whereas Jeremiah predicts that the span of the exile will be seventy years (Jer 29:10). These two prophecies are in conflict and Hananiah dies as he has lied (Jer 28:17). However, the core message of the text is realized as a voice of hope amid devastation. The climax of this voice of hope is heard again more emphatically in the so-called Book of Consolation (Jer 30-33). As one can see in the above chiasmic structure, the climax of the unit is reached in Jer 31 surrounded by a description of the ruins of exile (Jer 30 and 32) that heightens the pitch of the tone of hope in the midst of the ruins of exile.

Before Yahweh’s salvation comes, Israel and Judah will face life-threatening defeat like a woman in childbirth (Jer 30:6). However, after the humiliation of defeat, the texts promise that Yahweh will save the exile from afar (Jer 30:10) and rebuild the nation (Jer 31:4) so that the virgin Israel will take up her tambourines and dance for the celebration. Once the people have been brought to the north; the present time is the time to bring the people back from the north including ‘the blind and the lame, the woman with child and she who is in labor with child’ (Jer 31:8) so that “the virgin will rejoice in the dance” (Jer 31:13).

In Jer 31:15, the situation of the Israelite people is presented through the portrait of Rachel’s bitter weeping in Ramah, the historical site where the Babylonian exiles have been detained (Jer 40:1). Rachel is weeping for her lost children but she is comforted by Yahweh and he promises to bring her children back; Jer 31:17 promises that “there is hope for your future.” Since the exiles are coming back, the virgin Israel is commanded to set up road markers and guideposts for their journey home (Jer 31:21). The once faithless Israel is even mysteriously urged not to be dismayed by a new creation. Jer 31:22 reads “How long will you go here and there, O faithless daughter? For Yahweh has created a new thing in the earth-- A woman will encompass a man.”

In the new creation, the scattered will be gathered (Jer 30:3; 31:8), the broken will be rebuilt and the plucked up will be planted (Jer 31:28), a new covenant will be made (Jer 31:31-34), the election of Israel is reaffirmed (Jer 30:22; 31:1, 35-37), and the Davidic dynasty is restated (Jer 30:8-9, 21-22; 33:14-26). All the previous destructions are reversed and restored. In this restoration program, the female imagery is employed in positive ways.⁶⁰

(2) The Second Macro-Structural Unit (Jeremiah 37-45)

In this macro-structural unit, the situation of Judah, during and after the invasion by the Babylonians, is related by a third person narrator whom scholars identify as Baruch (Jer 45:1). The unit begins with the rejection of Jeremiah’s prophetic words by King Zedekiah and all the people of the land (Jer 37:1-2) and it is concluded by Yahweh’s decision to destroy the whole

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 175-176.

land (Jer 45:4). Within this framework, the narrative presents Jeremiah's imprisonment (Jer 37-38), the Babylonian invasion and Jeremiah's release (Jer 39), the appointment of Gedaliah, his assassination, the rebellion of the militants (Jer 40-41), and Jeremiah's exile in Egypt (Jer 42-44).⁶¹

Within this macro-structural unit, scholars have tried to find a theme. The most well-known themes in this unit are the suffering of Jeremiah and the words of Yahweh proclaimed by the prophet.⁶² For example, Kremers calls this unit a 'passion narrative' of Jeremiah.⁶³ Since Kremers has portrayed Jeremiah's suffering as being in the same manner as Jesus' passion, it has been a controversial issue among scholars. O'Connor has argued that the text should speak in its own Old Testament context and Christian language should not be imposed first.⁶⁴ Moreover, O'Connor points out that the absence of Jeremiah in chapters 40-41, and 45 does not support the reading of this unit as a passion narrative of Jeremiah.⁶⁵ In this regard, Carroll has also observed Jer 40:7-41:18; 45:3-5 and found the absence of the figure of Jeremiah so he also does not agree with the passion narrative view. In contrast, he focuses on "the divine word as it shapes the fate of the community."⁶⁶ Nicholson also argues that the focus of this unit is not on the person of Jeremiah; but rather, on the word of God that the prophet proclaims, its rejection, and fulfillment of the prophetic word.⁶⁷

However, can the prophet and the word of God be separated? The prophet and the word of God cannot be separated because silencing Jeremiah is silencing the word of God.⁶⁸ Zedekiah's request for prayer (Jer 37:3-10), a word from Yahweh (Jer 37:17-21) to Jeremiah, and the officials' attempt to cease the prophetic word by imprisoning Jeremiah (Jer 38:1-6) show that the prophet and the word of Yahweh are inseparable. Therefore, both person and prophetic word are working together. In other words, the two themes are working together.

In fact, the suffering prophet Jeremiah proclaims the word of Yahweh to his fellow people but the people reject the prophetic word so that Yahweh's judgment comes as the fulfillment of the prophetic word. In terms of the study of female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah, it is evident in Jer 44 that the evidence of calamity and the ruins of Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah are the consequence of idolatry and rejection of the prophetic word. Jer 44:7-14 continues that although the remnant of Judah have seen the calamity of Judah, they do not listen to the word of Yahweh and continue to do idolatry in Egypt so that Yahweh will destroy the remnant as he has punished the idol worshippers before in Judah. In Jer 44:15-30, the idolatry is identified with worshipping the queen of heaven and the women are presented as the chief practitioners and defenders of the idolatry. Unlike the women in Jer 7:16-20, the women in Jer 44:15-30 defend their practice of worshipping the queen of heaven. Jer 44 ends with the

⁶¹ O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 518.

⁶² Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 89.

⁶³ Heinz Kremers, "Leidensgemeinschaft mit Gott im Alten Testament: Eine Untersuchung der 'biographischen' Berichte im Jeremiabuch," *Evangelische Theologie* 13 (1953): 122-140; cited in O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 518.

⁶⁴ O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 518.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 669-670.

⁶⁷ Ernest Wilson Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 106; cited in Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 90.

⁶⁸ Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 90.

people's rejection of the prophetic word and Yahweh's resolution to destroy the remnant. Therefore, although the hope in the preceding macro-structural unit is strong, hope in this unit becomes weak. Only in a few places (Jer 38:2; 39:15-18; 40:7-12; 42:9-12; 45:5), the promise of hope is detected. Nevertheless, they are the promises of hope in the face of upheaval and chaos.

(3) The Third Macro-Structural Unit (Jeremiah 46-51)

Following the oracle of Yahweh's destruction on 'the whole land' and 'all flesh' (Jer 45:4-5), the corpus of oracles against the nations (Jer 46-51) is the last macro-structural unit of the Book of Jeremiah.

Many scholars have observed this arrangement as a theologically purposeful editorial arrangement.⁶⁹ In fact, it should be noted that the LXX places this corpus right after the first division of Jeremiah (chapters 1-25). However, the MT places the corpus at the end of the Book of Jeremiah. This remarkable arrangement shows its uniqueness. Moreover, the sequence of the oracles against the nations is doubly purposeful because the oracles against the nation are firstly addressed to Egypt and lastly addressed to Babylon. Indeed, Yahweh has been using Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar as his servant (Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10) in the mission of judgment. However, Babylon has to be destroyed at the end when the sovereignty of Yahweh is realized by all the nations. Thus, following the oracle of the downfall of Egypt (Jer 46:2-26), the Philistines (Jer 47:1-7), Moab (Jer 48:1-47), Ammon (Jer 49:1-6), Edom (Jer 49:7-22), Damascus (Jer 49:23-27), Kedar and Hazor (Jer 49:28-33), Elam (Jer 49:34-39), and finally Babylon (Jer 50-51) are given the message of doom. Starting from the most powerful nation, Egypt, all the nations will be judged through the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. However, as the real ruler of the nations is not Nebuchadnezzar but Yahweh, Babylon herself will be destroyed and the exiles will be restored (Jer 50-51).⁷⁰

In these oracles against the nations, the female imagery includes wounded, vulnerable, and shameful daughters. The nations are personified as daughters: The wounded virgin daughter Egypt is commanded to "go up to Gilead and obtain balm" (Jer 46:11) and to prepare for exile for her city is about to be ruined (Jer 46:19). The daughter Egypt is put to shame because the people from the north will take away her power (Jer 46:24). Likewise, daughter Dibon (Jer 48:18), the daughters of Rabbah (Jer 49:3), and daughter Babylon (Jer 50:42; 51:33) are put to shame because they are under attack.⁷¹ The warriors of Moab will be like a woman in childbirth (Jer 48:41). Damascus' fear is like a woman in childbirth (Jer 49:24). The anguish of the Babylonian king is expressed like a woman in childbirth (Jer 50:43). At the end of the collapse of the nations, the exiles are restored (Jer 51:45).

1.7. Recapitulation of the Second Framework

To recapitulate, in the first macro-structural unit of the second division of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 26-36), the promise of hope for Israel and Judah reaches its climax in chapter 31

⁶⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 26-52* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 209-215.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 212-213.

⁷¹ O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Women Bible Commentary*, 171; O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 522-526.

where Yahweh promises Rachel that he will bring her children back to her homeland. In the second macro-structural unit of the second division of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 37-45), the people's rejection of the prophetic words leads to destruction. The real women, who worship the queen of heaven and reject Jeremiah's prophetic words, are assured to be destroyed as Yahweh has destroyed before the idol worshippers in Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah. In this unit, the voice of hope is not as strong as in the preceding unit. However, in the last macro-structural unit of the second division of the Book of Jeremiah, the hope for the exiles powerfully reappears along with the oracles against the nations. When all the nations are judged according to their transgressions, the exilic Israel and Judah will be restored. Therefore, the tone of hope for the Israelite people in this last unit sounds out loudly. However, the personified daughters of other nations are observed as wounded, vulnerable, and shameful.

Summary

In this chapter, I have shown that the Book of Jeremiah is composed of eight macro-structural units. Five macro-structural units are bracketed within the first framework of Jer 1 and 25 whereas three macro-structural units are bracketed within the second framework of Jer 26 and 52.

Strikingly, in each macro-structural unit, female imagery is detected. Within the framework of the first division of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 1-25), the first composite unit (Jer 2-6) includes the female imagery of the once-loyal-bride, unfaithful wife, adulteress, prostitute, 'daughter my people,' 'daughter Zion,' Yahweh's divorced wife, a woman in childbirth, a wild vine, and a swift young camel. In the second composite unit (Jer 7-10), 'daughter my people,' the mourning women, and the worshippers of the queen of heaven are observed. Likewise, the 'virgin daughter' and a woman in childbirth in the third composite unit (Jer 11-17), the 'virgin Israel' in the fourth composite unit (Jer 18-20), and a woman in childbirth in the fifth composite unit (Jer 21-24) are detected. Within the framework of the second division of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 26-52), the first composite unit (Jer 26-36) contains a 'virgin daughter,' 'virgin Israel,' a faithless daughter, Rachel the mother of Israel, and a woman in childbirth. In the second composite unit (Jer 37-45), the worshippers of the queen of heaven are found. In the last composite unit (Jer 46-51), the daughters of other nations and a woman in childbirth are detected.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING FEMALE IMAGERY IN THE SETTING OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have searched the female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah by analyzing the compositional materials and the compositional structure of the book. The female images are found in each macro-structural composite unit of the book. As a whole, Judah and other nations are personified as bride, adulteress, unfaithful wife, prostitute, virgin, daughter, mother, a woman in childbirth, and even as non-human female figures. Among the Jeremianic portrayals of females, real women are also found including mourners and worshippers of the queen of heaven.

In this chapter, I will focus on such female imagery by grouping them into two domains. The personified daughter and mother will be studied under one domain, and the rest will be studied under the domain of marriage imagery. In the study of the daughter language, I will trace the origin of such daughter language in the ancient Near Eastern literature and study how such daughter language has influence in the book of Jeremiah. In the study of marriage imagery, I will focus on the reason why the female partner is sexually abused by male partner in ancient Near Eastern literature.

In order to begin my study, I will first focus on the study of daughter language and its frequency.

2.1. A Study of Daughter Language and Its Frequency

The daughter language is found in both first and second divisions of the Book of Jeremiah as follows.¹

2.1.1. In the First Division of the Book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1-25)

In the first macro-structural unit – ‘daughter Zion’ בַּת־צִיּוֹן (Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23), ‘daughter my people’ בַּת־עַמִּי (Jer 4:11; 6:26); in the second macro-structural unit – ‘daughter my people’ בַּת־עַמִּי (Jer 8:11, 19, 21, 22; 9:1, 7; and real daughters in Jer 9:20); in the third macro-structural unit – ‘virgin daughter my people’ בַּת־עַמִּי בְּתוּלָה (Jer 14:17); in the fourth macro-structural unit – ‘virgin Israel’ בְּתוּלָה יִשְׂרָאֵל (Jer 18:13); in the fifth macro-structural unit – the daughter language is absent.

2.1.2. In the Second Division of the Book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 26-52)

In the first macro-structural unit – ‘virgin Israel’ בְּתוּלָה יִשְׂרָאֵל (Jer 31:4, 21); in the second macro-structural unit – the daughter language is absent; in the third macro-structural unit – other nations as ‘daughter’ such as ‘virgin daughter Egypt’ בְּתוּלָה בַּת־מִצְרַיִם (Jer 46:11),

¹ O'Connor has clearly grouped the daughter language. See O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 171.

‘daughter Egypt’ בַּת־מִצְרַיִם (Jer 46:19, 24), ‘daughter Dibon’ בַּת־דִּיבּוֹן (Jer 48:18), ‘daughters of Rabbah’ בָּנוֹת רַבָּה (Jer 49:3), ‘daughter Babylon’ בַּת־בָּבֶל (Jer 50:42; 51:33).

Therefore, as a whole, the daughter language in the Book of Jeremiah appears as ‘daughter Zion,’ ‘(virgin) daughter my people,’ ‘virgin Israel,’ and other nations as ‘(virgin) daughter.’ It is noticed that all the occurrences of the daughter language, except Jer 49:3, are expressed in a way of formulaic expression: בַּת or בַּת־ + geographical name or the collective people בַּת־עַמִּי ‘daughter my people.’² This formulaic expression of personifying daughter imagery can be also found in other prophetic books.

In the Book of Isaiah, one can detect ‘daughter Zion’ בַּת־צִיּוֹן (Is 1:8; 10:32; 16:1; 52:2; 62:11), ‘virgin daughter Zion’ בַּת־צִיּוֹן בְּתוּלָה (Is 37:22), ‘daughter my people’ בַּת־עַמִּי (Is 22:4), ‘daughter Jerusalem’ בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם (Is 37:22), ‘daughter Gillim’ בַּת־גִּלִּים (Is 10:30), ‘daughter of Tarshish’ בַּת־תַּרְשִׁישׁ (Is 23:10), ‘virgin daughter Sidon’ בַּת־צִידוֹן (Is 23:12), ‘virgin daughter Babylon’ בַּת־בָּבֶל (Is 47:1), and ‘daughter Chaldea’ בַּת־כַּשְׁדִּים (Is 47:1, 5).

In the Book of Lamentations, one can find ‘daughter Zion’ בַּת־צִיּוֹן (Lam 1:6; 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 18; 4:22), ‘virgin daughter Zion’ בַּת־צִיּוֹן בְּתוּלָה (Lam 2:13), ‘virgin daughter Judah’ יְהוּדָה בְּתוּלָה (Lam 1:15), ‘daughter Judah’ בַּת־יְהוּדָה (Lam 2:2, 5), ‘daughter my people’ בַּת־עַמִּי (Lam 2:11; 3:48; 4:3, 6, 10), ‘daughter Jerusalem’ בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם (Lam 2:13, 15), and ‘daughter Edom’ בַּת־אֲדוֹם (Lam 4:21, 22).

In Amos 5:2, ‘virgin Israel’ בַּת־יִשְׂרָאֵל can be found.

In the Book of Micah, ‘daughter Zion’ בַּת־צִיּוֹן (Mi 1:13; 4:8, 10, 13) and ‘daughter Jerusalem’ בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם (Mi 4:8) are found.

In the Book of Zephaniah, ‘daughter Zion’ בַּת־צִיּוֹן (Zep 3:14) and ‘daughter Jerusalem’ בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם (Zep 3:14) are found.

In the Book of Zechariah, ‘daughter Zion’ בַּת־צִיּוֹן (Zec 2:10; 9:9), ‘daughter Jerusalem’ בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם (Zec 9:9), and ‘daughter Babylon’ בַּת־בָּבֶל (Zec 2:7) can be discovered.

Therefore, the frequency of the personified daughter expressed in the formula (בַּת or בַּת־ + geographical name or the collective people בַּת־עַמִּי ‘daughter my people’) in the Prophets can be seen as follows.

		Is	Jer	Lam	Am	Mi	Zep	Zec
1 st	(virgin) daughter Zion	6	3	8	-	4	1	2
2 nd	(virgin) daughter other nations	6	6	2	-	-	-	1
3 rd	(virgin) daughter my people	1	9	5	-	-	-	-
4 th	(virgin) daughter Jerusalem	1	-	2	-	1	1	1
5 th	virgin Israel	-	3	-	1	-	-	-
6 th	(virgin) daughter Judah	-	-	3	-	-	-	-

Table (i). Frequency of the Daughter Language in the Prophets³

² Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 61.

³ Dobbs-Allsopp counts at least fifty occurrences of the personified city or country as daughter in the genre of lament. See Fredrick W. Dobbs-Allsopp, “The Syntagma of Bat Followed by a Geographical Name in the Hebrew Bible: A Reconsideration of Its Meaning and Grammar,” *CBQ* 57 (1995): 454.

By viewing the above analysis, some questions arise. Why did Jeremiah and other prophets employ such formulaic expressions for personifying cities and nations as daughters in their time? Did the metaphors originate with Jeremiah? What literature had influenced the author of the Book of Jeremiah? What was the original context of the daughter metaphor? What function does the daughter metaphor play in its literary context? What are the similarities and differences between the portraits of Jeremiah and other literature? These are the questions that arise out of the above analysis.

Therefore, in the following, I will investigate whether the daughter language is invented by the biblical authors or whether it is inherited from or influenced by the Ancient Near Eastern traditions. In this study, I will argue that the biblical daughter language was influenced by motifs of the weeping goddesses in Ancient Near Eastern literature and the biblical authors appropriated the predecessor according to their own contexts. In this study, I will discuss the similarities and differences of the personification of nations and cities as daughter between the Ancient Near Eastern texts and the biblical texts focusing on the Jeremianic texts.

2.2. A Study of Daughter Language in the Setting of Ancient Near Eastern Literature

It is observed that most of the personification as daughters, that is expressed in the formula (בְּתֻלָּהּ or בְּתֻלָּהּ + geographical name or the collective people עַמִּי ‘my people’) in the Book of Jeremiah as well as in other Prophets, belong to the city laments genre.⁴ For example, in the historical destruction of Jerusalem, daughter Zion laments for the destruction of the city: “Woe to me, for I faint before murderers.” (Jer 4:31). Also in Jer 6:26, daughter my people is commanded to put on sackcloth, roll in ashes, and mourn bitterly for the coming of the destroyer. Likewise, Jer 46:11-12 mentions the laments of the virgin daughter Egypt for the destruction of her land.

In other biblical sources, the Book of Lamentations, for example, the personified city laments over the destruction of the city and its inhabitants. The text describes the way “She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks” (Lam 1:2). Once Judah was full of people but now the people of the city had been carried away to captivity so that the priests cry whilst the young girls and the roads mourn (Lam 1:4). For the destruction of her city, stronghold, tabernacle, palaces, and inhabitants, the personified daughter Judah laments (Lam 2).

It is observed that the genre of these biblical city laments is very similar to that of the Mesopotamian city laments. In fact, their imagery, characterization, subject matter, themes, mood, and motifs are very similar to each other.⁵ Similar city laments can be found in the Ancient Near Eastern Texts.

In the Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur, Ningal, the goddess of Ur, the daughter of Ningikuga, weeps/laments/mourns for her city that was mystically destroyed by the storm of Enlil, a chief deity, the Lord of wind. The entire city, the walls, the gates, the roads, the streets, the people are destroyed. Thus, in Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur 247, the lamentation of Ningal is expressed as ‘Alas, my city,’ ‘Alas, my house.’⁶

⁴ Dobbs-Allsopp, “Syntagma,” 454.

⁵ Dobbs-Allsopp, “Syntagma,” 454; Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 69; Karla G. Bohmbach, “Daughter,” 518-519.

⁶ Fredrick W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: A Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible*, *Biblica et Orientalia* 44 (Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico – Roma 1993), 75.

Likewise, the motif of the weeping goddess can be found in other Mesopotamian Laments such as Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur, the Eridu Lament, the Uruk Lament, and the Lamentation over the Destruction of Nippur.⁷ All these five lamentations have been widely assumed to be the materials composed shortly after the fall of Ur III to the Elamites dating ca 2025 BCE.⁸

In the Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur 115-118, the motif of the weeping goddess is observed. The text reads

The temple of Kis, Hursagkalama, was destroyed,
Zababa seized upon a strange path away from his beloved dwelling,
Mother Ba'u was weeping bitterly in her Urukug,
"Alas, the destroyed city, my destroyed temple!" bitterly she wails.⁹

In the Eridu Lament 5:5-9, the goddess of Eridu, Damgalnunna, laments for the destruction of her city. She cries uncontrollably so that she claws her breast and her eyes. She holds a dagger and a sword and she gashes herself with the dagger and the sword. The text reads as follows:

Because of this, Enki, king of the abzu, stayed outside his city as if it were an alien city. It bowed its neck down to the ground. Eridu's lady, holy Damgalnuna, the faithful cow, the compassionate one, clawed at her breast, clawed at her eyes. She uttered a frenzied cry. She held a dagger and a sword in her two hands -- they clashed together.¹⁰

In the Uruk Lament, there is no mention of the lament of the goddess Inanna but Margaret W. Green has noted that "somewhere in the broken kirugus (7-11) one can expect Inanna's private lament."¹¹

In the Lamentation over the Destruction of Nippur, the motif of the weeping goddess is absent but the divine queen Ninlil is mentioned as a 'great mother' as she pleads for the

⁷ Piotr Michalowski, *The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1989), partly translated into English by Samuel Noah Kramer in *ANET*, 611-19 and by Jacob Klein in *COS* 1.166: 535-39 (= first Ur Lament); Maurus Witzel, "Die Klage uber Ur," *Orientalia N.S.* 14 (1945): 185-234 and *Orientalia N.S.* 15 (1946): 46-63, translated by Kramer in *ANET*, 455-63 (= second Ur lament); Margaret W. Green, "The Eridu Lament," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 30/3 (1978): 127-67; Margaret W. Green, "The Uruk Lament," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104/2 (1984): 253-79; Samuel N. Kramer, "Lamentation over the Destruction of Nippur," *Acta Sumerologica* 13 (1991): 1-25. All are cited in Christl M. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 69.

⁸ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 69.

⁹ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 76.

¹⁰ Black, J. A., Cunningham, G., Robson, E. and Zólyomu, G. *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature*, Oxford University, 1998. Taken from <http://www.gatewaystobabylon.com/myths/texts/lamentations/lamenteridu.html>. (Accessed February 6, 2018)

¹¹ Margaret W. Green, "The Uruk Lament," 254. cited in Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 76.

restoration of the city to Enlil. As a consequence, Enlil is moved to mercy and compassion.¹² This imagery resembles the Jeremianic mother, Rachel, whose weeping is answered by Yahweh; Yahweh has mercy upon Rachel so that the exiles are restored accordingly. Jer 31:15-16 reads as follows:

¹⁵Thus says the LORD: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. ¹⁶Thus says the LORD: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the LORD: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; (NRSV)

Again, in the liturgical descendants of the city laments, the *balags* and *eršemmas*, one can find the weeping goddess who weeps for the loss of her husband and son. Dobbs-Allsopp has enumerated the occurrences of the figure of weeping goddess. According to Dobbs-Allsopp, it appears in “*balags* 42:68, 100 [OB]; 48:b+37 [FM]; 50:b+224-25, 262; 57.8:43; *eršemmas* 106:15-16; 159:25-26.”¹³

In fact, the mother language is not uncommon in the Mesopotamian texts. For example, one can find this mother language in the Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur where the weeping goddess Ningal is called ‘mother’ (254, 375, 378) and ‘queen’ (369, 373).¹⁴ Moreover, the title ‘mother’ is found in the Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur as Mother Bau (121), Ninisinna, the mother of the Land (140), and Mother Ninlil (144).¹⁵ Likewise, in the Eridu Lament, one can find the title of a goddess as ‘mother’ in 1:15.¹⁶

Since the motif of the weeping mother can be found elsewhere in Sumerian literatures, Kramer has suggested that this weeping mother imagery provides a prototype for Jeremianic Rachel who weeps for her lost children.¹⁷ Kramer’s proposal is quite plausible. As Maier has observed, the *balags* and *eršemmas* compositions have carried down the Mesopotamian ideas until the Seleucid times.¹⁸ According to Maier, “the spatial and temporal gap separating the Sumerian city-laments from the biblical laments is bridged by the *balag* and *eršemma*-compositions used from Old Babylonian to Seleucid times.”¹⁹

¹² Samuel Noah Kramer, “The Weeping Goddess: Sumerian Prototypes of the Mater Dolorosa,” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 46, No. 2. (Spring, 1983), 72.

¹³ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 82.

¹⁴ Samuel Noah Kramer, “A Sumerian Lamentation,” *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 455-463. Also see Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 70; Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 81-82.

¹⁵ Samuel Noah Kramer, “The Lamentation over the Destruction of Sumer and Ur,” *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. James B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 611-619.

¹⁶ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 81.

¹⁷ Samuel Noah Kramer, “BM 98396: A Sumerian Prototype of the Mater Dolorosa,” *Eretz Israel* 16 (1982): 141.

¹⁸ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 70.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

In addition to these resemblances, the similar interchange of the speaker of the texts is also noticed.²⁰ The speaker of the texts plays the roles of different persons within the texts. He changes his roles from the third person narrator to the second person addresser or to the first person utterer as the goddess. In the Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur, for example, the shift of the narrator's point of view to that of the city goddess Ningal is apparent.²¹ Likewise, in Jer 4:29-31, the prophet alternates his speeches from third person speaker (v. 29) to second person speaker (v. 30), and to first person speaker (v. 31) as follows:

29 At the noise of horseman and archer every town takes to flight; they enter thickets; they climb among rocks; all the towns are forsaken, and no one lives in them.

30 And you, O desolate one, what do you mean that you dress in crimson, that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with paint? In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life.

31 For I heard a cry as of a woman in labor, anguish as of one bringing forth her first child, the cry of daughter Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, "Woe is me! I am fainting before killers!" (NRSV)

In sum, it is observed that the biblical sources share a similar city lament genre with the Mesopotamian texts. Plausibly, the biblical authors might have been influenced by the Mesopotamian motif of the weeping goddess through the liturgical descendants of the city laments, the *balags* and *eršemmas*. In light of this consideration, one has an impression that the Mesopotamian city goddess stands as a prototype or precursor for the biblical personification of nations and cities as daughter and mother.²²

However, the monotheistic biblical writers do not straightforwardly employ the polytheistic female imagery although they adopt the motifs.²³ A transformation of the 'daughter' language is detected; the role of the weeping goddess is taken by the biblical nation or city herself personified as daughter (and mother). To see the biblical authors' appropriation of daughter language in their own context, I will explain it in terms of the biblical formulaic expression of daughter language.

2.3. A Study of Daughter Language and its Formulaic Expressions

Whenever the personified daughter is employed in the biblical text, the formula is observed to be בַּת־ or בַּת־יְהוָה + either the name of a city, land or people.²⁴ Therefore, the daughter language found in Jeremiah, as I have shown above, is daughter Zion, virgin daughter Zion, daughter Jerusalem, virgin daughter Jerusalem, daughter Judah, virgin daughter Judah,

²⁰ Dobbs-Allsopp, "Syntagma," 459; Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 69; W.C. Gwaltney Jr., "The Biblical Book of Lamentations in the Context of Near Eastern Lament Literature," *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method*, ed. William W. Hallo, James C. Moyer, Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 206. (pp. 191-211).

²¹ Dobbs-Allsopp, "Syntagma," 459-460.

²² Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 70.

²³ *Ibid.*, 70.

²⁴ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 61; Bohmbach, "Daughter," 518-519.

virgin Israel, daughter my people, virgin daughter my people, and virgin/daughter + other nations. Here, one can find that Zion, for example, is personified as a daughter; Zion is a daughter rather than Zion being a mother who has a daughter. However, as this formulaic expression is a construct chain *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* is usually translated into English as ‘daughter of Zion’ as if Zion had a daughter. This translation has been recently challenged by most scholars.²⁵ In fact, the translation of *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* has been a controversial one among scholars. However, by observing the literary context of the phrase *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* the translation ‘daughter Zion’ is opted to be an appropriate and accurate translation.²⁶

In the formulaic expression of the daughter personification, *בַּת־* or *בְּתוּלָה* is situated first in the construct chain state and it stands before the absolute noun – a city or land or people. Therefore, in the case of *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* for example, *בַּת־* is related to the absolute noun *צִיּוֹן*, the possessor, the genitive. Thus, it is tempting to translate *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* into English as ‘daughter of Zion’ as if Zion has a daughter. This translation results from an understanding that the function of the genitive rests on *צִיּוֹן* and *בַּת־* functions as the dependent in the construct chain. However, this should not be the single translation of this phrase especially for the daughter personification. In the case of *בְּתוּלָה בַּת־צִיּוֹן*, for example, *בַּת־* functions not only as the dependent in the construct chain with *צִיּוֹן* but also as the genitive of the preceding word *בְּתוּלָה*. Thus, the genitive *בַּת־* in the construction *בְּתוּלָה בַּת־צִיּוֹן* can be understood as being in apposition with *בְּתוּלָה*. As Karla G. Bohmbach has said “the genitive in a construct chain can express a wide variety of relationships to its preceding construct, such as possession, attribution, apposition, or explication.”²⁷ This observation challenges the wide and common translation of the phrase *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* as ‘daughter of Zion’ treating it as a possessive genitive in contrast to an appositional genitive. Many English Bibles including the KJV, the NEB, the RSV, the NIV, and the NAS have translated *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* as ‘daughter of Zion.’ However, one should notice that although the Hebrew personified daughter *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* is commonly translated into English as ‘daughter of Zion’ this is not an accurate translation for the personification figure *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* in the metaphorical literary contexts. In the metaphorical literary context, the phrase *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* indicates that the daughter represents the city and all the inhabitants of the city; “not just one individual daughter.”²⁸ Therefore, the relationship between the two words *בַּת־* and *צִיּוֹן* in the construct chain of *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* suggests translating the phrase in terms of an appositional genitive and not in terms of a possessive genitive. In other words, the two words *בַּת־* and *צִיּוֹן* refer to the same thing – Zion is a daughter. Since Zion does not have a daughter, the translation ‘daughter Zion’ for *בַּת־* and *צִיּוֹן* is to be preferred. The NRSV has correctly treated the phrase *בַּת־צִיּוֹן* by translating ‘daughter Zion’ (Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23).

In contrast to this view, Fredrick W. Dobbs-Allsopp has challenged this appositional genitive understanding and has defended the translation of the formulaic expression of daughter personification as ‘daughter of (whatever the geographical name is).’²⁹ According to him, both biblical and Akkadian formulaic expressions are construct chains. The biblical expression is ‘-

²⁵ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 171.

²⁶ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 61.

²⁷ Bohmbach, “Daughter,” 518-519.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 518.

²⁹ Dobbs-Allsopp, “Syntagma,” 451.

בַּת + geographical name' whereas the Akkadian expression is 'marat + geographical name.' Both expressions contain 'daughter' followed by a geographical name. Moreover, both share the lament genre.³⁰ In light of these similarities, Dobbs-Allsopp points out the titles of goddesses in the Akkadian texts that are related to geographical names. In the Sumero-Akkadian Hymn of Nana, the goddess Nana is given various titles such as 'daughter of Ur,' 'daughter of Eridu,' 'daughter of Kullab,' and 'daughter of Babylon.'³¹ Likewise, a Neo-Babylonian lament for Tammuz also contains divine epithets for the goddess Ishtar such as 'daughter of Uruk,' 'daughter of Akkad,' 'daughter of Larak,' and 'daughter of Nippur.'³² These female deities are related to the respective geographical location. Therefore, the formulaic expression 'marat + geographical name' can be interpreted as 'daughter of (geographical name),' a title of the goddess. In this respect, Dobbs-Allsopp argues that בַּת-צִיּוֹן is to be interpreted as 'daughter of Zion', a divine epithet that has its source in the epithets of goddesses related to a geographical location.³³

However, it seems to me that Dobbs-Allsopp overemphasizes the title of the goddesses related to geographical names. It should be noticed that while the Akkadian formulaic expression is attached to the name of a female deity such as 'Nana, daughter of Ur,' there is no evidence in the biblical formulaic expression that a goddess is associated with the formulaic expression 'daughter + geographical name.'³⁴ Moreover, Ur is a geographical location where Nana the female deity is venerated so that Nana and Ur can be seen as separate elements. In the biblical formulaic expression, however, no goddess is venerated on Zion. Therefore, the genitive Zion cannot represent the location of the goddess's shrine. Christl M. Maier has also argued against Dobbs-Allsopp's argumentation by saying "Ishtar may be called "daughter of Uruk" as the goddess can be distinguished from the city in which she is venerated, but Zion is identical with the space and thus cannot be called "daughter of Zion.""³⁵ Therefore, the phrase בַּת-צִיּוֹן should be understood as 'daughter Zion' in terms of appositional genitive.³⁶

In this regard, it is reasonable to assume that the biblical writers adapted the Mesopotamian female imagery into their own context. The figures of weeping goddesses are no longer found in the biblical texts though the motifs of weeping goddesses are found in the biblical texts as footprints of weeping goddesses. In fact, the biblical daughter and mother images have taken on the role of the weeping goddesses.

This appropriation and contextualization by the biblical authors were quite relevant in Jeremiah's time. In the setting of political upheaval in Jeremiah's time in Judah, real women comprising mothers and daughters led the mourning rites and public laments (Jer 6:26; 9:17-22). The role of these real women corresponded to the mystical laments made by the Mesopotamian city goddesses for the destruction of their cities in the joint attack by the

³⁰ Ibid., 453-455.

³¹ Ibid., 453.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 451-470.

³⁴ O'Connor, "Lamentations," *Women Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 179.

³⁵ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 62.

³⁶ See the NRSV translation for *Bat-ciyyôn*. The NRSV translate *Bat-ciyyôn* as 'daughter Zion.' For example, Jeremiah 4:31.

Elamites from the east and Amorites from the west.³⁷ As the goddesses play the role of mourners lamenting for their ruined cities, Jeremiah's personified daughters and mother weep for the destruction of their cities and people. In fact, 'daughter Zion' (Jer 4:31; 6:26), 'daughter my people' (Jer 8:19), 'virgin daughter Egypt' (Jer 46:11), 'daughter Dibon' (Jer 48:15-20), and daughters of Rabba (real women who live in Rabba; Jer 49:3) weep for the destruction of their cities and the inhabitants of the cities while mother Rachel weeps for her children (Jer 31:15). As the Mesopotamian goddesses' sufferings represent the pain of their people, the sufferings of the Jeremianic daughters symbolize the pain of the whole people of Judah: The sufferings of '(virgin) daughter my people' (Jer 4:11; 8:21, 22; 9:1, 7; 14:17) and 'daughter Zion' (Jer 8:19) represent the pain of the people. The vulnerabilities of 'daughter Zion' (Jer 6:2, 23), 'daughter Egypt' (Jer 46:19, 24), and 'daughter Babylon' (Jer 50:42; 51:33) represent the endangerment of their inhabitants.³⁸ The fear, pain, panic, anguish, and distress of a woman in childbirth is associated with the cry of the female images (e.g. Jer 4:31; 6:26).

The real daughters and mothers in Jeremiah's time were not unfamiliar with the idea of goddesses. They even took a leading role in worshipping the queen of heaven believing the queen of heaven was able to provide them with food, protection, and good fortune (Jer 7:18; 44:15-28). The identity of the queen of heaven is not clear but this reality reflects the influence of goddesses in Jeremiah's time. As O'Connor has suggested, this queen of heaven may be a hybrid of the Ancient Near Eastern goddesses.³⁹ Such polytheistic religion was no longer tolerated in the Deuteronomistic Jeremianic time and onward so that the author of the Book of Jeremiah and the rest may let their personified daughters swallow the identity of the weeping goddesses.

Therefore, the transformation of the 'daughter' language is detected; the role of weeping goddess is taken by the personified daughters and mother. For all the inhabitants of Judah the Jeremianic images of 'daughter Zion,' 'daughter my people,' and 'mother Rachel' serve two important roles. In the political domain, the daughters and mother serve as the mourners for the whole people of Judah; in the religious realm, they serve as the intercessors or mediators between Yahweh and the people. These are the roles of the Mesopotamian goddess as found in the above study.⁴⁰ As a consequence of the intercession of the personified daughters and mother in the Book of Jeremiah, the text describes Yahweh's promises of restoration to virgin Israel (Jer 31:4, 21) and to mother Rachel (Jer 31:15-17). However, unlike the Mesopotamian traditions, the Jeremianic texts describe the personified daughters as guilty; their apostasy and their negligence of Yahweh's commandments are described as the main cause of the divine punishment (Jer 9:1-24; 18:11-17).⁴¹

To recapitulate the above study, the Jeremianic daughter and mother images are found positively and negatively. On the positive side, the daughters and mother are found as the ones who wail for the whole people of Judah, the ones who intercede between Yahweh and the people, and the ones who channel the promise of the divine restoration to the people. On the negative side, daughters are blamed for their transgressions of the divine commandments. This

³⁷ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 92; O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 172.

³⁸ O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 170.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁰ Also see Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 69.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

accusation of the female images becomes stronger and even violent in the portraits of the bride, unfaithful wife, adulteress, and prostitute. Therefore, the focus will shift to the study of marriage imagery in the Book of Jeremiah.

2.4. A Study of Marriage Imagery in the Book of Jeremiah

In the first half of the Book of Jeremiah (chapters 1-25), one will find an ‘episode’ of the ‘fractured marriage’ between Yahweh and his wife.⁴² The episode develops from the ‘honeymoon vacation’ to the betrayal and divorce. Finally, following the accusation against the promiscuous wife, Yahweh’s harsh punishment upon the wife as the consequence of her betrayal ends with severe sexual violence against the woman. This marriage drama appears only in the first half of the Book of Jeremiah and it does not reappear in the second half of the Book of Jeremiah (chapters 26-52).⁴³

It is observed that this episode is set up under the umbrella of the main theme of Judah’s departure from Yahweh and the divine punishment as the consequence of her unfaithfulness to Yahweh (Jer 2-6; 11-17). In this episode, two parties are found as the essential characters of this marriage imagery. On the one hand, Yahweh is portrayed as the faithful husband. On the other hand, Israel and Judah are alternately presented as unfaithful wives⁴⁴ such as the once-loyal bride (Jer 2:2), unfaithful bride (Jer 2:20a; 3:1, 8, 11, 20), prostitute (Jer 2:20b; 3:2, 6-10), and Yahweh’s divorced wife (Jer 3:1-5; 4:16-18). Strikingly, Yahweh is seen as the main character of the drama. Throughout the drama, Yahweh speaks directly or through Jeremiah so that he has advantage over the female characters at the narrative text level. Yahweh speaks of his feelings and opinions so that the readers ally with him. The readers do not hear any words from the wife directly though at some points one hears them indirectly through Yahweh’s representation (cf. Jer 2:35). Yahweh’s wife is powerlessly portrayed as bride, unfaithful bride, promiscuous wife, nymphomaniac wife, and prostitute alike.⁴⁵

In Jer 2:1-2, Yahweh recounts the old love story of his bride Israel/Judah/Jerusalem.⁴⁶ The love of his bride was innocent and even holy to him in the past when they were in the

⁴² I borrow the words ‘episode’ and ‘fractured marriage’ from O’Connor. See Kathleen M. O’Connor, “A Family Comes Undone (Jeremiah 2:1-4:2),” *Review and Expositor*, 105, Spring 2008, 201-212.

⁴³ Angela Bauer has also noticed this point. She said that “unlike in the first half of the book (Jer. 1-25), female imagery does not have a prominent place at the beginning of the second half (Jer. 26-52). Indeed, traces will not figure distinctly again until later (Jer. 30-31), when the text moves to explore the realm of eschatology.” I would add that the marriage imagery does not occur at all in the second half of the Book of Jeremiah. See Angela Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah: A Feminist-Literary Reading* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1999), 123.

⁴⁴ Although one will notice Israel as male at first sight, one should also notice that the poetry alternately presents Israel as male (2:4-16; 2:26-32) and Yahweh’s wife (2:17-25; 2:33-3:5). In addressing Israel (2:17-25; 2:33-3:5), the gender of second person feminine singular ‘you’ is clear in Hebrew language while English language is limited in distinguishing the gender in this case. See Kathleen M. O’Connor, “A Family Comes Undone (Jeremiah 2:1-4:2),” 203.

⁴⁵ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

⁴⁶ O’Connor identifies the bride in Jer 2:2 as ‘Judah’ while Bauer understands it to be ‘Israel.’ I would add ‘Jerusalem’ in addition to ‘Judah’ and ‘Israel’ for the context of the story suggests identifying the bride as all three though the Hebrew masculine word קֹדֶשׁ for ‘holy’ constrains Israel to be male. Nevertheless, as O’Connor has observed, the three characters are to be understood as one female entity; O’Connor says, “The introductory poem (2:1-3) gives us a key for reading the divine speeches that follow. Wife Judah/Jerusalem

wilderness (Jer 2:3). Yahweh's longing and yearning for their past 'honeymoon vacation' is enforced with two kinds of 'love,' *חֶסֶד* and *אַהֲבָה*. As O'Connor has observed *חֶסֶד* refers to "covenant love, devotion, and faithfulness" while *אַהֲבָה* refers to "love between couples."⁴⁷ Jer 2:2 reads "I remember the *חֶסֶד* of your youth, your *אַהֲבָה* as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown." Although Yahweh remembers their original love, the time of good relationship is over because his bride forgot her faithful husband and followed after Baal who is seen as the lover of the promiscuous wife (Jer 2:4-8). Thus, Yahweh's longing for the love of his youth turns to accusation and to judgment (Jer 2:4-19). Yahweh's accusation even goes further to the descendants of his wife (Jer 2:9). Yahweh says that his promiscuous wife Israel has broken the bond (Jer 2:20a) and plays the whore "on every high hill and under every green tree" (Jer 2:20b) and "in the valley" (Jer 2:23) like "a restive young camel interlacing her tracks" (Jer 2:23) and like "a wild ass used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind" (Jer 2:24). Since the bride has forgotten her real identity (Jer 2:32), she is going to be put to shame publicly as punishment from Yahweh (Jer 2:35-37). Yahweh has divorced his nymphomaniac wife because she plays "the harlot with many lovers" (Jer 3:1, 8). Because of her harlotry, even the land is polluted (Jer 3:2); "Therefore the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come" (Jer 3:3). However, although Yahweh has divorced the nymphomaniac wife, he still expects her return (Jer 3:1, 5, 7).

In Jer 3:7-8, Yahweh turns his accusation to wife Judah by presenting her as the 'false sister' of wife Israel (Jer 3:7), the one who plays the harlot like her sister Israel (Jer 3:8), and the one who commits adultery "with stone and tree" (Jer 3:9). Because of her promiscuity, the land is polluted (Jer 3:9). Wife Judah is even worse than her sister Israel (Jer 3:11). Wife Judah plays the harlot and does not return to her husband Yahweh (Jer 3:10). The words of Yahweh assert that he is merciful and his anger is not forever (Jer 3:12). Therefore, faithless Israel and Judah are invited to return to Yahweh (Jer 3:12ff). The readers do not hear the answer of the faithless Israel and Judah. A severe sexual punishment upon the wife is found in Jer 13.

In Jer 13, one can find Yahweh's cruel and violent punishment to the nation personified as a woman. In Jer 13:22 and 13:26, the texts declare that Yahweh Himself rapes the female nation for the greatness of her sin.⁴⁸ Jer 13:22 (NRSV) reads "it is for the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are lifted up, and you are violated."

Recent scholars' translations of this passage are more graphic.⁴⁹ For example, J. Cheryl Exum's translation of this text highlights more about the female body. She translates Jer 13:22 as follows: "it is for the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are lifted up, and your genitals are treated violently."⁵⁰ Since the Hebrew word *עֲקָבֶיךָ* can be a euphemism for genitals, Exum's

and male Israel are one national entity. Setting them next to one another, the poem invites us to blend them, to read their stories as one. What God says about male Israel applies to female Judah and vice-versa, a point God confirms later in the drama (3:20). They are alike; both were "sacred to the LORD," and both had a long relationship with God. Surely, says this poem, God loved this nation from of old, even if now that love is over." See O'Connor, "A Family Comes Undone (Jeremiah 2:1-4:2)," 204; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 16.

⁴⁷ O'Connor, "A Family Comes Undone (Jeremiah 2:1-4:2)," 211.

⁴⁸ O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 172.

⁴⁹ Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 107-108; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 101; Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 414; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 303.

⁵⁰ Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*, 107.

translation is not unacceptable. The context also supports the exposure of a private shame. This cruel language reappears in Jer 13:26. Yahweh subjectively declares to the female nation through the mouthpiece of Jeremiah and through the literary text that “I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen” (Jer 13:26 NRSV). Again, Exum translates this passage as “And I too will lift up your skirts over your face, and your genitals will be seen” so that she understands that Yahweh himself participates in rape.⁵¹ At the end of Jer 13, the texts justify that the female nation deserves Yahweh’s punishment for her ‘adulteries,’ ‘lustful neighings,’ and the ‘lewdness’ of her prostitution on the hills and in the fields. No matter what the texts communicate to the readers, Exum argues that the genitals of a personified naked woman have been exposed to the readers. These images, in her opinion, have a different effect on men and women. Female readers will automatically feel sorry for the exposed woman. As for male readers, by using these images the author takes for granted that, besides the intended rhetorical effect, they also become excited by the imagery of a naked woman. The female body has been abused by Yahweh in the text and by the readers outside the text. Therefore, Exum reasonably labels such texts as ‘prophetic pornography.’⁵² Although the term ‘pornography’ may be anathema to some contemporary scholars and readers, the truth of the texts reflects that a male performs sexual violence on a female. This may be a reflection of the cultural reality of the prophet’s time.

This cultural reality of a male’s sexual violence against a female is found again in Jer 20:7 where the text describes Yahweh’s overpowering of Jeremiah by means of rape.⁵³ The NRSV reads Jer 20:7 as follows:

O LORD, you have enticed me בַּתְּהִינִי, and I was enticed וְנִאֲפַחְתָּ; you have overpowered me הִזְקַתְתָּנִי, and you have prevailed וַתִּתְקַבֵּל. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me.

Since the text uses terms with forceful sexual connotations (cf. Ex 22:16; Dt 22:25; and 2 Sm 13:11-14), DeBauer has plausibly translated בַּתְּהִינִי as “you-seduced-me” and הִזְקַתְתָּנִי as “you-raped-me/overpowered-me.”⁵⁴ According to Bauer, the translation of Jer 20:7 will be as follows:

You seduced me, YHWH, and I was seduced;
 You raped me/overpowered me, and you prevailed.
 I have become a laughingstock all the day [long],

⁵¹ Ibid., 108, 101-128.

⁵² Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*: 124.

⁵³ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*: 113.

⁵⁴ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*: 114. While some scholars think this translation is a possible one, scholars like John McLean Berridge et al agree this translation. See John McLean Berridge, *Prophet, People, and the Word of Yahweh: An Examination of Form and Content in the Proclamation of the Prophet Jeremiah*, Basel Studies of Theology 4 (Zurich: EVZ, 1970), 151-55; James L. Crenshaw, “Seduction and Rape: The Confessions of Jeremiah,” *A Whirlpool of Torment* (OBT 12; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 38-39; Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 552-53; William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, vol. 1*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 470; Walter Brueggemann, *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down*, 174.

All of it mocks me.⁵⁵

These literary creations of sexual violence against women, the pain and shame of literary women, and the sufferings of real women are quite relevant in times of war, and in the time of the Babylonian invasions in Jeremiah's time. The marriage imagery also reflects the realities of women in patriarchal society – males are superior and females are inferior. As a consequence, it leaves the ideology of males' dominion over females that unavoidably irritates our contemporary readers, especially feminist readers. In any case, the male's desire to control the female and the female's instinctual power of independence are also observed.

It is noticed that Jeremiah is not the only prophet who uses such marriage imagery in describing the relation between Yahweh and his people. In fact, one can find similar portraits in Isaiah (50:1-3; 54:1-10), Ezekiel (16, 23), and Hosea (1-3), for instance. Therefore, scholars assume that there had been a model for the biblical marriage imagery. Then, the immediate question arises: what is the background model of this marriage imagery? In order to search for a possible ancient model for biblical marriage imagery, the focus will shift to the study of the origin of biblical marriage imagery in the broader cultural environment. In the following study, I will propose that the Hittite vassal treaty and Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths serve as the model for biblical marriage imagery.

2.5. A Study of the Origin of Biblical Marriage Imagery in the Setting of the Ancient Near East

Most scholars agree in tracing the origin of biblical marriage metaphor to the eighth century prophet Hosea because Hosea is the first biblical author who employs the marriage metaphor in describing the relationship between Yahweh and his people as husband and wife.⁵⁶ In relation to this study, it is observed that Jeremiah borrows Hosea's words and ideas. In fact, as William L. Holladay has observed, there are many affinities, similarities, quotations, and parallels between the Books of Hosea and Jeremiah.⁵⁷ Chronologically, it is reasonable to assume that Jeremiah borrows words and ideas from Hosea. In fact, historically, Hosea was active in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in 750-725 BCE, before the Assyrians' invasion in 721 BCE, whereas Jeremiah was active in the Southern Kingdom (Judah) 626-582 BCE, before and after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians.⁵⁸ Therefore, it is appropriate to begin this study from the work of Hosea.

Many scholars believe that Hosea and his contemporary Israelites were influenced by the Canaanite religion as they did not live in isolation. Among these scholars, Hans Walter Wolff has asserted that Hosea's portrait of Yahweh and Israel as husband and wife was modeled

⁵⁵ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*: 114.

⁵⁶ Gale A. Yee, "Hosea," *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 195; Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 98; Gary Hall, "Origin of the Marriage Metaphor," *Hebrew Studies* 23 (1982): 169-171; William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 45-47.

⁵⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 45-47; Bernhard W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 181.

⁵⁸ Yee, "Hosea," 169-170.

after the Canaanite sacred marriage cult.⁵⁹ In Canaanite religion, according to Wolff, the rain god Baal is engaged in a sexual relationship with the earth goddess to ensure the fertility of nature. To imitate this sacred marriage of Baal and the earth goddess and to ensure their fertility, Wolff argues, every real female engaged in one act of cultic intercourse at a sanctuary before she married. Thus, Hosea's wife Gomer engaged in one act of sexual intercourse at a local shrine dedicated to the fertility god Baal.⁶⁰ As the evidence of the ritual defloration of virgins in Canaanite religion, Wolff cites the text from Greek writer Herodotus that mentions the cultic prostitution of the Babylonian women. Wolff assumes that Hosea replaces Baal and Anat with Yahweh and Israel so that the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel comes to be described in terms of the husband and wife relationship. In addition, Wolff asserts that Hosea uses the marriage imagery to combat his contemporaries who are engaged in the Canaanite sexual cult and prostitution.⁶¹

Wolff's argumentation is disputed by contemporary scholars. For example, Elaine June Adler, Richt Abma, Gale A. Yee, and Brad E. Kelle alike have properly contested Wolff's sacred marriage model. The reasons are: First, there is no evidence in the texts from Ugarit that the earth goddess ever existed and that Baal had formed a couple with that alleged earth goddess.⁶² Second, the alleged sacred marriage cult is not described in the Ras Shamara tablets.⁶³ Third, Wolff's evidence of the fifth century BCE text, about Babylon not Canaan, from Herodotus is unreasonable and unreliable for it is a much later work.⁶⁴ Finally, Wolff's interpretation of זָנוּיָהּ (Hos 1:2; 2:4) as a real once-in-a-lifetime prostitute like Gomer is problematic because it can also metaphorically denote 'breaking away from an existing relationship' especially in the relationship between Yahweh and Israel.⁶⁵ Therefore, the proposal of the alleged sacred marriage model for the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is unconvincing.

Relatively recently, scholars came to refer to the inscriptions, paintings, and drawings from Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom to support the view of biblical marriage imagery.⁶⁶ The inscription of Khirbet el-Qom reads as follows:

⁵⁹ Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea* (BKAT) (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961), xviii-xix. Richt Abma's discussion on this issue can be found in Richt Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 14-15.

⁶⁰ Wolff, *Hosea*, 14-15; Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2, Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective*, Academia Biblica Series (Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 132.

⁶¹ Wolff, *Hosea*, 13-15; discussed in Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 14-15.

⁶² Elaine June Adler, *The Background for the Metaphor of Covenant as Marriage in the Hebrew Bible* (Berkeley: University of California, 1990), 131-144; cited in Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 15.

⁶³ Yee, "Hosea," 196.

⁶⁴ Adler, *The Background for the Metaphor of Covenant as Marriage in the Hebrew Bible*, 178-188; cited in Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 15; Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2, Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective*, 133.

⁶⁵ Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 15, 137-139.

⁶⁶ Baruch Margalit, 'The Meaning and Significance of Asherah,' *Vetus Testamentum* XL, 3 (1990), 264-297; Saul Mitchell Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*, Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 34 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). The finds of Kuntillet 'Ajrud are dated to the first half of the eighth century BCE and the inscription of Khirbet el-Qom is dated to the second half of the eighth century BCE. See Othmar Keel and Christoph Uelinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, Translated by Allan W. Mahnke (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 210-248. Keel does not see the inscriptions and the drawings as the evidences for the biblical marriage imagery.

Uriyahu the rich wrote it:
 Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh
 from his enemies by his asherah he has saved him!⁶⁷

Since the elements in the find include the phrase ‘Yahweh ... and his asherah’ and the drawing of a couple of male and female figures, many scholars have claimed that Yahweh was believed to have a consort deity. For example, Baruch Margalit relates the inscriptions to the biblical marriage imagery by claiming that the eighth-century prophet Hosea had invented the idea of Israel as Yahweh’s wife to transform the wide spread ‘catch-phrase’ ‘Yahweh and asherah.’⁶⁸ According to Margalit,

The idea of Israel as YHWH's wife, first encountered in the writings of Hosea in the 8th century, may have originated as a polemical response to the pervasive catch-phrase *yhwh w'srTh* of contemporary Hebrew inscriptions, reflecting a religious syncretism which threatened to transform Yahwism into a *bona fide* Canaanite fertility cult centering on the storm-god Baal and his consort Astarte.⁶⁹

Before Margalit makes this claim, Saul Mitchell Olyan also has argued that Asherah is Yahweh’s consort.⁷⁰ Olyan not only refers to the Kuntillet ‘Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom as evidence but also enumerates biblical references. According to him,

- 1) 1 Kgs 16:32-33 attests that the Asherah is not associated with Baal; Ahab did not place the Asherah in the temple of Baal. In the syntax, Hebrew does not indicate the association of Baal and Asherah.
- 2) 2 Kgs 9-10 does not mention the destruction of the Asherah when Jehu destroyed the Baal temple. If the Asherah was assumed to be an illegitimate cult, it would have been destroyed at the same time.
- 3) 2 Kgs 23:15 shows that the Asherah is associated with Yahweh in the Bethel temple.
- 4) Asa cuts down the Asherah (1 Kgs 15:12-13). Hezekiah removes the Asherah (2 Kgs 18:4). Josiah destroys the Asherah (2 Kgs 23:14). Apart from these cultic reforms the Asherah seems to have a role in the cult of Yahweh in Jerusalem and various places.
- 5) Hosea did not mention the Asherah when he opposed Baal. Amos also did not oppose the Asherah. This means that the Asherah was a legitimate cult symbol from an early stage.

According to Olyan, both biblical and extra-biblical evidence suggest that the asherah, the symbol of the goddess Asherah, was a legitimate symbol in Yahweh’s cult and the polemic against Asherah is the innovation of the Deuteronomistic school.

⁶⁷ J.M. Hadley, ‘The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription,’ *Vetus Testamentum* 37, 3 (1987), 50-62 (51).

⁶⁸ Margalit, ‘The Meaning and Significance of Asherah,’ 264-297.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁷⁰ Olyan, *Asherah and the Cult of Yahweh in Israel*.

Olyan's argument that Yahweh had a consort deity, namely Asherah, is problematic for biblical marriage imagery. In fact, nowhere is it mentioned that Asherah is regarded as Yahweh's spouse.⁷¹ The texts that Olyan refers to in order to show that Asherah is Yahweh's consort only show Asherah as an object, not as Yahweh's spouse.⁷²

The claim of both Olyan and Margalit that the inscriptions of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom are the evidence of biblical marriage imagery is unconvincing because the figures in the painting are not divine deities. As Othmar Keel has shown, the inscription and the painting must be interpreted separately.⁷³ The illustration of the inscriptions and painting found on the jar A from Kuntillet 'Ajrud is shown below.

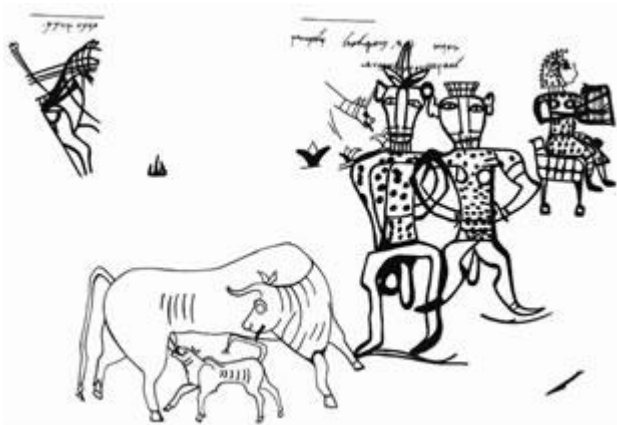


Figure 1. Kuntillet 'Ajrud - Pithos A⁷⁴

Keel's translation for the inscription reads as follows:⁷⁵

Line 1: Thus says: Say to Yehallelel, Yo'asa and... I bless you
Line 2: To Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah

The figures in the painting are (from left to right) are a harnessed horse, a lotus tree, a sucking cow with calf, an erect caprid, two Bes figures, and a seated female lyre player. According to Keel,

- Bes is not in the significant deity group but in the demon group.
- The female like Bes is not Beset; she has no shoulder-lock hair style. There is no custom to mention both Bes and Beset together. The figures are not a heterosexual pair; rather, masculine and bisexual-feminized.
- Linking of the figures hand in hand was drawn later.
- Bes never represents Yahweh nor Asherah.
- The lyre player is not Asherah because she has no goddess features.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 18.

⁷² Keel and Uelinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 210-248.

⁷³ Ibid., 217, 240. Ziony Zevit also agrees with Keel to interpret separately the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscription and the drawing. See Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 358-405.

⁷⁴ Keel and Uelinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, 213, illustration no. 220.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 225-226.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 217-224.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the inscriptions and paintings do not support the view of asherah as Yahweh's consort. The inscriptions and paintings also do not support the understanding of Hosea's portrait of Yahweh and his wife Israel where the faithfulness, unfaithfulness, blessing, and punishment are found as the essential elements. Jer 17:2 even asserts that Asherah/Asherim are the enemies of Yahweh.

One should notice the uniqueness of the prophetic marriage imagery where Yahweh's wife is not a singular goddess; rather, the wife is a personified collective nation – Israel/Judah/Jerusalem.⁷⁷ This feature of the biblical marriage imagery is indeed analogous to the Hittite vassal treaties and the Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths.⁷⁸

It is noteworthy that in describing the exclusive relationship between Yahweh and Israel, Hosea also employs the idea of covenant בְּרִית (Hos 8:1ff).⁷⁹ In the literary context of Hos 8, Israel's idolatry rather than faithfulness to Yahweh is described as the transgression of Yahweh's law. As the Israelites make idols for themselves with their silver and gold, the text declares that the destruction of their city will follow as the consequent of the transgression of Yahweh's law. Most scholars believe that this biblical idea of conditional law is the legacy of Hittite vassal treaties (fourteenth to thirteenth century BCE) and Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths (ninth to eighth century BCE).⁸⁰

In fact, one can find many similarities between the extra-biblical political treaties and biblical covenant while some differences are also observed. In the Hittite vassal treaties, six component parts are observed.⁸¹ First, the covenant maker, the suzerain, introduces himself by stating his name, titles, and sovereignty. Second, a review of previous relations of the parties follows. The review stresses the suzerain's beneficent action that should elicit vassals' faithfulness to the suzerain with gratitude. Third, the general stipulations that summarize the specific stipulations are set up. Fourth, specific stipulations are set up between the parties. Fifth, the gods of heaven and earth are invoked to witness the treaty. Finally, the treaty is concluded with the sanctions of blessing and cursing: blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience.

Some resemblances to these real political treaties are found in the biblical idea of covenant. Especially, the covenant pattern of the so-called Mosaic covenant found in the Book of Deuteronomy (also see Ex 19-34; Jo 24) is very similar to that of the suzerainty treaty pattern mentioned above.⁸² In the Mosaic covenant, Yahweh (sovereign) makes a covenant with Israel

⁷⁷ Adler, *The Background for the Metaphor of Covenant as Marriage in the Hebrew Bible*, 2-7; Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 23.

⁷⁸ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 98; Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology*, 142-153; George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17/3 (1954), 56ff, 50-76; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

⁷⁹ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 98.

⁸⁰ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 98; Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology*, 142-153; George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," 56ff, 50-76; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*; F. Rachel Magdalene, "Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses and the Ultimate Texts of Terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophet Corpus," *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 326-352, (see 341-346).

⁸¹ Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology*, 142; Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 23; George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," 56ff, 50-76.

⁸² Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology*, 142-152; Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 23; Moshe Weinfeld, "Covenant," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*,

(a group of slaves) based on certain stipulations and sanctioned by blessings and curses. Yahweh has an obligation to save his people and Israel has an obligation to be exclusively faithful to Yahweh alone. As long as Israel keeps the stipulations or laws of Yahweh, she will benefit from blessing from Yahweh; when Israel breaks the covenant, however, she will face disastrous calamities as the consequence of the stipulations. The following pattern of the Book of Deuteronomy reflects the pattern of the Hittite vassal treaties.⁸³

Dt 1:1-5 Preamble

Dt 1:6-4:49 Historical review

Dt 5:1-11:32 General stipulations

Dt 12:1-26:19 Specific stipulations

Dt 27:1-30:20 Sanctions of Blessing and Cursing

Dt 30:19; 31:19; 32:1-43 Witness

Moshe Weinfeld has pointed out the different length of the curse formulas between the Hittite and Neo-Assyrian treaties and has argued that the biblical covenant is much more similar to that of Neo-Assyrian treaties.⁸⁴ According to him, the Hittite vassal treaties use a short and generalized curse formula whereas the Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths use a long and elaborated curse formula. As he observes the long and elaborated curse formula in the Book of Deuteronomy, he argues that the biblical covenant is based on the Neo-Assyrian treaties although he notices the affinities of the major elements of the Hittite treaties in the Book of Deuteronomy. In contrast to this view, other scholars, like Mendenhall, have pointed out the absence of the historical review in the Neo-Assyrian treaties whereas the historical review is one of the major elements in the Hittite vassal treaties.⁸⁵ Since the Book of Deuteronomy contains the historical review, Mendenhall argues the biblical covenant is based on the Hittite vassal treaties.

It is noticed that the Book of Deuteronomy itself attests both phenomena. While the pattern of the biblical covenant is similar to that of Hittite vassal treaties, it contains the long and elaborated curse formula pattern of the Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths. In other words, the biblical covenant reflects the realities of both Hittite and Neo-Assyrian treaties. Some similar ideas between the Hittite vassal treaties and the Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths are observed as follows:

- The covenant is made by two parties: the suzerain and the vassal.
- The suzerain is superior and the vassal is inferior.
- The suzerain is responsible for the vassals' security whereas the vassals are responsible to be exclusively faithful to the suzerain.
- The covenant is a conditional one. As long as the vassals are faithful to the stipulations of the suzerain, they will be under the protection of the suzerain.

ed. Geoffrey Wigoder et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 5:1019; George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," 56ff, 50-76.

⁸³ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 24.

⁸⁴ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 59-157.

⁸⁵ George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," 56ff, 50-76.

However, if the vassals are unfaithful to the suzerain, the curse will fall upon the vassals as a consequence of the violation of the stipulations.

These ideas seem to be adapted by the biblical authors to describe the exclusive relation between Yahweh and Israel.⁸⁶ Scholars have observed ‘literal and thematic parallels’ between the curses mentioned in Dt 28:15-68 and those in such political treaties.⁸⁷ The ancient curses include such things as the betrayer of the treaty becoming a prostitute,⁸⁸ the wives of the betrayer being stripped like a prostitute,⁸⁹ and the rape of the wives by the enemy.⁹⁰ These are quite noticeable curses in relation with this study.⁹¹ With this notion of curses, the Deuteronomistic redactor of the Book of Jeremiah may describe the sexual abuse of the female partner of Yahweh as a consequence of the breach of the relationship. Plausibly, with the notion of the correlations between the covenant idea and human bond of marriage, the prophets may describe the relationship between Yahweh and Israel by means of marriage imagery and by means of the covenant.

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the Hittite vassal treaties and Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths serve as a ‘model’ for the biblical idea of covenant.⁹² This is evident in the study of Jer 13:20-27. In the literary and theological context of the Sinai covenant-curse (Jer 11-17), Jeremiah 13:20-27 describes Yahweh’s sexual violence against the personified woman Jerusalem as the consequence of the breach of the relationship.⁹³

Summary

In this chapter, I have analyzed two domains – daughter and mother imagery, and marriage imagery. In the study of daughter language, I observed that the personified daughters are described in the formulaic expression: (בַּת־ or בְּתוּלַת בַּת־ + geographical name or the collective people עַמִּי ‘my people’). This kind of expression is found in other prophetic literature and also in Ancient Near Eastern literature. As a result, it is observed that the biblical daughter language was influenced by the motif of the weeping goddesses of Ancient Near Eastern literature and that Jeremiah appropriated the precursor according to his own context. Thus, the

⁸⁶ Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 23.

⁸⁷ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 98. Also see Delbert R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, BibOr 16 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964), 43-79, 58-60, 63; F. Rachel Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curse and the Ultimate Texts of Terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophetic Corpus,” 326-65, especially 341-346.

⁸⁸ Erica Reiner, “Treaty Between Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati’ilu of Arpad,” *The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 533, (532-533).

⁸⁹ Franz Rosenthal, “The Treaty between Ktk and Arpad,” *The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 660, (659-661); Brent A. Strawn, “Treaty of Ktk and Arpad,” *The Ancient Near East: Historical Sources in Translation*, ed. Mark William Chavalas (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 302, (299-305); Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 98.

⁹⁰ Erica Reiner, “The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon,” *The Ancient Near East: Supplementary Texts and Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 538, (534-541).

⁹¹ Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 98;

⁹² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁹³ Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, 59-60.

pain and suffering of the daughters and the mother can represent the pain and suffering of the people. Moreover, the personified daughters and the mother serve as the mediator between Yahweh and his people. However, on the dark side, the personified daughters are accused of transgressing Yahweh's commandments. In the study of marriage imagery, the accusation of the female images is observed to be severe and even violent. Sexual violence is apparently found. Such description of sexual violence against women is possibly due to the prophet's notion of the curse sanctions of the covenant. Thus, the Hittite vassal treaties and the Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths are seen as the model for the biblical marriage imagery.

In this Chapter, I have not dealt with a question why Israel, daughter my people, and other daughters (+ geographical names) are called "virgin." This will be found in Chapter 3 that the purpose of use of "virgin" in addition to Israel/Judah/Zion/Jerusalem etc. is beyond the innocent Hebrew linguistic usage; it is to be sexually attractive, desirable and available, and finally to be abused by Yahweh.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ See Chapter 3, Section 3.3. of this dissertation. "The Roles and Functions of the Female Imagery in Jeremiah 13:20-27." See Pamela Gordon and Harold C. Washington, "Rape as a Military Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible," *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 308-325. T. Drorah Setel has characterized three distinguish features of pornography. According to her, the act is defined as pornography if "(1) female sexuality is depicted as negative in relationship to a positive and neutral male standard; (2) women are degraded and publicly humiliated; and (3) female sexuality is portrayed as an object of male possession and control, which includes the depiction of women as analogous to nature in general and the land in particular, especially with regard to imagery of conquest and domination." See T. Drorah Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 87. Also see Chapter 4 on pages 73-74.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF FEMALE IMAGERY IN JEREMIAH 13:20-27

Introduction

As it is mentioned in the previous chapter, Jer 13:20-27 is a literary unit where one finds a scene of sexual abuse – Yahweh’s sexual abuse on personified female Jerusalem. Since the female is disrobed publicly and her sexual organs are treated violently, many contemporary feminist scholars like Exum have labeled such texts as “prophetic pornography.”¹ As a consequence, some feminist scholars like Brenner would like to reject such texts as hopelessly negative.² According to Brenner, “One way of dealing with pornoprophetic texts is to expose and then reject them.”³ In contrast to this wing, some female scholars like Abma have argued against the feminist critique of pornography in the Prophets.⁴ According to Abma, “biblical texts have their origin in a specific historical context”⁵ so that “the text does not conform to modern standards with respect to gender.”⁶ Abma argues that concentrating only on the gender issue can lead an interpreter to see the text as prophetic pornography. Therefore, Abma labels such interpretation as “a one-sided and incomplete sort of interpretation.”⁷ Abma points out the plurality of meanings constituted in the elements of the texts and the possibilities of various interpretation levels. Therefore, Abma suggests that one should not think the focus on gender issue is the “only” way of interpretation; rather, one should read a text on various levels of interpretation.⁸ Abma’s argumentation is much appreciated but she herself stays on the textual level and stays away from the depiction of the unbalanced sexuality of the male and the female in the texts. Therefore, her interpretation of the Jeremianic text is also seen as being incomplete.

In order to avoid such one-sided interpretation, this study will pay attention to three different layers – literary and theological context, embedded gender ideology, and historical background of the text. Indeed, in order to find the roles and functions of female imagery in Jer 13:20-27, one should not ignore the literary and theological context of the pericope (Jer 11-17) because the texts are not randomly collected; rather, they are arranged for a theological purpose as it has been shown in the chapter 1 of this dissertation. Since the pericope is situated in the macro-structural unit of Jer 11-17, I will first analyze the structural and theological arrangement of Jer 11-17. By observing the literary arrangement, catchwords, and thematic connections of the materials in this macro-structural unit,⁹ I will find out the literary purpose of the macro-

¹ Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 101-128.

² Brenner, “Pornoprophetics Revisited,” 63-86.

³ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴ Abma, *Bonds of Love*, 26-31.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Thiel and O’Connor have also noticed the catchwords and thematic connections of Jeremiah 11-20 but O’Connor does not agree with Thiel in structural categorizations because Thiel’s categorizations are “vague

structural unit. I will argue that the purpose of this unit is to present the people's rejection of Yahweh's words stipulated in the covenant and the consequent curse upon the people. Secondly, I will analyze the selected text (Jer 13:20-27), its structure, and its literary unity. Finally, I will find out the roles and functions of female imagery in Jer 13:20-27.

3.1. Analysis of the Literary and Theological Context of Jeremiah 13:20-27

As it has been mentioned in the Chapter 1 of this dissertation, Jer 13:20-27 is located in the macro-structural unit of the dismantling of covenant ideology, Jer 11-17.

The prophetic general introduction formula *הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֵלֶי-יְרֵמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה* "The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh" appears in Jer 13:1 and 18:1 which demarcate the boundaries of the macro-structural unit of the dismantling of covenant ideology (Jer 11-17).

Following the general introduction formula *הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֵלֶי-יְרֵמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה* "The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh," the prose sermon (11:1-17)¹⁰ describes the prophet's pronouncement of the words of the Sinai covenant *בְּרִית* (11:2, 6), the Deuteronomic curse *אָרָר* upon those people of Judah who refuse to heed *שָׁמַע* the words of covenant (11:3), the relationship between obedience *שָׁמַע* and the promised land *אֶרֶץ* flowing with milk and honey (11:4-5), the prophet's warning to obey *שָׁמַע* Yahweh's covenantal commandment (11:6-7), the people's disobedience *שָׁמַעוּ* of the words of the covenant (11:8), the people's apostasy (iniquities *עֲוֹן*) and the broken covenant (11:9-10), and inescapable Yahweh's judgment coming as disaster *רָעָה*¹² (11:11-17). All these elements are formed together as the literary unit of the curse of the covenant and which serves as the introduction to the whole macro-structural unit (Jer 11-17). The absence of "the blessing" emphatically underscores "the curse" of the covenant.¹³

Following the introduction of the people's failure in keeping the covenant and the consequent curse upon the people, the so-called first confession of Jeremiah appears in 11:18-12:6. The confession describes the wickedness of the people who plan to kill the prophet as they cannot tolerate the prophetic words (11:18-19; 12:4), the treachery of the people (12:1-6), the rejection of the prophet and the prophetic words (11:19), the prophet's prayer for divine

and applied without respect for the literary forms present in the passages." See O'Connor, *The Confession of Jeremiah*, 116-117, 128ff; Winfried Thiel, *Die Deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 1-25*, Two volumes, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 41 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1971), I, 287. Rudolph also observes thematic connections in Jeremiah 1-25. In addition to this observation of thematic arrangement of Jeremiah 1-25, Rudolph also observes the arrangement of Jeremiah 1-25 as the chronological arrangement: 1-6 in Josiah's reign, 7-20 in Jehoiakim's time, 21-24 in the later period, 25 in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. See Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, Handbuch zum Alten Testament, XIX-XX. Also see William Lee Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20* (London: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1976), 125-174.

¹⁰ Stulman and Bauer treat Jeremiah 11:1-17 as the introduction unit whereas Holladay and O'Connor treat 11:1-14 and 11:15-17 as separate units. See Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 44; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 100; Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, 160-162; O'Connor, *The Confession of Jeremiah*, 131-132.

¹¹ The people's disobedience *לֹא שָׁמַע* occurs 4 times in Jeremiah 11-17 appearing in 11:8; 12:17; 13:11; and 17:27. Cf. Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 45.

¹² Disaster *רָעָה* appears five times in Jeremiah 11:11-17. See 11:11, 12, 14, 17 twice. Cf. Stulman, *Order amid Chaos*, 44.

¹³ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 131.

justice מִשְׁפָּט and vengeance נִקְמָה (11:20; 12:1),¹⁴ and Yahweh's decision to bring punishment upon the people (11:22-23). The confession reports that even the beasts and birds are swept away due to the presence of the wicked רע in the land (12:4). All the elements in this confession form together a unit showing the people's "perversity toward the prophet and his God" which explains the reason why Yahweh's punishment has to fall upon the wicked people.¹⁵ Since the divine judgment has not been executed, Jeremiah himself struggles with Yahweh's justice by asking questions: "Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease? (12:1).

To Jeremiah's questions, Yahweh immediately responds in the subsequent poem (12:7-13). Yahweh asserts that He Himself hates his people because of their attitude of hostility. Yahweh even compares the people with wild beasts (12:7-9). Jer 12:8 (NAU) reads "My inheritance has become to Me Like a lion in the forest; She has roared against Me; Therefore, I have come to hate her." Yahweh also blames the shepherds (leaders) for the whole land has been made desolate spiritually and physically (12:10-11). As a consequence, the divine destruction falls upon the people and the land (12:12-13). Hence, the unit repeats the preceding motif of destruction of the people.

The poetic utterance of destruction for the people and the land is followed by a prose narrative (12:14-17) that expands Yahweh's destruction from the wicked רע Israelite people to the wicked רע in neighboring countries (12:14). Yahweh's divine judgment on Judah and the neighboring countries is composed in terms of Deuteronomic covenant theology; "IF" the people do not listen יִשְׁמְעוּ לֹא יְהוָה to the words of Yahweh, they will be uprooted; "IF" the uprooted return to Yahweh, they will be built up בָּנָה. Thus, the conditional Deuteronomic covenant theology שָׁמַע resounds in this unit. Jer 12:16-17 reads as follows:

16 "Then if they will really learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, 'As the LORD lives,' even as they taught My people to swear by Baal, they will be built up in the midst of My people."

17 "But if they will not listen יִשְׁמְעוּ לֹא יְהוָה, then I will uproot that nation, uproot and destroy it," declares the LORD. (Jer 12:16-17, NAU)

In the midst of the people's disobedience, Jer 12:16-17 still offers a possible message of hope. However, the message of destruction given through the prophet's symbolic action in the following prose section shows the continued stubbornness of the people.

In fact, the prose narrative (Jer 13:1-11) portrays the prophet's symbolic action that gives the message of Yahweh's destruction of the wicked people רע who follow after other gods and who refuses to obey יִשְׁמַע the covenantal commandments. In this unit, Yahweh commands Jeremiah to buy a linen loincloth (13:1-2), to bury it by the Euphrates (13:3-5), and to dig up the ruined loincloth (13:6-7) to symbolize the ruined people who do not cling to Yahweh and His commandments (13:8-11). The prophetic symbolic action of Yahweh's destruction is followed by another symbolic action of destruction. Through the symbolic action of the wine-

¹⁴ The Hebrew root נִקַּם 'vengeance' appears in Jeremiah 11:20 and 15:15. Michael Avioz, "The Call for Revenge in Jeremiah's Complaints (Jer XI-XX)," *Vetus Testamentum* LV, 4 (2005), 429-438.

¹⁵ O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 132-133.

jar filled with drunkenness, a short prose threat of judgment (13:12-14) portrays Yahweh's destruction. The texts assert that Yahweh will fill the land with drunkenness so that the fathers and the sons will be dashed against each other. The content, language, and structure in this unit resemble the prose sermon of Jer 11:1-17.¹⁶ In content, both units mention the people's disobedience of Yahweh's word. Linguistically, the phrases: "the stubbornness of their hearts," refusing "to hear My words," and "gone after other gods to serve them" in 13:10 recalls 11:8 and 11:10. Structurally, the pattern: receiving the commands from Yahweh (13:1, 3, 6 and 11:2, 6), receiving the message from Yahweh (13:8-11 and 11:3-5), and the response of the people (13:10 and 11:9-10) is observed.¹⁷

Following the prose materials, a poem invites the people to listen שָׁמַע to the words of Yahweh (13:15-16). This invitation is juxtaposed with the report of Judah's captivity and the humiliation of the royal family (13:17-19); the king and the queen mother are humiliated by dethronement (13:18), the cities are locked up (13:19). These reports signify that the destruction is even already at hand.¹⁸ The dethronement probably alludes to the first deportation which took place in 597 BCE as 2 Kgs 24:8, 12 mention the surrender of Jehoiachin and his mother to the Babylonians.¹⁹

The abrupt change of the addressee in Jer 13:20-27 defines a distinctive literary unit in the larger literary context: Jerusalem personified as a woman is addressed by Yahweh in 13:20-27 unlike the preceding and succeeding units.²⁰ Yahweh's judgment is again visually described through Yahweh's sexual abuse of the personified female nation. The woman is accused of her failure to keep the flock (13:20-21), her accustomed evil-doing רַע (13:23), forgetting שָׁכַח Yahweh and trusting in falsehood (13:25), committing adulteries נִאֲוָה and licentious prostitution זָנְיָהּ (13:27). Because of these iniquities עָוֹן, the shame of the female nation is publicly exposed and she is sexually abused. 13:22 and 26 reads as follows:

"it is for the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are lifted up, and you are violated." (Jer 13:22 NRS)

"I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen" (Jer 13:26 NRS).

The language and content of this unit resemble the episode of Jer 2-6 where Yahweh's wife Jerusalem/Judah/Israel is similarly treated.²¹ Linguistically, the accusation against the female nation "who are accustomed to doing evil רַע" in 13:23 recalls 2:13 and 3:5. Likewise, "Because you have forgotten Me" in 13:25 recalls 2:32. Similarly, adulteries נִאֲוָה and licentious

¹⁶ See O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 134.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 134-135, 141.

¹⁸ O'Connor over emphasizes the prophet's invitation to listen to the words of Yahweh (13:15-17) so that she does not see 13:17-19 as the doom of the people. See O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 135.

¹⁹ See Bright, *Jeremiah*, 95; Rudolph, *Jeremia*, Handbuch zum Alten Testament, XIX-XX.

²⁰ Although Hebrew language may distinguish the gender of addressees in this pericope as female (13:20-22), male (13:23-24), and female (13:25-27), the motif of judgment flows smoothly without major disruption. As was noted before, the alternation of gender is the style of Jeremiah. In this unit too, the female imagery surrounds male imagery.

²¹ See Chapter Two, Section 2.4. "A Study of Marriage Imagery in the Book of Jeremiah" in this study.

prostitution זונה in 13:27 recalls 3:8-9; iniquities עון in 13:22 recalls 2:22 and 3:13. In content, both 13:20-27 and 2-6 describe the iniquities and licentiousness of the personified female nation; for instance, the words adulteries, neighings, fornication on the hills in the field in 13:27 recalls the sexual behavior of the woman in 2:20ff. After all, the present unit is thematically related to the preceding and succeeding units; i.e., the people's iniquities עון and Yahweh's punishment.

The appearance of the prophetic word-event formula, אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־דְּבַר־יְהוָה הַבְּצֻרֹת: אֲשֶׁר הָיָה דְבַר, "The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought" in Jer 14:1 signals the beginning of a new prophetic oracle that ends in 15:4. The poem reports that the drought is the consequence of the people's apostasies עון (14:7). Since there had been no water in the cisterns (14:3) and no rain in the land (14:4), the ground was cracked (14:4); the farms turned to wasteland (14:4); there was no grass on the ground (14:5); no vegetable was produced (14:6); The impact of the drought had affected all the people of Judah and Jerusalem as well as the animals (14:1-6). Although the community confessed their apostasies/iniquities עון and appealed to Yahweh not to break the covenant (14:7-9; 19-22)²², Yahweh rejected the community's prayers (14:10-18). Yahweh also commanded Jeremiah not to pray for the welfare of the people of Judah (14:11). As the people listen to the false prophecy שֶׁקֶר instead of Yahweh's words, Yahweh even pronounces triple judgment – drought, famine, and pestilence (14:12). The nation's devastation is presented through the portrait of a crushed and wounded 'virgin daughter my people.' Yahweh's triple judgment is expanded even further in 15:1-4 by adding captivity as a part of the judgment. Any intercession for the people is rejected; even the great prophets of the past – Moses and Samuel would not be able to change Yahweh's emphatic decision of judgment upon the covenant people.

Yahweh's destruction of His people also recurs in 15:5-9 through the portraits of Yahweh's lament (15:5-7) and the widows' sufferings (15:8-9); the widow mother, who has born seven sons, is described as a feeble, faint, dying, shamed and disgraced. Since the judgment is unalterable, Yahweh declares that all the rest of the widows will also be handed over to the enemy (15:9).

The oracle of judgment featuring the plight of the widow is followed by the curse of the so-called Jeremiah's second confession (15:10-21). In the confession, the text mentions that Jeremiah is cursed by the people (15:10). As in the first confession, Jeremiah asks Yahweh for vengeance נָקָם on his persecutors (15:15). For the sake of Yahweh, Jeremiah endures disgrace (15:15) but his pain and wounds are unhealed (15:18). Therefore, Jeremiah complains to Yahweh about His abandonment (15:18). In response to the prophet's complaint, Yahweh promises the vindication of the prophet; Yahweh will deliver the prophet from the hand of the wicked רָע; the wicked רָע will not prevail over the prophet (15:19-21).

Following the second confession of the prophet, the prose sermon (16:1-21) explains the people's questions: 'Why has Yahweh pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity עוֹן? What is the sin that we have committed against Yahweh our God?' (16:10). 16:11-12 gives the answer that it is because their ancestors have followed after other gods and forsaken the covenantal law; and it is because of the people's own disobedience לֹא שָׁמַע.

²² For the detailed linkages between 14:7-9 and 19-22, see Holladay, *The Architecture of Jeremiah 1-20*, 146.

Yahweh has withdrawn His peace (שְׁלוֹמִים) loving kindness (חֶסֶד) and compassion (רַחֲמִים) from the people (16:5). In the devastation, the dead will not be buried; rather, they will be devoured by “the birds of the sky” and “the beasts of the earth” (16:4). Although 16:14-15 and 16:19-21 are seen as two promises of future salvation, 16:16-18 pops out to remind the people of their iniquity עֲוֹן and their sin against Yahweh.²³

The last section of the macro-structural unit (Jer 17) resumes the main theme of the whole unit – curse אָרַר. After describing Judah’s idolatry and Yahweh’s judgment in a prose sermon (17:1-4), the collection of wisdom sayings (17:5-11) recall the “curse” אָרַר of 11:3 by declaring “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, and whose heart turns away from Yahweh” (17:5). The presentation of Yahweh as a just judge who judges the people according to their deeds (17:10) connects back to Jeremiah’s assertion of Yahweh as the righteous judge (11:20). Following the liturgical prayer (17:12-13), the so-called third confession of Jeremiah (17:14-18) thematically relates the preceding materials to Jeremiah’s plea for the “twofold destruction” (17:18). Finally, a Deuteronomic style prose sermon (17:19-27) – blessings for obedience שָׂמַע and curses for disobedience לֹא שָׂמַע, concludes the whole unit. The conditional word “if” controls the sermon. The fate of the eternal stability of the Davidic line depends solely on the people’s obedience and disobedience. The juxtaposition of this conditional claim and the prophet’s plea for destruction in this last section recapitulates the main theme – curse אָרַר upon those people who refuse to obey לֹא שָׂמַע the words of the covenant.

In sum, it is observed that the so-called ‘prophetic pornographic text’ – Jer 13:20-27 is part of the curse of the Deuteronomic covenant. By looking back at the historical context of the text, it is observed that the author/editor/redactor tries to show why the punishment is deserved by the object of divine judgment. In its covenantal theological framework of Jer 11-17, the author presents the images of the consequence of sin. The wicked people who break the covenant are punished by Yahweh through various forms of destructions such as humiliation, dishonorable death, drought, famine, pestilence, and captivity. The king and queen mother are also humiliated. Women are also some of the objects of Yahweh’s judgment. A mother of seven is disgraced; even widows who have lost their husband are given to the enemies. The personified ‘virgin daughter my people’ is crushed and wounded; Yahweh’s covenant partner is also humiliated by being stripped of her skirt. In this presentation of the divine judgment, gender bias representation is discovered. The female imagery carries the prophetic message of doom only through her humiliation. Thus, the macro-structural unit of Jer 11-17 can be seen as “words of censure, warning and judgment.”²⁴

3.2. Analysis of Text, Structure, and Unity of Jeremiah 13:20-27

The Hebrew version of Jer 13:20-27 may be translated into English as follows.

²³ O’Connor sees the promise of future salvation (16:14-15; 19-21; and 12:14-17) as the motif of new exodus for the exile. See O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 138.

²⁴ Bright, *Jeremiah*, LIX.

20 Lift up²⁵ your eyes,²⁶
 And see²⁷ the ones coming from the north.
 Where is the flock that was given you,
 Your beautiful flock?
 21 What will you say when he appoints (someone) over you,
 And you yourself had taught them over you confidants for a head?²⁸
 Will not pangs seize you like a woman in childbirth?
 22 And when you say in your heart,
 Why have these things happened to me?
 Because of the magnitude of your iniquity
 Your skirts have been removed²⁹
 And your hinder-parts have been treated violently.³⁰
 23 Can the Ethiopian³¹ change his skin,
 Or the leopard his spots?
 Then you also can do good
 Who are taught to do evil.
 24 Therefore, I shall scatter you³² like chaff
 Driven by the wind of the desert.
 25 This is your lot,
 The portion of your measure from me,³³
 Declares Yahweh.
 Because you have forgotten me
 And trusted in falsehood,

²⁵ *Kethib* כַּתִּיב renders Qal imperative feminine singular (cf. LXX) whereas *qere* קִרֵּא renders Qal imperative masculine plural (cf. Vulgate, Targum, and Syriac). LXX reads ἀνάλαβε ὀφθαλμούς σου Ἱερουσαλημ “Lift up thine eyes, O Jerusalem.” The addressee of 13:20-22 and 25-27 is second person feminine singular whereas 13:23-24 is second person masculine plural (after v 24 is emended).

²⁶ LXX reads, “Lift up your eyes, O Jerusalem” ἀνάλαβε ὀφθαλμούς σου Ἱερουσαλημ.

²⁷ (*kethib*) Qal imperative feminine singular; (*qere*) Qal imperative masculine plural.

²⁸ Most scholars agree that the meaning of this first part of the verse 21 is unclear. Bright says “The first part of the verse cannot be translated with any assurance.” Therefore, he leaves blanks in this part. See Bright, *Jeremiah*, 93-95. A beautiful translation of this part has been offered by Holladay, i.e., “What will you say when your lambs are missing? – and it was you who trained them! – your sucklings, as if trained by the poor man.” See Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 411.

²⁹ The Niphal of גָּלָה conveys the meaning of uncovering one’s nakedness. See 1808 גָּלָה in *BDB Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

³⁰ The phrase עָקְבֵיךְ וְנִזְהָמְסוּ has sense of violence. See 7343 עָקַב in *BDB Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*. Exum and Bauer have translated עָקְבֵיךְ as ‘genitals.’ See Exum, “Prophetic Pornography,” in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*: 107; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 101. Also see Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 414; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 303. Magdalene translates עָקְבֵיךְ as ‘buttocks.’ See Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curse and the Ultimate Texts of Terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophetic Corpus,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, 328-329.

³¹ כְּנִיזִי is the inhabitant of Cush and usually translated as “Ethiopian.”

³² BHS suggests to emend from “And I shall scatter them” וְנִזְהָמְסוּ to “And I shall scatter you” וְנִזְהָמְסֶיךָ.

³³ LXX reads “This is your lot, and the reward of your disobedience to me” οὗτος ὁ κλήρος σου καὶ μερίς τοῦ ἀπειθεῖν ὑμᾶς ἐμοί.

26 I myself have also stripped your skirts off over your face,³⁴
 And your pudenda³⁵ may be seen.
 27 Your adulteries and your neighings,
 Your licentious fornication,
 On hills in the field,³⁶ I have seen your abominations.
 Woe to you, O Jerusalem!
 You will not be clean, after how long again?³⁷

Jer 13:20-27 is an oracle of judgment that is presented through the picture of Yahweh's involvement in sexual abuse of the woman (personified Jerusalem). The female suffers like a woman in childbirth; not only have her skirts been removed but also her hinder-parts are treated violently; even her private pudenda are exposed to the public. In this pericope, the component elements are demarcated by the placement of rhetorical questions and the attachment of personal pronominal suffixes.³⁸ The female addressee is addressed in vv 20-22 and vv 25-27 whereas the male addressees are addressed in vv 23-24.

Because of the shift of personal references in vv 20-22, 23-24, and 25-27, Volz does not see 13:20-27 as a unified passage; rather, he has considered the two verses – v 23 and v 24 as additional materials inserted into the original unit made up of vv 20-22 and 25-27.³⁹ Another scholar, Rudolph, has observed that vv 20-22 contains more punishment than guilt whereas vv 25-27 stresses more guilt than punishment. As a result, Rudolph believes that vv 20-22, 23-24, and 25-27 are three separate fragments.⁴⁰

However, Holladay has reasonably argued that the shift of personal reference from feminine singular to masculine plural is Jeremiah's technique for esthetic effect and that it does not destroy the unity of the passage.⁴¹ Moreover, the words that Holladay shows as the catchwords of the component units are also convincing. For example, the root word לָמַד 'teach' links v 21 and v 23 whilst 'you too' אַתָּה גַּם (v 23) parallels 'and I too' וְגַם-אֲנִי (v 26).⁴² Furthermore, Holladay points out the parallelism between the composite units that support the unity of the passage.⁴³ Indeed, the twelve colons of the second person feminine singular units (vv 20-22 and 25-27) enclose the six colons of second person masculine plural unit (vv 23-24).

³⁴ While MT reads this line in perfect form, LXX reads future: "I also will expose your skirts upon your face, and your shame shall be seen." καὶ γὰρ ἀποκαλύψω τὰ ὀπίσω σου ἐπὶ τὸ πρόσωπόν σου καὶ ὀφθήσεται ἡ ἀτιμία σου. According to my analysis of the literary context of the final form of Jeremiah 11-17, MT's perfect tense is to be retained; the abuse/punishment has already taken place through the dethronement of Jehoiachin.

³⁵ See 8571 לְפָדָה in *BDB Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*; Delbert R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, 59-60.

³⁶ Holladay reads this colon as "On hills *and* in the field" in order to balance with the first colon "Your adulteries and your neighings." Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 412.

³⁷ Bright has offered a literal translation of this last colon: "You will not be clean. After how long yet?" See Bright, *Jeremiah*, 95.

³⁸ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 102.

³⁹ Paul Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia* (KAT 10; Leipzig: Deichert, 1928), cited in Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 412.

⁴⁰ Rudolph, *Jeremia*, cited in Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 412.

⁴¹ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 412.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 412.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 412.

The repetition of “your skirts” in v 22 and 26 further reinforces the parallel.⁴⁴ However, his argumentation concerning the vocatives in the beginning (v 20) and at the end (v 26) of the pericope is not convincing to me for the MT lacks “Jerusalem” or “Zion” in v 20 though LXX has “Jerusalem” Ἱερουσαλημ.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the arguments of Holladay are sufficient to treat 13:20-27 as a unified passage.

In addition to the linguistic evidence for the unity of Jer 13:20-27, one can also find thematic unity in the pericope. In fact, in the preceding unit, the humiliation of the king and queen mother followed by deportation is reported (13:15-19). In the succeeding unit, the devastation of Judah is portrayed through a severe drought (14:1-6). Indeed, the pericope is surrounded by the motif of curse in the larger macro-structural unit (11-17). The pericope is unified as an oracle of judgment.

3.3. The Roles and Functions of the Female Imagery in Jeremiah 13:20-27

The oracle begins with two consecutive imperatives directed toward a woman: “Lift up אֲנַפְּךָ your eyes, and see אֵלֶיךָ the ones coming from the north צָפוֹן (13:20a). The immediate questions would be: Who is the woman? Who are the ones coming from the north צָפוֹן? Why is the woman commanded to look at them? One first needs to identify the participants.

In the LXX, the first imperative is attached to a vocative and it reads “Lift up your eyes, O Jerusalem” whereas the MT lacks the vocative “Jerusalem.” Following the LXX reading, Bright has added “Jerusalem” in his translation.⁴⁶ Holladay assumes a vocative “Zion” צִיּוֹן would have been omitted for the haplography with עֵינֶיךָ at this point.⁴⁷ Holladay’s conjecture is difficult to accept as there is no concrete textual evidence for his translation. Moreover, “Jerusalem” is more plausible than “Zion” because although the MT lacks “Jerusalem,” the preceding literary units of this verse in the MT too have already stated that the people of “Jerusalem” are being addressed (Cf. 13:1-19). In addition, the vocative “Jerusalem” at the end of this pericope (13:27b) also identifies the addressee in this pericope as the people of Jerusalem personified as a female. Thus, the woman of 13:20a is the woman Jerusalem who is commanded to lift up her eyes and to see those coming from the north צָפוֹן.

In the Book of Jeremiah, the people of the north usually refers to the enemies of Israel and Judah (Cf. Jer 1:13, 14, 15; 3:18; 4:6; 6:1, 22; 10:22; 13:20; 15:12; 16:15; 23:8; 25:9, 26; 31:8). They may be either Assyrians or Babylonians. (In other references, the north may be Persia, the foe of Babylon. Cf. 50:3, 9, 41; 51:48). Among the references, Jer 25:9 explicitly mentions the name “Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.” Nebuchadnezzar and his troops are also appropriate referents for the people of the north in this verse (13:20a) because the invasion of the Babylonians has already implicitly been described to readers in the preceding unit (13:17-19).⁴⁸ According to 13:17-19, the king and the queen mother of Jerusalem have already been dethroned (Cf. perfect verb); the people who are personified as a “flock” עֶרְבָּר have been taken

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Also see my discussion in Interpretation of Jer 13:20-27 in the following section.

⁴⁶ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 93-95.

⁴⁷ Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 411.

⁴⁸ See “The Analysis of Literary and Theological Context of Jeremiah 13:11-17” above.

away into captivity. According to Bright, Jer 13:17-19 can be considered as the parallel text of 2 Kgs 24:8, 12 and as the report of the first deportation in 597 BCE.⁴⁹

The dethronement in 13:17-19 is reported through the phrase “your beautiful (תִּפְאַרֶת) crown has come down from your head” which is linguistically connected to 13:20b: “Where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful (תִּפְאַרֶת) flock?”⁵⁰ This rhetorical question is used to accuse the woman: “Where is the flock?” Since the addressee is being asked about the missing flock עֶדְרָה, the addressee here seems to be the king or the leaders of Jerusalem as the shepherds (רְעִים) are responsible for keeping the flock (cf. 12:10-11). In 12:10-11, the shepherds (רְעִים) are blamed for their destruction of Yahweh’s vineyard. The situation of the lack of “peace” (שָׁלוֹם) in 12:12-13 is again linguistically linked with 6:14 where there is no peace (אֵין שָׁלוֹם). Thus, one may unfold the collective shepherds as the king, priests, and the false prophets who had destroyed Yahweh’s vineyard; who had preached “peace” (שָׁלוֹם) when there was “no peace” (אֵין שָׁלוֹם) (6:14; 12:12). The flock עֶדְרָה has been taken away, i.e. the people have been taken into captivity. Therefore, the rhetorical question has pointed out the guilt of the woman as if she has failed her responsibility.

Having accused the woman of her failure to look after the flock, the speaker continues to mock the woman with the next two consecutive rhetorical questions: “What will you say when he appoints (someone) over you, and you yourself had taught them over you confidants for a head? Will not pangs seize you like a woman in childbirth?” (13:21). The Hebrew grammatical structure in the first question poses difficulty to make a confident translation. Bright has even left blanks in this part in his commentary.⁵¹ The MT reads 13:21a as follows:

מַה־תֹּאמְרֵי כִּי־יִפְקֹד עָלֶיךָ וְאַתָּה לְמַדְרֵת אַתָּם עָלֶיךָ אֲלֵפִים לְרֹאשׁ

My translation is as follows:

What will you say when he appoints (someone) over you, and you yourself had taught them over you confidants for a head?

According to Holladay, the preceding verse (13:20b) “Where is your flock which is given to you?” and the succeeding verse (13:21b) “Will not pangs seize you like a woman giving birth?” suggest 13:21a to mean “Your sheep will be taken from you.”⁵² Holladay puts his emphasis on the missing flock and the restoration of the flock so he emends the text at several points and proposes a rendition of this part. His translation of 13:21a reads as follows:

⁴⁹ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 95; See also my analysis of the literary and theological context of Jeremiah 13:11-17 above. Holladay finds the parallels between this pericope and Jeremiah 2-6 so that he assigns the date of this pericope in ca. 605 BCE. See Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 413. Bauer understands this part as if it has not taken place yet. According to her, “Two imperatives (שָׂא, “lift-up”; וּרְאֵי, “and-see”) stress the urgency of recognition, the need for attention. What is to be seen, to be realized, is the inevitability of an enemy attack from the North. The approach of the Babylonians to Jerusalem is imminent.” See Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 103. I insist that the verbs in the following judgment support the view that the invasion has already taken place.

⁵⁰ Carroll also notices these catchwords. See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 304.

⁵¹ See Bright, *Jeremiah*, 93-95.

⁵² Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 413-414.

What will you say when <<your lambs>> <<are missing?>>
 – and it was you who trained them!
 – <your sucklings,> <<as if trained>> <by the poor man.>⁵³

Holladay's translation is beautiful and interesting. However, as Bauer has noticed, "his rendition does not make the verse more intelligible in context."⁵⁴ For example, Holladay emends Qal of פָּקַד "appoint" to be Niphal "be missing" by comparing יִפְקְדוּ "be missing" of 23:4.⁵⁵ However, it is argued that one should not have related the word from the future salvation context by ignoring the present context of judgment. Thus, Holladay's emendation of פָּקַד does not fit in the context. Consequently, the restoration of the "lambs" in Is 40:11 is not necessary to be connected to the present context. In other words, the vocabulary adoption from Is 40:11, טְלָאִים "lambs" which is emended as טְלָאֵיךָ meaning "your lambs," is unnecessary in the context. Moreover, his rendition of the second עָלֶיךָ (literally 'over you') to mean "your sucklings" drawn from Is 40:11 (עֹלוֹת "those (ewes) giving suck" emended עֲלֵיךָ "your sucklings") does not make the verse more intelligible in context. His translation אֶלְפִים שׁ as 'trained' is plausible but his suggestion to read לְרֹאשׁ "for a head" as לְרֹאשׁ "poor man" (cf. 2 Sm 12:1-4) goes far more beyond the context.

The fact is that the rhetorical question in Jer 13:21a does not concern the future restoration of the 'missing flock;' rather, the speaker is mocking the addressee for her failure of responsibility and her disgraceful situation. Since King Jehoachin had been dethroned by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and his uncle Mattaniah/Zedekiah⁵⁶ was appointed as the king of Judah (2 Kgs 24:8-18), my translation of the rhetorical question "What will you say when he appoints (someone) over you, and you yourself had taught them over you confidants for a head?" would be more reasonable and plausible in the context. Once, Mattaniah might have been Jehoiachin's confidant but after Jehoiachin was dethroned, this confidant was appointed as the king (head) over him and all Judah. The king is mocked by the speaker. In the present context of an oracle of judgment, it is plausible to assume that the king is the head who is to be judged first and then the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be judged. In fact, the following rhetorical question "Will not pangs seize you like a woman in childbirth?" (Jer 13:21b) identifies the king and all the people as 'a woman in childbirth.'

In the Book of Jeremiah, the imagery of 'a woman in childbirth/labor' is not confined to one individual's pangs; rather, it is applied to men, to warriors, and to the nation.⁵⁷ Appearing a total of 9 times in the Book of Jeremiah (Cf. Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6; 48:41; 49:22, 24; 50:43), the imagery of 'a woman in childbirth/labor' denotes several meanings. It symbolizes crying/shouting/weeping (קוֹל), gasping for breath (יָפֵחַ), paleness (יִרְקֹן), anguish/distress (צָרָה), pain/agonies (חֵיל), and pangs (חֲבָל). Therefore, the rhetorical question "Will not pangs seize you like a woman in childbirth?" (13:21b) asks the nation to realize their situation of chaotic and disastrous catastrophe. One might imagine that the people in Jerusalem

⁵³ Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 411.

⁵⁴ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 101.

⁵⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 413-414.

⁵⁶ Babylonian king later changed the name of Mattaniah to Zedekiah (Cf. 2 Kgs 24:17).

⁵⁷ Also see O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *Women's Bible Commentary*, 173.

had been shouting, crying, weeping, gasping for breath when the Babylonian troops invaded Jerusalem. In the divine judgment, they might have been suffering from anguish, distress, pain, agony, pangs and their faces turned pale (Cf. Jer 30:6). Various forms of the nation's pain converge in the pain of the figurative woman – 'a woman in childbirth/labor.' This pain of the woman anticipates the next severe pain of the personified nation – the woman is brutally raped by the speaker/God/Yahweh (Jer 13:22, 26). The image changes from the pain of a woman in labor to a sexually violated woman.

My translation of Jer 13:22 reads as follows:

And when you say in your heart,
 Why have these things happened to me?
 Because of the magnitude of your iniquity
 Your skirts have been removed
 And your hinder-parts have been treated violently.

According to Brownmiller, "If a woman chooses not to have intercourse with a specific man and the man chooses to proceed against her will, that is a criminal act of rape."⁵⁸ Magdalene understands rape as one of the acts of sexual abuse so that she defines sexual abuse as "any act with a sexual connotation or result that is used in order to objectify, dominate, hurt, or humiliate an individual."⁵⁹ According to Magdalene, any violence to sexual parts may be considered as "sexual violence even if there is no penetration."⁶⁰

If one accepts the above definitions of rape and sexual abuse, Jer 13:22 can be seen as a scene of rape and sexual abuse. 13:22a begins with objectification of the woman; she is not allowed to speak. Even her unwillingness is heard through the speaker's quotation. 13:22a reads "And when you say in your heart, why have these things happened to me?" The woman is objectified and dominated by the speaker. Yet, the text leaves a hint of the woman's attempt of refusal: "why have these things happened to me?" This quotation shows the woman's unwillingness to accept the harsh treatment.⁶¹ Following the quotation of the woman's inner words, the speaker connects to the reason for the violent sexual treatment and the consequent sexual abuse: "Because of the magnitude of your iniquity עון, your skirts שוללך have been removed ונגלו; And your hinder-parts עקבך have been treated violently ונחמסו." (13:22b).

In the larger literary and theological context of the macro-structural unit (Jer 11-17), the people's iniquity עון is mentioned 8 times (Jer 11:10; 13:22; 14:7, 10, 20; 16:10, 17, 18) meaning apostasies, following after other gods, idol worship, disobedience of the words of Yahweh, and breach of the covenant. It is observed that committing iniquity עון is usually followed by divine punishment in various forms such as humiliation, dishonorable death, drought, famine, pestilence, and captivity. Particularly in this verse (13:22b), the humiliation of the female nation

⁵⁸ For detailed discussion of the definition of rape in modern concept and ancient concept, see Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), 17-18; Magdalene, "Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses," 336-337.

⁵⁹ Magdalene, "Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses," 328.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 328-329.

⁶¹ Exum also shows this point as "evidence of the woman's suppressed point of view" and unsuccessful prophetic patriarchal discourse. See Exum, "Prophetic Pornography," in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 125-126.

is brutal. Her skirts have been removed וְנִלְוָה; her hinder-parts עֲקָבֶיךָ have been treated violently נִחְמָסוּ. It should be noticed that the verbs here are Niphal (passive). The Niphal of גִּלָּה (remove) always conveys the meaning of uncovering one's nakedness. Moreover, usually it occurs in contexts of sexual violence against woman; e.g., Is 47:3; Ez 16:36, 37; 23:29.⁶² Therefore, the action of removing the woman's skirts is understood as violence.⁶³ On top of this sexual violence, another Niphal of חָמַס (treat violently) piles up the violence against the woman: "your hinder-parts עֲקָבֶיךָ have been treated violently."

Since Hebrew עֲקָבִים also denotes 'heels,' some English translations have politely translated the word עֲקָבֶיךָ as "your heels." For instance, NAU has "Your skirts have been removed and your heels have been exposed." NKJ has "Your skirts have been uncovered, your heels made bare." Other English translations have even 'cleaned up'⁶⁴ the text although they maintain the violence of the text. For example, RSV and ESV have "your skirts are lifted up and you suffer violence." NIV has "your skirts have been torn off and your body mistreated." NIB has "your skirts have been torn off and your body ill-treated." NJB has "your skirts have been pulled up and you have been manhandled." Nevertheless, the sexual connotation is still in the translations. Since עֲקָבִים 'heels' can be a euphemism for genitals like רַגְלִים 'feet,' Exum and Bauer have translated it as "your genitals."⁶⁵ Exum's translation has "your skirts are lifted up and your genitals are treated violently."⁶⁶ Although the text is translated differently in different versions, the truth of the text is that the woman Jerusalem is sexually abused, she is raped. Who is the rapist? Until 13:25, the reader is not explicitly informed that the perpetrator is "Yahweh."

Before he resumes his sexual violence against the woman in 13:25-27, the speaker leaves the woman in nakedness. While the woman is being exposed to the readers, the speaker continues to mock her not as a female addressee but as a male addressee. The personification of the people of Jerusalem has shifted from a female to male (masculine plural) in one of Jeremiah's usual techniques for esthetic effect. The addressees are mocked and even challenged by the speaker with a rhetorical question: "Can the Ethiopian כּוּשִׁי change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good, who are taught to do evil." (13:23). This text may be a later insertion as Volz⁶⁷ has assumed; but it does not interrupt the flow (in contrast to Carroll's view).⁶⁸ In fact, the placement of the text is rather appropriate for the speaker to heighten his mocking of the people for their evil-doing – unchanged custom. As the Ethiopian כּוּשִׁי cannot change his skin color or the leopard his spots, the people are incapable of changing their ways.

Some scholars assume this text to be a text of "othering."⁶⁹ For example Bauer has said:

⁶² Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 103.

⁶³ F. Rachel Magdalene, "Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses and the Ultimate Texts of Terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophet Corpus," *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 328-329.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 107; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 101, 104. Bauer provides the following texts as supporting texts of her translation. Is 7:20; Ez 16:25; Dt 28:57; Ru 3:4, 7, 8, 14; Jgs 3:24; 1 Sm 24:3.

⁶⁶ Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 107.

⁶⁷ Paul Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, cited in Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 412.

⁶⁸ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 305.

⁶⁹ "Othering is a way of defining and securing one's own positive identity through the stigmatization of an "other." Whatever the markers of social differentiation that shape the meaning of "us" and "them," whether

Ideology of race meshes with ideology of gender to render judgment. “Othering” here functions as a rhetorical strategy to shame and humiliate the non-female, non-Ethiopian audience while reinforcing power dynamics of misogyny and racism.⁷⁰

It is argued that the reference to the skin color of the Ethiopian כְּרוֹשֵׁי in this text does not seem to be reinforcing racism. In other words, the reference to the skin color of the Ethiopian in the text is not in a negative sense; rather, it is a positive one. The word “Ethiopian” כְּרוֹשֵׁי appears 5 times in the Book of Jeremiah (13:23; 38:7, 10, 12; 39:16). Apart from Jer 13:23, all other references are found in the account of Jeremiah’s imprisonment and his deliverance by Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch of the Judean king’s palace (Jer 38-39). According to this account, the Judean king Zedekiah and his officials, namely Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchijah, put Jeremiah into the cistern of Malchijah the king’s son for the prophet has pronounced the message of allegiance to the Babylonians (38:1-6). Ironically, the text mentions that Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, non-Israelite, approaches the Judean king Zedekiah and asks him to let him rescue the prophet Jeremiah. According to the conclusion of the narrative, Jeremiah is rescued by Ebed-melech the Ethiopian and the life of Ebed-melech the Ethiopian is in turn assured by the divine promise (39:16-18). There is no evidence of racism against Ethiopians at the level of text in the Book of Jeremiah and no discrimination based on the Ethiopian’s skin color in this text.⁷¹

Chronologically, the text (Jer 13:23) seems to be a later product (Volz’s view) but redactionally it is placed in an appropriate structure to reprove the unchanged manner of the implied audience who are left after the deportation of King Jehoiachin and company. In its present context, the text fits in the speaker’s mocking and challenging the people. The speaker is mocking the people but he also expects the people to change their ways. The speaker compares the people’s unchanged manner with unchanged skin of the Ethiopian but the speaker also seems to imply the Ethiopian’s deed as a good example for the remnant people. The text seems to say that ‘if even the Ethiopian can do good, why cannot you Israelites, the people of Yahweh, do good? I expect you to change your evil-doing but you do not change.’ This is a logical interpretation in relation to the next verse (13:24) – “Therefore, I shall scatter you like chaff driven by the wind of the desert.” This judgment of scattering the people relates the divine

they are racial, geographic, ethnic, economic or ideological, there is always the danger that they will become the basis for a self-affirmation that depends upon the denigration of the other group. When a group claims to be “chosen by God,” the danger multiplies, not only for the “unchosen” other who may be subjected to violence, but for the chosen group itself that is at risk of being undermined.” See Psychology Wiki. “Other.” Psychology Wiki. Accessed February 2, 2018. <http://psychology.wikia.com/wiki/Other>.

⁷⁰ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 104-105.

⁷¹ Even in other occurrences, biblical authors did not ‘other’ Ethiopians. For example, Nm 12 asserts that Miriam is struck with leprosy for she has spoken against Moses’ marriage to a Cushite woman. This reflects the biblical author’s positive view on the Cushite woman. See Rodney Steven Sadler Jr., “Can a Cushite change his skin? Cushites, “Racial Othering,” and the Hebrew Bible,” *Interpretation* 60 no 4 October 2006, 386-403; Rodney Steven Sadler Jr., *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 425; London/New York: Clark, 2005).

judgment through Babylonian captivity mentioned in preceding and succeeding units (13:17 and 15:2).

Following the pronouncement of judgment, the speaker resumes his sexual abuse on woman Jerusalem (13:25-27). In this second wave of accusations and punishments on the woman, readers are told that the perpetrator is Yahweh himself. My translation of Jer 13:25-27 reads as follows:

25 This is your lot,
The portion of your measure from me,
Declares Yahweh.
Because you have forgotten me
And trusted in falsehood,
26 I myself have also stripped your skirts off over your face,
And your pudenda may be seen.
27 Your adulteries and your neighings,
Your licentious fornication,
On hills in the field, I have seen your abominations.
Woe to you, O Jerusalem!
You will not be clean, after how long again?

Yahweh asserts that the female Jerusalem deserves his punishments because she has forgotten him and trusted in false prophecies שָׁקֶר (Cf. Jer 14:1-15:4; esp. 14:14-16; 6:14; 28:1-17). Why must the woman not forget Yahweh? What is the reason? Yahweh's accusations imply the bond made between them; i.e., 'covenant.' From the very beginning of the macro-structural unit of Jer 11-17, readers are informed that the people of Jerusalem are commanded to listen to the words of the Sinai covenant. Throughout the macro-structural unit, the texts assert that the people do not listen to the words of the covenant. As a result, the Deuteronomic curses of the covenant are to fall upon the people (Cf. Jer 11:1-17; 17:1-27; Dt 1-32, esp. 28:15-68). This breach of covenant and its consequence appear in the present text – Jer 13:25-27 through the imagery of a woman's uncontrollable sexual behavior and Yahweh's sexual abuse of the woman.

Modern feminist scholars have convincingly argued that the biblical metaphors of cities and nations as female are beyond the innocent Hebrew linguistic usage. For instance, Gordon and Washington have pointed out the gender ideology that is at work in the biblical texts.⁷² It is true that a city can be merely personified as a woman but she is often designated as בְּחֵילָה, a virgin, sexually attractive, desirable and available.⁷³ It is evident in the present text (Jer 13:25-27) that the personified female Jerusalem is described as committing adulteries נָאֵף (Cf. 3:8), neighing (נִצְדָה לָהּ) on the hill (גְּבֵעָה) in the field like a wild ass in her heat (Cf. 2:20-24), and whoring licentious fornication (Cf. 2:20). As a result, she is to be abused by Yahweh himself. Subjective gender ideology is present. The word וְגַם־אֲנִי "I myself" (13:26) emphasizes the

⁷² Pamela Gordon and Harold C. Washington, "Rape as a Military Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible," *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 308-325.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 319.

action; “I myself have also stripped your skirts off over your face, and your pudenda may be seen.” The phrase recalls the previous action of sexual abuse on the woman (13:22b). The word שָׁרָי “skirts” links the two verses – 22b and 26. Having her skirts removed and her hinder-parts treated violently, the woman’s pudenda are again publicly exposed. The text becomes pornographic; it allows the audiences/readers to view imaginatively Yahweh’s sexual abuse on the personified naked female.⁷⁴ Yahweh is not on the side of the victim of rape; rather, he himself is involved in the sexual abuse of the woman. Therefore, Magdalene is right in saying that such texts are “texts of terror.”⁷⁵ It is ultimately necessary to observe the present text at two different levels in this stage – at the level of ancient understanding of covenant-curse and at the level of the gender bias rhetorical strategy of the text.⁷⁶

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the Deuteronomic curses have parallels with the ancient treaty-curses. Among the curses, Jer 13:22 and 13:26 echo the curse of “The Treaty between Ktk and Arpad” that swears that the wives of the betrayer are to be stripped like a prostitute.⁷⁷ This curse of the ancient treaty and the Deuteronomic curse in the literary context of Jer 11-17 (also see Dt 1-32; especially 28:15-68) generally explain why and how the figurative woman is violently treated: sexual abuse as the consequence of the breach of the relationship. Most commentators have seen this portrait of the deity’s sexual abuse as legitimate punishment of the nymphomaniac woman without paying attention to the gender bias rhetorical strategy of the text. For example, Holladay sees the female image deserving the public stripping for her harlotry.⁷⁸ Thus, one of the aims of the text for Holladay becomes “harlotry which merits her public stripping and ravishment.”⁷⁹ However, this general explanation must not be the final interpretation of the text. In fact, one must also deal with the ramifications of Yahweh’s involvement in the sexual abuse.

As Exum has observed, the rhetorical strategy of the text asks male and female readers of the text to identify with Yahweh and the humiliated woman.⁸⁰ Naturally, male readers easily identify with Yahweh in the “subject position” of the man whilst female readers are limited when identifying with ‘male’ Yahweh as he is portrayed as a male. As a consequence, female readers are left to identify with the sinful and humiliated woman. Thus, O’Connor is right to say that “Jeremiah implicitly teaches that men represent God and women do not.”⁸¹ This is a ramification of the pericope for contemporary as well as ancient audiences/readers. Contemporary readers, men and women, must see such gender bias presentations and inter-

⁷⁴ T. Drorah Setel has characterized three distinguish features of pornography. According to her, the act is defined as pornography if “(1) female sexuality is depicted as negative in relationship to a positive and neutral male standard; (2) women are degraded and publicly humiliated; and (3) female sexuality is portrayed as an object of male possession and control, which includes the depiction of women as analogous to nature in general and the land in particular, especially with regard to imagery of conquest and domination.” See T. Drorah Setel, “Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea,” *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 87.

⁷⁵ Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses,” 327.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 326-352; Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 122-123.

⁷⁷ Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, 59-60; Rosenthal, “The Treaty between Ktk and Arpad,” 660, (659-661); Strawn, “Treaty of Ktk and Arpad,” 302, (299-305).

⁷⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 417.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 417.

⁸⁰ Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 122-123.

⁸¹ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 172.

pretations of the text.⁸² Especially, women must be liberated from such ideology of subordination of women and from justification of violence against women.

Then, one hermeneutical question for contemporary readers is: how should one deal with such sexual violence against women in the text? Are such texts of terror to be abandoned? For Brenner, one way of dealing with such texts is to expose the unbalanced sexuality of male and female and then reject them all.⁸³ Brenner said that “I can see no reason for complying with biblical pornography, even at the price of being considered politically incorrect. Far be it from me to censure erotics.”⁸⁴ Godorn and Washington also call their readers to “resist the metaphor.”⁸⁵ Magdalene also agrees with them to stand against the continued use of the metaphor of a male’s sexual abuse of a female.⁸⁶ Magdalene said that “In solidarity with all victims of sexual abuse, both in the text and beyond it, both in the ancient world and in the modern one, I must agree with them and stand against the continued use of this metaphor.”⁸⁷ The metaphors of covenant between Yahweh and his people, and covenant-curse and Yahweh’s sexual abuse on the female nation might be a useful tool in presenting the relationship between Yahweh and his people in ancient patriarchal society. However, in our contemporary society, such sexual abuse including all kinds of abuse must not be imitated. At the same time, such texts should not be abandoned. As Tribble has recounted such texts of terror should be read “in memoriam to offer sympathetic readings of abused women...in order to recover a neglected history, to remember a past that the present embodies, and to pray that these terrors shall not come to pass again,”⁸⁸ one has to study such texts of terror so that they should not happen again in our contemporary world. It is noteworthy that girls and women are not the only victims of sexual abuse. Indeed, researches have shown that boys and men can be also the victims of women’s sexual abuse.⁸⁹ Therefore, in dealing with the biblical texts of terror, it is important to study the texts at three levels – at the level of its ancient setting, at the level of the textual setting, and at the level of gender bias rhetorical strategy of the texts.

Summary

In summary, the female image in Jer 13:20-27 is depicted as an objectified, abused, raped, suffering, and disgraced woman. Under male domination, she is commanded to realize her situation. She is not allowed to speak; even her inner thoughts are represented by the male speaker; she is objectified. She is punished for her alleged failure of stewardship. Her judgment is sexual abuse. Indeed, her skirts are removed; her hinder-parts are treated violently; she is raped; raped by Yahweh himself. Her pain is like the pangs of a woman in childbirth. The portrait of the female imagery in this pericope even becomes prophetic pornography. Whether one likes it or not, at the level of the text she has played the role of committing adultery,

⁸² Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 122-123.

⁸³ Brenner, “Pornoprophetics Revisited: Some Additional Reflections,” 85.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁸⁵ Gordon and Washington, “Rape as a Military Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible,” 323-325.

⁸⁶ Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses,” 349.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁸⁸ Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 3.

⁸⁹ David Lisak, “The Psychological Impact of Sexual Abuse: Content Analysis of Interviews with Male Survivors,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, vol. 7, No. 4 (1994), 525-548.

neighing like a wild ass in her heat, whoring prostitution. Her sexual abuse is justified as a Deuteronomic curse. In any case, the female imagery in this pericope carries the prophetic message of doom for the implied audience through her disgrace.

CHAPTER 4

THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF FEMALE IMAGERY IN JEREMIAH 4:29-31

Introduction

This chapter will study the roles and functions of the woman Jerusalem and daughter Zion by focusing on Jer 4:29-31. In order to achieve my goal, I will first translate the pericope. Then, I will study the literary structure and unity of the pericope by analyzing its larger literary context. Finally, I will observe the roles and functions of woman Jerusalem and daughter Zion. In this study, I will show that the narrator of the pericope presents woman Jerusalem as a courtesan and daughter Zion as a dying woman so that the female images carry the prophetic message of doom through their negative roles.

4.1. Analysis of Text Structure and Literary Unity of Jeremiah 4:29-31

The original Hebrew text of Jer 4:29-31 may be translated into English as follows.

29 At the sound of a horseman and bowman,¹
every city² is fleeing,
they enter thickets,³
and they climb among rocks;
every city is abandoned,
and no one dwells in them.
30 And you⁴, Devastated One⁵,

¹ Many Hebrew manuscripts have plural קָשָׁה וְרַמֵי “and bowmen” but MT’s singular קָשָׁה וְרֹמֵה “and bowman” is consistent with its parallel פָּרָשׁ “a horseman.” Moreover, a horseman and a bowman could be realized as a pair of war men riding on the same chariot; while the horseman drives the powerful horses, the bowman shoots the arrows. See Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible vol. 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 367. Also see Jer 4:13.

² LXX reads πᾶσα χώρα, “the whole land.” However, MT’s reading – ‘city’ should be retained because the destruction of the city is a central theme in the literary context.

³ LXX expands this colon and it reads εἰσέδυσαν εἰς τὰ σπήλαια καὶ εἰς τὰ ἄλση ἐκρύβησαν, “they have gone into the caves, and have hidden themselves in the groves.”

⁴ *Kethib* אַתָּה is the older and more original form of *qere* אַתָּה “you” (2.f.s). It appears 7 times in the Old Testament – Jgs 17:2; 1 Kgs 14:2; 2 Kgs 4:16; 4:23 8:1; Jer 4:30; Ez 36:13.

⁵ LXX does not have שְׁדוּד ‘devastated one’ (Qal passive participle masculine singular absolute). LXX reads καὶ σὺ τί ποιήσεις ‘and you, what will you do?’ Although שְׁדוּד is used with both masculine and feminine, McKane has suggested to delete it for he thinks “it lacks grammatical congruence and has the appearance of an interpolation into an original מִה חַעֲשֵׂי.” Since he assumes שְׁדוּד as a “marginal comment on the fate of Jerusalem,” McKane deletes it in his translation. See McKane, *Jeremiah, 1*, 111. In the same line, Bright and Holladay also leave it out of their translations. See Bright, *Jeremiah*, 31; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 144-145. However, Lundbom’s does not delete שְׁדוּד. He repoints the masculine passive participle שְׁדוּד to be the infinitive absolute שְׁדוּד and he translates it as “Destructive One.” See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 368. Lundbom’s translation of infinitive absolute is to be declined because the literary context apparently shows

What will you do
 that you dress in scarlet,
 that you deck yourself with ornaments⁶ of gold,
 that you enlarge your eyes with antimony?
 In vain you beautify yourself.
 The paramours have despised you;
 They seek your life.
 31 For I heard a cry as of a woman in labor⁷,
 anguish⁸ as of one giving birth to her first child,
 the cry of daughter Zion gasping for breath,
 stretching out her hands,
 “Woe to me, for I faint before murderers⁹.”

Jer 4:29-31 is one of the scenes of terrible destructive war to be found in the larger literary unit of Jer 4:5-6:30.¹⁰ In the larger literary context, individual poems are thematically collected under the main theme of Judah’s departure from Yahweh and the inescapable destruction of Judah through the invasion of ‘evil from the north.’

In order to deal with this larger compositional unit (Jer 4:5-6:30), many commentators agree to divide it into three parts – 4:5-31, 5:1-31, and 6:1-30.¹¹ For example, Bright treats the three chapters separately as he observes each chapter develops the major theme of the coming judgment.¹² Similarly, O’Connor also treats the three sections as the announcement of the coming of the battle (4:5-31), the message of inevitable battle (5:1-31), and the attack on daughter Zion (6:1-30).¹³

In viewing the tripartite characteristic of the larger unit, one observes the envelope structure of 4:5-31. The appearances of two words – Jerusalem/Zion (4:5-6) and Zion (4:31), in fact, demarcate the literary boundary of 4:5-31.¹⁴ Within this framework, Perdue has observed the three prophecies of judgment (vv 5-8, 13-18, and 28-31) and two interludes (vv 9-12 and 19-26).¹⁵ Likewise, Bright and Clements have also observed five smaller units:

the passive meaning that woman Jerusalem is eventually to be killed. Thus, the MT’s unique שָׁדוּדָה should be translated as ‘devastated one.’

⁶ Volz suspects עֲדָי “ornaments” as a dittography but as McKane has observed there is no textual evidence to support this view. See Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, 52; McKane, *Jeremiah*, 1, 111.

⁷ BHS emends כְּהוֹלָה “as one who is sick” to כְּהֹלָה “as one in labor” by vocalizing it from the root היל rather than MT הלה. This emendation is preferable in accord with the following parallel colon כְּמִבְּכִירָה “as one giving birth to her first child” as well as with other versions (cf. LXX, Vulgate, and Targum) except Peshitta.

⁸ LXX reads צָרָה “anguish” as τοῦ στεναγμοῦ σου “of your groaning.”

⁹ LXX reads τοὺς ἀνθρωπημένους ‘the slain.’

¹⁰ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 28-34; O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 493. Also see Chapter 1 of this study.

¹¹ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 33; O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 493. Also see Ronald Ernest Clements, *Jeremiah*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 39-43.

¹² Bright, *Jeremiah*, 33.

¹³ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 493-495.

¹⁴ Leo G. Perdue, *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 1121.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1121.

announcement of the coming of evil from the north (vv 5-10), announcement of the devastation as Yahweh's judgment (vv 11-18), the agony of Judah's downfall (vv 19-22), the coming horrible judgment as Yahweh's will (vv 23-28), and torment of Jerusalem 'likened to a courtesan done to death by her lovers' (vv 29-31).¹⁶ I would argue that Jer 4:5-31 has six units that form a chiasmic structure with their minute elements under the motif of the destruction of the cities. The composite units of Jer 4:5-31 are: introduction of the terrible destructive war (4:5-8), Yahweh as the agent of the destruction (4:9-12), the wickedness of the city and the divine attack (4:13-18), the lament of personified Jerusalem over the destruction of her city (4:19-21), the foolishness of the people and Yahweh's destruction of the whole land (4:22-28), and conclusion of the mournful battle (4:29-31).

The chiasmic structure of 4:5-31 can be sketched as follows.¹⁷

A Zion, supposedly a place of refuge amidst trumpet blowing, shouting, crying, running, fleeing (5-6a)

B Evil from the North, 'a destroyer of nations has set out' (6b-7a)

C Cities ruined and uninhabited; 'For this, put on sackcloth' (7b-8a)

D The fierce anger of Yahweh has not turned away from the people (8b)

E 'A scorching wind from the bare heights in the wilderness' (9-12)

F 'Behold, he goes up like clouds, and his chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles.' (13-14)

G 'For a voice declares from Dan and proclaims wickedness from Mount Ephraim' (15)

H Besiegers come from a far country to destroy the cities of Judah (16-17a)

I Yahweh indicts his people for their rebellion against him (17b-18)

J Personified city Jerusalem is in anguish for she hears the sound of the trumpet and the alarm of war (19)

K 'Disaster on disaster' (20a)

X 'The whole land is devastated' (20b)

K' 'my tents are devastated, my curtains in an instant' (20c)

J' 'How long must I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet' (21)

I' Yahweh indicts his people for they are foolish, stupid, shrewd to do evil; they do not know Yahweh and good things; they do not have understanding (22)

H' The earth was formless and void; the heavens had no light. (23)

G' The mountains quake and hills sway (24)

F' 'Behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled' (25)

E' 'The fruitful land was a wilderness' (26a)

D' Yahweh's fierce anger will not turn from destruction (26b-28)

C' Cities abandoned, and uninhabited; 'In vain you beautify yourself.' (29-30a)

¹⁶ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 33-34. Clements sees 4:3-4 as a general introduction of 4:3-6:30. Clements, *Jeremiah*, 40-41.

¹⁷ Daniel C. Olson, "Jeremiah 4:5-31 and Apocalyptic Myth," *JSOT* 73 (1997), 82-83.

B' 'They seek your life' (30b)
A' Zion, crying, fainting, gasping for breath (31)¹⁸

According to the above chiasm, the destruction of the land is seen as the climax of 4:5-31. In this chiasmus, 4:5-8 serves as the introduction to the terrible destructive war. To begin with, the first sub-unit (4:5-6a) starts the depiction of war through the presentation of sights and sounds. The sounds of the trumpet, the people's shouting, running to the fortified cities, and raising the military standard toward Zion provide a scene of war. The inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem are called to seek refuge as fast as they can. They are commanded to go into the fortified cities; they are forced to flee from their cities; they are commanded not to delay in fleeing. Who is besieging the cities? The text does not mention this until the next sub-unit (6b-7a). In 4:6b-7a, it is mentioned that the coming enemy is 'evil from the north.' The enemy is metaphorically presented as 'a lion' that goes up from its thicket and 'a destroyer of nations.' In addition, 4:7b-8a asserts that the destroyer of nations is about to destroy Judah and all cities completely; "cities will be ruined without inhabitant" so that Judah is only to put on sackcloth, lament, and wail. 4:8b adds that the destruction is for the fierce anger of Yahweh אַף־יְהוָה.

4:9-12 heightens the motif of destruction by mentioning Yahweh as the agent of destruction. The text identifies Yahweh as the cause of judgment; Yahweh sends the strong wind (enemy) from the wilderness to daughter my people (4:11-12). When Yahweh's destruction comes, "the heart of the king and the heart of the princes will fail; and the priests will be appalled and the prophets will be astounded." (4:9). The speaker even accuses Yahweh of making a deceptive promise of peace (4:10).

4:13-14 continues the motif of attack with the presentation of the coming of an unidentified superhuman-destroyer along with his chariots that are like the whirlwind and his horses that are swifter than eagles. The people admit that they are ruined (4:13b). In addition to the people's confession, the text also highlights the wickedness of Jerusalem (4:14). The intensity of the wickedness of the people is enforced with the wickedness from Mount Ephraim (4:15). Because of this wickedness, the next sub-unit (4:16-17a) mentions that the besiegers come from a far country to destroy the cities of Judah (4:16b). 4:17b-18 again piles up the guilt of Judah on top of the previous wickedness so that Yahweh indicts the people/personified female Jerusalem – "Your ways and your deeds have brought these things to you. This is your evil. How bitter! How it has touched your heart!" (4:18 NAU).

After the deity's indictment, the lament of personified Jerusalem over the destruction of her city is seen as the climax of 4:5-31. 4:19-21 reads

My soul, my soul! I am in anguish! Oh, my heart! My heart is pounding in me;
 I cannot be silent, because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet,
 the alarm of war. Disaster on disaster is proclaimed, for the whole land is
 devastated; Suddenly my tents are devastated, my curtains in an instant. How
 long must I see the standard and hear the sound of the trumpet? (Jer 4:19-21
 NAU)

¹⁸ Olson, "Jeremiah 4:5-31 and Apocalyptic Myth," 82-83. All texts quoted are from NAU except the text in C'.

While Bright and Olson have identified the first person speaker ‘I’ of this verse as Jeremiah,¹⁹ O’Connor identifies the speaker as Yahweh.²⁰ However, Dobbs-Allsopp et al.’s identification of the speaker as the personified Jerusalem is preferable if one takes Jer 10:20 into consideration.²¹ Jer 10:20 has a parallel in 4:19-21 as follows:

My tent is destroyed, and all my ropes are broken; My sons have gone from me and are no more. There is no one to stretch out my tent again or to set up my curtains. (Jer 10:20 NAU)

This parallel text corrects the plural ‘my tents’ in 4:20 to be singular meaning ‘my tent’ which is a more accurate word for the Jerusalem Temple. At the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war, the personified Jerusalem laments over the destruction of herself, the city; disaster on disaster; the whole land is devastated; the tent (the Temple) is already destroyed, the curtains (sanctuary) has collapsed; the typical lament question: “How long must I see the standard and hear the sound of the trumpet?” signals the divine abandonment of the city. This lamentation may also signal historically the Babylonians’ destruction of the Jerusalem Temple during their invasion in 587 BCE.

After the city lament, Yahweh indicts the people again (4:22) because they are foolish, stupid, shrewd to do evil; and because they do not know Yahweh and good things. This indictment recounts the national disaster as the people’s fault. In 4:16-17a, the text just mentions the coming of the besiegers but in 4:23 the text mentions vividly the devastating situation of the earth – ‘formless and void’ *תהו ובהו* the reverse of creation. Even in the heaven, there is no light. The mountains quake and hills sway (4:24). The speaker does not see any human being on the earth; all the birds of the sky have also fled away (4:25). The fruitful land is seen as a wilderness (4:26a). Although Yahweh will not execute a complete destruction, the cities are destroyed, the whole land is devastated, the earth mourns (4:26b-28). As O’Connor has said, “theologically, politically, socially, the Babylonian invasion of Judah and Jerusalem meant the end of the world and the cessation of the created order for the community.”²²

Finally, 4:29-31 concludes the whole scene of mournful battle by taking up the sound of a horseman and bowman *קול* (v 29) and the cry of daughter Zion *קול* (v 31). Within this framework of sound *קול*, 4:29-30a reflects the visual image of battle like its parallel in 4:7b-8a: people’s fleeing and abandoning the cities. While the former reports the coming of disaster, the latter reports the arrival of the disaster. Thus, the speaker of 4:30b ridicules the personified female city for beautifying herself as an incongruous act in a time of deadly battle – in the time of the destruction of Judah by the invasion of evil from the north (4:6b-7a). Formerly, Zion has been reported to be a place of refuge (4:5-6a) but now Zion is presented as an endangered woman, who is crying in her first child labor, gasping for her breath, stretching out her hands due to her fear of death, and fainting before her murderers (4:31).

¹⁹ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 34; Olson, “Jeremiah 4:5-31 and Apocalyptic Myth,” 82.

²⁰ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 493.

²¹ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 139. Also see Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 89-91.

²² O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 494.

In short, the pericope (Jer 4:29-31) forms a literary unit within the literary boundary of קול (v 29 and 31)²³ and the pericope reflects a scene of destructive war through the presentation of two female images –over dressed woman Jerusalem, and daughter Zion. Since the larger literary context (4:5-31) has reported the destruction of the cities and the Temple in the perfect tense, it is reasonable to assume the historical background of this pericope to be the real situation of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. With this literary and historical background, the following section will study the roles and functions of female imagery in Jeremiah 4:29-31.²⁴

4.2. The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 4:29-31

The narrator of Jer 4:29-31 begins the pericope with a scene of devastating war. The scene of war is presented through sounds and sights. Following the opening line: פָּרַשׁ וְרָמָה קֶשֶׁת׃ “At the sound of a horseman and bowman,” five parallel cola reflect the images of fearful war.

every city is fleeing,
they enter thickets,
and they climb among rocks;
every city is abandoned,
and no one dwells in them. (Jer 4:29)

In the Old Testament, the word קול renders various meanings such as ‘sound,’ ‘voice,’ and ‘noise’ as it occurs 506 times in various contexts.²⁵ For instance, קול can be the sound of walking (Gn 3:8; 2 Kgs 6:32), the sound of marching (2 Sm 5:24; 1 Chr 14:15), the sound of a trumpet (Ex 19:19; 20:18; Jo 6:5; 2 Sm 15:10; 1 Kgs 1:41; Neh 4:20; Jer 4:19, 21; Ez 33:4-5), the sound of war (Ex 32:17; Ez 21:27), the sound of chariots, horses, and a great army (2 Kgs 7:6; Ez 1:24; Na 3:2; cf. Jer 4:13), the sound of thunder (Ps 77:18-19; 104:7), the sound of an animal (1 Sm 15:14; Jer 9:10), the sound of weeping (Is 65:19), the sound of a report, message, news, and rumors (Jer 10:22), the cry of panic and terror (Jb 15:21; Jer 30:5), the cry of desolation and great destruction (Jer 48:3), the sound of shouting for victory and the sound of the cry of defeat (Ex 32:17-18; 1 Sm 4:6), the sound of a gentle blowing (1 Kgs 19:12), the sound of joy (Ezr 3:13; Is 52:8; Jer 7:34; 16:9; 25:10), a voice praising someone (2 Chr 5:13; 23:12; Ez 3:12), a voice speaking (Gn 27:22; Dt 4:33; 1 Sm 26:17; Is 6:8; 40:3), a mighty voice

²³ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 67. Lundbom also see Jeremiah 4:29-31 as ‘a self-contained poem’ for its ‘content, flow of the argument, and rhetorical structure.’ See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 364 (also see 364-371).

²⁴ Clements has said that “From the perspective of the section as we now have it, the date Jeremiah originally gave the prophecies has ceased to be a matter of great importance. So too has the fact that Jeremiah’s anonymously described ‘foe from the north’ has taken on the real-life form of the armies of Babylon. No reader could seriously doubt that this was the enemy to whom Jeremiah’s prophecies referred.” See Clements, *Jeremiah*, 41. O’Connor also assumes the implied audience to be the exiles. See O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 493. Also see Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 370; and Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 82-93, 241. Jeremiah 52 also provides information about the complete destruction of Jerusalem including the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

²⁵ 1998a. קול, in *TWOT Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

(Ps 68:34), the sound of crying (Gn 21:17; Jer 4:31; 8:19; 25:36; Ez 8:18), the sound of weeping in a loud voice (2 Sm 15:23; 19:5; Ezr 3:12; Ps 6:9; Jer 9:18; 31:15), the voice of enemies (Ps 74:23), the sound of uproar from the city (Is 66:6), the voice from the temple (Is 66:6), the sound of weeping and supplications (Jer 3:21), the sound of fleeing and escaping from one's enemy (Jer 50:28), proclamation of the word (Ex 36:6; 2 Chr 36:22; Ezr 1:1), the noise of battle (Jer 50:22), the noise of lamentation (Lam 2:7), and the roar of the lions (Zec 11:3).

Therefore, the word קול in Jer 4:29a translated as "the sound" connotes the fearful sound of battle, the sound of chariots and horses, the sound of a horseman and Bowman, the voice of mighty men, the voice of the enemy, the sound of shouting, the sound of trumpets, the sound of marching, the noise of battle, the noise of great destruction, the sound of rumors and news, the cry of a watchman or of a messenger, the cry of panic and terror, the sound of uproar, the sound of fleeing and the cries of hunger as the city lacks food under the siege of the enemy (Jer 52). Metaphorically, the sound may be like the roar of the lion (cf. Zec 11:3 and Jer 4:7), like the sound of thunder and even the sound that could make the earth tremble, shake, and resound (cf. Ps 77:18 and 1 Sm 4:5).

Following the sound of great destruction, the narrator describes the sight of fleeing: "every city is fleeing." Where do they flee? The narrator reports the direction of the flight twice: "they enter thickets עֲבִיִּים, and they climb among rocks כְּבֵיִם." If Jer 52:7 refers to this event, the text asserts that the men of war fled from the city in the night to Arabah עֲרָבָה (i.e. wilderness, desert, desert plain) by way of the gate between the two walls that is by the king's garden. As they are fleeing, they could climb among rocks כְּבֵיִם, the places to hide (cf. Jer 16:16). Like the description of the direction of the flight, the narrator also describes the result of the flight twice – "every city is abandoned, and no one dwells in them." At the time of the Babylonian invasion into the cities of Judah, people of every city in Judah fled from their cities and they abandoned their cities. While the people were fleeing from their cities, the Babylonians also captured 745 Jewish people including the Judean King Zedekiah (Jer 52:30). Therefore, after the great destruction, the cities are seen as desolate, ruined, collapsed, and forsaken. One can even imagine the cities after battle being full of putrid unburied corpses (cf. Jer 9:22; 16:4; 19:7; and 33:5). Against this background of the destruction of the cities, the speaker moves his focus on to a specific city in 4:30.

Among the cities of Judah, Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, has been focused on and addressed five times in the preceding literary context (cf. Jer 4:5, 10, 11, 14, and 16). Now in Jer 4:30, the narrator focuses again on a specific ruined city in the midst of collapse by addressing it in second person feminine singular. The addressee is most probably Jerusalem, a personified female city.²⁶

O'Connor has identified this personified city Jerusalem with daughter Zion in Jer 4:31 so that daughter Zion is claimed to be Yahweh's divorced wife and the one who plays the whore.²⁷ She says:

²⁶ Lundbom also assumes the city to be Jerusalem. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 366.

²⁷ O'Connor, "Jeremiah," *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, 494. Maier also identifies the woman Jerusalem and daughter Zion for she sees "rhetorically both blend together into one." See Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 83-84.

(4:29-31) returns to the battle itself, the noise, the attack, the empty cities (v. 29), but the speaker addresses Jerusalem, personified as daughter Zion. ... Zion is YHWH's divorced wife (2:1-3:5; 4:16-18) who continues to play the whore and whose predicament has worsened. Her lovers now despise her and want to kill her (v. 30). The speaker hears her voice as of a woman in labor. She gasps and writhes not from giving life but in fear of death, finding her voice for the first time to bemoan her fate (v. 31; cf. 3:14).²⁸

O'Connor here fails to distinguish the roles and functions of female imagery between the personified Jerusalem (4:30) and daughter Zion (4:31). The word "Zion" appears 17 times in the Book of Jeremiah but none of them refers to Zion as either Yahweh's wife or a prostitute. In fact, Jeremianic Zion carries only two meanings – the meaning of actual land/territory (cf. Jer 3:14; 4:6; 8:19; 9:19; 14:19; 26:18; 30:17; 31:6, 12; 50:5, 28; 51:10, 24, 35) and personification as a daughter, namely daughter Zion (Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23). Nowhere does Jeremianic daughter Zion play the whore. In contrast, it is Jerusalem that is described as the bride, unfaithful bride, promiscuous wife, nymphomaniac wife, and prostitute in the presentation of faithless Israel and Judah (Jer 2-3).²⁹ Thus, personified Jerusalem and daughter Zion should be seen as different images. In fact, it will be seen that they play different roles in this pericope. In order to see the role of female Jerusalem, I will shift the focus to Jer 4:30.

In Jer 4:30a, the narrator addresses the uninhabited female city Jerusalem by calling "And you, Devastated One." The narration and presentation of the desolate cities in general become more specific as the speaker addresses Jerusalem with the second person feminine singular אַתְּ "you." Against the background of devastation, the speaker mocks the female personified Jerusalem as a woman. The double vocative "And you, Devastated One" is followed by three rhetorical questions and three affirmative mockeries. 4:30 reads as follows:

And you, Devastated One,
 What will you do
 that [כִּי] you dress in scarlet,
 that [כִּי] you deck yourself with ornaments of gold,
 that [כִּי] you enlarge your eyes with antimony?
 In vain you beautify yourself.
 The paramours have despised you;
 They seek your life.

The woman is mocked for she is foolish enough to misunderstand the real situation of devastation; she is still trying to adorn herself by wearing precious clothes and jewelry. Moreover, she paints her eyes by using 'mascara.' Although she is going to be killed by her lovers, she is still beautifying herself. Thus the speaker mocks her adornment as vanity.

The speaker begins to mock the woman with the vocative אַתְּ (אַתְּ) שְׂרֹרֶת "And you, Devastated One." In Jer 52:7, the text reports that the ones who had fled from the city are "all

²⁸ Ibid., 494.

²⁹ Chapter Two, Section 2.4. of this dissertation, "A Study of Marriage Imagery in the Book of Jeremiah."

the men of war” *כָּל-אֲנָשֵׁי הַמִּלְחָמָה*. The text does not say anything about the flight of women. Ironically, Jer 4:30 presents the figurative woman as the ‘Devastated One’ who is eventually to be killed.

The initial line of a mockery follows three *כִּי* parallel rhetorical questions: “What will you do that [*כִּי*] you dress in scarlet, that [*כִּי*] you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, that [*כִּי*] you enlarge your eyes with paint?” The Hebrew emphatic particle [*כִּי*] followed by the second person feminine singular ‘you’ highlights the stupidity of the woman. Moreover, the speaker’s use of three separate phrases highlights the detailed decoration of the woman.

First, the focus lies on the woman’s dress, the color of her dress, i.e. *שָׁנִי* ‘scarlet,’ red, the color of blood. The scarlet dye was obtained from “the eggs of the female kermes or cochineal scale insects which attach themselves to the kermes oak.”³⁰ The scarlet dyed materials were used to make fine clothes such as beautiful garments (2 Sm 1:24; Ex 28:5-8, 15, 33), and the curtains and veils of the tabernacle (Ex 26:1, 31). However, metaphorically, the word *שָׁנִי* ‘scarlet’ renders the meaning of bloodguilt (cf. Is 1:15-18; Jer 7:6; 19:4; 22:3, 17). Therefore, the woman’s dressing in scarlet might denote her bloodguiltiness and her adornment with luxuriant fabric. The image of the decoration of the woman is intensified with the colorful ornaments of gold.

The second *כִּי* phrase zooms in on the woman’s “ornaments of gold” *עֲדֵי-זָהָב*. What kinds of ornaments of gold? The text does not say specifically. It could be gold ear-rings (cf. Jgs 8:24-26; Prv 25:12; Is 3:19), nose-rings (Gn 24:22; Is 3:21), necklaces (Gn 41:42; Ez 16:11), bracelets (Gn 24:22; Ez 16:11), finger-rings, anklets, ankle chains, sashes, headdresses (Is 3:18-23), or ornaments of gold on the clothing (2 Sm 1:24). The speaker ridicules the woman’s beautification as it is inappropriate in a time of war. What kind of woman is this? What will she do? The speaker mocks her with rhetorical questions. According to the subsequent phrase: “The paramours *עַגְבֵּיִם* have despised you,” the woman is to be identified with a ‘courtesan.’ She is beautifying herself as if she is expecting her clients; i.e. noble men. She does not know that she will be killed by her clients. She is still beautifying herself even by painting her eyes with ‘mascara.’

The third *כִּי* phrase shifts the focus from ‘ornaments of gold’ to the woman’s face; specifically to her ‘eyes:’ the woman is enlarging her eyes with ‘antimony’ *פִּזְרִי* i.e. “black mineral powder, for increasing brilliance of eyes by darkening edges of lids.”³¹ According to the description of King David’s offerings for the temple (1 Chr 29:2), ‘antimony’ *פִּזְרִי* is understood to be as precious as gold and as beautiful as colorful gems. Jer 4:30 also describes ‘antimony’ *פִּזְרִי* in the presentation of the woman’s beautification along with beautiful garments and valuable gold. ‘Antimony’ *פִּזְרִי* is thus understood as a material used to beautify one’s eyes to be good looking in the physical appearance. There are two other women in the Old Testament who painted their eyes as part of their beautification: Queen Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:30) and personified Jerusalem (Ez 23:40). Both are killed after their eyes are painted. 2 Kgs 9:30 mentions that Jezebel has painted her eyes and adorned her head as a preparation for meeting Jehu who has killed her younger son Joram. At their encounter, the beautified Jezebel was

³⁰ 2420a. *שָׁנִי*, in *TWOT Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

³¹ 7596. *פִּזְרִי*, in *BDB (Full) Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

unfortunately thrown down from the upper window to the ground and she died there disgustingly; her corpse was eaten by dogs. Ez 23:40 also mentions the eye painting of the woman Jerusalem, the promiscuous wife of Yahweh. As this wanton woman sees the Babylonian male figures on the wall, she sends messengers to the Babylonians to play the whore (Ez 23:14-16, 40); when they come, she takes a bath, paints her eyes, and decks herself with ornaments (Ez 23:40). She uncovers her nakedness and lies with them on the bed of love (Ez 23:17-18). After she has been defiled by them, she becomes disgusted with them (Ez 23:17b) and Yahweh also becomes disgusted with her (Ez 23:18b). Throughout the whole chapter of Ezekiel 23, the woman Jerusalem (along with Israel)³² is pornographically depicted as a courtesan who commits adultery, plays the whore, lusts after her paramours “whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses.” (Ez 23:20 NIB). The woman is presented as the lewd woman who is preoccupied with sex and sexual desire since she was young. When she was young, the Egyptians fondled her breasts. Ez 23 has enumerated the lovers of Jerusalem such as the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, governors, commanders, officers, warriors, horsemen riding on horses, and all desirable young men (Ez 23:12, 14-18, 19, 21, 23). Since the promiscuous wife has given herself to her lovers (Ez 23), Yahweh will arouse her lovers against her (v. 22) and set his jealousy against her (v. 25). Thus, the lovers will mutilate her nose and her ears (v. 25) and expose her naked body (v. 26, 29). In her humiliation, she will be mocked (v. 32). She will be judged by the alleged righteous men (v. 45). Finally, Yahweh brings the crowd and they will stone the woman to death (v.47). A similar image of violence against woman Jerusalem is found in Jer 4:30; after she has beautified herself, she is to be killed. Jer 4:30b reads as follows.

In vain you beautify yourself.
The paramours have despised you;
They seek your life.

The speaker mocks the woman that her beautifying is in vain because the paramours – Babylonians, warriors, and the horsemen riding on horses have come to her but they have despised her; they seek her life. The speaker presents her to the readers/viewers through the images of wearing scarlet luxuriant fabric, wearing ornaments of gold, and painted eyes. Then she is to be killed. What is the role of the woman Jerusalem in this text? Is this not a footprint of misogyny? Is she not presented to the readers as ‘dressed to be killed’ as Bauer has said?³³ Or is it a lesson for women not to commit lewdness as woman Jerusalem has done (cf. Ez 23:48)? What is certain here is that the woman Jerusalem is abused. As Exum has said, it is “the abusive husband’s version of events. The woman’s version, her point of view, is not presented; she is called upon to accept her abuser’s accusations as valid and acknowledge her guilt.”³⁴

³² Exum points out this polygamy as a violation of the law in Lv 18:18 that commands “You shall not marry a woman in addition to her sister as a rival while she is alive, to uncover her nakedness.” See Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 109.

³³ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 66-70.

³⁴ Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, 110-111.

What would happen if the woman told the story?³⁵ Although Carroll has argued that we should not relate metaphors and real people,³⁶ Bauer is correct in arguing that one should explore the ideology of the discourses to discern who is helped and who is hurt by the use of such metaphor.³⁷ In fact, our contemporary readers must be aware of such power construction (including gender construction) in any discourses.

After the visual presentation of the woman Jerusalem in Jer 4:30, the speaker gradually fades out the pericope (4:29-31) with the fainting cry קול of daughter Zion (4:31) which reads:

For I heard a cry קול as of a woman in labor,
 anguish as of one giving birth to her first child,
 the cry קול of daughter Zion gasping for breath,
 stretching out her hands,
 “Woe to me, for I faint before murderers.”

The personification of the city as a courtesan (4:30) has shifted to Zion personified as daughter Zion (בַּת-צִיּוֹן) who is crying like a woman in labor, suffering extreme pain like a woman in her first childbirth, gasping for breath, and stretching out her hands for help as she is fainting before her murderers. The sound of soldiers קול (4:29) and the sound of daughter Zion’s cry קול (4:31) enclose the scene of destructive war; under the attack of Babylonian soldiers, the personified daughter Zion cries as she fears the threat of death.

In the preceding literary context of Jer 4:31, a cluster of city lament features can be observed such as the motifs of attack and destruction (4:13, 16-17, 29, and 23-28), the depiction of the enemy in metaphorical language such as ‘evil from the north’ and ‘a lion from his thicket’ (4:6-7, 13), the guilt of Judah (4:14, 17-18, 22), the destruction of the temple (4:20), the statement that the deity is the agent of the destruction (4:6b, 12), the theme of divine abandonment (4:21), the theme of lamentation (4:8, 19), the reaction of the personified city Jerusalem who wails for the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah (4:19-21).³⁸ Now, in 4:31, woman Jerusalem’s role of wailing is handed over to daughter Zion.

In the Ancient Near Eastern texts, one finds that the city goddesses cry for the destruction of their cities. For instance, the goddess Ningal of Ur cries bitterly when her city, city-walls, gates, roads, streets, and people are destroyed by the Elamites ca 2025 BCE.³⁹ She

³⁵ A.R. Pete Diamond and Kathleen M. O’Connor also have pointed out this fact. In their study of Jer 2-3, they raise the questions “What would happen if female Israel told the story? Would she tell of her husband’s verbal abuse, his foolish jealousy, his despicable exaggerations, his claims to have ‘planted her as a choice vine’ (2:21), his continual distrust of her and her sexuality? Would she recount how loving he had been and tell how he had become more and more controlling and demanding?” See A.R. Pete Diamond and Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Unfaithful Passions: Coding Women Coding Men in Jeremiah 2-3 (4.2),” *Troubling Jeremiah*, ed. A.R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O’Connor, Louis Stulman (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 144, (123-145).

³⁶ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 172-173.

³⁷ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 70.

³⁸ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 137-142.

³⁹ Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion*, 75; Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur 80-85, 108-109, 137-172, 252a-327. Also see “A Study of Daughter Language in the Setting of Ancient Near Eastern Literature” in my Chapter Two, Section 2.2. in this dissertation.

tears out her hair and beats her chest.⁴⁰ Similarly, the goddess Damgalnunna cries for the destruction of her city. Since she cries uncontrollably, she claws her breast and her eyes; she holds a dagger and a sword; and she gashes herself with the dagger and the sword (Eridu Lament 5:5-9).

In Jer 4:31, the narrator reports that the cry קול of daughter Zion is “a cry קול as of a woman in labor היל.” In the noise קול of battle - the sound of chariots and horses, the sound of blowing trumpets, the sound of shouting, running, killing, striking, hitting, fighting, and crying, the cry קול of daughter Zion is produced. קול on קול. Cry on cry. The Hebrew word היל even denotes twisting the body in fear. Moreover, it also conveys the meaning of anguish, extreme pain, distress, and anxiety. The speaker intensifies the anguish of daughter Zion in the parallel colon: “anguish as of one giving birth to her first child.” The speaker again heightens the cry קול of daughter Zion in the following parallel cola: “the cry קול of daughter Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands.” As she is suffering from extreme pain and struggling to breathe, she stretches out her hands for help. No one is near her. No one helps her. Yahweh is not with her. She is dying. As she cannot do anything at her last breath, she murmurs poorly: “Woe to me, for I faint before murderers.” (4:31).

In the Book of Jeremiah, the word “daughter” appears 24 times: daughter my people 8x (4:11; 6:26; 8:11, 19, 21, 22, 9:1, 7), virgin daughter my people 1x (14:17), virgin Israel 3x (18:13; 31:4, 21), daughter Zion 3x (4:31; 6:2, 23), faithless daughter (virgin Israel) 1x (31:22), virgin daughter Egypt 1x (46:11), daughter dwelling in Egypt 1x (46:19), daughter Egypt 1x (46:24), daughter dwelling in Dibon (Moab) 1x (48:18), daughters (Ammon) 1x (49:3), daughter Babylon 2x (50:42; 51:33), and King Zedekiah’s mother, Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Linah (52:1). In the midst of these occurrences, daughter Zion appears only three times (4:31; 6:2, 23). All three images of daughter Zion are found in the context of destruction by evil/people from the north. The speaker of Jer 6:2 declares to daughter Zion that “The beautiful and delicate one, I will destroy, O daughter Zion!” Moreover, the speaker of Jer 6:23 also threatens daughter Zion saying “they ride on horses, equipped like a warrior for battle, against you, O daughter Zion!” (Jer 6:23b NRS). In these contexts of destruction, daughter Zion in Jer 4:31 cries: “Woe to me, for I faint before murderers.” The onomatopoeitic interjection נַיִן “Woe to me” expresses the grief and sorrow of daughter Zion. With this last word of daughter Zion, the pericope ends. There are no more words of daughter Zion in Jer 6:2 or 6:23 or in the rest of the Book of Jeremiah.

Summary

In summary, Jer 4:29-31 contains two female images: woman Jerusalem and daughter Zion. The narrator presents woman Jerusalem as a courtesan who plays the whore with the paramours. According to the narrator’s presentation, the courtesan woman Jerusalem foolishly wears luxuriant scarlet garment and ornaments of gold at the time of the Babylonian invasion. In addition to her outerwear, she also paints her eyes with mascara to be more attractive. However, the narrator asserts that she will be killed by her paramours instead of playing the whore with them. The message that the author wants to convey here is the destruction of people of Jerusalem for their negligence to Yahweh. The author wants the audience to return to God.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

To convey his message, the author uses female imagery. The devastated situation is also presented as daughter Zion who laments over the destruction of the city. She suffers like a woman in childbirth, the first childbirth. After gasping for breath and stretching out her hands for help, she murmurs her last words: "Woe to me, for I faint before murderers." In this pericope, woman Jerusalem serves as the symbol of devastated Judeans and daughter Zion's cry serves as the cry of the people and her picture of dying symbolizes the people's helpless situation at the time of the Babylonian invasion. However, the author's presentation of female imagery is thought to be a product of misogyny because it emphasizes the destruction of the (personified) women. Therefore, even though woman Jerusalem and daughter Zion are personified women, the text renders the impression that the male deity is right and females are wrong. As a result, it is observed that ideological reading is necessary in reading every prophetic female imagery.

CHAPTER 5

THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF FEMALE IMAGERY IN JEREMIAH 31:15-22

Introduction

In this chapter, I will study the roles and functions of female imagery in Jer 31:15-22. In order to find the roles and functions of the female imagery in the text, I will first analyze the placement of the pericope in its literary and theological context. Second, I will set a possible date for the selected pericope by exploring the rhetorical and theological composition of the units. Third, the Hebrew texts of the pericope will be translated into English and the contents of the pericope will be studied in detail. Finally, the message of the pericope will be discovered. The aim of this study is to show the roles and functions of three female images – weeping Rachel, Yahweh as a compassionate mother, and virgin Israel in a leading role.

5.1. Analysis of the Placement of Jeremiah 31:15-22

Jer 31:15-22 is situated in the second division of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer 26-52). More specifically, it is located in the climax chapter (Jer 31) of the macro-structural unit of Jeremiah 26-36. Moreover, Jer 31 is part of the so-called “Book of Comfort” (Jer 30-31),¹ the unique collection of words of hope amidst the devastation. Therefore, the pericope is specifically located in the Book of Consolation.

The general introduction formula *הַדְבָר אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֶל־יְרֵמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה* “The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh” appears in Jer 30:1 and 32:1 so that it demarcates the boundaries of the ‘Book of Comfort’ as it does elsewhere in the Book of Jeremiah.²

Within this larger literary unit, the so-called prophetic messenger formula *כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה* “Thus says Yahweh” marks off the smaller units of the Book of Consolation. As the messenger formula appears in Jer 30:2, 5, 12, 18; 31:2, 7, 15, 16, 23, 35, and 37, one can see six poems within the framework of a short prose introduction (30:2-4) and a long prose conclusion (31:23-40).³ As Barbara A. Bozak has observed, the noticeable gender alternation between masculine audience and feminine audience also supports the determination of the units of the six poems.⁴ Thus, the composite units of the Book of Consolation can be seen as follows.

¹ Stanley Brice Frost, “The Book of Jeremiah,” *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary of the Bible*, ed. Charles M. Laymon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 374.

² The general introductory formula *הַדְבָר אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֶל־יְרֵמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה* “The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh” demarcates the major division of the Book of Jeremiah by appearing in Jer 7:1; 11:1; 18:1; 21:1; 27:1; 30:1; 32:1; 34:1; 35:1; 40:1. See Barbara A. Bozak, *Life ‘Anew,’ A Literary-Theological Study of Jer. 30-31*, *Analecta Biblica* 122 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991), 18-25; Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, WBC 27 (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 86, 10-12; also see Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 571.

³ Bozak, *Life ‘Anew,’* 19. The messenger formula *כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה* “Thus says Yahweh” occurs in 31:16 and 31:37 but it does not divide the units (31:15-22) and (31:23-40) because the former is united around Rachel and her weeping whereas the latter is united around Yahweh’s creation. See Bozak, *Life ‘Anew,’* 19, 24, 125.

⁴ Bozak, *Life ‘Anew,’* 19.

30:1-4	Prose	Introduction
30:5-11	Poem I	masculine audience
30:12-17	Poem II	feminine audience
30:18-31:1	Poem III	masculine audience
31:2-6	Poem IV	feminine audience
31:7-14	Poem V	masculine audience
31:15-22	Poem VI	feminine-masculine-feminine
31:23-34	Prose	Conclusion Part I
31:35-40	Prose	Conclusion Part II ⁵

Following the general introduction formula *הַדְּבָרִי אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֵלַי יְרֵמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה* “The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh” (30:1), the messenger formula *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה* “Thus says Yahweh” (30:2) introduces the main theme of the Book of Consolation – Yahweh’s future restoration plan for both Israel and Judah which sounds out repeatedly in all the following six poems.⁶

In Poem I, Yahweh promises the male Jacob (30:7, 10) and Israel (30:10) that He will save them from their captivity and bring them back to their own land. In Poem II, the gender of Israel shifts from male to female (notice the Hebrew suffixes: i.e. second person feminine singular suffixes) and Yahweh promises the female Israel that he will heal her wounds and restore her health. Like the preceding gender alternation, the gender in Poem III alters from female to male and the male Jacob is promised that his dwelling places will be restored; Yahweh promises “And the city will be rebuilt on its ruin, And the palace will stand on its rightful place.” (Jer 30:18). Yahweh’s repeated promises to all His people are found in Jer 30:22 “You shall be My people, And I will be your God.” and in Jer 31:1 “I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people.” In Poem IV, the gender of the audience alters again from the male Jacob to the female virgin Israel (31:4) and the virgin Israel is assured that she will take up her tambourines and “go forth to the dances of the merry-makers” for Yahweh is about to rebuild and replant the ruins (Jer 31:4). This same theme of Yahweh’s future salvation is carried on in Poem V where the male audience Jacob/Israel/Ephraim (31:9-11) is brought back by Yahweh from the north where they have been captives.

Poem VI (Jer 31:15-22) also carries on the theme of Yahweh’s future restoration program. Unlike the preceding units, this last unit (Jer 31:15-22) is formed with the enclosure of feminine-masculine-feminine gender – the female characters Rachel (vv 15-17) and virgin Israel (vv 21-22) enclose the male character Ephraim (vv 18-20). Under the main theme of the future restoration, hope, the three strophes together form a unit. The first strophe (vv 15-17) presents Rachel’s weeping for her missing children and Yahweh’s assurance of the return of the children. The second strophe (vv 18-20) ensures the hope by focusing on Yahweh’s motherly compassion for the repentant son Ephraim. The final strophe (vv 21-22) recapitulates the theme of hope by announcing the oracle of new creation to the virgin Israel. Thus, the unit

⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁶ Carroll labels this theme as ‘restoration of the nation’ and Bright calls ‘comfort.’ See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 568; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 284.

is wrapped up with the female images of Rachel, Yahweh's motherly compassion, and the virgin Israel.

Although the unit indicator – the messenger formula *כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה* “Thus says Yahweh,” appears within the unit (v 16), it can be considered as an emphasis of Yahweh's speech to Rachel within the same context. As Bozak has argued, the messenger formula *כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה* “Thus says Yahweh” in v.16 “must not be construed as the beginning of another poem, for the first stanza is clearly united around Rachel and her weeping.”⁷

Many scholars such as Duhm, Bright, Tribble, Anderson, Thomson, Brueggemann, Bozak, and Bauer have treated Jer 31:15-22 as a poetic unit.⁸

However, others prefer to treat v 15, vv 16-20, and vv 21-22 separately.⁹ For instance, Carroll treats 31:15-20 as a unit comprising vv 15-17, vv 18-19, and v 20.¹⁰ From the unit of vv 15-17, he treats v 15 separately as an independent unit. According to him, the word *אֵינָם* or *אֵינָהֶם* in v 15 provides the information about the death of the children, whereas vv 16-17 deals with the exiled children. Thus, he does not think v 15 fits in the context. Since the Hebrew word *אֵינָם* or *אֵינָהֶם* can render the meaning ‘they are no longer in existence’ and “they are no longer there,” one may be tempted to read *אֵינָם* or *אֵינָהֶם* as “non-existence.” However, the fact that the prophecy of the returning *שׁוּב* of the exiles occurs repeatedly throughout the context shows that the exiles are still existent. Therefore, it is argued that the translation for *אֵינָם* or *אֵינָהֶם* “they are no longer there” is a more plausible meaning than that of “they are no longer in existence” so that it is reasonable to treat v 15 as a part of vv 15-17 and it cannot be separated from vv 15-17. In addition to this, Carroll also suggests treating vv 21-22 as an isolated unit because of the change of the speakers.¹¹

However, it is argued that the abrupt change of speaker is not sufficient reason for the separation of the units. Such a change does not seem too foreign to Jeremiah. Even within the context of 31:15-20 a change of speaker can be found. Therefore, as Holladay has observed, the change of speaker and of mood is perhaps Jeremiah's style with the function of heightening emotion.¹² In this regard, one does not need to treat vv 21-22 as an isolated unit. Thus, it is reasonable to assume Jer 31:15-22 is a single literary unit.

The above analysis shows the Jer 31:15-22 is a literary unit that communicates the theme of future hope for the exiles. Since the exiles can allude to both northern Israel and southern Judah, scholars do not agree in assigning the date of this poem. Thus, to be able to propose the

⁷ Bozak, *Life 'Anew*, ' 24.

⁸ Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, KHCAT XI (Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr, 1901), 247-251; Bright, *Jeremiah*, 275-276; Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 40-50; Bernhard W. Anderson, “‘The Lord Has Created Something New’: A Stylistic Study of Jer. 31:15-22,” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 463-478; John A. Thomson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 572-576; Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant*, 64-66; Bozak, *Life 'Anew*, ' 18-25, 92-105; and Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 130-145.

⁹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 597; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 153-154, 186-195; McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 2, 796-807.

¹⁰ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 597.

¹¹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 597-598.

¹² William L. Holladay, “Style, Irony, and Authenticity in Jeremiah,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81(1962), 47.

possible date for this unit, the focus will shift to rhetorical, theological, and historical perspectives.

5.2. The Possible Date of Jeremiah 31:15-22

Bright has assigned the date of Jer 31:15-22 to the period of Josiah's political expansion to the northern territory – 622 BCE.¹³ First, he compares the affinities of 'the appeal to Israel' in Jer 3:6-13; 31:2-6; and 31:15-22. Then he points out explicit evidence such as 'Josiah' and 'Ephraim' as the historical referents. As a result, the exiles, for him, are northern Israel. Furthermore, he argues that even though some stylistic similarities can be found in both Jeremiah and Second Isaiah, they are especially lacking in Jer 31:15-22.¹⁴ Therefore, he cannot assign the date of Jer 31:15-22 after the fall of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah, as a Benjaminite, a northerner, might have sympathy for the northerners who went into exile after the fall of northern Israel in 722 BCE. However, the name 'Ephraim' is not a decisive proof that Jer 31:15-22 references the northerners. In fact, one should not ignore the setting of this unit. Jer 31:15-22 is a part of the so-called "Book of Comfort" (Jeremiah 30-31). In this setting one can find evidence that the consolation embraces both northern Israel and southern Judah.¹⁵ Rhetorically and theologically, the inclusive motif of the prophet can be found in every single unit of the Book of Consolation. To begin with, in the prose introduction (30:1-4) the addressee 'my people' is carefully linked together with 'Israel and Judah' *יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיְהוּדָה* (v 3). This mood is clearer in Poem I (30:5-11) where the common ancestor Jacob is treated as the addressee (v. 10). Moreover, the common king David (v 9) anticipates the common sanctuary Zion (v 17) in Poem II (30:12-17). In Poem III (30:18-31:1), the addressee becomes the plural form *יַעֲקֹב אֱהִי* 'the tents of Jacob' (30:18) and *מִשְׁפְּחוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל* 'all the families of Israel' (31:1). The inclusive tendency toward both northerners and southerners becomes vivid in Poem IV (31:2-6) where 'Samaria' and 'Ephraim' are bound together with 'Zion' (vv 5-6). A similar mood can be found in Poem V (31:7-14) where the prophet envisions the coming of 'ransomed Jacob' to 'Zion.' In Poem VI (31:15-22), the exiles become the plural, 'children,' literary 'sons' (v 15) though the singular term 'Ephraim' is mentioned in vv 18-20. In the prose conclusion (31:23-40), 'the house of Israel' and 'the house of Judah' are deliberately addressed in the making of a new covenant (v 31) *וְכָרְתִי אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־בֵּית יְהוּדָה בְּרִית חֲדָשָׁה*. Against this background of the rhetorical and theological setting, it is argued that the exiles do not refer to only northern Israel, but rather to both northern Israel and southern Judah. If this is the case, the date of Jer 31:15-22 is after the fall of Jerusalem. The historical setting also supports this proposal. In the historical setting, Ramah (Jer 31:15) was a concentration camp where the captives from Judah had been detained and collected before they were taken to Babylon (Jer 40:1).¹⁶ Since Jeremiah himself was one of the captives, the bitter experience in Ramah might be impressed on his mind. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that he might reflect the

¹³ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 26, 284.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁵ Anderson, "The Lord Has Created Something New," 475.

¹⁶ See Gen 35:14-20; 1 Sm 10:2ff; By taking the biblical references and the suggestion of BHS into consideration, Ramah is believed to be the geographical location of the tomb of Rachel, between Bethel and Bethlehem. Also see Bright, *Jeremiah*, 282.

bitterness of this experience in Jer 31:15-22. Therefore, it is plausible to assign the date of Jer 31:15-22 to the period immediately following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.¹⁷

5.3. Analysis of Text, Structure, and Literary Unity of Jeremiah 31:15-22

The original Hebrew text of Jer 31:15-22 may be translated into English as follows.

15. Thus says Yahweh:

A voice is heard in Ramah,¹⁸ wailing, bitter weeping;

Rachel is weeping for her children,

She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are gone.¹⁹

16. Thus says Yahweh,

Restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears;

Because there is reward for your work, declares Yahweh;²⁰ they will return from the land of the enemy.

17. And there is hope for your future, declares Yahweh;²¹ and children will return to their territory.

18. I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning:

You chastened me, and I was chastened like an untrained calf.

Bring me back and let me return, for you are Yahweh my God.

19. For after I had turned away,²² I repented.

And after I had learned I slapped my thigh.²³

I was ashamed, and also I was humiliated, for I bore the disgrace of my youth.

20. Is Ephraim my precious son?²⁴ Is he the child of delight?

For as often as I speak²⁵ of him, I do remember him still.

Therefore my internal organs²⁶ roar for him,

I will truly show motherly-compassion upon him,²⁷ declares Yahweh.

¹⁷ Barnabas Lindars, S. S. F., “‘Rachel Weeping For Her Children’ – Jeremiah 31:15-22,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 12 (1979), 47.

¹⁸ BHS suggests to include a definite article in בְּרָמָה and to read it as בְּרָמָה as found in Jo 18:25 so that it may imply the name of the place “Ramah.” LXX reads בְּרָמָה as ἐν Ραμα, “in Ramah.” However, Vulgate and Targum read בְּרָמָה as “on a height.” Some contemporary scholars also prefer to read ‘Ramah’ as ‘height.’ See Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 40, 58; Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 186-187; McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 2, 797; Bozak, *Life ‘Anew*, 94; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 131.

¹⁹ BHS suggests to emend the singular suffix אֶינָנוּ to plural suffix as אֵינָם. Mt 2:18 applies Jer 31:15 in the context of the death of the male children.

²⁰ נְאֻם־יְהוָה is not found in LXX.

²¹ וַיִּשְׁתַּקֶּה לְאַחֲרֵיתָּךְ נְאֻם־יְהוָה is not found in LXX.

²² BHS suggests to emend שׁוּבִי “I turned” to שְׁבִי “my captivity” as in LXX αἰχμαλωσίας μου.

²³ LXX reads καὶ ὕστερον τοῦ γινῶναι με ἐστέναξα ἐφ’ ἡμέρας αἰσχύνῃς “and after I knew, I groaned for the day of shame.”

²⁴ The interrogative הֲ is not found in LXX.

²⁵ BHS proposes to emend הַנְּבִרִי to הַנְּבִרִי.

²⁶ מְעֵי “internal organs” denotes the source of emotions.

²⁷ I owe this translation of אֶרְחַמֶּנּוּ נְהָם to Phyllis Tribble and Angela Bauer. See Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 45; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 132.

21. Set up for yourself road-markers,²⁸
 Set up for yourself guideposts;²⁹
 Set your mind on the highway, the road you walked.³⁰
 Return, O virgin Israel,
 Return to these cities of yours.
22. How long will you turn hither and thither,
 O apostate daughter?
 For Yahweh has created a new thing in the land,
 A female shall enclose a man.³¹

Trible and Bauer observe the poem as ‘a drama of voices’ that contains five strophes that organize the poem in a chiasmic structure.³² According to them, the voice of Ephraim stands at the center of the chiasmus whereas the voice of Rachel (v 15) and the voice of Yahweh (vv 16-17) stand on one side and the voice of Yahweh (v 20) and the voice of Jeremiah (vv 21-22) on the other side.³³

It is noticed that the chiasmus pattern is one of the indicators that signals the major subdivisions of a poem.³⁴ Watson has provided many other possible subdivision indicators of a poem.³⁵ According to Watson, the change of person within the poem, for example, is also one of the indicators that indicates the stanzas of the poem.³⁶ Therefore, the chiasmic reading (of Jer 31:15-22) of Tribble and Bauer is realized as one of the possible readings of the poem and it could not be a conclusive reading.

In fact, Bozak has observed the change of the person in the poem and found that the poem is formed of three stanzas – (vv 15-17), (vv 18-20), and (vv 21-22).³⁷ According to Bozak, the first stanza concerns Rachel; the second stanza expresses Ephraim and his words; and the third stanza speaks to virgin Israel.³⁸

My reading of Jer 31:15-22 is closer to that of Bozak that the poem is composed with three stanzas – (15-17), (18-20), and (21-22). The change of the person in the poem is striking. However, I would argue that the female gender encloses the whole unit because the poem starts with Rachel’s weeping for her missing children (15-17) and ends with the return of virgin Israel (21-22). Within the framework of these female images, the image of a compassionate mother

²⁸ LXX reads צִיָּיִם “road-markers” as *Σιων* “Zion.”

²⁹ BHS proposes to emend תַּמְרוֹרִים ‘bitterness’ to הַיְמָרִים ‘guideposts’ but the word תַּמְרוֹרִים can be translated as ‘guideposts’ as it is another term for צִיָּיִם ‘guideposts.’ See 8063 צִיָּיִן in BDB Lexicon (The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon) in Michael S. Bushell and Michael D. Tan, BibleWorks 6.0.005y (BibleWorks, 2003).

³⁰ The written *kethib* הֵלְכֶתִי is to be read as *qere* הֵלְכֶתִי.

³¹ LXX reads *ὅτι ἔκτισεν κύριος σωτηρίαν εἰς καταφύτεσιν καινήν ἐν σωτηρίᾳ περιελεύσονται ἄνθρωποι* “for the Lord has created safety for a new plantation: men shall go about in safety.”

³² Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 40; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 132.

³³ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁴ Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques* (London: T&T Clark International, 2007), 161-164.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 163-164.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Bozak, *Life ‘Anew,’* 92-93.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

God, who shows motherly-compassion upon her son Ephraim, is sandwiched (18-20). The diagram of the stanzas and strophes of Jer 31:15-22 can be seen as follows.³⁹

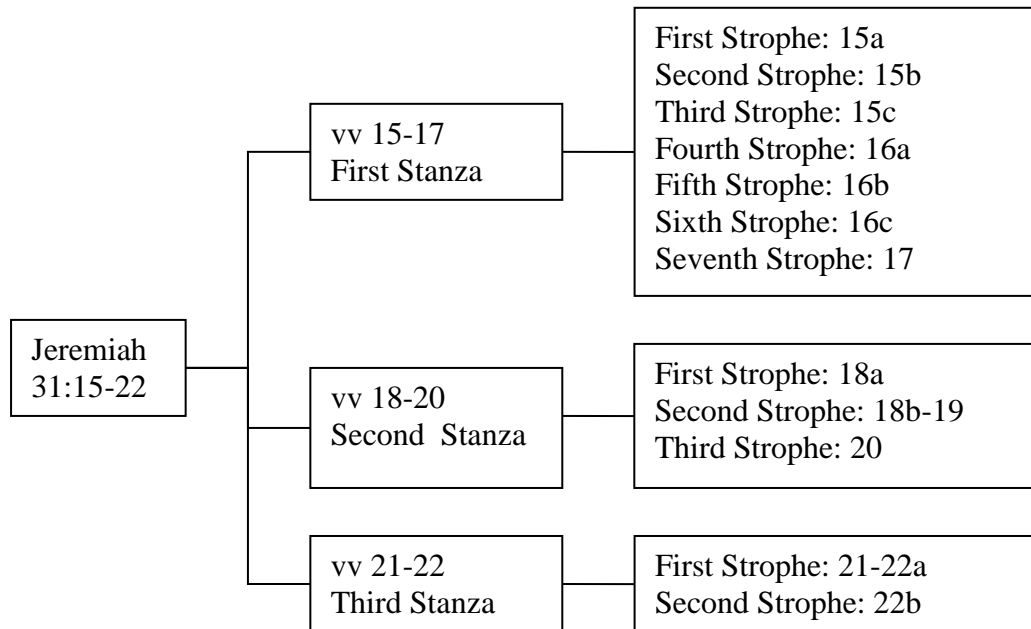


Figure (2) The diagram of the stanzas and strophes of Jeremiah 31:15-22

As is shown in the above diagram, the first stanza comprises seven strophes whereas the second stanza comprises three strophes and the third stanza comprises two strophes. In all three stanzas, female images are found as essential elements of the poem that shape the message of hope. In order to see the roles and functions of the female imagery in the whole poem, I will study each stanza and strophe of the poem.

5.4. The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 31:15-22

In this section, I will study the roles and functions of Jeremianic female imagery in each stanza of Jer 31:15-22 that I have analyzed above.

5.4.1. The First Stanza (Jeremiah 31:15-17): The Weeping Mother Rachel

Following the prophetic introductory formula *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה* “Thus says Yahweh” (v 15a), the stanza gradually develops the theme of Rachel’s weeping and the reward for her deed.

The second strophe (v 15b) starts with the voice that is heard in Ramah that is the wailing *נָהַי*, and bitter weeping *תִּמְרוּרִים בָּכִי*. The repeated identical vowel pattern *ü, î / ü, î* (*נָהַי / בָּכִי*) ‘wailing’/‘weeping’ reflects the intensity of the grief of the mourner.⁴⁰ The same word *נָהַי* ‘wailing’ can be found in Jer 9:17-20 where the professional mourning women are summoned

³⁹ The diagram is constructed by following Watson’s definition of ‘Stanza and Strophe.’ See Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, 161-164. According to Watson, a poem is analogous to a house whilst stanzas and strophes are analogous to the rooms and the furniture of the house respectively. In addition to this main structure, a strophe may consist of several lines.

⁴⁰ Bozak, *Life ‘Anew*, 93.

to 'wail' נָהָי on behalf of the people in a time of national calamity – the invasion of the Babylonians (Jer 9:17-18). In the time of disastrous war, killing, destruction, and deportation when the people have to leave their land אָרֶץ,⁴¹ “a voice of wailing (נָהָי) is heard from Zion” (Jer 9:19); the women are not only summoned to 'wail' נָהָי but also commanded to teach their daughters 'wailing' נָהָי (Jer 9:20). Thus, נָהָי 'wailing' is linked with women; 'wailing' נָהָי is the task of women. Women wail for the community to express the loss and sorrow of the community. In Jer 31:15, this word נָהָי 'wailing' is even intensified with the word בָּכִי 'weeping' accompanying the nominal word 'bitter' תַּמְרוּרִים. In the Old Testament, the word בָּכִי 'weeping' is used to express one's strong emotion. Particularly, in the Book of Jeremiah, בָּכִי 'weeping' is used to express the distress and sorrow of the people as just mentioned above. The combination of the two words בָּכִי 'weeping' and נָהָי 'wailing' is observed in Jer 9:10 where Yahweh weeps בָּכִי and wails נָהָי for the desolate mountains. The NAU translates Jer 9:10 as follows:

For the mountains I will take up a weeping and wailing, And for the pastures of the wilderness a dirge, Because they are laid waste so that no one passes through, And the lowing of the cattle is not heard; Both the birds of the sky and the beasts have fled; they are gone. (Jeremiah 9:10, NAU)

It is evident that Yahweh Himself once wept and wailed for the devastation of the country (Jer 9:10). To take His divine role, He has summoned the mourning women (Jer 9:17-20) and the women have taken on this role from the deity. Therefore, the weeping of the women in the Book of Jeremiah is not merely the expression of the sorrow of the people; it is indeed undertaking a divine commission. As the city goddesses have lamented over the destruction of their cities in Ancient Near Eastern literature, Jeremianic women here play the role of the deity (Cf. Chapter Two).

The third strophe (v 15c) describes how Rachel, the eponymous mother of Israel,⁴² takes the role of weeping for the Israelite exiles, her missing children. The third strophe makes clear that Rachel is the one who weeps in Ramah mentioned in the second strophe. The third strophe also develops the second strophe with the catch-word בָּכִי 'weeping;' Rachel is 'weeping' מִבְּכָה רַחֵל. Since her children are gone (אֵינָם or אֵינֶנּוּ), Rachel is weeping inconsolably and she even refuses to be comforted (v 15c). The connection between 'Ramah' (v 15b) and Rachel (v 15c) also emphatically explains the reason why Rachel is weeping for her missing children. As mentioned above, Ramah, the geographical location of Rachel's tomb, is the place where the exiles including the prophet Jeremiah were collected before they were taken into captivity.⁴³ When the Israelite people were carried into captivity, the poet metaphorically expresses the sorrow of the people by letting the eponymous mother of the Israelites, Rachel, weep like the weeping goddess found in the ANET.⁴⁴ In fact, when her city Ur was destroyed, the mother

⁴¹ The promise in the first stanza of the return of the exiles from the land אָרֶץ of their enemy is fulfilled in the last stanza of the poem with the return of the exiles and Yahweh's new creation in their own land אָרֶץ.

⁴² Gn 29-33; 35:16-20; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 132.

⁴³ Bright also believes Ramah to be the geographical location of Rachel's tomb (Cf. 1 Samuel 10:2ff). See Bright, *Jeremiah*, 282.

⁴⁴ See Section 2.2 of Chapter 2 in this dissertation.

goddess Ningal wept (Lamentation over the Destruction of Ur 254, 375, 378). The great mother/the divine queen Ninlil also pleaded to the deity Enlil to restore the ruined city and Enlil showed mercy and compassion to her.⁴⁵ As ‘weeping’ is especially linked with women in the Book of Jeremiah, the weeping of mother Rachel is here seen as a woman’s expression of the loss and sorrow of the community. As the women are engaged in the divine commission, i.e. weeping where Yahweh Himself is engaged, Yahweh does not withdraw from the weeping of Rachel. Indeed, Rachel’s weeping is not in vain. Yahweh shows mercy to Rachel and Yahweh rewards Rachel’s deed.

Bauer has translated ‘Ramah’ רָמָה, where the voice of Rachel is heard, as a ‘height’ because she notices the connection between the ‘heights’ and the female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah.⁴⁶ She provides Jer 2:20; 3:2, 6; and 13:27 as evidence of the connection of the two words. It is argued that Bauer’s evidence is not appropriate for this particular context because the references that she provides are related to the sexuality of the unfaithful wife. Apparently, in the present context, Rachel is not the unfaithful wife; rather, she is the eponymous mother of Israel and she is even undertaking the divine commission given in Jer 31:15-17. Moreover, the Hebrew words for Bauer’s evidence are not רָמָה; rather, גְּבֻעָה גְבוּהָהּ ‘high hill’ (2:20), שָׁפְיִם ‘bare heights’ (3:2), הַר גְּבוּהָהּ ‘high mountain’ (3:6), and גְּבֻעַת ‘hills.’ Therefore, the word רָמָה should be translated as ‘Ramah,’ the geographical location of Rachel’s tomb where the voice of Jer 31:15 is heard.

The messenger formula כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה “Thus says Yahweh” in the fourth strophe (v 16a) again places the emphasis on Rachel’s weeping and Yahweh’s concern. It stresses that Yahweh is concerned about Rachel’s weeping. Therefore, as Bozak has observed, the appearance of the messenger formula here “must not be construed as the beginning of another poem, for the whole first stanza is clearly united around Rachel and her weeping.”⁴⁷

The fifth strophe (v 16b) affirms that Yahweh indeed comforts Rachel to restrain her voice from weeping and her eyes from shedding tears. This anticipates the fact that Yahweh not only shows a general concern for Rachel but also rewards Rachel’s deed.

In fact, in the final two strophes (v 16c; 17),⁴⁸ one can find that Yahweh repeatedly promises Rachel that her missing children will return from the land of the enemy. The texts assert that the return of the exiles is Yahweh’s reward for Rachel’s work. In other words, the return of the exiles solely depends on a woman’s weeping. The table shown below is the structure of the last two strophes of the first stanza where Rachel’s reward can be closely observed.

31:16b	Because there is reward for your work,	declares Yahweh;	They will return from the land of the enemy.
31:17	And there is hope for your future,	declares Yahweh;	And children will return to their territory.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 131, 133.

⁴⁷ Bozak, *Life ‘Anew,’* 24.

⁴⁸ Their semantic parallelism signifies the closure of the stanza. See, Bozak, *Life ‘Anew,’* 95.

According to the above structure, one can see that the prophet affirms Yahweh's twice-repeated promises with a twice-repeated prophetic signatory formula נִאֲמַרְיָהוּהוּ 'declares Yahweh.' This prophetic signatory formula serves as a verbal signature and imprinted seal of the divine words. It is a special unique feature of the Book of Jeremiah. The formula occurs 175 times in the Book of Jeremiah out of 365 occurrences in the whole Old Testament. The next largest number of occurrences of the signatory formula can be found in the Book of Ezekiel where it occurs a total of 85 times.⁴⁹ With the double confirmations, Rachel is assured that her weeping has earned a 'reward' שָׂכָר – the return of the Israelite exiles from the land of their enemy to their own territory.

The weeping of Rachel has indeed caused Yahweh to listen to her weeping so that Yahweh grants the promise of the children's coming home as the 'reward' שָׂכָר for the weeping. Keown, Scalise, and Smothers also understand these home coming children as the 'reward' of Rachel's work.⁵⁰ However, according to them, this reward, the home-coming children, is what Rachel did not receive in Gn 30:14-21.⁵¹ According to them, Leah hired שָׂכָר Rachel's husband for a night by giving some mandrakes to Rachel. However, Rachel received only mandrakes and did not receive any offspring. Therefore, Keown et al understand the promise of the coming of children from the land of the enemy in Jer 31:16 as the 'reward' that Rachel did not receive in Gn 30:14-21.⁵² Keown et al's explanation of reward שָׂכָר in connection with the Genesis account is difficult to accept because in the reading of Gn 30, one can find that Yahweh had already opened Rachel's womb and Rachel has had offspring, Joseph (Gn 30:22-24) [and Benoni or Benjamin (Gn 35:16-20)]. Rachel does not need to wait to receive children after she dies, as a reward of her former work. Thus, Gn 30 does not fit in the context of Jer 31:15-17.

In the context of Genesis, Rachel is an actual woman, the wife of Jacob but in the context of Jeremiah, she is a metaphorical woman. It is clear that the prophet uses the image of Rachel in terms of a symbol of the collective people. In fact, Rachel was buried in Ramah (Gn 35:16-20; 1 Sm 10:2ff) and Ramah was also the holding place of the Judean captives before they were taken to Babylon (Jer 40:1). Thus it is reasonable to assume that what Yahweh heard in Ramah near the tomb of Rachel (Jer 31:15) is the voice of the wailing and bitter weeping of the captives. The voice of weeping can be assumed to be the voice of the captives who were collected in Ramah, near the tomb of Rachel. Therefore, Bright's understanding of the weeping of Rachel in Ramah as the haunting of Rachel's spirit for her children who are carried away to the Assyrians captivity also does not fit in this context.⁵³

Keown, Scalise, and Smothers have said that "Rachel's weeping does not have to be placed at her gravesite unless one is bound by a presupposition that Jer 31:15 describes a 'haunting' by Rachel's ghost."⁵⁴ It is argued that placing Rachel's weeping at Ramah is appropriate as the captives had been collected there. This geographical allotment is not based

⁴⁹ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 33.

⁵⁰ Keown, Scalise, Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 120.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵³ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 282.

⁵⁴ Keown, Scalise, Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 119.

on superstitious presupposition; rather, it considers the biblical references as Keown et al do.⁵⁵ Since the historical site of Ramah makes clear the context,⁵⁶ one does not need to presuppose that the voice of weeping is the voice of Rachel's ghost. It is Rachel, the personification of the collective people of Israel, whose weeping causes Yahweh to pay attention, which becomes the crucial point in this stanza.⁵⁷

In fact, through the image of Rachel the prophet gives his message attractively and effectively, that Yahweh listens to the voice of women/sufferers, and that Yahweh is with the women/sufferers; Yahweh is the listener and the companion of the women. In fact, the evidence of the repeated assurance of Yahweh shows that Yahweh is the deity who is with women. Furthermore, it is evident that weeping is especially related to women in the Book of Jeremiah. In the time of Jeremiah women served as professional mourners and the prophet himself summoned the mourners to weep on behalf of the suffering nation (Jer 9:17-18). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the prophet might be quite sure of the effectiveness of the connection between weeping and women, which he uses in Jer 31:15-17.

5.4.2. The Second Stanza (Jeremiah 31:18-20): The Compassionate Mother God

The second stanza (vv 18-20) can also be seen as intensifying the prophet's usage of female imagery because here he portrays the relationship of Yahweh and Israel in terms of a mother and her children. In fact, the portrait of Yahweh as the mother God can be seen at the center of the poem (Jer 31:15-22).

The first strophe of the second stanza (v 18a) begins with Yahweh's hearing of Ephraim's bemoaning: "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning" that introduces the words of Ephraim's bemoaning in the following series of strophes. According to the biblical narratives, Ephraim is understood to be the grandson of Rachel, the second son of Joseph (Gn 41:52; 35:16-20). As sudden changes of personification are among Jeremiah's stylistic strategies for heightening emotion, the bitter weeping of Rachel becomes the bemoaning of Ephraim who represents Rachel's children – the exiles. Yahweh's concern for the wailing and bitter weeping of the mother in the first stanza is shifted to the bemoaning of the children of the mother in the second stanza. The infinitive absolute construction שָׁמַעְתִּי שִׁמְעָתִי "I have surely heard" strengthens Yahweh's serious attention to the 'bemoaning' of Ephraim. The reflexive of the piel, hithpolel participle מִתְנַוֵּד 'bemoaning' expresses the depth of Ephraim's regret. The root word נוּד of מִתְנַוֵּד 'bemoaning' denotes a 'going back and forth' so that it is usually applied to movement in physical position or a change of attitude.⁵⁸ In the Genesis narrative, Cain had been cursed and driven away from his original location so that he became a wanderer נוּד in the land of Nod נוּד (Gn 4:12, 16). In Jer 3:21-4:1, Yahweh calls upon the faithless Israel to return שׁוּב to Him both physically and attitudinally נוּד. It is noteworthy that bemoaning and returning are linked

⁵⁵ Ibid., 119.

⁵⁶ Jeremiah 40:1.

⁵⁷ Carroll has extended the interpretation of female weeping because the term קָהַל can be rendered "ewe-lamb" and קָמָה can be rendered "height." According to his extended interpretation, "the image is one of a mother sheep lamenting on the highlands the loss of her lambs." See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 589. In any case, it can be said that the female figure still remains.

⁵⁸ 1319. נוּד, in *TWOT Lexicon (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament lexicon)* in Michael S. Bushell and Michael D. Tan, *BibleWorks 6.0.005y* (BibleWorks, 2003).

together in Jer 4:1. This link becomes clearer in Ephraim's series of speeches in the next strophe.

In the second strophe (vv 18b-19), Ephraim bemoans as follows.

You chastened me, and I was chastened like an untrained calf.
 Bring me back and let me return, for you are Yahweh my God.
 For after I had turned away, I repented; and after I had learned I slapped my thigh.
 I was ashamed, and also I was humiliated, for I bore the disgrace of my youth.

As Tribble, Bozak, and Bauer have observed, Ephraim's confession, plea, prayer, and repentance are noticeable.⁵⁹ In the first line, Ephraim implores Yahweh with confession: Yahweh chastened him and he was chastened like an untrained calf. The Hebrew root word for 'chasten' יָסַר also denotes admonish, instruct, correct, and discipline.⁶⁰ The subject of these verbs can be a man or Yahweh. Parents could chasten their son as found in Dt 21:18-21 and Yahweh could chasten Ephraim here.

In the second line, Ephraim begs Yahweh to bring him back: "Bring me back and let me return, for you are Yahweh my God." The theology behind the prayer is observed; Ephraim still believes that Yahweh can bring him back for Yahweh is his God. It is possible for him because Yahweh's chastening His people is not to destroy completely but to יָסַר punish justly; after the punishment, Yahweh will save His people. This is the difference between human punishment and divine punishment. In Deuteronomy, a son may be stoned but in Jeremiah, a son is not to be put to death; rather a son is to be saved. Jer 30:11 reads as follows.

For I am with you,' declares the LORD, 'to save you; For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, Only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly And will by no means leave you unpunished. (Jer 30:11, NAU)

According to the above declaration of Yahweh, Ephraim's physical return from exile is still possible. In the prayer of Ephraim, the word 'return' שָׁב is used twice: "Bring me back and let me return," הֲשִׁיבֵנִי וְאָשׁוּבָהּ. The word 'return' שָׁב is one of the most important theological words in the Old Testament occurring 1050 times. It appears most often in Jeremiah (111 times) followed by Psalm (71 times), Genesis (68 times), Ezekiel (62 times), 1 Kings (62 times), 2 Chronicles (61 times), 2 Kings (55 times), and Isaiah (51 times) respectively.⁶¹ Particularly, the root word שָׁב occurs 8 times in this poem (Jer 31:15-22). The word 'return' שָׁב means not only the physical return but also spiritual return – "repentance: to turn from evil and to turn to the good."⁶² Especially, in the covenantal community, שָׁב in the Qal form is the most important

⁵⁹ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 42; Bozak, *Life 'Anew*, ' 96-97; Bauer, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah*, 134-135.

⁶⁰ יָסַר, *BDB Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

⁶¹ שָׁב, *TWOT Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

⁶² *Ibid*.

theological usage. It is used in turning away from Yahweh (apostasy) and in turning to Yahweh (repentance). Therefore, the physical returning in the second line and the spiritual returning in the third line are closely linked.

In the third line, Ephraim's repentance is observed: "For after I had turned away *שׁוּב*, I repented; and after I had learned I slapped my thigh." Once, Ephraim has turned away from Yahweh but now he repents. Ephraim's confession of his *שׁוּב* can be understood as the apostasy observed in the previous chapters. Now, the two consecutive lines emphasize the turning *שׁוּב* – physical and spiritual turning. Therefore, Tribble has commented on these lines that "theologically, the repentance of Ephraim is an act of God; geographically, the return of Ephraim is the work of God."⁶³ Indeed, the repentance of Ephraim, the return of Ephraim, and the work of Yahweh are closely linked together with Yahweh's promise to Rachel regarding the return of the children. In these relationships, the expression of Ephraim's emotion is noteworthy: "I slapped my thigh." Since an expression like "slapping one's thigh" or "beating one's breast" in the society of the ancient Hebrews was the climax of the expression of sorrow, Ephraim's regret is seen to be serious repentance.⁶⁴

The last line piles up Ephraim's repentance by mentioning the former guilt: "I was ashamed, and also I was humiliated, for I bore the disgrace of my youth." This line is connected to Ephraim's confession in the first line that he was even like an untrained calf and was chastened by Yahweh. It makes sense that only after the punishment of Yahweh or the captivity, Ephraim gains self-knowledge and he repents.⁶⁵ The motif of repentance again links with the third line where Ephraim confesses that he repented *נִחַמְתִּי*. Since the Nifal *נִחַמְתִּי* can render the meanings both "I repented" and "I was comforted," it is reasonable to assume that after he repented Ephraim was comforted.⁶⁶ In fact, Yahweh's words "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning" (v 18a) and "I will truly show motherly-compassion upon him" (v 20) tell us that Yahweh compassionately comforts Ephraim. The verbal construction, i.e., infinitive absolute + perfect, intensifies the strong willingness of Yahweh's response to Ephraim's repentance, confession, plea, and prayer. It is clearer in the next strophe where Yahweh has motherly-compassion upon Ephraim.

In the last strophe (v 20), the first line begins with Yahweh's rhetorical questions: "Is Ephraim my precious son? Is he the child of delight?" followed by Yahweh's parent-child relationship motif speech: "For as often as I speak of him, I do remember him still." The rhetorical questions without 'not' and Yahweh's affirmative answer highlight the positive response of Yahweh.⁶⁷ Moreover, the two modifiers 'precious' *יָקִיר* and 'delight' *שֶׁשֶׁשְׁעִי* also underscore how Yahweh values the child. The Hebrew root word 'precious' *יָקִיר* is applied in Prv 3:13-15 to describe how 'wisdom' is 'precious.' In Ps 45:9, the daughters of the kings are called as "noble *יָקִיר* ladies." In Lam 4:2, the inhabitants of Judah are called as "The precious (*יָקִיר*) sons of Zion, Weighed against fine gold."⁶⁸ Therefore, the word 'precious' *יָקִיר* in

⁶³ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 42.

⁶⁴ Bozak, *Life 'Anew'*, 98.

⁶⁵ McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 800-801.

⁶⁶ נחם, *BDB Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

⁶⁷ Keown, Scalise, Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 120.

⁶⁸ יָקִיר, *TWOT Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

Yahweh's speech highlights Yahweh's subjective personal feeling for his son. Ephraim is not only Yahweh's precious son but also the child of delight שְׂעִשְׂעִי. The word שְׂעִשְׂעִי is also used to describe the relationship between Yahweh and his people. For example, Is 5:7 equates the vineyard of Yahweh to the nation of Israel whilst the people of Judah are equated to Yahweh's delightful שְׂעִשְׂעִי plant.⁶⁹ These two modifiers, therefore, show the close relationship between Yahweh and Ephraim. The motif of the close relationship between Yahweh and Ephraim is heightened with the כִּי - clause: כִּי־מִדְּבַר־יְהוָה בּוֹ זָכַר אֶזְכְּרֵנּוּ עוֹד – “For as often as I speak of him, I do remember him still.” In the emphatic infinitive absolute construction אֶזְכְּרֵנּוּ, the divine remembrance reveals the closeness of the relationship between Yahweh and Ephraim. Yahweh has promised Rachel the returning of her children because she has wept for her missing children. Now the children have repented and returned to Yahweh so that Yahweh shows compassion by means of the parent-children relationship. As Rachel yearns for her missing children, Yahweh shows motherly concern for the child. Yahweh identifies with Rachel by raising the rhetorical questions: “Is Ephraim my precious son? Is he the child of delight?” Thus, Rachel's children become Yahweh's child of delight.

The last line states Yahweh's maternal compassion upon the child: מֵעֵי לֹא רָחַם אֶרְחַמֶנּוּ “Therefore my internal organs roar for him, I will truly show motherly-compassion upon him.” It is noteworthy that the two Hebrew root words in Yahweh's speech: מֵעֵי “internal organs” (primarily means the abdomen and intestines) and רָחַם “womb” allude to Yahweh as the compassionate mother.⁷⁰

As noted by Tribble, the two words מֵעֵי and הָמוּ: the roaring and the internal organs that Yahweh speaks in this final line (Jer 31:20) are in the reverse order of the words that the woman speaks in Song of Songs 5:4.⁷¹ Moreover, the word מֵעֵי ‘internal organs’ parallels בֶּטֶן ‘womb’ in Gn 25:23; Ps 71:6; Is 49:1; and Ru 1:11.⁷² In addition, the root word רָחַם “womb” in Jer 31:20 can be observed as the exclusive female internal organ. Therefore, Tribble could reasonably translate this final line of Jer 31:20 as “Therefore, my womb trembles for him; I will truly show motherly-compassion upon him.”⁷³

McKane, however, does not agree with this view of Yahweh as mother. He argues that “Yahweh's love is indeed portrayed as ‘visceral’ (עַל־כֵּן הָמוּ מֵעֵי לֹא), but this does not make it ‘uterine.’”⁷⁴ Since McKane cannot see Yahweh as a mother in this text, he even labels this understanding of Yahweh as mother as a “bizarre assumption.”⁷⁵

Wolff rejects McKane's argument that מֵעֵי does not merely mean “visceral.” In fact, it also denotes “internal sexual organs.”⁷⁶ Keown, Scalise, and Smothers have rightly observed that the word “refers specifically to the generative organs of the male (Gn 15:4; 2 Sm 7:12) or female (Gn 25:23; Ru 1:11; Ps 71:6; Is 49:1).”⁷⁷ Therefore, the word מֵעֵי “my internal organs”

⁶⁹ שְׂעִשְׂעִי, *TWOT Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*. Also see שְׂעִשְׂעִי, *BDB Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

⁷⁰ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 44-45.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 45, 58.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷⁴ McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 802.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 802.

⁷⁶ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1974), 63.

⁷⁷ Keown, Scalise, Smothers, *Jeremiah 26-52*, 120. Also see Nm 5:22.

can refer to Yahweh's source of procreation and it can also render the maternal imagery of Yahweh. The intensity of the maternal imagery of Yahweh is observed in the strengthened verbal forms (Piel infinitive absolute + Piel prefix) אֶרְחַמְנִי רַחֵם. In Hebrew, Piel stands for intensive meaning. In addition, the infinitive absolute also intensifies the meaning of the root.⁷⁸ Thus, the grammatical construction אֶרְחַמְנִי רַחֵם shows the intensity of the root רַחֵם "womb." While one may argue that מְעֵי designates the "internal sexual organs" of both male and female, it is רַחֵם that belongs only to the female. Thus, the metaphor of Yahweh as the compassionate mother God should be underscored. Since the root word רַחֵם and its derivatives are occasionally associated with the hope of restoration,⁷⁹ the maternal imagery of Yahweh is quite appropriate in this strophe. Like mother Rachel, Yahweh always remembers her children; the mother God does not forget to bring back her children from the exile as she promised Rachel. In fact, Yahweh's caring for the exiles is seen in the picture of virgin Israel in the next stanza.

5.4.3. The Third Stanza (Jeremiah 31:21-22): The Returning Virgin Israel

In this last stanza, the personification of the returning exiles shifts from the the image of Ephraim to the image of virgin Israel. Five consecutive feminine singular imperatives in the first strophe stir up the exiles to prepare for their return home. They also signify Yahweh's immanent restoration program. The imperatives are terse and sharp.

Set up for yourself road-markers,
Set up for yourself guideposts;
Set your mind on the highway, the road you walked.
Return, O virgin Israel,
Return to these cities of yours.

In these imperatives, the two words: 'guideposts' תְּמַרְוֵרִים and 'return' שׁוּב are noticeable because they signify the change of the situation. In the first stanza, Rachel weeps 'bitterly' תְּמַרְוֵרִים for her missing children but in this final stanza the same word 'bitter' תְּמַרְוֵרִים changes to mean the guideposts for the returning children.⁸⁰ Yahweh's promise of returning Rachel's children home to her is fulfilled; Rachel's bitter weeping results in the children's home-coming. In addition to this change, the command 'return' שׁוּב relates the first and second stanzas. In the first stanza, the word שׁוּב appears twice in Yahweh's promise to Rachel that the children will return שׁוּב from the land of their enemy to the land of their own territory. In the second stanza, the word שׁוּב appears three times in Ephraim's prayer and repentance: "Bring me back and let me return וְאָשׁוּבָה לְיְהוָה, for you are Yahweh my God. For after I had turned away וָשׁוּבָה, I repented." In this last strophe also, the word שׁוּב appears three times: twice in the prophet's command to virgin Israel to return to her cities; once in the prophet's rhetorical question: "How

⁷⁸ Bonnie Pedrotti Kittel, Victoria Hoffer, Rebecca Abts Wright, *Biblical Hebrew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 361, 372.

⁷⁹ Mike Butterworth, רַחֵם in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, vol. 3, ed. Willem A. Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 1093-1095.

⁸⁰ The word תְּמַרְוֵרִים is another term for צִיָּוִים 'guideposts.' See צִיָּוִים, *BDB Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*. Also see Bozak, *Life 'Anew*, 101.

long will you turn hither and thither, O apostate daughter הַשׁוֹבֶבֶה?" Thus, the Hebrew root word שׁוּב threads through the whole poem. The weeping mother is promised the שׁוּב of the children; the delightful child Ephraim has asked Yahweh to שׁוּב; the sexually transformed virgin Israel is commanded to שׁוּב. Therefore, the reward of the weeping mother becomes clear: the exiles are coming back to their God and to their home land.

Yahweh's restoration program includes not only bringing virgin Israel back from her enemy's land but also the future new creation program in which women will take the prominent role. The second strophe reads:

"For Yahweh has created בָּרָא a new thing חָדָשׁ in the land אֶרֶץ,
a female נִקְבָּה shall enclose תְּסֹבֵב a man."

In fact, it is noticeable that the announcement that the real female shall enclose a man נִקְבָּה תְּסֹבֵב אֶרֶץ is made to the metaphorical female virgin Israel. Since the Hebrew root word for 'enclose' סָבַב can mean turn around, go around, march around, surround, encompass, enclose, encircle, there is no consensus translation and interpretation of this line. It is evident in the wide range of different modern English translations. For example, "a woman protects a man,"⁸¹ "a woman will surround a man,"⁸² "a woman shall encompass a man,"⁸³ "a woman must encompass the man with devotion,"⁸⁴ "a woman turned into a man,"⁸⁵ "the woman sets out to find her husband again."⁸⁶

Duhm has treated v 22b as an editorial gloss⁸⁷ but Bright does not agree with this view because the intention of a gloss is to clarify but not to introduce obscurity.⁸⁸ According to Bright, v 22b is "a proverbial saying indicating something that is surprising and difficult to believe." However, Bright also says that "the meaning is wholly obscure" so that it is wiser to leave the colon blank.⁸⁹ Holladay also argues that "v 22b is not an editorial gloss", rather it is "authentic" to Jeremiah.⁹⁰ Holladay has rightly pointed out two words: שׁוּב "turn" and חָדָשׁ "new;" the authentic words of Jeremiah that are closely linked together in the last strophe. In fact, שׁוּב "turn" and חָדָשׁ "new" are prominent in the Book of Jeremiah. Even in this poem, שׁוּב occurs 8 times as mentioned above. חָדָשׁ also appears in the same chapter (Jeremiah 31:31) as בְּרִית חָדָשָׁה "new covenant." Thus, v 22b is indeed the authentic words of Jeremiah.

As the word תְּסֹבֵב in v 22b is closely linked with the words בָּרָא "create," אֶרֶץ "land," and נִקְבָּה "female," Holladay, Anderson and Carroll interpret this verse in the light of the

⁸¹ RSV.

⁸² NIV.

⁸³ NKJ.

⁸⁴ NAB.

⁸⁵ NEB.

⁸⁶ NJB.

⁸⁷ Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, 251.

⁸⁸ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 282.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁹⁰ William L. Holladay, "Jer. xxxi 22b Reconsidered: 'The Woman Encompasses the Man,'" *Vetus testamentum* 16.2 (April 1966), 236.

Genesis account.⁹¹ In Genesis 1:27-28 God ‘created’ בָּרָא man and ‘woman’ נִקְבָּה and assigned them procreation. Thus, Holladay understands the role of the female in Jeremiah 31:22b in the sexual sense: the female becomes “the initiator in sexual relation.”⁹² Anderson also argues that the verb תִּסְבֵּב has a sexual or maternal meaning so that “the Woman (Virgin Israel) will enfold a man (a son) as a sign of Yahweh’s gracious gift of new life in the land.”⁹³ Carroll also applies the sexual connotation in v 22b as repopulation that was essential in rebuilding the community. He understands this verse as “the woman encircles, i.e. wraps herself around, the man” and he even explains in parentheses “the vagina envelops the penis.”⁹⁴

However, it seems to me that the interpretation of Jer 31:22b in light of Gn 1:27-28 is improper for five reasons: (1) In Gn 1:27, the “female” נִקְבָּה is linked together with the “male” זָכָר but not with the “man” גִּבּוֹר. (2) In Gn 1:27, the female נִקְבָּה is the “object” of the creation whereas the female נִקְבָּה in Jer 31:22b is the “subject” who shall enclose a man גִּבּוֹר. (3) In Gn 1:27, the name of the creator is “God” אֱלֹהִים but not “Yahweh” יְהוָה. (4) The present form of the Genesis account is a late product and the author of the Book of Jeremiah might not know about the Genesis creation story. (5) The word ‘create’ בָּרָא occurs only once in the Book of Jeremiah so that it is very unlikely that the text refers merely to the procreation of the Genesis account. Thus, it is possible that Jeremiah is presenting a role of the “female” that is prominent and initiating and which is unrelated to the passive role of the “female” of Gn 1:27. In fact, the female in Jer 31:22b is the subject of the man: “a female shall enclose a man.”

One should not ignore the verb form of ‘enclose’ תִּסְבֵּב. It is polel and that also conveys the meaning “go about.”⁹⁵ Since the situation of the land אֶרֶץ had been already ruined and chaotic, the land required new creation; the nation required organization; the community needed to be rebuilt. Therefore, it is very likely that the ‘female’ will go about the nation and organize a man גִּבּוֹר who is a source of power of the nation.⁹⁶ By this initiative, a female will enclose the nation including a man. This is the new thing in the land that Yahweh has created; surprising! As O’Connor observes, “the surprising new role of women symbolizes a changed order of relationships in a reconstituted and joyous society.”⁹⁷ In fact, a “female” נִקְבָּה stands for every female whereas a “man” represents every man since there is no article in נִקְבָּה a ‘female’ and גִּבּוֹר a ‘man.’ In Yahweh’s new creation, the surprising new role of women for the new society is more than home-staying-procreation; rather, it is going about the nation and leading the society.

In the whole poem, several reversals of situation are observed. Let alone the gender reversal of the children from male Ephraim to female virgin Israel, Yahweh Himself even turns from the masculine deity to the feminine compassionate mother God. The bitterness תַּמְרוּרִים of

⁹¹ Holladay, “The Woman Encompasses the Man,” 237; Anderson, “The Lord Has Created Something New,” 476; Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 601-605. Tribble also links the word ‘create’ to the Genesis account. See Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 48-49.

⁹² Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 195.

⁹³ Anderson, “The Lord Has Created Something New,” 476;

⁹⁴ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 602.

⁹⁵ 6430 סָבַב, in *BDB Lexicon in BibleWorks 6*.

⁹⁶ John N. Oswalt, גִּבּוֹר, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 148-149.

⁹⁷ O’Connor, “Jeremiah,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, 176.

Rachel is also converted into the guideposts תְּמִירָהִים of the home-coming exiles. The once-turned-away-children שׁוֹבֵי become the home-coming children שׁוֹבֵי: returning to their God and to their land. In the context of such upside-down changes, the text's assertion that "a female shall enclose a man" is quite a 'new thing' in the land. As Tribble observes, the power of a female even surpasses a male in Yahweh's new creation.⁹⁸

Summary

It is observed that Jer 31:15-22 being situated in the Book of Comfort presents the major theme of Yahweh's future restoration of the exilic Israelite people. Within this theological context of Yahweh's restoration program, the pericope describes three major female images: the weeping mother Rachel, the compassionate mother God, and the virgin Israel. All three female images play the important roles in the pericope. In the first stanza, Rachel weeps bitterly and inconsolably for her missing children. As a result, Yahweh promises to bring her missing children back. In this stanza, we see the message that Yahweh is with the weeping women. In the second stanza, Yahweh emotionally identifies with the mother Rachel in heeding the confession of the son so that Yahweh is found as a compassionate mother who has motherly compassion upon the son. The shift of Yahweh's paternal imagery to maternal imagery gives the message that Yahweh is not only a male deity but also a female deity. In the last stanza, Rachel's missing children are to be found as the personified virgin Israel. In this last stanza, virgin Israel is earnestly commanded to return to her cities because Yahweh has created a new thing in the land, and because women have to take the leading role in a reconstituted society. The message of this stanza is that Yahweh's relationship to the Israelite people follows a parent-children pattern which is different from that of the husband and wife relationship found in other places in the Book of Jeremiah.

In conclusion, it is clear that female imagery is an effective literary device for Jeremiah. By using the images of Rachel, Mother God, and virgin Israel, the prophet gives his messages in Jeremiah 31:15-22. In the image of Rachel, the prophet makes clear that Yahweh is not only with the weeping women but also that He is the God who is not far from the ones who are weeping for their suffering, and that Yahweh is the God who can give hope to the hopeless. This message of hope is intensified with the image of Mother God that Yahweh always takes care for the suffering people like a mother who protects and cares for the child in her womb. Finally, the prophet pronounces that women will take the prominent role in building the community. In other words, the prophet is announcing that women will go around the land and organize the mighty men like the political leader for the nation building.

⁹⁸ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 48.

SUMMARY OF THE EXEGETICAL STUDY OF JEREMIANIC FEMALE IMAGERY

In this research, I have observed the roles and functions of female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah by exploring the compositional materials and compositional structure of the book. As a result, I first discovered that the compositional units are not randomly collected but theologically arranged – from destruction to restoration. I have shown that this arrangement is well assembled with eight macro-structural units: five macro-structural units in the first division of the book and three macro-structural units in the second division of the book. As a consequence, I rejected Bright's classical assertion of the incoherency of the book.

Against this background of the compositional structure of the book, fascinatingly, Jeremianic female imagery and real women are detected in each macro-structural unit such as the personified faithful bride, the unfaithful wife, the promiscuous wife, the nymphomaniac wife, the adulteress, the prostitute, Yahweh's divorced wife, the faithless daughter, daughter my people, daughter Zion, virgin daughter, virgin Israel, daughters of other nations, eponymous mother of Israel, a woman in childbirth, real mourning women, real worshippers of the queen of heaven, and even non-human female imagery are detected such as a swift young camel and lustful wild ass. Therefore, it can be said that female imagery occupies the whole Book of Jeremiah.

Although many female images are frequently and superficially found as guilty and sinful, the literary analysis of the texts in this research has exposed the gender bias in the portraits of female imagery. Especially, the studies of Jer 13:20-27 and 4:29-31 have discovered the pornographic presentation of female imagery. In such prophetic pornography, the personified women are voyeuristically presented, sexually abused and even eventually killed. In such cases, the roles and functions of female imagery are seen as passive. Therefore, I have argued against such representations of female imagery as misogynistic male versions and I have highlighted the needs of ideological readings. If the texts are not observed through ideological criticism, the description that male (deity) is always right and females (Jerusalem, Judah, and Israel) are always wrong will leave an ideology of unbalanced gender bias as footprints/impact of the biblical message. Thus, the studies of Jer 13:20-27 and 4:29-31 highly recommend the ideological readings and new hermeneutical interpretations.

Interestingly, Jeremianic female images have been found not only in the context of destruction but also in the context of restoration. The study of Jer 31:15-22 has demonstrated the active roles and functions of female imagery: Rachel, the eponymous mother of Israel weeps for her missing children so that her weeping moves Yahweh to have compassion upon the children. In this study, Yahweh is even seen as a compassionate mother when s/he identifies with weeping Rachel. In addition to this positive portrayal of female imagery in the text, virgin Israel is also earnestly summoned to return to her cities to take the leading role in reconstituted new society in the post exilic period. Therefore, the female images in the Book of Jeremiah are found in both passive (negative) and active (positive) portraitures.

The research has vigorously studied Jeremianic female imagery not only in the context of literary, theology, and gender ideology but it has also studied the female imagery in the historical context of the Ancient Near East. As a result, it has affirmed that the ancient weeping

goddesses serve as the prototype of Jeremianic weeping daughters and mother imagery and that the Ancient Near Eastern treaty-curse serves as the model for the biblical idea of the Sinai covenant-curse. This historical research sheds light on the understanding of the roles and functions of Jeremianic female imagery in the ancient context. The ancient curses might have been a useful means to giving prophetic messages in ancient times but unfortunately the metaphors of sexual violence against women is difficult to accept in our contemporary time. Therefore, the research still opens to more fruitful reading methods for such biblical text. In the following chapter, I will discuss about my hermeneutical framework for further in-depth re-reading of the biblical texts.

PART II
RE-READING JEREMIANIC FEMALE IMAGERY
FROM MYANMAR INTERTRIBAL READING PRACTICE

CHAPTER 6

STRETCHING THE HERMENEUTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE
INTERPRETATION OF THE JEREMIANIC TEXTS: FROM EXEGESIS TO
HERMENEUTICS

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have explored the female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah and discovered their positive and negative roles and functions. Yet, it has become clear that my exegetical studies on the Jeremianic texts have shown only interpretations of what the texts could have meant in the past. In fact, what the texts mean for today's people has not been observed in my studies. Therefore, in order to research what the texts mean for current readers, in the following chapters, I will take the step from exegesis to hermeneutics, from historical orientation to an exploration of the 'in front of the text,' of its reception history, of its effect on current readers. In this chapter, I will answer the following questions: How could this hermeneutical framework be constructed? How could this exploration of the 'foreground' of the text be connected with what I have been doing in the previous part? How could both approaches be made complementary? Why is it necessary for me to do this hermeneutics for our contemporary people? Why is the exegetical interpretation of the text not sufficient for me? These are indispensable critical questions that I must face to legitimize my hermeneutical framework. To achieve my goal, I will first clarify my definition of exegesis, and hermeneutics. Second, I will establish my hermeneutical framework legitimately by discussing the hermeneutical components in current biblical scholarship. Third, I will discuss the reason why it is necessary for me to extend my hermeneutical framework from exegesis to hermeneutics by exploring my own context in terms of social, political, culture, and religious situations. Finally, I will present the legitimacy and necessity of the empirical hermeneutics in my project of interpreting the Jeremianic texts.

6.1. Definitions of Exegesis and Hermeneutics

In order to discuss the hermeneutical framework, I will first grapple with the following two questions: What is meant by exegesis? What is meant by hermeneutics?

The terms exegesis and hermeneutics have been used interchangeably. However, I would like to distinguish the difference between them. I would define exegesis as the effort to scientifically explore the meaning(s) the text may have had in its original context and for its first hearers. In other words, exegesis is the scientific study of the original author's intended

meaning within the author's historical setting and within the literary setting of the text.¹ In this exegetical study of exploring the meaning of the text, though exegesis is not mathematics and never totally neutral or objective, the exegete may bring a certain personal interest to the text but the primary focus of the study is the text itself.² Thus, exegesis could be also seen as "a way of talking with texts."³ In talking with the text, the exegete systematically analyzes the text, "diachronically or synchronically, focusing on its grammar and syntax, the meanings it may have had in its original context(s), its references to its historical background(s), its history of growth, its more literary aspects."⁴

Hermeneutics would be defined as the study of how the meaning of the text speaks to the present reader.⁵ In a broader sense, hermeneutics is the discipline that is occupied with the question as to what a reader does when he or she reads a text, reflects on its significance and tries to apply it to his or her own context. In that definition, exegesis (the historically oriented scientific exploration of the 'original' meaning of the text) is just one part, one operation in a whole spectrum of operations. The appropriation process is another one and hermeneutics looks at both. Hermeneutics, then, analyses (at least) two fundamental dimensions of reading or interpretation processes: it examines the ways in which the historical and literary dimensions of the text are explored, and the way in which its meaning potential for current readers and situations is made operative. Hermeneutics should not be misunderstood merely as application of the meaning of the text. It is a discipline that observes how the significant explication and understanding of the text can take place. In a sense, it is a helicopter-observation that observes what the readers do when they read the text. Therefore, hermeneutics could be understood as "scholarly reflection on the question of how it is possible to explain (old) texts (*exegesis* in its sense of unfolding the web of significances) and understand them (*appropriation*)."⁶

6.2. Establishing a Hermeneutical Framework

It is noticeable that although classical historical-critical exegesis could explore the meaning of the text, it does not have much concern about how the meaning of the text speaks to the present reader's specific situation. For example, Segovia has categorized the interpretive disciplines or biblical criticism under four different paradigms or umbrella models of interpretation – historical criticism, literary criticism, cultural criticism, and cultural studies.⁷ Under the umbrella of historical criticism, he puts literary or source criticism, history-of-religions criticism, tradition criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and composition criticism. Historical criticism sees the text as means. Therefore, these methodologies help

¹ Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M., "From Exegesis to Hermeneutics: The Problem of the Contemporary Meaning of Scripture," *HORIZONS* 8/1 (1981), 23-39.

² Hans de Wit, "Exegesis and Contextuality: Happy Marriage, Divorce or Living (Apart) Together?," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning*, ed. Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2008), 4.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Schneiders, 23-39.

⁶ Hans de Wit, "Exegesis and Contextuality: Happy Marriage, Divorce or Living (Apart) Together?," 5.

⁷ Fernando F. Segovia, "Grand Models and Strategies of Interpretation," in *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 3-52.

interpreters to find the author and its world, the message behind the texts. These methodologies have been dominant criticism until 1975.

Under the umbrella of literary criticism, there are narrative criticism, structuralism, rhetorical criticism, psychological criticism, reader-response criticism, and deconstructionism. These methodologies help interpreters to see the text as medium, “the text as a message from author to readers.” These methodologies have been dominant criticism especially from 1980s to 1990s.

Under the umbrella of cultural criticism, there are sociological approaches and anthropological approaches. These approaches take the text as both medium and means. It means that “The text as a message from author to readers within a given context, with an emphasis on the codes or principles governing the sociocultural aspects of such communication; hence, the text as a means to that world in which it was produced.” These criticisms have flourished from 1980s to 1990s alongside of literary criticism.

In addition to these criticisms, Segovia proposes the fourth paradigm – cultural studies (alternately called ideological criticism). He argues that cultural studies is the most relevant interpretive discipline in this postcolonial and postmodern time because cultural studies is mainly concerned with the social location of the reader or interpreter. In other words, cultural studies focuses on the real readers and their community who were suppressed in 20th century by the biblical critics and their criticisms. Segovia argues that everyone has their own rights to interpret the biblical passages based on their own contexts in this postcolonial and postmodern time.

Segovia’s argument bases on at least two reasons. First, the three interpretive paradigms – historical criticism, literary criticism, and cultural criticism – could not explain some issues. For example, literary criticism could not provide historicity of the texts. Second, the Eurocentric traditional historical biblical studies could not give meaningful message for certain indigenous peoples. For example, the indigenous people had lost their own culture values when the colonizers or the centers or missionaries or clergies brought Eurocentric biblical interpretations to the colonized or the margins. For these reasons, Segovia proposes cultural studies is able to provide meaningful messages for every one regardless of social locations.

The essence of ‘this still-emerging paradigm of cultural studies’ could be summarized as follows.⁸

Cultural studies assume the text as construction. All recreations of meaning and all reconstructions of history are regarded as constructs or re-presentations: re-creations and re-constructions on the part of flesh-and-blood readers.

The meaning or the message of the text emerges as the result of an encounter between a socially and historically conditioned text and a socially and historically conditioned reader.

The text may be approached and analyzed from a variety of angles such as historical, literary, and cultural criticism; both vertical and horizontal readings. Different real readers use different strategies and models in different ways, at different times, and with different results (different readings and interpretations) in the light of their different and highly complex social locations. First, it may be viewed as a medium (from literary critical perspective), as a message between a sender and a receiver, an author and a reader. The focus is on its artistic and strategic

⁸ Ibid. 41-52.

character features: the text as a literary and rhetorical creation. Second, it may be approached as means, as evidence from and for the time of composition. The focus is on the world behind the text: the text as a historical, cultural, and ideological creation. Third, it may be understood as a construct, as the result of interaction or negotiation between the text and its reader (s). The focus is on the text as actually read and interpreted: the text as a creation on the part of readers and interpreters.

The meaning of the text is no longer regarded as objective and univocal. There is no universal meaning of the text for people.

A critical analysis of real readers and their readings (their representations of the ancient texts and the ancient world) becomes as important and necessary as a critical analysis of the ancient texts themselves (the remains of the ancient world), since these two critical foci are seen as ultimately interdependent and interrelated. For example, the analysis of socioeconomic class, race and ethnicity, socio-religious background, sexuality and gender problem must be studied.

Cultural studies is interested in analyzing not only the social location and agendas of texts but also the social location and agendas of flesh-and-blood readers and their reading.

Thus, from the hermeneutical perspective, exegetical interpretation is seen as a half-finished work in the interpretation process although exegesis has been once assumed as an exclusive interpretation in academic circles. How do the current biblical scholars deal with these hermeneutical components in the current biblical scholarship? Are they exclusively working on exegesis or actualization or collaboratively? In the following, I will investigate how the current biblical scholars are working with these hermeneutical components. Eventually, I will argue that the hermeneutical framework must embrace both exegesis and actualization.

In the process of biblical interpretation in European biblical scholarship, more specifically in the Dutch context, the Dutch scholar Hans de Wit has reviewed the relationship between exegesis and contextuality.⁹ According to de Wit, in current European biblical scholarship, actualization (appropriation, application, contextualization,) is a part of the interpretation process but exegesis and actualization are, in the marriage metaphor, “living apart together” because of exegesis and actualization require different interpretational skills.¹⁰ De Wit says, “Exegesis requires skills that are different from those needed in the process of actualisation.”¹¹ What are the required different skills? In short, exegesis is a critical conversation with the text whereas actualization is replacing the original reference of the text with a new one and making it part of the present reader’s life.¹² It is striking that there is a ‘crack’ between the two hermeneutical components - exegesis and actualization.¹³ Based on this interpretation theory, biblical scholars had been working in two circles - exegesis and actualization. For instance, while for many European and North American biblical scholars exegesis comes in the first place, Latin-American biblical scholars put their emphasis on the importance of actualization.¹⁴

⁹ Ibid, 3-30.

¹⁰ Ibid, 4-7.

¹¹ Ibid, 4.

¹² Ibid, 4-5.

¹³ Ibid, 10-13.

¹⁴ Hans de Wit, *Leerlingen van de Armen*, (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Uitgeverij, 1991). In this dissertation, Hans de Wit has analyzed the interpretation theories of the Latin-American scholars C. Mesters,

It is noticed that the difference of the interpreter's context can also cause misunderstanding of the other's hermeneutical framework.¹⁵ For example, the context where the European biblical scholars write is generally not characterized by permanent poverty, hunger, oppression, persecution, and exclusion. They live in cities and their context is pretty safe.¹⁶ Liberation and social transformation are not their priority. Therefore, the biblical texts that are intrinsically historical products have been their focus so that they are engaged in exegetical methods in the interpretation process. In contrast, many Latin-American biblical scholars live with the poor in the periphery and write from the opposite context of that of those European biblical scholars. Where Latin-American biblical scholars read the Bible with the poor, social transformation is important for them. Thus, they stress actualization of the meaning of the Bible as their main concern although many also use the tools of classical exegesis.¹⁷ Because of their different contexts and emphases, the reciprocal criticism between European and Latin-American biblical scholars has sometimes been rough and harsh, in the sense of metaphor.¹⁸ Therefore, de Wit has metaphorically described the relationship between those who yield to exegesis 'the detached' and to actualization 'the impassioned' as follows:

The detached often look upon the other group with contempt and consider them bastards, hybrid members of the family. The impassioned would like to make an impression, want to convert the other group to their interest - they are angry if it does not succeed - and often also feel inferior.¹⁹

In fact, it is obvious, that even in European biblical scholarship where exegesis has played such an important role, biblical texts have also been actualized and applied to new situations and contexts. In de Wit's retrospective review of European biblical scholarship history, one sees that reading the old text and the application of its meaning in new situations has been important in European biblical scholarship since the birth of the Bible until the rise of the Renaissance.²⁰ Especially, the commentaries of Martin Luther and John Calvin show in an exemplary manner the bond of exegesis and application. However, this practice of biblical

J.S. Croatto, and M. Schwantes. See Hans de Wit, *Leerlingen van de Armen*, 367-374 (Summary in English). Also see Hans de Wit, "Exegesis and Contextuality," 8; Schneiders, 23-39.

¹⁵ See Gerald O. West, "The Difference it Makes with Whom We Read," in *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 21-33. In this essay, West shows the different readings of Mt. 19:16-26/Mk 10:17-22 between Pope John Paul II and the poor from South Africa. The main difference is concerning the absence and presence of wealth and poverty, the rich and the poor in their readings. West says "The significant difference between these readings is who the primary interlocutors are; the Pope has chosen to read with other trained-scholarly-readers in a place of privilege and power, whereas I have chosen to read with ordinary African readers in place of poverty and marginalization." 32-33. However, other scholars acknowledge that Pope John Paul II was the most prominent global critic of capitalism in the 1990s.

¹⁶ It is evident in the reading reports from the Dutch group who read 2 Samuel 13 together with the Myanmar theological student group. See, La Rip Marip, "Intercultural Bible Reading for Social Justice and Social Transformation," (a paper presented at the international conference on the Bible and Transformation: The promise of intercultural Bible reading, Amsterdam, Netherlands, February 18-20, 2013).

¹⁷ Hans de Wit, *Leerlingen van de Armen*, 367-374.

¹⁸ Hans de Wit, "Exegesis and Contextuality," 10-19. Especially see on page 11, 13.

¹⁹ Ibid, 11

²⁰ Ibid, 7-8.

interpretation had been subdued in the Age of Enlightenment when the European biblical scholars started to perceive reason and rationality as universal, and the only legitimate criteria for biblical interpretation. It is not only because of the fact that people started to see actualization of the meaning of the text as manipulation of the interpreter forcing others to see the significance of the text just as they themselves saw it, but also because of the emergence of historical orientation that assumed the text as a stable and controllable object which meaning could be unraveled 'by means of the proper instruments'.²¹

Nevertheless, the important role of the actualization of the meaning of the text had not been completely annihilated in the process of biblical interpretation in European biblical scholarship. In fact, since the last quarter of twentieth century, in European biblical scholarship as well as in non-European biblical scholarship, exegesis and actualization have been realized as complementary components of biblical interpretation.²² One of the reasons for this has been the discovery of the importance of the role of the reader. For instance, in European and American biblical scholarship, Paul Ricoeur's philosophy had shed the light on the semantic autonomy of the text that opens up to every reader who can read it.²³ Every reader may and can read the text from his or her own situation. Therefore, actualization elsewhere has been then realized as a legitimate hermeneutical component in the process of interpretation. In addition, other reasons would include the biblical scholars' fear of irrelevancy of biblical interpretation, the international literary production of voices from the periphery, the effect of globalization and multicultural situations.²⁴

Therefore, while Latin-American biblical scholars actualize the meaning of the text through the communal or communitarian reading, the Bibliodrama is used as one of the ways of actualization in the Netherlands.²⁵ It should be noticed that actualizations of the Bible text are frequently different from one another, which depends on the different situation and location.²⁶

If we turn around our focus from European-American biblical scholarship to African biblical scholarship, we will also find a similar hermeneutical problem. In his interrogation of the Comparative Paradigm in African biblical scholarship, the African biblical scholar Gerald West has, in line with Stephen Fowl, affirms that all interpreters of the Bible approach the text with two sets of interests - 'interpretive' and 'life' interests.²⁷ According to West, interpretive

²¹ Ibid, 8-10; Baruch de Spinoza, *Theologisch-Politiëk Traktaat*, 1670:VII, 1, translated from Latin, introduced and annotated by Fokke Akkerman, (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1997) cited in Hans de Wit, "Exegesis and Contextuality," 9.

²² Ibid, 14-16; Schneiders, 23-39.

²³ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976). See also below, section 6.4.

²⁴ Hans de Wit, "Exegesis and Contextuality," 16.

²⁵ Ibid, 16.

²⁶ While communal reading is workable in Latin-America, only 13% of the Dutch population read the Bible, according to the recent research. Among this small percentage of the Bible readers, only 15% read the Bible with the group whereas 50% read the Bible individually. In this context, the application taken from the reading is spiritual application for their lives and it is unlike the Latin Americans' desire of socio-political transformation. Ibid, 16-19.

²⁷ Gerald O. West, "Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue*, ed. Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West, (Cluster Publications, 2009), 38; Stephen E. Fowl, "The Ethics of Interpretation; or, What's Left Over after the Elimination of

interests are concerned with the dimensions of the text that the individual interpreter is interested in. For example, some interpreters may be interested in the historical and sociological dimensions of the text while some others may be interested in the literary dimensions of the text and still others may be interested in thematic or symbolic dimensions of the text. These interests are what West calls 'interpretive interests.' These interpretive interests may be seen as interests belonging to the realm of exegesis. Life interests, that are different from that of interpretive interests, are concerned with the interpreter's life experiential questions and concerns that drive the interpreter to bring such existential questions and concerns to the text such as, race, class, gender, health, and other socio-political and religio-cultural concerns. These life interests may be seen as interests of application, realization, contextualization, or actualization.

Having observed these two sets of interests in biblical scholarship, West has also rightly discovered that the African biblical interpretation has been dominated by the interpretive interests in the historical and sociological dimension of the text although literary, thematic, and symbolic interests can also be found. For instance, the South African biblical scholar Itumeleng J. Mosala has strongly argued to pay attention to the social and historical dimensions of the biblical text in order to deal with racial and economic liberation in South Africa.²⁸ Mosala's argument is the assertion that socio-historical interpretive interests can cover life interests. From one aspect, this assertion is seen as a signal that shows how the African biblical scholars favor exegesis. It is noteworthy that the reason why interpretive interests dominate many African biblical scholars is because most African biblical scholars have been trained in either Europe or America.²⁹ The confidence that the interpretive interests can profoundly highlight the present situation of socio-political and religio-cultural contexts and that they supply the life interest of most of African biblical scholars are seen as the basis of the dominance of interpretive interests in African biblical scholarship.

However, West also points out that the weight of interpretive interest that African biblical scholars put in their interpretation varies from case to case. The so-called African biblical interpretation, the "Comparative Paradigm," has linked interpretive interests and life interests.³⁰ In the comparative paradigm, there is a dialogue between the socio-historical dimensions of the biblical text and the religio-social realities of African life.³¹ In other words, it is a dialogue between the biblical text and the social context of the Africans. According to West, this dialogue is necessary in their African comparative paradigm for three reasons. First, the Bible was brought to the Africans by the foreign explorers, traders, missionaries, and

Meaning," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Department of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield*, ed David J. A. Clines et al., (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 379-398; also see M. G. Brett, "Four or Five Things to Do with Texts," in *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield*, ed David J. A. Clines et al., (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 357-377.

²⁸ Itumeleng Jerry Mosala, *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Gerald O. West, "Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship," in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue*, ed. Hans de Wit and Gerald O. West, (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2009), 38.

²⁹ West, "Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship," 38-39.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 40.

³¹ *Ibid*, 41.

colonizers who had seen African religion and culture from a negative perspective. Second, the Bible had been translated into African vernaculars so that the forms and contents were coated with their own contextual culture and language. Third, the Bible is accepted by the African Christians not just as a book but as God's word that speaks to them in any situation.³² What then are the dimensions of the dialogue with the Bible? According to Justin S. Ukpong, there are five dimensions in the dialogue of the African comparative paradigm.³³

The first is to evaluate the African culture, religion, beliefs, concepts, and practices in the light of historical critical biblical research and find the salvific values of African religions.

The second is to analyze the biblical text through historical critical methods and to find relevant biblical critiques/teachings to address the particular issue of a particular church or society.

In the third place one should approach the biblical text from the African social-cultural perspective so that it offers new insights for the Africans.

The fourth is to communicate the African culture and biblical message by analyzing both context and the text so that Jesus could be seen as the conqueror of all evil powers that the Africans fear.

And, finally, the fifth is to find biblical models of the church for the contemporary African churches.

As West has observed, Ukpong's summary of the African comparative interpretation paradigm is dominated by historical and sociological dimensions of the biblical text. Moreover, African life interests are enriched by the interpretive interests throughout the interpretation process. In addition, West's research also shows that many African biblical scholars do not offer their exegesis without application. In other words, African biblical scholars connect their exegesis with appropriation so that the biblical author's intended meaning is recovered for the particular contemporary readers.³⁴

However, West argues that "Ukpong's orthodox formulation of the relationship between exegesis and application not only concedes too much to the dominant (and dominating) discourse in biblical scholarship, it also does not do justice to his (and other African's) actual interpretive practice."³⁵ Therefore, following Hans-Georg Gadamer who develops Martin Heidegger's model of the hermeneutical circle, West argues that the exegesis-actualization process is what the interpreter must unavoidably undertake in the course of his interpretation because "all understanding is necessarily perspectival, influenced by the assumptions, needs, and interests of the interpreter."³⁶ In reading a text, the purpose of the interpreter is not only to understand what the text meant in its own context but also to understand the truth about the subject matter which he may or may not agree with. To reach this goal, the interpreter dialogues with the text. The dialogue could not be done without the interpreter's own perspective on the text. Thus, the interpreter comes to the text with a certain pre-understanding of the text and

³² Ibid, 41-46.

³³ Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories and Trends*, ed. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2000), 17-18 (11-28).

³⁴ West, "Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship," 49.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, 50; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

dialogues with the subject matter of the text to reach an understanding of the truth about the subject matter which he may or may not agree with. In this regard, Gadamer and West are right in saying that actualization (or) application is “not a secondary practical concern but an intrinsic component of the one hermeneutic act of understanding/interpretation/application.”³⁷

One could also argue, as West does, that those who work only on what the biblical text meant are not open and not honest to the biblical interpretation because their interpretation is only valid when people take their research for granted as the biblical author’s intended meaning but the interpretation will become problematic when people question the alleged author’s intention behind the text as the sole meaning of the text.³⁸ Therefore, such a stance of historical and literary studies as hermeneutical paradigm is found as incomplete hermeneutics. Therefore, the hermeneutical framework must embrace both exegesis and actualization.

Inspired by this discussion between African and European readers of the Bible, in the following, I will adopt this in my own situation. I will explain why is it necessary for me to extend my hermeneutical framework from exegesis to appropriation. Why is the exegetical interpretation of the text not sufficient for me? There are three reasons for me to undertake this hermeneutics in my context. The first one is related to a social-religio-political concern. In the second place it has to do with the ambiguity of the Bible itself. Third, it is related to problematic interpretation theories of the text.

6.3. The Demands of Wider Hermeneutical Framework in Myanmar Context

6.3.1. The Problems of the Social-Religio-Political Situation in Myanmar

To a certain extent, in the academic atmosphere, an exegetical study/exercise/research of a certain selected text alone would be a sufficient academic contribution for an exegete who is not engaged with any church and society. In fact, many excellent exegeses could be found in the academic domain as valuable contributions of the non-socially engaged exegetes. In a sense, classical biblical scholarship is about determining the original author’s intended meaning. The historical critical exegetical methods are not affected by any concerns of inspiration or revelation.³⁹ The task of the exegete is thought to discover and deliver what the original author intended to say; the exegete is not supposed to deal with theological and pastoral implications of what he or she has discovered.⁴⁰ However, for the Myanmar professional biblical exegetes,⁴¹ leaving any exegetical study of any biblical text at the level of academic exercise is not

³⁷ West, “Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship,” 50.

³⁸ Ibid, 55.

³⁹ Schneiders, “From Exegesis to Hermeneutics,” 26-27.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 26-27.

⁴¹ I will use the phrase “Myanmar biblical exegetes” to refer to the early evangelists and later theologically well-trained local professors, church pastors, theological students, and all theological graduates no matter from basic Bible schools or from graduate schools of theology. However, the term “Myanmar professional biblical exegetes” will imply only those professionals who are working at theological education institutes in Myanmar. Note: The scientific biblical exegesis was first taught in Myanmar in 1978 at the leading Protestant theological institute, the Myanmar Institute of Theology. To see some evidences of how Myanmar professional exegetes have been reading the Bible in Myanmar context, see Anna May Chain, “Wives, Warriors And Leaders: Burmese Christian Women’s Cultural Reception Of The Bible,” *SBL Forum* (2005), <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=455> (accessed February 3, 2018). Naw Eh Tar Gay, “Authority and Submission in Some New Testament Letters: Postcolonial Feminist Reading from Myanmar,” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2011).

sufficient, not proper, and not appropriate, because they all are socially and religiously engaged in everyday problems of Myanmar Christians as well as non-Christians who are struggling for their survival under various kinds of hardships such as unequal opportunity in social, political, and economic situations.

Myanmar had its own Buddhist monastic school system long before the arrival of Christianity in Myanmar.⁴² When the Christian missionaries arrived in Myanmar, the missionaries too tied education and the Bible together. Thus, some missionary basic educational schools would later develop into Bible schools that produced early evangelists who worked in the local churches.⁴³

Sadly, after Myanmar gained her independence in 1948 from the British empire, the government broke the historic Panglong Agreement which guaranteed equality and a federal union between Burman and Non-Burman Myanmar ethnic groups. Moreover, the parliament proclaimed Buddhism as the official state religion of the country on August 29, 1961. Many ethnic armed resistance groups appeared after independence. The religio-political situation separated Myanmar people and pushed the people back to their religio-political grounds. In 1965, most of the early mission schools were nationalized by General Ne Win's Revolutionary Council. It is noteworthy that all the successive Myanmar governments have not allowed teaching theological education in any government-run colleges and universities. This means that all Myanmar biblical exegetes come from other kinds of accredited theological schools, which are rooted in an academic-religious foundation. As a result, Myanmar biblical exegetes and professional biblical exegetes are inseparable from church and society in Myanmar. In view of this general picture of the social-religio-political background, one can imagine why the Myanmar professional biblical exegetes are engaged in their churches. Throughout the history of Christianity in Myanmar, the main question Myanmar biblical exegetes ask themselves is always: what appropriate message does the Bible give to the Myanmar people?

Since I will try to research the relevancy of the meaning of the Jeremianic texts in my own context, I need to consider the context of Myanmar. The Union of Myanmar is made up of 135 national races and I myself belong to one of the ethnic groups which is called Kachin.⁴⁴ In Myanmar, people practice Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Spiritualism, Judaism, and

⁴² The beginning of the Buddhist monastic school system in Myanmar is dated back in 11th Century in King Anawrahta's period.

⁴³ Although the first Christian, a French Franciscan named Pierre Bonfer, arrived in Myanmar in 1554, the first Myanmar Bible translation was accomplished by the first American Baptist missionaries, the Judsons in 1834. Because of this monumental Myanmar Bible translation, some people mistakenly assume the arrival of the Judsons on July 13, 1813 as the first arrival of Christianity in Myanmar. Actually, following the French Franciscan Pierre Bonfer, the first Portuguese Roman Catholic missionary arrived in Myanmar in 1603 along with the colonization of the Portuguese chief mercenary Filipe de Brito e Nicote. However, the permanent presence of Christians in Myanmar became visible only after the arrival of the Italian Barnabite Order in 1721 and the British Baptists in 1807. According to the present official statistics, 6.2% of the Myanmar people practice Christianity. The Republic of the Union of Myanmar, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Religion, Census Report Volume 2-C* (Yangon: Department of Population, Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, July 2016). Anna May Chain, "Wives, Warriors And Leaders: Burmese Christian Women's Cultural Reception Of The Bible."

⁴⁴ It is noteworthy that many Kachins have scattered around the world since 1980s for sociopolitical instability in their geographical location. At present, many diaspora Kachins can be found in Asia, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada, UK, Europe, and in Scandinavian countries.

other religions. 89% of Myanmar population practice Buddhism and most Buddhists are Bamar ethnic people. Most Christians are from ethnic minority groups. Those who belong to Christian churches are Roman Catholics, Baptists, Assemblies of God, Methodists, Anglicans, and newly established Pentecostal churches. Among these Christian denominations, the Baptist stands as the majority group to which I belong. Recently, the Myanmar government has changed the former military ruling system to the democratic parliamentary system but many people have been already forced to leave their homeland because of many kinds of human and ethnic rights violations of the successive governments. For instance, thousands of Internally Displaced People can be found in these days in Kachin State, Rakhaing State, Shan State, Karen State, Mon State and other parts of the country for the social-political-religious conflicts. During the civil wars, hundreds of ethnic women have been raped and killed. Hundreds of men have been arrested, tortured, and persecuted. Hundreds of political leaders have been arrested and imprisoned. Thousands of inhabitants of the country have fled away. Since I am an ordained pastor of the Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) and a lecturer at an ecumenical Christian seminary the Myanmar Institute of Theology, I am deeply socially engaged with all Myanmar people.⁴⁵ All these social-religio-political situations of my context unavoidably oblige me to extend my hermeneutical framework. As a professional biblical exegete and as a pastor, I have to do research on the Jeremianic female imagery and its relevancy to Myanmar context. How is it possible to apply the meaning of the text into my context? Myanmar Christians read the Bible as the words of God. Therefore, I have to figure out what the texts might mean today and have to deliver it to the life of our Church. It is my social and ethical accountability.

6.3.2. The Problems of the Ambiguity of the Bible

In addition to the problems of social-religio-political situations in my context, the Bible itself is problematic for our people because the Bible in Myanmar stands with the people and at the same time it stands against the people, just as in some other parts of the world.⁴⁶ In fact, the Bible has liberated the Myanmar people from their socio-religious bondage; and the same Bible causes gender segregation. To be clearer, I would like to give an example of the complexity of the Bible. The Bible had liberated the Kachins from their socio-religious bondage. To the Kachin people, the American Baptist missionaries first introduced the Bible in 1877.⁴⁷ Before the missionaries arrived in the Kachin land, Kachin people worshipped hundreds of spirits whom they called '*nats*.' Before the Kachins turned to the Christianity, they had been metaphorically the slaves of the *nats*. For instance, when a family member was sick, the household had to consult *nats* through a priest/prophet. On behalf of *nats*, the mediator/priest/prophet demanded from the household a cow or a pig or a hen to appeal to certain *nats*. The

⁴⁵ Myanmar Institute of Theology was founded in 1927 and is the oldest seminary in Myanmar. It is accredited by the Association for Theological Education in South East Asia (ATESEA).

⁴⁶ Theologies of apartheid and theologies of liberation to be found in South Africa are good examples for this case. See Gerald O West, "Reading the Bible Differently: Giving Shape to the Discourses of the Dominated." *Semeia*, no 73 1996, p 21-41.

⁴⁷ Although some American Baptist Missionaries had been in the Kachin soil before 1877, the official date of the arrival of the Christianity to the Kachins (who later become the members of the Kachin Baptist Convention KBC) is taken 1877 when the American Baptist Mission Headquarters made the decision to send missionaries to the Kachins. See M. Awng La, *K. B. C. Labau Laika* (The History of Kachin Baptist Convention), (Myitkyina: KBC, 1984), p. 22.

length of time required and the amount of properties depended on the patient's condition. If the poor patient's sickness was chronic, the whole family knew they would be in debt. This traditional belief made them poor. Under this belief, Kachin became poorer and poorer. In this way, Kachin had been the slaves of the evil spirits. When the missionaries introduced the Bible and the biblical story of Jesus' triumph over the evil spirits, the Kachin people turned away from the slavery of evil spirits and eagerly embraced Christianity. Along with the application of the Bible, the Kachins were liberated from the bondage of *nats*. It is their salvation history; it is their redemption history.

Until 1990, the Bible in Myanmar did not create a great problem in terms of gender issues among the Kachins as well as in other Myanmar ethnic groups because the major concern of most of the churches in Myanmar had been proselytism. But since 1991, with the development of biblical interpretive disciplines and the teaching of feminist theology in the leading Protestant theological seminary, i.e. the Myanmar Institute of Theology, the gender or man-woman issue has strongly impacted on many Myanmar churches.⁴⁸

Traditionally, cultures of all Myanmar ethnic people would have set women under male's domination. For instance, the Bamas, the majority ethnic group in Myanmar, call a husband a '*ein oo nat*' which means 'the lord of the family.' Recently, the "Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation MAAF," dominated by men (soldiers), has shown some leading roles of women in the ancient Bagan period such as queens and ministers but it also strengthens the general moral codes for Myanmar women, which still set Myanmar women under the domination of men. The six moral codes for Myanmar women in '*Mahathudathana Thote Pali*' reads as follows:

Waking up before their husbands,
going to bed later than their husbands,
following their husband's lead,
always soothing and satisfying the husband,
always saying sweet things, and
shunning other men even mentally.⁴⁹

The ideal for Myanmar women is to live as a slave, daughter, wife, and mother. Such culture could be legitimized with similar biblical ideology found in Proverbs 31; Ephesians 5:22-24; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:5-6; and in many others.⁵⁰

Hierarchical customs and traditions can be found in many Myanmar ethnic minority groups.⁵¹ A Kachin saying even identifies the female with a hen when it reads '*u yi goi na nhtoi*

⁴⁸ Rosemary Kathleen Harley, "The Impact of the Feminist Theology on the Mission of the Church in Myanmar: with Special Reference to the Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon" (Master of Theology thesis, University of South Africa, 2001) cited in Anna May Chain, "Wives, Warriors And Leaders: Burmese Christian Women's Cultural Reception Of The Bible."

⁴⁹ Khin Aye, "Adorable Customs and Traditions of Myanmar Women," Papers Presented in Honour of Myanmar Women's Day, July 3, 2005, Yangon University.

⁵⁰ There are some instructions for a husband to love his wife as himself (Ephesians 5:33) and not to be harsh with the wife (Colossians 3:19), which should not be forgotten.

⁵¹ To see the culture of how women are set in the lower position in the Myanmar society, see Anna May Chain, "Wives, Warriors And Leaders: Burmese Christian Women's Cultural Reception Of The Bible."

nhtoi ai’ which means ‘the daylight does not appear through a hen’s crow.’ Women are not allowed to climb up the trees. Even their skirts are not allowed to hang on the clothes rod/bar because the woman’s skirts will defile men and will lessen the power and glory of a man. In this culture, even many female exegetes had not noticed their potential and status in their respective churches until the feminist theology arose in Myanmar. Most of the traditional interpretations of biblical women had been emphasized on the biblical role model of good wife, daughter, and mother. Therefore, many traditional exegetes had explored the role models in the stories of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Naomi and Ruth, for example. But when the feminist theology was realized in Myanmar context, many Myanmar exegetes, both female and male, come to see how the Bible was used to limit the position of women.⁵² They critically search the position and status of women’s roles in the stories of Miriam, Deborah, Jael, Huldah, Esther, Vashti, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, Dorcas, Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia, and other women.⁵³

The biblical creation story in Genesis 2-3 is used as the biblical reference for women’s subservient position in many Myanmar churches.⁵⁴ Although many women in Myanmar churches are still trying to find equal opportunities in their respective churches, the status of women in the old Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), may be, perhaps, the worst among other Myanmar ethnic Christian groups. Why? Because starting from 1993, the KBC leaders began a partnership with the BILD International organization (USA) who denies woman ordination.⁵⁵

In 2008 (September 23-25), the KBC leaders held a summit conference on mapping their theological stance at KBC Headquarters and the issue of women’s ordination was one of the matters at that summit conference. Coincidentally, in the same time, the “Ziun” Kachin journal (vol. 7. no. 1) issued by the liberal arts Kachin students from Myanmar Institute of Theology, which included an article that questioned the traditional negative views on Eve, was published and circulated among the Kachins.⁵⁶ As a consequence, many KBC top male leaders

⁵² Anna May Chain, “Wives, Warriors And Leaders.”

⁵³ Ibid. Ah Gu Sam, “Num ni hpe Sari Lu Lata Mara Hpung Up jaw ai lam gaw Chyum Laika hte Nhtan Shai nga ai i? (Is Women’s Ordination Opposed to the Bible?),” in *PAHTAU Magazine*, annually published by the Kachin Seminarians Fellowship, Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon Myanmar (2007-2008), 110-115. La Rip Marip, “Did Bathsheba Willingly Involve Herself in Sexual Relations with King David?” in *Tamar Alin, Baptist Theological Journal 2006: Myanmar Baptist Convention* (2006): 45-51; “In Search of Mother God,” in *Our Theological Journey: Writings in Honor of Dr. Anna May Say Pa*, ed. Festschrift Committee, Myanmar Institute of Theology. Insein, Yangon: MIT, 2006, 142-153; “Jeremiah amid Women,” in *Rays, Theological Journal of Myanmar Institute of Theology (MIT)* vol. 5, (January 2005): 155-163.

⁵⁴ Aye Aye Win, “Women in Creation and Today” (Bachelor of Theology thesis, Myanmar Institute of Theology, 1998), 55 - 56. Eh Wah Hpaw, “Women’s Concern in University Christian Fellowship of Myanmar” (Bachelor of Religious Education thesis, Myanmar Institute of Theology, 1998), 15. Kyi Kyi Aung, “Communicating the Women’s Suffering for Change” (Bachelor of Theology thesis, Myanmar Institute of Theology, 1994), 6. Nang Thuzar Mon, “Victimization of Women in Kengtung Area” (Bachelor of Theology thesis, Myanmar Institute of Theology, 1994), 42 - 43. Mary Dun, “Woman: A Special Creation,” *SCM Women’s Magazine*, Vol. 1 (1998), 32 - 34. All are cited in Anna May Chain’s “Wives, Warriors and Leaders.”

⁵⁵ Also see Ah Gu Sam, “Num ni hpe Sari Lu Lata Mara Hpung Up jaw ai lam gaw Chyum Laika hte Nhtan Shai nga ai i? (Is Women’s Ordination Opposed to the Bible?),” 110-115. Anna May Chain, “Wives, Warriors And Leaders: Burmese Christian Women’s Cultural Reception Of The Bible.”

⁵⁶ Ah Gu Sam, “Ewa, Nang N Shut Ai: Shinggyim Ahkaw Ahkang hpe Jaw Ai Hku Lata la ai lam (Re-reading the Story of Eve with the Perspective of Freedom of Choice),” in *ZIUN Journal vol 7 no 1*, bi-

in the conference were uncomfortable with that article, although some delegates did not find any big problem for them. Nevertheless, unexpectedly and unprecedentedly, the KBC leaders who were attending the summit conference forcefully banned the circulation of the journal in the KBC world. Coincidentally, in the same year, 2008 October 15-17, the Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) held a women's conference at MBC Headquarters where 25 ordained women pastors appeared from seven different ethnic groups while there was none from the KBC.⁵⁷ This MBC women's conference could highlight the status of Christian women in Myanmar churches as well as in the Kachin Baptist Convention.

This problem of women as the second sex comes from both cultural prohibitions and theological doctrines. In this religio-cultural and socio-political context, how can one appropriate the positive and negative role of Jeremianic female imagery? What will happen if the positive and negative roles of Jeremianic female imagery are appropriated in this context? One of my exegeses – Jeremiah 13:20-27, for example, reflects the ideology that women are disloyal, nymphomaniac, promiscuous, and subjects to be punished. This biblical negative view of women could even reinforce the existing Kachin bride price system for example. According to the bride price system, the Kachins pay at least a cow (may be in money) and a gong (may be in money) as a bride price. As a consequence, a few Kachin husbands BUT NOT ALL assert that they have the right to enslave their wives as draught cattle and they have the right to beat them as the gong for they have already paid the bride price. Such ideology should not be maintained in the present so that it is to be eliminated. What does Jeremiah 13:20-27 say to the Kachins as well as to other Myanmar people? What does Jeremiah 4:29-31 and 31:15-22 say today to our people? How would our people understand these texts today? Is exegesis the only component within the broader interpretation process? As shown above, exegesis is not the only component of biblical interpretation. As a Myanmar professional exegete, I would like to study what these texts could mean for the today's Myanmar people. A new empirical hermeneutics would help the actualization of the meaning of this text.

In 2010, I presented my exegesis of Jeremiah 13:20-27 at the biblical faculty meeting at Myanmar Institute of Theology.⁵⁸ The exegesis is about the so-called prophetic pornography where the alleged disloyal personified female Jerusalem is punished by Yahweh himself by means of violent sexual exposure of her genitals. Yahweh, the speaker of the pericope, even asserts that the sexual punishment is deserved by the partner because of her disloyalty. Some colleagues were shocked by such a text of terror. Some colleagues encouraged me to explore such texts of terror, so that such actions do not happen again in our present society. But others thought of such exegetical study as a useless study for Myanmar churches. Two remarkable questions from a senior professor were: (1) What was my intention of the study? (2) Was it merely for my academic enjoyment? My only answer was that these roles and functions of the female imagery popped up unexpectedly in my research of the roles and functions of female imagery in the Book of Jeremiah. It became evident that even some Myanmar biblical scholars have hermeneutical problem with such exegesis. In other words, it is difficult to make this

annually published by the Kachin Seminarians Fellowship, BARS, Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon Myanmar (2008), 10-11.

⁵⁷ The Myanmar Baptist Convention is comprised of 18 ethnic conventions based on language and region. Kachin Baptist Convention is one of the largest component conventions in Myanmar Baptist Convention.

⁵⁸ See my exegesis of Jeremiah 13:20-27 in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

interpretation of the biblical text useful for today Myanmar people. While positive views on the biblical women's roles, exegesis of Jeremiah 31:15-22 for instance, could speak the positive inspiration to the Myanmar people, how could the negative views on women be appropriated in Myanmar churches? It is evident that my exegetical study was only finished at the level of exegesis and it should not be the final product of hermeneutics for Myanmar people as well as for others. In fact, it is necessary to extend my hermeneutical framework to find what the text speaks us today. It is expected that the rest of the hermeneutical approach will help me find new insights that one cannot find in commentaries.

6.3.3. The Problems of Interpretation Theories

The third reason why I need to extend my hermeneutical framework is related to the problematic interpretation theories of the text. In the past, Myanmar Christians traditionally imitated the biblical figures from the ancient biblical mold – that means making carbon copies of the old text such as a good wife, daughter, a powerful patriarch, etc. But, the rise of new biblical interpretation disciplines, such as feminist theology, have highlighted the importance of the current situation of the present readers. Thus, the paradigm shift from traditional interest in ancient figures to the contemporary issues demands a new hermeneutics for Myanmar people.

Concerning the shift of the hermeneutical paradigms, the American biblical scholar Sandra M. Schneiders has described three models for the use of the Bible in the Roman Catholic Church and the implied theories of text and interpretation.⁵⁹ The three models are the proof-text model, the exegetical model, and the hermeneutical model. Her purpose in this description is to highlight the inadequate theory of interpretation in the proof-text and exegetical models and to advocate the need of the hermeneutical model in the contemporary churches. Schneiders' observation of the paradigm shift of the use of the Bible and interpretation theory in Roman Catholic Church is quite similar to the situation in Myanmar churches.

As I have mentioned before, many Myanmar churches use the Bible oriented by the traditional male dominant culture to create the theological, spiritual, moral, and pastoral positions of the Church. Although the Roman Catholic Church may include other non-biblical sources such as church disciplines, philosophy, and canon law in constructing such positions, the Myanmar Protestant churches do not usually have such enormous sources.⁶⁰ However, church constitutions in some Myanmar Protestant churches, for example, may also use biblical references extracted from their contexts to support certain positions, so make use of the proof-text model.

Usually, the legitimization of a woman as the second sex position is extracted from Genesis 2-3, 1 Timothy 2:11-12, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, and 1 Corinthians 11:3. This literal application and interpretation of the Bible may be called the proof-text model and such legitimization of the unequal position between men and women in the Church may be the apparent evidence of the inadequacy of this proof-text model. The theory of interpretation at work in this model is in fact uncritical and naive. It ignores the fact that the texts were conditioned by their respective literary and historical conditions. As Schneiders has pointed out, the individual canonized collections of literary units under various forms such as narrative,

⁵⁹ Schneiders, 29-37.

⁶⁰ Schneiders, 29.

poetry, and history are meaningful only within their structures which are the part of larger units that constitute the Bible.⁶¹ Moreover, the texts are also conditioned by historical situations in and for which they were composed. Furthermore, various texts were written for a certain situation and addressed to certain addressees so that the authority of the texts varies.⁶² The historical critical methodologies are required to interpret the text. Thus, Schneiders has remarked on this proof-text interpretation model as follows:

It is unconscious of the effect on the texts of historical conditioning, genre codes, the development of languages, the effects of translation, immediate and global literary contexts, theological and ecclesial problematics, or even individual differences among authors.⁶³

Because this proof-text interpretation model could lead from illegitimate allegorization to total misinterpretation, Myanmar biblical exegetes have moved from the paradigm of the proof-text to the exegetical model. In Myanmar, the scientific method of biblical exegesis was first introduced in 1978 in Myanmar Institute of Theology, but the proof-text model is still used among many ordinary readers who are non-professional readers of the Bible. The readings of ordinary readers are to some extent similar to that of academically trained biblical scholars. This is evident in my later empirical research.

The exegetical model is predominant in academic circles, but it is also, and in principle, widely accepted by the church authorities. In this model, the exegete attempts to discover the original intended meaning of the original author as it was understood by the original audience. Generally, Western exegetes do not insist that the Church should duplicate the structure, disciplines, theology, and morality of the biblical communities; rather, they contribute their findings to the 'corporate theological effort' to set forth the Christian faith for present day.⁶⁴ As the task of the exegete is to discover and deliver the intended meaning of the original author from the point of view of the original audience, the exegete does not decide how their normative biblical data are to be understood.⁶⁵ Since the Myanmar biblical exegetes inherited the Western originated exegesis, their interpretations are dominated by historical critical and literary analysis. Many contemporary issues such as injustice, inequality, oppression, poverty, and ecological crisis could be addressed by means of exegesis. However, the part of actualization is often forgotten. Nevertheless, even this model lacks interest in appropriating the meaning of the text in the present situation, the theory of Scripture and the theory of interpretation at work in this model are more adequate than that of the proof-text model because this model accurately regards Scripture as the material that was once composed for individual audiences in a fixed time, place, and culture. The historical critical exegetical interpretation tries to find out the original intended meaning of the original author from the point of view of the original

⁶¹ Ibid, 29.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid, 30.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

audiences. Furthermore, it delivers the biblical materials to the Church to figure out what the text means today.⁶⁶

Although the historical critical exegetical model could find out the original author's intended meaning, relatively recently it has been seen as one of the many methods within the massive biblical interpretation methodologies because of the emerging of interdisciplinary approaches stemming from sociology, psychology, literature, philosophy, and aesthetics.⁶⁷ Especially, the modern philosophical disciplines of hermeneutics are increasingly gaining influence on biblical studies. More specifically, the new linguistic philosophical disciplines have challenged the well-established historical critical exegetical model in terms of theory of the understanding of text.⁶⁸ In fact, the modern French philosopher Paul Ricoeur had discovered the semantic autonomy of the text so that the text could speak the present reader anew without being exclusively bound to historical conditions. Any reader can now interpret the text from his/her own situation. The exegete has become one of the interpreters. In this paradigm shift of biblical interpretation, it is necessary to study what the text says today to people. Especially, it is quite relevant for me to do this hermeneutics as a socially engaged biblical exegete. While exegesis as Sandra M. Schneider sees it examines the intended meaning of the original author, without paying attention to the real message of the text, the hermeneutical model does pay attention to the full message of the text. Since new interpretive methodologies have developed, the focus of the interest of biblical interpretation has also shifted from the exclusive interest in what the text meant in the past to what it may mean today. The exegetical model, mainly based on the historical critical approach to the text, is not the only way of interpreting the Bible for the Myanmar context as well as in biblical scholarship, and should therefore be complemented by other approaches, also those who take 'reader response criticism' seriously.

6.4. The Legitimacy and Necessity of the Empirical Hermeneutics

According to the modern philosopher Paul Ricoeur, how we see the most elementary dimensions of texts is the basis for doing hermeneutics because the text mediates between the writer and the reader.⁶⁹ In order for the text to speak to every reader who can read it, the text needs to be seen as semantically autonomous. In fact, the text needs to be and could be detached from its original author and audience to let it speak to the present reader. When the text is detached from the original author and audience, the interpretation of the reader contributes very much to the meaning of the text. Thus, the text speaks not only in the past at a specific time and space but also in the present. Therefore, Ricoeur says that the aim of hermeneutics is "to make one's own what was previously foreign."⁷⁰ In other words, hermeneutics aims to overcome the distance between the past time when the text produced and the present time of the reader. In this hermeneutical model, according to Ricoeur, what is to be understood and appropriated is

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 27-28. Also see Paul J. Achtemeier and Gene M. Tucker, "Biblical Studies: The State of the Discipline," *Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion* 11 no 3 (June 1980), 72-76.

⁶⁸ Schneiders, "From Exegesis to Hermeneutics," 32-33. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

⁶⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, (Fort Worth, Texas: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 25.

⁷⁰ Ricoeur, 43, 91.

not the historical situation of the original author and audience, not the mental intention of the author, not the intended meaning of the author, not the understanding of the original audience, but the meaning of the text itself, a new production of meaning takes place.⁷¹ This model indeed challenges the historicism of the exegetical model but Ricoeur's theory of text is able to bridge the gap between the biblical author and the present reader in terms of linguistic philosophy. Three major elements of Ricoeur's text-theory can be highlighted as follows.

First, unlike in a spoken discourse, when a text is written down and finished as a written discourse, the text becomes semantically autonomous; the meaning of the text is free from the mental intention of its writer.⁷² Whatever the text now means is whatever it actually says. The meaning of the text transcends the author's intention when s/he wrote it. The writer can no longer rescue the text, the text is now beyond the control of the writer. Once the text has been written down, the author's intended meaning is nowhere else to be found than in the text. In other words, the text has escaped from the psychological intention of the writer. The meaning of the text is in front of the text and not behind the text. By way of analogy, Schneiders has compared the text with an exam answer paper of a student which is to be evaluated by his professor. Once the answer paper is submitted to his professor, the professor will make a judgment on the paper as it actually appears in the paper. The professor cannot make a dialogue with the student. The answer paper is beyond the control of the student. The text is in the hands of the professor. The answer paper may get a failing grade because the professor does not understand what the student meant. The student cannot object to the grade because the professor has to judge what the answer paper actually says, which does not always show what the student might have intended to say. To write what the student really wanted to mean is the task of the student. To assess it as it actually appears on the paper is the task of the professor.⁷³ Since the author is not available for questioning, the text becomes determinative in construing the meaning of the text of the author. As Ricoeur says "[t]he text is like a musical score and the reader like the orchestra conductor who obeys the instructions of the notation."⁷⁴ The meaning of the text is independent from the writer and the text becomes semantically autonomous.

Second, unlike the spoken discourse, when a text is written, the addressee 'you' escapes from the face-to-face dialogical situation, and the text is addressed to universal unknown reader.⁷⁵ The text is now opened up to every reader who can read it. The meaning of the text is no longer determined by the understanding of the original audience.

Third, unlike in a dialogical situation, once a text is written, the reference of the situation is freed from the sense of the text envisioned by the author.⁷⁶ For example, the well-known fairy story of George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, tells about the animals' revolution and its bad consequence. It is the *sense*, the literary or linguistic dimension of the text. However, the *reference* of the text, i.e., its connection with the extra-linguistic world the text is referring to,

⁷¹ Ricoeur, 92.

⁷² Ricoeur, 29-30. In a spoken discourse, what the speaker means and what the discourse means overlap each other because the speaker is present in the dialogical situation. The spoken message communicated between the speaker and hearer in spoken discourse would become the mute textual message in the written discourse.

⁷³ Schneiders, 33.

⁷⁴ Ricoeur, 75.

⁷⁵ Ricoeur, 31.

⁷⁶ Ricoeur, 34-37.

what the text is really about, now transcends the animals' revolution happening in the animal farm. It is no longer related directly to the animals' revolution and its bad consequences. The reference becomes contemporaneous with the reader, and it can be seen as speaking about a political revolution and a revolutionary government's exploitation of the fellow people. The reference is freed from the sense of the text, and the sense of the text now has a reference different from the situation of the reader. In a sense, the text wants to be appropriated by anyone who can read it.

This theory of the text shows that every reader is permitted to read and to appropriate the text as his/her own. This appropriation is what Ricoeur means by doing hermeneutics or reading a text hermeneutically. The text can now be appropriated by different readers from different situations. The contemporary reader's understanding of the meaning of the text may be different from that of the original audience, but the contemporary reader's understanding of the text is no less valid than that of the original audience and is equally legitimate because the text is semantically autonomous. Thus Ricoeur could assert that "[t]he letters of Paul are no less addressed to me than to the Romans, the Galatians, the Corinthians, and the Ephesians."⁷⁷

Since readers are not *tabula rasa* – a blank slate —, multiple valid interpretations are not only possible, but this is inevitable and legitimate. It is evident in my previous study. For example, sexual punishment of women in ancient times, as is evident in the ancient Hittite vassal treaties and the Neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths as well as in the time of the author of Jeremiah 13:20-27, might have been a norm for them. But what does the text speak about to us today? What is the meaning of the text in front of us? These are the hermeneutical questions. Different interpreters produce different interpretations. Although we have discovered some gender ideology in the text with modern eyes, we cannot dialogue with the original author. What we can dialogue with is the text that the author left to the readers. The text is beyond the control of the original author. The text is open to the readers. With new readers the text starts to grow and unfold its surplus of meaning. Thus, the individual reader is just one of the interpreters among other readers. For instances, when Holladay reads Jeremiah 13:20-27, he sees the woman as deserving the public stripping and ravishment for her harlotry. When O'Connor reads it, she sees that Jeremiah implicitly teaches that men represent God and women do not. For Brenner, such texts are to be exposed for the unbalanced sexuality of male and female and then all those texts should be rejected. However, Tribble does not abandon such texts of terror because it is necessary for her to offer sympathetic readings of the abused women in the past and present, and to pray it will not happen again. Gordon, Washington, and Magdalene call their readers to resist such a metaphor of male sexual abuse of females.⁷⁸ It is evident that different readers understand the same text differently because they are not *tabula rasa*.

Then, concerning the validity of the interpretation, some questions arise: Who is right in their reading of the text? How do we establish that? Ricoeur says that to validate an interpretation, one needs to guess the meaning of the text first.⁷⁹ Why it is necessary to guess the meaning is because we cannot communicate with the original author; the original author's intention is beyond our reach. But this does not mean that guessing the meaning of the text is

⁷⁷ Ricoeur, 93.

⁷⁸ These have been already discussed in the Chapter Three of this dissertation.

⁷⁹ Ricoeur, 75-79.

because of the incommunicability of the author and his/her intention. Rather, it is because of the nature of the verbal meaning of the text. As we have seen above, when a text is composed, the verbal meaning of the text cannot coincide with the author's intention. Therefore, to understand the meaning of the text is to guess the verbal meaning of the text.⁸⁰

Transition from guessing to validating the guesses follows by means of literary criticism. Since the verbal meaning of the text is a structure of the component meaning, the procedure will analyze the whole textual component and the individual literary genres, types of literature. As the literary genres are generative devices or codes in the production of discourses, the investigation of the whole structure of sentences and literary genres such as narrative, poetry, and the like will enable decoding the verbal meaning of the text.⁸¹

Potentially, plurality of interpretation can occur in the interpretation process and which may be appropriated differently. Ricoeur reminds that “[a]n interpretation must not only be probable, but more probable than another interpretation. There are criteria of relative superiority for resolving this conflict, which can easily be derived from the logic of subjective probability.”⁸² Ricoeur says that validation is in no way verification.⁸³ It is to compare different interpretations and examine to find which one seems to make more sense.

On the basis of the above theory of the text and interpretation, I will study how the Jeremianic texts speak to us today. My tool will be newly tested empirical hermeneutics, namely, the “Intercultural Reading of the Bible” which is in line with the above interpretation theory.⁸⁴ In the following chapter, I will explain this empirical hermeneutics in detail. This empirical hermeneutics is in fact necessary and legitimate in my dissertation because of its epistemology on theory of text and reader that the text opens up to every reader who can read it. Since every reader is not a *tabula rasa*, the meaning of the text can be open to more than one meaning. Different readers will read and appropriate the text differently. In the following chapters, I will study how the text grows, and how its surplus of meaning unfolds, i.e. in the process of ordinary readers' interpretation and actualization new meanings of the text appear, that will not be found in commentaries.

6.5. Summary

In summary, this chapter discusses the questions: why is it necessary to extend my hermeneutical framework from exegesis to hermeneutics? How could this hermeneutical framework be legitimate? And why is it legitimate to do the empirical hermeneutics?

In order to extend my hermeneutical framework from exegesis to hermeneutics, I first defined ‘exegesis’ and ‘hermeneutics.’ In my definition of exegesis and hermeneutics, I clarified the two terms and showed that hermeneutics comprised the analysis of (at least) two different approaches to biblical texts: exegesis and actualization. Secondly, I discussed current

⁸⁰ Ricoeur, 76. To this procedure of guessing the meaning of the text, Gerald West would call a step of looking for a proper theme of the text with a question what about this text is. See Gerald West, “Constructing Critical and Contextual Readings with Ordinary Readers: Mark 5:21-6:1.” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no 92 S 1995, 63, also see 60-69.

⁸¹ Ricoeur, 32-34.

⁸² Ricoeur, 79.

⁸³ Ricoeur, 78.

⁸⁴ For more information about this hermeneutics, see *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible*, ed. Hans de Wit et al, (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Press, 2004).

biblical scholarship and showed the necessity of including both hermeneutical approaches in my hermeneutical framework. Thirdly, I explored my own context to show the demands of hermeneutics in the Myanmar context. In this exploration, I presented the contextual social-religio-political problems, the ambiguous nature of the Bible, and the problems of interpretation models presented when one feels the necessity of extending one's hermeneutical framework. Finally, the linguistic philosophical argument of the theory of text was discussed to show the legitimacy and necessity of including empirical hermeneutics in my project of interpreting the Jeremianic texts.

CHAPTER 7

INTERTRIBAL BIBLE READING METHODOLOGY AND A PILOT EXPERIMENT OF MYANMAR INTERTRIBAL READING OF JER 13:20-27 IN THE NETHERLANDS

Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the methodology of Intertribal Bible Reading practice and I will analyze the interpretation process of some groups of Myanmar people who are living in the Netherlands. In my study, I will analyze two Kachin groups' intertribal readings of Jer 31:15-22 to study how this methodology works among the Myanmar people. To achieve my goal, I will first present the methodology of the Intertribal Reading of the Bible because I will let the readers use this reading steps for my research. Second, I will study the Myanmar intertribal reading of Jer 31:15-22. Third, I will analyze the results of the reading process and will find the significant explanation and appropriation of the text that took place in the two groups. In this step, I will analyze some hermeneutic components such as the motivations of the groups, the group dynamics, the reading attitudes of the groups, the focalization of the groups, the explanation strategy of the groups, the groups' reading of characters in the text, the groups' appropriation strategies, the groups' appropriation content, the groups' appropriation dynamics, and the praxeological effects of the reading. Finally, I will make an initial attempt at answering the question of how the process of explaining an old text and understanding it in an individual's current situation works.

7.1. Methodology of Intertribal Reading of the Bible

The intertribal reading methodology is the adopted reading practice from the Intercultural reading of the Bible which is a method in which different groups of people from different social-political-cultural backgrounds read the same biblical text and exchange their different perspectives (the surplus of meaning of the text) in terms of their understandings of the text. Therefore, it is both a contextual and a cross-cultural reading of the Bible. Because of the readers' different social-cultural backgrounds, there can be confrontations between the groups but such confrontation may also help the groups to start a positive social transformation. This reading methodology can be found as a new biblical empirical hermeneutics in current biblical scholarship. This methodology was initially designed by scholars from the Netherlands, Africa, and Latin-America in 1998. It has been tested by international scholars through the world-wide project of *Through the Eyes of Another* and this project has been documented as a book in 2004.¹ In the case of my study, I will use this reading practice among different Myanmar tribes so that I will call this method "the intertribal reading of the Bible."

¹ *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible*, ed. Hans de Wit et al (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Press, 2004).

Although this method has been designed for groups of readers from different cultures, in this chapter, as a pilot experiment, I tested this method in the groups of Kachin people who themselves comprise six different linguistic groups. In this project, people from three different linguistic groups participated. Myanmar government officially recognizes 135 distinct ethnic groups although they are grouped into eight major national ethnicities.

In doing the intertribal reading of the Bible, the reading groups have to go through four phases.²

7.1.1. Phase Zero: Preparatory Phase

In the preparatory phase, which could be called phase zero, a pair of small reading groups is formed; the intentions and expectations of the project are introduced to the participants; a facilitator and a reporter for the individual reading group are selected; the meeting schedules and venue of both groups are set up since this intertribal reading practice will exchange its reading reports with its partner reading group. Within the group, a group portrait will be drawn up so that the partner group will understand the social situation of the partner group and will be able to read the text again through the eyes of the partner group. In order to produce the group portrait, each participant will introduce his or her respective social, religious, economic, and political background. As a result, this process will enable their partner group to see the discrepancies and understand the text through the eyes of another.

7.1.2. Phase One: Spontaneous Reading of the Bible

In phase one, the group will start reading the text without outside input, that is called spontaneous reading of the Bible. Since the text is semantically autonomous and it opens up to every reader who can read it, every participant will read it with his or her own heart from their own situations and experiences. According to De Wit who wrote a manual for the facilitators and reporters of intercultural reading of the Bible, “the main focus is not so much on the historical background of the text, but on the ‘foreground’ of the text: the effect the text has on new readers, the way it affects you, what it evokes. What strikes you? What touches you? What makes you angry, what do you recognize?”³ In any case, it does not totally reject the importance of the historical context of the text. Any professional exegete from the group can contribute historical background information of the text. Some guiding questions for Spontaneous Reading in Intertribal Bible Reading will be as follows.⁴

² Hans de Wit, *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible: Manual for facilitators and reporters* (VU University Amsterdam, August 2008), 11-15.

http://www.bible4all.org/content/Default.aspx?hoofdruibrick_id=1&ah=1&pagina_id=11 Accessed on April 27, 2011. Also see Arie Moolenaar, “Listening with the Heart: The Reading Experience of the Dutch Groups,” in *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible*, ed. Hans de Wit et al (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Press, 2004), 90.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴ Hans de Wit, “Handbook for Intercultural Bible Reading 2011,”

http://www.bible4all.org/Content/scholar_documents.aspx?pagina_id=22&ah=5 (accessed May 20, 2016), 27. In this handbook, Hans de Wit says “These questions show three ways in which one can deal with (biblical) texts. In this context, the terms “behind the text”, “in the text” and “before the text” are used. Looking “behind the text” implies that one looks at the historical context in which the biblical text was created. Looking “in” the text implies that one primarily focuses on what the text expresses, as a collection of words and phrases. Looking “before” the text, or looking at its “foreground” implies that one especially

- Does the text refer to certain conflicts? (Behind the text)
- What traces of culture do you discover in the text? (In the text)
- Do you understand everything in the text? (In the text)
- What is the central message of the text in your opinion? (In the text)
- “With whom” do you read the text? (meaning by that: What person in the story do you identify with and why? What role do you think you would have played if you had been part of the story? (The foreground of the text)
- What aspects of the story especially touch you? What thoughts, memories and experiences from your own life does the text you read evoke? Why? (The foreground of the text)
- How would the text be able to play a role in your life? (The foreground of the text)

There can be either agreement or disagreement among the group members. In any case, the final reading report will be exchanged with the partner group’s report which may show the same agreement and disagreement among their group members. Therefore, it is important to draw up the group portrait in order for the partner group to understand the reason for such differences. Thus, the two major components in the first reading report will be the group portrait and the report of the spontaneous (first) reading of the text.

7.1.3. Phase Two: Exchange of the Reading Reports

In phase two, the partner reading groups will exchange their reading reports. It is the phase of exchange; not only the exchange of the reading reports but also the exchange of perspectives. In other words, this is the moment of confrontation. In this phase, the group will interact with the reading report of the partner group. The interaction will occur in the observation of the similarities and differences between the partner groups. It is the moment to re-read the text ‘through the eyes of another.’ The group’s observation about the discrepancies will enable the group to figure out where the differences come from.

In this step, the reading groups will look carefully at the group portrait and reading report of the partner group to see the partner group’s faces, to feel experiences of the partner group, and to get an idea of the partner group. Some questions for this step are as follows.⁵

- What is the partner group’s profile? What problems do they wrestle with? What pains do they suffer?
- How did they deal with the biblical text? Were there any conflicts in the group, were there any disagreements? Was there a consensus as to the meaning of the biblical text? Does the group use scholarly commentaries? Does the group address the entire text or do they concentrate on a part of it? What part? What components in the text, defined by culture, attracted the partner group’s attention? How does the group view the central message of the text? With whom do they identify in the story and why?

focuses on what new readers do with the old text and what the old text does to new readers. If participants want to consult scientific commentaries, they are of course entirely free to do so. It is important that the voice of professional readers (exegetes) does not become dominant in the discussion (exegesis is only one way to deal with biblical texts!) and that the group also learns to assess the value of its own insights.”

⁵ Ibid., 27-29.

- Do the group members actualize the text? Do they apply the text to their own lives?

7.1.4. Phase Three: Exchange of Perspectives

Finally, in phase three, the group will once again exchange feedback and perspectives with their partner group. In this step, the groups are to focus on three important issues: (1) How did the partner group deal with the group's reading report and interpretation of the Bible story? What did the partner group notice in particular? Were they amazed, pleased, irritated, angry about this? (2) What happened to themselves, how did they deal with similarities, and with the differences? (3) How did they subsequently address us, with admiration and empathy or critical and condemning? In this last phase, the group will rethink whether they will change their perspective and follow their partner's understanding or whether they have reached a saturation point.⁶

7.1.5. The Role of the Socially Engaged Exegete in the Reading Process

The above-mentioned is the methodological framework of intertribal reading of the Bible. In this systematic reading procedure, what is the role of myself and what is my position as a socially engaged professional biblical exegete? I raise these questions because in the intercultural/intertribal reading of the Bible, the scholars do not act until the readers have produced their reading reports. The scholar/researcher will start his/her research on the reading reports only when the readers finish their actual readings.

According to my life experience, all ordinary Bible readers in Myanmar prefer to study the Bible with their pastors or biblical scholars because they think of their pastors and scholars as their teachers (in Myanmar language: *sayagi/sayamagi*). Unlike other parts of the world, in our country we do not have the so-called *lectura popular*, i.e. popular reading or communal reading exercises. Most Bible studies in our country are led by pastors or biblical scholars. Even those Myanmar people who are residing outside the country invite their pastors or biblical scholars to give Bible studies. This was evident when I was working on this research at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Kachin people and other Myanmar people from around Europe including the Netherlands, England, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden invited me to lead Bible studies. The reason why our people invite biblical scholars is mainly based on their ultimate trust in the resources of trained biblical scholars. Most ordinary Myanmar Bible readers would admit that they have little knowledge of the Bible although some of them may have a general biblical knowledge. This culture of humbleness, lowliness, and submissiveness is the consequence of an oppressive military dictatorship system in our country. The long-lasting oppressive political system has silenced the voice of our people. In such a social, political, religious, and cultural context, it will be an unethical and inappropriate position for me if I stay away from them.

In my intertribal Bible reading project, our people indeed expected me to play an important role even after I explained the process of intertribal reading of the Bible which encourages spontaneous reading of the text by ordinary readers. In fact, in our actual group readings, I was asked to explain the historical background information of the biblical text and its literary correlations. Although I contributed my reading resources at some points, primarily,

⁶ Ibid., 29-32.

I was involved in both groups by letting themselves interpret and appropriate the text. I deliberately choose this position because I want to change the traditional view of ordinary Myanmar Bible readers that the biblical scholars are the only ones who can interpret the biblical texts for them.

Most of our people have not noticed their reading resources which is what Gerald West would call “the academy of the poor.”⁷ In fact, the text is open to all the readers and the text wants to be interpreted by every reader who can read it as I have already discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, along with the methodology of intertribal reading of the Bible, I attempted to change the traditional sense of inferiority held by our ordinary Bible readers. I took the position of Bible study enabler. The intertribal reading of the Bible must enable our people to express their own feelings and thoughts. Therefore, our intertribal reading of the Bible will be a liberative hermeneutics. I participated in the reading groups and read the Bible with them but the final reading reports are those of the ordinary readers; not my idealized or my rationalized reports. What I did throughout the process of my hermeneutical research was to read the Bible with ordinary readers and analyze their reading reports to find significant explanations and appropriations from their readings.

Another reason why I took this position is that there are two potential problems which can occur when socially engaged biblical scholars participate in local people’s Bible reading.⁸ The first is ‘uncritical listening to’ the ordinary readers that romanticizes and idealizes the interpretations of the ordinary readers. The second is ‘an arrogant speaking for’ the ordinary readers that minimizes and rationalizes the interpretations of the ordinary readers. Such problems have been already attested in the contexts of South Africa and Latin-America.⁹

Since the readers are not *tabula rasa* – a blank slate —, socially engaged biblical scholars must leave room for the ordinary readers to speak for themselves. The scholar must not underestimate the reading resources of the ordinary readers. They can articulate the meaning of the text based not only on the biblical text but also on their own context (life experiences). For example, in reading the Exodus story, poor and marginalized South Africans who are the victims of an apartheid system have seen the exodus story as their own story; the oppression of Israelite people as their own oppression; the desire for liberation of the biblical Israelites as their own desire; Pharaoh as oppressor; the oppressed as the poor themselves.¹⁰ The same happened when a group of Myanmar theological students read 2 Samuel 13. The story of Tamar’s rape became their own story because their voices were silenced like Tamar. The student group identified with Tamar because their native land was metaphorically raped.¹¹ Such appropriation in the hermeneutical process signals the socially engaged scholars to leave room for the ordinary readers to speak for themselves. The life experience of each individual is clearly different from that of others.

⁷ Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*, Ed. J. Webb Mealy, Robert P. Carroll, David J.A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

⁸ West, “Reading With: A Call to Conversion,” in *The Academy of the Poor*, 37.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See La Rip Marip, “Personal Application Social Justice, and Social Transformation (A Dialogue between Myanmar and the Netherlands)” in *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading*, edited by Hans de Wit and Janet Dyk, Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), Semeia Studies Number 81. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015, 159-166.

Moreover, socially engaged biblical scholars must read the Bible with the ordinary readers and critically analyze the text and context together so that he or she can avoid romanticizing the interpretations of the ordinary person in the process of Bible reading. Therefore, I willingly participated in the reading groups and read the Bible with the ordinary readers. Yet, I did not try to dominate the groups nor romanticize the interpretations of the groups. I participated in the groups just as one of the participants and I contributed my input only at the explicit request of my fellow participants.

The following is an intertribal reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22 in which I participated as a Myanmar socially engaged biblical exegete.

7.2. A Pilot Experiment of Myanmar Intertribal Reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22 in the Netherlands

This project on intertribal reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22 was done among the diaspora Kachins in the Netherlands from January 8 – February 13, 2011. They all participated willingly in the intertribal reading process at my personal request. The readers themselves formed two groups: a male group and a female group. The reading reports were written in the Kachin language. The names of the paired groups are ‘Kachin Women’s Group in the Netherlands’ and ‘KCNL Male Youths.’¹² Both groups accomplished phase zero and phase one in their first meetings which took one day. Phase two and three were done in the next two one-day meetings held at two-week intervals. Both groups met at the home of one of their group members. The women’s group met at U Myo Kyaw and Daw Ma Lu’s house in Nieuwerkerk aan den IJssel while the youth group met at Hpung Awng Li’s house in Amsterdam.

In both groups, I introduced the procedure of the intertribal reading of the Bible and clarified their questions concerning the procedure. Then, throughout the reading process in both groups, I participated solely as a fellow member.

Each group had six members.¹³ In the women’s group, four were married and two were singles. In the male youth group, all were single. All the participants are diaspora Kachins. While all the members of the male youth group have a strong feeling of diaspora or exile, noticeably, the members of the women’s group do not have that same feeling. Most participants from both groups finished high school in Myanmar and some already graduated from colleges in Myanmar. But since they were part of the diaspora in the Netherlands, they were studying Dutch language and working in part-time jobs. Their common language was Jinghpaw although the participants’ dialects and hometown locations varied from one another.¹⁴ Although their dialects and education levels were different from one another, one thing that all they had in common was their religious affiliation. In fact, all participants were members of the Kachin Baptist Convention. All participants were already baptized. They used the Kachin Bible

¹² The acronym KCNL stands for the Kachin Community in the Netherlands that was officially organized in 2009 December 25 to help the Kachins in the Netherlands and in their home country Myanmar. This organization was officially registered in 2013 according to the law of the Netherlands.

¹³ The names of those in the women’s group were Pri Nan, Hkawn Hpang, Bawk Nu, Ah Roi, Ah San, and Ma Lu. The women’s group elected Pri Nan as the facilitator and Hkawn Hpang as the reporter. The names of the youth group were Brang Awng, Bawk San, Gun Yawng, Zau Awn Naw, Yaw Htung, and Hpung Awng Li. Brang Awng was appointed as the facilitator and Bawk San was appointed as the reporter.

¹⁴ The dialects to be found in both groups are Jinghpaw, Maru (Lawngwaw), and Azi (Zaiwa).

(translated by Ola Hanson) as a primary source and the Myanmar Bible (translated by Adoniram Judson) as a secondary source because they grew up with these languages in Myanmar.

7.2.1. The Kachin Women's Group's Portrait and Spontaneous Reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22

The women's group started their reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22 by building intimate relationships. They first introduced each other and drew up their group portrait. They came from different places in Myanmar and now they live in different places in the Netherlands. Originally, four participants came from different villages of Shan State and two participants from different villages in Kachin State. A woman had worked as a nurse and had lived in Japan for ten years before she entered the Netherlands. She said that she had been reading the Bible and praying for thirty years but she found God only when she arrived in Japan so that she is now in her new spiritual life. Another participant who had no higher education in Myanmar and who had worked in Thailand said "I left my three children at my parents' home after I was divorced. I left my children and went to Thailand to make money there because my family was very poor. In Thailand, I had uncountable difficulties. I cried day and night. I missed my children. I prayed to God and fasted. Finally, I found my present husband who was going to be resettled by the UNHCR in the Netherlands. God had listened to my crying and prayer. God did not ignore my crying. God did not abandon me. Now God has even brought my children to me." In contrast with these two women, the other two participants said that they neither read the Bible nor prayed regularly. While one said that she might pray fifteen minutes during a week, the other said that she prayed only at times when she was in need. While these four women grew up in Christian families, another participant grew up with animism until her family converted to Christianity when she was in high school. Although she is still young in her Christian life, she believes in God's intervention in response to human prayer as she has experienced in her migrant worker life in Thailand and Malaysia. The last participant, who joined the group later, said that she grew up in a mixed family where her mother was a Kachin Christian and her father was a Palaung Buddhist. She herself was baptized by me in the Netherlands in 2010. She said she was not very familiar with reading the Bible and praying.

After building a close relationship among the participants, the group selected their facilitator and reporter. The reading process began with a prayer by the facilitator. The facilitator asked a participant to read Jeremiah 31:15-22 in a loud voice. They used both Kachin and Myanmar versions to be able to clarify the meaning of the text. Since most of them are not used to reading the Bible, they had in fact difficulties in understanding the meaning of the text. They asked me to explain about the text but I refused their request and encouraged them to decipher the text themselves.

In their reading, their first observation was the compositional structure of the text. According to them, the text was composed of three literary units which spoke about Rachel's weeping, Ephraim's repentance, and a woman who would encompass a man.

Gradually, the reading process developed as they raised their own concerns and questions: "Whose wife is Rachel? How many children does she have? Is she very beautiful? Where is Ramah situated? Who is Ephraim? What are Ephraim's sins? What does it mean that a woman will encompass a man?" At their request, I showed them the stories of Rachel in

Genesis 29; 30; 35:16-20; 48; and the weeping stories in Jeremiah 9:17-20; 40:1.¹⁵ After clarifying their questions by reading these inter-textual references, they agreed on some points:

1. The incidence of Rachel's weeping and Yahweh's reward teaches that God listens to the voice of an individual woman's cry. As one participant had already convincingly testified to her life experience as mentioned above, all the women were easily convinced to do the same.
2. Ephraim's repentance and Yahweh's mercy shows that even though humans commit sins, God forgives and receives humans if they repent.

Although they could achieve agreement on the above points, they disagreed on the last part of the text (vv. 21-22) because of the ambiguous nature of the text. The Hebrew phrase **נָקְבָה תְּסִיבֵב** in the Kachin translation could mean 'a woman shall protect a man' or 'a woman shall wrap a man.' In the Burmese translation too, it could mean 'a woman shall go around a man' or 'a woman shall circle a man.' Therefore, one of the participants imaginatively interpreted this line as women would protect men in the future by holding spears. Another participant explained that the text could mean that women would lead men in the future so that she even envisioned a future initiating role for women and a future matriarchal time. In relating to the theme of protection, another participant highlighted the phrase "For the LORD has created a new thing **חֲדָשָׁה** on the earth" (Jeremiah 31:22b RSV) which is closely related to the next phrase "a woman protects a man" (Jeremiah 31:22c RSV). The word new thing **חֲדָשָׁה** translated in Kachin conveys the meaning new custom/law. Therefore, this reader interpreted that what the new thing Yahweh created on earth was a new law that would protect men and women. She explained that this Scripture was the future time that the prophet had envisioned and now the Scripture had been fulfilled in her life because women in Myanmar were always exploited and they had no rights; no law protected them; but in the Netherlands, women had full human rights as well as men because of the laws of the Netherlands. As she is living now in the Netherlands, she is protected by the laws of the Netherlands. The prophetic message of a 'new thing' becomes 'the law in the Netherlands' which is new to her. Amazingly, she has appropriated the biblical 'new thing' to 'the law of the Netherlands' which is new to her and which gives protection to men as well as women. Another one went further and interpreted the new law as the new covenant so that she saw the coming of the virgin Israel as the coming of Jesus Christ. This view was not developed by other participants.

The reading started at 11:30 and stopped at 18:00. The host family treated the group to lunch, tea, and dinner throughout the day. The meeting closed with a short prayer.

7.2.2. The KCNL Male Youth Group's Portrait and Spontaneous Reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22

The KCNL male youth first carefully selected an appropriate name for their group because they preferred their group's name to show their group's identity. After naming their group as the "KCNL Male Youth Group," they selected their facilitator and Reporter. Then they began the Bible reading session with an opening prayer.

¹⁵ See the Chapter 5 "The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 31:15-22" in this dissertation.

The facilitator first took a moment to draw up their group portrait.¹⁶ First, a man introduced himself. He said that he was the youngest son among nine siblings and their family lived in Keng Tung, Eastern Shan State, where Nat (spirit) worship was once strongly practiced. Their family became Christians just in his father's generation. He used to go to Sunday School and read *Our Daily Bread* booklet. Then, another man introduced himself. He is also the youngest son among four siblings. He said that he came from Kutkai, Northern Shan State, where opium poppy cultivation, drug trafficking, heroin and amphetamines addiction, movements of insurgents, and endless national wars had severely affected the people's social-economic-political and religious situation. He thanked his father, for his father brought them up with the teachings of the Bible and prayed for them. He testified that by the grace of his father, none of his brothers used drugs while many people have been slaves of several kinds of drugs. He always reads a verse of the Bible before he sleeps. He likes Psalm 21 because it always gives him encouragement whenever he is in trouble. Then, another man introduced himself. He was born and grew up in Law Hkum, a village which is now a wasteland, in a KIA area (KIA stands for Kachin Independence Army) in Kachin State. He said "As I grew up in the KIA area, where KIA and Myanmar troops were used to fighting, I was used to fleeing from one place to another to escape from the battles. My native village no longer exists today. After my father's death, we moved to Myitkyina (i.e. the capital of Kachin State). My father and my mother brought me up with the biblical teaching since I was young. I like the Scriptures in the Book of Proverbs." Another man was also born in a war zone - Daga village, during the war between the KIA and Burmese armies. As he lived in the KIA area, the Burmese troops had set fire to their house as well as others' several times. He said "Once, we could not take our female guest along with us when we fled from the battle; when we came back home after the battle, the female guest was already killed there. We were very sad. Our house was also burned down. It was in the 1980s." This man had been moving from place to place but he never forgot the list of his ancestors going back seven generations which his father taught him. Throughout all generations, his ancestors were animists. They just became Christians in his father's generation. He likes the books of Psalms and Proverbs. Another man introduced himself by explaining the composite clans in his dialect. He is also a descendant of animists. Formerly, their household evil spirits used to harm the people who visited their house. But his parents converted to Christianity when he was born. He originally came from Loi Je/Mai Ja Yang/Ja Len Yang village in Kachin State. Later, he left the village and went to school in Bamaw where he could actively attend Sunday School and youth services. He has already earned bachelor's degrees from Distance University and from Myanmar Institute of Theology where he could get general knowledge of the Old and New Testament. Interestingly, he had read through the whole Bible after he arrived in the Netherlands. Then, another man introduced himself. He came from Myitkyina where there was no war in his life. Only occasionally when Burmese troops seized ordinary citizens to serve as their porters (i.e. carriers of weapons and rations for the soldier; and also as human mine sweepers), he had to hide himself. He also has obtained bachelor's degrees from Distance University and Myanmar Institute of Theology. He believes that the

¹⁶ All the participants wanted to mention their names in the reading report because they preferred to acknowledge each person's contribution to the Bible reading. However, as a common ethical research practice, I grant them anonymity while I inform the readers concerning some relevant information about the participants of the reading groups.

Bible has power to encourage him but he does not believe that reading the Bible alone guarantees the heavenly eternal life.

Having drawn up the group portrait, the group started reading the Bible silently because the facilitator thought individual silent reading could help them concentrate on the text. However, three participants read the Bible together out loud because they were used to reading aloud.

Their initial discussion began with the story of Rachel. They talked about the story of Jacob and Rachel, Jacob's 14-year service at Laban's house, and the marriage of Jacob and Rachel. Then, they put their attention on the text more closely and they agreed that the text was speaking about three characters – a mother, a son, and a daughter.

Firstly, they discussed about the mother Rachel. One participant thought the reason why Rachel was crying was because she herself had committed sins. But another member convinced the group that it was because the children had left for the battlefield. Since no one could guarantee the children's lives in the battlefield, Rachel made lamentations for her children. Then, a man saw the biblical characters as metaphorical representations so that he explained that Rachel's cry represented the collective cry of all the Israelite people because a country is usually metaphorically called as one's 'mother country.' He continued to say that 'Myanmar,' for example, was usually called as 'our mother country' so that he understood the mother Rachel as a symbol of the collective Israelite people and the country. This idea was developed by the group members so that one reader identified Rachel with Myanmar country (as well as Kachin State) and Rachel's children with himself and with the other diaspora Kachins. He said that "we had to leave our mother country and are scattered in foreign countries because of various kinds of forces such as various kinds of human rights violations and systematic abolishment of our language and our cultural values. In reality, our country is the most pleasant place in the world." Another group member added that the force that sent the Kachins away also included various kinds of globalization waves, the new market-oriented economic system, and new information technology. He said that the increasing occupation by non-Kachin local investors in Kachin State and aggressive ecological destruction in the area especially shattered the stability of the indigenous Kachin people and their economy. Therefore, he said that all the loss of the Kachins and their dispersion in diaspora could be seen as losing the battle and being exiles which could be compared with Rachel's weeping story. In this actualization, a group member related the biblical Rachel's weeping to the metaphorical weeping of Kachin State so that the Kachin pop song 'A Ka Law' (English translation: Ouch!) was remembered as the relevant lamentation song for them. The chorus of this song can be roughly translated as follows:

'Ouch!...
 hills and mountains are crying,
 forests are crying,
 teaks and timbers, gold and jade are crying,
 streams and rivers are crying,
 animals are crying,
 all the seasonal plants are crying too,
 because there is no one to take care of them.'¹⁷

¹⁷ Blast, "A Ka Law," *Jan Pan*, 2009.

Then, all the male youths agreed that their mother country was crying and that she was looking forward to seeing her children's return. Therefore, all realized that it was their responsibility to comfort their mother country. How could they comfort their mother country? They would return to their home country and get involved in rebuilding their poor country. They said "otherwise, our mother would not be comforted."

Secondly, they discussed about the son Ephraim. A participant saw that Ephraim was pleading to God because of the sins of his youth. This time, he saw Ephraim not as a historical man but as a symbolic character that represents the Israelite people. He understood Ephraim's sin as the sin of the Israelite ancestors who committed senseless genocides. Another participant explained Ephraim's pleading as theological teaching about repentance. He related this theology with the New Testament story of Peter and Judas; both committed the same sins - both denied Jesus; but only Peter who turned to the Lord with repentance got salvation. Therefore, he highlighted the importance of repentance and at the same time he called all the Kachins to return to God with repentance. This interpretation was agreed on by other group members. The group actualized the story of Ephraim's repentance into the life of the Kachin diaspora. According to a participant, the scattering of the Kachins could be a kind of admonishment by God. One of the group members did not see the word of pleading in Ephraim's prayer; rather, he saw the words of self-condemnation and a guilty conscience. The group did not develop this different perspective.

In this part, the facilitator asked me to raise some questions, so I raised the questions: How do you see the relationship between Ephraim and God? Do you see God as a father or a mother? Interestingly, in this part, all the participants saw the maternal image of God in terms of the love of God. A man said "fathers are short-tempered and easy get angry while mothers are patient and tolerant in caring lovingly for their children. Mothers are capable of forgiving and accepting their children as they are. Therefore, God's merciful love upon Ephraim here is quite similar to that of a mother's love. Therefore, the maternal image of God is seen in this text." In addition to this, a man also observed the repetition of the word 'love' in his Kachin Bible that usually comes from mothers so that he saw God's love as a mother's love. In relation to this maternal image of God, the group also discussed the issue of the ordination of women. Except for one participant, the male youths did not have any reasons to reject the women's ordination.

Finally, the group discussed about the virgin Israel. A man understood the situation of the text as the post-war period when most men would have been killed in the battle and many women would have been left in the community. The participants observed the text's emphasis on the woman in this part. They related the virgin Israel, faithless daughter, and the woman who would protect the man so that they found the important role of the woman. Thus, they advocated to promote women's status in their society. The group agreed to share good positions with women in the Kachin society while most Asian people have a culture that even prohibits passing under the women's skirts and touching the women's skirts because they think women were unclean and subordinate to men. The male youths also related the prophetic message of the important role of the woman to the actual role of historical women – how women protected men in history. A man shared an Indian legend that said how the wife of Gandhi protected her husband's dignity; even at times when Gandhi beat her, she let her husband beat her indoors;

otherwise people would look down on the non-violent protester Mahatma Gandhi. Whether this legend is true or not, they all agreed on the important role of women.

At the end of their report, they asked some questions to their partner group such as: Did you understand the text as soon as you read it? How did you read the text? Did everyone participate in the discussion? How do you see the Bible?

The meeting adjourned at 17:30 with a prayer. The host family treated all the members to a delicious lunch.

7.2.3. The Women's Reading of the Youth's Report

The second phase was opened with a prayer by the facilitator. In their reading of the youth's report, the women noticed similarities and differences between it and their own report.

The women said that they were similar to their partner group in finding the three composite units of Jeremiah 31:15-22 regarding Rachel (vv 15-17), Ephraim (vv 18-20), and virgin Israel (vv 21-22).

The points of difference were listed as follows.

- seriousness in choosing the name of their group
- all the male youth were used to reading the Bible whereas the majority of the women were not.
- each individual's religion, social roots, and clan history were highly stressed in the male youth group's portrait.
- the mention of personal names in the youths' reading report.
- the youth spent a lot of time discussing women and gender issues.
- identification of who the biblical characters represented: e.g. while the women identified Rachel with their individual lives, the male youths identified Rachel with their country, native land, and geographical location; in other words, the identification of Rachel as mother country and her children as the KCNL male youths themselves made up for the differences between them.

The women assumed the reason why the male youths' perspectives were different from theirs was because their hearts were firmly rooted in their culture, their people, and their political situation.

Moreover, they appreciated their partner's perspectives that opened their world view. The women admitted that the partner group's report could point out their weakness in reading the Bible. They made a commitment to read the Bible more in the future. Moreover, the report of the male youths encouraged them to learn their Kachin social structure and culture. Yet, one woman argued that culturally that was the responsibility of all Kachin men and not of Kachin women. However, another participant disagreed with her. This woman held the view that Kachin women also had to know their own culture and social relationships because she thought it was important to know one's own roots. The rest of the Kachin women were silent in front of this argument. Nevertheless, the women appreciated the male youths for their exploration of their social and cultural roots and gender issues related to promoting the status of the women, an issue that had not been taken into consideration by the women themselves. Moreover, the women appreciated the male youths for helping them see the maternal images of God and the motherly love of God that they did not find in their reading.

In their second report, the women answered the questions of their partner group's first reading report. Their answers were:

- a) they did not understand the meaning of the text quickly.
- b) they read the whole text out loud.
- c) all participants were involved in the discussion.
- d) the question "how do you see the Bible?" was not very clear.

At the end of their report, the women group asked some questions to their partner group.

- a) What benefit did you get from this intercultural/intertribal Bible reading?
- b) Would you actually promote the status of women? Can women definitely protect men?
- c) Could the man, who know his seven generations, tell them his generations since we are interested in his family tree?

The women's second phase was concluded with a prayer by me. The meeting started at 11:00 and ended at 19:00. As in the first phase, the host family served delicious food all day.

7.2.4. The Youth's Reading of the Women's Report

After having lunch, the youths began their second phase with a prayer by the host. The youths thoroughly read the women's group portrait and interpretation of the text. They noticed that the majority of women enjoyed praying but were not accustomed to reading the Bible. Two women were seen as spiritual women. A man said that a woman from the partner group was similar to him in terms of being the youngest child in the family. According to him, the youngest are usually loved by all the family members but are also usually melancholy outside the home. The youth group agreed to see that all the members of their partner group were strong believers.

In their reading of the women's report, the youths saw some similarities and differences between them.

Similarities were:

- using the Kachin and Burmese versions of the Bible.
- observation of the three composite units of the text.

Differences were:

- understanding of the character Rachel. While the women saw Rachel as an individual woman, the youth understood Rachel as a metaphorical woman who represented the whole Israelite people.
- while the women understood Rachel's weeping as a woman's weeping, the youths understood it as the weeping of the country.
- the youth were less interested in the geographical location of Ramah whereas the women were curious about the location of Ramah.
- the women understood that repentance was important in reconciliation with God but the youths thought repentance alone was not enough; verbal pleading was also required.
- the youths understood Ephraim to be a representative figure of all the Israelite people but women understood it as both collective and individual.

- while the women envisioned a future matriarchal society, the male youths did not; they viewed the last part of the text as equality of men and women. In this case, a man compared the women's imagination of the spear-women with the ancient Chinese women warriors. He related a legend that he had heard. According to the legend, the ancient Chinese women warriors once almost defeated a Chinese king but eventually lost the war and consequently the Chinese women's feet were bound in order to deform their legs. Therefore, this man would like to suggest the women not to try to dominate men. All the youths did not want to be dominated by the women but they wanted equality between man and women. The male group itself did not want to dominate the women.
- the women's appropriation of Israel's coming home as Jesus' coming was also different from the youths' appropriation of their returning to their home country.

The youths noticed that the women's appropriation started from their context and not from the text. In contrast, the youths thought that letting the text speak first was important. The youths also noticed that the women's interpretation was dominated by a mystical view.

The meeting started at 12:00 and ended at 18:00.

7.2.5. The Women's Looking Back on the Entire Process

In the last phase of the intertribal Bible reading, the women thoroughly read their partner's reaction to their spontaneous interpretation of the text and looked back on the entire process. They asked themselves the question: What perspectives and opinions did we change? In this phase, the women opened their hearts. They viewed their partner's reaction as the mirror for them so that they were willing to reconsider their previously established perspectives and their social and religious horizons. First, they broadened their own limited perspectives on the Kachin culture so that they came to value their own system of social relationships, cultural patterns, and the importance of their origins and land. But it is noticed that they did not say anything about going back to their original home country. Second, they widened their religious perspective on God. They followed the partner's way of seeing God as a mother in terms of God's motherly love. Third, they adjusted their perspective on the gender hierarchical system and welcomed the youths' idea of gender balance. Fourth, they revitalized themselves to read the Bible more as the male youths did. They all agreed to continue meeting regularly and to read the Bible regularly although this project was over.

However, they maintained their mystical reading perspective. They preferred an individual spiritual relationship with God. They also preferred personal identification with the biblical characters; the weeping of Rachel was their weeping; Ephraim's returning to God was their returning to God; even virgin Israel's returning home is seen, from one aspect, as Jesus' coming to the world.

7.2.6. The Youths' Looking Back on the Entire Process

In the last phase of the intertribal Bible reading, the male youths read their partner's reaction from a defensive ground. Instead of changing their previously established perspectives and opinions, they defended their position. They maintained the view that interpretation must start from the text so they did not adopt the women's eagerness for individual personal

identification with the biblical characters. Moreover, they did not change their view on the text as they believed the text spoke to them to relate the text and their context so that their contextual interpretation began with the text and was anchored in their context. Consequently, their understanding of the text strengthened them to uphold their cultural values. Furthermore, they did not think the imagination of a matriarchal system was God's new creation; rather, they sustained the view that mutual protection was what God created on the earth as a new creation. It was neither patriarchy nor matriarchy; rather, the equality of men and women.

Although they did not change their perspectives and opinions through reading the reaction of their partner group, interestingly, they unanimously admitted that the methodology of the intertribal reading of the Bible itself made them improve in their understanding of the text because it provided a time when they could study the text closely and thoroughly. Moreover, it provided a space for the group where each one could exchange their different perspectives and opinions on the text. This means that the exchange of perspectives occurred only within the group but not with their partner group. In addition, it provided a place to gain new theological insights. More interestingly, they all agreed that the method of intertribal reading of the Bible helped the text speak as it helped them to reconsider their current situation through the text.

7.3. Analysis of the Hermeneutical Components

This section will analyze the hermeneutic components from the above reading reports and will detect the significant explanations and appropriations of the text. To be able to analyze the reading reports, I will approach the reports with a set of research questions. All the research questions applied in this analysis are adopted from the empirical research project of *Through the Eyes of Another*.¹⁸ The purpose of this section is to find how it is possible to explain an old text and understand it in the individual's current situation.

In order to begin the analysis of the spontaneous reading, I first labeled the text segments according to the preset research questions. The labels are codes that were attached to segments of the text of the reading reports. After coding the segments of the reports, the segments were grouped under appropriate categories so that the categorized elements were interpreted eventually.

After the analysis of the spontaneous reading, analysis of exchange of perspectives will be followed. In this study, I will analyze the groups' interactions in partner's profile, hermeneutic-exegetical aspect, and the effect of interactions.

7.3.1. Analysis of the Spontaneous Reading

In the analysis of the spontaneous reading, the research examines ten hermeneutic components – the motivations of the groups, the group dynamics, the reading attitudes of the groups, the focalization of the groups, the explanation strategy of the groups, the groups' reading of characters in the text, the groups' appropriation strategies, the groups' appropriation content, the groups' appropriation dynamics, and the praxeological effects of the reading.

¹⁸ Hans de Wit, *Through the Eyes of Another*. Most adopted research questions are from "Codes and Coding," 395-434.

7.3.1.1. Analysis of the Motivations of the Groups

All members from both groups have participated in the intertribal reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22 at my personal request but the analysis below will show whether their motivation was affective or cognitive. To examine the motivations of the groups, the research questions will be “Why did groups participate in the project, and what are the implications of this motivation for the development of interaction with the partner group? What motives led the group to participate?”¹⁹

Table 1 shows the motivation of the Kachin women’s group. According to the Table 1, one can find the participants’ emotionality, longing for a better situation, longing for help from God, curiosity and an exploratory affective exchange as their motivations for the development of interaction with the partner group. Some participants have been exploring the reality of God for several years in their lives and have experienced God’s intervention in their lives. They testified how they were helped by God in times of difficulty. Some participants got involved in the group due to their curiosity in exploring the biblical messages for their lives as they want to know more about God and God’s intervention in human history. In short, the group’s emotionality is seen as the dominant motivation of this women’s group.

In contrast to the women’s group’s affective motivation, a more cognitive motivation is found in the male youth group. Table 2 shows that the male youths wish to exchange their perspectives, to share their insights into faith with others, to be challenged, to acquire new knowledge, and they wish to validate their concepts. As they want to know others’ perspectives and want to acknowledge the different perspectives of others, the dominant motivation in this group is seen as cognitive.

7.3.1.2. Analysis of the Group Dynamics

In this analysis, I search the group dynamics or directing mechanisms that the groups have applied in their intertribal reading process. My research question is: What are the dynamics of the groups?

As shown in Table 3, the dynamics of the women’s group are intertwined with the branches of liturgical framework, mutual trust, attention to the text, and reading process as celebrating and reflecting their own personal situations. Within a liturgical framework the women’s group practiced communitarian reading. With mutual trust, their reading is celebrating and reflecting their own situations. One participant read the Bible for all the participants. Their use of Kachin and Myanmar Bible translations also broadened their reading horizon. Within a liturgical framework and within the framework of mutual trust, they also paid attention to the text itself. Although they felt inferior in reading the Bible and had different opinions in the group, liturgical framework and mutual trust have well served as major directing mechanisms in their reading process.

The male youth group also opened their reading with a prayer but did not end with a prayer or any religious conclusion so that the liturgical framework in this reading group is not as strong as that of the women’s group. Unlike the women’s group, many interactions occurred within the group. Every participant read the Bible for himself. Their communitarian reading mainly developed with lively discussions, paying attention to the text itself, and to the context

¹⁹ Hans de Wit, “Codes and Coding,” in *Through the Eyes of Another*, 411.

of their own social-cultural situations. On the three biblical images – a mother, a son, and a daughter, they discussed and exchanged their ideas. Then they brought the biblical ideas to their social-cultural context and made reflections. Their reading is reflecting their own situation. Whatever the Bible says is meaningful to them. For example, weeping mother Rachel is appropriated as the weeping Myanmar country. Their contextualization through their current pop song also broadened the horizon of meaning of the text. Their appropriation is enriching aspects of the semiosis process. In short, the dynamic of the male youth group is the method of the hermeneutical circle (text-context-text).²⁰

7.3.1.3. Analysis of the Reading Attitudes of the Groups

In this part, the hermeneutic aspects are analyzed. The research question is what is the reading attitude of the group?

As shown in Table 5, the women's group's reading attitudes are a mixture of reading with Rachel, personal spirituality, personal faith, the text's effect on individual life, liberation perspectives, and desire for social-historical and literary background information. Although the women showed a desire for social-historical and literary background information about the text, their reading attitude is dominated by their personal faith. In the same reading, the women's reading with Rachel empowered their personal faith in God. In contrast, the male youth's reading with Rachel reflected the image of their weeping mother country which belonged to all Myanmar people; not restrained to individuals.

In Table 6, one can see a focus on the status of text as the framework of the reading attitude of the male youth group. Within this framework, they focused on the text's effects on their lives and on their survival. As a consequence, their reading attitude is seen as liberating. As is seen in the Table 6, the male youths committed themselves to returning to their home country and they saw rebuilding the ruined mother country as their responsibility.

7.3.1.4. Analysis of the Focalization of the Groups

The research question for this analysis is: what heuristic keys are used by the group? My usage of the term focalization is slightly different from the usage by the narratologist Mieke Bal. Bal means by focalization the relationship between the presentation of the textual elements and the way a reader selects, emphasizes, excludes and includes those in his or her interpretation. In Bal's narratology, focalization is related to the questions who sees and who is seen? Who is the subject and who is the object of focalization?²¹ In my analysis, I especially examine what cultural components of the readers are constitutive in the readers' interpretation process.²²

In the women's group, the readers' focus lies on culture, social injustice, social exclusion, power/powerlessness, unbalanced gender position, religious, ethical/morality and central characters in the text.²³

In the male youth group, the focus lies on central concepts or characters in the text, the readers' social-political-economic injustices, power, powerlessness, exclusion, inclusion,

²⁰ See Table 4.

²¹ Bal, *Narratology*, 146.

²² Hans de Wit, "Codes and Coding," in *Through the Eyes of Another*, 415.

²³ See Table 7.

ethnicity, and weakness of culture are found as constitutive components of the group's focalization. Although both groups paid attention to the weakness of their culture in terms of unbalanced gender position, the scope of the male youth group's focus covered more than their own social-cultural injustices; in fact, their focalization also included the country's social-political-economic injustices and ethnicity problems. Therefore, the women's focalization seems to be individual and the male's focalization seems to be more inclusive.²⁴

7.3.1.5. Analysis of the Explanation Strategy of the Groups

To analyze the explanation strategies of the groups, the research question is: what explanation strategies are used by the group?

The women's group explained the text by applying three explanation strategies. First, they paid attention to literary composition, to the world behind the text, to the broader literary context, and to explicit exegetical input by a person in the group. Second, they used more than one Bible translation. Third, they used a strategy of imagination. Among these explanation strategies, the strategy of imagination is found as the significant explanation strategy of the group.²⁵

The male youths' explanation strategies included six major strategies. First, they paid attention to the literary composition, to the broader literary context, and to the world behind the text. Second, they observed the translation in their own language. Third, they observed theological implementation in the text. Fourth, they read with the characters in the text. Fifth, they observed the symbolic characters in the text. Sixth, they used imagination as a strategy of explanation.²⁶

7.3.1.6. Analysis of the Reading of Characters in the Text

The research questions for this step are: Which characters do the readers focus on in the process of actualization? What is the new referent of the text?

In the women's group, the biblical characters Rachel, Ephraim, and virgin Israel were focused on by the readers. In the process of actualization, the old referent of the text was freed from the original sense so that Rachel became an individual woman like the participants themselves; Ephraim represented a repenting person; and virgin Israel became Jesus. Their reading of biblical characters enabled them to see God's care, forgiveness, and the role of women.²⁷

The male youths' reading also focused on three characters - a mother, a son, and a daughter, but the referents were totally different from that of the women's new referents. In the male youths' process of actualization, the old referent Rachel became a new referent - Myanmar; Rachel's weeping became the weeping of Kachin State (and Myanmar); and Rachel's children, Ephraim became diaspora Kachins themselves. They also saw the maternal image of God in their reading of the characters in the text.²⁸

²⁴ See Table 8.

²⁵ See Table 9.

²⁶ See Table 10.

²⁷ See Table 11.

²⁸ See Table 12.

7.3.1.7. Analysis of Appropriation Strategies

The research questions for this analysis are: “How, by means of what strategy, is the text actualized? If actualizing texts is the process in which the original referent of a text is replaced by a new one (Ricoeur), how does this process develop for the reading groups?”²⁹

As shown in Table 13, the woman’s appropriation strategies included parallelism of terms (or tracing paper model), testimony of personal experience develops reading process, and allegory. However, allegory is seen as the main appropriation strategy in this group.

The male youths’ appropriation included analogy, allegory, typology, and parallelism of terms. As shown in Table 14, the frequency of analogy is higher than others.

7.3.1.8. Analysis of Appropriation Content

The research question for this analysis is: what is the content of the appropriations?

The women’s group’s appropriations have both spiritual and physical aspects. Faith in God’s strength for their own earthly struggle and women liberation from socio-political oppression are detected in this group.³⁰

In the male youth group, the appropriations included their political-social-economic exclusion, their faith in God’s strength for their own earthly struggle, oppression-liberation, gender equality, maternal image of God, the love of God, and the important role of woman.³¹

7.3.1.9. Analysis of Appropriation Dynamics

The research questions for this analysis are: What is the effect of the text on the readers? Do the readers see their own life as a fulfillment of the text? Have they become more sensitive to their own situation, culture, and ideology? Has the story led the readers to new insights?

In the women’s group, the awareness of the biblical message, awareness of woman’s initiative role, awareness of their own context, awareness of their own cultural bias, awareness of gender balance are found as the effects of the text. As a consequence of the effects, a reader even sees her own life as a fulfillment of the text. Thus, in this step, hermeneutic circulation (context-text-context) is also detected.³²

In the male youth group, hermeneutic circulation (context-text-context) is detected as the dominant appropriation dynamic. The awareness of their own context, awareness of the biblical message, awareness of their failure/sin, awareness of their own ideology, awareness of their own cultural bias, awareness of one’s own prejudices, and self-criticalness are found as the effects of the text on the readers.³³

7.3.1.10 Analysis of Praxeological Effects

The research questions for this analysis are: What is the praxeological effect of the intertribal reading? What characters do the readers identify with? Is there any empowerment to the self or toward others? What is the significant change of perspective of the groups? Does the reading result at the level of ‘we should’? What is the resultant action?

²⁹ Hans de Wit, “Codes and Coding,” in *Through the Eyes of Another*, 417.

³⁰ See Table 15.

³¹ See Table 16.

³² See Table 17.

³³ See Table 18.

The praxeological effects of the intertribal reading in the women's group are mostly spiritual empowerment of the self and toward others. In this group, they imitated virgin Israel and found the leading role of virgin Israel. However, their imitation stayed on the level of intention; the practical did not follow.³⁴

In the male youth group, they imitated virgin Israel and committed themselves to return to their home country to rebuild their ruined mother country. Therefore, the praxeological effect of the intertribal reading on the male youth group was realizing new forms of social or political action. As they identified with virgin Israel, another praxeological effect was breaking through social-cultural barriers and promoting the role of women. In addition to this social-political action, the call of spiritual renewal is also detected.³⁵

7.4. Analysis of Exchange of Perspectives

In this section, I will study three areas such as interaction with the partner's profile, hermeneutic-exegetical aspect of interaction, and the effect of interaction. The aim of this analysis is to study the effect of the interaction. Are development and growth involved, or rather stagnation and freezing?

7.4.1. Analysis of Interaction with the Partner's Profile

How did the group deal with the partner group's profile? Does the group pay attention to the partner's profile? Does the group acquire knowledge from the context of the partner group? Is there any interest in the profile of the partner group? Do certain issues of the partner group stand out?

The women's group paid attention to the partner's profile so that they learned the partner group's seriousness of choosing the name of the group, serious allegiance to their socio-cultural and history, serious discussion on gender issues, and that the participants of the partner group were regular Bible readers. In the interaction with the partner's profile, the women were inspired to read the Bible as their partner group were inspired to learn their own Kachin social structure and culture. In addition, the women acquired knowledge of the political problems and sufferings that their partner group wrestled with.

The male youth group, as I mentioned before, carefully read the women's group portrait and even noticed details like a woman being the youngest child in her family. In contrast with the women's group, the male youths did not acquire knowledge from the political context of the partner group but the male youths did notice the women as strong believers.

7.4.2. Analysis of Hermeneutic-exegetical Aspect of Interaction

What differences or similarities does the group itself discover in method, focalization, identification, appropriation, and actualization of the partner group?

In the women group's view, social injustice, social exclusion, and gender inequality were constitutive in their interpretation process. Likewise, in the male youth group's focalization, social-political-economic injustices and ethnicity discrimination they experienced were found as major constitutive components of the group's focalization.

³⁴ See Table 19.

³⁵ See Table 20.

However, in the case of identification, the women group prefers to identify the biblical character individually while the male youth group prefers to identify collectively.

In terms of appropriation strategies, the women group's main appropriation strategy is an allegorical model while they used parallelism of terms and testimony of personal experience. The male youths' main appropriation strategy is analogy while they used allegory, typology, and parallelism of terms.

In terms of the hermeneutic-exegetical aspects of interaction, both groups prefer to maintain their differences. It seems to me that this is their group's preference and is not related to their attitudes toward the partner group because both groups enjoy seeing similarities between the two groups.

7.4.3. Analysis of the Effect of Interaction

How does the group deal with these similarities and differences? Is there any rejection of the reading of the partner group? Why, and based on what factors? Does the group address the entire text or do they concentrate on a part of it? What part?

Both groups noticed their similarity in viewing vv 15-17, vv 18-20, and vv 21-22 as the three composite units of Jer 31:15-22. Both groups dealt with all parts of the text.

The women's group exchanged the new view of maternal images of God from their partner group. The women admitted that this view was not found in their reading. Moreover, the women's group also adopted a different identification of their partner group; while the women identified Rachel with their individual lives, the male youths themselves identified with the children of Rachel and their country with mother Rachel.

The male youths did not exchange the different ideas from their partner. For example, the women's appropriation of Israel's coming home as Jesus' coming was different from the youths' appropriation of the text. According to the male youths, the prophetic message of Israel's coming home is the Israelite remnants' home coming which was eventually appropriated as the male youths' own returning to their home country. The youths preferred to let the text speak first so that the appropriation would come secondarily. In the male youths' view, the women's appropriation started from their own social context so that they did not exchange this appropriation.

Conclusion

This chapter tested the intertribal hermeneutics among the diaspora Kachins and attempted to answer the question who it is possible to explain an old text and understand it in the individual's current situation.

First, I explained about the methodology of the intertribal Bible reading practice.

Second, I formed the two reading groups and tested the intertribal Bible reading method. The experiment showed that the method worked very well in these two groups; the two groups successfully accomplished the reading process within about six weeks.

According to my analysis of the hermeneutical components of the reading reports, I discovered some significant hermeneutical elements that would help better understanding of how the old text could be understood and explained in the individual's current situation. These significances are summarized as follows.

- 1) The readers could read the text with either affective motivation or cognitive motivation. Some read the text to receive help from God while others read the text to acquire new knowledge or to share their insights into faith with others.
- 2) Among the Kachin reading groups, a liturgical framework is discovered as the directing mechanism in their Bible reading process. Their invocation or prayer creates a unique atmosphere where they read the Bible as spiritual guidance for them. Every biblical segment becomes a meaningful text for them.
- 3) The readers' reading attitudes show that they not only read the Bible for their spiritual guidance but also for liberation; they embed the text in their lives and feel invited to find liberation from social-political-economic injustices.
- 4) The groups used their contextual situations such as social-political-economic injustices, social exclusion, and unbalanced gender position as the heuristic keys to unlock the meaning of the text.
- 5) The common explanation strategies of the two groups are paying attention to the literary composition, to the background information, to the different Bible translations, to the characters in the text, and strategy of imagination.
- 6) In the process of actualization or appropriation, the readers used a tracing paper model, an allegorical model, and an analogy model. The readers identified with a certain character from the text so that it led the readers to new insights. For example, the readers became aware of their own context of social-political-economic injustices. As a result, the male group committed itself to return to their home country to participate in nation building.

From a hermeneutical perspective, I discover that the story of weeping Rachel becomes their own story. The story of exilic Israelite people becomes their own story. The weeping of Rachel becomes their personal weeping and/or their mother land's weeping. The 'new thing' in the Bible has been even beautifully appropriated as 'the law of the Netherlands' which is a very meaningful message of the text for the Kachin woman who has moved from the unsafe part of the world to the safe country Netherlands. By looking through the eyes of one another, some different perspectives have been exchanged, although some different perspectives are maintained by the groups. As a result, one's blind spot has been complemented by others. This is especially found in the women's group as shown above. Some mild personal transformation has also occurred among the readers during their reading process. One of the significant results of this pilot experiment of intertribal Bible reading is that the women's group continues to meet regularly and read the Bible regularly. Later, this meeting has been transformed into the Kachin Church's women fellowship meeting.

CHAPTER 8

RE-READING OF JEREMIAH 31:15-22 CASE STUDY ON MYANMAR INTERTRIBAL HERMENEUTICS OF JEREMIAH 31:15-22

Introduction

In this chapter, I will re-read Jer 31:15-22 from Myanmar intertribal reading practice perspective hoping to contribute to the articulation of an intertribal hermeneutics and a more in-depth reading of the text of Jeremiah.

In my re-reading of this text (Jer 31:15-22), I will try to answer the following questions as much as I can. What do we know about the Myanmar ordinary readers? What are important dynamics in the groups? Which heuristic keys¹ do they use to unlock the meaning of the text? With whom do the readers identify? How do the groups explain the text? What, according to the group, is the central message of the text? Does the text get new reference in a new context? Which characters or actions do the readers especially focus on in/during the process of appropriation? What is the praxeological effect of the reading? To what extent does growth take place and which factors in the exchange promote this?

As a socially engaged scholar, I want to take into account the two poles of the reading process: biblical exegesis and interpretation of ordinary readers. Therefore, I will first analyze the social situation of the Myanmar Bible reading groups. This exploration will help me comprehend their social contexts from which they read the text.

Second, I will analyze the group dynamics because these forces could not only unite the group members but also drive the groups to meet regularly until they finish the reading process. Group dynamics include inspiration or power.

Third, I will analyze the focalization and interpretation methods of the groups, because I want to find out which components from the reader's own context are constitutive for the interpretation process and what exegetical methods are applicable in their interpretation of the text. Focalization here means "the relationship between the components presented in the story and the outlook the readers have on it."²

Fourth, I will analyze the group's appropriation strategy of the text in order to show how it is possible to appropriate the text into the contemporary world.

Finally, I will examine the intertribal aspect of the reading process by means of the group's interaction with the partner's reading, hermeneutic-exegetical aspects of interaction, and the effect of interaction. The aim of this study is to develop a more fruitful reading of Jer 31:15-22 at the level of hermeneutics, exegesis, and praxeology.

¹ Heuristic key here means the question: "which components from the reader's own context are constitutive for the interpretation process." Ibid. 415.

² See De Wit, "Codes and Coding," 415.

8.1. Analysis of Social Situation of the Myanmar Reading Groups

Who are Myanmar ordinary Bible readers in this Bible study? What do we know about them? When, where, and under what circumstances do they read the biblical text? What background information is necessary for better understanding of their interpretation?

In this Bible reading project, I formed six Myanmar ordinary Bible reading groups in Myanmar to produce empirical data for my research. The participants in this project are from various social ethnic backgrounds such as Kachin, Mon, Bamar/Myanmar, Kayin, Paoh, Chin, and Shan. The participants are from different Christian denominations such as Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, and Assembly of God. The participants have very varied and different backgrounds.³ Their ages are between 20 and 70 years. The empirical data were collected in Yangon city and slum areas of Yangon during 2011 June to 2012 December.

Among the Bible reading groups, social situations of the readers are different from each other. Their pains, problems, and major concerns are not the same. For example, while one group is concerned about sociopolitical conflicts, the other group concerns about education, health care, and holistic development problems inside and outside the Church.

All the project participants read the Bible as a Holy Scripture, not just as a text. They pray and sing before they read the Bible. Therefore, the participants can be called a faith community or faith oriented Bible readers. Normally, they do not argue with each other like scholars do in the academic world.

The six reading groups are paired into three such as Kachin-Mon, Kayin-Shan, and Kayin-Myanmar groups. In this point, the names of the groups do not necessarily represent their ethnicities because the names of the groups represent only their respective Church affiliations.

Among the six groups, I could personally and regularly attend the meetings of the Kachin-Mon pair so that I could make voice recordings. The other two pairs live outside Yangon so that I could not attend their meetings. These four groups also sent me their written reports but the reports are not enough for me to grasp their interpretation process fully. Therefore, I will use only materials that were produced by the Kachin and the Mon groups.

During my data collection in Yangon, the former military leaders were transforming their military ruling system to the democratic parliamentary system. Many former military officers were still holding important positions in the new government. In this transitional period, the quasi-civilian government has reformed and released some political restrictions but recent fighting between the government and some ethnic armed groups in ethnic areas were the most striking grievous suffering among Myanmar people.⁴ The ethnic armed conflict in Myanmar is not a new political problem. In fact, it began since the Union of Burma (now Union of Myanmar) gained its independence from the British in 1948. The main reason for fighting between the government's military and ethnic armed groups is because the successive Bamar ethnic dominant governments have never implemented the historic Panglong agreement, which guaranteed political equality and autonomy among Myanmar's ethnic nationalities.

³ The participants include jobless, disabled, day laborer, military pensioner, retired, police officer, school teacher, music teacher, nurse, accountant, NGO worker, pastor, Church minister, seminary lecturer, Church moderator, deacon, deaconess, religious organization worker, evangelist, day care, night care, students, seminarians, and housewife.

⁴ Also see Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2012: Burma*, <http://www.hrw.org/print/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-burma>, [Accessed April 5, 2013].

When the government came to power in 2011, the Myanmar army started an offensive war against Kachin ethnic people. The immediate cause for the fighting was related to the nine hydropower dam projects of Myanmar Electric Power Enterprise (MEPE) and China Power Investment Corporation (CPI) in Kachin State.⁵ The largest dam was the Myitsone dam and it was built at the head of the Irrawaddy River which is the longest river in Myanmar. It starts flowing from Kachin State and ends up in Andaman Sea. All Myanmar people have gained many benefits from this river as it flows throughout from the north to the south. The dam projects had been expected to produce 16,160 megawatt hydropower and to be sold to China.⁶ The Myitsone dam being the biggest dam among others is located 100 kilometers from a major fault line in an earthquake-prone area.⁷ Many educated experts, politicians, and civilians have expressed their concerns about social, economic, political, and environmental problems.⁸ Especially, the dams are located in the area where a long history of conflict between the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) and the government's army. Finally, the war broke out on June 9, 2011.⁹

The government forces attacked not only the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) but also innocent Kachin civilians. According to the press release of Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) dating on the January 30th 2013,¹⁰ the ongoing offensive war in Kachin regions had

⁵ Saw Yan Naing, (Oct. 1, 2008), *Chinese Dam Incurs KIO Wrath*, [Online], Available from http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=14360, [Accessed: September 26, 2011]. The seven series dams in one close area are Khaunglanphu, Phizaw, Lakin, Pashe, Chibwe, Laiza, and Myitsone. See Kachin Development Networking Group, (August 3, 2011), *Irrawaddy Dams*, [Online], Available from <http://www.kdng.org/dams/irrawaddy-dams.html>, [Accessed: September 26, 2011]. Aung San Suu Kyi, (August 11, 2011), *Irrawaddy Appeal*, [Online], Available from http://irrawaddy.org/pdf/Irrawaddy_Appeal.pdf, [Accessed: September 24, 2011].

⁶ The propaganda of MEPE can be found in A Staff Member (MEPE), "Perpetual Natural Heritage Relayed with Good Volition," *The New Light of Myanmar*, Tuesday, August 9, 2011, Volume XIX, Number 110, 8-9. Mr. Zaw Min, the Minister of Electric Power (1), later admitted that he wrote this article at the press held at the meeting hall of Ministry of Rail Transportation in Nay Pyi Taw on 11 September 2011. See Eleven Media Group Editorial Staff, (September 11, 2011), *Myitsone Hydropower Project will not be discarded anyhow despite objections from any sources: Electric Power Minister*, translated by Aung Khin+MYA, [Online], Available from <http://eversion.news-eleven.com> (English) and <http://www.weeklyeleven.com> (Burmese), [Accessed: September 24, 2011]. Eleven Media Group, (August 15, 2011), *Pragmatic Comments by EMG and Ludu U Sein Win on Hydropower Project*, [Online], Available from <http://www.burmariversnetwork.org/news/11-news/658-pragmatic-comments-by-emg-and-ludu-u-sein-win-on-hydropower-project-.html>, [Accessed: 24 September 2011]. Ei Ei Toe Lwin and Aye Thidar Kyaw, (September 19-25, 2011), *We'll never back down on dam, minister warns activists*, [Online], Available from <http://www.mmtimes.com/2011/news/593/news59302.html>, [Accessed: September 24, 2011].

⁷ Min Zin, (September 21, 2011), *The Myitsone Dam: A Cause for Unity or an Uprising in the Making?*, [Online], Available from http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=22114, [Accessed: September 26, 2011].

⁸ Eleven Media Group, (September 10, 2011), *'Save The Irrawaddy' Literature Talk (in Burmese)*, [Online], Available from http://www.weeklyeleven.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10112:save-the-irrawaddy-&catid=43:2009-11-10-07-39-09&Itemid=111, [Accessed: September 10, 2011].

⁹ The dam project was suspended on September 30, 2011.

¹⁰ Kachin Baptist Convention (2013) *The Statement of Kachin Baptist Convention Regarding the Ongoing Civil War*, 30 May, available: <http://www.kbckachin.com/Page/KBCStatement.pdf> [accessed April 5, 2013]. American Baptist Churches USA (2013) *International Ministries Urges Advocacy on Behalf of Kachin People*, 22 March, available: <http://www.abc-usa.org/2013/03/22/international-ministries-urges-advocacy-on-behalf-of-kachin-people/> [Access April 5, 2013].

already destroyed over 200 villages and 66 churches. Moreover, the offensive war has left more than 100,000 Kachin Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and refugees in both the government controlled areas and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) controlled area. The KBC press release also reflects the government personnel's unlawful arbitrary arrest of innocent civilians, indiscriminate firing on refugee camps, killing civilians, raping Kachin women, sexual abuse on Kachin men, heavy airstrikes and artillery, using chemical weapons, and violations of human rights.¹¹ Such wars and atrocities had also happened in other ethnic regions. Especially, ethnic minorities from Shan, Kayin, Kayah, and Mon States had suffered from several human rights violations including unlawful arrest, rape, murder, torture, forced labor, and forced displacement.¹² The government forces always use rape as a weapon in civil wars so that hundreds of ethnic minority women have been raped by the government military personnel during the civil war.

During and after my data collection in Yangon, all ethnic people around Myanmar are demanding ethnic equality and self-determination for ethnic nationalities consistent with the original intent at the Panglong Conference between General Aung San and the ethnic nationalities. All civil society organizations including Bamar ethnic people are demanding to stop civil war. People's demonstrations for peace and peace prayer meetings could be found in many major cities.¹³ Especially, all Kachin people are praying for peace in their churches. The peace and reconciliation process is still going on in Myanmar but the peaceful demonstration organizers for International Peace Day in Yangon on September 21, 2012, for instance, were charged by the quasi-civilian government.¹⁴

While the Kachin war caused 100,000 IDPs in the northern part of Myanmar, Rakhaing-Rohingya conflict in the western part of Myanmar caused another 100,000 IDPs along with destruction of villages, raping, and killing.

Noticeably, while people are demanding peace and justice that would guarantee long lasting peace in Myanmar, Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, Lower House parliamentarian and chair of Myanmar opposition party National League for Democracy (NLD), remained silent regarding these social ethnic issues. She said that she remained silent because she did not want to add fire to any side of the conflict.¹⁵

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2012: Burma*, <http://www.hrw.org/print/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-burma>, [Accessed April 5, 2013].

¹² Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN) and the Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) (2002) *License to Rape*, 5 April, available: http://www.shanwomen.org/images/stories/reports/licensetorape/Licence_Rape_english.pdf, [Accessed: April 5, 2013]. Also see periodical reports of Karen Women Organisation such as *Shattering Silences* (2004), *State of Terror* (2007), and *Walking Amongst Sharp Knives* (2010). <http://karenwomen.org/reports/>, [Accessed: April 5, 2013]

¹³ For instance, Annual commemoration of Kachin war, June 9, 2012, Doe Yoe Yaw Myanmar Restaurant, Shwe Gone Dine, Yangon. Peace prayer service, July 13, 2012, Myanmar Institute of Theology, Yangon. Peace marching and demonstrations on International Peace Day in Yangon on September 21, 2012. Peace Walk in Yangon on January 21, 2013. Peace walk from Myingyan to Laiza, February 7-March 13, 2013.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, (October 1, 2012), *Burma: Peaceful Protest Organizers Charged*, Available from <http://www.hrw.org/print/news/2012/10/01/burma-peaceful-protest-organizers-charged>, [Accessed: April 5, 2013]

¹⁵ Editorial, "Suu Kyi Remains Silent as Burma Burns," *The Irrawaddy*, January 5, 2013, <http://www.irrawaddy.org/archives/23187> (Accessed April 9, 2013).

The above exploration has shown that all the readers in this project are from several ethnic and religious backgrounds. They live in the country where the political situation is unstable, armed conflicts can be discovered in ethnic people's regions, many women have been raped during the armed conflicts, and many internally displaced persons are still emerging. This is the general background situation of the Myanmar ordinary Bible readers who produced the empirical data for my research. In the next section, I will study the dynamics of the groups.

8.2. Analysis of the Group Dynamics

What are the dynamics of the groups in their reading process? Why is it worth studying them? As mentioned above, the group dynamics is the powerful mechanism that drives the groups to meet regularly until they successfully finish their interpretation process. In other words, group dynamics is the culture specific pattern of the group.¹⁶ In the following analysis, the liturgical framework and life interests are found as the important elements of the group dynamics.

First, the liturgical framework is found as the most fundamental dynamic of both groups in their reading process. Whenever they begin and end the meeting, they pray. For instance, in the first phase of the intertribal reading process, the Kachin group started the Bible reading process with a liturgical opening. The facilitator read Isa. 60:1 without any further exposition; then he prayed for the whole process of the Bible reading project. In his prayer, the facilitator humbly prayed that the group members would approach the text as ordinary readers who knew nothing and came to learn from the text so that he beseeched God to grant them the Holy Spirit that would guide them throughout the reading process. In fact, all the group members come to the meeting with well-prepared notes. They all read Jer 31:15-22 before they come to the meeting. Nevertheless, they approach the Bible reading session with humbleness within a liturgical framework. Following the liturgical opening, the group drew the group portrait. In their group portrait also, they recounted their history where God has been involved as a liberator from the bondage of spirit (*Nat*) worshipping. Therefore, their first meeting lasted a day. In the next meeting also, the Kachin group began the meeting with a liturgical opening. The facilitator read Ps. 100:3 and the group sang a praise song entitled “the Lord is my everything” followed by an opening prayer. After they took a liturgical moment, they proceeded to the Bible reading of Jer 31:15-22. The facilitator reminded his group members to follow the guideline questions that I had prepared for them for their reading process.¹⁷

The Mon group also took a liturgical moment at the beginning and at the end of the meeting. The wordings of the prayer are similar to the humbleness of the Kachin group although they speak different languages; the Mon group used the Myanmar language whereas the Kachin group used the Kachin language. In the Mon group, each member read each verse of Jer 31:15-22. They used the Myanmar Bible translated by Dr. Adoniram Judson and first published in 1835 by the American Baptist Missionary Union, Maulmain. The Kachin group used the Kachin Bible translated by Dr. Ola Hanson, first published in 1927 by American Baptist Missionary Union, Rangoon.

¹⁶ See De Wit, “Code and coding,” 413.

¹⁷ The guideline is translated from Hans de Wit, “Handbook for intercultural Bible Reading 2011,” http://www.bible4all.org/Content/scholar_documents.aspx?pagina_id=22&ah=5 (accessed May 20, 2016).

The liturgical moment is observed as very powerful moment in their reading process of each group. For example, with the invocation of God in their reading of the Bible, the groups are inspired to read the Bible although they humbly admit their lack of knowledge of the Bible. Here, as a socially engaged biblical scholar, I let these Myanmar ordinary Bible readers know that every Bible reader is not *tabula rasa*, that everyone is legitimate to read the Bible and to understand the meaning of the text from their own social cultural context because the text is open to everyone who can read it, as mentioned in the previous chapter (See Chapter 6). At one point, a Kachin reader said that he did not find any difficulties in understanding of the text because of the guidance of Holy Spirit. Another Kachin reader said that whenever she encountered a difficult text like Jer 31:21-22, she would try to understand it but she would also ask God to grant the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, to help her understand such a difficult text. Here, I let these Myanmar ordinary Bible readers know again the need of validating the verbal meaning of the text through literary analysis of all textual components and the individual literary genres, that is the expertise of biblical exegetes. However, this does not mean that the biblical exegetes are superior to the ordinary readers because linguistic philosophy has shown that the text is open to everyone who can read it so that every interpreter is one of the many interpreters. Nevertheless, in addition to the effectiveness of the liturgical framework of the groups in the reading process, the contribution of biblical exegetes would benefit Myanmar ordinary Bible readers to produce more fruitful and new meanings of the text as one will see in a ‘third culture perspective’ for instance, in this chapter.

Second, life interests of each group are observed as important dynamics of the group. As mentioned before in Chapter Six in this dissertation, life interests are concerned with the interpreter’s life experiential questions and concerns that drive the interpreter to bring such existential questions and concerns to the text such as, race, class, gender, health, and other socio-political and religio-cultural concerns. These life interests could be seen as interests of personal application from the reading exercise.

Among the Myanmar Bible reading groups, the life interests are not identical with each other because of their different social cultural backgrounds. For example, it is noticed that the Kachin group has communal life interests whereas the Mon group has individual life interests. Nevertheless, it is observed that any life interest could function as a legitimate heuristic key of the group in their reading process, as we will see in the next section of this chapter.

To study the reader’s life interest as the important element of the group dynamics, I will shift the focus on the case of the Kachin group. This group consists of two males and three females. Their ages range from 28 to 68 years. They all belong to the Kachin ethnic group and currently all are members of Yangon Kachin Baptist Church although they once lived in different geographical locations. They have strong attachment to their Church. All the members serve their Church through various roles such as deacon, deaconess, nurse, librarian, and evangelist. Some of them obtained a university degree but some of them could not pursue higher education due to the sociopolitical instability in their regions when they were young. In this group, the sociocultural and political problems are seen as the two major life interests of the group. All the group members suffer from the Kachin-Myanmar armed conflicts directly or indirectly. This sociopolitical situation affects the group and their Bible readings also reflect on this situation. As their partner group has also noticed, the Kachin group is firmly rooted in their sociocultural foundation. Such social tie is not found in their partner group.

Whenever the Kachin group members share their life experiences, they relate their stories to their social backgrounds, traditions, practices, beliefs, culture, and political background. For example, all the ancestors of all the Kachin group members were animists. When they converted to the Christianity, the Kachin group sees Christianity as liberating and the former animism as destructive. A good example for this view is found in a story of one of the Kachin group participants who grew up as an animist. When she was young, she was a spirit worshiper as her fellow Kachin people did in Kawng Wai village, Loi Je Township, Kachin State. She converted to Christianity only after she got married. The animist Kachin in her community used to dance when a certain old villager died. The villagers would dance inside the funeral house all night until the next morning. When they dance, they would beat two or three big ceremonial gongs rhythmically. This funeral dance or burial dance would last one to three months although the dead body would have been buried after two or three days after the death. The Kachin animists performed this funeral musical dance because they believed the *nats* (spirits) would harm the rest of the household if they did not dance. The Kachin people would also dance in times of success such as prosperous harvest and new house dedication by wearing their colorful traditional costumes. Their colorful unique traditional clothing also reflects the Kachin ethnic identity, their traditions, wealth, climatic conditions and geographical location, and social cultural status. Among Kachin people, the annual Kachin *manau* dance festival is also important for them because the performance of the *manau* dance could visibly express the unity of the Kachin which comprises six major tribes. This sociocultural system binds the Kachin together so that they share either joy or sorrow with one another. At present, over 95% of Kachin are Christians. Therefore, most Kachin people viewed the *nat* worshipping as unfaithfulness to the God who liberated them from the bondage of harmful spirits. Theologically speaking, the Kachin group members are influenced by the Deuteronomistic theology - blessing for obedience and judgment for disobedience. As a way of faithfulness to God, all group members read the Bible regularly and evangelize others. Some members read a verse of Bible per day but some read more than that. A participant has read the entire Bible over four times. The group members now see the Kachin churches as the shelters for the Kachin people in the times of civil wars. All the group members are very satisfied with their Church and Church's ministry because it helps all the Kachin unite and helps peacemaking in Kachin State in the midst of the recent severe national war.

In addition to the sociocultural interest, the Kachin war is observed as another major interest in this Kachin group. The unending national war forced the readers to be connected with the Church. For example, an ordained deaconess participant said that her family had been moving from one place to another due to the political instability in her regions. She was born and grew up in Shan State but the endless armed conflicts between the ethnic armed groups and the Myanmar government Army in her village forced her family to move from Shan State to Kachin State and finally down to Yangon. When she was two years old, her mother died. She could not attend the school so that she could not access a good education. She was a born animist as her father had been a priest of animism but later she became a Christian when her father converted to Christianity from animism. In this situation, the Church becomes her safe place. She is pleased with her religious services at the churches she participates.

Likewise, a participant also shared his life experiences with the group that his native land, Khanti, was rich in natural resources such as beautiful animals, birds, flowers, forest, fresh

air, rivers, streams, rich soil, jade, and gold but recently, many native people had no benefit from the natural resources because these natural resources were monopolized by the former military government and the big companies who had good relationship with the military government. The companies only employ people from lower Burma so that the native people become unemployed. He said “We cannot even be a manual laborer in their business.” Most native people are poor and have low educational attainment. The majority of his native people are Naga and Chin, among other people such as Kachin, Shan, Bamar, Indians and Chinese. In this home land, the native people once had tasted freedom and peace but now, they suffer from such social problems. He himself moved down to Yangon but he had difficulties to find a reasonable job again. He had worked as a clothes seller in a popular market and as an air-con repairer. He attended school in several places such as Khanti, Myitkyina, and finally he graduated from Yangon University of Distance Education. Now, his Yangon Kachin Church employs him as a church librarian. According to him, God is the life of Kachin, the Church is a dependable place for Kachin people, and God is everything for the Kachin people.

In response to the present Myanmar Army’s attack on the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and Kachin civilians with heavy forces and weapons, a woman participant said that it was genocide and ethnic cleansing war against Kachin people.¹⁸ She said that the Myanmar Army attacked the Kachin every day and night with no respect of international humanitarian law. Myanmar Army broke a 17 year-old-ceasefire agreement made between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Myanmar Army. In this situation, the group saw that the Kachin people were suffering from various kinds of human rights violations. The Kachin civilians had to leave their houses, farms, animals, and had to flee to the refugee camps that were opened in Myanmar Army controlled areas and KIA controlled areas. Nevertheless, the Kachin internally displaced persons (IDP) are not safe even in the refugee camps because the Myanmar police officers arrested Lahtaw Brang Shawng, for instance, from Myitkyina Jan Mai Kawng Refugee Camp and tortured him severely. Sumlut Roi Ja from Hkai Bang village, for instance, was also gang raped and murdered by the Myanmar Army personnel from Light Infantry Battalion (LIB) 321.¹⁹ These communal life interests are culture specific patterns found in this group. In the next section in this chapter, we will see how these life interests are used as the heuristic keys to unlock the meaning of the text.

In the case of the Mon group, neither strong ethnic attachment nor geographical location attachment are discovered but it is discovered that they have a strong attachment to their Mon Church. Their life interests are based on their church, their individual life, and their works.

The Mon group consisted of ten members from Mon Baptist Church in Yangon. Three members are men and seven members are women. Their ages range from 27 to 72 years. Most of them are graduates as they grow up in urban area. The uniqueness of this group is that most of them come from intermarriage families. Therefore, the group members partly belong to Mon, Kayin, Kachin, Chin, Shan, Paoh, and Bamar ethnicities. They are minority Christians living among Buddhist majority. In such social location, the group members value their Church. The members of the Church help each other whenever the members need help. The Mon Church

¹⁸ To see some information about this Kachin conflict or Kachin war, see “Kachin Conflict,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kachin_conflict, (Accessed on April 3, 2013).

¹⁹ To see more information about this case, see “Burma: Women’s Day -- No protection for women,” March 8, 2012, <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-052-2012>, Accessed on April 3, 2013.

itself opened a center of early childhood care and development which helps children for holistic development. In addition, the church contributes its human resources to the Christian Education Department of Myanmar Baptist Convention which offers training and education to those who are working with children to raise awareness of the needs of young children, orphans, and disabled. The Mon Church also opens a micro-finance commission under a/the Christian social service department. Most of the group members are not accustomed to any specific ethnic traditional culture although some group members wear the Mon dress once a month in attending the Mon Church. Their life interest is mainly concerned with their church. In addition, their individual life and work is also found as their life interest. For example, the NGO workers also work with women and youths offering sex education before and after marriage, sex education on Valentine's days, education on problem solving and decision making. Therefore, in their sociocultural setting, their major concern is related to social works such as education, health, and holistic development of people inside and outside the Church. This social cultural pattern reflects in their reading of the Bible.

The Mon group used their individual life to unlock the meaning of the text. Unlike the Kachin group members, the members of the Mon group identified with the biblical characters individually. In any case, from this individual family life and from their individual comfort zone, the Mon group exchanged their opinions with the Kachin group so that the Mon group committed themselves to make a religious ceremony of public confession for their sins as the Kachin people did, to comfort the Kachin IDPs, and to donate money for the Kachin IDPs as much as they could.

In the above analysis, it is noticed that the life interests of the Kachin and Mon groups are not the same. The Kachin group is influenced by sociocultural and sociopolitical problems whereas the Mon group is engaging in the holistic development including social care, education, and health care. Kachin group members are deeply rooted in their ethnicity whereas Mon group members tend toward individualism. Nevertheless, all members of both groups have strong relationships with their respective churches. These are the realities of the sociocultural setting found in these two groups.

Since these groups approached the text from their sociocultural contexts, it was necessary to analyze their social setting not only to see their reality but also to see if they reflect and connect their Bible readings onto their reality and if so they take action at the praxeological level. This awareness of the sociocultural contexts is necessary for the Bible reading groups themselves because it enables not only a group to see their own reality but also the partner group to become aware of their own context and the partner group's context, and above all it enables them to understand the groups' interpretation of the text.²⁰ This analysis of the sociocultural contexts is also necessary for socially engaged biblical scholars, because most biblical scholars are used to reading a biblical text from 'interpretive interests' and largely leave out the 'life interests' of the ordinary readers. For example, in my previous exegesis of Jer 31:15-22, my interpretation process was mainly concerned with the analysis of the structure of the text, intertextuality, and the world of the text as in all the biblical scholars consulted such as Duhm,

²⁰ See "Doing Contextual Bible Study: A Resource Manual," Produced by The Ujamaa Centre for Community Development & Research, http://ujamaa.ukzn.ac.za/RESOURCES_OF_UJAMAA/MANUAL_STUDIES.aspx, (Accessed on May 20, 2016).

Bright, Tribble, Anderson, Thomson, Brueggemann, Bozak, Bauer, Carroll, McKane, Holladay, Keown, Scalise, and Smothers. The voices of the contemporary people were not heard in my exegesis.²¹ I grappled Jer 31:15-22 because it popped up in my study of Jeremianic female imagery. This may be what Fowl and West called ‘interpretive interests.’²² On the other hand, Myanmar Christian reading groups would read the same text not from the context of research of Jeremianic female imagery but from the context of their sociocultural situation. Thus, the Myanmar ordinary readers’ group dynamics must be examined. After having analyzed the group dynamics, I will analyze the groups’ interpretation process in the next section.

8.3. Analysis of Interpretation Process

This section will study two main categories: focalization of the groups and methods of interpretation of the groups. The aims of this study are to search the components from the reader’s own context that are constitutive for their interpretation process and to search their interpretation methods.

8.3.1. Analysis of Focalization of the Group

What is the groups’ focalization? Which components from the reader’s own context are constitutive for the interpretation process? Which heuristic keys or codes did they use to unlock this meaning from the text? Are there specific themes/concepts, etc., which originated in their experiences of life that provided them with mechanisms to unlock meaning from the text (e.g., poverty, feelings of exclusion, injustice, etc.)? With whom do readers identify? How willing are they to come with their experiences to the text?

In the Kachin group, the contextual political armed conflicts, traditional *nat* worshipping, injustice, and immorality are used as heuristic keys to unlock the meaning of sin, punishment, repentance, prayer, forgiveness, restoration, and hope in their interpretation process. For instance, in the interpretation of ‘the divine hope’ in Jer 31:17 (“There is hope for your future, declares the LORD,”), a reader said that some Kachin armed forces had sinned against God by means of practicing *nat* worshipping, shedding innocent blood, extrajudicial killings, and other types of violence. Therefore, she interpreted the current Kachin war as God’s correction and punishment over the Kachins’ shortcomings. She said that the Kachin people had to realize their sins and had to repent from their sins; if the Kachins repented and returned to God, God would save the Kachins as God had given the promise of hope in the text. Here, the reader makes Jer 31:17 her own which was previously addressed to the Israelites. What the current reader now understands is not the historical situation of the original author and audience, not the mental intention of the author, not the intended meaning of the author, not the understanding of the original audience, but the meaning of the text *for her*; she is re-contextualizing the text. This hermeneutics overcomes the distance between the biblical period and the present time so that the old text becomes meaningful in the new context of the reader.²³

²¹ This is common phenomenon among biblical scholars. See Hans Snoek, “Biblical scholars and ordinary readers dialoguing about living water,” in *Through the Eyes of Another*, 304-314.

²² West, “Interrogating the Comparative Paradigm in African Biblical Scholarship,” 38; Stephen E. Fowl, “The Ethics of Interpretation; or, What’s Left Over after the Elimination of Meaning,” 379-398.

²³ Ricoeur, 91-92.

Likewise, another reader also used the physical existence of Kachin internally displaced persons (IDPs) and communal longing for better future to unlock the meaning of hope. In reading the whole text (Jer 31:15-22), the reader noticed that God had forgiven the sins of repented Israelites so that God restored them with merciful love. God was able to turn things upside down; from destruction to restoration. Therefore, the biblical message of hope is meaningful for her as she hopes for the return of the Kachin IDPs to their homes.

Another reader used the Kachin traditional spirit worshipping and the political system to unlock the meaning of the relationships between Yahweh and Ephraim such as sin, punishment, repentance, and restoration. This dominant reading of sin and punishment of the Kachin group is detected in their identification with the characters in the text. The guiding questions for the group to determine their personal identification with the characters were:

- With whom do you read the text?
- What person in the story do you identify with and why?
- What role do you think you would have played if you had been part of the story?

In response to these questions, a reader identified with God and Israel simultaneously. From the perspective of God, she said that the Israelites deserved the judgment of God because the Israelites endlessly sinned against God's commandments. From the perspective of Israel, she admitted that people were sinners. Moreover, she even identified with Jeremiah because she admired the patience of the prophet. She said, if she were Jeremiah, she would refuse God's commission to announce prophetic messages to the people because of the stubbornness of the people. This female reader's identification with the biblical character is noteworthy because Exum and O'Connor have argued that "female readers are limited when identifying with 'male' Yahweh as he is genderly portrayed as a male." (See Chapter 3, Section 3.4). This kind of opposite sex identification is widely found in the Myanmar readers. I will discuss this kind of identification below and in the next chapters too.

Like her fellow reader, another woman reader also identified with Jeremiah because she also admired Jeremiah's patience in delivering the prophetic messages. She would not be patient as Jeremiah. She would not pronounce prophetic words more than two times if someone did not give attention to her. Jeremiah had endured such hardship so that she admired the prophet. A male reader also identified with Jeremiah because he would like to evangelize his people to repent and return to God. In line with the dominant reading of sin-repentance-restoration, a reader identified with the Israelites because he thought he also would have committed sin against God if he were one of the Israelites. The old text becomes meaningful in the new context of the reader.

In the Kachin group, the readers focalized on the idea of sin-repentance-restoration and they unlock this meaning by using their heuristic keys such as war, injustice, and *nat* worshipping.

In the Mon group, the aspect of sin and judgment is not as prominent as in the Kachin group. All the group members used their family lives to unlock the meaning of the text. The group members identify with God, Rachel, faithless daughter, and Ephraim. They focalized the love of God, the promise of God, faithlessness, and hope for the future.

To begin with, a reader used her family life to unlock the meaning of the 'love of God' in the text. In her interpretation, the reader identified with God and she focalized on the love of God. According to her interpretation, God loved all people including Israelites. The reader

identified with God because she also loved other people outside her own ethnic group. This ecumenical spirit is related to her family life. She said she loved her ethnic people very much so that she was able to love other people not less than her own people. With the notion of the love of God that embraces all people, she married a man who belonged to another ethnic group. She said she always tried to adopt the divine love. Another woman also identified with God because God loved and forgave the unfaithful Israel. As a married woman, the reader realized how faithfulness between husband and wife was important. A breach of marriage vows would follow wrath. Therefore, she said that if she were God of unfaithful Israel, it would be difficult for her to forgive unfaithful Israel. She focalized on the love of God by using her life experiences of marriage vows. The group focalized on the love of God who always loved Israel although the people were rebellious. The group also interpreted the love of God as both paternal and maternal love. According to the group, God disciplined Israel because he loved Israel not only as a father but also as a mother. Here, the readers overcome the gender barrier in terms of empathy. For instance, a reader who is a mother and a grandmother said that she loved all her children no matter how they were rebellious against her. She admonished her children with strong words because she loved them, as the text mentioned how God loved Israel. When her children did not listen to her, she always forgave them and tried to forgive them because God also loved his/her children and always forgave them. After the group identified with God and focalized on the love of God, the group continued to focalize on Rachel.

The group identified with Rachel and unlocked the meaning of hope. To illustrate this, I will present a female reader who lives with her mother and who identifies with Rachel. She said that her mother always worried about her brothers because her brothers never fulfilled the mother's expectation. They did not want to go to their schools; they did not want to study very hard. Therefore, her mother had lost hope. When this reader read the text, she was reading with Rachel because Rachel had lost hope, like the reader's mother who lost hope for the future of her sons. Therefore, God's promise of hope to Rachel became God's promise of hope to herself and to her mother.

The group's next focalization is on faithlessness. The group focalized this by using their weakness of faith in God. For example, a woman said that she would identify with the faithless daughter because she felt she was not very faithful to God. For instance, she committed herself to take time for personal devotion but she failed to do so in practice because, she had to do many things from early in the morning till in the evening; in fact, she is a widow and a mother of three sons. As a result, she was accustomed to meditate by lying down in her bed. Therefore, she thought that her heavenly room would be very small. All members were laughing at this focalization. In any case, the group understood the central message of the text as "God's love and forgiveness to unfaithful."

The group finally identified with Ephraim because Ephraim prayed to God to bring him back to God. For instance, a reader identified with Ephraim because he wanted to live in accordance with God's will. As Ephraim asked God to bring him back, he had asked God to bring him back in accordance with God's will. The reader had been financially broke, he had nothing; in that situation, he had asked God to bring him back. This kind of focalization may be called imagination strategy.

In the above analysis, the contextual political armed conflicts, traditional *nat* worshipping, social injustices, and immorality are observed as constitutive for the interpretation process in the Kachin group.

In sum, the daily family life in the Mon group is discovered as constitutive for their interpretation process. The Mon group focalized on the love of God, the promise of God, and the faithfulness/faithlessness by identifying with God, Rachel, and Ephraim. In the Kachin group, the readers identified with God, Israel, Jeremiah, and Rachel in their interpretation of sin-repentance-restoration theology.

In the groups' identification with the characters in the text, it is noteworthy that some male readers identified with female characters and some female readers with male characters. All the readers willingly come with their experiences to the text. In the Kachin group, two female identified with male characters and one male identified with a female character. In the Mon group, two females identified with God. The rest identified with same gender characters. These personal identifications remind us that scholarly observation of personal identification was partially but not absolutely true.²⁴ Exum said that due to the rhetorical strategy of the text, male readers naturally identify with the male God and female readers identify with sinful women. This is not absolutely true in the above case because four female readers have identified with the male God/Jeremiah. Similarly, O'Connor's accusation of Jeremiah is also not absolutely true in this case. O'Connor accused Jeremiah of teaching implicitly the idea that "men represent God and women do not." This is not absolutely true because the two women have represented God in terms of motherly love and forgiveness. Therefore, the above personal identifications have shown that women can identify with God and represent God in terms of compassion empathy.²⁵

8.3.2. Analysis of the Interpretation Methods of the Groups

This section will examine two exegetical aspects of the reading process: methodology and central message, according to the groups.

In the following, I will first search the interpretation methods of the groups. How do the groups explain the text? What methods do they use? Do the readers pay attention to the world behind the text? If so, how? Is a particular identifiable method being used (literary, rhetorical, historical-critical, sociological, etc.)? What central components or characters in the text are reflected on by the group? Are there any textual problems that were not solved? How are the gaps in the text filled in (imagination strategies)?

²⁴ Exum, "Prophetic Pornography," 122-123. O'Connor, "Jeremiah," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, 172. Also see Chapter Three in this dissertation: "The Roles and Functions of Female Imagery in Jeremiah 4:29-31."

²⁵ A similar case was also found in another empirical data collection. When a group of Myanmar theological students read the story of Tamar (2 Samuel 13), both male and female students identified with Tamar because most Myanmar people were metaphorically raped, exploited, silenced, expelled, and many ethnic women were physically raped during the ethnic conflict. See La Rip Marip, "Intercultural Bible Reading for Social Justice and Social Transformation," a workshop paper presented in *Bible and Transformation: The promise of intercultural Bible reading*, held in Amsterdam from 18-20 February 2013.

8.3.2.1. Analysis of Interpretation Methods of the Groups

Both groups explain the text by paying attention to three areas such as the world behind the text, the text itself as linguistic entity, and the foreground of the text. They used methods of discussion, intertextuality, imagination strategy, consultation of different translations, and theological implication. At some point, both groups used the same method but some methods are absent in the other group.

First, it is observed that the two groups used a collaborative group discussion method and exploration of the broader literary context of the text as it is in the book now, simultaneously in their study of the world behind the text. In fact, Jer 31:15-22 does not mention who the enemy is and why Rachel's children are no more. Only when the groups read the larger texts, the groups can see the wider scope of the pericope. For instance, in the case of the Kachin group, a reader said that the text referred to a conflict between God and Israel because the Israelite people disobeyed the commandments of God and they followed Baal and other gods. She said that this was the sin that the people committed against their God. As a consequence of their sin against God, they were punished by being sent into captivity to Babylon. However, another reader said that the conflict could not occur between God and Israel because the status of God was higher than that of human beings. He said "God is the divine being and not a human being." Therefore, he said that the conflict happened between Israel and Babylon because Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylonians and the Israelites were taken to Babylon. Therefore, he affirmed his view that the conflict that the text referred to was the conflict that occurred between the Babylonians and the Israelites. Then, another alternative understanding of the text was offered by another reader who said that the conflict occurred between Rachel and God because Rachel could not stop crying although God had promised her twice the return of her children. Therefore, she said the conflict was between Rachel and God because of Rachel's weakness in believing God's promises. This reader also attempted to see v. 18 as the conflict between God and Ephraim. Here, the readers come to comprehend that Rachel and Ephraim are representing the Israelite people. Therefore, the group said that the conflict was between God and human beings. The group explains this conflict as information behind the text. In the group discussion, the group members did not make any serious judgment over their differences in the interpretation of the text. They read the text as the Sacred Text for them. In their discussion of traces of culture in the text, an open ended discussion was also found. For example, all the group members explained idol worshipping as the traces of culture in the text coming from neighboring countries and having influence over the Israelite people. The group considered that this culture came from Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt, although the group did not prove this with scholarly research.

In the case of the Mon group too, collaborative group discussion method and exploration of the broader literary context of the text were used to explain the text. Each group member was involved collaboratively in the discussion. In the beginning, some had difficulties to distinguish between literal and figure of speech such as Rachel, Ephraim, and virgin Israel. But later their collaborative group discussion helped all members see the characters Rachel, Ephraim, and virgin Israel as metaphors representing the Israelite people. Then, they realized that the characters 'Ephraim' and 'faithless daughter' were metaphorical expressions of Israel who was loved and chosen by God as his own people. The group then comprehended that Israel betrayed and rebelled against God by worshipping idols. Therefore, the group saw the conflict between

God and Israel. Consequently, the group interpreted that the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians as God's discipline for Israel. The Israelites were taken captive to Babylon. Therefore, the group comprehended that the conflict occurred between God and Israel. When the group searched a conflict behind the text, they also discovered how God had mercy upon Israel in the aftermath of the conflict. The group observed Ephraim's repentance and return to God (v. 19). The group explained the last part of the text (vv. 20-22) as God's restoration of the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity, as the Israelites repented and returned to God. Therefore, the group comprehended the themes of the love of God and hope beyond judgment. Some group members tried to explore more background information about the text by reading preceding and following parts of the text. As I participated in the group, I was asked to contribute to the knowledge about the background information of the text. This is a place where a socially engaged biblical exegete could contribute his or her expertise to the collaborative group discussion for a more in-depth reading of the text. I did read the Bible along with these ordinary readers but I chose the position of one of the group members, not of the expert.

Second, both Kachin and Mon groups attempted to interpret the text by reading the broader literary context. For instance, in the Kachin group, a reader said that "Virgin Israel" in vv. 21-22 (which the Myanmar translation reads "bride Israel") could also be seen as the Church in terms of understanding of the New Testament where Jesus was described as the bridegroom of the bride or Church. Therefore, at one point, virgin Israel in Jer 31:21-22 was interpreted as the Church by the Kachin group. Similarly, a reader from the Mon group also interpreted the scattered Israel as scattered churches from different cultures so that the return of scattered Israel was interpreted as the reunion of scattered churches in front of Christ. Therefore, the phrase, 'Your sons will return to their own land,' in v. 17 was interpreted as the pilgrimage of different people from different cultural backgrounds uniting in Christ in the future.

Third, the Mon group explained the text in terms of its theological implication and different translations when they dealt with the traces of culture in the text. The group first observed the patriarchal system in Rachel's weeping story because the Myanmar version reads the Hebrew *Bānîm* as 'sons', not as 'children', so that literarily Rachel was weeping only for her sons, not for her daughters. The group members reminded themselves that in ancient times it was customary to omit the names of women in the text. Even in the time of arranged marriages in the Bible, men would take initiative. In such culture, Jer 31:22 signaled a new culture. What is the new culture according to the group? The new culture in the post exilic period is that the women would take a role of initiation - "A woman will encompass a man." (Jer 31:22, NAU). Theologically, they explained v. 22 as the reverse role of initiation in making love between God and Israel: a woman (the repented Israel) will encompass a man (God) in the future whereas God alone used to love Israel before. In other words, when Israel realized how God loved them and forgave them, Israel would repent and love her God. This understanding was finally approved with the New Living Translation Bible - "Israel will embrace her God" (Jer 31:22, NLT). This is a new insight to be found in the text. The use of different translations of the text is one of the interpretation methods to be found in the Mon group. This reading practice was not found in the Kachin group. The Mon group members said that reading different versions would help understand some difficult texts. For instance, the Myanmar version of Jer 31:20 was not clear to the readers in terms of rhetorical structure while it was clearer in the English versions where the tone of God's affection on Ephraim is heard. Therefore, a reader said that

the tone of God's tenderness let her understand God as merciful but not wrathful. In her reading of the Myanmar Bible version, God was seen as short-tempered and disciplined so that she did not see God as compassionate. However, in her reading of the English version, she was moved by the phrase "come back again my virgin Israel" (Jer 31:21 NLT) which revealed God's tenderness, affection, and loving kindness. In her English version, she did not hear any tone of wrath but she heard God's tender voice that moved her to see God as a merciful God. She was not saying that the Myanmar version was not good but what she was saying was that some translations could offer new views and understandings. This explanation convinced the group members.

Fourth, the Mon group also used imagination strategy in their interpretation process. In the interpretation of Rachel's weeping and refusal of comforting (vv. 15-17), the group explained that Jacob's wife Rachel had been barren and she had difficulty to conceive a baby. She gave birth to Joseph and Benjamin only in her final days. Therefore, the group imagined why Rachel was bitterly weeping when she lost her sons. This mother-child metaphorical imagination let them realize how God loved Ephraim, the dear son (vv. 18-20). In my opinion, this imagination is also valid although I have explained Rachel's weeping imagery as Israel's national mourning at Ramah when they were being deported to Babylon (See Chapter 5, Section 5.5.1).

It is observed that the two groups are able to use many different methods in their interpretation process. Three common methods found in both groups are collaborative group discussion, intertextuality and the reading of the broader literary context. In addition to these common interpretive methodologies, the use of theological implication, different translations, and imagination strategy are found exclusively in the Mon group. These exegetical methods are the strengths of the Myanmar ordinary readers.

In the interpretation process of the Myanmar ordinary readers, what can a socially engaged biblical scholar contribute? The contribution of biblical exegetes could help make fruitful interpretation. Many participants willingly expressed that they still wanted to know more information about the historical background of the text, the context of the text, and the meaning of the text. Therefore, the Myanmar ordinary Bible readers, at least in these two groups, need more exegetical resources such as commentaries or input of biblical scholars who could help understand the text by contributing their own knowledge of the Hebrew language and contribute with other relevant exegetical information about the text.

8.3.2.2. Analysis of Central Messages of the Groups

In this section, I will study the central message of the text, according to the reading groups. In the Kachin group, 'repentance, mercy of God, God's restoration, and hope' is found as the central message of the text. How do they obtain this central message of the text? The group used presentation, discussion, and consideration of the broader literary context as the tools in their interpretation process. First, a reader asserted that true repentance and restoration in the text were closely related. She said that there could not be restoration without true repentance. Then, another reader developed this explanation by saying that the Israelites once did not obey the commandments of God so that God sent them into exile in Babylon; but, God promised to restore them back mercifully again as they returned and appealed to God with repentance. Therefore, she said that the Israelite exiles could hope their future restoration. By

considering a broader literary context, another reader again added that returning to God with repentance was what God most wanted from human beings as it was evident in Jesus's inaugural ministry where he called to repentance according to the Gospel of Matthew 4:17. Another reader took up this idea of repentance and related it to the idea of hope which was the hope of new life of Israel. He said, Israel had followed after other gods and pagan customs but they repented and returned to God when they were disciplined in Babylon. When the people appealed to God with repentance, God restored the people. Therefore, he said that even in times of God's punishment there could be hope for the future; God had remolded and reshaped Israelites into a new life. The hope granted by the merciful God then becomes the central message of the text. In the group's observation, the text was divided into three parts: vv. 15-17, 18-20, and 21-22. According to the group, the first part is about God's comfort of weeping Israelite people who were being taken to Babylon as captives. The second part is about the development of repentance of the people, the confession and acceptance of God's disciplines, the appeals of people to God for deliverance, and God's promise of deliverance to his people. The last part of the text is about God's calling to the people to return to their homeland. The group said that God was merciful and trustworthy, and would give hope even in a desperate situation. Therefore, the group said 'repentance, mercy of God, God's restoration, and hope' was the central message of the text.

In the case of the Mon group, the participants found more than one central message. The group members have different opinions on the text. For instance, while a reader understood 'the work and reward of Rachel' as the central message of the text, another reader understood 'hope' as central message because Rachel looked forward to her sons (vv. 15-16), God promised the return of Rachel's sons (v. 17), Ephraim repented (vv. 18-20), and virgin Israel was invited to return to her cities (v. 21-22). According to the reader, all parts related to each other and showed 'hope' as the central message of the text. For another reader, reunion of all churches in one Christ as the central message of the text because she regarded Israel as a symbol of Churches so that the dispersed Israel who would return to her homeland was seen as the dispersed churches in different cultures that would be united in one Christ. A reader saw God's 'love and forgiveness to his children' as the central message because God was expecting the return of unfaithful children, and even when the faithless children returned to him, he would embrace them. By extending her reading of Jer 31:15-22 up to vv. 34 (quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17), another one said that the old covenant was broken but God still loved his people and forgave them so that he would make a new covenant with his loving kindness. Therefore, she comprehended 'God's love and forgiveness' as the central message in terms of covenant. A reader also said that the central message that he found in the text was salvation by God because there was God's salvation even in times of punishment by God.

If we list the central messages of the text that the group produced, we will have eight central messages such as repentance, mercy of God, God's restoration, and hope as found in the Kachin group and the work and reward of Rachel, hope, reunion of all churches in one Christ, God's love and forgiveness, and salvation of God as found in Mon group. What is the meaning of the discovery of various kinds of central messages in the groups' interpretation process? It is the evidence of the surplus of meaning of the text as Ricoeur has shown the

capacity of semantic autonomy of the text.²⁶ The meaning of a text emerges when the reader and the text interact. The surplus of meaning of the text is produced when the readers approach the text from their particular perspective and concerns. The more perspectives the readers have, the more surplus of meaning of the text is produced. In the Kachin group, the participants shared their communal life interests so that the central message was mainly focused on the theme of 'sin, repentance, mercy of God, restoration of God, and hope.' As the Mon group had individual life interest, their interpretations of the central messages of the text were more than one focused theme. The various central messages emerged from their individual interaction with the text. This shows the need of exchange of perspective in order to discover more of the spectrum of meanings of the text.

8.4. Analysis of Appropriation

This section will examine the groups' appropriation of the text and the praxeological effect of the reading exercise. How do the groups appropriate the text? What characters do readers identify with? Which characters or actions do the readers especially focus on in the process of appropriation? How does the text get a new context, a new reference? Does the reading become a place to develop a new praxis? What is the praxeological effect of the reading?

In the Kachin group, Ephraim was appropriated as the Kachin people and this appropriation became a place to practice a new praxis - evangelization. In contrast to this communal appropriation strategy, individual appropriation was detected in the Mon group. For instance, Ephraim was actualized as an individual person who confessed that he was chastised like an untrained calf.

To begin with, in the case of the Kachin group, the group focused on the relationship between Yahweh and his dear son Ephraim so that the group saw a parent-child relationship in the text. The group said that Ephraim had once strayed from God but God restored this stray son after having disciplined him and after the son had repented and returned to him. Then, the group paralleled this literal parent-child relationship between God and Ephraim to the relationship between God and the Kachin who were thought to have sinned against God. One should keep in mind that more than 95% of Kachin people are Christians. The group said that once the Kachins worshipped spirits and the Kachin chieftains ruled their subjects with autocracy instead of ruling with a democratic system. The group critiqued that these were the sins that the Kachin people committed against God in the past. Because of such sins, many Kachin IDPs had to leave from their homes as if in exile in the current Kachin war. The internally displaced Kachins (IDPs) and many other Kachins were thirsting, starving, suffering, and praying. In this situation, the group's focus lies on the parent-son relationship in the text which has revealed the love of God to his son; God had mercy upon the repentant son. Therefore, the group anticipated God's parental love and restoration of the Kachin people. The group understood that the current moment was the time of God's shaping and remolding the Kachins. This appropriation method may be called the model of the parallelism of the terms or the tracing paper model.²⁷ In this appropriation, the old text gets a new context. Ephraim

²⁶ Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*.

²⁷ See De Wit, "Code and coding," 417.

becomes the Kachin people. The reader compared the Kachin people and Ephraim in the model of the parallelism of terms. This reading becomes a place to practice developing a new praxis - evangelization. How? The group developed this appropriation of the text because they understood that God was shaping and remolding the Kachin people's life in terms of moral discipline. A reader pointed out that many Kachin men working in the Hpakant jade mine areas had been morally corrupted when they made money. According to his life experiences in Hpakant jade land areas, common forms of moral corruption were sex, gambling, alcohol, drugs, and family divorces. He saw the present Kachin war as God's intervention in Kachin history and as the time of God's reshaping the Kachin people because Kachin refugees were gathered together in refugee camps where Kachin people could study the Bible and renew their faith in God. He himself had turned away from God and worked in business companies for years. Only after he joined a Bible study group, he realized his sins and returned to God with repentance. After his personal transformation, he started evangelizing and establishing churches in several villages. Therefore, he said that the war might not only destroy lives but also might reshape the Kachin into new lives. At a praxeological level, the readers said that the text reminded all Kachin people to appeal to God to renew their lives according to the will of God. Therefore, the group said that it was the time for the whole Kachin people to repent and humbly appeal to God for peaceful life since God was merciful and was able to bring his people back to their homes. The group said that the text was encouraging them to pray for the restoration of 100,000 of Kachin IDPs.

In the Kachin group, social transformation is observed not only in the group but also in the readers' personal lives. For instance, a reader said that the text let him repent and motivated him to have strong faith in God who would remold his life as anew. As he has comprehended God's parental love, he said God still loved him although he had shortcomings. He believed that God had a plan for him to create him as a new man. Therefore, he had repented and was walking on the right path. Another reader also said that the text reminded him of his former life and drove him to the new life. He said he was disciplined by God so that he was ashamed and repented. He was proud of his high rank position in the Burma Socialist Programme Party so that he prioritized socialism and ignored God. However, the demise of the Burma Socialist Programme Party in 1988 with a popular uprising humiliated him. He had to work under the supervision of low educated people. Therefore, the reading of the text once again reminded his life experiences and directed him to the new life. Likewise, a reader also said that God's promise of hope to Rachel would play an important role in her life. She prayed God to extend her life when she was sick; God heard her prayer. With the new life, she is now serving her church as a volunteer nurse and flower director.

In the Mon group, each participant appropriated the text into their individual lives. It seems to me that the Mon group members more prefer to apply the text directly into their respective personal lives rather than group application. For example, a reader has especially focused on Jer 31:18 and read with Ephraim. Then he identified with Ephraim's grieving saying "You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained calf; Bring me back that I may be restored, For You are the LORD my God." The reader said that in 1998 when many Myanmar people sent their children to Singapore to make money there, he mortgaged his house to be able to send his son to Singapore. When his son arrived in Singapore, the son could not find job until three months later. Only after six months, the son started to send some money to home.

However, unfortunately, before he could repay the mortgage, his son had to return home because of the son's tuberculosis. The son received medical treatment in Myanmar and he would never go to Singapore again. The reader lost his house. He felt his experience was very identical with the experience of Ephraim who was chastised like an untrained calf. Therefore, the reader said "I was chastised like an untrained calf." The old text gets a new reference in a new context. The text, originally written for the Israelites, becomes the text for the present reader. The reader appropriated the text as if it directly spoke to him. He read the text full of feelings as follows: "Thus says the Lord, a voice is heard in (---), lamentation, and bitter weeping. (---) is weeping for his poverty. He has no possession of property like a monkey who loses the branches of the tree. He refuses to be comforted for he has nothing in his hands. Thus says the Lord, restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears for your work will be rewarded. There is hope for your future. By your faith and by the Grace of God you will be saved." This reader appropriated the text directly into his personal life by means of the tracing paper model - the model of the parallelism of terms. This is an example of the idea, frequently present in the discussions, that everything that happens comes from God and must contain a lesson, warning, discipline. Evil is not just due to bad luck, or to cruel enemies, but must be God's punishment.

Likewise, another man who focused on God's discipline on Ephraim also said that the text let him remember his previous life. He was a born Christian. He did not know much about the Bible but he believed that the tithe belonged to God so that he set aside it for God. However, he sometimes used it for a while and repaid it again. Once, he faced bankruptcy so that he realized that this was God's judgment on his management of tithing. He comprehended it was what God disciplined him for. Therefore, he changed his lifestyle into a new one and now donated his tithe as soon as he set it aside for God. Discussion on tithing may be directed to another topic but here one finds the power of the text; the praxeological effect of the reading. The text let the reader see his own life; the text led to new insight and new praxis. The method of this appropriation may be called typological as he used a doctrine of theological types in his interpretation.²⁸

In another case in the Mon group too, a reader focused on Rachel and appropriated Rachel's 'work and reward' into her own life. Rachel's work and God's promise of reward became her 'work and reward.' She said that she had been working in a restaurant since she was twenty years old until she was forty years old. Unexpectedly, she suffered from spondylosis so that she had to quit from her job. It was a time of distress for her family. She said that out of the situation of suffering, God granted her a new warm society, opportunities to travel abroad, to enjoy new life with happiness, and even to study theological education. She said all these opportunities were the reward granted by God. Another woman who read with Rachel said that she was also moved by the aspect of 'hope.' She was accustomed to hope things with little confidence. But she now had confidence that God was able to fulfill her hope. As Rachel could hope for her children, she could hope for her dream because of God's promise of hope. In reading with Rachel, the reader was also stimulated by the text to renew her relationship with God. She said that her family had turned away from God like the Israelites who had turned away from God. Her family had relied more on humans than on God so that they were cheated

²⁸ Ibid.

by human beings. Now, her family could not run their own business very well. They had spoiled the son with excessive money support to pursue his education. Her parents now could not make money because they were retired. Finally, they were frustrated with their expectation and regretted for their ignorance of God. They now came to God as Israel had come back to God. The text gets a new reference. Israel becomes the reader and her family. The promise of hope empowered her. Another reader who read with Rachel also appropriated God's promise of hope into her life. She said that she lost her three sons within a year in several ways. Her eldest son married and left her; her second son went abroad and left her, her youngest son died and left her. In such a situation, the promise of the return of Rachel's sons in the text was understood as it was promising directly to her the return of her own sons. This promise of hope revitalized her in time of hopelessness. This is the power of the story. The story empowers these readers to find more peace. This is the praxeological effect of reading the text. The story let them see God's faithfulness in the promise. They appropriated the text into their lives through the model of parallelism.

Another appropriation method that was discovered in the Mon group is allegorical. For example, a reader allegorically appropriated the love of God into the love of her father. The reader said that the text was able to reveal at least two new insights about God that she found in her father. First, in her reading of the text in Myanmar Bible, she found the God who disciplines. But in her reading of English Bible, she found again the affectionate God in terms of the tone of the text. Likewise, she had thought of her father as a strict father, disciplining his children before she was married to her husband. Then, she found the aspect of an affectionate father only after her marriage. She said when she was young, she thought her father was not affectionate because her father did not give pocket money to her. Although her father had bought a piano for her, he did not bring snacks whenever he came home. Therefore, she saw her father as a tough and strict one until she married. Only after she was married to her husband, she saw the affectionate characteristic of her father when she ran into her father on the street; she felt very happy because her father forgave her shortcomings and still loved her. She felt the affection of her father. This is also the power of the text that led the reader to new insights.

In the case of another reader, the reader did not focus on a character but the reader focused on the action of God's discipline on Ephraim (vv. 18-20) and observed God's discipline as a source of blessing. She said that the story reflected God's serious discipline on her own family. Both her husband and she herself were ministers of the Mon Baptist Convention. They once had decided to quit their job because their mission was not very fruitful. There were only a few church members in the Mon Baptist churches so that she felt insecurity in the Mon mission field. The reader had worked in the Kachin Baptist churches where she worked with thousands of church members even within a single Church. In contrast to the Kachin Church, the Mon Church has very few members. This different situation made her disappointed. In addition, other weaknesses among leaders tempted her to move to another mission field like the ten-year project in Naga mission of AD 2000. Finally, she and her husband made a request of resignation to the Mon Baptist Convention, and their request was granted. According to the reader, she and her husband did not realize that God did not want them to leave from Mon Baptist Convention. Right after they resigned, her husband was seriously sick and nearly died. The reader was also suffering from malnutrition, but her husband's sickness (male menstruation) was more severe than her health. She was not strong enough to see the blood of her dying husband. She submitted

her husband to God's hands and asked the will of God if God wanted to prolong the life of her husband. The next day when she visited her husband, he was getting better. They realized that God still wanted them to continue to work in the Mon mission field. Therefore, in the hospital, they knelt down to pray and submitted themselves to God to continue working in the Mon mission field. Afterwards, they are healthy and serving the Mon Baptist Church in Yangon. This is how the reader appropriated the text into her own life. The reader did not focus on a character but focused on the action. It is noteworthy that the text can get a new context even though the reader focuses on an action.

Summary

In this section, both communal and individual appropriations of the text were discovered. In the Kachin group, the relationship between God and Ephraim was especially focused on in their actualization process. They identified with Ephraim. As a result, Ephraim gets a new reference - Ephraim becomes Kachin. In this appropriation process, the praxeological effect was also discovered. As the readers identified with Ephraim, they had appealed to God for salvation and rescue from the current armed conflict. It is also noticed that the Kachin group's reading was a place to evangelize the IDPs and refugees. At the level of the individual, they renewed their lifestyles. Although the communal appropriation is present in the Kachin group, it was absent in the Mon group in the first phase of their reading process. Each of the Mon group members appropriated the text into their personal lives so that Ephraim becomes an individual man; Rachel becomes an individual woman; and the love of God becomes the love of a father. It is noticed that the text can get a new context and a reference although the reader focuses on an action. Both communal and individual transformations are seen as the praxeological effect of reading exercise that could not be worked out by a single work of doing only exegesis. Therefore, to get more fruitful exegesis, biblical scholars should re-read the text with believers who would read the Bible naively and who would need mutually enriching inputs from the biblical scholars.

8.5. Analysis of Exchange of Perspectives

In order to develop more fruitful reading of Jer 31:15-22 at the level of hermeneutics, exegesis, and praxeology, I will continue to examine the groups' exchange of perspectives in their reading process. The two basic tasks that I will perform in this analysis are: first, to evaluate the readings of the ordinary readers and to take the verbal meaning of the text into account at the hermeneutic-exegetical level, and second, to find out a potential action at the praxeological level. In order to achieve my goal, I will analyze three main areas such as the interaction with the partner's profile, hermeneutic-exegetical aspect of interaction, and effects of the interaction. First, in the analysis of interaction with the partner's profile, I will examine the effect of the interaction and the exchange of perspectives in terms of paying attention to the partner's contextual situation. Second, in the analysis of the hermeneutic-exegetical aspect of interaction, I will evaluate the different readings for more fruitful interpretation methods. Finally, in the analysis of the effects of the interaction, I will examine the effect of the interaction.

8.5.1. Analysis of Interaction with the Partner's Profile

The aim of the analysis of the interaction with the partner's profile is to examine the groups' exchange of opinion and the effect of interaction. Does the group pay attention to the partner's profile (composition, age, education, church background, social status, ethnicity, etc.)? Does the group acquire knowledge from the context of the partner group? Is there any interest in the profile of the partner group? Do certain issues of the partner group stand out (e.g. war, ethnic conflict, etc.) according to the other group? Are development and growth involved, or rather stagnation and freezing? How does the group deal with the partner group as such, and what is the effect of the interaction (e.g., does this exchange of experiences of faith enrich them)?

The Kachin group met three times to interact with the Mon Group's reading reports. Before the Kachin group started the reading process, they prayed and sang a song as they were used to do. The title of the song could be roughly translated as 'Obedience and Growth in Christ' (1 Samuel 15:22; Matthew 7:24; Ephesians 4:15). In the second meeting, they sang some songs of praise and worship. Then they read 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 and prayed for the meeting. In the last meeting, they again sang the song "Obedience and Growth in Christ." They read Psalm 33:13-15 and submitted the meeting into God's hands. In their interaction with the Mon group's profile, the Kachin group paid attention to the characteristics of the group members, ethnicity, family life, faith, religious atmosphere, education, job, and services like early childhood development program and youth development program. In this interaction, the Kachin group expressed their admiration to each of Mon group members. For example, "We admire Ruth who comes from the Mon and Kachin mixed family, married a Kayin, and is serving the society with her talents of education and music. She is an admirable and respectful person." The Kachin group also adopted the partner group's spirit of unity in diversity, cooperative spirit, Christian spirit of service and sacrifice for Church and society, strong faith in God, and enthusiasm for the learning the process. The Kachin group especially noticed the mixed ethnicity of the partner group and the Buddhist dominant social context so that the Kachin group realized that "all people are the children of God." The Kachin group said that it was important to love one's own ethnic people but it was more important to love any other people because loving others was loving God who is the Savior for all people.

The Mon group also met three times to accomplish the exchange process. Every meeting was liturgically opened and closed. Unlike the Kachin group, the Mon group does not read a passage from the Bible and does not sing any song. In the interaction with the partner's profile, the Mon group observed the personal characteristics of the partners, Kachin culture, Kachin social structure, geography and ecology of Kachin regions, political crisis and situation of churches, their faith and services. The Mon group noticed that the Kachin never detached from their social ties so that they saw that as a Kachin social structure; even the Kachin group living in the comfort zone strongly identified with the Kachin living in the war zone. Therefore, the Mon group said "Kachin people are proud of their nationality, race, culture, tradition, heredity, and natural resources. They dared to raise their voice for injustice." Concerning the richness of natural resources in Kachin State, a reader witnessed her experiences on the Kachin mountains where many plants served her mountaineer group as life-giving food. She was worried about the Myitsone hydropower project which had already destroyed its environments. She thought, this abundance of natural resources would be a major barrier in political negotiation between

the central government and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO). As a complement and a reflection on the Kachin current situation, another reader shared her view on the fear of ethnic people. She said the Mon also had to fear the Bamar ethnic group because some Bamar could destroy the Mon's culture. For instance, Kamawet village in Mon State is administered by ten village headmen. It was a big village but the Mon preferred to preserve this village as a rustic village because they feared the Bamar who might take away the last remnants of Mon culture and traditions. In 1057, Bamar King Anawrahta had destroyed Pegu, the capital of the Mon kingdom, and took Mon's Buddhist Scriptures (Tripitaka) along with the Mon royal family to their Pagan kingdom. In the interaction with the partner's profile in terms of culture, the Mon group came to realize that many Mon Christians, unlike the Kachin Christians, had abandoned their Mon culture when they became Christians because they were taught that their own culture was not acceptable in Christianity. Even the Mon tradition of delivering rice sticky cake (*mont-hpet-htote*) on full moon day of Waso (falls in July) had also disappeared in Mon villages when the Mon villagers were converted to Christianity. A reader said that the Mon's way of making a gesture of respect by putting the palms together and raising them to the forehead should be preserved. Through the interaction with the partner's profile, the Mon group agreed to preserve their Mon culture. Concerning faith, some of the Mon group had thought people might abandon their faith in a time of crisis but that was not true in the Kachin group, whose faith was stronger when they faced hardships. Regardless of their endurance of war and poverty, the Kachin served their community through their churches. Therefore, the Mon group realized that the Kachin churches were the Kachin's dependable places. In short, both groups learned each other's contextual situation.

8.5.2. Analysis of Hermeneutic-exegetical Aspect of Interaction

The aim of this analysis is to evaluate the groups' readings and to find out more fruitful interpretation methods. What differences or similarities does the group itself discover in method, focalization, identification, appropriation, and actualization of the partner group? How does the group deal with these similarities and differences? Do similarities lead to an 'ecumenical honeymoon'? Does the group deal with differences in a way of graceful fighting? How does the group deal with the partner's imagination method? What happens to the group's own opinion of the text? Is there any growth? Why, and based on what factors? Is there any rejection of the reading of the partner group? Why, and based on what factors? Were the group's own insights put into perspective? Has something like a 'third culture perspective'²⁹ developed? Is there new focalization?

When the two groups interacted with the partner's spontaneous reading, the Kachin group was mindful whereas the Mon group was mindful and critical. The term 'mindfulness' here means openness to the new information and the term 'critical' means expressing an analysis of the partner's work which is problematic for them.³⁰ The Kachin group's openness

²⁹ A 'third culture perspective' means a new perspective that is developed when the intercultural reading process is enriching, horizon-broadening to the group itself. "The culture of the partner group is no longer assessed from the group's own culture, nor vice versa, but a perspective is being developed that is fed by the desire for a new culture, a third culture." See de Wit, "Third Culture Perspective," in *Through the Eyes of Another*, 424-425.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 418-419.

to the new information was detected while the Mon group's desire of more explanations was detected. For example, in their analysis of Mon group's spontaneous reading, the Kachin group discovered the liturgical opening of the meeting as the first similarity between the two groups. The Kachin group said "We are very much inspired by the discovery of the Mon group's submission of their work into God's hand before they start." Second, the Kachin group thought the second similarity between the two groups that the Kachin found was the conflict behind the text. They said "both groups were similar in viewing the text as God's judgment on Israel because of Israel's disobedience to the commandments." However, this was problematic for the Mon group, as I will discuss below. Third, the Kachin group considered the interpretation of the metaphorical language in vv. 21-22 as the third similarity between the two groups. Israel was interpreted as a woman/church and God as a man. The fourth commonality between the two groups was a view on vv. 21-22 as a difficult text. The Mon group observed that some members of the Kachin group left a difficult text without any attempt to understand it although some participants attempted to understand such difficult text. Some tried to understand it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, while some attempted to understand the text through the lens of their personal life experiences and related the text with other Scriptures.³¹ In their analysis of the Kachin group's reading, the Mon group noticed that the Kachin group read the text from three perspectives - political, spiritual, and evangelization. The Mon group assumed that the Kachin group read the text from the political liberation perspective for their present social-political-economic situation. In addition, the Kachin group read the text from a spiritual perspective because they all admitted that they were sinners and their salvation was totally dependent on God. By looking at the eagerness of the Kachin group in evangelization, the Mon group also assumed that the Kachin group read the text from the evangelization perspective. The Mon group said that the Kachin group studied the Bible in its historical setting and reconsidered how the text spoke to them.

From the hermeneutical perspective, this is the stage of evaluating different interpretations. What happened when the different interpretations were validated in these two groups? At some point the differences between the two groups were not problematic for the groups, but at some points, a graceful fighting was discovered. For instance, the differences between the two groups were their findings on cultural traces of the text. While the Kachin group saw worshipping Baal and idols as cultural traces, the Mon group saw deportation and release, the patriarchal system and Israel's initiation role, smiting thigh in grieving, setting up road marks and guideposts, and using a cow in the text as culture traces of the text. Another observation of the difference between them was personal identifications. They differently identified with Rachel, God, Ephraim, Israel, and Jeremiah. These differences were not developed further. However, the Kachin group's dominant reading was problematic for the Mon group and it was developed in their interaction.

The Mon group discovered that the Kachin group was influenced by their dominant reading. Although the Mon group's interpretation had come up with an alternative perspective to the Kachin group, the Kachin group refused to abandon their dominant reading - 'sin, punishment, repentance, prayer, restoration.' They hold on to their opinion that repentance and

³¹ As we have seen in the Chapter 6, the readers are not *tabula rasa* – a blank slate, multiple valid interpretations are inevitably and legitimately possible.

prayer were important elements in the text and in their real lives. In their analysis of the Mon group's observation of the conflict behind the text, the Kachin group said that both groups were similar in viewing the text as God's judgment on Israel's disobedience to the commandments. In this point, the Kachin group focused less on the Mon group's realization of the themes of the love of God and hope beyond judgment.

In their interaction with the Kachin group's dominant reading, the Mon group said that the Kachin group read the whole text carefully but their focus was mostly on vv. 16-17 which was about hope of liberation from bondage so that the Kachin group consequently took 'repentance, mercy of God, God's restoration, and hope' as the central message of the text. The Kachin group asserted that if the Kachin people repented from their sin and returned to God, God would save them because God was merciful. As a result, the Kachin group hoped for God's new creation - restoration from judgment. The Mon group also noticed that sin, punishment, repentance, and restoration were also dominant in the Kachin group's identification with the characters of the text. The members of the Kachin group identified not only with Virgin Israel but also with Rachel and the prophet Jeremiah. Some identified with Jeremiah because they would like to remind disobedient Israelites to obey the commandments of God and to avoid judgment. At the same time, some identified with Virgin Israel because they would also commit sins like Virgin Israel. Some identified with Rachel because there was hope in God who is faithful to his promise. In any case, it was observed that the text stimulated the Kachin group to repent from their sins and to return to the merciful God who could restore and rebuild the wellbeing of his people. In fact, many Kachins were praying in their churches and in their homes to pardon their sins and to restore them from the destruction of war. In response to this, the Mon group said that every human being used to commit sin but the Kachin group confessed that they were punished for their sins. Presumably, not all Kachin people thought that the current war was because of their sins. Therefore, the Mon group thought that the Kachin group humbly confessed personal and communal sins. Some Mon group members thought the Kachin war was not because of the Kachin's sins but because of God's special unknown plan. A reader of the Mon group said that the Kachin group's relation of the current armed conflict to their communal sin was too general, so that prayer alone would not be enough to settle the existential problem. He said that there were deceits in the history so that people had to fight for justice; people had to support for justice. He thought, submitting to injustice was not leading to true peace, therefore he admired those who were fighting for justice. He said, even the prophet Jeremiah involved himself in political affairs in his time. He understood the current Kachin war as the consequence of political injustice. He empathized with the Kachin IDPs and refugees.

The Mon group's interaction with the Kachin group's reading is directing to the so-called 'third culture perspective.' However, the Kachin group still held their view that they had to repent and pray for the peace in their land although they perceived the differences and accepted the Mon group's opinion as a new perspective. In such situation of interaction, a biblical scholar could become involved and contribute his or her knowledge of exegesis. In fact, a biblical scholar could contribute the verbal meaning of the text by exploring the whole literary components of the text and individual types of literature. For instance, my exegesis of Jer 31:15-22 has shown the pericope as a literary unit situated in the so-called the book of consolation. The central theme of the book of consolation is Yahweh's future restoration plan for the Israelite people. The Kachin group is praying God for peace. The Kachin group said faith is hope. This

hope is peace. The Mon group said, submission to injustice was not true peace so that they would fight for justice and peace. This perspective is also related to the subject of hope for peace. Where can they meet? The third culture perspective grows here. This is not my exegesis where I focused on female imageries such as Rachel, God, and virgin Israel. This is not the Kachin group's dominant reading where they focused on sin, punishment, repentance, prayer, and restoration. This is also not the Mon group's individual focalization and liberation perspective. As I have mentioned about the third culture perspective before, the third culture perspective happens when the process is enriching; "The culture of the partner group is no longer assessed from the group's own culture, nor vice versa, but a perspective is being developed that is fed by the desire for a new culture, a third culture."³² Now, the third culture perspective here would be a conjunction of hermeneutic-exegetical praxeology - a combination of faith and action. In fact, many Myanmar ordinary Christians from every ethnic group in Myanmar usually cling to their churches and stay away from sociopolitical affairs outside the Church. This is either because of the successive Myanmar government's suppression of ethnic identity and Christianity or perhaps, Myanmar churches' conviction of the separation of Church and State. Nevertheless, Myanmar ordinary Christians now need to involve themselves in sociopolitical affairs as stimulated in this intertribal reading of the Bible. This would be a new challenge to Myanmar ordinary Christians and Myanmar churches, but there has been a significant change in Myanmar. The government is changing from dictatorship to a democratic system. Many young Myanmar ordinary Christians, as well as people from other religions and civil societies, have joined hand in hand in working for justice and sustainable peace for the whole Myanmar. These civil societies not only involve themselves in political dialogues and political conferences but also pray together with people from different faiths. If the Kachin group thinks that all people are the children of God, they could work with people outside the Kachin ethnic people. If the Mon group empathizes with the Kachin IDPs who are beyond the Mon group's comfort zone, the Mon group could pray for the Kachin. If a biblical scholar accepts hermeneutic-exegetical and praxeological effects of the text, he or she would re-read the Bible with the so-called naive readers. The above analysis has shown how the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the ordinary readers' readings of the same text can be fruitful and mutually enriching on hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological level.

8.5.3. Analysis of the Effect of Interaction

The aim of this analysis is to measure the effect of the interaction. Are development and growth involved, or rather stagnation and freezing?

By reviewing the whole process, the Kachin group members, who were deeply rooted in their Kachin culture, realized that all ethnic people were the children of God. For instance, the Kachin group focused on a Kachin participant in the Mon group who married to a Mon. This Kachin woman was working among Mon and other ethnic groups both Christians and Buddhists. Therefore, the Kachin group was convinced that service was more important than race preservation. Moreover, the Kachin group learned from their partner group to read different versions whenever they face difficult texts like vv. 21-22. In addition, they also learned the benefits of collaborative group discussion that enabled the Mon group in dealing with the

³² See de Wit, "Third Culture Perspective," in *Through the Eyes of Another*, 424.

difficult texts. However, the Kachin group agreed to continue to appeal God to pardon their sins and to restore their people and land to the state of peace. They saw the current situation as God's judgment over their previous sins so that they saw repentance and prayer (with fasting) were what they urgently needed in their context. They also committed to hope in God like Rachel who was weeping for her children.

In the case of the Mon group, the Mon group was impressed by the Kachin's humble confession, repentance, and hope in God. Through this Kachin group's reading, the Mon group members were reminded themselves to reconsider their spiritual journey. The Mon group admitted that the Mon Christians also had to have a public confession for their sins of past and present. For instance, some Mon people in the missionary period in Myanmar had killed or made mad some missionaries. As a social transformation, the Mon group agreed to renew their spiritual journey. Moreover, the Mon group imitated humbleness and unity from their partner group. The Mon group encouraged each other to greet each other wherever they run into each other. They would confess their shortcomings and return to God. They committed themselves to help Kachin IDPs and refugees through any possible channels. Finally, the group stood up and prayed for the Kachin IDPs and refugees for solidarity with the Kachin victims.³³

Conclusion

The above analyses have shown how the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the ordinary reader's readings of Jeremiah 31:15-22 can be fruitful and mutually enriching on hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological levels.

First, the contextual issues were exchanged between the two groups of Myanmar ordinary readers although they came from different contextual situations.

Second, the group dynamics were observed as the important elements in the reading process. In their reading process, the liturgical framework and life interests are detected as the group dynamics. In both groups, the liturgical framework inspired them to study the Bible as the words of God that would directly speak to them. Likewise, the communal interests such as sociocultural and political problems were observed as the major group dynamics in the Kachin group whereas the individual family life was what most steered and determined the conversation of the Mon group.

Third, the groups were able to use their contextual issues to unlock the meaning of the text in the interpretation process. The Kachin group utilized their contextual political armed conflicts, traditional *nat* worshipping, social injustices, and immorality to unlock the meaning of sin, punishment, repentance, prayer, forgiveness, restoration, and hope in the text. The Mon group also used their individual family lives to unlock the meaning of the text. In addition, the two groups used several methodologies in their interpretation process such as collaborative group discussion method, intertextuality, their ways of acquiring information of the world behind the text, consideration of the broader literary context, explanation of the text in terms of theological implication, reading of different translations, and imagination strategy. These are

³³ Th Mon Church has been donating its charities to the Kachin refugees since the Kachin war broke out in 2011. The charities go through Mon Baptist Convention, and Myanmar Baptist Convention Headquarters. The charities include money, medicine, and clothes.

not scientific exegetical methods but they are applicable methodologies in the interpretation of the text among Myanmar ordinary readers.

Fourth, their different personal identifications beyond their gender reality in the interpretation process also contributed new empirical data to the biblical scholarship because some scholars had asserted that male readers would identify male God and female readers would identify with sinful woman. This reminds me to listen to the interpretations of both scholars and ordinary readers.

Fifth, the contributions of biblical exegetes were observed as the important elements for the more fruitful interpretation since the Myanmar ordinary Bible readers demanded more exegetical resources such as the historical background information of the text and verbal meaning of the text. Therefore, the input of biblical scholars who have knowledge of Hebrew language and other relevant exegetical information about the text will be an essential contribution in the reading process of the ordinary readers. Especially, the expertise of biblical scholars is necessary in the interaction between the group through their spontaneous readings where the biblical scholars will have to contribute the verbal meaning of the text by means of literary criticism.

Sixth, the ordinary readers were able to draw out a surplus of meaning of the text by means of understanding the central message of the text. The central messages that the groups drew out were repentance, mercy of God, God's restoration, hope, 'the work and reward of Rachel,' 'reunion of all churches in one Christ,' 'God's love and forgiveness to his children,' new covenant, 'God's love and forgiveness,' and salvation of God.

Seventh, the praxeological effects of the text were discovered. The groups' appropriation was a place to practice developing a new praxis. In the Kachin group, Ephraim was appropriated as the Kachin people and this appropriation became a place to practice evangelization. Moreover, individual social transformations were also discovered in the Kachin group as they renewed and changed their life styles. In the Mon group too, the text was appropriated into their individual lives. The old text gets new contexts and references. The readers appropriated the text into their lives through the model of parallelism and allegorical model. It is noteworthy that in one appropriation case, the readers did not focus on a character but they focused on the action.

Eighth, the third cultural perspective was achieved in the interaction of the two groups by means of their spontaneous readings. The new perspective in their interaction was not the Kachin group's dominant reading, not the Mon group's individual focalization and liberation perspective, and not my exegetical perspective; it was a third cultural perspective - a conjunction of hermeneutic-exegetical praxeology, i.e., the combination of faith and action; in other words, spiritual prayers and physical help for the war victims.

Finally, the effects of interaction were discovered. The Kachin group members who were rooted in their Kachin ethnic sociocultural context were aware of the Mon group's mixed ethnicity and their Buddhist dominant society. Therefore, the Kachin group realized all people were the children of God. The Mon group living in the comfort zone also empathized with the Kachin IDPs and refugees so that they committed themselves to comfort the Kachin IDPs and refugees, to donate money, and to support them as much as they could. These are the effects of the interaction to be found in the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the ordinary reader's readings of Jer 31:15-22.

To recapitulate, let me repeat that the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the ordinary readers and between the reading groups themselves is discovered as fruitful and mutually enriching on hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological levels.

CHAPTER 9

RE-READING OF JEREMIAH 13:20-27 CASE STUDY ON MYANMAR INTERTRIBAL HERMENEUTICS OF JEREMIAH 13:20-27

Introduction

In the third chapter of this dissertation, I have studied Jer 13:20-27 in three layers such as literary and theological layer, gender ideology layer, and historical layer. I have shown how the personified woman Jerusalem was sexually objectified in the prophetic message of Deuteronomic covenant theology in the ancient setting. In giving the prophetic message of why and how God judged the people of Jerusalem, the skirts of woman Jerusalem were stripped off over her face, she was sexually abused, raped, and disgraced. Unexpectedly, the rapist was Yahweh Himself. This ancient metaphor for covenant and curse theology might be a useful tool in conveying the relationship between Yahweh and his people in their own time but many contemporary female scholars have encountered such an abusive text so that they critiqued, resisted, and rejected such portrayal of the woman Jerusalem. As a consequence, the text has been labeled as “prophetic pornography” as it contains images of personified naked woman and sexual abuse of God. Some exegetes say that Jeremiah implicitly teaches that men represent God and women do not. Some exegetes also label the text as “text of terror” and some exegetes claim that the text is hopelessly negative and to be rejected.

However, in contrast with these scholarly interpretations, it is noticed that none of Myanmar Bible readers in my empirical research on this text tried to reject any aspect of the text. Why? Why are they not willing to reject the text? Do the readers recognize what exegetes say? Do they also find what is found by exegetes? How do the Myanmar readers deal with such gender bias in the text? How do they read the text? What are their reading methodologies? Do the Myanmar male readers identify with a male God as Exum has argued and do Myanmar female readers identify with only a female character in the text? What happens when this text is read by Myanmar readers using their life experiences as an instrument?

With the above hermeneutical tools, I will re-read Jer 13:20-27 from an intertribal reading practice perspective hoping to contribute to the articulation of an intertribal hermeneutics and a more in-depth reading of the text of Jeremiah. To reach my goal, I will first analyze the socio-cultural reality of the readers. Second, I will examine how this context influences or determines the reading strategies and methodology that they use for the explanation and understanding of the text. Third, I will analyze a specific part of their interpretation process: i.e., how do they appropriate or apply the text to their context. Finally, I will analyze the exchange of groups’ perspectives to determine how and to what extent the intertribal interaction between the paired groups helps the groups to increase their hermeneutical competence.

9.1. Analysis of Group Compositions and Social Situation of the Groups

In this project of intertribal reading of Jer 13:20-27, four groups of Myanmar Bible readers participated. The four groups of Myanmar ordinary Bible readers of Jer 13:20-27 were paired into two associated pairs. Group A and B were associated as one pair and Group C and D were joined as another pair. All the group members were the master students of Myanmar Institute of Theology who came from different parts of Myanmar and different ethnic backgrounds. Most of the participants speak their own ethnic languages whereas Myanmar (Burmese) is the official language of Myanmar. The average age of students in this project is 22 years. Every group consisted of people from more than three different ethnic backgrounds so that they brought slightly different contextual politico-socioeconomic information into the group. They met regularly on the school campus until they finished the reading process. All the groups began and ended their meetings with a liturgical moment. They used both English and Myanmar Bible translations. In the following, I will analyze each group composition in detail.

9.1.1. Analysis of the Group Composition and Social Situation of Group A

Group A consists of two males and two females. In this group, the group members are people of Kachin, Kayin, and Wa. They come from Shan State, Kayah State, Rakhaing State, and Yangon Division. Except a member who belongs to the Church of Christ, the rest of the group members belong to Baptist denomination. Three members have worked in their respective ministry fields before they came to the seminary. There is no tension within the churches the group members belong to.

The main interest and concern in this group is related to politico-socioeconomic problems. For example, one of the social problems discussed in the group is unemployment of Myanmar university graduates. The majority of Myanmar university graduates are unemployed so that most graduates end up with working in non-professional jobs either in Myanmar or in the neighboring countries. One group member who lives in Yangon city is unemployed for many years after his graduation. This social situation is seen as the national politico-socioeconomic situation in Myanmar as it can be found in the whole country. In terms of education, the situation of those people who are living in rural areas is the worst. For instance, a member who belongs to Wa ethnic people says that her people, who are living in a mountainous rural area and who formerly had practiced headhunting, can hardly access good education. In addition, the group says that the local people in some places like in Maw Chi town in Kaya State are suffering from the impacts of environment destruction like mining. For instance, tin mining causes pollution, mining waste, impure drinking water, deforestation, landslides, damage of roads, difficulty of transportation, insecurity for armed forces of both the government and rebel groups, and loss of opportunities for native ethnic people. Interestingly, the group has discussed squatters' habitual swearing rude words unfaithfulness to God, they do not live up to the Christian norm. This view may be based on Church Covenant. In some Baptist hymnals, a stipulation forbids use of obscene language. In Myanmar, this Church Covenant is recited once a month during the Lord's Table Service.

In short, the group is characterized as a pious Christian group and they are facing a difficult politico-socioeconomic situation.

9.1.2. Analysis of the Group Composition and Social Situation of Group B

Group B consists of two males and two females. They all belong to the Baptist denomination but they belong to different ethnic people and they come from different ethnic areas. A member comes from Tarlay, Eastern Shan State and she belongs to the Akha ethnic group. A member comes from Bago and she belongs to the Kachin ethnic group. A member comes from the Yangon Division and he belongs to the Chin group. A member comes from the Southern Chin State and he belongs to the Chin ethnic group.

In this group, poor education and moral corruption of local people, regional weaknesses in development, and weaknesses in Christian faith are found as main social problems for the group. First, the group discusses about poor education and moral corruption of the local people. To illustrate this, a member explores her social context where the majority are Shan Buddhist whereas the minority people are Akha and Lahu. In this social context, most people prioritize making money since the town is located on the border between Myanmar and Thailand so that many inhabitants do not emphasize pursuing education. Many girls are at risk of being lured into the sex trade. Second, the group discusses regional weaknesses in development. For instance, Kanpetlet, the native town of a member, is the poorest town among others in the Chin State. Kanpetlet is undeveloped in terms of low population, low education, bad communication, and bad economy. Therefore, the local people cannot access good education and other information technology that can bring news and up to date knowledge to the native people. Third, the group pays attention to the faith of their contemporary people. According to their group discussion, some contemporary Christians are not as strong believers as their ancestors who believed in God as their true God. In their opinion, their forefathers clung to God even by facing the life threatening harmful spirits, the *nats*, but in some churches contemporary Christians do not cling to God as their ancestors did.

In short, like their partner group, this group B is also characterized as a pious Christian group who is facing problems of low education, moral corruption, socio-economic problem, and weak faith.

9.1.3. Analysis of the Group Composition and Social Situation of Group C

Group C consists of one female and five male readers. Except for a member who belongs to the Methodist Church, the rest of the group members are Baptists. The group members belong to different ethnic groups such as Kayin, Kachin, Chin, and Myanmar-Chinese. The group members come from the Shan State, Chin State, Kachin State, and the Bago Division. They have various kinds of contextual problems such as socioeconomic unbalance, church conflict, tribal conflict, leader crisis, and poppy cultivation.

First in terms of socioeconomic unbalance, it is observed that the local socioeconomic situation is unbalanced even within the same political Division. For instance, two members come from the Bago Division but one member lives in the capital of the Division whereas another lives in a rustic rural village. In the social context in the city, the majority of the citizens are Myanmar Buddhists and they work in the civil service, financial institutions, trading, personal businesses, and in the local marketplaces. In the social context of the villagers, the majority of the villagers are Kayin Buddhists and *nat* worshippers while there are few Christians. The majority of the villagers are farmers although there is some civil service personnel. There is no bus road to the village. There are 300 households in the village but there

is no middle school or high school in the village. Therefore, many children are not interested in pursuing a good education. Recently, children are encouraged to go to the school, but many children have left the school before they finish their primary school to join their parents in the farm. Although the socioeconomic situations of these two members are different, the common social situation is the great influence of Myanmar culture and Buddhism in their social locations. The majority of the people practiced Buddhism and the influence of Myanmar culture had a great impact on the people so that most people no longer speak their languages and only speak the Myanmar language. The Myanmar-Chinese member himself no longer speaks the Chinese language and his Chinese Methodist Church also no longer uses the Chinese language in the church services so that the Myanmar language has replaced Chinese.

Second, church conflict and tribal conflict can be found as an aspect of the social situation of this group. For instance, two members live in Chin State and they belong to the Chin ethnic group. The majority of the people are Christians. For example, a member said that the 95% of people in his Falam town practiced Christianity and there were about 30 different Christian denominations in his town. There are 12 different Chin tribes within Falam township and there are many different tribal languages in the Chin ethnic group. In this multi-tribal social context and diversity of languages, churches are not able to work together. Rather, some Christian denominations have even prosecuted each other and they have to face charges in court. Disunity, rivalry, and hatred among different Chin Christian denominations are some contextual problems found in this group. In addition, the diversity of Chin tribal languages also causes social problems in their social context. For example, during a funeral service, different tribes from Chin ethnic groups had a conflict due to their ethnocentricity.

Third, the group has discussed the crisis of future leadership. For instance, the migration of Chin people is observed as an aspect of social problems in this group. Half of the Chin people have left the Chin State due to poverty, lack of religious freedom, and social injustice. Therefore, the future leadership in this context is uncertain. The leadership crisis is also found in the context of another group member who lives in the Sadung regions, the Kachin-China border areas, where many people cultivate poppy. Myanmar is the world's second largest producer of opium after Afghanistan. A majority of the native people in that region are uneducated. A majority of youths are drug users. Many youths marry when they are teens. Although there is some terrace cultivation and fruit cultivation in these areas, most people cultivate poppy because it makes more money. Many traditional native Christians in this context are attracted by the *nat* worshipping. Many faith communities in this region need pastoral leaders but the Church does not have enough pastors to send there. This situation creates weakness in the faith communities with regard to Christian spirituality.

In short, this group is characterized as a faith community who is facing an unbalanced socioeconomic situation, church conflict and tribal conflict, and crisis of leadership.

9.1.4. Analysis of the Group Composition and Social Situation of Group D

Group D consists of six males. Except for a member who belongs to Methodist denomination, the rest of the members are Baptists. The group members come from Chin, Kachin, Lahu, and Naga ethnic backgrounds. The group lives under several politico-socioeconomic hardships such as ethnic discrimination, corruption of youths, migration,

political restrictions which are recently released, struggling for ethnic rights and nation building.

First, ethnic discrimination is found as an aspect of the social problem of the group. According to a member who belongs to the Chin ethnic group, Chin people face discrimination in civil service in terms of their race and religion. For instance, this member had to add a Bamar (the major and dominant ethnic group in Myanmar) name in his National Registration Card to get a job in civil service so that his ethnic name Lalropuia became “Lalropuia @ Min Htet.” Especially, it is reported that Chin Christians have difficulties in getting a job and promotion in civil service while a Bamar (Myanmar) Buddhist may be promoted to a higher position.

Second, moral corruption of youths is another social problem for the group. For instance, Tamu is a Myanmar-India border trading center, where the social situation is complex; people from different places, different faiths, and different ethnic backgrounds create an environment of mixed marriage, a materialistic money-oriented society, drug abuse, and lack of religious interest although there are more than 90 churches in that town. This social atmosphere has largely affected the youths and caused youths’ moral corruption.

A third aspect of social problem is migration. As it is already reported by Chin people in the previous group, many Chin people from their regions migrate to several countries around the world. According to the members of this group, 50% of the Chin people have already migrated to foreign countries due to discrimination and poverty. Many Chins from small villages also have migrated to Haka so that many small villages have been abandoned.

Last, the group pays attention to the changing of the Myanmar political system. For example, recently, the former restriction of issuing permit for church building construction is gradually released. In this political transition, the group members realize to participate in nation building. For instance, recently, Aung San Suu Kyi and all ethnic group leaders are trying to amend the 2008 constitution. A member who belongs to the Naga and comes from the Naga Self-Administered Zone said that the Naga people did not have legislative power although the zone was to be self-administered by the Naga people.

In short, this group is characterized as a Christian group who are facing ethnic discrimination, youths’ moral corruption, local people’s migration, and political transition.

Summary

The above analysis has shown that all the group members are Christians coming from different ethnic groups and different geographical backgrounds. They are facing unhealthy politico-socioeconomic situations such as unemployment, poor education, political instability and insecurity, armed conflict, tribal conflict, traditional *nat* worshipping, poppy growing and drug abuse, discrimination, and migration from their native land to other countries. Since all the readers are Christians and theological students, it is notice that, the readers try to relate their current problems with God in terms of allegiance. Even using obscene language is considered to be unfaithfulness to God. After having analyzed the group composition and social situations of the groups, in the following section, I will study the groups’ interpretation process.

9.2. Analysis of the Interpretation Process

In this section, I am working on the analysis of the interpretation process of the groups because I want to find out what heuristic keys are used by the groups to unlock the meaning of

the text and to find out how the group explains the text. By doing this, one might better understand the bigger question of why all readers of the text do not interpret the text as a prophetic pornography.¹

The tools that I will apply in this analysis are the following. What heuristic keys are used by the group? Which components from the reader's own context are constitutive for the interpretation process? Which heuristic keys or codes do they use to unlock the meaning from the text? Are there specific themes/concepts, etc., which originated in their experiences of life that provided them with mechanisms to unlock meaning from the text (e.g. poverty, feelings of exclusion, injustice, etc.)? How willing are they to bring their experiences to the text?

9.2.1. Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group A

In the interpretation of Group A, the contextual situation of drunkenness, *nat* worshipping, and swearing obscene words are constitutive for their interpretation process.

In their interpretation, the group members first focus on the conflict between God and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then, they shift their focus to the wrath of God and punishment of God. As the people of God in the text have followed after the other gods, God is about to punish this people. The group members stop their reading of the text when they find the Deuteronomic idea of punishment and do not proceed to address other aspects. Then, the group relates this Deuteronomic idea of unfaithfulness and punishment to their contextual problems. Therefore, drunkenness, *nat* worshipping, and swearing obscene words become essential components to unlock the meaning of sin and punishment.

First, the group considers their local alcohol drunkenness as sin so that they connect the sin in the text to the present-day alcohol drunkenness in their context. To illustrate this, many people from various places of Myanmar come to Maw Chi mines to make money. Most of the mine workers spend their time by making money and drinking alcohol. Therefore, there is a saying in that area: "Roman Catholics make wine; Anglicans drink it; and the Baptists are drunk." Many Christians do not want to go to the Church. Therefore, the group compares this people's negligence and those people in the text.

Second, the group uses Wa people's *nat* worshipping as the tool to unlock the meaning of sin. In Wa culture, people offer *nats* domestic animals' gallbladder, lung, and kidneys for propitiation. Wa people also look at the chicken gallbladder to predict their fortune. When a Wa family kills a domestic chicken for food, they look at the gallbladder. If the gallbladder is very small, it predicts that the family will have bad luck in their business. But if the gallbladder is large, the family business is to be predicted as successful soon after that meal of chicken. Wa people do not eat chicken with white legs; they eat only chicken with dark legs because they believe it brings good luck, prosperity, blessing, and health. When Wa people are converted to Christianity, they are expected to stay away from this *nat* worshipping. However, some Wa Christians still want to practice this traditional *nat* worshipping because they think *nats* can protect them from dangerous situations. Some Wa Christian families still offer to the *nats* the

¹ Heuristic keys refer to the question of "which components from the reader's own context / experience are constitutive for the interpretation process as a selection process"; and the focalization refers to "the relation between the components presented in the story and the outlook the readers have on this." See De Wit, "Codes and Coding," *Through the Eyes of Another*, 415.

domestic animals' gallbladder, lung, and kidneys for propitiation. Therefore, the group sees this as unfaithfulness to God.

A group member said that his ancestors were the priests of the *nats*. Even in the generation of his father, their family used to visit the graves of their ancestors by bringing food for the spirits of their ancestors because they believed the spirits of their ancestors were still alive. But when they were convinced of the biblical prohibition of worshipping other gods, they stopped this ancestor spirit worshipping.

Third, the group relates their contextual social problem of swearing obscene words to the idea of sin in the text. In Myanmar Christian norm, the believers are taught not to swear obscene words because it is equated to the blasphemy. To illustrate this, people in the mission field of a group member are Bamar squatters who have a rich vocabulary to swear obscene words. She has been working among those squatters for six years but the people are not able to stop the former habitual swearing. They always swear profane words so that they do not think of those words as rude or impolite. Their swearing habit becomes their culture. Whenever she is teaching the children to be polite and gentle, people from neighboring houses are swearing profane words. Therefore, even when they convert to Christianity and accept Jesus as their Lord, they still speak rude words frequently. Even in their personal testimony in the Sunday service, their obscene words have spilt out. The group see this as unfaithfulness to God who wants civilization.

This way of dominant reading is also found in the group's personal identification. For example, in her reading of the text, a female reader sympathizes with God. She said that the male character in the text was thought to be abusive to the female character but the female herself also had imperfections as she had forgotten him and committed adultery. She explains that every man may want to be treated tenderly and fondly because he works very hard for his family's survival. If his wife forgot him and committed adultery, the husband would feel bitterness. She sympathizes with the male God who would suffer from his wife's betrayal. Therefore, she explains that the punishment in the text that the male is preparing for the female is necessary to let his wife remember him, to return to him, and to love again him. In any case, the punishment in her view is not to hurt her but to discipline her. Both discipline and punishment are required in human life for successful life. This female reader also proved this with her life experience. She works for God's ministry but when she is able to manage many things, she forgets God. She said that she always prayed God to help her before she taught Sunday school classes. However, as soon as everything went well, she forgot her God. She was proud of herself; she was jealous of others. Thus God disciplined her for some failure. This discipline reminded her to remember God so that she could return to God. If there was no discipline, she would not correct herself. Therefore, she thinks God's punishment as a discipline is acceptable. She does not think of God's punishment of his wife Jerusalem as violence or unfair punishment. She even says "let the husband punish his licentious wife." Here, it is noteworthy that this female reader identifies with a male character although she is a female reader. This is a different reading between the female Myanmar Bible reader and feminist exegetes such as Exum et al.² Unlike Exum et al, this female reader does not emphasize the sexual part of the personified woman Jerusalem. She does not care about the disrobing and

² See the Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

nakedness of the personified woman Jerusalem. She does not care about the euphemism for female sexual organs. Since I was in the group, I thought it was because of the Myanmar Bible translation that the group members used in their reading process. However, in my knowledge, the Myanmar translation of Jer 13:20-27 is quite a standard version compared with other English standard translations. Only in v. 22, the used euphemism tones down the sexual part of the female as in other English standard translations. Therefore, the female sexual part in Myanmar translation in v. 22 simply reads in Myanmar as “barefoot.” At the request of the group, I involved in the group discussion and shared with them the knowledge of Hebrew and possible textual variations in different English translations. Moreover, in order to explore interaction between these Myanmar readers and biblical exegetes, I offered them some feminist interpretations of the text and observed their responses. For instance, I offered them the view of Exum who labels the text as the ‘prophetic pornography.’ Exum points out the sexual violence of the text by means of literary treatments on the female character and ideological implications of the text. According to Exum, the nakedness of the female character is created by the author in the text and exposed to the readers; to both the original and every reader who reads this text. Therefore, the naked body of the female and the consequent sexual scene are viewed by the readers as pornography. In addition, Exum said that a male reader would identify with the male character and a female reader would identify with the female character according to the rhetorical strategy of the text. Therefore, the implication of the text teaches male is right and female is wrong. To this exegesis, this group of Myanmar readers responded in a univocal answer - all the group members agreed not to view this text as prophetic pornography but to view it as just a metaphor.³ Exum would define the language used in the text as metaphorical, but a pornographic metaphor. The fact that the group did not want to read with exegetes like Exum may be due to their reading attitude that only emphasized the spiritual side. In their interpretation process, none of the group members were attracted to the sexual parts of the text. They read the whole text and discovered the element of disrobing but they think the metaphorical expression of the text was used just to express the message of the text in understandable way. The group asserted that the text did not actually happen. This is the reading attitude of the group members. The group members asserted that the text must be read ‘with spiritual eyes.’ Is that a way of saying that the possible social and cultural implications of the text should not be taken seriously? It seems to me that they are defending their view on God that God is Holy and is far from sexuality. For whatever reason, they are saying that the portrait of God’s punishment of the woman is not to be taken as the teaching of men’s authority of dominion over women because men are not God.

The group had extensively argued against the reading practice of the feminist exegetes; they even labeled their reading practice as literal interpretation or misuse of the text. They argued that such an interpretation can be harmful for the readers. According to them, some Pentecostal members in Maingshu area had made a literal interpretation of 2 Kgs 20:1-7 so that it resulted in pollution of the holy church. According to a group member, she was in that Church when the Pentecostals invited the believers to come out and confess their sins if they wanted to

³ In Myanmar transliteration, “*hnar twi matwi bae sar twi twi ya mae.*” This may be roughly translated as: “Do not interpret the text from a sexual perspective but sincerely interpret the text from the perspective of literature.”

prolong their lives, as the Pentecostals' literal interpretation of 2 Kgs 20:1-7 claimed that God had extended for 15 years the life of the king Hezekiah who prayed in time of a mortal illness. The Pentecostals' literal interpretation on 2 Kgs 20:1-7 was greatly attractive to the believers so that many prostitutes and men who wanted to prolong their lives came out to the public and confessed their sexual immorality. Therefore, the group member feels that the indecorous public confessions have polluted the worship service in the holy Church. This female reader uses the words 'indecorous' and 'pollute' because many believers in the worship service were visualizing their experiences of sexual intercourse during the worship service instead of worshipping God properly. She does not regard those confessions as honest confessions during the worship service; rather, she regards them as indecorous words during the worship service. She argues that this pollution in the public worship service is the result of the literal interpretation.

This hermeneutic circulation - from text to life - was observed as their contextual interpretation method of Group A. In addition, reading the text through "the spiritual eyes" also helped them to ignore the rhetorical strategy of the text as it is evident in the female readers' identification with the male character God.

To recapitulate, all group members, both male and female readers, identify with God and justify God's punishment over woman Jerusalem. They do find the disrobed woman Jerusalem as the exegetes see her. But they refuse to see this disrobed woman as prophetic pornography because they simply understand the portrayal of the naked woman as metaphor so that they read the text through the spiritual perspective. Their reading method could be called 'spiritual emphasis reading' methodology. This perspective filtered out some important aspects of the text. In their 'spiritual emphasis reading' of the text, they avoid the sexual parts. The group focalizes the conflict between God and the people of Jerusalem. They unlock the meaning of the text by means of different kinds of sin found in their context such as drunkenness, *nat* worshipping, and swearing obscene words. Since the group read the text through the spiritual eyes, they do not find any clue of prophetic pornography and androcentric ideology in their interpretation process. The group prefers to read the metaphor as metaphor. Exum also read the text in a metaphorical sense. So the question of whether or not to read the text as metaphor is not decisive; it is more about a new domain of reference. Whereas Exum maintains the sexual aspect and imagery of the text, this group connects the text to another domain, i.e. drunkenness, etc.

9.2.2. Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group B

In the case of Group B, a history of Christian mission, Chin philosophy of life, and contextual cultural and socioeconomic situations are used to unlock the meaning of sin, gender inequality, and punishment in their context and the text.

First, the group especially focuses on the people's iniquity and God's punishment in vv. 22-27 so that this becomes the central message for them. Then the group relates this central message to their own lives. For example, a reader relates this message of people's sin and God's punishment to his tribal history of Christian missionaries. He said that a tradition of revenge, which would be very rude and wild in the eyes of the contemporary Christians, was present in his sociocultural context in the Mindat and Kanpetlet areas in Chin State. By 'tradition of revenge,' he means "life for a life." If a man kills someone, he will be also killed. Even though

the murderer flees away, the family members of the dead will kill someone from the murderer's own family or from his relatives. Therefore, revenge is inescapable. This traditional revenge culture had been practiced in Kanpetlet. The reader comes to realize that this revenge culture is a sin and causes God's punishment. He interprets that the un-development of his social context is the punishment of God. According to him, a history of Christian mission in their Kanpetlet area had recorded that once a missionary had attempted to work in their village but the missionary could not conduct the missionary works there because the missionary was threatened by the fearful revenge system. The reader interprets this mission history as the evidence of God's punishment on their practice of revenge culture. Kanpetlet is, until today, physically and spiritually rustic and undeveloped compared with other ethnic groups' mission history and regional development. Kanpetlet is undeveloped in terms of low population, education, communication, and economy so that inhabitants cannot access good education and other information technology that can bring news and up to date knowledge to the native people. He thinks his native town would have been more developed if the missionaries could have worked towards development as early as in other places. Therefore, he said that the text reminded him and his people to abolish evil that occasionally exists in the history as a culture and to live in accordance with God's will. In a broader sense, the reader also appropriates the meaning of the text to the contexts of churches and organizations. Here, the reader re-contextualizes the old text into his new context.

The Chin philosophy of life is also used to unlock the meaning of the people's iniquity and God's punishment in the text. According to the members who belong to Chin tribe, Chin people usually raise a philosophical question whenever they face misfortune or success. For example, if a child is born as disabled, the Chin will raise a question for the main reason that causes the baby to be born disabled. Then they will regard it as a punishment of God because either the parents or the ancestors of the baby have committed something wrong that God does not like.⁴ Similarly, if a man achieves a success, the Chin will reason that it is for his own good deed or for the good deed of his ancestors. Up until now, the Chins assume either the destruction of a village or the burning of a village is the result of iniquity and punishment of God. From this perspective, the group interprets the text that the punishment of God for Jerusalem is unavoidable because Jerusalem is full of iniquity.

Some Chin readers in the group focus on the unchangeable Ethiopian's skin and the unchangeable spots of the leopard and relate them to their Chin culture. In the Chin's arranged marriage culture, the Chins carefully trace the family history of both the bridegroom and the bride because they hold the view that the bridegroom or the bride can be a good generation only if he or she has descended from good ancestors, and vice versa. This interpretation was not favored by their partner group. I will discuss it later. Nevertheless, this focalization let them realize the idea that 'one will reap as he or she sows.' If one does good deeds, there will be blessings; if one does evil deeds, there will be punishment.

In the case of interpretation of the female character in the text, the group members use the norm of gender equality to unlock the meaning of sin and punishment in the text. For instance, they focus on the female character (Jerusalem) who plays the role of a sinful woman

⁴ In contrast to this view, Jesus had said that the born blind is not because of human sin but because of God's plan to reveal God's work in the blind man. (John 9:2-3).

and is to be punished by God. Beyond this dominant reading, they argue that the text degrades the role of the woman because it uses the woman's character in the portrait of an evildoer whereas God is portrayed as the right male. Especially, a female reader argues that the character of the sinful in the text could have been portrayed in another way without a female character, but the text now uses the female character in the text as sinful. That is inequality of gender in the text. In her present context, she does not find such gender inequality. Rather, males and females in her context play their respective important role of male or female. Another female reader also argues that the text is full of obscenity. Therefore, these two female readers see this text as a trace of ancient culture. Their focalization attempted to unlock the meaning of sin and punishment, but they do not imitate the text in their context in terms of gender construction. In this case, the female Myanmar readers' reading is closer to Exum's exegesis that is critical with regard to the treatment of the female character. The reading attitude of both female and male readers in this group is different from that of Group A. This observation informs that not all Myanmar readers are uncritical of the text. When the readers are critical in reading the text, their interpretation could be similar to the biblical exegesis by some biblical scholars.

The impact of this emphasis on sin and punishment is discovered in their personal life. For example, some readers understand the people's disobedience, forgetting God, and worshipping other gods as the sins of the people and the reasons of God's punishment because the readers do not find the evidence of the people's repentance or salvation at the level of the text so that their emphasis is only on the 'sin and punishment.' These components of the text redirect the reader to see their Church where some people similarly behave like the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Their eyewitnesses in their community have ensured them that those who forgot God will indeed be destroyed. Therefore, the readers commit themselves to worship God and obey the words of God. A good example for this is found in a group member's interpretation. The reader uses the local sexual immorality to unlock the meaning of the sin and punishment. She focalizes on the sin of the people in terms of unchangeable Ethiopian's skin, the unchangeable spots of the leopard, and constant uncleanness of Jerusalem and relates them to the unchangeable sexual immorality in her context, Tarlay, which is located near the border between Myanmar and Thailand. According to this reader, Tarlay is a small town. Most of the people in her village prioritize making money without emphasis on pursuing education because they assume that they cannot be rich with any common jobs. Therefore, the most popular way of making money in this village is selling the virginity of 13-14 years old girls to the rich people through brokers. This business is called in Myanmar 'apyo phauk' which means 'unpacking virginity.' This sex business is popular but risky for the people. If there is blood in the sexual intercourse as a proof of true virgin, the girl is given a lot of money so that her family can be rich within a day. However, if there is no blood in sexual intercourse and the man assumes the girl is not a virgin, the man can deny giving money. According to her eyewitness, there is almost no virgin daughter in the village. Many girls are lured into the sex trade. Most parents themselves sell their daughters. Therefore, many parents think the girls do not need to go to the school. This sexual immorality is gradually spreading among the Shan, Akha, and Lahu in that border area. HIV transmission rate is also gradually increasing in that area. As a social field worker of an NGO, the reader had worked with NGOs to stop HIV transmission and sex trade but it did not succeed because of the lack of cooperation of the parents and the respective local responsible personnel. The youths themselves do not care how to value their sex and lives.

Having sex with anyone is not uncommon in this area. Although some girls have to become involved in this sex business because their parents sell them, most girls involve themselves in this sex business willingly for they want to be rich. They do not care about HIV/AIDS. Therefore, this reader interprets the 2011 Tarlay earthquake as the warning from God that may let the people learn a moral lesson from the ruin.⁵

In short, the focalization in this group is the people's iniquity and God's punishment. Unlike their partner group, i.e. Group A, this group has paid attention to gender description in the text. They criticize the description of the personified woman. Their reading methodology can be called a feminist reading perspective. In any case, they do not reject the text as the feminist exegetes have proposed; rather, the readers relate the biblical idea of sin and punishment to their local situation so that the text has power on the readers.

9.2.3. Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group C

In the Group C, the group members have focused on several similes and metaphors such as the beautiful sheep, the leopard, the Ethiopian, and the female metaphors. Their focalization is mainly on biblical punishment and gender issues. For instance, a reader, who is the only one female member in this group, points out the 'discriminated female images' in vv 21, 22, 26, and 27 (NIV) and argues against the usage of women as the object of God's punishment. She says that all the female images in the text are negatively portrayed. Every evil aspect in the text is compared to the woman. The people of Judah are personified as a woman; the people's pain is described as the pain of a woman in child birth; the sins of the people are mentioned as the sins of the woman; the people's unfaithfulness is portrayed as the harlotry of the woman so that the punishment is to be given by disrobing her clothes and lifting up her skirts for humiliation. Therefore, she argues that the text has suppressed women and the text should be seen as discriminating against women.

However, the above focalization is not favored by the rest of the group members, who are male readers, who do not see the text as discrimination against women. For example, a reader interprets the text that the personification of the people as a woman is not to discriminate against women but to demonstrate the physical weaknesses of the people in the time of Babylonian invasion. According to him, when the Babylonians invaded the city, the men were not strong as men but they were weak as women in terms of physical nature so that the invasion of the Babylonians was similar to that of sexual assault of the physically weak woman. The description of a woman in childbirth is also not intended to suppress women but to remind the pain of Eve in childbirth in the beginning of the book of Genesis. The pain and suffering of Eve in childbirth is the punishment of God so that the pain of the people in the Babylonian invasion is to be seen as the punishment of God to the people. Another male reader also does not view the text as a degradation of women. Since women are at risk of their lives in their labor pains, he thinks the text only draws an analogy between the suffering of the people and the woman in childbirth. In both cases, the two male readers do not discuss about the description of harlotry and disrobing of the female character of the text. Another male reader also understands that the utilization of the female imagery in the text is just the employment of the metaphors in an

⁵ According to the report of Myanmar Red Cross, the Tarlay earthquake affected 90 villages in Tarlay township and 20,000 people. 3,100 people lost their houses.

understandable way in the ancient world. In his reading of the text, he understands that the female metaphors and similes are used to describe the people's worship of other gods that are practiced on the hills and in the fields. Therefore, he does not think of the text as degradation of women so that he interprets the text as a trace of ancient culture. This outlook is related to his reading of the Good News Bible Translation (GNT) that reads Jer 13:27b "... He has seen you go after pagan gods on the hills and in the fields..." This translation does not mention anything about the harlotry of the woman; instead, the people's worship of pagan gods is described as a man's lusting. The personified man is portrayed as sinful. Jer 13:27c reads "... like a man lusting after his neighbor's wife or like a stallion after a mare." This standard translation is totally different from the other standard translations. The harlotry of the woman even becomes the man's lusting. Therefore, he sees no bias in the text; no gender discrimination in the text. As a result, his focalization becomes the relation between God's punishment and idol worshipping of the people. For him, the personification is not important but the importance is to see the people as people. Likewise, another male reader also does not think of the depiction of the female imagery as discrimination. He reads the Myanmar translation (Judson) which tones down the violence in v. 22. The Myanmar translation simply means that the clothes of the woman will be taken off and she will not wear footwear. There is no word 'skirts' nor 'sexual part of the woman' in Myanmar translation. Therefore, he interprets that God's punishment is to make the people slaves. It is because he relates this text with Lk 15:11-32 where the prodigal son received the robe on his body and sandals on his feet when he returned back to his father. He understands disrobing and putting off sandals as the status of slave. Therefore, he interprets Jer 13:22 as the opposite of Lk 15:11-32, meaning that the people are about to be punished by means of slavery but not by means of sexual abuse. In any case, he does not compare the Myanmar translation with other translations.

In contrast with her fellow group members, the female reader uses NIV where she finds the words 'skirts' in vv. 22, and 27 which is absent in the Myanmar translation and other English translations like GNT that read simply 'clothes.' Therefore, she persistently argues that different translations could lead to different interpretations. She insists that the pulling up the woman's skirts over her face and mistreating her body are indeed a form of degrading women the text describes. Finally, the group members agree to disagree with each other in their interpretations. Why do male readers disagree with the female reader? Is that because of the interaction between the two sexes? It seems to me that is not because of the interaction between the two sexes; rather, it is because of the readers' different perspective. In my whole empirical research, there is no proof that women are more prone to interpret the text as Exum does than men because some men also interpret like Exum. It is evident in Group D where a male argues against the sexual abuse of the woman in the text. I myself also have interpreted the text as Exum does. In other groups also, the interaction between the two sexes does not necessarily lead the readers to disagreement.

In sum, in the case of Group C, the female participant has read the text through the eyes of a woman and focalized God's punishment and gender discrimination. She thoroughly explores the portraits of female images as a victim, sinful, and as a prostitute, so that she argues against the discrimination of woman. However, the rest of the group members (males) do not see the text as a source of humiliation against women. There are two potential reasons for this case. The first reason is that the focus of some readers does not cover the whole number of

verses; they just discuss the image of a woman in childbirth. The second reason is that the different Bible translations lead the readers to different interpretations. Their consulted translations dominate them. Some translations tone down the violence; some translations switch the perspectives. Although some consulted translations mention the disrobing of “the skirts” and mistreat on the “barefoot,” the male readers ignore them in their reading. The different perspectives between the male and female readers were not settled. The group members agreed to disagree with each other in this case. This is important and shows how frequently dominant reading or cultural traditions obscure what the text says and how readers stick to what they already were convinced of. The details of the text are not taken into account. Nevertheless, the two characters, God and the personified woman Jerusalem, are still the central characters in their reading process. It is evident that the readers have observed the embedded gender idea in the text. Interestingly, the female group member identifies with the male God whereas the males identify with the female character in their reading process. The personal identifications will be discussed in the section of the analysis of the re-contextualization of the text.

9.2.4. Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group D

In the Group D, all readers are male. The main focus of the Group D is also female imagery. The group members reflected on the female imagery from the negative and positive perspectives.

On the one hand, from the negative point of view, the group members see the portrait of female imagery as the degradation of the woman because God’s punishment is directed too much towards the inferior woman. The group members see the woman as the inferior one because most women in the Old Testament are even not counted in the list. This culturally diminished woman, whether or not she is taken as a metaphor, is disrobed; her skirts are torn off; her skirts are pulled over her face and her shame is exposed. In addition, the woman is compared with a prostitute and is charged as a prostitute in the text. Adultery and prostitution in the Old Testament are to be found as crimes so that the prostitute may be put to death. Here in the text, the unfaithfulness of the people is portrayed as the prostitution of the personified woman so that the woman is to be put to death. Therefore, the group members see that God’s punishment is too much for the woman and they interpret the text as degradation of woman.

On the other hand, the group members reflected on the text from a positive perspective. The exclamation mark ‘O Jerusalem!’ in the last verse (v. 27) indicates God’s everlasting love of the personified woman. The group members imagine that God will not utter such a compassionate word if he really has the intention of degradation against the woman. Therefore, the group members assume that God does not degrade the woman; rather, God is promoting the role of the woman because God still loves the woman and the woman is not put to death, that is an exemption from the Old Testament law. The sentence of the punishment is reduced. Moreover, the whole nation is personified as a woman so that the woman plays a role in the text that is not an inferior role but the significant role. In any case, the text has double meanings for the group members. The group members also realize the righteousness of God, the jealousy of God, and the love of God. They see God as the righteous One because God punishes the people only if the people do not listen to his warning. They see God as the jealous One because God punishes the people only if they follow after other gods. The group members realize that these jealousy and punishment are because of the love of God for his people.

In short, this group pays attention to the female imagery. The group criticizes the portrait of female imagery as degradation against women. Nevertheless, they do not try to reject the text; rather, they discover the love of God in their interpretation of the portrait of female imagery.

Summary

It is observed that none of the readers sees the text as prophetic pornography. They read the text as the message of God for them. Even at times of dealing with the description of naked woman Jerusalem, they do not try to reject the text as so-called prophetic pornography. Some readers who are more critical to the text see sexual description and gender inequality. In any case, the readers do not reject the text; rather, they try to find out a message for them as the instruction from God. It is discovered that there is no obstacle for Myanmar readers to identify with biblical characters when they read the text. As it has been shown above, female readers willingly identify with the male God and male readers willing identify with a female character. The impact of the reading process is discovered in some groups. For instance, the ancient text about gender imbalance is the point to begin social transformation in the readers' social context.

The members of Group A use the contextual situation of drunkenness, *nat* worshipping, and swearing obscene words to unlock the meaning of sin and punishment. In their interpretation process, they read the text through their spiritual eyes. Therefore, their reading methodology can be called as a 'spiritual emphasis reading' perspective. In their reading, the imagery of sexual parts has been placed at the stage of metaphor so that they do not see the text as 'pornography.' There is no gender problem in their interpretation of the text. The female readers freely identify with the male character God in the text.

In the case of Group B, a history of Christian mission, Chin philosophy of life, contextual cultural and socioeconomic situations are used to unlock the meaning of gender, iniquity, and punishment in their interpretation process. Unlike their partner group, Group B detected gender inequality in the text. The female readers critique the text and interpret the text as a trace of the ancient culture. Nevertheless, they do not reject the text.

In the Group C and D, the readers use elements of gender issues to unlock the meaning of the text. The female imagery in the text has double meaning in both groups. Some Bible translations which are applied in their interpretation process also offer many possible meanings. Some translations tone down the sexual description, and one translation even totally changes the gender of the character in the text. Therefore, the groups interpret the female imagery on the one hand as promoting the degradation of women and on the other hand as promoting the liberation of women.

9.2.5. Analysis of Exegetical Aspects of the Reading Process

In this section, I will continue to analyze exegetical aspects of the reading process because I want to find out how the Myanmar ordinary readers explain the text.

Since all the groups in this Bible reading project are encouraged to read the text spontaneously, the groups do not discuss what methods are to be used in their interpretation process. Each group explains the text in different ways. Therefore, it is discovered that the readers use more than one method to explain the text. Some pay more attention to the world

behind the text, others more to the text itself, and others more to the relationship between the text and their lives.

To begin with, Groups A and B pay more attention to the relationship between the text and their lives as we have seen above. For instance, Group A used their contextual experiences such as drunkenness, *nat* worshipping, and swearing obscene words. In addition, Group A read the text through ‘spiritual eyes.’ Group A hardly used other interpretive instruments than their own context. In any case, Group A had used elements of Deuteronomistic theology in their spiritual and existential reading. Group B also used their tradition and context to explain the text but more than that, Group B also used a feminist reading perspective in their interpretation of the text. As a consequence, they could discover the description of sexual abuse and gender inequality.

In the case of the Groups C and D, the methods can be defined as scientific and exegetical. To what extent and in which manner were ‘exegetical’ or scientific tools used by Group C and D? This analysis will be made regarding the group’s interpretation of the focus question: Does the text refer to certain conflicts?

In the case of Group C, the pattern of the historical-critical method is detected although the group does not deliberately mention the methods to be used in their reading process. For instance, the group looks at the world behind the text through the window of the “conflict” to which the text refers. First, they clarify the “conflict” as the conflict among the people of Judah (Jer 13:19, 27) who are disobedient to God and the God (Jer 13:27) who is sharply scolding those disobedient people. Then, the group pays attention to the geographical location of Judah (v. 19) and Jerusalem (v. 27). Therefore, the group explains that the text could even refer to another conflict between the people of Judah and the Babylonians since the Babylonian invaders had carried away the people of Judah (‘exile’ in v. 19). Finally, the group sets 586 BCE as the possible date of the text when Judah fell in the hands of the Babylonians.

Another explanation from the historical perspective is found in the group. For instance, some members link this Jeremianic text with 2 Kgs 20:12ff to trace the background information about why the people of Judah were carried away to Babylon. In the story of 2 Kgs 20:12ff, Hezekiah showed the Babylonians all his treasures that would be eventually carried away to Babylon along with the royal family members as it was predicted by Isaiah. The historical time frames of Jer 13:20-27 and 2 Kgs 20:12ff are totally different but the point is their attention to the world behind the text, which serves to explain why the political conflict between the people of Judah and the Babylonians eventually broke out.

Another example of the group’s historical interest is also discovered. Some group members consider that the conflict is between God and the people of Judah because of their sin committed against God. These readers first pay attention to the world behind the text by looking at the characters of the kings of Judah who are contemporary with Jeremiah such as Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Then they see Josiah as the good king who led the religious reformation while the successors are seen as the evil who committed socio-religious sins such as oppression, idolatry, apostasy, and disloyalty. Therefore, these readers explain the judgment of God as the consequence of the conflict between God and his people.

In the above analysis, it is observed that the group members try to explain the text’s original meaning in its original historical context. They examine the text’s historical origins such as the time and the geographical location in which the text was created. In addition, they

explore the names of the kings for their interpretation of the text. At one point, a reader tries to trace the origin of the conflict in another biblical source (2 Kgs 20:12ff) which is a part of the conclusion of Deuteronomistic history (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and the theological explanation for the destruction of the Jewish kingdom by Babylon in 586 BCE. In any case, from the exegetical perspective, the method that the group used can be called the historical-critical method.

In the case of the Group D, the group members do not pay much attention to the world behind the text, although they have paid a little attention to those people who are coming from the north (v. 20) whom the group members identify as the 'Babylonians.' The group does not continue their discussion on the coming of the Babylonians. The group also does not pay attention to the sociopolitical background situation of the conflict that the text refers to. Nevertheless, throughout their interpretation process, the group members pay more attention to the text than to the world behind the text. Their method may be called a literary critical reading method. Unlike their partner group, Group D pays attention to the characters in the text and the characters' roles in the text. For instance, in addressing the question as to whether the text refers to certain conflicts, the group pays attention to God and the people in the text. They explain that the conflict broke out between God and the people because of the infidelities of the people. The group explains that this is the idea of monotheism which means how God hates infidelities and how God is faithful to the people. These readers continue to observe the infidelities of the people so that they come to see the role of the personified woman in the text. The personified woman is presented as a prostitute to be punished. In their observation, they pay attention to the woman's permanent unwillingness to do good as if the skin color of the Ethiopian and the spots of the leopard cannot be changed. Therefore, the readers see this portrait as the gender bias or gender inequality in the text. The sinful people is portrayed as a woman. Since the group understands that the personified woman not only represents the women but also the men in Jerusalem, the group members attempt to recover the humiliation of the personified woman. How do they recover this degraded female imagery? The group compares Jer 13:20-27 with Psa. 137 because the group considers these texts as reflecting the situations of the exiles that encompass both men and women. The humiliation in the text is equated with the humiliation by the Babylonian captivity and exile. The degraded personified woman is recovered by viewing her as the collective people of Jerusalem. In this analysis, the method of the Group D may be called literary analysis and an example of feminist approach. From their interpretive perspectives, the group members explore the characters and recover the humiliated female character.

Summary

In the above analysis, a correlation between contextual problems that are used to interpret the text and corresponding methods was discovered. The groups interpret the text by using both existential interpretation and scientific interpretation methods such as historical-critical, literary analysis, and feminist exegesis. Especially in Group A, the readers used 'spiritual emphasis reading' and existential reading so that their contextual problems such as drunkenness, *nat* worshipping, and swearing obscene words become tools for the interpretation of loyalty and disloyalty in God. This method helped them to discover the presence of elements of the Deuteronomistic theology. Other issues such as tradition of revenge, local sexual

immorality, and earthquake used by Group B are correlated with existential interpretation method. With the aid of feminist criticism, Group B and C dealt with the sexual abuse so that the text becomes the starting point for their feminist interpretation. In addition, Group C used the historical critical method so that they can acquire background information about people, geographical location, time, social and political situation. Group D used both literary analysis and feminist perspective methods so that these methods helped them discover not only the idea of monotheism in the text but also the idea of how to recover the degraded woman in the text and in the social context.

9.3. Analysis of Re-contextualization

In this section, I will analyze the groups' re-contextualization of the text to find out how the text gets new references and to determine the praxeological effect of the reading exercise. This analysis will explain why the so-called prophetic pornography is not hopelessly negative and why Myanmar readers do not reject the text. In addition, one may better understand the bigger question of why a female reader can identify with the male character in the text, and vice versa.

In this section, I will examine which characters or actions readers especially focus on in the process of actualization. My research questions for this section are as follows. What characters do readers identify with? How does the text get a new context, a new reference? How, by means of what strategy, is the text appropriated? Does the reading become a place to practice developing a new praxis, a new project?

In the following analysis, the praxeological effect will be determined by means of the power of the text. If the text has power on the reader, it will be considered as the praxeological effect. Any significant new insights perceived from the reading, any personal commitment to do something in the reader's own life, and any community movement empowered by the reading will be defined as the praxeological effect of the text.⁶

9.3.1. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group A

In the process of appropriation of the text or re-contextualization of the text,⁷ all the group members, both males and female readers of the Group A, focus on God. There are two females and two males in the group but their gender difference does not prevent them from identifying with God because their focus is on God's righteousness, justice, and mercy.

In reading 'with' God, they see the righteousness, justice, and mercy of God as the components of the central message of the text. They assert that God's punishment is fair and just because God has already stipulated what is blessing and what is cursing when He elected the people as His own and brought them out of Egypt. The group says that "God acts as he speaks. God does not punish the people without giving the Mosaic laws. People are punished

⁶ De Wit, 'Codes and Coding', 417. By 'praxeological,' De Wit means actions, new behavior, practices, projects that are a sequel of the interpretation process. New insights in the meaning, the message or structure of the text are more hermeneutically determined and do not necessarily represent the transition from 'text to action.' Those new insights lie more on the level of transformation of the text.

⁷ Re-contextualization has to do with new domains of references and not necessarily with new actions, and appropriation lies more on the field of making the text one's own and act correspondingly in accordance to what the reader sees the text asks from him/her in terms of introspection, change, and action.

because they violate the law of God.” The group members continue to affirm their assertion that God is merciful because the punishment is not the final judgment. There is salvation beyond the judgment. The people of Jerusalem could repent and return to God for their salvation. They said that God’s mercy was everlasting as Jer 13:27 mentions “Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you remain unclean?” According to the group, this verse informs them that God is still waiting for the return of His people.

In their reading of the text with God, the text now gets new references. God becomes the model for how the group members themselves act. The group members become the agents of God and the old context of the text is replaced by the group members’ respective contexts. Their motivation for the interaction with the text is affective - they wish to help their society. They wish to improve their society.⁸ From their reading of God’s righteousness, justice, and mercy, they appropriate the text through the actions of praying and teaching of God’s righteousness, justice, and mercy. This strategy of appropriation of the text could be called the model of parallelism of terms or tracing paper model.⁹ The readers imitate what God has done in the text. The ‘they of the text’ becomes ‘the we in the current context.’ The praxeological effect of the reading exercise is detected. The text empowers them to be engaged in various kinds of mission works. The significant correlations between reading the text and transformation can be found in the group as follows.

In this group, the members of the group are from Kachin, Kayin, and Wa ethnic groups. They come from Shan State, Kayah State, Rakhaing State, and Yangon Regions. Except one reader who belongs to the Church of Christ, all the group members belong to the Baptist denomination. One of the group member said that he had been trying to find a job for six years but he remained unemployed as well as many other Myanmar graduates. In this situation, this reader realized that he was called by God. He wants to be equipped with the words of God. In this Bible reading process, he was touched by God’s righteousness, justice, and mercy. The text has led him to new insight; The text invited him to focus on the Kachin-Myanmar war that had killed many civilians and destroyed dozens of local houses and churches. This reader reassessed this war as fighting for justice. Nevertheless, in the midst of the war, he commits that he cannot do anything except pray to God with endurance. Therefore, in his case, his action of praying is seen as the evidence of the correlation between reading the text and transformation.

In the case of another reader in this group, a reader constructed a parallel between the people of Judah and the people of his church in Maw Chi mines in terms of sin, i.e., drinking alcohol. It is noteworthy that in most Myanmar Baptist churches, drinking alcohol is understood as sin. This reader was aware of his local people’s priority on making money and drinking alcohol so that he saw them as the problems in his Church. The text stimulates him to reassess the spiritual and physical weaknesses of his Church. In addition, his local people were also suffering from the social and environmental impacts of the mining of the companies in terms of health problems caused by tin mining, pollution from mining waste, impure drinking water, deforestation, landslides, damage of roads, difficulty of transportation, insecurity for armed forces of both the government and rebel groups, and loss of opportunity of native ethnic people.

⁸ De Wit, “Codes and Coding,” 411.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 417.

Therefore, he was planning to serve his mother Church again. He will teach his Church about God's righteousness, justice, and mercy.

In the case of another reader, the text empowers her to see the social cultural situation of her Wa context. She was concerned about the limited access for education in her mountainous areas. She said that there were not many educated Wa people. In the past, Wa people had practiced headhunting. She said that "the Wa people were known as aggressive and violent people." In addition, she said that some Wa Christians were still tempted to practice their traditional *nat* worshipping which was considered as apostasy. Therefore, she said "I felt myself I have responsibility to change these things by the power of God." As God is concerned about the uncleanness of his people, she is concerned about uncleanness and purification of her people. She is planning to work in the Wa Church.

In the case of another reader, the compassionate expression in the last phrase of the text: "Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you remain unclean?" empowers her to see God's love beyond the judgment. She says God is merciful so that God is still concerned about his people beyond the judgment. Thus she says the people need to repent and to return to God. In her mission field in the Yangon slum area, the squatters always use obscene language, that is prohibited in their Church tradition, even when they converted to Christianity. In the Myanmar Christians' norm, people think swearing rude words is blasphemous. Therefore, she has decided to evangelize and civilize the community to repent and return to God.

In sum, in their re-contextualization of the text, the readers identify with the character God and they imitate God. They want to become the agents of God. The weaknesses of the people in the text become the weaknesses of their own people. Therefore, the text empowers them to implement the justice and mercy of God. They appropriate the text by tracing God's righteousness, justice, and mercy. In this process of recontextualizing the text, there is place for many foci and interests. What they share is the desire to transform Myanmar's context. So the text leads, in a way, to shared agency. The analogies readers create may differ but the main message of the text for all is that of transformation. Hermeneutically speaking, we can say that the text wants to be applied to new situations, not seen by the author. Therefore, the effect of the text is evident in this group. Although the personal commitments of the group members for their mission field could be seen as the intentional stage in the praxeological effect of the text, the immediate action of praying for the better situation in Myanmar in the midst of war can be seen as a kind of praxeological effect of the text. It is remarkable that both males and females have identified with God. This empirical data shows that a female reader can identify with the male God in the text, which is what feminist scholars have previously thought impossible. How and to what extent this conclusion should be seen as overcoming gender differences and liberative vis a vis a feminist approach? At this point, it is shown that the readers' way of 'spiritual emphasis reading' can help the readers to overcome the barrier of gender difference between the biblical characters and the readers.

9.3.2. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group B

In the Group B's appropriation of the text too, the text grows with its new references; the people of Jerusalem and the God in the text get new references in the group's reading exercise. Therefore, the text gets more than one reference.

To illustrate this, a reader said that the text directly taught him to avoid all evil and to cultivate good because he understood that God could judge those people of Jerusalem who committed sin. This reader reads the text with the original audience of the text. Since the text empowers him to work for social transformation, this reading becomes a place to practice a new praxis. For instance, women in his culture have to work more than men. This is a culturally defined gender construction in his culture background. In this culture system, men do not gather firewood for cooking but women have to do this work because the gender construction defines the role of male and female in that way. If a man gathers the firewood, he will be supposed to be abnormal. In addition to this work of gathering firewood, women also have to cook for the family, wash clothes, and feed their babies if they are mothers. Furthermore, women have to work together with men in the field since their main vocational job is hill-side cultivation. When these farmers return home, women will carry the firewood while men do not carry any heavy things. The reader considers this culturally defined gender inequality as a sin; sin against the will of God who could judge those people who would commit sin. The culturally defined gender inequality can end up with God's judgment. Therefore, the reader makes a vow to educate his people to abolish gender inequality, to change the unequal gender construction in his context, and to practice gender equality. In relating his context and that of the text, the reader has new insight that some aspects of a culture are to be left out while some aspects of culture will be carried on. The result of his re-contextualization of the text is to re-construct the gender equality between male and female in his culture. The text gets a new context and a new reference. The text is no longer the judgment of God; it becomes the source of praxeology in the context of the reader. The effect of the text in this reader is just the opposite of what feminist readers assume it to be. The text does not lead this reader to affirm gender inequality, but just the opposite: strive for more gender balance.

Another female reader who also focuses on sin and judgment also understands disobedience and judgment as the central message of the text. She said "I got the lesson to listen to the words of God and to worship only God in my life." The text gives her a lesson to obey the words of God and to be faithful to God. The old reference has been replaced by a new reference. The re-contextualization of the text in her personal life for her own spiritual development is seen as the evidence of the correlation between reading the text and social transformation. The social transformation here does not mean involvement in social and political movements but it means development in her individual spirituality. Her reading becomes a place to renew her spirituality.

Within the group, sin and judgment are discovered as focal points for for the group dynamics. In fact, in another case, a reader focuses on the punishment of the people of Jerusalem. He said "I believe that I will be punished if I forget God in my life." The reader identifies with the sinners in the text. The text has power on the reader's own life. This reader grew up in a culture where people believe that things happen because of something. Through this world view, the reader understands that the punishment of God is because of the sin of the people. This reading empowers him to make an immediate decision to cultivate the good without forgetting God. The text is re-contextualized in his individual life by means of the tracing paper model, the sin and punishment. The old reference becomes contemporaneous with the reader. The people of Jerusalem in the text become the current reader himself. According to his evaluation, the faith of his contemporary people is not as strong as that of their ancestors

who believed in the Christian God as their true God. Their forefathers clung to God even when facing a life threatened by harmful spirits, the *nats*. In contrast, his tribal fellowmen do not cling to God as their ancestors did. Therefore, the new praxis of his reading is to lead the youths in his Church as a theologian and a musician.

Another reader also focuses on God who punishes the people of Jerusalem because of their continuing idolatry, unwillingness to listen to the words of God and unwillingness to repent. In her reading, the reader identifies with God because her people is also unwilling to repent from sexual immorality. She lives at the border between Myanmar and Thailand where many people do not underline the importance of further education; most people prioritize making money, and many girls are involved in the sex trade. She had been working with NGOs for two years to stop HIV and sex trade but it was not successful because of the individuals' reluctance to transform their social situation. Therefore, she said that her town was full of evil like in Jerusalem. She is disappointed by this unchangeable sexual immorality. From her reading, she empathizes with God. She imagines that God might feel like her for his own people. In this reading, the text gets a new reference. It is also noteworthy that this female reader willingly identifies with God.

In sum, the text gets new contexts and new references. The character of the male God is replaced by the female reader; the personified woman Jerusalem is replaced by the male reader; the people of Jerusalem are replaced by the male and female readers. The text has power on each reader. To some readers, it directly speaks and lets the readers make immediate decisions for social transformation. For instance, the text helps a reader to develop her individual spirituality. In the process of the re-contextualization of the text, the group appropriates the text by means of tracing paper model and typological model.

9.3.3. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group C

Group C consists of one female reader and four male readers. In their reading process, the female reader identifies with the male character God whereas all the male readers identify with the female character woman Jerusalem. The group appropriates the text by means of the tracing paper model. In other words, the group appropriates the text by means of model of the parallelism of terms.

To begin with, the female reader identifies with God because she sympathizes with God who is betrayed by his loved one. She identifies with God and focuses on the historical relationship between God and the people of Jerusalem. According to her reading, God loves the people and rescues them out of Egypt. God designates the people as his own. However, the people betrayed God. Therefore, she sympathizes with God. She could also understand why God punishes the people violently. In her experience, she was also betrayed by her friend. For example, her friend borrowed her lecture notes but did not return them to her until their examination. Her friend misused her friendliness and friendship. Therefore, the reader empathizes with the feelings of God who is betrayed by his chosen people. In this case, it is evident that the gender difference between God and herself does not cause any difficulty to her to be in solidarity with God. According to her, this reading inspires her not to misuse the love of God.

In the case of a male reader, he reads with the Judeans who have forgotten God and worshipped other gods. He said that the text directly spoke to him not to forget God. In other

words, the punishment in the story reminds him not to be arrogant like the Judeans. The reader appropriated the Judeans into his own life. According to him, he sometimes ignores God like the people of Jerusalem. Therefore, he said that Jer 13:27 should be read frequently because it could figuratively serve as the 'rod.' The rod is used by most Myanmar parents in punishing/beating children. This would be strange for Westerners, but "corporal punishment" is common in Myanmar. In Myanmar, most parents beat their children when they discipline them at home. Most teachers in schools also beat their students when they discipline them. Unlike what happens in Myanmar, corporal punishment is unlawful in many countries including the Netherlands. In any case, it is how a Myanmar reader appropriates the text in his own life. The power of the text is detected as the reader said that the text warned him not to commit any sins; it directly spoke to him not to forget God.

Another male reader also identifies with the personified woman Jerusalem. In his reading the text, he also reads the preceding and following texts so that he sees the personified woman Jerusalem as a group of people comprising the king, the queen mother, the masters, the nobles, the servants, the priests, the prophets, and all other ordinary citizens. In such variety of the category of the people, he first identified with the servants as he had worked in civil service for 15 years. Then he identified with the priests/prophets as he worked as a lecturer in Kachin Theological College Kutkai. Finally, he also identified with the ordinary people because he worked as a mine worker in the Hpakant jade mines. Especially, during his career in the civil service, bribery was the main corruption in the society. In terms of the religious ministry, he sees himself as imperfect. In the identification with ordinary people, he asks himself whether he lives according to the will of God or not. Eventually, his identification is mostly related to the imperfection of the people. Therefore, the power of the text is discovered. The text lets him see his own imperfection. This re-contextualization strategy can be called an allegorical model.

Like the above reader, another male reader also said that the text let him remember his imperfection. Since he considers himself as a sinner, he identifies with the female personified Judeans. In addition, he said that the text also directly spoke to his own ethnic people because a half of his fellow Chin people from the Chin State have been scattered around the world as found in Jer 13:24. He sees this scattering as the judgment of God because of their weaknesses such as rivalry and hatred. To avoid this possible judgment, the immediate requirement in his community is to start a spiritual reformation. This prophetic vision or new insight can be seen as a new praxis resulting from the reading exercise.

Another reader also identifies with the Judeans, and he focuses on the sin of the Judeans because he relates the text with his own situation. According to him, most of his fellow Kachin Christians in his social context deliberately commit punishable sins. He said that God had given opportunity to live in the Kachin land, which was full of natural resources like gold and jade, the land of agricultural richness and of good soil; but the Kachin were proud of their land and arrogant. According to this reader, even many Kachin Independence Army personnel are corrupted by means of drugs, money, and sex until before the last Kachin-Myanmar war. He criticizes that many Kachins have not followed the religious teachings and have forgotten God who has given the land to the Kachin. As a result, many young generations become drug users, opium addicts, alcoholics, and are uneducated. He said that "By reading the text, I get a lesson that we must leave our secular desire and embrace spiritual aspects."

In sum, the above analysis offers us some important hermeneutical conclusions. First, the sex of the reader does not restrain the reader from personal identification. As is seen in the above analysis, a male (man) could identify with the female (woman) character in the text, and vice versa. To read with the biblical character, the reader does not have to be of the same sex as the biblical character. What is important in the process of focalization and re-contextualization of the text is the reader's personal feelings or experiences. To identify with the character in the text, the reader may either sympathize with the character or have similar experiences in terms of personal imperfection, for example. Therefore, it is discovered that the mechanism for personal identification is the reader's social reality such as life experiences, personal commitments, and personal free will for the social transformation. It is observed that the text gets new references and new contexts in the group's reading exercise. The text is appropriated by the readers by means of either the tracing paper model or the allegorical model. Since the readers get some new insights like spiritual commitment, one can say that the text has power to speak to its readers. Therefore, it can be said that there is a praxeological effect in the group's reading exercises.

9.3.4. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group D

In Group D, the group members identify with the woman Jerusalem, with the Ethiopian, and with the prophet respectively. How, by means of what strategy, is the text appropriated? In their reading process, they first focus on the sinful woman Jerusalem and identify with her even though the readers are all male. They identify with the woman Jerusalem because they sympathize with the woman who was not given a chance, within the context of Jer 13:20-27, to respond to the prophetic words of judgment. Therefore, the group argues that the woman should have a chance to speak. Even though she is sinful, she should have been given a chance to repent; nevertheless, the woman does not have that chance in the text. Therefore, a group member felt pity for her and said that if he was given a chance to respond to the prophetic words of Judgment, he would ask some questions to the prophet/God : "It is true that I am sinful but will you merely punish me? Will you not give me a chance to rectify myself?" This reader argues that he can accept the punishment for the sin but he also expects God's instruction for rectification in a new way. This is how a reader deals with the text in the appropriation process. The reader had worked at a Christian orphanage where he had to oversee the education of the children. He was used to punish the children when they did not work hard in their study. But now when he reads the text along with the personified woman Jerusalem, he considers that the punishment for not hard working is not the only way of treatment for children's development. Therefore, he argues that one has to find out other possible ways to develop the children's education. This reading exercise empowers the group to find out new proper strategies for helping the orphans. In this appropriation process, the personified woman Jerusalem is replaced by the Myanmar ordinary male readers. The reading becomes a place to find out proper strategies for nurturing the students.

The group then focuses on the Ethiopian and identifies with him because of the Ethiopian's skin. The group sees the description of the skin color of the Ethiopian as a negative portrayal. Therefore, they approach the text with the question as they have done above. They raise questions: Why does God create us/the Ethiopian with this skin color? But they do not find out the solution for this problem. In this appropriation process, the text empowers them to

identify with the Ethiopian because they think that the life of the sinless Ethiopian is better than that of sinful Jerusalem. The text gets a new reference and a new context.

Then, the group continues to focus on the prophet and identifies with him because they sympathize with the prophet who serves as the mediator between God and the people. On the one hand, the prophet has to utter the words of God. On the other hand, the people hate him because of the words of the truth. The position of the prophet between the people and the truth is uneasy for ordinary people as most people do not want to hear the words of criticism even though the criticism is the truth. In this reading, the text empowers the group to make a good choice between what they have to do and what they want to do.

In sum, in this process of appropriation of the text, the personal identifications between the readers and the character in the text are mainly related to the reader's empathy and emotional responsiveness. The readers have identified with the woman Jerusalem, with the Ethiopian, and with the prophet. The text gets new readers and new contexts. The text has stimulated the readers to be self-critical so that it can be called a praxeological effect of the reading exercise.

9.4. Analysis of Exchange of Perspectives

In this section, I will analyze the interactions between the paired groups because I want to find out how the groups exchange their perspectives and how this intertribal reading practice helps the growth of the groups' hermeneutical process, if any. This study will also explain how in-depth re-reading of the text through an intertribal hermeneutics contributes to the articulation of an Myanmar hermeneutics at the hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological levels. To reach my goal, I will analyze four main aspects of the interaction such as the interaction with the partner group's profile as an contextually determined interpretive community, the attitude toward the partner group, the hermeneutic-exegetical aspect of the interaction, and the effects of the interaction.

9.4.1. Analysis of Interaction with the Partner's Profile

In this analysis, I will analyze the group's acquirement of knowledge of the context of the partner group. The aim of this analysis is to measure what knowledge a group acquired about the partner group, an element which is extremely important in reading the partner group's report through their eyes. In the next section (9.4.2), I will show how this 'acquiring knowledge' is related to the very important element of motivation for successful exchange. In this section, my research questions are: Does the group pay attention to the composition of the partner group? Does the group acquire knowledge of the context of the partner group? Is there any interest in the profile of the partner group? Do certain issues of the partner group stand out?

9.4.1.1. Analysis of Interaction between Groups A and B

In their interaction with the partner group's profile, Group A first acquired knowledge of the worldview of the Chin people that says that good posterity can come only from good ancestors. This outlook also implies that good children cannot come from a wicked family. However, this worldview is not favored by Group A. They partially agreed with this outlook as they compared it with Jer 31:29-30: - "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." However, Group A disfavored this outlook for two reasons. First, sociologically, they have seen that certain good persons descended from wicked parents. The

social setting of people can form people to be good persons. Second, theologically, human beings can change as the Group itself has seen in their re-contextualization of Jer 13:27 (See above 9.3.1) where the group asserts that God is merciful so that the punishment is not the final judgment and the people can repent and return to God for their salvation. It is noticed that the outlook of Group A is fully related to their religious conviction that God can act; God can help; God can change everything.

Second, in their interaction with their partner group, the issue of child-prostitution in Tarlay also stands out. In Myanmar, prostitution is illegal. Since a member of Group A also had worked in that area, she sympathized with the partner group. According to her, the local people believe that they are under the cursing of Thai people because Myanmar King Bayinnaung (1551-1581) had destroyed their city and carried people into captivity. This cursing pronounced that ‘every Myanmar girl be spoiled by Thai people.’ Since the Myanmar local people in that Thai-Myanmar border area believe in this alleged curse, the local people may run fast to make money before they die in their short life span. In dealing with this partner group’s social situation, Group A recommended five possible ways to help improve these social problems. First, the mindset of the local people has to be changed. Second, a good social atmosphere has to be created for the children who are now used to see prostitution in their surroundings. Third, social care has to keep up. Fourth, the government has to take care of this social problem. Fifth, evangelization and Bible teaching have to be imparted. Group A members believe that the biblical teaching of repentance will liberate the local people who are influenced by the ideology of cursing. They believe that God can change the mindset of the local people although their partner group does not see the possibility of changing the attitude of the local people.

In the case of Group B, they first paid attention to the affective motivation of the partner group; each of the partner group members wants to help their churches because of the spiritual weakness of their churches. Then the Group B acquired knowledge of the experience of suffering of the partner group. Group B especially paid attention to the situation of the politico-socioeconomic problems of their partner group. In this interaction, the Group B gets to know that many Myanmar graduates end up with working in non-professional jobs in Myanmar and in the neighboring countries. In addition, Group B acquires knowledge of the contextual politico-socioeconomic situation of the Maw Chi mines where the local people are suffering from the social and environmental impacts of the mining of the greedy companies (Cf. Section 9.1.3).

In the above analysis, both groups paid attention to the group composition and acquired knowledge of the partner group’s social setting.

9.4.1.2. Analysis of Interaction between Group C and D

In the case of Group C, the Group paid attention to the social settings of each of their partner group members. Group C learned about each member’s sex, denomination, and ethnicity. Then, Group C acquired knowledge of the sociopolitical and economic situation of the partner group, whose members came from different Christian denominations, and whose problems were ethnic discrimination, corruption of youths, migration, political restrictions and release, ethnic rights and nation building. The group assumed a causal relationship between the mixed character of people and money oriented society. Group C is interested in a social context of their partner group (Cf. Section 9.1.4.) because many people are not interested in religion

although there are more than 90 churches in that town. One of the members of Group C shares his personal experience about the situation of the local churches because he lives there. According to him, some rich people in some churches are powerful so that ordinary people are normally silent in the Church. Illegal drugs are available in that area. This social atmosphere has largely affected the youths and caused youth moral corruption. In addition, Group C became informed of the contextual situation of a member of their partner group who comes from Shan State and who belongs to Lahu who are under the influence of Shan Buddhists so that the situation is demanding Lahu literature to be developed for Lahu people. In addition, Group C learns that the Shan State is currently not a peaceful area because of the existence of the Shan State Army (SSA) and Myanmar Army side by side. Group C also acquired knowledge from their partner as it could be found in Section 9.1.4 of this chapter.

Group D also learns information about the group composition of their partner group. Then, the Group D learns that socioeconomic unbalance, church conflict, tribal conflict, leader crisis, and poppy cultivation are important issues of the partner group's context (Cf. Section 9.1.3). In addition, due to the influence of Myanmar Buddhist culture, many people enjoy the Myanmar Buddhist culture and have abandoned their own mother language. A Chinese no longer speaks Chinese and his Chinese Methodist Church no longer uses the Chinese language in the church services because Myanmar language has replaced Chinese. In this context, the Christians are found as the minority people.

The Group D also learns another social context of a member of their partner group in terms of population of Christianity, diversity, disunity, rivalry, hatred among people, poverty, social injustice, migration, and poppy cultivation. Many faith communities in this region need pastoral leaders but the Church does not have enough pastors to send there. The Group D learns that this situation is weakening a strong spirituality amongst Christian communities.

In short, both groups paid attention to the composition of the partner group and they acquire knowledge from the partner's context. Each group has interest in the profile of the partner group so that issues like religious conflict, political conflict, and ethnic conflict stand out in their interaction.

Summary

In sum, the above analysis made clear that all groups paid attention to the partner group's composition, gender, number, ethnicity, church background, geographical location, and socio-political economic situation. Group A is interested in Chin culture but they decline the partner's view of 'good generation can come only from good ancestors.' Group A also highlights the issue of child-prostitution in Tarlay. In this case, Group A exchanges the issue of child-prostitution with their five recommendations for solving the problem. Group B also acquired knowledge of their partner's situation of unemployment and ecological crisis. In the case of Group C, the group focused on situation of multicultural money oriented environment of Tamu area, ethnic discrimination in Chin State, and political situations of their partner group. Group D learns their partner group's socioeconomic unbalance, church conflict, tribal conflict, leader crisis, and poppy cultivation. Overall, it is observed that all groups are interested in their partner group's profile.

9.4.2. Analysis of Attitude towards the Partner Group

As it was mentioned above, in the next section, I will show how the ‘acquiring knowledge’ is related to the motivation for successful exchange. How was the information of the situation or context of a group received by its partner group? Were there signs of bewilderment, admiration, pity, solidarity, lack of knowledge, criticism, rejection, incomprehension? In other words, what attitude does the group assume towards its partner group: critical, openness to new information, vulnerable, tolerance of ambiguity, admiration?

In the case of Group A, the attitude of tolerance for ambiguity and a critical attitude towards the partner group are discovered but there was no learning process in their interaction. First, Group A is tolerant for the ambiguous interpretation of their partner group. In that interpretation, the personified woman Jerusalem is ambiguously mentioned either as the daughters of Zion or the personified woman Jerusalem. It was not clear to Group A whether it was mentioned about the female citizens of Jerusalem or all the citizens of Jerusalem. In any case, Group A finally assumed their partner group’s interpretation of the personified woman Jerusalem as the female citizens of Jerusalem. However, when Group A encountered the interpretation of the relationship between Hezekiah and the Babylonians as an ally (2 Kgs 20:12-19), Group A did not agree with its partner group because Group A itself understood the Babylonians as the scouts who came to spy upon the king of Judah. The Babylonians could have come to Hezekiah as allies but Group A did not see the delegates as true allies; rather, they are seen as spies. Group A confirmed its view by looking at Jer 13:20 where people from the north were the enemy of Judah in the time of Jeremiah. Therefore, Group A assumed the interpretation of their partner group was an incorrect interpretation of 2 Kgs 20:12-19. Group A’s attitude of tolerance for ambiguity shifted to the same critical attitude as the partner group. Exegetical discrepancies play a role: Group A does not appreciate their partner’s appropriation process.

In the case of Group B, direct expressions of admiration to their partner group, tolerance for ambiguity, vulnerability, openness to new information, and critical attitude toward the partner group are discovered. Group B is prepared to interact with the partner group. Although Group B assumes a critical attitude towards Group A, attitudes of ‘expression of admiration to the partner group’ and ‘vulnerability of one’s own group’ help them develop their search for meaning of the text in their interpretation process. First, the direct expression of admiration to the partner group and vulnerability of one’s own group are detected. The members of Group B were impressed by the reading report of Group A because it neatly categorized Group discussions under the relevant subtopics. By looking at the format of the reading report of the partner group, Group B revisited their own reading report and compared their reading report and that of their partner group. They learned that their interpretations of the text were not arranged systematically; rather, their reading report looked like a collection of their individual interpretations of the text that did not show up much group discussions as was the case in their partner group. In fact, within the group meeting, the members of Group B did not discuss much about the interpretation of its members. They mostly listened to the interpretation of each member and agreed on it. Therefore, they assumed that their partner group could have had more interaction within the group in the interpretation process. Therefore, Group B expressed direct admiration for /towards their partner group along with their own vulnerability by saying “The orderly organized reading report of our partner group lets us see our weakness.” In addition,

Group B was impressed by the group photo of their partner group which showed intimacy, unity, and happiness in studying the Bible. Furthermore, Group B did not see any disagreement or conflict within Group A. Therefore, Group B expresses its admiration to their partner group. Second, the vulnerability of Group B is detected. Group B exposed their inner selves to their partner and said that Group B themselves did not notice the aspects of righteousness, justice, and mercy of God in their reading so that such new perspectives were carried on in their exploration of the meaning of the text. In addition, Group B's tolerance for ambiguity is also detected. For instance, Group B said that they did not understand the interpretation of the partner group but they gradually comprehend the interpretation as they repeatedly read the reading report of the partner group. These attitudes develop the Group's acquiring of a new meaning of the text.

In the case of Group C, the group members practice a nonjudgmental and admiring attitude toward the partner group. For example, Group C does not judge their partners when group members discover that the partner group members have different opinions on the text; rather, they take for granted that the partner group members have different opinions on the text. In addition, Group C expresses its admiration to their partner group. For example, they said that their partner group can explain the text with beautiful examples.

In the case of Group D, direct expressions of admiration to their partner group, vulnerability, tolerance for ambiguity, openness to new information, and a critical attitude toward the partner group are discovered. Although Group D assumes a critical attitude towards its partner group, the admiration to their partner group helps them develop their quest of meaning of the text in the interpretation process. For example, in dealing with the profile of a member of the partner group who comes from a Buddhist dominant area, Group D expresses their admiration of the partner's faithfulness to God.

Summary

In sum, Group A has a critical attitude toward the partner group. There was no learning process in their interaction. In the case of Group B, the group has also a critical attitude toward their partner group but their direct expressions of admiration to their partner group, tolerance for ambiguity, vulnerability, and openness to new information help them to learn new aspects of righteousness, justice, and mercy of God from their partner group. In the above analysis, the direct expressions of admiration to their partner group, vulnerability, tolerance for ambiguity, and openness to new information are seen as the positive attitudes which are also found in both Group C and D. It is observed that such positive attitudes are an important condition for the learning process.

9.4.3. Analysis of Hermeneutic-exegetical Aspect of Interaction

In this section, I will search for the differences and similarities that the groups themselves discovered in method, focalization, identification patterns, appropriation, and re-contextualization of the partner group's reading experience. Consequently, I will study how the groups dealt with these similarities and differences.

In the case of Group A, they first discover Group B's interpretation method of exploration of the historical background of the text. For instance, they notice the exploration of the historical background of the text which traces up to the time of Hezekiah's reign (2 Kgs

20:12-19). By looking at this exploration of the historical background of the text, Group A realizes the need of consultation of commentaries in their own interpretation process.

Second, Group A discovers the difference in the partner group's concentration on text segments. According to Group A, the partner group pays too much attention to vv 22-26 while v 27 is out of their concentration. As a result, the central message for Group B becomes disobedience and judgment of God. There is no trace of mercy of God in the interpretation of Group B. In the view of Group A, this reading cannot provide any spiritual inspiration. Group A understands spiritual inspiration as the goodness of a merciful God whose love is everlasting. Therefore, in the reading of Group A, v 27 is the climax of the text where the mercy of God is to be found. According to v 27, God is expecting that the unclean people will return to God with repentance. As a result, Group A perceives God's mercy and goodness whereas Group B saw only God's judgment. In other words, Group A drew out the meaning of the reliability of God's salvation whereas Group B drew out the meaning of judgment. The difference froze the interaction between the two groups. The interaction is blocked. Group A does not consider the partner group's interpretation of disobedience and judgment as one of the prophetic messages.

Third, Group A discovers the feminist reading of the partner group as a difference in reading methodology. For instance, a critical feminist reading of the female imagery in their partner group is totally different from that of the group's own 'spiritual emphasis reading.' However, Group A does not agree with this criticism on the portrait of woman Jerusalem. The partner group has critiqued the ideology in the text that the woman character in the text is portrayed as a sinful woman who commits all kinds of evil. The partner group has argued that the ideology of degradation of women is at work although the woman is described in metaphorical language. In addition, the partner group argues that the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem can be described in other ways but it is described through the female imagery. This point is significant of the text for the partner group. As a consequence, they explained that the negative portrait of female imagery in the text degrades the role of women. Unlike this interpretation, Group A recovered the text by arguing that Jeremiah does not degrade the role of women because the purpose of the text is to give a message of the intensity of the wrath of God. Group A raises a question: what happened if the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem is described with male images instead of female imagery? Group A answers this question that if the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem is described with male images instead of female imagery, the present male readers will also argue like the partner group. This is why Group A reached their conclusion about the role of women.

In the case of Group B, they first discover the linking between heuristic keys and focalization as the similar interpretation method between their partner group and themselves. In fact, both Group A and B connect the relationship between the components presented in the text and the outlook that the readers have on it to their own contextual experiences to unlock the meaning of the text. This similar interpretation method leads Group B to an 'ecumenical honeymoon.'

I observe the reason why Myanmar ordinary readers link the meaning of the text with their own experience is because they want to find a possible and applicable biblical message from any biblical text. It is seen as part of their reading attitude. It is evident that even in dealing with this so-called prophetic pornography, the Myanmar readers in Group B and A try to figure out the meanings of sin and punishment for the purposes of their regional development, gender

equality, spiritual transformation and for social transformation. Therefore, the interpretation method of connection between the heuristic keys and the meaning of the text is found as positive and enriching in the Myanmar hermeneutics.

Second, Group B considers the partner group's spiritually oriented reading methodology - 'reading with spiritual eyes,' as a difference between the two groups. The purpose of the method of the partner group is to promote the spiritual growth of the reader but Group A largely neglects the historical aspects of the text which is one of the interests of Group B. Group B takes the partner group's spiritually oriented interpretation as one aspect of the meaning of the text in addition to their own interpretation. The status of text for both groups is undeniably that of Holy Scripture but Group B reads the text from more than a spiritual perspective because they do not only see the text as part of the collection of Holy Scriptures, but also as an historical text. For example, in Group B's interpretation of the female character in the text, the unbalanced gender description is treated as the cultural trace of the ancient patriarchy society. Therefore, while Group A does not explore the background information of the text, Group B explores the historical conflict between Judah and Babylon, and explores the embedded patriarchal background of the text. As a consequence, Group B consults commentaries. This signifies the need of scientific analysis in doing Myanmar hermeneutics like in Group B. This is important that ordinary readings and exegesis need each other, and that also in processes of ordinary readers the exegete should have a role by proposing alternative reading possibilities, draw attention to the details of the text, liberate readers from their dominant and sometimes oppressive and excluding reading traditions. At the same time the socially engaged exegete will be willing to be 'partially constituted by the interests of the ordinary readers.'¹⁰ In any case, it is observed that neither Group A nor B considered the Holy Scripture as an ordinary book but they considered the Bible as the words of God. It is the common reading attitude of both groups.

In reality, Group A did not disregard the historical aspect of the biblical text. For instance, Group A has argued for the importance of the historical background information in their broader reading of 2 Kgs 20:1-7. However, in the case of their main reading of Jer 13:20-27, they do not explore the historical background information of the text.

Third, another difference between the two groups is the interpretation of v. 23. In the interpretation of Group B, the impossibility of changing the evildoing of the wicked people of Jerusalem is understood as the impossibility of changing the skin of the Ethiopian or the spots of the leopard. However, in the interpretation of Group A, the impossibility of changing the evildoing of the wicked people of Jerusalem was imaginatively related to God's salvation. According to the imagination strategy of Group A, the impossibility of changing the sinfulness of people became possible through the salvation of God. The difference is damped.

Fourth, Group B pays attention to the re-contextualization of the partner group so that they find that the central message of the partner group is different from that of their own. Although the above mentioned difference in the interpretation of v. 23 that damped, Group B here sees the difference as an enriching and complementary interpretation in the process of interaction with the partner Group. In this case, Group B carried the partner group's central

¹⁰ See West, *The Academy of the Poor*. Also see De Wit, "Exegesis and Contextuality: Happy Marriage, Divorce or Living (Apart) Together?," *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning*, 3-30.

messages of righteousness, justice, and mercy of God as new components of the central message of the text that they have not noticed in their interpretation. In their interpretation, Group B considers the relation of disobedience and judgment of God as the central message of God. Especially, they have not observed the role of God's mercy in the story.

Fifth, Group B notices their partner group's consultation of different translations. For example, Group A consults different translations of the text including NRSV that translates the lifting of the skirts of the woman. This reading provides important information to a Myanmar reading because there is no word for 'skirts' in Myanmar (Cf. Section 9.2.3). The Myanmar translation reads simply 'clothes' instead of 'skirts' which is apparently the female clothes for the lower part of the female body. This picture of nakedness of the woman in NRSV is clearer than that of the Myanmar translation. The reason why Group B notices this consultation of different translations is because it is a similar method between the two groups in their interpretations. In other words, the consultation of different translations is an important method in the two groups.

Sixth, Group B discovers the different identification pattern of the partner group. In the interpretation of the partner group, group members identify with God and they saw themselves as the agents of God so that they proclaim the importance of holy life and repentance of the people. In Group B, group members identify with different characters of the text such as God and the people of Jerusalem. Hermeneutically speaking, the text in Group B gets more new references in new contexts. Nevertheless, the text has empowered the readers to implement the messages that the readers received from the text.

In the case of Group C and D, both groups discovered that the partner group's interpretation of the text as the conflict between God and the people of Jerusalem as a similar interpretation between the two groups. Another similarity between the two groups is the central message of the text. These similarities lead the group to an enriching interpretation process. Moreover, Group C discovers the partner group's concentration on the female imagery as another similarity between the two groups. Both groups concentrated on the female imagery and both groups had two similar views about the female image. On the one hand, some members from both groups saw the punishment of woman Jerusalem through disrobing as degrading the woman. On the other hand, some members from both groups see the usage of female imagery in the text as promoting the role of woman. In any case, both groups obtain the broader reading of the partner group as a new interpretation of the female imagery.

In sum, Group A learns historical critical method from their partner group in the process of their interpretation. Moreover, Group A learns disobedience and judgment of God which is the central message of their partner group but which was not favored by Group A because such a hopeless message does not provide spiritual inspiration. Therefore, Group A returned to their own reading method. Group A reads the text through their spiritual eyes. In addition, Group A does not agree with Group B's feminist approach to the text because Group A reads from the perspective of a/the male God. As a result, there is almost no learning process in their interaction with the partner group.

In the case of Group B, they see the common reading methodology between Group A and Group B that uses the context to unlock the meaning of the text as an enriching reading methodology. Furthermore, Group B sees consultation of various standard Bible translations as their common reading method that enriches their interpretation of the text. Moreover, Group B

takes Group A's spiritual oriented reading methodology as a new aspect of reading methodology. In addition, Group B takes Group A's re-contextualization that is different from Group B's own re-contextualization as enriching and complementary in their interpretation process. Finally, Group B discovered Group A's identification with God as a common interpretation strategy between their intertribal reading process.

In the case of Groups C and D, the groups see similarities between the two groups as an enriching interpretation process. The similarities between the two groups are views on the conflict between God and people of Jerusalem, concentration on female imagery, and on the central message of the text.

9.4.4. Analysis of the Effects of the Interaction

In this part, I will analyze the effects of the interaction between the groups because I want to find out possible growth and stagnation in their intertribal reading of the Bible. I will measure the effects of the interaction by means of the group's observation of new focalization brought by the partner group and the group's rejection of the partner group's opinion of the text.

9.4.4.1. Analysis of the Effects of the Interaction between Group A and B

In the case of the interaction between Groups A and B, Group A does not develop their opinion of the text while Group B's interpretation 'grows' by adopting a new focalization and new insights of Group A.

To begin with, Group A has paid attention to the partner group's profile in terms of group composition, gender, ethnicity, and social background situation but the Group does not take any new insights from the partner group's profile. For example, as mentioned above, the partner group's presentation of Chin culture was not favored as new insight. Group A also rejected the partner group's interpretation because the partner group's interpretation is considered to be incorrect, inadequate, and improper. For instance, the partner group's interchanging usage of 'daughters of Zion' for 'people of Jerusalem' is considered to be improper and incorrect interpretation because the text only mentions 'Jerusalem' in v. 27. In addition, the partner group's interpretation of 2 Kings 20:12-19 as good relationship between kings of Judah and Babylon is also considered to be an incorrect interpretation by Group A because they see the text as the prediction of the fall of Judah. Although Group B brought up characters such as daughters of Zion, Judah, Jerusalem, Ethiopian, leopard, and God, Group A did not consider this as a motive for a new focalization. As a consequence, Group A does not recognize the central messages brought by their partner group.

In addition, Group B's 'spiritual emphasis reading' of the text was not recognized by Group A as a new insight. For instance, Group B's understanding of the text as a warning that reminded them not to commit sin against God is rejected by Group A because this interpretation focuses only on God's wrath and did not show up God's love and mercy. If Group A combines different readings - judgment, love, and mercy, the group's interpretation will grow.

Furthermore, Group B's commitment of doing good works in their future is also criticized by Group A as inadequate commitment because of the lack of clear specification.

The most significant difference between the groups is their gender view on the text. Group A criticizes that Group B emphasizes the female characters and reads the text from a

feminist perspective. Group A maintains their reading perspective from God who is presented in the text as a male who punishes personified female Jerusalem. Therefore, in the interaction with their partner group, Group A remains stagnant on their own perspective.

In contrast, Group B is willing to see the partner group's interpretation. Group B is open and vulnerable to their partner group. They also mention admiration to their partner group. For instance, Group B sees Group A's interpretation of the justice and righteousness of God as new knowledge of the text that they have not recognized in their interpretation process. In addition, Group B considered Group A's method of explanation of the text with their own life experiences as new insight for reading the text for their spiritual growth. Most importantly, Group B finds that the partner group's focalization on God is a new focalization for them because they did not emphasize on this focalization in their interpretation process.

Although Group B is open and vulnerable, they read the partner group's reading report carefully and critically. For instance, Group B notices that the reading report of Group A is overwhelmed by their own cultural information while there is no cultural background information of the text. In any case, Group B does not reject any information in the reading report of their partner group. Although Group B feels sorry when they learn that their partner group considers their interpretation as incorrect, Group B takes this method of intertribal reading of the Bible as a fruitful reading methodology because it has provided them with more than one opinion of the text. In addition, this method helps them understand the other's contextual situation.

In sum, Group A considers the partner group's interpretation as incorrect and improper although the partner group may provide new focalizations in their reading report. Group A rejects the partner group's opinions of the text and regards their own interpretation as legitimate, correct, and proper. Therefore, the growth of the interpretation process is limited in Group A. In contrast, Group B develops their views of the text as they carry new focalization and other new insights from their partner group. Both groups are critical in reading their partner group's reading report. However, it is observed that the growth and stagnation of the groups in their intertribal reading process mainly relate with their attitude towards the partner group's interpretation. The more open to the partner group, the more fruitful hermeneutics is produced. The importance of the attitude of the reader is discovered.

9.4.4.2. Analysis of the Effects of the Interaction between Group C and D

In the case of interaction between Group C and D, both groups have an attitude of openness towards the partner group's interpretation. However, in terms of discovering new focalization, Group C grows in their reading process more than Group D because Group D does not obtain new focalization from Group C.

To begin with, Group C is open to their partner group's reading report. They read the interpretation of their partner group through the eyes of their partner group so that they come to a new focalization. For instance, the character of the Ethiopian which has not been recognized by Group C itself, but brought by the partner group, becomes a new focalization of Group C. From this focalization, the members of Group C learn that one is to avoid pointing to the weakness of others because the group realize the description of the Ethiopian in the text contains a negative opinion on dark-skinned Ethiopians.

Likewise, Group C also obtains other new insights from their partner group. For instance, the partner group's interpretation of the judgment of God brings new insight to Group C because this judgment can be seen as the love of God. The judgment could be seen as a kind of warning to the unfaithful people but it also could be seen as the love of God because the groups see God's expectation of the repentance and return of the one who is unfaithful to Him. This evangelization perspective teaches both groups to be faithful to God and to return to God.

In the discussion of the gender problem of the female character of the text, members of both groups have different opinions on the text but the Group C finds the positive interpretation of the female character as a new insight in the text. This positive interpretation argues that the use of the female character and the image of sexual abuse of the personified woman is to be understood as an image of promoting the role of women, because the woman in the text is selected as a representative of the whole people of Jerusalem. This interpretation emerges as a new insight among the groups' positive and negative opinion of the text. Since the intertribal reading of the Bible can offer new insights of the text from various perspectives, Group C agrees to see the method as an important and relevant reading method for Myanmar where there are 135 ethnic groups that live together.

In the case of Group D, the group has openness toward their partner group's interpretation of the text but they maintain their own views of the text. Group D have seen how their partner group has identified with the biblical characters; five male readers identify with the female character in the text and a female reader identifies with the male character, God. In any case, Group D does not obtain any new focalization from these two main characters and the partner group members' different focalizations.

The members of Group D also recognize the historical critical oriented reading method of their partner group, but they do not change their opinion of the text. The Group D describes that the overall reading process gives lessons to interpret the text from various perspectives and to read the text through the eyes of another.

In sum, in the case of Group C and D, both groups have attitudes of openness towards the interpretation of the partner group. Both groups do not reject the other's point of view. However, Group C's reading process is more fruitful than Group D because they obtain more new focalization and new insights of the text. Therefore, in this case, it can be said that the group's willingness to learn from the other is equally important to having an open attitude to the other's interpretation.

Conclusion

In my re-reading of Jer 13:20-27 from an intertribal reading practice perspective, I discovered seven important hermeneutical insights as summarized below. Therefore, I conclude that the intertribal reading of Jeremiah 13:20-27 is fruitful and enriching on hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological levels.

First, in the analysis of the groups' compositions, social situations, heuristic keys, and focalization, I discovered the power of the biblical text and the power of the reader's context that help produce new meanings of the old text. The contextual problems such as unemployment of graduates, poor education in rural areas, mining and environmental pollution, and swearing of squatters of the Yangon slum area were the only four facts that Group A had explicitly described in their group portrait, for instance. There was no obvious information about the

contextual situation of drunkenness and *nat* worshipping in their group portrait. However, when the Group interacted with the text, drunkenness and *nat* worshipping as well as swearing obscene words became constitutive for their interpretation process. This shows that the text has the power that can stimulate the reader to explore his or her own situation to explain the meaning of the text. Correspondingly, this also shows that the reader's context has the power to unlock the meaning of the text. Similar evidences can be also found in other reading groups. Therefore, exploration of the contextual situation in both text and context is recommended in doing biblical hermeneutics.

Second, in the analysis of interpretation, heuristic keys, and focalizations of the groups, I discovered that some readers' interpretation of the text is similar to that of exegetes whereas some ordinary readers' interpretation is not. For instance, in the analysis of heuristic keys and focalizations of the Group B, the view on female image in the text of the readers is similar to that of O'Connor and Exum. The readers argue that the text degrades the role of woman because it uses the woman character in the portrait of evil whereas God is portrayed as the right male. This argument is similar to that of O'Connor who argues that the text implicitly teaches that men represent God and women do not. Moreover, a reader argues that the text is full of obscenity, like Exum who has labeled the text as 'prophetic pornography' because it contains images of personified naked woman and sexual abuse of God. Likewise, such feminist critical interpretation can be found in other groups such as Group C and D. For instance, a reader argues against the negative portrait of the female image of the text (vv 21, 22, 26, and 27). There is no proof in the empirical data that women were more prone to interpret the text as Exum does than men, because many male readers are also reading in this line. In contrast to this view, all members of Group A do not see the text as so-called 'prophetic pornography' because of their reading attitude. They read the text with spiritual eyes, and they understand a metaphor is a metaphor and it is not real. This point clearly shows that the reading attitude of the reader affects the interpretation of the text. In addition to these similar and different interpretations between exegetes and ordinary readers, I also discovered that the readers could unlock the meanings of sin and punishment, gender equality between men and women, the righteousness of God, the jealousy of God, and the love of God.

Third, in the analysis of the groups' reading methodology, I discovered more than one interpretation methodology such as the use of contextual issues, historical critical method, literary criticism, and feminist hermeneutics. In this analysis, I observed that different interpretive instruments can produce different interpretations of the text. For instance, the historical critical method helps the reader find historical background information of the text, while the use of contextual issues helps the reader find the front message of the text. The more interpretive tools are used, the more meanings of the text can be unlocked.

Fourth, in the analysis of the groups' re-contextualization, I discovered that gender difference between the character and the reader does not hinder personal identifications. In their re-contextualization, some male readers identified with a female character in the text. Some female readers also identified with a male character. The important mechanism for personal identification is the reader's social realities such as life experiences, personal commitments, and personal free will for transformation. In addition, the reader's empathy and emotional responsiveness are also important in the personal identifications between the readers and the character in the text. This finding challenges a feminist assumption that argues a female reader

can only identify with a (sinful) woman in the text. In my analysis above, I have to assert that both male and female readers can also identify with sinful woman in the text.

Fifth, in the analysis of the groups' re-contextualization, I discovered that the old text gets new references. For example, in the analysis of re-contextualization of Group D, the characters of woman Jerusalem, the Ethiopian, and the prophet were replaced by the ordinary male readers.

Sixth, in the analysis of the groups' re-contextualization, the power of the text was also discovered. In the case of Group A, the readers identify with God so that the text empowers them to become agents of God. Likewise, the text also empowers other group members to start new practices.

Seventh, in the analysis of interaction with partner profile, attitude toward the partner group, analysis of hermeneutic-exegetical aspects of interaction, and analysis of the effects of the interaction, I discovered the reasons of growth and stagnation in interpretation process. Attitudes like direct expressions of admiration to their partner group, tolerance for ambiguity, vulnerability, and openness to new information are the factors responsible for the growth, but a critical attitude toward the partner group is a negative element in the learning process. In the above analysis, I observed that Group A remains in its own repertoire with the critical attitude toward the partner group while other groups show growth in their interpretation process.

CHAPTER 10

RE-READING OF JEREMIAH 4:29-31 CASE STUDY ON MYANMAR INTERTRIBAL HERMENEUTICS OF JEREMIAH 4:29-31

Introduction

In my exegetical study of Jer 4:29-31, I have examined the roles and functions of the personified woman Jerusalem and daughter Zion. Since the narrator of this pericope presents woman Jerusalem as a courtesan and daughter Zion as a dying woman, both female images have carried the prophetic message of doom through their respective negative roles. This study is in fact a scientific study done at the academic level. What will happen when this text is read by Myanmar Bible readers from their own sociocultural context and with their own life experiences? This is challenging and interesting question for me. Therefore, I will continue to do in-depth research about these Jeremianic female imagery with the following research questions.

What else can we discover if the same text is read by Myanmar people from their sociocultural contexts and from their life experiences? How are their life experiences or feelings important in their interpretations? What different method(s) other than exegesis will they use in their existential interpretation? How do the Myanmar readers re-contextualize the original reference with a new one? How do their readings contribute to the articulation of an inter-tribal hermeneutics?

In this chapter, I will re-read Jer 4:29-31 from a Myanmar inter-tribal reading practice perspective hoping to contribute to the articulation of an inter-tribal hermeneutics and a more in-depth reading of Jer 4:29-31. In my project of inter-tribal reading of Jer 4:29-31, twenty one readers from ten different ethnic groups of Myanmar people participated. These readers are gathered into four groups: Groups A and B were joined as one pair and Groups C and D were joined as another pair.

In the following, I will first examine the readers' socio-cultural context for each group. Second, I will analyze the reading methodology that the groups use in their explanation of the text. Third, I will study how groups re-contextualize the text. Re-contextualization here means how the original reference of the text is replaced by a new one. Finally, I will analyze the intertribal interaction between the paired groups to find out, if any, growth of groups' hermeneutical process.

10.1. Analysis of the Socio-cultural Context of the Myanmar Readers

As I have mentioned above, in this section, I will examine the readers' biographical information to find out their sociocultural situation and their group compositions.

In general, all the reading group members in this project were theological students from the Myanmar Institute of Theology. The age of the students ranges from twenty to forty. Most students are single. Only two students are married. Each student came from various ethnic backgrounds and various parts of Myanmar. They meet regularly on the campus during this

reading project. Economically, they all are not rich people. Generally, most religious workers' salary in Myanmar is not enough for their living expenses. All the readers mainly used the Myanmar Bible in their reading process although they used English and their respective ethnic Bible translations. It is noticed that, all reading groups read the Bible devotedly so that they open and close their meetings with a short prayer. Interestingly, Group A always sings a song in their opening and closing meetings while other groups do not sing any song during their meeting. The detailed analysis is as follows.

10.1.1. Analysis of the Group Composition and Sociocultural Context of Group A

Group A consists of six members - four females and two males. The group members respectively belong to Asho Chin, Mro Khami Chin, Tedim Chin, Pwo Karen, Sagaw Karen, and Lahu tribes. Therefore, this group is composed of people from six different tribal languages. Coincidentally, they all belong to the Baptist denomination. All group members have obtained Bachelor of Theology degrees and worked in their respective mission fields. They used Myanmar and English standard Bibles in their reading process.

In their group portrait, it is discovered that their major concerns are their contextual religious situation and cultural stumbling blocks in attainment of higher education. By saying contextual religious situation, there are three main categories such as contextual *nat* worshipping, contextual church situation, and expansion of Buddhism in their context. First, *nat* worshipping is found as a cultural heritage in the contexts of many group members. For example, a reader is from Asho Chin tribe and she lives in Bungbaw village, high hill countryside of West Myanmar, where traditional *nat* worshipping is a dominant religion. All native people including herself believe that the *nats* are harmful spirits who can afflict those people who disrespect the existence of the *nats*. This belief of *nat* forces the native people to offer sacrifices appropriately to propitiate the *nats*. For instance, a funeral service should be held seven days by providing food to the visitors while the sacrifices are to be placed properly near the corpse. If the house members do not follow this rule, native people assume that seven people from both sides of the funeral house will die sooner or later. Likewise, in the context of another reader who belongs to Lahu ethnic group, some believers go first to the black magician and mystic magician when they are sick. Such believers only return to the Church when their sickness was not healed completely. In the context of other readers who belong to Karen ethnic group too, the ancestors' bone collecting ceremony is related to the *nat* worshipping. In this bone collecting ceremony, the family members expect blessings from the *nats*. Therefore, they go to the burial ground and collect the ancestor's bone followed by propitiation of the *nats* with sacrificial food. Although they have never participated in such occasions, this culture can be found in their context as a cultural heritage.

A second major interest in this group is their church situation. To a certain extent, the life of the church is somehow related to their traditional *nat* worshipping. For instance, in the context of Asho Chin, the native people who fear the *nats* are attracted by biblical Jesus's triumph over the evil spirit. In addition, the ordinary native Christians' singing songs in the funeral and warm comfort to the funeral family are indirect attractions to the native people. Therefore, many *nat* worshippers have been converted into Christianity. Interestingly, this conversion has even affected ecology because the former native *nat* worshippers have cut many trees down for their hillside cultivation. Before they converted to Christianity, they feared to

cut down the trees for they believed that *nats* were dwelling on the trees. However, when they converted to Christianity and when they do not fear the traditional *nats*, they cut many trees down so that some hills even become plain within a few years. This awareness of abuse of ecology becomes a new challenge for the missionary. The group's interest in their church situation is found in their discussion of strength and weakness of their individual churches. Although some churches do not have any internal conflict, a reader's church has internal quarrel in some meetings so that some church members stop going to the Church.

In addition to this situation, the expansion of Buddhism to the mountainous areas is seen as the third major interest in this group. For example, the government favored expansion of Buddhism in a reader's village and forced the native people to build monasteries while it also forced people to destroy churches. In some places, Christian mission works are prohibited. It was reported that in 1998, all the Christians in Zuntat village had to convert into Buddhism because a Christian youth burned a monastery in Zuntat village. This bitter experience taught the villagers to accept neither Christianity nor Buddhism but to return to their traditional *nat* worship.

In addition to their local religious situation, the culture stumbling block in attainment of higher education was seen as another major discussion in this group. In other words, females are culturally discouraged in attainment of higher education in both local and national levels. For example, a reader is a Tedim Chin woman who lived in Monlai village, Kalay Township. In her culture, only men are encouraged to attain higher education but not women. In this culture, she resisted her family as well as her culture and tried to go to the school so that finally she was the first graduate woman in her village. Unfortunately, another female reader was discriminated against from the national level in attainment of higher education. She passed her matriculation with good scores but she was rejected pursuing medical college because she is a woman. Some men who got lower scores than her are allowed to enter medical college. But she was not allowed to enter the medical college for the score for women is set much higher than the requirement for men. This cultural discrimination on women has alerted the group before they read the text.

In sum, this group consists of six people from six different tribes. Their ethnic backgrounds are different but their religious denomination is the same, Baptist. As the preparation for reading the Bible, the group members have focused on the four major problematic issues: the *nat* worshipping as a cultural tradition, the internal church conflict, the expansion of Buddhism in their contexts, and gender discrimination in attainment of higher education.

10.1.2. Analysis of the Group Composition and Sociocultural Context of Group B

Group B consists of five members: a female and four males. The group members are from Lisu, Chin, and Karen ethnic groups. They come from the north and south of Myanmar. Except a reader who is an assistant deacon in the Anglican Church, the rest of the group members are Baptists.

The group members describe their sociocultural situation in terms of youths' drug addiction, the need of leadership in their community, social corruption with bribery, problems of church, and scattering of native people away from their ancestral homeland.

According to the group's report, drug abuse is noticed not just as a specific local social problem but as a nationwide social problem because youths' drug addiction is found not only

in the context of northern but also in southern Myanmar. According to a reader, youths' drug addiction in her context is related to the lack of good community leaders because her culture defines that good leaders can educate the youths to be good persons. In this case, she did not take the government's 'rule of law' into her consideration. Since the government has largely neglected the local drug problem, in her view the Church is the most responsible to take care of the drug users. The group discussed this drug abuse in terms of drug trafficking in the wider context of the whole Myanmar context because many youths in other contexts were also drug addicts. According to a reader, many local people in his context assume that the government personnel could be involved in such mass drug trafficking by receiving bribery. This popular assumption could be true because bribery is a very common practice in the whole of Myanmar. Many Myanmar government organizations have been corrupted by bribery so that the Myanmar government even formed an anti-bribery commission on February 26, 2014 to fight corruption and bribery in government organizations. Nevertheless, youths' drug abuse is still found as a social problem in their contexts.

In terms of bribery, the context of another reader also suffers from bribery. According to him, his native town Tamu is a commercial town in Myanmar-India border where businessmen are more powerful than ordinary people because they can bribe government personnel. In this context, the powerful businessmen usually abuse common people. Therefore, bribery and corruption spread social injustice in the whole country.

In terms of the problems of the Church, there are some internal and external problems. For example, a reader has not seen yet any action from her church to the youths' drug addiction. She criticizes her church's inattention to such youths' drug abuse as the worst problem in her social situation. This can be seen as the internal weakness of her local church. Another internal weakness inside the Church is found in the context of another reader. According to him, misuse of money, favoritism, party strife, and discrimination among church members can be found in his social context. In addition, due to the armed conflict between Karen National Union and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army, some churches have been burnt and some Christians have been displaced in his social context.

Unlike the situation of northern and southern part of Myanmar, the churches of other group members are very stable and strong. For example, 99% of population in a reader's Hakha Chin context practices Christianity. There is no tension among the church members. The only problem in this Chin context is scattering of native people away from their ancestral homeland because of the lack of natural resources in their context. Approximately, 200,000 Chins have gone to foreign countries to make money and to support their families back home. Such social movement is also seen in other group members' contexts. For instance, many native Karen people have gone foreign countries to make money. Unfortunately, other people from other tribes move into that Karen State and occupy many businesses.

In sum, the group has focused on four major social issues as their politico-socioeconomic problems. These are drug addiction, bribery, problems in their local churches and native people's migration. Youths' drug addiction and the church's negligence demand good leaders and rule of law. Moreover, bribery and corruption cause mass drug trafficking and social injustice in business domain. The native people's making money in foreign countries could support their family, but the migration of other people into their land could occupy not only business but also land which is the most valuable thing for tribal people.

10.1.3. Analysis of the Group Composition and Sociocultural Context of Group C

Group C was formed by five members: two males and three females. The group members are from Kachin, Chin, Lisu and Lahu ethnic groups. They come from northern, eastern, western, and middle parts of Myanmar respectively.

From the group portrait, three focus points are detected, including discussion about the situations of their churches, the socioeconomic situation in their respective contexts, and political tension between the Kachin ethnic group and the Myanmar government. In terms of the situation of the churches of the group members, all group members belong to the Baptist denomination. Except for the churches in the context of one reader, spiritual life in other churches is to be found as healthy. For example, they state that their church members are enthusiastic to help others and are very devoted to spiritual life. Some churches open nursery schools and nurture children. The group defines the Church that has believers who just traditionally come to the Church but do not read the Bible as an unhealthy Church.

Concerning the socioeconomic situation, half of the group members' church members are poor farmers and day laborers. In these poor social contexts, no war is reported. However, in the economically rich social context, specifically, in Kachin State, there is ethnic war. In the Kachin regions, natural resources produce abundantly. Some popular natural resources are jade, gold, teak, and hydropower. In such areas, a political tension can be seen between the Kachin ethnic armed group and the Myanmar government and Chinese foreign investors. In sum, this group has focused on their churches' spirituality and sociopolitical issues.

10.1.4. Analysis of the Group Composition and Sociocultural Context of Group D

Group D consists of three females and two males. The group members are from the Lisu, Karen, Chin, and Kachin ethnic groups. Except for a reader who is from Lisu Christian Church of Myanmar, the rest are Baptists. Concerning the sociocultural situation of the group, the group mainly discussed poverty, drug abuse, the situation of their churches, and gender. First, poverty is found as a common situation among the members. For instance, most native people of the group members are either poor farmers or fishermen. Many native people did not get good education. Unfortunately, unforeseen heavy rain in the context of a member has added trouble by destroying all paddy fields, and it heavily struck poor farmers. In other places, native people are poor because of the government's ruling system. For example, Kachin State and Mogok produce invaluable natural resources such as jade and ruby. However, the native people are poor because of the sale of the stones profits mostly the dictatorial regime and their cronies. The native people are left as poor farmers, uneducated, and drug users. It is also reported that some mining owners provide their employees narcotic to be able to produce more jade and ruby. Therefore, drug abuse in these areas is more prominent than in other places. In such areas, youths who have not tried drugs are lesser in number than those youths who use drugs and narcotics. Therefore, drug abuse was seen as the second social problem of the group members.

Another social problem in this group is related to their churches. Although there is no tension in the churches of some group members, party strife and corruption in the church is detected in the contexts of other group members.

The group also discussed gender inequality in their context. According to a reader, his culture had defined that women be under the rule of men. However, the group realized that such social hierarchical structure represents gender inequality.

In sum, this group consists of two males and three females. The group members are from four different tribes. Their social problems are related to poverty, drugs, corruption in the church, party strife in the church, and gender inequality.

Summary

In this section, I have examined the biographical information of the Myanmar readers and presented the reading group compositions and sociocultural situation of the reading groups. The participants come from 9 different tribes. Each group consists of male and female readers. The age of the group members runs from twenty to forty. The readers are not rich. Majority of the participants are Baptists while an Anglican and a Lisu Christian Church member are present in this reading project. In the above analysis of the group composition, no hierarchic pattern was discovered. The groups do not support gender inequality in their society. This means that the readers oppose traditional male dominant custom. In their social context, politico-socioeconomic situations are related to the issues of poverty, low education, bribery and corruption, drugs, tensions in churches, political tension between Kachin and Myanmar, the needs of good leadership, and migration of native people.

After having done the analysis of sociocultural contexts of the readers, the next step will be the analysis of the readers' spontaneous reading of the text.

10.2. Analysis of the Interpretation Methodology of the Myanmar Readers

In this section, I will analyze the spontaneous readings of the groups to find out whether the interpretation practices of these Myanmar readers produce new insights in the text in relation with their life experiences and which methods they used. This analysis will focus on three areas such as the reading attitude of the groups, their heuristic keys and focalization, and the exegetical aspects of the reading process. Reading attitude here means "the result of the combination of the status of the text for the readers, the result expected from the interpretation, and the methods to be used for it."¹

10.2.1. Analysis of the Interpretation Process of Group A

10.2.1.1 Analysis of the Reading attitude of Group A

The members of Group A read the text with a critical attitude towards the text so that they ask two questions to the text. The first question is addressed to Jer 4:30; "Is Yahweh not one of the lovers of woman Jerusalem?" They ask this question because the text reads "Your lovers despise you; they seek your life." To this text, the readers argue that Yahweh himself can be seen as one of the lovers of woman Jerusalem who despises the woman Jerusalem. The second question is addressed to the structure of the text because the group members see the seams that patch the three separate verses. The changes of scenes and characters in the text are the reasons why they are suspicious and think the verses may have formed originally separate

¹ Hans De Wit, "Codes and Coding," *Through the Eyes of Another: Intercultural Reading of the Bible*, ed. Hans de Wit et al (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Press, 2004), 414.

units. This reading attitude is again observed in the following examination of their heuristic keys and focalization.

10.2.1.2 Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of Group A

Which components from the reader's own context are constitutive for the interpretation process? In the interpretation of Group A, a wrongful death case and the church discipline are constitutive to unlock the meaning of God's judgment. Since the group read the text critically, they critically interpret God's judgment on the people of Jerusalem.

In their interpretation, the group members first read the preceding and following text of Jer 4:29-30. Then, they focused on the conflict between God and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then, they focused on the judgment of God. According to them, God punishes the people of Jerusalem because of their moral corruption (Cf. v. 14), rebellion (Cf. v. 17), and inattention to God. Therefore, God punishes the people. The group members have observed the consequence of God's punishment that all the cities had been destroyed; no man was there; even the birds had fled away. However, the group members are critical of the punishment of God because they think that not all inhabitants of Jerusalem would be evil. Therefore, they argue that it will not be fair if all people suffer for some evildoers. The group compares this biblical case with a wrongful death case from their life experience. The group argues that traditional understanding of God's will is difficult to accept. For instance, a reader said that there was a victim of wrongful death case on a hospital. The victim was a 19 years old boy, his parents' 'only child.' This boy was suffering from diabetes when he was hospitalized but his sickness was wrongfully treated as tuberculosis so that he died at the hospital. When the son died, many church members convinced the parents as if it was the will of God but the parents could not be comforted and could not accept it as the so-called God's will. The group members do not view the wrongful death case as the will of God. Rather, they understand this case as human fault. Therefore, the group members argue that there are some cases that cannot be called the will of God. In the case of God's judgment on the people of Jerusalem too, the group members do not want to accept this judgment as the will of God because the group thinks the punishment is suddenly and extremely strong for the people. The group members would accept it as the will of God only if God gives several warnings before the final judgment in analogy of their church discipline. According to their church discipline, the Church does not exclude its members immediately when they would commit sin such as elopement and living together, for instance. It is observed that the group members are critical of the text, but they have overlooked the preceding chapters where Jeremiah has been warning the people of Jerusalem at several points. In the above analysis, one has seen that the group uses a wrongful death case and a church's rule to unlock the meaning of the judgment of God. These heuristic keys are from their life experiences. The readers use their life experiences frequently unconsciously. In the above analysis, feelings of injustice and exclusion are observed as possible codes to unlock the meaning of the text in an inter-tribal reading practice.

10.2.1.3 Analysis of Exegetical Aspects of the Reading Process of Group A

In this section, I will analyze the exegetical aspects of the reading process by using the following questions. How does the group explain the text? What method do they use? Is a

particular identifiable method being used (literary, rhetorical, historical-critical, sociological, etc.)? What is the central message of the text according to the readers?²

The method that the Group A used to explain the text can be defined as rhetorical criticism because the group members search the message that the author is trying to convey. For instance, in their searching of the conflict that the text refers to, the group pays attention to the author's message in the text. For example, a reader explains that the conflict happened between God and the people of Jerusalem because the author has addressed Jerusalem in v. 14 although Jerusalem is absent in the pericope (vv 29-31). Thus the group interprets that the author is trying to persuade how the inhabitants of Jerusalem are wicked and why God punishes the city and its inhabitants. The group also finds out the author's persuasion in vv 25, 26, 27, and 30, through which the author conveys the message of the people's unfaithfulness and complete destruction of Jerusalem; all inhabitants and birds are destroyed for their wickedness and unfaithfulness to God. In addition to the rhetorical criticism perspective, the group's critical reading attitude towards the text can be found in their consultation of different translations of the Bible such as English, Myanmar, and Kayin translations. For instance, in Myanmar and Kayin Bibles, the woman is beautifying her face whereas the English translation mentions the woman as enlarging her eyes. Although these Bible translations are slightly different from each other, the group mainly observes what message the author is trying to convey. By using this reading methodology, the group explains the punishment of God as the central message of the text.

10.2.2. Analysis of the Interpretation Process of Group B

10.2.2.1 Analysis of Reading Attitude of the Group B

The members of group B read the text with full of confidence. Suspicion (of the text) is not detected. For instance, when they read the portrait of female imagery, their reading attitude is full of confidence. There is no critical attitude towards the portrait of the women as found in other groups. This could be based on their cultural world view. For example, a reader is of the opinion that the portrayal of the land as daughter Zion is normal metaphorical language because heaven in his culture is personified as a father while the land/earth is personified as a mother. Therefore, the portrait of the woman in the text does not stand as an example of gender discrimination against women. Rather, the text carries spiritual message to the group that is to correct one-self and to return to God with repentance.

10.2.2.2 Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group B

In the interpretation of the Group B, Karen war experience and Lisu festival experiences are constitutive to unlock the meaning of the war, and the people's wickedness and God's judgment. In Myanmar, civil war is not uncommon in all ethnic peoples' areas. The internal conflict in Myanmar began shortly after the country obtained independence from the United Kingdom in 1948. Since then, whenever the government troops enter the ethnic areas, armed conflicts start. All the ethnic people have been suffering from the civil war. Many Karen people also have to flee to Thai-Myanmar border areas for their survival. Many villages have been quiet and there is no one in such villages. The Karen native people have to flee to the border

² De Wit, "Codes and Coding," 415-6.

areas; otherwise, they may be tortured by the government troops. This experience helps the group members understand why and how the inhabitants of Jerusalem have fled to the thickets and to the rocks.

Another constitutive component to unlock the meaning of the people's wickedness and God's judgment is the Lisu festival experience. According to the group explanation, Lisu people are used to celebrating their traditional New Year festival for three days. During the festival, the visitors are used to be drunk so that their drunkenness brings unpleasant things in their society. This drunkenness and consequent social problems let the reader explain God's destruction as the consequent of the people's wickedness.

10.2.2.3 Analysis of Exegetical Aspects of the Reading Process of Group B

In the Group B, the members use different translations of the Bible and imagination strategies to explain the meaning of the text. For example, in the explanation of the pronoun of the addressee 'desolate one' and 'you' in v. 30, a reader uses the Falam Chin Bible translation because English and Myanmar version are not clear about the gender and number. Fortunately, Falam Chin Bible translated by Rev. Dr. Stephen Hre Kio provides the gender and number of the addressees. Therefore, the group identifies 'desolate one' in v 30 as woman Jerusalem. This method could be called 'imaginative way of reading.' It is noticed that the group continues to use this imaginative method in their interpretation.

In their explanation of the conflict that the text refers to, the group imagines two separate scenes of conflict such as a conflict between two countries and a conflict between the prophet and the people of the city. The first scene is related with v. 29 which is referring to a war because horseman and bowman are invading the city so that the people are fleeing to the thickets. In addition to this conflict, another conflict is related to v. 30 because it is denouncing a beautifying woman who is irrelevantly beautifying herself in time of the invasion of the enemies. Then the group imagines that the beautifying woman would represent the ruling elite who could ignore the difficulty and cry of the ordinary citizens as if in Myanmar context. Therefore, the group imagines that the other scene of the conflict could be between the prophet and the ruling elite. Nevertheless, the Group did not assert that the ruling elite are the only responsible class for the severe destruction. Rather, they interpret the conflict as the combination of the sin of all inhabitants of Jerusalem. With this interpretation method, the group explains that the central message of the text is 'a call for repentance.'

10.2.3 Analysis of the Interpretation Process of Group C

10.2.3.1 Analysis of the Reading attitude of the Group C

In the Group C, all group members are critical in reading the two women characters in the text. For instance, a male reader critiques that daughter Zion was portrayed as a woman who was exploited by men. According to him, a figure of a woman in his context is occasionally used to portray the beauty of a land or a country or a city because they produce many things like a woman who could bear a child. However, unlike in his own social context, in the case of Jer 4:29-31, daughter Zion was portrayed as the woman who was abandoned and exploited by the murderers. A female reader also criticizes that the usage of women in the text is not fair because the women are utilized to portray the defeat of men in the battle of the Babylonian invasion. The women are inappropriately mocked instead of men. Therefore, she argues against

the author of the text that the portrait of women in the text is not fair. The group even would like to rewrite the text. In their interpretation process, the group members connected the image of the cry of daughter Zion to the cry of their people such as crying for child prostitution, crying for losing local natural resources. According to the group, Kachin State, which produces natural resources, is like an exploited woman because the natural resources have been taken away by the greedy business tycoons. Likewise, the group also connects the cry of daughter Zion to the cry of her people who are suffering from child prostitution in her context.

10.2.3.2 Analysis of the Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group C

In their interpretation of the text, the group understands that the invasion of the enemy forced the inhabitants of the city to flee to the jungle. This stage of insecurity of the people is again compared to the insecurity and labour pains of the Jeremianic woman who is giving birth to her first child. In order to interpret the text in this way, the group relates the people's insecurity and labour pains of the woman to their own contextual problems of exploitation of natural resources and socioeconomic problems. Therefore, the group's focalization is pain as the woman is painfully giving birth to her first child.

According to a reader, the ruby mining business of her native people in her native town Mogok had been stable and going well until 1990. However, the rise of Myanmar-military-personnel-own company (The Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited) in 1990 has been shattering native people by grabbing large portions of land and by exploiting businesses in the whole Mogok as well as in the whole country. The native people have lost gradually any rights to do businesses. The native people are even in danger of displacement like in other parts of Myanmar. Therefore, the native people have to sell their houses and move to the rustic villages as the inhabitants of Jerusalem have fled to the jungle when the horseman and bowman invaded the city. The native people of Mogok have been suffering from this exploitation for more than a decade so that nowadays the people have even crossed the border and left the country. This suffering affects not only the individual inhabitants of the city but also the whole community and all churches in that context. Therefore, the image of the cry of the woman is explained by comparing the cry of her community. A similar situation of exploitation committed by Myanmar military personnel and their cronies is found in the contexts of other group members. In addition, the Myanmar government troops and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) have been fighting in his Kachin State for economic and political reasons. The native people have fled and have been displaced to various places. This local situation is identical to the image of the women in the text. The cry of the local people is identified with the cry of the Jeremianic woman who is giving birth to her first child. It is noticed that the specific contexts are fruitful for the (re)interpretation of the text. Moreover, the analogy produces new insights in the text that the Babylonian invaders who destroyed Jerusalem could have a hidden agenda that is beyond what Jeremiah has mentioned in his text from the religious perspective.

The analysis of exegetical aspects of the reading process will be discussed along with that of group D below because they will be compared and contrasted together.

10.2.4. Analysis of Interpretation Process of Group D

10.2.4.1 Analysis of Reading attitude of the Group D

In the Group D, the readers read the text with a critical attitude and with liberating attitude towards the portrait of woman Jerusalem. The readers' critical attitude towards the portrait of women in the text is not based on the readers' gender because all male and female members of the group equally criticize it. Although they come from different ethnic backgrounds, they all have the same critical attitude towards the gender description of the text. This critical feminist view resists the male dominant culture in their social contexts.

The group members read the text in the Myanmar version and read the text in a loud voice. After reading the text, all agreed to see the description of the woman Jerusalem as the work of discrimination against women because woman Jerusalem is compared to evildoers of Jerusalem and she is to be killed after she beautified herself. Through this depiction of woman Jerusalem, the readers detected discrimination against women in their society. For example, a reader said that women in his culture had been neither valued nor respected. There is even a saying in his culture that "women are to be beaten as the drums are to be beaten." In addition, women had to work more than men. Women have to pound corn for food early in the morning. Then, women have to work in the farms with men until evening. When they return from the farms, women have to carry fire wood in their bamboo baskets to cook food. A man would carry only his mattock. If a man helps a woman, he will be mocked by the society. Therefore, no man will help woman. As a result, the group concludes that their society is demanding gender equality. This reading method can be called feminist hermeneutics or liberation hermeneutics. What the new insight found in the text through the reading method of this group is to liberate women from gender inequality.

10.2.4.2 Analysis of Heuristic Keys and Focalization of the Group D

In this group, the Nargis cyclone, poverty, and political conflict are important elements for their interpretation process. In their interpretation process, the group focuses on the moral preached by the text so that repentance and faithfulness to God are found as the central message. For example, a reader relates disloyalty of the people of Jerusalem to her own church members' disloyalty because she is worried about the destruction of her people like those people of the text. According to her, the church leaders and members are not faithful to God even though God has saved them from the Nargis cyclone. When the Nargis cyclone hit Myanmar in 2008, it destroyed the Ayeyarwady Delta region. 84,500 people were killed and 53,800 went missing. A total of 37 townships were significantly affected by the cyclone. The UN estimates that as many as 2.4 million people were affected.³ In the midst of this devastation, her community was not affected severely. In her opinion, this is the evidence of how God saved them. In the post-Nargis period, she was worried about the destruction of her own people since they are not faithful to God. This is seen as action-consequence theology. All the group members hold this view. For instance, a reader is worried about his people because poverty is making his people depart from God. According to him, the native town Tedim is poor so that many parents cannot

³ Myanmar: Cyclone Nargis 2008 Facts and Figures <http://www.ifrc.org/en/news-and-media/news-stories/asia-pacific/myanmar/myanmar-cyclone-nargis-2008-facts-and-figures/#sthash.FuyzTOP2.dpuf>. (Accessed on August 23, 2016).

send their children to the school. In this situation, the Buddhists open a school and make end meets for the poor. As a result, the believers are in danger of religious proselytization. Similarly, another reader relates the fleeing of the people of Jerusalem to the fleeing of his people from the civil war. According to him, God has granted natural resources such as gold and jade to the Kachins. However, in his view, the Kachins forgot their God so that recently the Kachins have to flee to various places. Therefore, he said that God is calling the Kachin to repent and return to God. In short, natural disaster, poverty, and political conflict are found as heuristic keys for the group's interpretation. Since the group focuses on the moral preached of the text, the group members are dominated action-consequence theology so that repentance and faithfulness to God become central message of the text in this group.

10.2.4.3 Analysis of Exegetical Aspects of the Reading Process of Group C and D

Both Group C and D used a feminist reading as a method for their interpretation of the text. As we have seen in the analysis of their reading attitude, they searched gender bias in the text and criticized it. They read the text from a feminist perspective so that the text itself became deconstruction of hierarchical system in their society.

According to the previous study,⁴ one has been informed that this pietistic reading is normally found in the group who reads the text with full confidence. However, the group D also reflected on the moral preached by the text. This means that the critical readers could immerse themselves into the moral preached by the text which is normally found in the groups who read the text with full of confidence. At the same time, it also signals that those readers who read the text with full of confidence could be critical readers as we have seen in the analysis of the group B's interpretation. Group B is uncritical in reading feminine metaphor because they trusted it as a common description as it is usual in their context. However, they are critical in identifying ambiguous second person 'you.' Therefore, it is observed that a reader who reads the text critically may also interpret the text with full of confidence and vice versa.

Summary

The above analysis shows that the reader's sociocultural context is important in Myanmar readers' interpretation of the text. The readers can explain the text not only by using exegetical methods such as rhetorical and feminist readings but also by relating one's own life experience or feelings to the components presented in the story which is a form of appropriation. How does the hermeneutical process of appropriation work? The readers read the text in more than one translation. In some groups, the readers read the preceding and following text. Then the readers focus on either character or action in the text. Then the readers connect the text with their life experiences to encounter injustice in their social context or to grow their spirituality. It was found that all reading groups are able to unlock the meaning of the text by using their heuristic keys such as gender inequality, a wrongful death case, the church discipline, civil war, New Year festival, problems of exploitation of natural resources, socioeconomic problems, political problems, poverty, education, drugs, and natural disaster. In addition, a group has indicated the possibility of explanation through an imaginative way of reading that is not part of the scientific reading method.

⁴ De Wit, "Codes and Coding," 415.

10.3. Analysis of Re-contextualization Strategy of the Myanmar Readers

In this part, I will study how groups re-contextualize the text. To reach my goal, I will analyze four sections such as groups' reading of characters in the text, re-contextualization strategies, re-contextualization dynamics, and the praxeological effect of the reading exercise. Praxeological effect here may be loosely defined as getting new insight from the reading and doing something practically. In the first section, I will examine which characters or actions group members especially focus on in their process of re-contextualization and how the original reference of the text is replaced by a new one. In the second section, I will examine how, by means of what strategies, the text is re-contextualized. In the third section, I will examine the critical function or the power of the story which could lead groups to new insights. In the fourth section, I will examine significant correlations between reading the Bible and social transformation.⁵

10.3.1. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group A

10.3.1.1 Reading of Characters in the Text

On what character do the readers especially focus in the process of re-contextualization? How and why do the readers identify with the character? Is re-contextualization process problematized by the readers? "Problematize" here means to make into or regard as a problem requiring a solution.

In the process of re-contextualization, members of Group A focus on people of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, God, and the woman in labor. Then, the members identify with the character without any restriction. For example, a reader identifies with the people of Jerusalem because he understands that God wants the people to repent and to return to God when they have committed sin. The reader makes the text his own so that the old character is replaced by himself in his new context.

Another reader identifies with Jeremiah because she thinks Jeremiah understands the feeling of the metaphorical woman in labor. According to her, Jeremiah's verbal expression of the cry of the metaphorical woman in labor shows how Jeremiah identifies with such a woman in labor. Since she is a nurse who assists women in labor, she also understands how women in labor have to struggle for their survival. Therefore, in reading of the characters in the text, the original reference (Jeremiah) is replaced by the reader herself in terms of sympathetic mind for women who have to suffer in their labor. She becomes the agent of God like the prophet Jeremiah. Likewise, another reader also identifies with Jeremiah because she is a minister in her village and has to deliver the message of God like Jeremiah did. However, she does not think Jeremiah's way of giving the message to his hearers is effective because the prophet was used to deliver his message through warning and threatening. She thinks that warning and threatening would be emotionally effective only for a short period just like at the time of Jeremiah. She argues that Jeremiah's audience did not listen to the prophet because the prophet did not show kindness to his audiences. If Jeremiah used skillful personal close relationships like modern understanding of care and counselling, his people would listen to him for everlasting. Therefore, she proposes the need of care and counselling methods in delivering message in the present context. The original reference (Jeremiah) is replaced by the readers

⁵ De Wit, "Codes and Coding," 416-417.

(ministers) and the old reference (preaching method) is replaced by the new one (care and counselling).

Unlike other group members, a reader problematizes the re-contextualization process. Since she is a minister in her Church, she identifies with God in terms of judging others. She understands that God's judgment is related to discipline. However, she argues that God should not judge immediately without any prior disciplines because she thinks God's judgment is very harsh. In the analogy of her Church discipline, the action of judgment should come step by step. According to her, there are many cases of elopement and living together in her social context. Her Church prohibits such social affairs. Therefore, the Church would first remind those who have not obeyed the Church discipline. If another couple broke again this discipline, the Church would let them acknowledge the discipline of the Church with signing a signature on a paper. If another couple still broke the discipline, the Church would bar them from coming to the Church. However, this is not for life; the Church will accept the couples who confess their sin in the Church within three to seven weeks. The main point of the reader here is that the judgment should come only through step by step. This re-contextualization is again problematized by another group member because she does not think such expulsion is effective discipline. She argues that some ministers could abuse the power of authority by replacing God's position. She argues that instead of judging and expelling someone from the Church, one needs to take care of the couples' social background. In fact, the former reader also admits that this Church discipline could not stop the rate of eloping. She agrees with the latter reader that the problem mainly arise from the young people's social situation; the young eloped couples are students who have to commute each day to their school located in the town which is very far from their village; as they are villagers, most students could not follow their lessons; consequently, they do not obey their teachers. The main reason for this social affair is that the youths are out of the control of their parents. On the one hand, parents are making money for their household members; on the other hand, they could not take care of their children effectively. Therefore, in this re-contextualization, the original reference (God) is replaced by present ministers and the action of discipline is replaced by the idea of social care. This is how the readers make the text their own "what was initially alien" which is the goal of hermeneutical process, according to Paul Ricoeur. Interpretation overcomes cultural distance.

Likewise, a reader also problematizes re-contextualization. He identifies with the people of Jerusalem but he raises critical questions to God: "Is everyone in Jerusalem evildoer? Is there anyone who obeys the commandments of God? Is it fair for some people who are suffering because of some people who are doing evil?" Not only the original reference (people of Jerusalem) is replaced by the reader but also the unheard voice of the people of Jerusalem is recuperated by the reader. However, he has difficulty to re-contextualize the action of God or the will of God. He illustrates this by telling that the 19-years old young boy from his Church died unexpectedly by medical malpractices or errors. The boy had been actually suffering from diabetes but he was wrongfully treated for Tuberculosis. As a result, the boy died and his parents had difficulty accepting this death. In this situation, some Christians tried to convince the parents this wrongful death was the will of God. Along with the mother, the reader does not think the medical malpractice was the will of God. In relation to his reading of the action of God, he argues that the voice of the victim also needs to be heard. The action of God is not re-contextualized; re-contextualization of the action of God here for him is found to be difficult.

10.3.1.2 Re-contextualization Strategies

How, by means of what strategies, is the text re-contextualized? Members of Group A re-contextualize the text by means of typology, the tracing paper model, allegory, and the model of the correspondence of relations.

The re-contextualization strategy of one reader can be called typological because he reads the story as the doctrine of repentance from sin. The strategy of another reader is called the tracing paper model or parallelism of terms because she draws an analogy between Jeremiah's sympathy to a woman in labor and her own experience of assisting a woman in labor. The role of Jeremiah is traced, copied, and finally replaced by the reader. The strategy of re-contextualization of another reader can be called the allegory model because they take a symbolic figure and action from their readings. For example, the reader identifies with Jeremiah who preaches the prophetic message to his people. However, the reader does not copy the preaching method of the character because she does not think the harsh prophetic message is effective; rather, she would use care and counselling methods in giving her prophetic message. Likewise, a reader identifies with God in terms of discipline and judgment. She draws an analogy between God's discipline and her Church discipline. Since God's discipline according to her reading is harsh, she reads God's discipline or judgment as a symbolic figure and action. Therefore, when she replaces the character God, she re-contextualizes the text by means of an allegorical model. In the case of another reader, the text is re-contextualized by means of the model of the correspondence of relations. He relates the two similar situations of people of Jerusalem and his Church members who have been victims of injustice. According to him, some people of Jerusalem are victimized by others who have done evil in the sight of God. Likewise, the 19-years old boy from his Church was victimized by medical malpractices or errors. In the correspondence between these relations, he criticized and confronted God and so-called "God's will." In this re-contextualization model of correspondence of relations, there is a room for criticism and confrontation.⁶

In sum, the text is re-contextualized by means of typology, tracing paper model, allegory, and model of the correspondence of relations.

10.3.1.3 Re-contextualization Dynamics

The confrontation between the story and the reader's own life differs from reader to reader. For instance, a reader becomes more sensitive to her interpretation about war. The story stimulates her to remember the ethnic war in Shan State where she and her ethnic people had to flee and hide in the bunkers. During this war, some villagers were killed by the armed forces because of suspicion. These bitter experiences of fleeing in the midst of gun shooting, fighting, and killing during ethnic war leads her to review the text with new insights. Likewise, another reader becomes more sensitive to her Church's failings. Since she gets new insights about the needs of care and counselling in delivering the message of God, she is critical to the Church's failure of caring for her members who are away from the Church. According to her, the Church usually asks for money from those Church members who are making money abroad, but the Church fails to care about these donors who may be facing various kinds of hardships like homesickness. Therefore, she insists on the need of the Church's care and counselling ministry

⁶ Wit, "Codes and Coding," 417.

for such Church members. In short, the story has a power on this group. The story led the group to new insights.

10.3.1.4 Praxeological Effect of the Reading Exercise

What are the significant correlations between reading the Bible and social transformation? Their reading empowers the Group so that the group commits themselves to change their traditional preaching style. This could be seen as praxeological effects of the reading exercise.

10.3.2. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group B

10.3.2.1 Reading of Characters in the Text

In the reading of characters in the text, members of Group B identify not only with the characters but also with the material, the land. For instance, a reader reads with the land because the land always subsequently suffers for the people on it. In his reading, the cries and sufferings of the land are not heard by the people who are dwelling on it (Jer 4:31). He sees the cries and sufferings of his land are also not heard by his people. In this point, the text gets a new context. Another reader identifies with Jeremiah because she sympathizes with the prophet. According to her, the prophet must know what will happen to his own people and the prophet must pity his own people. In terms of sympathy, the original reference (Jeremiah) is replaced by the female reader.

Another reader identifies with the people of Jerusalem because he is imperfect just like people of Jerusalem who are warned by the prophet. He thinks, people are to listen to the prophetic message because of the imperfect nature of people. Through this modesty, the original reference (the people of Jerusalem) is replaced by the reader.

In sum, the group especially focuses on the land, people, and the prophet. The original reference such as the people of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, and the land are replaced by the modest reader, compassionate reader, and the reader's own land.

10.3.2.2 Re-contextualization Strategies

Members of Group B use strategies of allegory and tracing paper to re-contextualize the text. The strategy of one reader may be called allegory in relation to political situation. This reader draws an analogy between the abandoned land of Judah and the land of Chin State in his own context. Many people from Chin State also left the Chin State for bad economic, religious, and political oppression. Both lands are neglected by the dwellers whereas the land symbolically cries. The metaphorical cry of the woman in labor and the cry of daughter of Zion are interpreted as the cry of the land. Through this analogy, the text is re-contextualized in a new context. Another allegory is found in another reader's interpretation of the text. According to his reading, the preaching of the prophets to his own people represents God's admonishment to all his creatures. Therefore, the original audience is replaced by himself who eventually obtains moral and spiritual admonishment from God.

In the case of another reader, re-contextualization is found to be the tracing paper model because she traces Jeremiah's compassion for his own people and she copies it for her life. In sum, re-contextualization strategies found in this Group are the allegory and tracing paper models.

10.3.2.3 Re-contextualization Dynamics

The story has a critical function in this group. Especially, the political conflict in the story led the readers to see their real situation. A reader said that the text gave him new insights about the relationship between religious and political realms. At first, he thought that there was no relationship between these two realms. However, the invasion of the enemy into the city of the people of God and the destructive function in the story let him see his social context anew. In his context, it is difficult to get religious construction permits from the government. Therefore, many congregations do not have a permit to construct their Church building, while many Buddhist temples are built with the support of government's fund. Moreover, a holy cross on the mountain in Southern Chin State was not only destroyed but also curved a female sexual organ on it. The reader was directed to see these realities by the power of the story.

The story also led the readers to revisit their social realities where full of ethnic conflict and discrimination. According to a reader, he was selected for Mathematical Olympiad that would be held in Singapore. However, the local education headquarters manipulated this selection and re-selected another one as the championship competitor because of ethnic and racial favoritism.

10.3.2.4 Praxeological Effect of the Reading Exercise

In their reading process, the group admits that the text empowers them to change their individual and communal social life. Transformation takes place at the level of the self-understanding of the readers in front of the text and not so much at the level of socio-political transformation. The readers commit to renew their spiritual, moral, and cultural life. They would try to avoid any kind of discrimination. They would also try to find ways for local social development.

10.3.3. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group C

10.3.3.1 Reading of Characters in the Text

In this group, some members re-contextualize the text but some do not. For instance, a reader identifies with people of Judah who are unprotected. According to him, people of Judah are unprotected at time of Jeremiah because of the lack of strong government which can protect its own people. Likewise, people in his own townships in Chin State are unprotected because there is no good government who can protect the people, not in terms of war but in terms of the bad economic situation. Many people from his townships are now leaving to other countries for there is a bad economic situation as his context. The people of Judah in the text are now replaced by the people of Chin State.

Other readers identify with God because they think people need to unite with God to receive spiritual guidance from God. Here, the characteristics of God are adopted by new readers and they become the agents of God.

Unlike other group members, a woman does not identify with any character because she does not see any ethnic armed conflict or political instability in her context. Therefore, re-contextualization is found to be difficult for her. Although she has not identified with any biblical character at this moment, she later comes to see cultural bias through the windows of the text.

In sum, four readers out of five re-contextualize the text. The one who does not re-contextualize the text sees her situation is different from that of the text. Nevertheless, the group focuses on two characters – God and the people of Judah which are eventually replaced by the readers and the local people of the readers.

10.3.3.2 Re-contextualization Strategies

In Group C, the model of allegory is found as the only strategy for re-contextualization of the text in the readers' new context. For instance, a reader draws an analogy between the vulnerable people of Judah and the vulnerable people from Chin State. Therefore, the original political refugees at time of Jeremiah are replaced by the reader's contemporary socio-economic refugees by means of allegorical model. Since the group also read with God, the original message of the prophet becomes moral and spiritual messages of God for their own lives. In short, the use of an allegorical model is the strategy for the group in their re-contextualization.

10.3.3.3 Re-contextualization Dynamics

In the confrontation between the story and the readers, group members become more sensitive to their own prejudice. For instance, a reader said that God is the God of oppressed so that God will be with the victims of the Kachin war. However, God is not only the God of the oppressed but also the God of justice and righteousness. Therefore, God will not be biased toward his own Kachin people but God will do justice to Myanmar army. This self-criticism led him furthermore to uncover weaknesses of the Kachin people. According to him, there have been corruptions and immorality in the Kachin armed forces and in the Kachin Churches. Other members also become more sensitive to the cultural bias against women. For instance, even the reader, who does not identify with any character in the text, starts exploring the cultural bias in her context. According to her, many girls are not encouraged to go to the school. Instead, many girls are sold by themselves or by their parents to child sex trafficking. Therefore, the critical function of the text is discovered in this group.

10.3.3.4 Praxeological Effect of the Reading Exercise

The story empowers Group C to see cultural bias in their context and wider meaning of the justice of God. If one defines social transformation as the self-understanding of the readers in front of the text, there is praxeological effect of the reading exercise in this group.

10.3.4. Analysis of Re-contextualization of Group D

10.3.4.1 Reading of Characters in the Text

In the process of re-contextualization, Group D focuses on several characters such as God, Jeremiah, horseman, bowman, war refugees, beautifying woman, woman in labor, and action of God's judgment. However, members of the group identify only with war refugees, beautifying woman, and woman in labor because only these characters, according to the group, are relevant for re-contextualization in their situation.

To begin with, a reader identifies with war refugees because there are thousands of war refugees in his ethnic group. Like the war refugees in the text, the refugees of his ethnic people have to flee from the war. In addition, this reader says that his fellow Kachin people have to run away from their native land because there is no opportunity for the ethnic minority. For

example, people from an ethnic minority will not be promoted in governmental civil services. Therefore, Kachin people are seeking refugees in other countries.

Other readers identify with woman in labor because they just sympathize with the suffering of the people portrayed as a woman in labor. Other readers identify with the beautifying woman who neglects her true lover, God. Likewise, they see some Christians including themselves pretending to be followers of God but actually they neglect God by making money, for example.

In sum, the original references of war refugees, woman in labor, and the beautifying woman are replaced by the readers and their fellow people.

10.3.4.2 Re-contextualization Strategies

In Group D, the parallelism of terms model or tracing paper model is discovered as the strategy for the group's re-contextualization. For instance, a reader parallels war refugees in the text and Kachin war refugees because both refugee groups are fleeing out from the war zones. Likewise, other readers are tracing the story of woman in labor with sympathy. Similarly, other readers are showing the parallelism of people's negligence to God. Therefore, it can be said that the parallelism of terms model is the re-contextualization strategy of the Group D.

10.3.4.3 Re-contextualization Dynamics

In the analysis of re-contextualization dynamics of this group, it is noticed that all group members refocus on the character woman who is unfaithful to God. As we have seen above, their re-contextualization strategy is the parallelism of terms. By tracing the story, they see new spiritual insight, i.e., about unfaithfulness to God and its consequential judgment from God. They all agreed that many Christians from their social context are unfaithful to God. A member has said that even after God had saved their village from the Nargis cyclone, many Church members neglect God by drinking and gambling. This new social outlook reminds them to repent and return to God. Their re-contextualization dynamics is found as a spiritual pilgrimage.

10.3.4.4 Praxeological Effect of the Reading Exercise

The group members confess that they should be faithful to God and they should return to God. It can be said as a personal social transformation in front of the text. A member has proposed to hold workshops for sex and gender knowledge because there are many kinds of discrimination against women in their society. The text has empowered the readers to renew their spiritual life.

Summary

In the above analysis, it is observed that all groups have attempted to re-contextualize the text through the strategies of typology, allegory, and parallelism of terms. In their re-contextualization process, readers intentionally focus on biblical characters because they may be analogous to their own life experiences and often are heartbreaking. Therefore, the readers could use methods of allegory, typology, and carbon copy or tracing paper. In this way, the original characters are appropriated by the new contemporary readers into their own lives. In other words, the text has power over the reader. In fact, significant correlations between reading the text and social transformation are detected. At some points, the readers get new insights

from their reading but at some points, the readers commit themselves to change their unjust social-cultural-political situation. This may be called as praxeological effect of the reading exercise.

10.4. Analysis of the Intertribal Interaction between the Paired Groups

In this part, I will study the intertribal interaction between the paired groups to find out, if any, growth of groups' hermeneutical process. To reach my goal, I will analyze three sections such as the interaction with the partner's profile, the hermeneutic-exegetical aspect of interaction, and the effects of the interaction.

10.4.1. Analysis of Intertribal Interaction with the Partner's Profile

In the analysis of the intertribal interaction with the partner's profile, I will determine the growth of groups' hermeneutical process by means of the following research questions. How does the group deal with the partner's profile? How does the group deal with similarities and differences between the groups? Does the Group acquire knowledge from the context of the partner group? Is there any interest in the profile of the partner group? Do certain issues of the partner group stand out? Are development and growth involved, or rather stagnation and freezing?⁷

10.4.1.1 Analysis of Intertribal Interaction between Group A and B

In the intertribal interaction with their partner's profile, Group A has acquired knowledge from the context of their partner group. In fact, Group A not only acquired knowledge from the partner's context but also offered feedbacks on the issues that their partner group was facing. First, Group A pays attention to the partner's gender, ethnicity diversity, Church's ignorance on youths' drug abuse, local socio-economic issues, local development issues, and endangered language and culture. For example, the group observed that drug trafficking and drug abuse are major social problems which directly affected the partner group's churches. Such an issue lets the group see their own local situation and lets them realize that drug abuse is not only the main social problem for their partner group but it is also their own problem since they have similar situation in their churches. This is the first issue that stands out from the interaction with the partner group's profile. Therefore, Group A has dealt with this issue by raising critical questions: Who grows poppy? Why do they grow it? Who are involved in opium trafficking? The group could not identify those people who are behind the drug trafficking but they could point out the weaknesses of Rule of Law in Myanmar because many drug traders are exempted from legal punishment. Therefore, Group A recommends to educate youths and church authorities by showing the danger of drug abuse. In such project, the Church is to organize youths and to encourage them to take part in Church activities; The Church is not to wait until government takes these responsibilities.⁸ Since there are many youths who are

⁷ De Wit, "Codes and Coding," 417-18.

⁸ Such commitment is widely found among Myanmar Christians during and after my data collection period. Especially, most Christians from ethnic minority people have such commitment. For instance, it actually happened in the beginning of 2016 when "civilian-initiated anti-drug campaign group" called "Pat Jasan" attempted to destroy opium poppy fields in northern part of Myanmar. The government police department and military forces did not help the members of civilian-initiated anti-drug campaign group. The government

unemployed, the group also recommends development programs for the community such as fruits production projects.

The second issue that stands out from the interaction with the partner's profile is the issue of endangered language and culture. In the partner's profile, a member has indicated that he is not able to speak his own Karen language because of the influence of powerful Bamar Buddhists. The Group A worries about the extinction of their own languages and culture values because the group realize that not only Karen but also many other ethnic people in Myanmar are facing this problem. For example, many Karens who had been living in Thanlyin were counted as Bamar in the official census because they did not speak Karen language. In addition, in terms of their religious practice of Buddhism, many Karen people are counted as Bamar because it is general assumption in Myanmar that Buddhist is Bamar and Bamar is Buddhist. In this point, the group shares the same feeling of powerlessness of the partner group.

In group B, how does the group deal with the partner's profile? The group has paid attention to the partner group's profile in terms of gender, ethnicity, job, marital status, geographical location, and religious situation. In their interaction with the partner group's profile, Group B has also acquired knowledge of how to do mission and evangelism in the midst of religious conflict, ethnic diversity and conflicts, and new cultural pattern of marriage from their partner group.

First, the group has paid attention to the religious conflict between Christians and Buddhists in the context of the partner group. The group observes the detailed report of mission achievement in the midst of religious conflict and Group B discovers that the member of the partner group has successfully brought seventy villagers to Christianity. Therefore, Group B compares the missionary with the prophet Jeremiah because of hard working in the midst of social strife. The Group B replies that "It would not be wrong if we compare the missionary with the prophet Jeremiah whose society also was full of social strife." Therefore, the group acquires knowledge that perseverance and diligence are keys for successful mission and evangelism in the midst of religious conflict.

Second, the group notices that a female member of the partner group has reported a plan to marry a man to be able to work in her mission field securely. This member is from Lahu tribe and she is a minister in her context. When the group members first find this marriage plan, they all laugh. However, after they have acquired knowledge of the partner's cultural background, they gradually realize why she has such plan. According to her cultural background, a woman without husband is insecure and looked down. Therefore, a woman needs to marry a man to be secure and to be respected in the society. This is new knowledge of a cultural pattern that the group has acquired from the partner group.

Third, the group is concerned about ethnic diversity in the partner's profile. The group pays attention to the culturally mixed social context of a member. In that context, there are at least fifteen different tribes living together. These diverse tribes speak their own dialects. In the midst of this multicultural society and in the midst of tribal tension, the group worries about ethnic conflicts which can happen any time although the partner group does not report a conflict in such social context.

protects the opium poppy producers. Therefore, Myanmar is still Southeast Asia's top opium producer and the world's second largest after Afghanistan.

In sum, in the above study, growth of groups' hermeneutical process is discovered in the intertribal interaction between the paired groups. Both groups develop their hermeneutical process by dealing with similarities and differences between them. For Group A, drug trafficking and extinction of language and culture are main issues that can redirect them to see and judge their own local situations. Group A not only acquires knowledge from its partner group but also discusses how to combat such situation. Group B also pays attention to new knowledge. They have acquired perseverance and diligence as keys for successful mission and evangelism. Moreover, the group finds how an unmarried woman could be insecure in a certain culture. In addition, the group realizes that a society of diverse ethnicity could be a peaceful society.

10.4.1.2 Analysis of Intertribal Interaction between Group C and D

Group C does not discuss about the partner's profile. They just confessed to their partner group saying "Our group did not discuss our partner's group portrait." Therefore, the group misses the opportunity to acquire knowledge from their partner's profile. This could be due to the group's dedication to the partner's hermeneutical-exegetical aspects in their interaction. According to the investigation of their voice records of their meetings, it is realized that they have met twice in two separate days to interact with the reading report of their partner group, but they have paid more attention to the partner's hermeneutical-exegetical aspects in their interaction and they do not pay attention to the group portrait of their partner group.

On the other side, what does Group D acquire from the partner's profile? Group D acquires knowledge from their partner group. Some issues that arise from the group portrait of their partner are the government's exploitation of local natural resources, spiritual weaknesses in the Church, party strife in the Church, and people's low education situation. The group discusses such issues as similarities between the two groups. The group agrees that such issues are commonly found in many places in Myanmar.

In sum, in the intertribal interaction with the partner's profile, Group C does not acquire knowledge from their partner group while Group D acquires knowledge of general situation of their partner group such as sociopolitical exploitation in ethnic people regions, low education situation, and spiritual weakness in terms of party strife in the Church.

10.4.2. Analysis of Hermeneutic-exegetical Aspect of Interaction

In this section, I will examine how the group deals with the method used by partner group. What differences or similarities does the group itself discover in method, focalization, identification patterns, and re-contextualization of the partner group? How does the group deal with the similarities and differences?⁹

10.4.2.1 Analysis of Interaction between Group A and B

In terms of the hermeneutic-exegetical aspect of the interaction, Group A has growth in their hermeneutical process. Group A pays attention to the partner group's reading perspective and identification patterns. Group A observes that the partner group has read the text through liberation perspective, spiritual perspective, and mission and evangelism perspective. Then

⁹ De Wit, "Codes and Coding," 418.

group A re-reads the text through these perspectives along with knowledge of the partner's contexts that they have already acquired. Therefore, Group A broadens their reading perspectives.

In addition, Group A observes the partner's identification patterns so that they found some similarities and differences between the two groups. The group maintains the similarities between them and adopts different identification. The group said that "identification with 'the land' is new to us. We did not notice this identification pattern as a fruitful method. Now it is possible through the partner's contextual situation." It is direct expression of admiration. Therefore, Group A grows in their hermeneutical process.

Growth of hermeneutical process is also discovered in Group B. The group first pays attention to the partner's focalization – judgment of God, and to the rhetorical reading. Then, the group re-reads the text through the focalization that the partner group has used so that Group B could unlock the new meaning of the text – punishment of God. Then, the group analyzes the identification patterns and rereads the text. As a result, the Group acquires new insight of re-contextualization from the partner group. In this intertribal interaction, Group B expresses direct admiration to the partner group saying "We gain such new insights of the need of care and counselling method. Through discussing our group partner's perspective, we come to realize the importance of interpreting, preaching, and reading biblical passages with new eyes or with the eyes of another."

In sum, both groups have developed their hermeneutical process by exchanging perspectives. Group A acquires reading perspectives from Group B such as liberation, spiritual, mission and evangelism perspectives. Likewise, Group B enriches their hermeneutical process by adopting partner's focalization and rhetorical reading.

10.4.2.2 Analysis of Interaction between Group C and D

In their interaction with the partner's reading report, Group C returns to its own repertoire. The group observes differences and similarities between them, but the group deals with these differences and similarities critically.

First, the group argues against their partner's explanation of Jer 4:29 which reads "At the sound of the horseman and bowman every city flees; They go into the thickets and climb among the rocks; Every city is forsaken, And no man dwells in them." Group D has explained the text as if Israelite people were riding horses and fighting. Group C responds that those who are riding horses and fighting are not the Israelite people but they are the enemies of the Israelite people. Therefore, Group C does not accept their partner's explanation and they return to the text.

Second, Group C argues against several identification patterns and re-contextualization strategies of their partner group. In fact, Group D has focused on several characters such as God, Jeremiah, horseman, bowman, war refugees, beautifying woman, woman in labor, and action of God's judgment whereas Group D identifies only with three characters such as war refugees, beautifying woman, and woman in labor.

Third, at some points, Group C has graceful fighting with the partner's interpretation. For example, Group D has interpreted the description of the woman Jerusalem in the text as the discrimination against women because woman Jerusalem is compared to evildoers and she is to be killed eventually. This interpretation lets the Group D search for women discrimination

in their context and to fight against gender inequality in their respective social contexts. In their interpretation, Group D also points out a traditional saying that would support discrimination against women; the saying says “women are to be beaten as the drums are to be beaten.” In contrast, Group C returns to the text and re-reads their own reading report to restate that there is no evidence of discrimination against women in the text. Group C argues that using female imagery in the text is just to be effective in the prophetic message because a beautifying male will be awkward and ineffective for the prophetic message. Therefore, Group C does not think description of a female image here is discrimination against woman; rather, they explain the portrait of the woman in the text as simply a literary tool. Consequently, Group C does not think the saying was official and real because if the saying was factual there would be no woman who would marry a man. To recapitulate, Group C does not re-read through the method of their partner; rather, they affirmed their own reading method. One reason why the group returns to their own repertoire can be that they do not try to be acquainted with the context of the partner group. Therefore, it is assumed that their attitude of superiority could be a motive for stagnation and return to their own repertoire.

On the other hand, Group D itself has discovered a different feminist perspective reading method in their partner’s reading report. This may be called a positive feminist interpretation method. For instance, their partner group explores more strong points of women and views women from more positive perspective. For example, their partner group interprets the use of female image in the text as a useful literary tool and which would show an evidence of importance of women. This positive view is new for the Group D in their reading. Group D has explained the portrait of woman in the text as degradation of woman. Therefore, Group D has adopted this new interpretation method with the attitude of openness to new information. In sum, in this analysis of hermeneutic-exegetical aspect of interaction between the two groups, it is discovered that only Group D has enriched their reading method by adopting its partner’s positive feminist reading method whereas Group C returns to its own repertoire.

10.4.3. Analysis of the Effects of the Interaction

Now I have come to the end of my detailed analysis of interactions between groups, what did we see, discover? Is intertribal Bible reading a tool for more hermeneutical competence and for better understanding the text? In the above analysis of the intertribal interaction between the paired groups, I have observed that three groups out of four have been affected in important ways by this way of Bible reading. In this section, I will examine the effects of interaction by measuring growth and stagnation of the groups’ own opinion of the text.

In the interaction between Group A and Group B, intercultural competence increases. Each group exchanged their perspectives with its partner group.

Group A asserts that they can re-contextualize the new character “land” in their context after interacting with partner group’s reading report. This new identification offers them new socio-political insights. Moreover, interaction with people from a different cultural background offers them new knowledge of contextual situations such as drug abuse and endangered language and cultural values. The group learns that people are not separable from culture. In addition, the partner group’s positive view on women also lets them explore impacts of discrimination against women in their own context. More importantly, the group has learned to

read the Bible through the eyes of other people by learning other's contextual situation. The group eventually asserts that the main reason that causes current ethnic conflict in Myanmar is the lack of intercultural competence.

Group B also describes the growth of their own insight in the text. Through interaction with the partner, Group B learns the need of Church's involvement in social care for its members. In addition, they acquire specific knowledge of Lahu marriage culture that ensures security for women. Moreover, Group B also learns the needs of church discipline and care and counselling. The group also affirms that understanding of cultural differences can help peace and solidarity. They said that one was not to hold his or her own perspective that was thought to be right; rather, one also needed to view its own opinion from the perspective of another.

In another pair of groups, Group C remains in its own perspectives. They reject the partner's interpretation because they think that the partner group neither analyzes nor evaluates the text properly. Moreover, Group C assumes that their partner group does not understand their social-cultural contexts because of unspecific feedback from their partner group. One may notice that group C does not discuss the profile of their partner group. Yet, Group C asserts that their partner will get new insights, new ideas, and new perspectives from them. In any case, Group C remains in stagnation. Why this stagnation? Previously, I thought it was for insufficient time of their meeting since they paid more time on the partner's hermeneutical-exegetical aspects in their interaction. However, it was not the case because they did not exchange any reading aspects from their partner. Therefore, it is assumed that their total lack of interest in the partner group's context and who they really are, is the case. Attitudes of openness and fruitful exchange are missing in this group.

On the other hand, Group D itself states that they have acquired knowledge of the socio-cultural background situation of their partner group. They said they learned how to relate text and context. Therefore, they affirm that it is possible to interpret the text with several interpretation methods. The group also wonders why their partner does not read their group profile.

In sum, three groups out of four groups enriched their interpretation process by exchanging opinions of their respective partner group's interpretation. The three groups acquire knowledge of socio-cultural patterns and the hermeneutic-exegetical aspects from their respective partner groups. Only Group C returns to its own repertoire as they affirm that their own perspective is more accurate and relevant for them.

Summary

In this section, I have analyzed three sections of the groups' exchange of perspectives to determine the growth of groups' hermeneutical process. The intertribal interaction between the paired groups can be seen as fruitful at the hermeneutical level. In fact, except for group C, the rest have enriched their hermeneutical process. At the level of interaction with the partner's profile, most participants deal with similarities and differences between the paired groups so that it can direct the groups to see and judge their local sociocultural and political situation. At the level of interaction of hermeneutic-exegetical aspects, participants have adopted ways of reading of the other so that they are able to reproduce new insights out of the text. The distinguishable hermeneutic-exegetical aspects are identification patterns, focalization, feminist approach, liberation perspectives, spiritual formation, and mission and evangelism.

Consequently, at the level of study of the effects of interaction, the groups assert that re-reading the text through the perspectives of another can offer not only new insights of the text but also a starting point for mutual understanding and for establishing peace in Myanmar.

Conclusion

According to the above analysis, one can assert that the Myanmar readers' existential and intertribal reading practice can contribute to the articulation of an intertribal hermeneutics by means of four hermeneutical aspects as follows.

First, the readers connected the text with their own life experiences. They focused on and connected to the text in terms of war, political and religious conflicts, social injustice, drug trafficking, and gender inequality as they come from various ethnic, sociocultural, and political backgrounds. In other words, the readers read the text through the eyes of their life interests. They did not pay attention to the Hebrew grammar and syntax. This aspect of applying the text to one's own experiences is one of the differences between exegesis and ordinary reading practice. Their life experiences are their heuristic keys to unlock the meaning of the text. Although the readers did not pay attention to the Hebrew grammar and syntax, the text has power on the readers in terms of letting the readers see and judge their local issues. A hermeneutical circulation takes place. Therefore, their reading stimulated them to work for social justice, economic justice, and to establish peace in Myanmar. These are the new insights for me that I did not discover in the first part of my dissertation. More importantly, theological insights drawn out from their reading directed them to help churches to be healthy. This shows how their life experiences work and are important in their hermeneutical process.

Second, the groups used two main methods which may be categorized as scientific and existential. In fact, although the readers do not realize what method they are using, the rhetorical and feminist liberating reading methods are identifiable. Here, rhetorical reading means reading the text by paying attention to the literary context such as preceding and following the selected text. Feminist hermeneutic here means not only a critical reading to the gender description against women but also a reading of the female characters from the positive perspective. In any case, these two reading methods can be identified as scientific exegesis. Another method, the groups' focalization, identification, and imagination strategies can be seen as the unique reading methods and which cannot be found in the scientific exegetical methodology. By using these unique reading methods, the readers connect the text with their own lives.

Third, groups' re-contextualization or appropriation method is one of the important hermeneutical contributions of Myanmar readers. The text, Jer 4:29-31, which was previously owned by others, was appropriated in their new contexts. For instance, one reader has appropriated Jeremiah and his life to her own situation by means of tracing paper model or parallelism of terms. This reader draws an analogy between Jeremiah's sympathy to a woman in labor and her own experience of assisting a woman in labor. The role of Jeremiah is traced, copied, and finally replaced by the reader so that she becomes an agent of God. Therefore, such re-contextualization process can lead even to the praxeological level – to practice something in their own lives, at least at the level of self-understanding in front of the text. The re-contextualization of the text was implemented by means of allegorical, typological, tracing paper model, and model of the correspondence of relations. Among them, tracing paper model and allegorical model are more frequently used.

Finally, it is discovered that intertribal interaction between the paired groups is fruitful and mutually enriching in the hermeneutical process. The key element for the growth in intertribal interaction between the groups is the open attitude that wants to acquire new information from others. They are open to the insight that they are not the only owners of revelation, texts are inexhaustible. In dealing with similarities and differences of the partner group, this reading attitude is the key for the growth in hermeneutical process. Here, open attitude does not mean naive attitude because critical readers can have an open attitude as is shown above. For instance, Groups A and D are critical reading groups but they have dealt with their partners' reading reports with an open attitude so that they have acquired the partner group's contextual knowledge and feasible methods of interpretation. Therefore, too much criticism as found in Group C could force the group to return to their own repertoire.

In conclusion, the intertribal hermeneutics of Myanmar readers can contribute to the articulation of an intertribal hermeneutics. What one should pay attention to in the Myanmar readers' hermeneutics is that they connect the text with their own lives. They focalize and identify with the characters in the text. They use methods of allegorical, typological, tracing paper model, and model of the correspondence of relations in their re-contextualization of the text. After all, one can find that an open attitude is the key in the hermeneutical process.

CHAPTER 11

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.” (Jeremiah 31:31 [NRS])

11.1. Summary

The research was set out to study important roles and functions of Jeremianic female imagery so that it has examined the compositional materials of the book of Jeremiah, female imagery in the setting of the Ancient Near East, and three specific texts of Jeremianic female imagery (Jer 13:20-27; 4:29-31; and 31:15-22) in the first five chapters of this dissertation. The research has shown that the book of Jeremiah is composed with eight macro-structural units and that each macro-structural unit contains the Jeremianic female imagery. In addition, the research has shown that the author of Jeremiah was influenced by the ancient personifications of mother and daughter goddesses as well as influenced by the marriage imagery that was used to describe the covenant relationship between God and the people in the framework of the Deuteronomistic theology. As a result, the Jeremianic female images played both negative and positive roles in the framework of cursing and blessing of the covenantal theology. On the one hand, the study of Jer 13:20-27 showed that the personified woman Jerusalem carried the prophetic message of doom by playing the role of a raped woman in what has been called by some scholars - ‘prophetic pornography.’ Likewise, the study of Jer 4:29-30 also showed the personified woman Jerusalem as a courtesan and daughter Zion as a dying woman carrying the message of doom.

On the other hand, the positive roles of weeping mother Rachel, loving mother God, and leading virgin Israel were discovered in the prophetic message of hope in Jer 31:15-22. These negative and positive roles and functions of the Jeremianic female imagery challenged me to further my study because Brenner has suggested the purpose of such images is to expose the unbalanced sexuality of male and female and then to reject such texts for they are hopelessly negative. Moreover, feminist biblical scholars like Exum have especially focused on the sexual portrayals in Jer 13:20-27 and she has labeled such texts as ‘prophetic pornography.’ In addition, Tribble named such texts as ‘texts of terrors.’ Since I was interested more broadly in how ordinary Myanmar people read these texts and how their reading and scholarly exegesis could interact, the research has also sought whether different reading practices of different groups of people can contribute to a more fruitful reading of the text, particularly in the sociocultural contexts of Myanmar.

The research has sought to answer the following hermeneutical questions. (1) What roles and functions do Jeremianic female imageries have in their literary context and Myanmar context? (2) What do Myanmar readers do when they read the literary units of Jeremianic female imagery in their sociocultural context? (3) How can the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the approach of ordinary readers on the one hand and the exchange between ordinary readers themselves on the other be mutually enriching on a hermeneutical, exegetical,

and praxeological level and contribute to a new contextual and intertribal hermeneutics in the context of Myanmar? In order to deal with these hermeneutical questions, I have argued for the legitimacy and necessity of the empirical hermeneutics in my project of interpreting the Jeremianic texts (See Chapter 6). The main empirical findings are chapter specific and were summarized within the respective empirical chapters: Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 10. This concluding chapter will synthesize the empirical findings to answer the study's research questions.

11.2. Conclusions

11.2.1. The Roles and Functions of the Jeremianic Female Images

What roles and functions do Jeremianic female images have in their literary context and the context of Myanmar?

Three Jeremianic female images, among others, significantly play important roles in their literary context and in Myanmar context.

(1) The Roles and Functions of the Disrobed Woman Jerusalem

The disrobed woman Jerusalem was discovered, recovered, and became the source for social transformation. In the Myanmar intertribal reading of Jeremianic female imagery, the personified woman Jerusalem was discovered as the source for social transformation. How is this possible?

The ways Myanmar readers discover the naked woman Jerusalem are not identical. Some critical feminist readers immediately discovered the nakedness of the woman Jerusalem while some traditional readers reluctantly discovered it. The clearest evidence can be found in the reading reports of the groups A and B of the project of reading Jer 13:20-27 (See Chapter 9, Section 2). In this study, the critical feminist readers paid attention to the gender inequality in the text and assessed the representations of naked woman Jerusalem as sinful woman and God as right male.¹ These Myanmar critical feminist readers have strongly criticized these texts and found that the use of female naked images in the prophetic messages was a degradation of the role of women so that they treated as the cultural traces of the ancient text and the text which discriminates against women. In contrast to this view, the traditional readers simply see the naked woman as either a literary device or a collective sinful people of Jerusalem. Since many English standard Bible translations have smoothed the original Hebrew word for sexual parts, one might think that the traditional readers would also used a Bible translation that softened the description of the naked women in the text. It is true in other groups but this group did not soften the text. In my research, I have discovered that a group of readers recovered the naked woman by using the Myanmar standard Bible version which politely mentions the nakedness of the woman. Another group of readers recovered the naked women by using a part of the Good News Translation (Jer 13:27) where Jerusalem was personified not as a woman but as a man who is "lusting after his neighbor's wife or like a stallion after a mare." Some readers 'recovered', so to say, the naked woman Jerusalem by promoting her role as representing the whole nation. However, group A did not deal with the text in this manner because they read different translations. The readers of group A discovered that the woman Jerusalem is represented as a naked woman but they refused to read the text from a sexual perspective. The

¹ This criticism is in the same line with Exum et al.

reason why they refused to view the nakedness of the personified woman in the text is because of their reading attitude. The readers read the text from a spiritual perspective rather than the sexual perspective. Spiritual reading perspective here means reading the text as Holy Scripture that is inspired by God. The group asserted that their spiritual reading practice could give spiritual lessons or theology from the Bible. In fact, even the critical feminist readers eventually dealt with the text as the description of sin and punishment by focusing on the relationship between God and the naked woman Jerusalem. In their reading of the so-called prophetic pornography (Jer 13:20-27), the groups of Myanmar readers focused more on theological implications than sexual connotations of the text. The ultimate interest of the readers in their reading process is not the naked woman herself but the relationship between God and the people. They focused on the relationship between God and the people so that the woman was discovered not as a naked woman but as a metaphor of collective people who committed sin against God. In their reading, theologically speaking the most important element was “sin and punishment.” If people are unfaithful to God, they are to be punished by God. That is the most significant role that the personified woman Jerusalem played in the context of the Myanmar readers because this theology empowered them not to turn away from God. The readers do not want to be unfaithful to God; they do not want to be punished by God. The theology perceived from the conflict between God and Jerusalem teaches moral norm and social transformation. A moral norm here means an indication how readers ought to exercise their freedom. Therefore, the text teaches them not to drink alcohol, not to swear impure words, not to practice *nat* worshipping, etc. This normal norm comes from reading the text where personified woman Jerusalem had a special relationship with God. The so-called prophetic pornography was dealt with as a spiritual guide for the readers. Although the unbalanced sexuality of male and female was exposed, the Myanmar readers did not reject such texts because they were not hopelessly negative for them.

(2) The Roles and Functions of the Compassionate Mother God

God is challenged, criticized, but finally accepted as compassionate mother. The research has shown that groups of Myanmar readers found God not only as the male God but also as the compassionate mother. Ironically, the male God who had violently treated the personified woman Jerusalem in Jer 13:20-27 (and in Jer 4:29-31) was playing a role in Jer 31:15-22 as a merciful mother God. How did the Myanmar readers challenge, criticize, and accept this God? One should notice that groups of theological students read Jer 13:20-27 and 4:29-31 whereas groups of ordinary readers read Jer 31:15-22. In both cases, God was challenged and criticized by some readers. Nevertheless, none of the Myanmar readers rejected God, but all accepted God.

In the case of the groups of theological students, the readers criticized God when God was portrayed as a male God who despised the woman Jerusalem, who judged the woman Jerusalem, who lifted up the skirts of the woman Jerusalem, and who sexually abused the woman Jerusalem. Is the readers' criticism based on the readers' critical attitude towards the text or based on the role of the character male God? The research has shown in Chapter 9 and 10 that the readers' criticism was based on both the readers' critical attitude towards the text and on the role of the character male God. In both cases, the readers finally accepted God as God no matter what He did to the personified characters in the text. The most significant

evidence for this can be found in Chapter 9 where a female reader who had strongly criticized God eventually identified with the male God. Therefore, we can even say that faith overrules scientific approach to the text and thus offers alternative reading possibilities.

In the case of the ordinary readers, they did not criticize God in terms of gender description or God's judgment upon the people of Jerusalem. Is that because of the nature of the text (Jer 31:15-22) which is not related to the sexual parts like the so-called 'prophetic pornography'? In fact, the ordinary readers read Jer 31:15-22 and some groups of readers found God as a compassionate mother. However, the reason why these ordinary readers did not criticize God could not be the nature of the text because the text also contains God's judgment on Ephraim who was identified with an untrained calf. It is most probably the reader's piety as the research has shown in Chapter 7 and 8. Although these ordinary readers did not criticize God, they did challenge the traditional view of God as male. Interestingly, it was the male group who found God a maternal God in their reading of Jer 31:15-22 because the love of God to Ephraim is like the human maternal love. These readers did not learn Hebrew language so that they did not know the Hebrew root word for compassion which is also the same root word for mercy and womb. However, by looking at the repentance and forgiveness between Ephraim and God, these readers come to see God as mother since this kind of compassion could come exclusively from mothers who are patient and love their children. A similar case was also found in the Mon Group. The traditional view of God was challenged but an alternative view of God, a mother God who has compassion like their mothers, was accepted.

(3) The Roles and Functions of Crying Mother Rachel

Mother Rachel is crying with Myanmar people. The crying of mother Rachel was significant among Myanmar readers in its three layers. These three layers of significance of Rachel's crying are closely related.

First, the crying of mother Rachel gives spiritual insights to the Myanmar readers who are residing both abroad and inside Myanmar. The research has shown that a group of Myanmar women, who are living in the Netherlands, had focalized on the relationship between crying mother Rachel and Yahweh so that they discerned a spiritual insight that Yahweh had listened to the crying of mother Rachel and rewarded promise that guaranteed the return of the children. This crying and comfort story in the text again evoked memories and experiences of the readers' own lives. Therefore, a divorced woman in the group, as shown in Chapter 7, could testify how God listened to her cry and rewarded her cry by bringing her children back to her. Since her life had been a struggle, she left her children at home and had to work in another country so that she had been crying for several years for her children who were now with her in the Netherlands. This is how the text gives spiritual insight to the group. The women group read the text with mother Rachel so that the crying of mother Rachel became their crying. The readers came to comprehend that God could listen to their cry and could give a reward to their cry. As a result, the readers realized that the biblical promise was fulfilled in their life. A similar case was discovered in the Mon Group members who are living inside Myanmar. A man who lost everything and hopelessly had apprehended the promise of hope in the reading process. Therefore, in terms of spiritual insights, the biblical character mother Rachel is still crying with Myanmar readers.

Second, mother Rachel's crying comforts individual and communal pain. The above case can be also seen as how Rachel's crying comforts an individual reader. It is noteworthy to pay attention to the gender of the readers because some feminist exegetes have argued that women easily identify with the female character in the text and men do identify with the male characters in the text. Therefore, one should explore if Rachel could be crying with male readers. As the research has shown, Rachel also cried with male readers. In fact, this was the case in the Mon Group. A male reader in the Mon Group had bitterly cried because he lost his mortgaged house. He had mortgaged his house because he had to send his son abroad to make money. However, he lost his mortgaged house because of the sickness of his son and his quick return to home. He could not comfort himself from this great loss. He said that his bitterness was like the bitterness of Rachel; his weeping was like the weeping of Rachel; his loss is like the loss of Rachel. In such situation, the text about Rachel's crying comforted him to restrain his voice from weeping and his eyes from tears because of the promise of God. Rachel's crying and God's reward raised him up. The research has shown that even at the communal level of reading, Rachel's crying could comfort both people in Myanmar and diasporic Myanmar in the Netherlands.

Third, Rachel's crying empowered the readers for social transformation. In this perspective, Rachel is compared with Myanmar so that Rachel's role is neither to comfort the readers nor to give spiritual insights but to be comforted by the readers themselves, who are to participate in the nation building of Myanmar. For example, the Myanmar diaspora male youth group living in the Netherlands had read with Rachel and her sons so that the weeping mother Rachel gradually became the crying mother Myanmar who is crying for the loss of her diasporic sons. Rachel/Myanmar is crying for her diasporic sons in terms of the political, economic, and ecological situation. This understanding and interpretation of the text had empowered the Myanmar diaspora to return to Myanmar and to comfort their crying mother Myanmar by means of participating in nation building. This personal commitment was discovered as social transformation in front of the text.

(4) The Roles and Functions of the other Characters among Jeremianic Female Imagery

Some female characters become insignificant whereas some new characters are discovered. The research has shown that the Myanmar readers' interest in reading the text is not exclusively confined to the female characters. In fact, the readers paid attention not only to female characters but also to other characters such as male characters and even animals and land as identifiable characters in the text. In such situation, some female characters become insignificant although they did play roles in the text. For instance, groups of readers, both males and females, who read Jer 13:20-27 never fail to take the male character (God) into their interpretation.

Moreover, in their interpretation process, the theological implications of the text were more important than identification of both female and male characters. It became evident that the theological implication of "sin and punishment" dominated all groups in their readings and in their personal identifications. Although some readers criticized the unbalanced gender representation of the woman, eventually they draw out the theological implication of "sin and punishment" (Cf. Jer 13:20-27). The theological implication was, so to speak, "we are sinful, we should change, and God forgives like a mother." A similar case can be found in the study

of a woman in childbirth and virgin Israel (Jer 31:21-22). The individual roles of female characters were not exclusively expounded; rather, the female characters are considered in relation with other characters to draw out theological implication from the texts. As a result, some female characters become insignificant for the Myanmar readers.

11.2.2. Intertribal Hermeneutics in the Context of Myanmar

What do Myanmar readers do when they read the literary units of Jeremianic female images in their sociocultural context?

It is observed that Myanmar readers identified with the characters in the text. They used not only their contextual situations but also scientific exegesis to unlock the meaning of the text. In their reading, the Myanmar readers used methods of allegory, typology, and parallelism of terms to re-contextualization of the text. Remarkably, most Myanmar readers engage in praxis. In the following, I will present about these observations.

(1) Identifying with the Characters in the Text

Myanmar readers identified with the characters in the text.

All Myanmar readers are eager to identify with the characters in the text. Their identification with the characters is not directly related to the gender; rather, their identification is much related to personal experiences, personal feelings, socio-political contexts, and personal theological views. Therefore, male readers could identify with female characters and female readers could identify with male characters, vice versa. This discovery challenged Exum's argument that rhetorical strategy asked female readers to identify with female characters in the text and male readers to identify with male characters in the text respectively.

In addition, the pattern of identification is not the same among Myanmar readers. While some readers identify the character communally, some identify individually which is apparent in the study of the identification of Kachin and Mon groups. In the above study, it is noted that individual identification could give more theological views than that of communal identification.

(2) Using Contextual Situations and Scientific Exegesis

Myanmar readers used their contextual situations and scientific exegesis to unlock the meaning of the text.

The research has shown that Myanmar readers used both their contextual situations and their interest of exegesis to unlock the meaning of the text. This discovery recalls Fowl's observation, followed by Gerald West, that all interpreters of the Bible approach the text with two sets of interests – 'interpretive' and 'life' interests.' As it was discussed in the Chapter 7, interpretive interests are concerned with the dimensions of the text that the individual interpreter is interested in. Life interests are concerned with the interpreter's life experiential questions and concerns. While most Myanmar readers used their contextual situations to unlock the meaning of the text, some readers did not use their contextual situations at all; rather, they used their 'exegetical' or interpretive interests. The readers' interest in an exegetical approach is not related to their education. It is evident in Chapter 9 that out of four groups, two groups used their contextual situations to unlock the meaning of Jer 13:20-27 whereas two groups used interpretive interest. All these readers are theological students from one school. In any case, it

is interesting that a discussion about social transformation could take place in both approaches as long as the readers identified with the characters in the text. It is also interesting that all the four groups have focused on a theology of 'sin and punishment.' Therefore, it is noted that even the ways in which they approached the text were different from each other, the Myanmar readers eventually coincided in their emphasis on a single theology: 'sin and punishment.'

Since this empirical research itself has encouraged the readers to read the Bible existentially, most ordinary readers and theological students read the Bible spontaneously with their life experiences. The existential methods consisted of in-depth discussion about life, imaginative ways of reading, and consulting different translations. In addition to these interpretation methods, the research shows that most theological students approached the text with identifiable interpretation methods from the 'interpretive interest' category such as the historical critical method, rhetorical criticism, and feminist exegesis.

As it is mentioned above, although the readers used several methods in their interpretation process, their final goal is to draw out the meaning of the relationship between God and the people. The identifiable scientific methods could lead to several dimensions but the Myanmar readers used these methods only to find out meaning of the relationship between God and the people. For example, those readers who used the historical critical method explored the geo-political situation behind the text to see the conflict between God and the people. Likewise, those readers who used rhetorical criticism explored the text to see how the author was trying to convey the people's sin and God's punishment. However, it is noted that some feminist readers had strongly criticized God because of gender bias and gender inequality in the text. In any case, these theological students who used feminist exegesis eventually obtained an idea to level the hierarchical system in their society.

(3) Using Methods of Re-contextualization

Myanmar readers used methods of allegory, typology, and parallelism of terms in their re-contextualization of the text.

Re-contextualization is the penultimate stage in the reading process of the Myanmar readers. This stage is important hermeneutically and praxeologically because the readers in this stage not only appropriated the old reference with a new one but also developed a new praxis. The research has shown that Myanmar readers re-contextualized or appropriated the texts by means of allegory, typology, and parallelism of terms. It is observed that re-contextualization strategies determine the readers' praxis. For instance, some readers identify with the people of Jerusalem by means of typology so that the readers found the doctrine of sin and repentance in the text. The old reference Jerusalem was replaced by the Myanmar group. As a result, the readers committed to repent and return to God.

(4) Engaging in Praxis

Most Myanmar readers engage in praxis.

For most Myanmar readers, the ultimate stage of their reading process is to develop a new praxis. Their Bible reading exercises becomes a place for a new praxis. Although not all readers engaged in socio-political transformation, the research has shown that most Myanmar readers engaged in praxis. As it has been already defined by the above study, 'Praxis' here means the self-understanding of the reader in front of the text and socio-political/cultural

transformation. One of the most striking evidences of praxis may be found in the Kachin-Mon groups where the Mon group developed from the level of the self-understanding to the level of collecting a relief fund for the Kachin refugees. The text has empowered the readers from an individual level to a communal level to change or to do a new praxis.

11.3. Recommendations for Future Research of Contextual and Intertribal Hermeneutics **How can the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the approach of ordinary readers on the one hand and the exchange between ordinary readers themselves on the other be mutually enriching on a hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological level and contribute to a new contextual and intertribal hermeneutics in the context of Myanmar?**

The following recommendations are offered for related research in the field of contextual and intertribal hermeneutics.

(1) The need of a liturgical moment in reading the Bible in Myanmar context

One needs to pay attention to the importance of liturgical moment in the Myanmar Bible reading process. A liturgical moment in reading the Bible is a common phenomenon found among Myanmar readers. The research has shown that all Myanmar readers begin and close their reading Scripture with short prayers and sometimes with singing. Including a liturgical moment in their reading process is not related to the readers' different education level, different gender, and different ethnicity. Both theological students and ordinary readers, both male and female, and all different ethnic groups of Myanmar include a liturgical moment in their Bible reading. Why do the readers begin and close their Bible reading with a liturgical moment? There are three reasons for this. First, it concerns the readers' faith. Myanmar readers read the Bible passages as the holy words from God that would directly speak or give revelation to them. Therefore, invocation is religiously important for the readers. It is part of their faith. Readers believe that God's presence in the group and God's guidance can help the groups to a proper understanding of the meaning of God's revelation. In some groups, this invocation prayer has more weight than in other groups.

The second reason why Myanmar readers take a liturgical moment is because it is a moment to express their life experiences to God who would speak or give revelation to them through their Bible reading. This expression of life experiences in the reading process is extremely important for the readers and consequently for the biblical exegetes because it relates the readers' life experiences and their Bible reading. The research has shown that their life experiences were the sources of their heuristic keys with which they would unlock the meaning of the text. Consequently, the readers would appropriate the meaning of the text that they found through their interpretation. This hermeneutic circle, connecting text and context and doing so in a liturgical setting, would teach them a theology, affirm their belief, correct their moral, and heal their pain.

Third, a liturgical moment is a force that binds group members together in interacting with individuals and in producing proper theological insights for the group. Through a close relationship under one God, group members interact and develop group discussion on their Bible reading. Within the liturgical framework, group members decide what proper theology is for them and what is not. Therefore, the inclusion of liturgical moments in the Bible reading process is discovered as of crucial importance in Myanmar hermeneutics.

(2) The need of exploration of the social context of the readers

It is discovered that the group's exploration of the social context within the group and intergroup of the readers lets the readers see the realities of their social situation. The empirical data show that many readers usually do not notice their realities. By exploring the social context of the readers, readers become aware of their tradition, ethnic identity, political conflicts, killing, raping, war and refugees, human rights violation, social injustice, gender inequality, poverty, ecological crisis, spirituality, immorality, solidarity, and many other needs of social transformation.

In addition, the step of exploration of the social context of the readers is found as the preparatory stage of the reading process. In fact, after understanding their realities, readers choose what to focalize in their readings. In other words, exploration of their social context could offer heuristic keys to the readers. Since the readers come from different ethnic backgrounds, they have different social realities and social conflicts. In some groups, the exploration of social realities has no intragroup and intergroup conflict. However, some groups discovered either mild or strong tension in exploring their social situation. Since the readers come from different ethnic backgrounds, their life interests and heuristic keys could be different from one another. Therefore, the more we explore the social context of the readers, the more heuristic keys will be found.

In the process of exchange of perspective too, the exploration of the social context of the readers is necessary since the partner group could have the opportunity to acquire their partner group's contextual social information. Subsequently, the readers could learn to know the partner group's heuristic keys and could develop their interpretation methods. The research has shown how exploration of social realities is necessary for intragroup and intergroup interactions. For instance, after acquiring the information of the realities of their partner group, the Mon Group stood in solidarity with the partner Kachin Group by means of collecting relief funds for the Kachin war refugees. When the two groups started reading the Bible, the Myanmar military forces had been severely attacking the Kachin Independent Army. The military not only attacked with weapons but also burned several Kachin villages, destroyed over two hundred villages, and forced over one hundred thousand local villagers to become refugees. Dozens of Kachin women were raped and several men were arrested with suspicion. Many Kachins were suffering for this war. In such situation, the Mon Group stood up for solidarity with their partner group. Likewise, the Kachin Group widen their perspective on viewing other ethnic people and religion when they interact with the Mon Group's social realities. Formerly, the members of the Kachin Group had viewed the relationship between God and people only through the lens of Kachin communal life. After exchanging their social realities, the Kachin group members came to view other people in broader perspective. This transformation occurred only after the two groups exchanged information about their social realities in the Bible reading process.

The interpretation practices of ordinary readers and exegetes may be different from each other but interaction between these two important, and complementary approaches to the text appear to be mutually enriching on a hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological level.

(3) The need of contribution from scholarly exegesis

The ordinary readers have their own reading resources such as their life experiences, heuristic keys, willingness to identification with the biblical characters, and re-contextualization strategies. However, it is noticed that the ordinary readers still want to know more about exegetical information such as the historical background of the text and knowledge derived directly from the Hebrew source text.

In fact, scholarly exegesis could contribute to historical background information. The research has shown that many ordinary readers had difficulties in understanding the historical background situation of the text. For instance, many ordinary readers could divide Jer 31:15-22 into three literary units by looking at four main major characters such as Rachel, Ephraim, God, and Israel. However, remarkably, they still want to know more about the background situation of the text. In fact, the readers had asked me to contribute scholarly exegetical historical background of the text. Therefore, it was noticed as the point where scholarly exegesis could contribute to the reading process of ordinary readers.

In addition, scholarly exegesis could contribute to literal translation and accurate translation from the original language. The research has shown that the Myanmar readers used more than one Bible translation. In some groups, the readers used the translation in their individual ethnic language and the Myanmar translation. In some groups, the readers could use four different translations because of different ethnic group members. Why did the Myanmar readers use different Bible translations? It is noticed that the readers want to produce the most accurate interpretation as much as they can. For instance, the readers consult the Myanmar Bible when the meaning of the text didn't become clear in reading their own ethnic translations. Some readers who can read English also consult the different English translations too. However, the problem is that the Myanmar translation could tone down the original language and could use euphemisms that would offer a different understanding as one can see in the research. Even the English Good News Translation (GNT) of Jer 13:20-27 has changed the gender of the character from female to male. Therefore, the readers could be confused with different translations when they were reading for accurate interpretation. In such situation, scholarly exegesis of original language could be a helpful contribution for the ordinary readers.

Furthermore, scholarly exegesis will contribute its scientific methods of interpretation. The research has shown that all readers could spontaneously interpret the text by using their own heuristic keys so that their interpretations are unique. From the interpretive perspective, one can find that theological students' critical reading methods are more similar to the scientific exegesis than that of the ordinary readers. The scientific exegetical methods found in the groups of theological students are historical-critical, literary analysis, and feminist exegesis. However, it should be noticed that not all theological students used scientific exegesis. In fact, a group of theological students even rejected the critical feminist reading. How then can scholarly exegesis contribute through its scientific methods to the interpretation of such a group? In fact, one should notice that a feminist exegesis is only one of many approaches to the text. There are still many other possible contributions of scientific exegetical methods for such readers. Indeed, although the group had rejected the feminist exegesis, they were interested in reading the texts within a wider literary context. Therefore, historical-critical methods and literary methods, for example, may be an appropriate contribution of scholarly exegesis for such readers. Not all

scientific exegeses may be unacceptable for the readers. Contribution of acceptable new interpretive tools to the readers will be helpful in their lifelong spiritual journey.

(4) The need of re-contextualization that overcomes the distance between the biblical period and the present time

In their reading process, Myanmar readers have overcome the distance between the biblical period and the present time by making the text their own. As Ricoeur has shown, the written text has semantic autonomy and it is open to all readers who can read it. In other words, the text wants to be read, interpreted, and owned by the readers who can read it. The research has shown that Myanmar readers read the text with a character in the text, interpret the text by relating the components presented in the story and the outlook the readers have on it, and finally make the text their own by means of models of allegorical, typological, and tracing paper model. With its new owner, the text grows and gets new references.

(5) The need of interaction with other readers

In our Myanmar intertribal reading practice, the text grows and gets new references as the readers personally identify with it. However, holding fast to personal identification could be prone to mislead the central meaning of the structured pericope because personal identification is related to the reader's focalization. The research shows that some readers only focused on some parts of the pericope. For instance, the readers' focus may be either on God or on the people of Jerusalem, or on Jeremiah, or on the personified female images, etc. Therefore, to validate their focalization, the groups need to exchange their perspectives.

In this step of interaction with other readers, the open attitude is the key for the growth in intertribal hermeneutics. As shown in Chapter 10, 'an open attitude does not mean a naive attitude because critical readers can have an open attitude.' Through the attitude of openness in the interaction with others, readers will acquire not only knowledge of the social realities of others and of themselves but also new reading methodologies. As a result, the readers become aware of contextual situations such as drug trafficking, drug abuse, low education of local people, violence in the community, inequality, injustice, exploitation, religious conflict, political conflict, and so on. This awareness of the contextual problems could stimulate the readers to get involved in processes of social transformation. It is evident in Chapters 7-10 that many Myanmar readers are committed to social transformation.

In addition to the praxeological level, this open attitude towards the other reader helps readers to see new interpretation methods and perspectives such as a liberation perspective, a spiritual perspective, and a mission and evangelism perspective. Therefore, an open attitude in the interaction with others is a key element at the hermeneutical level. As was shown in Chapter 10, a group said "We gain such new insights of the need of care and counselling method. Through discussing our group partner's perspective, we come to realize the importance of interpreting, preaching, and reading biblical passages with new eyes or with the eyes of another." In fact, reading groups not only realized what was previously unnoticed by the group itself but also initiated a process of social transformation. The research has shown that a group of Myanmar readers, who had mainly focused on religious aspects became aware of drug abuse in their own social context only when they interacted with their partner group. As a result, the group initiated youth education to avoid using drugs. Their partner group also acquired

knowledge from their partner group of how to do mission and evangelism in the midst of religious conflict, ethnic diversity, and ethnic conflicts. This example shows how interaction with other readers is important for mutual enrichment on a hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological level.

Attention needs to be paid to the fact that not all groups easily accepted their partner group's interpretation. Some readers even rejected their partner group's interpretation. In such cases, the research has shown that the lack of openness and willingness to really interact with the partner group was one of the main reasons for this rejection, and that openness is an elementary condition for growth and discovering what previously was hidden of the text.

Conclusion

To recapitulate, Brenner has argued that the unbalanced sexuality of a male and female text is to be exposed and rejected. Exum also argued that rhetorical strategy prompted a woman to identify with the sinful woman and a man to identify with the male God. O'Connor also argued that Jeremiah implicitly teaches that men represent God and women do not. However, this interpretation did not find much echo amongst the readers whose interpretations were analyzed and presented in this research. Not even one of our Myanmar readers rejected one of the texts of Jeremiah they had been reading; rather, they acquired relevant theology from the text by identifying with characters in the text. As the research has shown, the readers' identification is not related to their gender. Male readers can identify with female characters in the text and vice versa. All Myanmar readers accomplished their hermeneutical circle by reading, interpreting, and making the text one's own. Therefore, this theoretical case for personal identification with the biblical characters needs to be revisited in order to further understand the rhetorical strategy and how it can be made into a more fruitful reading on a hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological level.

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I studied roles and functions of Jeremianic female imagery on the exegetical, hermeneutical, and praxeological levels, hoping to contribute a new way of reading the Bible to the study of contextual and intertribal hermeneutics.

This research was divided into two parts. The first part focused on “the roles and functions of Jeremianic female imagery.” As a result, both passive and active roles and functions of female imagery were discovered. In passive representations of Jeremianic female imagery (Jer 4:29-31 and 13:20-27), the personified wives such as Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem were sexually objectified, abused, raped, tortured, mutilated, and even killed. Amazingly, Yahweh Himself committed this violence. Daughter Zion was also discovered as a dying woman in front of the murderers. The cry of the devastated females was heard like the cry of a woman in childbirth. Likewise, the pain and suffering of the females were depicted as the pain and suffering of a woman in childbirth. Although the pain and suffering expressed in Jeremianic female imagery could be assumed to be metaphorical representations of the pain and suffering of the Israelite people, it also seemed to leave the footprints of misogyny and pornography. At the same time, active female imagery was also discovered within Jeremiah (e.g., Jer 31:15-22). The eponymous mother of Israel, Rachel, who wept for her missing children, was able to move Yahweh to have compassion upon her children. Consequently, Yahweh could then be seen as a compassionate mother. Since Yahweh, a compassionate mother, identified with mother Rachel, Yahweh may be understood as the mother of Rachel’s children. In this positive depiction, virgin Israel was also found as a leading figure in the reconstituted new society. This part of research was done by utilizing synchronic, diachronic, feminist, and ideological criticisms.

In the second part, the research extended from the academic level to the empirical level, at which the Jeremianic texts were re-read from a Myanmar intertribal perspective. The goal was to articulate a more in-depth, insightful, and relevant reading of the text of Jeremiah by means of utilizing contextual and intertribal hermeneutics. In re-reading the same texts, the personified naked woman Jerusalem in Jer 13:20-27 was discovered, recovered, and theologized. According to their reading attitude, the Myanmar readers refused to see the depiction of the naked woman Jerusalem as prophetic pornography; rather, they interpreted the female imagery as a theological portrait of the relationship between God and the people, in terms of ‘sin and punishment.’ The male God who punished the naked woman was challenged and criticized but was also accepted as a compassionate mother because Myanmar readers connected the text with their lives. Namely, they identified with the biblical characters so that the pain and suffering of the Jeremianic female image became their own pain and suffering; the cry of Rachel became their own crying (cf. Jer 31:15-22). The biblical characters were thus re-contextualized by means of allegory, typology, and parallelism of terms in the contemporary situation of the readers. In addition to the interpretation methods of existential discussion, imaginative ways of reading, and consultation of different translations, the Myanmar intertribal hermeneutics utilized more customary interpretation methods such as the historical critical method, rhetorical criticism, and feminist exegesis. The distinctiveness in this Myanmar inter-

tribal hermeneutics was that their reading practice becomes a place to develop a new praxis that was not discovered at the academic level.

In the concluding section, I showed that the interaction between scholarly exegesis and the approach of ordinary readers, on the one hand, and the exchange between ordinary readers themselves, on the other, can be mutually enriching on hermeneutical, exegetical, and praxeological levels and can contribute to a new contextual and intertribal hermeneutics in the context of Myanmar.

SAMENVATTING

In dit proefschrift heb ik, op het niveau van de exegese, de hermeneutiek en het praxeologisch effect van het interpretatieproces, bestudeerd hoe in de voorstellingswereld van Jeremia de rollen en functies van vrouwen beschreven worden. Mijn hoop is, met een nieuwe manier van bijbellezen bij te kunnen dragen aan de studie van contextuele hermeneutiek en van een hermeneutiek die de interactie analyseert tussen bijbellezers van verschillende etnische groepen en stammen (voortaan: ‘intertribal hermeneutics’).

Dit onderzoek bestaat uit twee delen. Het eerste deel is gericht op de analyse van de rollen en functies van vrouwen in de voorstellingswereld van Jeremia. Dit resulteerde in de ontdekking dat er bij Jeremia sprake is van zowel passieve als actieve rollen en functies van vrouwen.

Waar in de Jeremiaanse voorstellingswereld sprake is van passieve rollen van vrouwen (Jer 4:29-31 en 13:20-27) worden de verpersoonlijkte echtgenotes, zoals Israël, Juda en Jeruzalem, als seksueel object beschreven. Ze worden mishandeld, verkracht, gemarteld, verminkt en zelfs gedood. Verbazingwekkend genoeg blijkt JHWH zelf zich schuldig te hebben gemaakt aan dit geweld. We ontdekten dat ook Dochter Sion beschreven wordt als een stervende vrouw tegenover de moordenaars. De schreeuw van de gebroken vrouwen was als de schreeuw van een vrouw in barensnood. Ook de pijn en het lijden van de vrouwen werden afgeschilderd als de pijn en het lijden van een vrouw in barensnood. Ook al kunnen de pijn en het lijden, uitgedrukt in Jeremia’s beelden van vrouwen, opgevat worden als metaforische weergaven van de pijn en het lijden van het volk Israël, evenzeer lijkt men er sporen van vrouwenhaat en pornografie in te kunnen ontdekken. Tegelijkertijd is er sprake van beelden van actieve vrouwen in Jeremia (bijv. Jer 31:15-22). De stammoeder van Israël, Rachel, die weende om haar vermiste kinderen, was in staat JHWH te bewegen tot medelijden met haar kinderen. Op deze wijze kon JHWH dan worden gezien als een barmhartige moeder. Aangezien JHWH als een begripvolle moeder zich identificeert met moeder Rachel, kan JHWH gezien worden als de moeder van Rachels kinderen. In deze positieve voorstelling komt Maagd Israël naar voren als een leidende figuur in de herstelde nieuwe maatschappij. Dit deel van het onderzoek werd gedaan door gebruik te maken van synchrone en diachrone, feministische en ideologische kritiek.

In het tweede deel werd het onderzoek verder uitgebreid: de exegetische benadering van de teksten werd aangevuld met een meer empirische: de Jeremiaanse teksten werden opnieuw werden gelezen, nu vanuit een ‘intertribal’ perspectief en door gewone lezers in Myanmar. Het doel was te komen tot een meer diepgaande, inzichtvolle en relevante lezing van de tekst van Jeremia door middel van het gebruik van contextuele en ‘intertribal’ hermeneutiek. Door het herlezen van dezelfde teksten, nu door groepen van verschillende stammen in de context van Myanmar (waaronder ook in Nederland woonachtige mensen uit Myanmar), wordt de verpersoonlijkte naakte vrouw Jeruzalem in Jer 13:20-27 ontdekt, ‘herwonnen’ en tot onderwerp van theologische reflectie. Hun leeshouding verbood de lezers uit Myanmar om de voorstelling van de naakte vrouw Jeruzalem als profetische pornografie te zien; veeleer interpreteerden zij de vrouwelijke beelden als een theologisch portret van de relatie tussen God en het volk, een

portret van ‘zonde en straf.’ De mannelijke God die de naakte vrouw bestrafte werd aangevochten en bekritiseerd, maar werd ook aanvaard als een begripvolle moeder omdat lezers uit Myanmar de tekst met hun leven verbonden. Ze identificeerden zich namelijk met de bijbelse personages, zodat de pijn en het lijden van de Jeremiaanse vrouwen spiegel werd van hun eigen pijn en lijden; de schreeuw van Rachel werd hun eigen huilen (cf. Jer 31:15-22). De bijbelse personages werden aldus door middel van allegorie, typologie en parallellie van termen in een nieuwe context geplaatst: de huidige context van de lezers. Als aanvulling op interpretatiemethoden als existentiële discussie, creatieve manieren van lezen en raadpleging van verschillende vertalingen, gebruikte de ‘intertribal hermeneutics’ uit Myanmar meer gebruikelijke interpretatiemethoden zoals de historisch-kritische methode, retorische kritiek en feministische exegese. Het bijzondere van deze in Myanmar beoefende ‘intertribal hermeneutics’ was, dat deze leespraktijk een plek werd om een nieuwe praxis te ontwikkelen, een zaak die niet aan de orde is bij het lezen op academisch niveau.

In het afsluitende hoofdstuk heb ik aangetoond dat enerzijds de interactie tussen wetenschappelijke exegese en de tekstbenadering van gewone lezers, anderzijds de interactie tussen gewone lezers onderling elkaar kunnen verrijken op hermeneutisch, exegetisch en praxeologisch niveau en kunnen bijdragen aan een nieuwe contextuele en ‘intertribal hermeneutics’ in de context van Myanmar.

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TABLES

Table 1. Analysis of the Motivation of Kachin Women Group¹

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
Why did groups participate in the project, and what are implications of this motivation for the development of interaction with the partner group? What motives led the group to participate?	1. She said that she had been reading the Bible and praying for thirty years but she found God only when she arrived in Japan so that she is now in her new spiritual life.	Emotionality; Curious/exploratory affective exchange;	Motivation of the Group
	2. God had listened to my crying and prayer. God did not ignore my crying. God did not abandon me. Now God has even brought my children to me.	Emotionality; Longing for a better situation; One wishes to be helped;	
	3. She might pray fifteen minutes during seven days a week.	Curious/exploratory affective exchange	
	4. She prayed only at time when she needed.	Curious/exploratory affective exchange	
	5. She believes God's intervention in human's prayer.	Curious/exploratory affective exchange	
	6. She is not very familiar with reading the Bible and praying.	Curious/exploratory affective exchange	

Table 2. Analysis of the Motivation of KCNL Male Youth Group²

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
Why did groups participate in the project, and what are implications of this motivation for the development of interaction with the partner group? What motives led the group to participate?	1. All the participants agreed to mention their names in the reading report because they prefer to acknowledge each one's contribution to the Bible reading.	One wishes to be challenged; One wishes to share insight into faith with others; More understanding for each other;	Motivation of the Group
	2. He used to going Sunday Schools and reading Daily Bread.	Acquiring new knowledge	

¹ See 7.3.1.1. Analysis of the Motivations of the Groups.

² Ibid.

3. He reads a verse of the Bible before he sleeps.	Acquiring new knowledge
4. My father and my mother brought me up with the biblical teaching since I was young. I like the Scriptures in the Book of Proverbs.	Acquiring new knowledge
5. He likes the books of Psalms and Proverbs.	Acquiring new knowledge
6. He had read the whole Bible after he arrived in the Netherlands.	Acquiring new knowledge; One wishes to share insight into faith with others;
7. He believes that the Bible has a power to encourage him but he does not believe that reading the Bible alone guarantees the heavenly eternal life.	One wishes to be challenged (motivation for validity)

Table 3. Analysis of the Group Dynamics of Kachin Women Group³

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What are the dynamics of the groups?	1. The women group started their reading of Jeremiah 31:15-22 with building an intimate relationship.	mutual trust;	Group Dynamic
	2. After having a close relationship among the participants,	mutual trust;	
	3. The reading process began with a prayer of the facilitator.	liturgical framework;	
	4. The facilitator asked a participant to read Jeremiah 31:15-22 in a loud voice.	one reading for all participants;	
	5. They used both Kachin and Myanmar versions to be able to clarify the meaning of the text.	horizon broadening;	
	6. They asked me to explain about the text	inferiority;	
	7. In their reading, they first observed that the text was composed with three literary units	attention to the text itself;	

³ See 7.3.1.2. Analysis of Group Dynamics.

8. Gradually, the reading process developed with their own concerns and questions	mutual trust;
9. After clarifying their questions by reading inter-textual references,	attention to the text itself;
10. they agreed at some points	communitarian reading process
11. The incidence of Rachel's weeping and Yahweh's reward teaches that God listens to the voice of individual woman's cry. As a participant has already convincingly testified her life experience above, all the women are easily convinced this idea.	reading is celebrating; reading is reflecting their own situations;
12. Ephraim's repentance and Yahweh's mercy shows that even though humans commit sins, God forgives and receives humans if they repent.	reading is celebrating;
13. they also had disagreement on the last part of the text	different opinions;
14. The meeting closed with a short prayer.	liturgical framework;

Table 4. Analysis of the Group Dynamics of KCNL Male Youth Group⁴

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What are the dynamics of the groups?	1. The KCNL male youths first carefully selected an appropriate name for their group because they wanted their group's name to show up their group's identity.	interaction in the group	Group Dynamic
	2. they began the Bible reading session with an opening prayer	liturgical framework	
	3. The facilitator first took a moment to draw up their group portrait.	interaction in the group	
	4. the group started reading the Bible silently because the facilitator thought individual silent reading could help more concentration on the text. However, the three participants	everyone for himself; interaction in the group;	

⁴ Ibid.

read the Bible together by pronouncing in a voice.		
5. They talked about the story of Jacob and Rachel, Jacob's 14 year service at Laban's house, and the marriage of Jacob and Rachel.	attention to the text itself	
6. they put their attention on the text more closely and they agreed that the text was saying about three characters – a mother, a son, and a daughter.	attention to the text itself;	
7. Firstly, they discussed about the mother Rachel. A man thought the reason why Rachel was crying was because of But another member convinced the group that Then, a man saw the biblical characters as ... This idea was developed by the group members so that one reader identified Rachel with Myanmar country (as well as Kachin State) and Rachel's children with himself and with the other diaspora Kachins. In this actualization, a group member related the biblical Rachel's weeping to the metaphorical weeping of Kachin State so that the Kachin pop song 'A Ka Law' (English translation: Ouch!)....	communitarian reading process; interaction in the group; reading is reflecting their own situations;	
8. Therefore, he said that all the loss of the Kachins and their dispersion in diaspora could be seen as losing the battle and being exiles which could be compared with Rachel's weeping story.	reading is reflecting their own situations;	
9. a group member related the biblical Rachel's weeping to the metaphorical weeping of Kachin State so that the Kachin pop song 'A Ka Law' (English translation: Ouch!)	horizon broadening; reading is reflecting their own situations;	
10. all the male youths agreed that their mother country was crying and that she was looking	interaction in the group	

forward to seeing her children's return.		
11. Secondly, they discussed about the son Ephraim. A participant saw that Another participant explained ... Therefore, he highlighted the importance of repentance ... This interpretation was agreed by other group members. The group actualized the story of Ephraim's repentance into ... According to a man, the scattering of the Kachins could be ... One of the group members did not see ...	communitarian reading process;	
12. In this part, the facilitator asked me to raise some questions so I raised the questions: How do you see the relationship between Ephraim and God? Do you see God as a father or a mother? Interestingly, in this part, all the participants saw the maternal image of God in terms of the love of God. A man said ... In relation to this maternal image of God, the group also discussed the issue of the ordination of women. Except for one participant, the male youths did not have any reasons to reject the women's ordination.	focus questions; communitarian reading process;	
13. Finally, the group discussed about the virgin Israel. A man understood the situation of the text ... The participants observed ... They related the virgin Israel... The group agreed to share ...	communitarian reading process;	
14. The group agreed to share good positions with women in the Kachin society while most Asian people have a culture that even prohibits passing under the women's skirts and touching the women's skirts because they	horizon broadening; enriching/stimulating aspects of the semiosis process;	

think women were unclean and subordinate to men.		
15. At the end of their report, they asked some questions to their partner group such as Do you understand the text as soon as you read it? How do you read the text? Does everyone participate in discussion? How do you see the Bible?	enriching/stimulating aspects of the semiosis process	

Table 5. Analysis of the Reading Attitude of Kachin Women Group⁵

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What is the reading attitude of the group?	1. She said that she had been reading the Bible and praying for thirty years but she found God only when she arrived in Japan so that she is now in her new spiritual life.	pietistic/spiritual; focused on personal faith;	Reading Attitude of the Group
	2. God had listened to my crying and prayer. God did not ignore my crying. God did not abandon me. Now God has even brought my children to me.	liberating; focused on survival; focused on personal faith;	
	3. She believes God's intervention in human's prayer	effect on life;	
	4. Whose wife is Rachel? How many children does she have? Is she very beautiful? What does it mean that a woman will encompass a man?"	Reading with Rachel;	
	5. Where is Ramah situated?	geography	
	6. Who is Ephraim? What are Ephraim's sins?	status of text; historical background; literary	
	7. Ephraim's repentance and Yahweh's mercy shows that even though humans commit sins, God forgives and receives humans if they repent.	focused on personal faith;	
	8. Scripture had been fulfilled in her life	effect on life;	

⁵ See 7.3.1.3. Analysis of the Reading Attitudes of the Groups.

Table 6. Analysis of the Reading Attitude of KCNL Male Youth Group⁶

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What is the reading attitude of the group?	1. they put their attention on the text more closely and they agreed that the text was saying about three characters – a mother, a son, and a daughter.	focused on status of text;	Reading Attitude of the Group
	2. He continued to say that ‘Myanmar,’ for example, was usually called as ‘our mother country’ so that he understood the mother Rachel as a symbol of the collective Israelite people and the country.	with an eye to life;	
	3. one reader identified Rachel with Myanmar country (as well as Kachin State) and Rachel’s children with himself and with the other diaspora Kachins.	contextual; effect on life; with an eye to life; reading with;	
	4. He said that “we had to leave our mother country and are scattered in foreign countries because of various kinds of forces such as various kinds of human rights violations and systematic abolishment of our language and our cultural values.	focused on survival; effect on life;	
	5. the increasing occupations of the non-Kachin local investors in Kachin State and aggressive destruction of ecology in the area especially shattered the stability of the indigenous Kachin people and their economy.	focused on survival; effect on life;	
	6. a group member related the biblical Rachel’s weeping to the metaphorical weeping of Kachin State so that the Kachin pop song ‘A Ka Law’ (English translation: Ouch!)	contextual; effect on life;	
	7. Therefore, all realized that it was their responsibility to comfort their mother country. How could they comfort their mother country? They would return to their home country	liberating;	

⁶ Ibid.

	and get involved in rebuilding their poor country. They said “otherwise, our mother would not be comforted.”	
	8. Another participant explained Ephraim’s pleading as theological teaching about repentance. He related this theology with the New Testament story of Peter and Judas; both committed the same sins - both denied Jesus; but only Peter who turned to the Lord with repentance got salvation.	pietistic/spiritual
	9. he called all the Kachins to return to God with repentance.	effect on life;
	10. The participants observed the text’s emphasis on the woman in this part.	focused on status of text;

Table 7. Analysis of the Focalization of Kachin Women Group⁷

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What heuristic keys are used by the group?	1. “Whose wife is Rachel? How many children does she have? Is she very beautiful? Where is Ramah situated? Who is Ephraim? What are Ephraim’s sins? What does it mean that a woman will encompass a man?”	individualized	Focalization of the Group
	2. As a participant has already convincingly testified her life experience above, all the women are easily convinced of this idea.	individualized;	
	3. Ephraim’s repentance and Yahweh’s mercy shows that even though humans commit sins, God forgives and receives humans if they repent.	ethical/morality; religious; central concepts/characters in the text;	
	4. one of the participants interpreted this line that women would protect men in the future by holding spears alike.	gender	
	5. so that she even envisioned the future initiative role of women and the future matriarchal time.	gender	

⁷ See 7.3.1.4. Analysis of the Focalization of the Groups.

	6. women in Myanmar were always exploited and they had no rights; no law protected them; but in the Netherlands, women had full human rights as well as men because of the laws of the Netherlands.	culture; power/powerless; gender; social; exclusion/inclusion; injustice;	
	7. Another one went further and interpreted the new law as the new covenant so that she saw the coming of the virgin Israel as the coming of Jesus Christ.	religious	

Table 8. Analysis of the Focalization of KCNL Male Youth Group⁸

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What heuristic keys are used by the group?	1. they put their attention on the text more closely and they agreed that the text was saying about three characters – a mother, a son, and a daughter.	central concepts/characters in the text;	Focalization of the Group
	2. He said that “we had to leave our mother country and are scattered in foreign countries because of various kinds of forces such as various kinds of human rights violations and systematic abolishment of our language and our cultural values. In reality, our country is the most pleasant place in the world.”	social; power/powerless; exclusion/inclusion; ethnicity; injustice; political; culture;	
	3. Another group member added that the force that sent the Kachins away also included various kinds of globalization waves, the new market-oriented economic system, and new information technology. He said that the increasing occupation by non-Kachin local investors in Kachin State and aggressive destruction of ecology in the area especially shattered the stability of the indigenous Kachin people and their economy.	economic;	

⁸ Ibid.

4. Therefore, all realized that it was their responsibilities to comfort their mother country.	inclusive; ethical/morality; political;
5. Interestingly, in this part, all the participants saw the maternal image of God in terms of the love of God.	gender;
6. The participants observed the text's emphasis on the woman in this part.	gender;
7. most Asian people have a culture that even prohibits passing under the women's skirts and touching the women's skirts because they think women were unclean and subordinate to men.	culture;

Table 9. Analysis of the Explanation Strategies of Kachin Women Group⁹

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What explanation strategies are used by the group?	1. In their reading, they first observed that the text was composed with three literary units which said about Rachel's weeping, Ephraim's repentance, and a woman who would encompass a man.	attention to literary composition;	Explanation Strategies
	2. At their request, I also contributed my academic resources to the discussion by consulting the Book of Genesis and Jeremiah such as Genesis 29, 30, 35:16-20, 48; Jeremiah 9:17-20; 40:1.	attention to world behind the text; historical-critical; sociological; explicit exegetical input by a person of group; attention to broader literary context;	
	3. The incidence of Rachel's weeping and Yahweh's reward teaches that God listens to the voice of individual woman's cry. As a participant has already convincingly testified her life experience above, all the women are easily convinced this idea.	world parallels; strategies of imagination;	

⁹ See 7.3.1.5. Analysis of the Explanation Strategy of the Groups.

4. The Hebrew reading...in the Kachin translation could mean ‘a woman shall wrap a man’ or ‘a woman shall protect a man.’ In the Burmese translation, it could mean ‘a woman shall go around a man or circle a man.’ Therefore,	translation; problems of translation;
5. women would protect men in the future by holding spears alike.	strategies of imagination;
6. envisioned the future initiative role of women and the future matriarchal time	strategies of imagination;
7. The prophetic message of ‘new thing’ becomes ‘the law in the Netherlands’ which is new to her.	strategies of imagination;
8. so that she saw the coming of the virgin Israel as the coming of Jesus Christ.	strategies of imagination;

Table 10. Analysis of the Explanation Strategies of KCNL Male Youth Group¹⁰

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What explanation strategies are used by the group?	1. They talked about the story of Jacob and Rachel, Jacob’s 14 year service at Laban’s house, and the marriage of Jacob and Rachel.	attention to broader literary context;	Explanation Strategies
	2. they put their attention on the text more closely and they agreed that the text was saying about three characters – a mother, a son, and a daughter.	attention to literary composition;	
	3. a man saw the biblical characters as metaphorical representations so that he explained that Rachel’s cry represented the collective cry of all the Israelite people because a country is usually metaphorically called as one’s ‘mother country.’	symbolic;	
	4. This idea was developed by the group members so that one reader identified Rachel with Myanmar country (as well as Kachin State) and Rachel’s children with	reading with;	

¹⁰ Ibid.

himself and with the other diaspora Kachins.	
5. a group member related the biblical Rachel's weeping to the metaphorical weeping of Kachin State so that the Kachin pop song 'A Ka Law' (English translation: Ouch!)	world parallels; strategies of imagination;
6. he saw Ephraim not as a historical man but as a symbolic character that represents the Israelite people.	symbolic;
7. Ephraim's pleading as theological teaching about repentance.	theological;
8. the scattering of the Kachins could be a kind of God's admonishment on the Kachins.	theological;
9. a man also observed the repetition of the word 'love' in his Kachin Bible that usually comes from mothers so that he saw God's love as a mother's love.	translation; strategies of imagination;
10. A man understood the situation of the text as the post war period when most men would have been killed in the battle and many women would have been left in the community.	attention to world behind the text; attention to sociological situation;
11. Thus, they advocated to promote women's status in their society.	theological;

Table 11. Analysis of the Kachin Women Group's Reading of Characters in the Text¹¹

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
Which characters do the readers focus on in the process of actualization? What is the new reference of the text?	1. In their reading, they first observed that the text was composed with three literary units which said about Rachel's weeping, Ephraim's repentance, and a woman who would encompass a man.	focused on Rachel, Ephraim, a woman who would encompass a man;	Reading of Characters in the Text

¹¹ See 7.3.1.6. Analysis of the Reading of Characters in the Text.

2. The incidence of Rachel's weeping and Yahweh's reward teaches that God listens to the voice of individual woman's cry.	Rachel becomes individual woman; focused on God's care;
3. Ephraim's repentance and Yahweh's mercy shows that even though humans commit sins, God forgives and receives humans if they repent.	Ephraim represents repented; focused repentance and forgiveness;
4. women would protect men in the future by holding spears alike.	the woman represents the contemporary women; focused on woman's ability;
5. envisioned the future initiative role of women and the future matriarchal time	focused on initiative role of women and the future matriarchal time;
6. the coming of the virgin Israel as the coming of Jesus Christ.	focus on virgin Israel; new reference – Jesus;

Table 12. Analysis of the KCNL Male Youth Group's Reading of Characters in the Text¹²

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
Which characters do the readers focus on in the process of actualization? What is the new reference of the text?	1. the text was saying about three characters – a mother, a son, and a daughter.	focused on a mother, a son, and a daughter;	Reading of Characters in the Text
	2. identified Rachel with Myanmar country and Rachel's children with himself and with the other diaspora Kachins	Rachel becomes new reference – Myanmar and Rachel's children diaspora Kachins;	
	3. a group member related the biblical Rachel's weeping to the metaphorical weeping of Kachin State so that the Kachin pop song 'A Ka Law' (English translation: Ouch!)	Rachel's weeping becomes the weeping of Kachin State;	

¹² Ibid.

4. he highlighted the importance of repentance and at the same time he called all the Kachins to return to God with repentance.	focused on Ephraim's repentance;
5. all the participants saw the maternal image of God in terms of the love of God.	focused on God's maternal image of God;
6. They related the virgin Israel, faithless daughter, and the woman who would protect the man so that they found the important role of the woman. Thus, they advocated to promote women's status in their society.	focused on virgin Israel;

Table 13. Analysis of the Kachin Women Group's Appropriation Strategies¹³

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
“How, by means of what strategy, is the text actualized? If actualizing texts is the process in which the original reference of a text is replaced by a new one (Ricoeur), how does this process develop for the reading groups?”	1. “I left my three children at my parents' home after I was divorced. I left my children and went to Thailand to make money there because my family was very poor. In Thailand, I had uncountable difficulties. I cried days and nights. I missed my children. I prayed God by fasting. Finally, I found my present husband who was going to be resettled by the UNHCR in the Netherlands. God had listened to my crying and prayer. God did not ignore my crying. God did not abandon me. Now God has even brought my children to me.” ... Rachel's weeping and Yahweh's reward teaches that God listens to the voice of individual woman's cry.	parallelism of terms (tracing paper); testimony of personal experience develops reading process;	Appropriation Strategies
	2. one of the participants interpreted this line that women would protect men in the future by holding spears alike.	allegory	

¹³ See 7.3.1.7. Analysis of Appropriation Strategies.

3. The prophetic message of 'new thing' becomes 'the law in the Netherlands' which is new to her.	allegory
4. envisioned the future initiative role of women and the future matriarchal time	allegory
5. she saw the coming of the virgin Israel as the coming of Jesus Christ.	allegory

Table 14. Analysis of the KCNL Male Youth Group's Appropriation Strategies¹⁴

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
"How, by means of what strategy, is the text actualized? If actualizing texts is the process in which the original reference of a text is replaced by a new one (Ricoeur), how does this process develop for the reading groups?"	1. a man saw the biblical characters as metaphorical representations so that he explained that Rachel's cry represented the collective cry of all the Israelite people because a country is usually metaphorically called as one's 'mother country.'	analogy;	Appropriation Strategies
	2. This idea was developed by the group members so that one reader identified Rachel with Myanmar country (as well as Kachin State) and Rachel's children with himself and with the other diaspora Kachins.	allegory	
	3. Therefore, he said that all the loss of the Kachins and their dispersion in diaspora could be seen as losing the battle and being exiles which could be compared with Rachel's weeping story.	analogy;	
	4. a group member related the biblical Rachel's weeping to the metaphorical weeping of Kachin State so that the Kachin pop	parallelism of terms (tracing paper);	

¹⁴ Ibid.

song 'A Ka Law' (English translation: Ouch!)	
5. he highlighted the importance of repentance and at the same time he called all the Kachins to return to God with repentance.	parallelism of terms (tracing paper);
6. Therefore, God's merciful love upon Ephraim here is quite similar to that of a mother's love.	analogy;
7. The male youths also related the prophetic message of the important role of the woman to the actual role of historical women –	typology;

Table 15. Analysis of the Appropriation Contents of Kachin Women Group¹⁵

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What are the contents of appropriations?	1. Rachel's weeping and Yahweh's reward teaches that God listens to the voice of individual woman's cry.	faith in God's strength for their own earthly struggle;	Appropriation Contents
	2. Ephraim's repentance and Yahweh's mercy shows that even though humans commit sins, God forgives and receives humans if they repent.	faith in God's strength for their own earthly struggle;	
	3. women would protect men in the future by holding spears alike	oppression-liberation;	
	4. envisioned the future initiative role of women and the future matriarchal time	oppression-liberation;	
	5. women in Myanmar were always exploited and they had no rights; no law protected them; but in the Netherlands, women had full human rights as well as men	political/social/economic exclusion;	

¹⁵ See 7.3.1.8. Analysis of Appropriation Content.

	6. she saw the coming of the virgin Israel as the coming of Jesus Christ.	faith in Jesus;	
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Table 16. Analysis of the Appropriation Contents of KCNL Male Youth Group¹⁶

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What are the contents of appropriations?	1. He said, “we had to leave our mother country and are scattered in foreign countries because of various kinds of forces such as various kinds of human rights violations and systematic abolishment of our language and our cultural values.”	political/social/economic exclusion	Appropriation Contents
	2. that the force that sent the Kachins away also included various kinds of globalization waves, the new market oriented economic system, and new information technology.	political/social/economic exclusion	
	3. ... highlighted the importance of repentance and at the same time he called all the Kachins to return to God with repentance. ... the scattering of the Kachins could be a kind of God’s admonishment on the Kachins.	faith in God’s strength for their own earthly struggle;	
	4. all the participants saw the maternal image of God in terms of the love of God.	maternal image of God; the love of God;	
	5. they found the important role of the woman.	the important role of woman;	
	6. agreed to share good positions with women in the Kachin society while most Asian people had the cultural that even	the important role of woman; gender equality; oppression-liberation; political/social/economic exclusion;	

¹⁶ Ibid.

prohibited passing under the women's skirts and touching the women's skirts because they thought women were unclean and subordinate to men.	
7. Whether this legend is true or not, they all agreed on the important role of women.	the important role of woman;

Table 17. Analysis of the Appropriation Dynamics of Kachin Women Group¹⁷

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What is the effect of the text on the readers? Do the readers see their own life as a fulfillment of the text? Have they become more sensitive to their own situation, culture, and ideology? Has the story led the readers to new insights?	1. The incidence of Rachel's weeping and Yahweh's reward teaches that God listens to the voice of individual woman's cry.	awareness of biblical message;	Appropriation Dynamics
	2. Ephraim's repentance and Yahweh's mercy shows that even though humans commit sins, God forgives and receives humans if they repent.	awareness of biblical message;	
	3. women would protect men in the future by holding spears alike	awareness of woman's initiative role;	
	4. envisioned the future initiative role of women and the future matriarchal time	awareness of woman's initiative role;	
	5. the Scripture had been fulfilled in her life	harmony: in my life God's promises are fulfilled;	

¹⁷ See 7.3.1.9. Analysis of Appropriation Dynamics.

6. women in Myanmar were always exploited and they had no rights; no law protected them; but in the Netherlands, women had full human rights as well as men	awareness of one's own context; awareness of one's own cultural bias; awareness of gender balance; hermeneutic circulation: context-text-context;
7. she saw the coming of the virgin Israel as the coming of Jesus Christ.	awareness of biblical message;

Table 18. Analysis of the Appropriation Dynamics of KCNL Male Youth Group¹⁸

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category	
What is the effect of the text on the readers? Do the readers see their own life as a fulfillment of the text? Have they become more sensitive to their own situation, culture, and ideology? Has the story led the readers to new insights?	1. He continued to say that 'Myanmar,' for example, was usually called as 'our mother country' so that he understood the mother Rachel as a symbol of the collective Israelite people and the country. This idea was developed by the group members so that one reader identified Rachel with Myanmar country (as well as Kachin State) and Rachel's children with himself and with the other diaspora Kachins.	hermeneutic circulation: context-text-context;	Appropriation Dynamics	
	2. Therefore, he said that all the loss of the Kachins and their dispersion in diaspora could be seen as losing the battle and being exiles which could be compared with Rachel's weeping story. ... a group member related the biblical Rachel's weeping to the metaphorical weeping of Kachin State so that the Kachin pop song 'A Ka Law' (English translation: Ouch!)	hermeneutic circulation: context-text-context;		
	3. Then, all the male youths agreed that their mother country	hermeneutic circulation:		

¹⁸ Ibid.

was crying and that she was looking forward to seeing her children's return.	context-text-context;
4. he highlighted the importance of repentance and at the same time he called all the Kachins to return to God with repentance.	awareness of biblical message; awareness of one's own failure/sin; self-critical; hermeneutic circulation: context-text-context;
5. the scattering of the Kachins could be a kind of God's admonishment on the Kachins.	awareness of one's own context; self-critical;
6. all the participants saw the maternal image of God in terms of the love of God.	awareness of biblical message;
7. In relation to this maternal image of God, the group also discussed the issue of the ordination of women. Except for one participant, the male youths did not have any reasons to reject the women's ordination.	hermeneutic circulation: context-text-context;
8. They related the virgin Israel, faithless daughter, and the woman who would protect the man so that they found the important role of the woman. Thus, they advocated to promote women's status in their society.	awareness of biblical message; hermeneutic circulation: context-text-context;
9. The group agreed to share good positions with women in the Kachin society while most Asian people have a culture that even prohibits passing under the women's skirts and touching the women's skirts because they think women were unclean and subordinate to men.	awareness of one's own context; awareness of one's own ideology; awareness of one's own cultural bias; awareness of one's own failure/sin; awareness of one's own failure/sin; awareness of one's own prejudices; hermeneutic circulation: context-text-context;

Table 19. Analysis of the Praxeological Effects of the Reading in Kachin Women Group¹⁹

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
<p>What is the praxeological effect of the intercultural reading? What characters do the readers identify with? Is there any empowerment to the self or toward others? What is the significant social transformation of the groups? Does the reading result at the level of 'we should'? What is the resultant action?</p>	<p>1. The incidence of Rachel's weeping and Yahweh's reward teaches that God listens to the voice of individual woman's cry. As a participant has already convincingly testified her life experience above, all the women are easily convinced this idea.</p>	<p>empowerment to the self; empowerment to others;</p>	<p>Praxeological Effects of the Reading</p>
	<p>2. Ephraim's repentance and Yahweh's mercy shows that even though humans commit sins, God forgives and receives humans if they repent.</p>	<p>empowerment to the self; empowerment to others;</p>	
	<p>3. one of the participants interpreted this line that women would protect men in the future by holding spears alike. Another one participant explained the text that it could mean the women would lead the men in the future so that she even envisioned the future initiative role of women and the future matriarchal time.</p>	<p>intention; imitating virgin Israel;</p>	
	<p>4. women in Myanmar were always exploited and they had no rights; no law protected</p>	<p>interacting with social-cultural differences;</p>	

¹⁹ See 7.3.1.10 Analysis of Praxeological Effects.

them; but in the Netherlands, women had full human rights as well as men	
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Table 20. Analysis of the Praxeological Effects of the Reading in KCNL Male Youth Group²⁰

Questions	Text Segments	Labels/Codes	Main Category
What is the praxeological effect of the intercultural reading? What characters do the readers identify with? Is there any empowerment to the self or toward others? What is the significant social transformation of the groups? Does the reading result at the level of 'we should'? What is the resultant action?	1. Then, all the male youths agreed that their mother country was crying and that she was looking forward to seeing her children's return. Therefore, all realized that it was their responsibility to comfort their mother country. How could they comfort their mother country? They would return to their home country and get involved in rebuilding their poor country. They said "otherwise, our mother would not be comforted."	empowerment to the self; empowerment to others; new forms of social or political action; imitating virgin Israel;	Praxeological Effects of the Reading
	2. he highlighted the importance of repentance and at the same time he called all the Kachins to return to God with repentance.	new life (style);	
	3. Thus, they advocated to promote women's status in their society. The group agreed to share good positions with women in the Kachin society while most Asian people have a culture that even prohibits passing under the women's skirts and touching the women's skirts because they think women were unclean and subordinate to men.	breaking through social-cultural barriers;	

²⁰ Ibid.