

# The Making of Gershom's Story: A Cameroonian Postwar Hermeneutics Reading of Exodus 2

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In his first articulation of self-definition—though not his first identity-forming moment—in Exodus, Moses, a repeat survivor of violence, describes himself in genealogical and geographical terms: “I have become a sojourner in a foreign land” (Exod 2:22). The bearer of that identity and memory, however, is not Moses but Gershom; that is, “sojourner” and “foreignness” function less as person-specific and boundary-specific tropes than as intergenerational and interregional presences. Moses’s intergenerational and interregional interpretive act creates a narrative and embodied character, Gershom, whose “inherited” story illustrates an exodus motif of fragmented and dislocated identity reclaimed as trauma-promise. Combining biblical exegesis with theoretical insights from postcolonial analyses, cultural memory, and identity formation in the nation-state of Cameroon, the essay reads Exodus 2 as a postwar story of identity formation, infused with multiple consciousnesses (political, ethnic, gendered, regional, and religious) and varied memories (conjunctive, disjunctive, and adjunctive). These consciousnesses and memories create gershomite identity, the narrative trope and communal embodiment that transform the traumas of communal fragmentation and displacement into trauma-hopes of survival and regeneration.

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My analyses proceed on two basic assumptions. First, the exodus story’s inter-regional and intergenerational identity, as well as its ethics and cultural values, are significantly shaped by war and violence—real or anticipated—and by communal responses to such violence.<sup>1</sup> Second, consistent with canonical practice in African biblical hermeneutics of using cultural history as a resource and context for interpretation,<sup>2</sup> analyses of postwar history and geography are vital to biblical

<sup>1</sup>See Thomas B. Dozeman, *God at War: Power in the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). See also Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3–27.

<sup>2</sup>See Gerald O. West, ed., *Reading Other-wise: Socially Engaged Biblical Scholars Reading*

interpretation in the African nation-state. My focus is on the intersection of war, violence, and biblical interpretation in colonized and independent Cameroon. On the basis of these assumptions, I will read Exodus 2 as a postwar narrative.

Central to postwar hermeneutics is prioritized attention to forms of power that facilitate access to and control of individual, communal, and cosmic life—what the Bafut of Cameroon call *nchuwi-ntə* (literally, “life force”).<sup>3</sup> The cradle of this hermeneutic, much like the “cradle of the nation”—to evoke Julius Wellhausen’s popular phrase—is not just the “war camp” but also the “birth stool,”<sup>4</sup> both of which evoke two primary impulses in individual and collective identity formation, survival, and memory: (1) trauma from cognitive and material alienation and threat of extinction, which Jacob Wright calls “*the fear of defeat and defeat itself*”<sup>5</sup> and (2) communal drive for survival, restoration, and integration, which Desmond Tutu calls the “African *Weltsanschauung*” constructed around concepts of life-affirming hospitality and compassion: *ubuntu* in Nguni languages<sup>6</sup> or *akwaaba* in Twi languages. The use of historical, cultural, contextual, and religious perspectives in African biblical hermeneutics<sup>7</sup> connects human bodies, communities, and geographies; it combines ecologies, ideologies, and economies of life. Thus, postwar hermeneutics engages what Patrick Manning calls “history through culture ... expressed in verbal and nonverbal media, at the level of whole societies and individuals.”<sup>8</sup> For Cameroon and the biblical story, war and violence (re)define communal identity around gender, ethnicity, politics, religion, and region, and therefore impact narrative ethics and cultural values. These identity markers and their associative values are deployed here not as a menu of hermeneutical options but as interpretive clusters that illumine postwar hermeneutics in Exodus 2—the

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*with Their Local Communities*, SemeiaSt 62 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007); Madipoane Masenya, “Esther and Northern Sotho Stories: An African–South African Woman’s Commentary,” in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed. Musa W. Dube, GPBS 2 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 27–49; Robert S. Wafula, *Biblical Representations of Moab: A Kenyan Postcolonial Reading* (New York: Lang, 2014); Musa W. Dube, Andrew M. Mbuvi, and Dora R. Mbuwayesango, eds., *Postcolonial Perspectives in African Biblical Interpretations*, GPBS 13 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>Robert Ritzenhaller and Pat Ritzenhaller, *Cameroon’s Village: An Ethnography of the Bafut* (Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Public Museum, 1962).

<sup>4</sup>Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1958), 24; Claudia D. Bergmann, *Childbirth as a Metaphor for Crisis: Evidence from the Ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and 1QH XI, 1–18*, BZAW 382 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 60–71.

<sup>5</sup>Jacob L. Wright, “The Commemoration of Defeat and the Formation of a Nation in the Hebrew Bible,” *Proof* 29.3, special issue, *The Jewish Mystical Text as Literature* (2009): 435 (emphasis original).

<sup>6</sup>Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 31.

<sup>7</sup>See David Tuesday Adamo, ed., *Biblical Interpretation in African Perspective* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006); Hugh R. Page Jr., ed., *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel’s Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

<sup>8</sup>Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History through Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 20.

deployment of compassion, resistance to exploitation, and hospitality as tropes for regenerative transformation of dislocated identity into trauma-promise.

### I. GERSHOM: AN INTERGENERATIONAL AND INTERREGIONAL STORY

In his first articulation of self-definition—though not his first identity-forming moment—in Exodus, Moses describes himself in genealogical and geographical terms: “I have become a sojourner in a foreign land” (Exod 2:22). The bearer of that identity and memory, however, is not Moses but Gershom; that is, the ideas “sojourner” and “foreignness” function less as person-specific and boundary-specific tropes than as intergenerational and interregional presences. In this interpretive episteme where geography, sociology, and genealogy are integral to narrative and existential meaning, paradox emerges: although narrative nomenclature designates his spatial location as “foreign,” Midian is not foreign land to Gershom. Moses’s intergenerational and interregional interpretive act creates a narrative and embodied character—Gershom—whose “inherited” story illustrates an exodus motif of dislocated identity reclaimed as trauma-promise. But how and why does Gershom happen? What processes, events, and places provide structure, meaning, and purpose to his narrative genealogy and its interpretive relevance? What virtues shape social interaction and discourse about communal identity, ethics, and governance? What memories infuse and galvanize this story?

Exodus begins as a story of profound shifts in communal identities—political, gendered, ethnic, religious, and regional—centrally linked to a new pharaoh’s hypothetical, but deeply impactful, wartime policies and ideologies (1:8–22). Anxieties about survival partially unfold around (firstborn) children, whose continuous endangerment crystallizes wartime gender ideology and necropolitics, “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die”<sup>9</sup> (1:15–22, 4:21–26, 32:9–14), and the interpretive impetus for reengaging exodus as escape from violence (12:26; 13:8, 14–15). The story, Thomas Dozeman writes, is “presented as a holy war against Egypt, which is meant to probe conflict between Yahweh and other powers concerning the divine claim on Israel.”<sup>10</sup> With ongoing claims

<sup>9</sup>Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15 (2003): 11. On the precarious life of the child in the Hebrew Bible, see Danna Nolan Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

<sup>10</sup>Dozeman, *God at War*, 5. On the global geopolitics and ideology of war and violence in Exodus, see Robert Warrior, “Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians,” *USQR* 59 (2005): 1–8; Dennis T. Olson, “Violence for the Sake of Social Justice? Narrative, Ethics and Indeterminacy in Moses’ Slaying of the Egyptian (Exodus 2:11–15),” in *The Meanings We Choose: Hermeneutical Ethics, Indeterminacy and the Conflict of Interpretations*, ed. Charles H. Cosgrove, JSOTSup 411 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 138–48; Robert M. Good, “The Just War in Ancient Israel,” *JBL* 104 (1985): 385–400. See also Edward Said’s response to Michael Walzer’s *Exodus and Revolution* in Said,

and counterclaims over Israel (e.g., 4:22: Israel as YHWH's firstborn; 5:15–17: Israel as Pharaoh's servants and people; 32:7: Israel as Moses's people; 32:11–12: Israel as YHWH's people), the story is politically "mixed" and spatially mapped. Events marking Israel's emergence connect birth stools and wetland economies of the Nile and the sea of reeds;<sup>11</sup> there are temporary, life-saving treks to the wilderness (5:1–4) and violent debates about legal and kinship structures in wilderness and mountain areas (2:13–14, 5:10–15, 32:15–34).

Woven into a "grand" narrative, the story of intergenerational and interregional bonds redefines identity: Israel is on the cusp of becoming exodus-Israel, shaped by kinship narratives about attempted control over the birthing and nurturing waters of the womb and Nile/Sea, and postviolence survival and migration narratives. Political identity is linked to lively birthing (1:19), adoption (4:22–23), divine deliverance (*ʿālā*, "going up," *yāṣāʾ*, "going out," "being brought out," 12:38, 39, 41, 42) and expulsion (*gāraš*, "being driven out," 12:39; cf. 6:1, 11:1) by Pharaoh;<sup>12</sup> ethnicity identifies and distinguishes Hebrews from a "mixed multitude" of migrant subgroups (12:38); religion connects matriarchal and patriarchal traditions with YHWH (Exod 3:13–15, 6:2–4; cf. Gen 21:15–21); and migration transitions liberated or asylum-seeking Israel<sup>13</sup> toward an old-new land (Exod 6:6–8). In the intersection of birth and survival, narrative constructions of woman, nation, land, man, mother, God, migrant, and warrior converge;<sup>14</sup> it is the makings of Gershom's story—of beginnings that structure and transform the traumas of violent dislocations and births into interregional and intergenerational identities. In this reformulation of spatial dislocation and birth/adoption, memory belongs to children, but regional, generational, and divine ancestors are the iconic means by which children remember.

"Michael Walzer's 'Exodus and Revolution': A Canaanite Reading," *Grand Street* 5.2 (1986): 86–106.

<sup>11</sup> Ilana Pardes, "Biography of Ancient Israel: Imagining the Birth of a Nation," *CL* 49 (1997): 24–41. Exodus begins with the "children of Israel" in Egypt (1:1) and ends with the "house of Israel" (40:38) around the mountain area. With the exception of 1:22, all references to the Nile in Exodus have economic implications, for Pharaoh's house, local populations, or both. See 2:3, 5; 4:9; 7:15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 28; 8:5, 7; 17:5. On the use of reeds in ancient Egypt to produce baskets, pens, sandals, artwork, and spears, see Louffy Boulos and Ahmed Gamal-El-Din-Fahmy, "Grass in Ancient Egypt," *Kew Bulletin* 62 (2007): 509.

<sup>12</sup> Hosea 11:1 speaks of YHWH "calling" Israel from Egypt. Philo of Alexandria portrayed Egypt as a female body, including depiction as a birthing mother (*Agr.* §64, 88). See Albert C. Geljon and David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria, On Cultivation: Introduction, Translation, And Commentary*, PACS 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 181. See also Sarah J. K. Pearce, *Land of the Body: Studies in Philo's Representation of Egypt*, WUNT 208 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 103–27.

<sup>13</sup> See Jonathan P. Burnside, "Exodus and Asylum: Uncovering the Relationship between Biblical Law and Narrative," *JSOT* 34 (2010): 254.

<sup>14</sup> L. Juliana M. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 1–17.

Exodus 2 describes the processes that create Gershom. The traumas and triumphs of *gershomite* identity are conceptualized as acts of exposure, alienation, and adoption; but also of creative agency, critical engagement with memory, and hospitality. Moses, a repeat survivor of violence, is remembered as a Hebrew of Levite heritage (Exod 2:6) and as an Egyptian of the royal class (2:10, 19). Narrative irony unfolds: only as an Egyptian does Moses survive as a Hebrew. Then, as violence defines genealogical and territorial identity, Moses flees to Midian, marries Zipporah, and the birth of Gershom becomes a key interpretive episteme in identity formation (2: 22). In this epistemological (re)formulation of identity and meaning, Zipporah is a life-giving and life-saving character (4:22, 24–26).<sup>15</sup> Her actions extend those of her narrative ancestresses: the midwives, Moses's biological mother, Miriam, the Egyptian princess (1:16; 2:1–10), and, farther back in the matriarchal narratives, the eponymous Egyptian *gēr* (“sojourner”) ancestress *Hagar* and her experience of trauma and survival around intergenerational and interregional motherhood, expulsion, child exposure, and adoption (Gen 16; 21:8–21).<sup>16</sup>

Like their preeminent leader and narrative forebear Moses, who is exposed by the bank of the Nile and enclosed in a basket from which he emerges as a distressed young man (2:3–6), Exodus-Israel is exposed near the sea of reeds and enclosed by the wilderness. It is a vulnerable place to be and attracts anew the attention of a warring pharaoh (14:3–4). War-induced infanticide weakens intergenerational identity; as the plague narratives indicate, governing structures are dangerous and management of resources is unreliable; and with the Passover ritual structured around violence-induced consumption and burning (12:9–11), prospects of returning to Egypt appear unlikely. Yet the intergenerational and interregional identity and memory that Gershom embodies include alternative portraits of Egypt (2:10, 19) and even a postwar/postviolence exodus-in-reverse, return to Egypt (4:19; cf. 13:17–18; Gen 21:21). This narrative and embodied process lends itself to postwar hermeneutics.

## II. AFRICANA POSTWAR HERMENEUTICS: HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, AND THEORY

A significant amount of Africana scholarship in the modern era has concerned itself with violence and war, variously conceptualized: colonizing war, guerrilla war,

<sup>15</sup>Whether the deity intends to kill Moses or Gershom is unclear; however, Gershom's identity is intergenerational and interregional.

<sup>16</sup>Following the divine promise about Abraham's children becoming *gēr*, we read about the ethnic, regional, and genealogical relation between Hagar, Sarah, and Abraham (Gen 15–16). See Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell, eds., *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).

revolutionary war, civil war, world war, cold war, and “war on” terrorism.<sup>17</sup> Political theorists,<sup>18</sup> economic underdevelopment theorists,<sup>19</sup> theologians and ethicists,<sup>20</sup> psychologists,<sup>21</sup> literary critics,<sup>22</sup> and journalists,<sup>23</sup> have brought complex and clarifying analyses to bear on describing, interpreting, and responding to the causes, tactics, ideologies, and effects of war and violence, as well as on preventing war and violence. Arguing that “war, or the use of naked force to achieve desired goals, has proved to be a permanent feature of human society,” Ali Mazrui examined a “warrior tradition”—ranging from territorial wars to self-defense anticolonial wars to martial arts to fighting as a rite of passage—that shaped communal constructs of political identity, moral agency, gender ideology, and so on.<sup>24</sup> Because of the power of war and violence drastically to (re)define cultural, gender, political, and generational identities and boundaries, a predictable and critically important corollary to interpreting the war tradition is “postwar” tradition: the literary, ethical, aesthetic, religious, and institutional identities and processes that facilitate transition from war to “after” war, or that seek to avert war and violence altogether.

The postwar hermeneutics proposed here is not comprehensive; nor is it uniform across political, gendered, religious, or regional embodiments.<sup>25</sup> Its significance as an interpretive concept consists of (1) its narrative role in mapping

<sup>17</sup>W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, “Of the Culture of White Folk,” *Journal of Race Development* 7.4 (1917): 434–47; Raymond W. Copson, *Africa’s Wars and Prospects for Peace* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994); Stephen L. Weigert, *Traditional Religion and Guerrilla Warfare in Modern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1996); David M. Rosen, *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Christine Emily Ryan, *The Children of War: Child Soldiers as Victims and Participants in the Sudan Civil War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

<sup>18</sup>Ali A. Mazrui, ed., *The Warrior Tradition in Modern Africa*, *International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology* 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, *Studies on the History of Society and Culture* 41 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>19</sup>Samir Amin, *Re-reading the Postwar Period: An Intellectual Itinerary*, trans. Michael Wolfers (New York: Monthly Review, 1994).

<sup>20</sup>Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Rebecca Y. Ganusah, “Widowhood Beliefs and Practices of the Avatime,” in *Where God Reigns: Reflections on Women in God’s World*, ed. Elizabeth Amoah (Accra, Ghana: CCAWT, 1997), 135–58; and, in the same volume, Dinah B. Abbey-Mensah, “Violence against Women,” 172–82.

<sup>21</sup>Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove, 1966).

<sup>22</sup>Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* (London: Allison & Busby, 1979); Mongo Beti, *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, trans. Gerald Moore (London: Heinemann, 1971).

<sup>23</sup>Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998).

<sup>24</sup>Mazrui, *Warrior Tradition*, 22.

<sup>25</sup>Odile Cazenave, “Writing the Child, Youth, and Violence into Francophone Novel from

intergenerational and geopolitical landscape in the biblical story; (2) its ethical attempt at recovering the “artifacts of war”<sup>26</sup>—fragmented and remapped bodies and spaces—as interpretive sites that give cultural memory its narrative and material focus; and (3) its prioritizing the agency of survivors in forging new community identities. Postwar hermeneutics interprets disjunctive history through the lens of mnemohistory—“reception theory applied to history”<sup>27</sup>—and interprets “fragmented” space through the lens of mnemogeography—reception theory applied to geography.<sup>28</sup> For my present purposes, mnemohistory and mnemogeography converge around colonialism’s project of self-definition through foreign domination, which resulted in profound *alienation*, temporarily constructing *alien* nations and spatially transforming them into *nations* of aliens. European celebration of exploration as a heroic act of triumph over and conquest of the “unknown” world and literature from state-sponsored exploration informed colonial imagination, “particular ways of reading unknown landscapes.”<sup>29</sup> The Berlin conference of 1884–1885 that inaugurated violent territorial mapping and “effective occupation”<sup>30</sup> constitutes a particularly traumatizing moment in modern African history, geography, and memory. Twenty years earlier, the British army officer, anthropologist, and explorer John Hanning Speke had argued, linking the biblical story of Ham to nation-state identity formation, that “could a government be formed for them [the Negro] like ours in India, they could be saved.”<sup>31</sup> The convergence of violent conquest, colonial ideology, and biblical interpretation “birthed” the nation-state around (1) mapping and remapping of geographical spaces, drastically altering historical narration; (2) social engineering that subsumed local cultural identity under externally conferred notions of citizenship; and (3) governance: narrative and institutional structures that enforce these identities.

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Sub-Saharan Africa: The Impact of Age and Gender,” *Research on African Literatures* 36 (2005): 59–71; Gary E. Machlis and Thor Hanson, “Warfare Ecology,” *BioScience* 58.8 (2008): 729–36.

<sup>26</sup> This is a modification of “artifact of violence” in Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9.

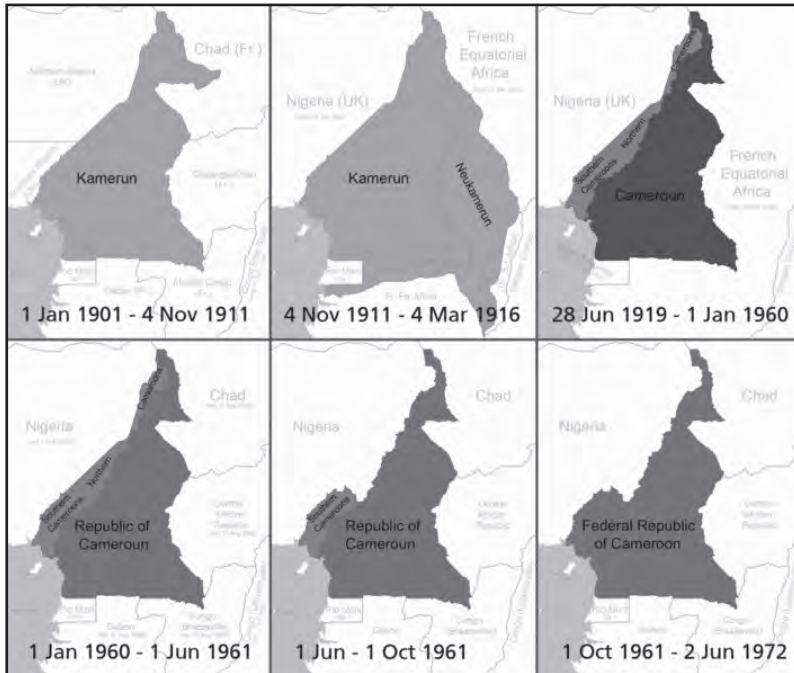
<sup>28</sup> Aliou C. Niang demonstrates how French colonial policy in Senegal transformed and utilized geographical space to create and enforce the colonial ideologies of assimilation and governance through regional association (Niang, “Postcolonial Biblical Theology in Geographical Settings: The Case of Senegal,” in *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology: After the Collapse of History*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 319–39.

<sup>29</sup> Felix Driver, “Henry Morton Stanley and His Critics: Geography, Exploration and Empire,” *Past & Present* 133 (1991): 136.

<sup>30</sup> Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 312–20.

<sup>31</sup> John Hanning Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile* (New York: Harper, 1864), xxiv.

**Scenario 1: Cameroon: Geography, Colonial Identities,<sup>32</sup>  
and Biblical Interpretation**



Code	German Kamerun	British Cameroons
	French Cameroun	Independent Cameroon

“Africa, surrounded by numerous suitors,” writes Musa Dube, “did not have the choice to choose a suitor or to refuse one.... The modern history of Western colonization of Africa was a violent process of taking Africa by force.”<sup>33</sup> Regarding Cameroon, German aspirations included a grand vision of *Mittelafrika*, a colony extending from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, linking German Kamerun to German East Africa. As colonial patronage evolved, France agreed to exercise power over Morocco while Germany would take a sizable portion of French-controlled Congo, creating Neukamerun.<sup>34</sup> After World War I, the remapping of

<sup>32</sup><https://www.google.com/search?q=colonial+maps+of+cameroon&tbm> (accessed 28 February 2015).

<sup>33</sup>Dube, “Introduction,” in Dube et al., *Postcolonial Perspectives*, 3. Sara Berry writes that the nation-state emerged from an “era of intensified contestation over custom, power and property” (*No Condition Is Permanent: The Social Dynamics of Agrarian Change in Sub-Saharan Africa* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993], 8).

<sup>34</sup>Richard A. Joseph, “The German Question in French Cameroun, 1919–1939,” *CSSH* 17 (1975): 67.



Cameroon's geography, history, and identity continued: France reclaimed Neu-kamerun and reasserted plans to align Cameroun with Equatorial Africa, in opposition to Germany's goal of a new African empire.<sup>35</sup> Colluding with this colonial maneuvering and remapping was a period that Cheikh Babou calls "the internationalization of the colonial problem," namely, "the founding of the League of Nations after the First World War, the creation of the mandate system, and the introduction of the language of trusteeship in the language of international politics."<sup>36</sup> In fact, "the establishment of the international community as legal custodian of the Ottoman and German colonies, in the Middle East and Africa, respectively, created a juridical precedent that undermined the rights of conquest, which, since the Berlin conference in 1885, had served as legal framework for colonial rule."<sup>37</sup> Placed under French and British rule as part of the League of Nations trusteeship program, Cameroon's identity and governing structure changed, again: British Cameroons, administered in two parts, Northern and Southern; and French Cameroun.

Interwar debates included the possibility of the colony being reoffered to Germany to appease the Third Reich, but the outbreak of World War II ended this option and Cameroon's regional and political identity would be "settled" on the battlefield<sup>38</sup> and, later, through a plebiscite in which part of British Cameroons joined Nigeria. This violent history and its geopolitics of territorial and political patronage resulted in post-World War II Cameroonians negotiating multiple colonial legacies held together by enforceable but movable lines on the map from 1884 through 1919 and to 1961. The relation of "nationality" to territorial boundaries was not only fluid, but boundaries changed in the wake or anticipation of war. Whose Cameroon was it? What memories of Kamerun/Cameroun/Cameroon would become canonical, heretical, suppressed, or transformed into promise? And what ideologies would provide structure to these fluid identities?

Post-World War II independence movements provided narrative and ideological structure (though not ideological coherence) to these searing identity questions. For Samir Amin, the Egyptian underdevelopment theorist of post-World War II Africa, independence "brought about a qualitative change to the political organization of the world capitalist system" because independence meant that "the history of sovereign states was extended to the entire globe," thereby changing colonial perception of Africa as "free game for competitive expansion from centers."<sup>39</sup> This investiture of (new) meaning on violently carved boundaries,

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>36</sup> Cheikh Anta Babou, "Decolonization or National Liberation: Debating the End of British Colonial Rule in Africa," in *Perspectives on Africa and the World*, ed. Tukufu Zuberi and Tanji Gilliam, AAAPSS 632 (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010), 43.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph, "German Question," 69.

<sup>39</sup> Amin, *Re-Reading the Postwar Period*, 28–29.

histories, and geopolitical structures was predictably complex. As Frederick Cooper argues:

We now live in a world of nearly two hundred nation-states, each jealous of its sovereignty. Most of those states did not exist in 1948. So the temptation is to look for the roots of the nation and to assume that territorial sovereignty was what people wanted all along.... The decolonizations of 1950s and 1960s, in such a view, represent the playing out of a story of transition from empire to nation-state whose origins lie much earlier.<sup>40</sup>

In Francophone Africa, “many political activists knew that the old colonial order was gone, but they did not know what would replace it. Various forms of federation and confederation were on the table,” and few persons knew with certainty what political arrangements they would get.<sup>41</sup>

The creation of the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961 brought together the majority French-speaking “La République” and the minority English-speaking “Southern Cameroons”—two territories with different colonial legacies. Considered a rare experiment in postcolonial governance within Sub-Saharan Africa, Cameroon would undergo political metamorphoses, reflected in name changes. First, a United Republic of Cameroon (1972), the product of a referendum presented as a unifying compromise and update from the founding federal system that combined two regions and their colonial legacies; then a Republic of Cameroon (1984), unilaterally proclaimed by presidential decree (against significant, though not unanimous, protestations by politicians and citizens from the former Southern Cameroons, who interpreted the move as effective assimilation). The result was a highly centralized fusion of colonial and postcolonial patronage structured around negotiable identities, histories, and geographies.

Jean-Marc Éla’s *The African Cry* and *My Faith as an African* represent postwar biblical hermeneutics attendant on these realities.<sup>42</sup> Published respectively before and after a violent, deadly, and failed coup d’état that traumatized millions and entrenched political oppression and patronage in Cameroon, Éla’s works articulated the challenges of postwar hermeneutics “in those countries where bloody tyrants celebrate countless murders, exterminating harmless, voiceless populations?”<sup>43</sup> Critical of inculturation hermeneutics devoid of social engagement, Éla wrote,

<sup>40</sup> Frederick Cooper, “French Africa, 1947–48: Reform, Violence, and Uncertainty in a Colonial Situation,” *Critical Inquiry* 40.4, *Around 1948: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Global Transformation*, ed. Leela Gandhi and Deborah L. Nelson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 466–67.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 467–68.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-Marc Éla, *The African Cry*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986); original *Cri de l’Homme Africain* (Paris: Librairie-Éditions Harmattan, 1980); *My Faith as an African*, trans. John Pairman Brown and Susan Perry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); original *Ma foi d’Africain* (Paris: Karthala, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> Éla, *African Cry*, 7.

In a society that yearns for change and progress, for welfare and freedom, the church ought not to sit back and be content with nice big Sunday worship services and lively liturgies using native languages and native musical instruments. How can it turn its back on the horrifying spectacle of arbitrary arrests and brutalities that do not even spare children and pregnant women?<sup>44</sup>

Interpretations of Exodus, Éla argued, must attend to the “religious, cultural, political, and socioeconomic” situations of its audience, since biblical interpretation cannot be understood abstractly, in an “atemporal fashion.”<sup>45</sup> Taking aim at “missionary preaching,” particularly its God, who was “so distant, so foreign to the history of colonized people,” Éla challenged “the privatization of Christianity” which “reached its zenith” in a Christian mission that lacked analysis of the historical realities of colonized persons, and thus kept Africans from launching into “the historical adventure of liberation.”<sup>46</sup> Éla’s constructivist project enshrines the agency of the postwar community for creating “radical novelty” that rejects cultural notions and myths about God’s abandonment of creation or a God that has been killed.<sup>47</sup> For Éla, conflict compels a “rereading of our African memory.”<sup>48</sup> This rereading highlights multiple consciousnesses.

First, there is “national” consciousness that enjoyed significant cultural and political support with the independence movements. The paradox of this is consciousness—its embrace of colonial boundary making and rejection of colonizer governance—is yet unfolding in its self-defining governing ethos beyond colonial history and geography. Ironically, through decades of economic austerity and political apathy, the most entrenched marker of national consciousness in Cameroon is the institution of the armed forces: the military, police, and gendarmerie.

A second form of consciousness is regional, or lingua-regional, when linked with colonial boundary making. Although “Anglophone” and “Francophone” consciousnesses are linguistic misnomers, their emergence from post–World War I geopolitics highlights the role of “official” languages in representing the continuing power of colonial geography in postcolonial space.<sup>49</sup> The categorization of languages as “official” (French and English) or “unofficial” (local languages) reinforces binaries between national and regional identities. Multilingual competency is only a first step toward the deployment of language as a signifier of the power to govern or to nurture cultural, regional, or social affinities.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Éla, *African Cry*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 29, 31.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–38.

<sup>48</sup> Éla, *My Faith as an African*, xvi.

<sup>49</sup> Piet Konings and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, “The Anglophone Problem in Cameroon,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 35 (1997): 207–29.

<sup>50</sup> Linguistic creolization increasingly gained currency in popular culture, in significant part, because of the influence of the late artist/musician Lapiro de Mbanga, whose songs routinely blended Pidgin, French, and English.

Third, there is ethnic consciousness. In the regional politics of Cameroon, ethnic consciousness crystallized around “local” and “foreigner” tropes when migrant workers, either en masse or over a sustained period of time, moved from one location to another, in response to emerging national, political, and economic institutions. This happened, for example, when migrant workers from the northwest region of Cameroon moved to the southwest to work at the German-established plantation economy (1884–1916). As colonial and postcolonial “economic enclaves” of extraction developed—for example, around plantations, refineries, mines, and so on—putting pressure on preexisting customs of land-giving tenure based on lineage, migrant workers (who often maintained strong ties with places of origin) soon became “pariahs” for a political and economic system that extracted local resources, without due respect for local customs.<sup>51</sup> Because ethnicity is coexistent with regional consciousness and may transgress national (colonial) boundaries, the contestation and renegotiation of ethnic consciousness and its customs of communal identity have sought both to protect “ethnic” consciousness from the legacy of colonial rule and to align with colonial political and economic patronage.

Fourth, there is religious consciousness, in the forms of Christianity, Islam and so-called African Traditional Religions—“monotheistic” and “polytheistic” religions whose coexistence is itself testimony to the complex history and politics of religious travel, syncretism, and antagonism.<sup>52</sup> As Stephen L. Weigert points out, “the persistent impact of traditional religious views on domestic and foreign affairs in many areas of the world underscores the fact that the ‘age of ideology’ has not yet ended. ‘Church and State’ have not been thoroughly or conclusively separated and the relationship between ‘magic’ and science is still a subject of lively debate.”<sup>53</sup> This synthetic worldview makes manifestations of religion at once integrated and contested.

Fifth, gendered consciousness permeates postwar subjectivity. Discourse about war often includes such topics as the targeting, capturing, raping, and selling of young women and sometimes young men.<sup>54</sup> As Melanie Hughes argues, “Although

<sup>51</sup> See Achille Mbembe, “On Politics as a Form of Expenditure,” in *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, ed. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 302–3; Piet Konings, “Religious Revival in the Roman Catholic Church and the Autochthony–Allochthony Conflict in Cameroon,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 73.1 (2003): 34–40; Francis Nyamnjoh and Michael Rowlands, “Elite Associations and the Politics of Belonging in Cameroon,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 63.8, *The Politics of Primary Patriotism* (1998): 320–38.

<sup>52</sup> Quentin Gausset, “Islam or Christianity? The Choices of the Wawa and the Kwanja of Cameroon,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 69.2 (1999): 257–78.

<sup>53</sup> Weigert, *Traditional Religion*, 1.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, the UNICEF document on child soldiers, *Cape Town: Principles and Best Practices* (Cape Town, 1997). The 2014 kidnapping of school girls in Nigeria by Boko Haram and the resulting transnational efforts to combat the terrorist group are recent examples of the gender ideology of violence and war.

men more often fight in combat, women are disproportionately the victims of sexual crimes such as rape and forced prostitution, and women are more often displaced as refugees.<sup>55</sup> As local and global awareness and critical resources—cultural and gender analyses—are brought to bear on war and its violent legacies, the urgency of a hermeneutic of resistance to violence takes institutional shape and engenders policy changes.<sup>56</sup>

As Richard Bjornson's study of post-World War II Cameroon illustrates, a postwar rereading of memory creates a "*universe of discourse*," that is, "rules, procedures, assumptions, and conventional meanings that permit verbal communication among individuals from the same community of language users," recognizing that "several discourse communities may exist within the same country, and a single individual may belong to more than one of them."<sup>57</sup> Appeal to more than one cultural, historical, religious, and regional memory canon is the hallmark of postwar Cameroonian subjectivity and consciousness.

### Scenario 2: Postwar Hermeneutics after Liberation

In *The Sacrifice of Africa*, Emmanuel Katongole explores Christian social ethics at the intersections of violence and the functioning of the nation-state. In a rather stunning proposition, Katongole argues that, instead of assuming that Christian social ethics would "make politics work better, that is, become more democratic and transparent," one ought rather to consider the "possibility that politics in Africa, and the nation-state in particular, have not been a failure but have worked very well. Chaos, war, and corruption are not indications of a failed institution; they are ingrained in the very imagination of how nation-state politics works." With that working assumption, the interpretive task is defined: "while Christian social ethics in Africa have focused on providing strategies for revising, improving, or managing a failing institution, they have paid very little attention to the story of the institution: *how* it works and *why* it works in the way it does."<sup>58</sup> For Katongole, two symbolic moments assist in exploring the *how* and *why* of the nation-state. Adam Hochschild's book *King Leopold's Ghost*, detailing Leopold's conquest of Congo "ceased to be a book about Congo and became a metaphor for Africa, raising the key issues not only of foundational narratives, but of the transmission and reproductions of social memory."<sup>59</sup> A second symbolic moment representing the

<sup>55</sup> Melanie M. Hughes, "Armed Conflict, International Linkages and Women's Parliamentary Representation in Developing Nations," *Social Problems* 56.1 (2009): 175.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 179–81.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Bjornson, *The African Quest for Freedom and for Identity: Cameroonian Writing and the National Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), x (emphasis original).

<sup>58</sup> Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 2 (emphasis original).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 12; referring to Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

“dispensability of African lives” as the practice of nation-state politics was the Rwanda genocide of 1994, a century after the start of effective colonial occupation. Postcolonial successors “had no qualms perpetrating the same wanton sacrifice of lives in pursuit of their political ambitions and greed.”<sup>60</sup>

Although one may quibble with Katongole about the extent to which the *why* and *how* of nation-states in Africa has preoccupied African social ethics, his invitation to examine the link between institutional identity and the necropolitics of governance is worth exploration. After the official end of the Cold War in 1991 and the advent of heightened discourse about political liberalism, Achille Mbembe started theorizing on the epistemological, political, and cultural constructions and manifestations of governance in the postcolony.<sup>61</sup> Mbembe began formulating his theories at a time of deadly crackdown on political dissidents in Cameroon, crystallized in violent clashes between “law enforcement” and citizens during and after the launching of an opposition party (Social Democratic Front, SDF) in 1990, followed by popular demands for multiparty democracy and antigovernment sit-in protests known as “ghost towns”—an apt, yet dreadful, metaphor for postwar analyses. Mbembe focused on the relationship between colonial and postcolonial governance, paying attention to the power or right to govern, which he called Sovereignty or *Commandement*. Colonial Sovereignty, he argued, rested on three sorts of violence: (a) founding violence, which underpinned the right to conquest and the prerogatives flowing from that right; it created “the space over which it is exercised; one might say it presupposed its own existence,” regarding itself as “the sole power to judge its laws”; (b) legitimizing violence functioned to give the founding order meaning, justifying the “universalizing mission” of the colonial enterprise and converting “founding violence into authorizing authority”; and (c) a third form of violence fell short of what is properly called war and sought to ensure the “maintenance, spread, and permanence” of legitimizing authority.<sup>62</sup>

Drawing on Freudian psychology, Mbembe interpreted violent governance as libidinal desire that ultimately manifests itself in a peculiar space, *fantasm*,<sup>63</sup> which Mbembe analyzed in terms of monotheism, arguing that monotheism “implies organization of some arrangement that is presented as legitimate and that resolves the conflicts between a plurality of divinities such that one is endowed with a monopoly on truth. How this arrangement is produced is clearly a political *travail*.”<sup>64</sup> This political *travail* with its “narcissistic self-definition” as distinct from all others may find its impulse in the divine being, making the “biblical god a tribal god,” who,

<sup>60</sup> Katongole, *Sacrifice of Africa*, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Postcolony,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62.1 (1992): 3–37; Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*; Mbembe, “On the Postcolony: A Brief Response to Critics” *Qui Parle*, 15.2 (2005): 1–49; Mbembe, “On Politics,” 299–335.

<sup>62</sup> Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 25.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 212–13 (emphasis original).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 215 (emphasis original).

in contrast to pagan gods, had a “distinctive” trait of “relative solitude.” This god “had no relatives, was neither the son nor the cousin of any other god, had neither wife nor children. His claim to power was thus total, unchallenged by any member of a possible lineage.”<sup>65</sup>

Although Mbembe’s depictions of the divine in the Hebrew Bible are incomplete and do not address the ways in which the notion of divine “solitude” has its narrative fault lines (Exod 4:22–23: Israel as YHWH’s endangered “son”; Ezek 16:4–7: YHWH as an adopting parent; Hos 2:4–7: Israel as YHWH’s “wife,” sometimes abused), his insights into the monotheistic impulse as religious, political, ethnic, and gendered fantasm is relevant to understanding Cameroon as a postcolony violently produced and contested through a mix of fantastic ideology between 1884 and the 1990s, and biblical interpretation. In order to account for the mind-set that defines power relations and governance in the postcolony, Mbembe argued that “the postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration but can best be characterized as a relationship made fraught by the very fact of the *Commandment* and its ‘subjects’ having to share the same living space.”<sup>66</sup> Because this living space has multiple, intermingling, public-private places—national, ethnic, religious, regional, gendered—the postcolonial subject has also learned and mastered the skills of negotiating these spaces, performing thereby a certain form of mitosis.<sup>67</sup>

Whether this mitosis degenerates through communal fragmentation or regenerates into communal integration is the travail of postwar hermeneutics. Mahmood Mamdani’s analyses of the Rwanda genocide and the nonviolent transition to post-apartheid South Africa define the unpredictability of this postwar travail and its ethical challenges:

If Rwanda was the genocide that happened, then South Africa was the genocide that didn’t. The contrast was marked by two defining events in the first half of 1994: just as a tidal wave of genocidal violence engulfed Rwanda, South Africa held elections marking the transition to a postapartheid era. More than any other, these twin developments marked the end of innocence for the African intelligentsia. For if some seer had told us in the late 1980s that there would be a genocide in one of these two places, I wonder how many among us would have managed to identify correctly its location. Yet, this failure would also be testimony to the creative—and not just the destructive—side of politics.<sup>68</sup>

As the quintessential site for power struggle, the postwar community is a place where the banal, the grotesque, and the sublime take place, not just as officialdom’s way of creating and structuring a method of being, but also, simultaneously, as

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>66</sup> Mbembe, “Provisional Notes,” 3–4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>68</sup> Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, 184.

avenues used by ordinary people to navigate, negotiate, and survive official oppression, creating thereby what Kä Mana calls an *imaginaire*,<sup>69</sup> an existential worldview. Historicizing this worldview requires interpreting iconic moments of political creativity and trauma in ways that illumine anew and prioritize the lived experiences that foster communal healing and restoration.<sup>70</sup> For Masiwa Gunda, an interpretive shift from Exodus-liberation to Nehemiah-reconstruction in African biblical hermeneutics must address the reality that oppression has outlived its systems, namely, institutionalized racism, formal colonialism, and Cold War tutelage. Gunda proposes that the book of Amos, with its emphasis on social justice, provides “models upon which an effective ‘liberative reconstructive theology’ in Africa can be built.”<sup>71</sup> The interpretive task requires daring: “The danger that the church faces is how to tell the many ‘Moses’ they created that they are now ‘Pharaohs.’”<sup>72</sup> Talk about a poignant turn of phrase, a flipping of the political and religious script!

### III. EXODUS 2 AS POSTWAR HERMENEUTICS

Set against the backdrop of Pharaoh’s circumstantial, not inevitable, wartime geopolitical and economic policies, Exodus 2 develops as a postwar story: violent political and economic pressures compel a woman to expose her son beside the Nile, the “economic” engine of the nation (2:1–10); tensions and recurring violence around an “economic enclave” in the sandy area compel debates about the process of political structure and governance (2:11–15); violence and territorial dislocation necessitate engagement with the nomenclature of territorial “otherness” (2:16–22). Moses’s navigation of political (2:10), social (2:13–14), and geographical (2:22) boundaries becomes the narrative impetus for new meaning—postwar *akwaaba*. If transition from violent governance; if economic distress associated with the infrastructure of war; and if divine memory, functioning as the community’s access to ancestral identity (2:23–25), constitute the impetus for initiating a new phase of

<sup>69</sup> Valentin Dedji, “The Ethical Redemption of African Imaginaire: Kä Mana’s Theology of Reconstruction,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31.3 (2001): 254–74.

<sup>70</sup> Ali Mazrui construed this endeavor in terms of a second wave of liberation struggle aimed at creating continental integration, pan-African unity. See Ali Mazrui, “Independent African States and the Struggle for Southern Africa,” in *The Decolonization of Africa: Southern Africa and the African Horn*, General History of Africa: Studies and Documents 5 (Paris: UNESCO, 1981), 13–25.

<sup>71</sup> Masiwa Raiges Gunda, “African Theology of Reconstruction: The Painful Realities and Practical Options,” *Exchange* 38 (2009): 84–102.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 90. On liberation hermeneutics, see Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, “From Nobody to Somebody: The Pertinence of African Liberation Theology,” in *Movement or Moment? Assessing Liberation Theology Forty Years after Medellín*, ed. Patrick Claffey and Joe Egan, STSC 1 (New York: Lang, 2005), 97–124; Alejandro F. Botta and Pablo R. Andinach, *The Bible and the Hermeneutics of Liberation*, SemeiaSt 59 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).



the exodus narrative as *return to Egypt* (4:19), then the ethical and ideological thrust of the narrative, from a postwar Cameroonian perspective, is not primarily or even exclusively about leaving Egypt (by liberation or by expulsion) for an extra-territorial land; the ethical thrust for this postwar story is reengaging Egypt in all its clustered, sometimes fragmented, but also creative identities—gendered, ethnic, political, religious, and regional.

Interpreting intergenerational and interregional identity this way means claiming the trope of displaced (not landless) memory to reconstruct alienation not as endless dispersal but as interregional mapping, which, in the biblical story, stretches out from Egypt (Exod 2:15, 22; Gen 15:13–22). The story creates structured existence around what Anthony Smith calls ethnoscapescapes—“landscapes endowed with poetic ethnic meaning through the historicization of nature and the territorialization of ethnic memories.”<sup>73</sup> Broadly, there are Midian and Egypt, but, within Egypt itself, Goshen has ethnic and economic value (Exod 8:22; cf. Gen 45:10, 47:27). *Gershomite* identity grapples with exposure as a function of the emergence of economic and cultural enclaves, populated by vulnerable persons in a climate of austerity (Exod 2:6–10, 19; Gen 21:1–20). As fragmented spaces are linked (or, as economically distressed places are abandoned and new ones occupied), the waters of the womb (Exod 1:19, 2:22) and the Nile (2:10) merge with the sands of the seashore and battlegrounds (Exod 2:12, 14–15), forming a primal nexus between birth stools and burial grounds—places and processes that symbolize the dignity and the fragility of human and cosmic life. That is the narrative world which my postwar analysis places alongside the cultural and political world of colonial and postcolonial Cameroon.

At this intersection of biblical and cultural interpretation, adoption is the quintessential postwar mnemonic that integrates interregional and intergenerational tropes and bodies into geopolitical, economic, and religious structures and processes. The construction (Exod 2:1–10), deconstruction (2:11–15), and reconstruction (2:16–22) of adoption constitute three “scenarios” of postwar hermeneutics that produce conjunctive, disjunctive, and adjunctive memories, respectively.

The construction of adoption (2:1–10)<sup>74</sup> revolves around three foci. First, ethnopolitical identity shaped by an encounter between an exposed Hebrew child and an Egyptian rescuer whom the storyteller views favorably (2:3–6). The trauma of exposure is signaled by its association with economic distress; the boy was found

<sup>73</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16. For a detailed application of Smith's concept to the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, see Elisabeth Robertson Kennedy, *Seeking a Homeland: Sojourn and Ethnic Identity in the Ancestral Narratives of Genesis*, *BibInt* 106 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 41–75.

<sup>74</sup> On the multiple traditions underlying ancient Near Eastern adoptions, see Meir Malul, “Adoption of Foundlings in the Bible and Mesopotamian Documents: A Study of Some Legal Metaphors in Ezekiel 16:1–7,” *JSOT* 46 (1990): 97–126; Jonathan Cohen, *The Origins and Evolution of the Moses Nativity Story*, *SHR* 58 (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

crying. Second, nurturing that reunites the rescued child with members of his subgroup (2:7–9). Cultural and economic motifs intersect in institutionalized responses to exposure. Third, political identity is a malleable process by which the son of a Levite's daughter becomes the son of Pharaoh's daughter (2:2, 10). As an act of postwar hermeneutics, adoption is the culmination of a process involving ethical, cultural, economic, and political negotiations between members of an endangered group and the daughter of the governing house of Pharaoh.<sup>75</sup> The story engages rather than ignores economic anxieties and communal vulnerability from violent exposure, the effects of which are partially addressed through adoption. Reflective of Cameroon's attempts at integrating colonial legacies and multiple postwar consciousnesses, there are no motifs here of complete escape from Pharaoh or the *Commandement*; there are stories of narrow, even selective, improbable escape, fueled by acts of compassion and acts of cultural agency that create conjunctive memories of a cultural alien and political adoptee, of intraethnic nurture and interethnic structure.

Narrative perspective changes to counteradoption in 2:11–15, framed by two kinds of motion. On the front end, Moses "goes out" as a political leader (2:11, 11:3); on the back end, he flees from Pharaoh (2:15). Moses's trips place him at the center of two distinct but related events, economic hard labor and ethnopolitical (deadly) violence. The narrator is silent about Moses's involvement in alleviating the economic hardship, perhaps indicative of entrenched wartime economics of patronage that ensures selective survival.<sup>76</sup> The narrator, however, provides details about Moses's involvement in the politics of the story. After mortally striking an Egyptian in defense of a Hebrew man who was himself being struck, Moses is surprised to see Hebrew-on-Hebrew violence on his second visit, and inquires why a Hebrew (described as "wicked"<sup>77</sup>) would attack another: "Why do you strike your neighbor?" Distinct, yet overlapping, ethnic and political consciousnesses infuse this episode of shifting identities, of journeys, and of "in-group" violence in workplaces. The Hebrew man's rebuttal ("Who made you ruler and judge over us?") forestalls Moses's attempts at establishing political and judicial authority in the workplace but also incites the violence-prone Pharaoh, who now wants to kill Moses. These are the disjunctive memories of survivors of "official" violence who must also deal with "unofficial" violence. The traumas of "founding violence," to use Mbembe's

<sup>75</sup> Kenneth Ngwa, "Ethnicity, Adoption, and Exodus: A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of Exod. 2:1–10," *JSOT* 38 (2013): 167–68.

<sup>76</sup> The Midrash portrays Moses as being "touched unto tears" upon seeing the hardship, as providing encouraging words to his people about a hopeful future, and as using his political status as an adopted son to negotiate with Pharaoh to lighten the labor. See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909–1938), 2:277–78.

<sup>77</sup> The word *רשע* carries a sense of legal offense (Exod 9:27, 23:1, Deut 25:1, 1 Kgs 8:23, Prov 24:24). In his rebuttal, the man challenges Moses's authority as a judge.

phrase, do not fade into the past; they are lodged in postcolonial spaces and combine with new forms of violence to reinforce a sense of internal alienation. When the episode ends with Moses away from Egypt, away from the ethnic group to which his adoption story assigned him, and away from the institutional setting for his adoption, then counteradoption is complete. Exile is exposure writ large, territorially.

In 2:16–22, narrative texture and perspective change once again. Almost as if to suggest cognitive latency (in a Freudian sense),<sup>78</sup> Moses's Hebrew identity is unmentioned and his Egyptian identity and actions (2:19) are no longer a function of political stature but of *alienation*. It is as an *Egyptian refugee* that Moses is re-adopted—this time into the family of a local priest. Re-adoption adds to the story's kinship of strangers, transitioning the story's "institutional" framework from political to religious, and Moses's social identity from refugee to sojourner. The transforming power of this episode is signaled by the morphological similarity between Moses's navigation of geography ("another land"), that is, his resisting alienating acts (*grš*) by shepherds, and his son's name, Gershom (*gršm*). This struggle over geography and its resources connects sociology and genealogy (*gēr hāyīti bəʿereš nokrîyâ*). Pejorative anxieties about foreign geography (*ʿereš nokrîyâ*) are linked to partially protected and integrated identity (*gēr*).<sup>79</sup> The new identity—*gershomite*—cannot simply claim self-definition by "returning" to or reclaiming "insider" ancestral space and memory but must also incorporate the enduring and compelling power of cultural and territorial "otherness" into communal identity.<sup>80</sup> These are the adjunctive memories of a returnee-remainee community in the postwar space.

These multiple, clustered memories belong to a generation defined by intergenerational and interregional bonds, a generation that reinterprets postwar "national" identity, economic duress, and cultural renewal (Exod 2:23–25). A number of questions inform this interpretive move: What happens to the political

<sup>78</sup> Freud developed his idea of latency to explain the temporal lapse between the Amarna period (where he located the traumatic events of Akenaton's monotheism) and the return of that traumatic memory under Moses (Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones [London: Hogarth, 1939], 35–41, 108–10).

<sup>79</sup> The term *nokrîyâ* can designate a person of foreign nationality/ethnicity (Gen 17:12, 27; Exod 2:22; 12:43; 18:3; Ezra 10:2, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 44; Neh 9:2) or persons outside of one's family household (Gen 31:15, Exod 21:8, Prov 23:27, 27:2). See Jopie Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live! The Literary Architecture of Exodus 1–2 as a Key for Interpretation*, BibInt 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 121–27; Rolf Rendtorff, "The Gēr in the Priestly Laws of the Pentateuch," in *Ethnicity and the Bible*, ed. Mark G. Brett, BibInt 19 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 77–87.

<sup>80</sup> See Reinhard Achenbach, "Gēr-nākhri-tōshav-zâr: Legal and Sacral Distinctions regarding Foreigners in the Pentateuch," in *The Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Reinhard Achenbach, Rainer Albertz, and Jakob Wöhrle, BZABR 16; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 29–51. At the family reunion in the wilderness (Exod 18:3–4), Moses's children (Gershom and Eliezer) embody the convergence of intergenerational and interregional identity in response to violence.

imagination, the economic fortunes, and the cultural identity of an oppressed “sub-group” when, in rare moments of political transition, one of its members becomes associated with positions of political power, privilege, and governance? Does such political transition create and institutionalize a variation of du Boisian double consciousness,<sup>81</sup> of an iconic motif of survivor-become-ruler, or does it entrench the very discordant, institutionally sanctioned conditions that compel the transition of a healthy boy from his mother’s care to a distressed young man in public? Furthermore, how might questions of political process (“Who set you as commander and judge over us?”) illumine postwar hermeneutics? Does the question simply resist the establishment of political and legal authority over entrenched economies of patronage, or does the question signal the collapse of binary constructions of ethnic identity and social agency in postwar communities? Finally, how might interregional bonding and hospitality foster new interpretive spaces concurrent with and relevant to the shifting geographies and histories that define *gershomite* communities?

As a narrative whole, Exodus 2 is not simply or singularly concerned with the individual charisma or political fortunes of heroic characters. Rather, the story grapples with communal memory about (the possibility of) recurring violence, and the creative agency that ensures survival. Indeed, for postwar and postindependence Cameroon, the story is about the nexus between political power and its structured necropolitics; about identity politics and political process. Or, as Mbembe asks, “under what conditions is the right to kill, to allow to live, or to expose to death exercised? Who is the subject of this right?”<sup>82</sup> Moses’s interactions in the public arena (2:3–6, 11–12, 16–17) alter and restructure the relation between “subculture” and “official” dominant culture. The communal character of the story allows postwar analyses of (a) adoption as a function of conjunctive memories; a constructive and creative process that relies on the ethics of compassion and methods of “cultural hermeneutics” to initiate and sustain the transition from the lived experience of distressful public exposure to institutionally recognized political power and safety; (b) counteradoption as a function of disjunctive memories; a process that uncovers and exposes the discrepancies between privileged adoptees and the life-threatening anxieties of kinfolk and neighbors, whose labor funds a postcolonial *Commandement* that recognizes but fails to alter the plight of its multiethnic labor force. Postwar counteradoption means that colonial patronage cannot simply be replaced by local regalia of postcolonial ethnocentrism and associated nepotism; and (c) readoption as adjunctive memory; a process that requires reinterpreting and expanding regional identity. The narrative sustains

<sup>81</sup> William E. B. Du Bois wrote of a “two-ness” that defined African American experience: “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (*The Souls of Black Folk* [1903; repr., New York: Cosimo, 2007], 2),

<sup>82</sup> Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 12.

this effort through Jethro, a local Midianite priest, who provides structure to the creative process of interethnic and interregional bonds, otherwise considered “other.”<sup>83</sup>

The story’s regenerative process and power develop around unadopted characters who possess and deploy complex agency, playing a critical role in shaping the outcome of the story (2:7–9, 13–15, 18–19). Exigencies about survival and pressures from economic duress prompt cooperation with personalities in the governing *Commandement*; Pharaoh’s gendered wartime necropolitics of exposing boys by the Nile and letting daughters live is interrupted by the daughter of Pharaoh, who deploys the cultural identity and labor force of the unadopted (Miriam and her mother) to mitigate a distressful economy. Anxieties about recurring violence prompt resistance to the establishment of ethnocentric governance. Riddled with violence, the counteradoption episode demonstrates the power of an unadopted man successfully to resist political and legal exploitation of subgroup labor by officialdom. Pharaoh’s attempt to exploit this “in-group” fighting is reinterpreted, and Pharaoh becomes the instigator of escape from the land (2:15), in ironic contrast to what his initial wartime policies intended to avoid (1:10). In Midian, the daughters of Jethro become the catalyst for readoption. Their representation of the “creative side” of Egypt (2:19) initiates a process of integrative, regenerative, and embodied living; postwar *akwaaba*, hospitality.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Exodus 2 is a postwar story, infused with multiple consciousnesses and varied memories—conjunctive, disjunctive, and adjunctive—all of which produce Gershom, the narrative trope and communal embodiment that transforms the traumas of alienation to hopes of survival and integration. The construction of adoption as an effective, even acceptable motif and process for grappling with violent oppression initiates and structures the narrative genesis of momentary rescue transformed into political survival. That is the conjunctive memory of the cultural alien and political adoptee. Recurring (near) death scenarios threaten individuals and communities, deconstruct political adoption, and prompt resistance to cultural and economic patronage. Those are the disjunctive memories of unadopted characters, whose relation to the land and its *Commandement* is framed in terms of suppliers of its labor force. Yet deconstruction of adoption does not result in its abandonment as a trope. Rather, adoption is reconstructed; intergenerational alienation and interregional dislocation are embodied, internalized, and institutionalized anew, in a different land. That is the adjunctive memory of the returnee-remainee community.

<sup>83</sup> Adriane Leveen, “Inside-Out: Jethro, the Midianites and a Biblical Construction of the Outsider,” *JOT* 34 (2010): 399–404.

The critical interpretive claim of this postwar analysis, with its three-dimensional constitutive memories, is that because the *Commandment* and its “subjects” share a kinship of narrative strangers—political, ethnic, gendered, religious, and regional—mapped out in historical and regional terms, the story of Gershom and, indeed, of the exodus could be examined for postwar intergenerational and interregional values. These values and memories probe questions of political power, access to economic resources, cultural identity, and ethnicity; prioritize inquiry into the power of war and violence to shape identity; plumb the aesthetic and ethical depths of memory construction; and navigate intraterritorial and extraterritorial socialization forged from alienation (exposure) and the possibilities of “return.” To reflect cumulatively on these conjunctive, disjunctive, and adjunctive memories is to incorporate iconic tropes of identity formation with the “ordinariness” of lived experience by a people that fill the land and supply its labor force, a people whose communal existence is profoundly shaped by the enduring effects of externally conferred identity, a people whose claims to self-determining liberation must include rigorous engagement with the traumas of structured and sporadic violence. To remember this way is to interpret Israel’s presence prior to, including, and beyond the wreckages of the violent oppression of political opportunism, beyond and including the passage of time and regional dislocation, and beyond and including the frailty of the human bodies buried in the seas and sands of Egypt. These memories recast the biblical story, resisting war-induced temporality and tenuous claims to space and history that define Exodus-Israel’s relation to Egypt, and resisting benevolent (divine) patronage as the defining trope for Exodus-Israel’s self-understanding. A confluence of the ethics of compassion, of cultural hermeneutics, of critical political process, and of hospitality propel the *gershomite* story of communal return, of reengagement with the multiple histories, bodies, and places that nourish and propel *healthy* interregional and intergenerational existence.