Studies on Israel's Conflicts and Wars with Benjamin in Judges 20 in African Context

Michael Ufok Udoekpo

Abstract:

In Judges 20, Israel overacts, revenges against injustices of Gibeah's crime (Judges 19). Doing so, plunges Israel into civil-religious war and conflicts with Benjamin, indicating the tragedy of confederacy without visionary leaders, who fear the Lord. This phenomenon of war is common, outside the bible and world over today, especially in Africa. Past exegetes and commentators of non-African origins have interpreted Judges 19-20 historically, using diverse approaches or interpretative models. This work newly and contextually examines Judges 20 for Africa which is plagued today with wars and violence. It adapts a postcolonial biblical interpretative (PCBI) approach within the overall context of the theology and ethics of Deuteronomistic History (Joshua-Kings). It argues for dialogue and against incessant tragic phenomena of civil wars, conflicts, and domestic violence in African faith communities.

Key Words: Postcolonial, Israel's War, Conflicts, Crimes, Dialogue, Violence, Peace

Introduction

In Judges, we find a cycle of disobedience, infidelity, leading to punishment, repentance and deliverance (3:7-16:31). Chapters 17-21, in particular, represent very old tradition which sheds light on the social and religious history of Israel. It describes the cultic, moral anarchy of the era "when there was no king in

Israel (Judges 17:6; 19:1) and a time when people did whatever was right in their own eyes" (21:25). This refrain encapsulates this study, and serves as a connecting bridge to the book of Samuel where Saul and David are introduced as Kings and a theocratic implication of God as King of Israel (1 Sam 8:23).

Chapters 19-21 broadly present a terrible story of violence and Gibeah's crime (Judges 19), leading to Israel's bloody tribal war, with the fellow tribe of Benjamine (Judge 20), and kidnapping of the innocent dancing maidens at Shiloh (Judges 21). In this story, a Levite from Ephraim went to Bethlehem of Judah searching for his concubine/wife (*philegesh*) who left him on ground of anger (*ōrgisthē* in *LXX*) or unfaithfulness/prostitution (*zānāh* in the *MT*) and went back to her parents in the southern Israel. Returning home late they passed through Jebus (a pre-Israelite name for Jerusalem, about 5 miles or 7 kilometers north of Bethlehem), and passed a night in Gibeah a city in the territory of Benjamin (vv.11-15), in the home of an elderly and hospitable old man(*zāqen*) from Ephraim (vv.16-21). At night some sons of worthlessness (*bənê-bəliyyaʿl*) surrounded the old's man's compound with an attempt to gang-rape the Levite (v.22). He hands-over his concubine to these worthless men., who raped her all night to death(vv.23-28). The Levite reaching home with the body cuts and distributes her parts to all the tribes of Israel, demanding for judgment (vv.29-30).

Outraged by incident, Israel overacts, revenges against injustices of Gibeah's crime (Judges 19). They took oaths never to give their daughters to the Benjamites in marriage, as well as plunged into civil war against Benjamin which nearly wipes out the entire tribe, leaving only 600 men as survivors (Judge 20:21-48). They destroyed the city of Jabesh Gilead, whose residents did not take part in the war nor in the oath (Judges 21 1-15). In doing this, Israel violently captured their 400 maidens as wives for the Benjamites (v.12), while their 200 remaining men were allowed to abduct the maidens dancing at Shiloh (vv.16-24).

As ancient and distance from us, as this story from the book of Judges may sound to modern ears, echoes of violence in our text, and other forms of injustices are heard in our societies today, especially in Africa. Today's world, especially the continent of Africa is daily and continuously confronted with all forms of conflicts and violent including tribal wars, religious extremism, greed, corruption, kidnappings, killings, arm robberies, and disorderliness (Carry,1986; Bevan, Isabirye and Kooros, 1999; Udoekpo, 2020, 24-38; Najimdeen, 2023). In the 20th century alone Africa has experienced costly wars and conflicts in Somalia (1991), Nigeria (1967), Uganda (1987), Rwandan and Burundi Genocide (1994), and during the Eritrean-Ethiopian War of 1998, not to mention several other bloody conflicts and the recent threats of war in the Republic of Niger (Norwich University, "Five Major African Wars," 2017).

Granted that war is a universal phenomenon, ancient and modern, scholars from different locations, especially of non-African background have often read this text, or episode of Israel's war with Benjamin (Judg 19-21) diachronically, and limiting it to rabbinical or theoretical analyses (Szpek, 2007; Fokkelman, 1999, 110-111; Arnold, 2009). Szpek exceptionally sees it not only as ahistorical, but as "a metaphor of dire, not gentle, admonition, pieced together by allusions, of what Israel's destiny might become" (2007). Boling reads the story, as merely representing "the confederacy as utterly leaderless" (Boling, 2008,178). He thinks that it is "a rich mine of data on Israel's pre-monarchial organization as well as dramatic ironies or a tragicomic" (Boling, 2008, 178, Currie, 1971, 14).

On the other hand, Martin Noth regards it as a reflection of military expedition of the twelve-tribes organization against one of its members in the pre-Davidic era (Noth, 1960, 104-6). Wellhausen reads it as an addition or late imitation of the story of Lot in Genesis 19 and dismissed it as having no positive value (Wellhausen,1957,235-37). While others, such as Yairah Amit understands it as a supplement to Micah's story (Judges 17-18), pointing at what happened in Israel, when there was no

King (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25), as well as a post-exilic political narrative to demonstrate the unfading unity of Israel (Amit, 1999). As noted in my earlier studies, these earlier, western and European-minded-studies, "were devoid of African concerns, stories, examples, customs, parallels, culture, or worldview, particularly those cherished by African Biblical Hermeneutics" (Udoekpo, Locust, 2023).

Methodology

Methodologically, this study uses common African historical and cultural experiences as an exegetical point of departure (Udoekpo, Locust, 2023). Basic terms such as "postcolonialism" and "Third World," used in the study are minimally defined and analyzed. This is followed by a general overview or survey of the book of Judges, with particular attention to the text, moral and structure of Judges 20. Postcolonial biblical interpretation is contextually, theologically and inexhaustibly deployed in the exegesis of the text. In doing this, attention is not only devoted to highlighting the antecedent factors responsible for conflicts and wars between ancient Israel and the tribe of Benjamin as illustrated in the book of Judges. Echoes and parallels of these factors are drawn in today's African, society, where necessary. Above all, analyses are done theologically within the overall contexts of Deuteronomistic History (Josh-2 Kings), particularly Judges 19-21. It is believed that the fruit of this essay will not only transform African readers, but will benefit them within their faith context, since in Christ, all peoples and their cultures are drawn to dialogue and peaceful co-existence in God. What then is postcolonialism?

Clarification of Terms

Postcolonialism, as narrowly used in this study is an amalgam of different methods and contextual approaches that are not restricted to the familiar form, source, historical or literary criticisms (R. S. Sugirtharajah's Postcolonialism, 2002,6-7). It embraces other hermeneutical approaches that promotes

African stories, cultures, experiences, inculturation, values, customs and beliefs (Udoekpo, 2005,18-19; Adamo, 2015, 1; Ukpong, 2002, 17–32, esp. 18; Udoekpo, 2022, 16–23). As extensively discussed in my earlier works and in other places, details beyond this scope of this work, it is an interpretative method which liberates or breaks away from that which is exclusively associated with Europeans or American expansionism, culture, values, customs, power, domination and imperialism (Udoekpo, 2005,18-19; Fiorenza, 1999, 36; Segovia, 1999, 285-286; Mbuvi, 2023, 7; Said, 1993, 9; Sugirtharajah, 2001, 242). It is a "a condition that exists within, and thus contests and resists the colonial moment itself with its ideology of domination" (Udoekpo, 2005, 17; Lionnet, 1995, 4). It is minimally used in this this study, as a contextual approach adopted by biblical scholars from non-European of American countries a (Fiorenza, 1999, 37; Udoekpo, 2005, 17). I consider this important as each age and culture continues to seek to understand, translate, inculturate, appropriate, actualize and contextualize the word of God (John 1:14) of which Judges 19-20 forms a apart. It is a testimony to a great shift in methods of biblical interpretation in different contexts, African context in particular (Udoekpo, 2017, xxxix–xxx, Brown and Schneiders, 1990,1146–65; Fitzmyer, 1995; McKenzie and Haynes,1999).

Similarly, Robert Schreiter affirms the importance of contextualizing and appropriating of biblical exegesis and theology when he advises that "theology must not be reduced to context in a crude contextualism, for then it is likely to lose its critical edge as it becomes simply a product of its surroundings" (Schreiter, 1997, 1–27; Udoekpo, Locust, 2023). In other words, although, reading ancient Old Testament texts like the Book of Judges in the context of Africa could be appear challenging, it becomes easier when we keep in mind, that the Word of God, that became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14; (Isa 40:8; 1 Pet 1:23–25)) is both timeless and without continental boundaries (Udoekpo, Locust, 2023).

That is to say, the narrative in Judges 19-20, beginning with the following overview, is capable of "entering into and finding expression in various cultures and languages, yet that same word overcomes the limits of individual cultures to create fellowship between different people" (Benedict XVI, 2010,116; Udoekpo. Locust, 2023).

Judges, an Overview

Judges were charismatic leaders raised up by the impulses of God's spirit to deliver Israelites from their enemies. They were not Judges in the modern courts or judiciary systems in Africa, or other parts of the world, today. Rather, through divine assistance they vindicated the justices of God. Oppression comes to Israel as a result of their infidelity to God. Salvation comes to Israel in their obedience to the Lord (Deut 28:15-68; Judg 2:11-18). They were the Lord's salvific fidelity to his word. The book of Judges is a continuation of Israel's history in the promised land beginning from the death of Joshua to just the time or before the birth of Samuel, the last Judge of Israel (1 Sam 7:15). Its setting covers the time between the conquest of Canaan under Joshua until the rise of the monarchy under the first King of Israel, Saul. In modern scholarship, the book of Judges is treated as an important historical source for the time between the Exodus from Egypt and the beginning of the United Monarchy (Schneider, 2000, xii; Udoekpo, 2020), 1-18).

The text itself has come to us in different versions such as (a) the Hebrew text, (b) the Hebrew text transliterated into Greek characters, (c) Aquila, (d) Symmachus, (e)Origen's LXX and (f)Theodotion (Boling, *Judges*, 43; Udoekpo, "Household Shrine of Micah"1-18). As Boling would observe the principle of textual criticism has not changed, but throughout this study, we shall be indicating where necessary the relationship between different version (Boling, *Judges,* 46). Judges, generally are stories of God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness including their Judges, leaders and the citizens (Branick, 2011,31).

They are cyclical stories of extended laments about idolatry, tribal and defensive wars, violent and corruption of families, tribes and religious and political leaders that took place in Israel when there was no king in Israel and every one, as mention earlier "did what was good in his or her eyes" (2:10-19; 17:6; 18:1;19:1 21:25). Its moral revolves around the fact that oppression of the Israelites is the punishment of impiety, disobedience and that victory, restoration, salvation comes as a result of repentance, conversion, renewal, and making a "U-turn" from violence and war (*milchamah*) to God and peace (*shalom*).

Based on content, many scholars usually attribute three major parts to the entire Twenty-One Chapters of the book of Judges: (a) Introduction (1:1-3:6), (b) stories about individual Judges (3:7-16:31) and (c) the concluding stories (17-21). John Currid (Judges, accessed 9/14/23), whom I would like to borrow, for instance, arranges his division of the book of Judges into:

(1) Israel's unfaithfulness (1:1-3:6)

a. Ongoing conquest (1:1-3:6)
b. Failure to fulfil the conquest (1:27-36)
c. Israel's disobedience (2:1-3:6)

(II) the downhill cycle of the 12 Judges (3:7-16:31)

a. Othniel (3:7-11)
b. Ehud (3:12-30)
c. Shamgar (3:31) Deborah (4:1-5:310
d. Gideon (6:1-8:32)
e. Abimelech (8:33-9:57)
f. Tola and Jair (10:1-5)
g. Jephthah (10:6-12:7)
h. Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon (12:8-15)
i. Samson (13:1-16:31)

(III) the sinful abyss (17:1-21:25)

a. Micah, the Levite, and the Tribe of Dan (17:1-18:31
b. Sin of the Benjaminites (19:1-21:25).

In other words, there are as many structures and outlines as there are authors and commentators. Our primary focus is on the last section, which discusses Israel's domestic war in the territory of Benjamins (Judges 20), and within the proximate context Judges 19-21 where factors responsible for the war and conflicts are listed.

Analysis of Israel's War with Benjamine (Judges 20)

There is no better place to begin the analysis of the story of Israel's war with Benjamin in Judges 20, than with a brief highlight on the factors responsible for the war and conflicts. These include; disobedience to God's commands, idolatrous practices, tribalism, relativism, selfishness, greed, unfaithfulness, anger, corruption, lack of thoughtful leaders, male dominated world as well as tribal conflicts.

Antecedent and Responsible Factors

According to Boiling (Judges, 173), the text of Judges 19: 1 introduces a man, a Levite and a resident alien (*ʾîsh, lēwî, gār*), who lived in the remotest part of the hill country of Ephraim (*bəyarəkkê har-ʾephrayîm*). This was "in those days when there was no king in Israel" (*wayəhî bayyāmîm hāham ûmelek ʾên bəyisrā'êl*). He took for himself a woman, a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah (*wayyiqqḥ-lô ʿsshāh phîlegesh mibbêt leḥem yəhûdāh*). Obviously, this would indicate relativism and lack of a central human leadership as well as the disobedience to God.

It is not clear in the text whether he was a priest, strictly speaking, but in the holiness code, an obedient Levite was supposed to marry a virgin, and not concubines (Lev 21:10-5), although the concubine may have had the status of a legal mistress, like in the case of Abraham (Gen 25:6), Jacob (35:22),

Caleb (1Chr 2:46), Saul (2 Samuel 3:7), David (2 Samuel 5:13), Solomon (1 Kings 11:3) and Rehoboam (2 Chro 11:21), but not exactly as that of a legal wife. But it is clear that this disobedient Levite is from the north while the concubine (*phîlegesh*) is from the south, setting the stage, for tribal sentiments and other forms of lawlessness that would foreground the conflicts in Judges 20, and by extension, wars and conflicts in different parts of Africa. Boling sees this north-south element not only as a "conscious contrast (narrative inversion) to the preceding story of "a young Levite" (18:3), but as "a partial antithesis of Micah's "priest" (17:7-12)."

In verses 1-4, the Levite's concubine became "angry with him" (*orgisthe auto, LXX*). Other version would say she was unfaithful to him, or got into harlotry or prostitution (*wattizneh 'ālâw, MT*), as a result she went away to her father's house in Bethlehem for some months. A situation of this nature is common in Africa of which a loving husband with time would seek reconciliation and reach back, respectfully to the father-in-law of "an angry" or "unfaithful" wife, for reconciliation. Sons-in-law, like grand children in Africa are 'sacred' and often would have maintained a mutual-loving relationship with the entire household of the father-in-law during such visits in Judges. But that was not the case. The Levite in Judges, spent most of the four days with his hospitable father-in-law and spoke to the concubine only after her death (vv. 27-28). According to Boling "It was a man's world. There is no mention of the interest of the girl in rejoining her husband, nor of what womenfolk did while the two men celebrated most of the week" (Boiling, Judges, 174). In African cultural values, exchange of wine, kola, blessings, and other forms of prayer-rituals are expected to occur in the context and presence of the entire household, including the daughter/concubine, for effective reconciliation of this kind.

In verses 5-10, the father-in-law extended his visits and hospitality to the Levite, who finally, succeeded in departing Bethlehem in the afternoon, on the fifth day, instead of in the morning. Ironically, by seeking to avoid potential inhospitality

and risk of spending the night in Jebus, a foreign (Canaanite) city, the Levite and his entourage suffer that very fate in Gibeah, an Israelite city in northern Jerusalem (vv.11-15), but only to be given hospitality by an old man, a fellow Ephraimite, whom he shared the same tribal region with (vv.16-21). Some sons of worthlessness (*bənê-bəliyyaʿl*) surrounded them at night with an attempt to gang-rape the Levite (v.22), who rather sadly surrendered his concubine to them. She was raped all night to death (vv.23-28). Reaching home, with the body, which he discovered at the threshold of the house, the following morning, cuts and distributed her parts to all the tribes of Israel, demanding for judgment (vv.29-30). This terrible action, among many other factors listed above, generated Israel's war with Benjamin in Judges 20.

Israel's War with Benjamin (Judges 20)

In response to the actions of the Levites, all the Israelites gathered in Mizpah, a town located about 5 miles or 7 kilometers north of Gibeah on the border between the tribal territories of Ephraim and Bejamin. The introductory text(vv.1-3) of this war drumming, and conflicts, says;

MT	Working Translation/NRSV
1.*wayyētsə'û kôl- bənê-yisrāē'l wattiqqāhēl hāʿēdāh, kəʾîsh ʾeḥād, ləmiddān wəʿad-bəē'r shebaʿ, wə'eretz haggilāʿd, ʾel-ădônay hammitzppāh.*	"Then all the Israelites came forth. The assembly gathered, as one man, around the Lord at Mizpah-from Dan to Beersheba including the land of Gilead"
2.*wayyityatztzəbû pinnôt kôl-hāʿām kol shibətê yisrāē'l biqəhal 'am hā'ĕlohîm ʾarəbbaʿ*	"The leaders of all the people (all the Israelites tribes) stationed themselves in the assembly

mē'ōth ʾeleph ʾîsh ragəlî shōlēph ḥārebh.	of God's people, four hundred contingents of sword-bearing foot soldiers"
3.*wayyîshməʿû bənê-binyāmin kî-ʿālû bənê-yisrāē'l hammitzppāh, wayyomərû bənê-yisrāē'l dabbərû ʾêkāh nihəyətāh hārāʿāh hazzo'th*	"The Benjaminites heard that the Israelites had gone up to Mizpah. The Israelites said, "speak out. How did this vile thing happen"?

Following this text are the Levites' testimony, (vv.4-7), the people's response and planning (vv.8-11), the actual three-phased-battle's execution (12-36), and subsequent violent against the city of Jabesh Gilead (21:4-15). Noticeably, the above introductory text(vv.1-3), significantly lay emphasize on the unity of Israel who all came out *en masse*, by using the phrase for the entirety of the land, "from Dan to Beersheba" (*ləmiddān wəʿad-bəē'r sheba*ʿ). And were united before the Lord in Mizpah. They all gathered as "one man" (*hāʿēdāh, kəʾîsh ʾeḥād*), that is as one body, which was the hope of the Levite because of the horrible rape and murder of the concubine.

Even, though the tribe of Benjamin was not in this gathering, the very idea of oneness and communal living in this ancient and distant narrative, as earlier mentioned, is something that resonate in Africa, that so much value solidarity and community life, though not without challenges.

Of course, in Africa, no matter their magnitudes, challenges and difficult situations are tackled together as a community, with a deep sense of *ubuntu,* "I am because you are" (Udoekpo, 2021,196–220; Udoekpo, "A Study of the Ministry of the Royal Priesthood,"2023, 1–7). In Africa, "It is unthinkable to celebrate even a feast without the participation of the whole village" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 43). This is "not simply a

recognition of the core value of community in African identity formation, but, in distinct contrast to the prevalent individualism that governs the western society outlook" (Mbuvi, *African Biblical Studies*, 81; Udoekpo, Locust, 2023). Africans also responds to calamities, funerals, and other tragedies, including situations of wars, based on the level of instigations, causes, such as tribalism, as was the case in the Israel-Benjamin story as well as external and colonial influences across Africa.

Narrating causes of wars and conflicts in Africa known for communal leaving and *ubuntu* practice, David Crary, cites how in Uganda, where guerrilla's militia who took over power with the message of national unity. In this case, they later derailed by tribal affiliation causing more than half a million lives during two decades of chaos. He recalls Willie Musururwa, a political commentator in Zimbabwe, where the Ndebele and Shona tribes spared for over 150 years. He observes that "anybody who has been hanging around since Africa began to rule itself has seen tribalism butchering many people in our continent" (Crary, 1986). He also notes that, before colonialism, the tribes functioned as a distinct nationality. They sometimes engaged in wars with one another, as was the case with Israel and Benjamin in the book of Judges 1-20). But before the advent of colonialism, tribes were not locked in day-to-day friction. This began when "they were lumped together by Europeans who drew the borders of their possessions without regards for the peoples, languages and cultures within them" (Crary,1986,1).

Crary identifies tribal jealousies encouraged by colonial, powers as a divide and rule tactics which resulted in wars in different parts of Africa, including, south Africa, Chad, Angola, as well as Nigeria, during the Biafran-Nigerian civil wars in the 1960s (Crary, 1986,2). Echoes of the brutality complained in the book of Judges by the Levite to the assembly of Israel, could be heard, at least, comparatively of figuratively in the "Tens of thousands of people who were slaughtered during the power struggles between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes of Burundi and Rwanda in

the 1960s and 1990s, and the toll of violent along the unity of tribal line continues to climb across the continent" (Crary, 1986, 2).

In verses 4-7 the Levite presented his case against his brothers in Benjamin in the best possible light. He accused the nobles, lord and leaders, or chiefs (*baʿal*) of Gibeah of doing nothing to stop the assault. Boling notices that "nobility" or chief, leader or "the lords" (*baʿal*), is also used sarcastically in Judges 9:2 (Boiling *Judges*,183). Even at that, and contrarily, among the Africans senior citizens and elders are naturally thought to be wise very prudent in their actions and decisions. They are not erratic nor would act in a haste. African elders unlike the elders in Judges 20:4-7, are the custodians of norms and conduits of knowledge. They are embodiments of wisdom, justice, peace, family ethics and values such as love, sexuality, and respect for life and children of all genders, mothers and wives. In addition, Africans of all ages, venerates their ancestors and fore-fathers (*ʻăbhîtêkem*). They show respect for human life from conception to death. Life is sacred at all stages in African culture. Their elderly and aged parents are kept within the family. Nursing homes for the elderly, of instance, are not popular in Africa. Thus, it would have made much sense if the elders and the noble men of Gibeah had wisely discourage others in rushing to judgment, or reacting violently to the Levite's presentation. Unfortunately, the whole community including the elders and noble men were in agreement "as one man" (*kəʾîsh ʾeḥād*), in establishing a draft to fight Gibeah (Judges 20:8, 11).

Furthermore, Benjamin's help was sought to handover the culprits, but they refused. In this case, Benjamin also put loyalty to tribe, first, rather than God. They rather prepared themselves with 26,000 warriors, with 700 of them, who were left-handed warriors, for tribal war (vv12-17). The other Israelites tribes with 400,000 soldiers consulted the Lord in Bethel to decide which tribe would lead the fight against their brothers and sisters in Benjamine (v.18). Unlike some African civil wars (see, Norwich University Online, "Five Major African

Wars," accessed September 12,2023) and conflicts that spanned for many years, Israelites-Benjamin war took three days (vv.19-36), but brutal.

On day one of the war, we are told, Benjamin inflicted a stunning and resounding defeat on the Israelites because the Israelites, initially relied on their army and in their goodness of the causevv.19-23). This consultation together with Judges 20:2, fits into De Vaux's description of the concept and rites of the Holy war in Israel. He says, "when the people took up arms, they were called the people of Yahweh or the people of God (Jg: 5:13; 20:2), the troops of God (1 S 17:26), or the armies of Yahweh (Ex 12:41; cf. 7:4) … They were bound to remain continent (1 S 21:6; 2 S 11:11; (Dt 23:10-15), and this obligation of cleanliness extended to the camp, which had to be kept 'holy' if Yahweh was to encamp with his troops" (De Vaux, 1997, 258-59; Craigie, 1978, esp., 45-54; Niditch, 1993, esp.,20-25; Barrete, 2019, 13-74).

In other words, Israel's wars were the wars of the Lord (1 Sam 18;17; 25:28), and the national epic was even put into music in the "Books of the Wars of Yahweh" (Numb 21:14). The enemies of Israel were Yahweh's enemies (Judg 5:31; 1 Sam 30:26; cf. Exod 17:16). This is true in the case of the battle with Benjamin, before marching out to battle a sacrifice was not only offered to the Lord (1 Sam 7:9; 13:9, 12), but the Lord was consulted (Judg 20:23, 28). Such consultation, of course, would not be strange to Africans, who among their many values are their profound religious sense of the sacred and of the existence of God, as their creator and controller of events in both the physical and spiritual worlds (Mbiti, 1969; Mbiti, 1970, and Udoekpo, 2010, 288-290).

On the second day of battle Israelites were defeated again, and about 18,000 of their soldiers were killed. Israel repented before the Lord, by coming to Bethel, led by Phinehas, the high priest (Numb 25:6-11), mourning, praying and fasting (vv.25-28). God might have used this defeat to remind Israel that the crime of

Gibeah was not just a sin committed against God by an individual or a single tribe of Benjamin. Israel needed to recognize that the nation as a whole had a sin problem. That crime had a social and communal implications. This is a stark reminder to waring and corrupt nations in Africa where wars, religious extremism, and all forms of violence and brokenness have become daily routine, with communal and negative implications. Wrong decisions might have been taken by a group of few men and women, nobles, politicians, or leaders to the detriment of the entire nation, as it was for Israel, until they repented (v.28).

Such repentance led to the Lord "defeating Benjamin" on behalf of Israel, on the third day of battle, except the 600 men who fled to the wilderness of Rimon Rock. In addition, to their foolish oath never to marry their daughters to the men of Benjamin tribe (Judges 21:1), they hastily placed a cruel and harsh ban (*ḥerem*) on Gibeah and on Benjamin towns, their fellow tribe's people (vv.29-49; Judges 21:11). This is reminiscent of how Africans harshly and cruelly treat their fellow tribes' brothers and sisters in different parts of Africa and beyond (De Vaux, 260-261).

In addition, the Israelites army attacked an innocent city, Jabesh Gilead, who did not show up in Mizpah (vv.8-11), killing everyone, except 400 young women whom they forcefully abducted to the men of Benjamin in marriage (vv.12-15). Echoes of such is equally heard the ongoing practice of *boko-haram* extremists in north-eastern Nigeria, where kidnapping and maiming of innocent people have become the order of the day.

In verses 16-24 a problem persisted in that there were not enough wives to go round the 600 men of Benjamin who survived Israelites war, and fled to the desert, resulting in the kidnapping of the young women who came to dance during an annual festival in Shiloh (cf. 1 Sam 1:3). With these women, the people of Benjamin returned to their inheritance and rebuilt

their cities. Again, there is no better way to end this narrative than, pointing to the era of relativism where every person did what they thought was right in his or her own eyes (Judges 21:25; cf. 2:10-19, 17:6; 18:1; 191).

Conclusion

The consequences of crimes, war, anarchy, conflicts, violent of all forms with their responsible factors, be it between Israel and Benjamin (Judges 19-21), Russia and Ukraine, or among African tribes and nations cannot be over-emphasized. In Israel-Benjamin conflicts, their relationship with God was threatened as well their tribes and neighbors. Israel, as we saw engage on war and revenge mission because of anger, foolish vows, tribal sentiments and lack of thoughtful leaders, and noble men of integrity. They brought an to bear on their own people as well as indulged in killing thousands of lives. They also indulged in kidnapping their own women and daughters who were worshiping at the tabernacle of the Lord in Shiloh.

Similar tribal wars, conflicts and echoes of all forms of violent are heard all over the world, particularly, in Africa. some of these wars and injustices could have been avoided if not for greed, external colonial influences, lack dialogue, and fear of the Lord. Like in the case of the ancient Israelites in the discussed book of Judges leaders in today's societies, especially in the continent of Africa continue to engage in all forms of recklessness, anger, inordinate pride, lack of vision, selfishness and thoughtlessness, and many more forms brutality, violent and corruption, as discussed throughout this paper. Such conflicts, especially during the twentieth century have enabled untold loss of lives and properties.

It has also resulted in the collapse of African socio-economic systems, as well as in the degradation of health and education services across the continent of Africa. In fact, African civil

wars, conflicts and all forms of violence, as discussed, in light of the wars and conflict in the book of Judges, have rendered African citizens and religious communities to intense physical and phycological traumas with negative impact on development throughout African nations. Postcolonial critics insist that if those narrative in Judges 19-20 are to resonate well in our African cultural context, theology and biblical interpretation will have to carry out its work of articulating the culture-bound exegesis as attempted in this paper. Like the Israelites who constantly returned to the Lord, in repentance, in spite of their wars and conflicts, warring tribes and nations in Africa invited to drop radical relativism, tribalism, corruption, greed and inherited colonial weapons of wars. They are encouraged to search for a visionary leader and imitate noble and elders who are committed to leading the people in search for common good, genuine dialogue, deeper trust in God, development, justice, prosperity, truthfulness, oneness, sense of community and peace.

Sources

Adamo, D. T. (1998). *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament*. San Francisco: International Scholars Publications.

Adamo, D. T. (2001). *Explorations in African Biblical Studies*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Adamo, D. T. (2006). *Africa and Africans in the New Testament*. Washington: University Press of America.

Adamo, D. T. (2015). "The Task and Distinctiveness of African Biblical Hermeneutics," *Old Testament Essays* 28, no. 1 (2015): 31–52.

Arnold, P. M. (2009). *Gibeah: The Search for a Biblical City*. New York: A&C Black.

Barrete, L. (2019). *The Way God Fights: War and Peace in the Old Testament.* Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock.

Benedict XVI. (2010). *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Verbum Domini.* Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Boling, R. G. (2008). *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible. New Haven &London: Yale University Press.

Brown, R. E. and S. Schneiders, (1990)."Hermeneutics," in *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, ed. J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Crary, D. (1986). "African Continent Tormented by Tribal Conflicts: Problem Has Triggered Wars, Toppled Governments and Wrecked Courtships." *Los Angelos Times*, March 23, 1986.

CBCN Secretariat. (2022). "Human Fraternity: Path to Building Sustainable Peace in Nigeria," A Communique issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria Resource Center, Durumi, Abuja, March 5–11, 2022.

Craigie, P. C. (1978). *The Problem of War in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids; Michigan: Eerdmans.

Currid, J. (2023). *Judges: Commentary*. The Gospel Coalition Bible Commentary (TGCB). https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/judges/. accessed 9/14/23.

Currie, S. D. (1971). "Biblical Studies for a Seminar on Sexuality and the Human Community," Austin *Seminary Bulletin 87*(1971), 14.

De Vaux, R. (1997). *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans.

Fabella, V. and Sugitharjah, R. S. eds. (2002). "Third Word," *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

Fiorenza, E. S. (1999). *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies.* Minneapolis: Fortress.

Fitzmyer, J. A. (1995). *The Biblical Commission's Document: The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, Text and Commentary,* Subsidia Biblical 18. Rome: Biblicum.

Fokkelman, J. P. 1999. *Reading Biblical Narrative*. Leiderdorp: Deo.

Hardon, J. A. (1989). *The Catholic Lifetime Reading Plan.* Royal Oak, MI: Grotto.

Isabirye, S. B and Kooros M. Mahmoudi. (1999). "Tribal" Conflicts in Africa: A Case Study of Rwanda and Burundi." Ufahamu: Journal of African Studies. Vol 27, Issue, 1-2-3, 1999, http://doi.org/10.5070/F7271-2-3016611.

Lionnet, F. (1995). *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

McKenzie, S. L., and S. R. Haynes, eds., (1999). *An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Applications: To Each Its Own Meaning.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox.

Mbuvi, A. M. (2023). *African Biblical Studies: Unmasking Embedded Racism and Colonialism in Biblical Studies.* London: T&T Clark.

Najimdeen, H. (2023). "Politics, tribal Violence, and Socio-Economic Rivalry in Afria," Politics Today. https://politicstoday.org/african-politics-tribal-violence-and-socio-economic-rivalry-in-africa/ access September 12,2023.

Niditch, S. (1993). *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Norwich University. (2017). "Five Major African Wars and Conflicts of the Twentieth Century" Norwich University Online, September 4th, 2017.

Noth, M. (1960). *The History of Israel.* New York: Haper.

Pobee, J. S. (1979). *Toward and African Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon.

Okure, T. (1988). *The Johannine Approach to Mission: A Contextual Study of John 4:1–42*. WUNT 2/31. Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck.

Ruiz, Jean- Pierre. (2003). "Taking a Stand on the Sand of the Seashore: A Postcolonial Exploration of Revelation 13," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*. Edited by David L. Barr. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage Books.
Segovia, F. F. (1995). *Reading from this Place, vol. 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States.* Minneapolis: Fortress.
Segovia, F. F. (1999). "Reading the Bible Ideologically: Socioeconomic Criticism," *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticism and their Application*, edited by Steven McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes. Louisville. Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
Schneider, T. J. (2000). *Judges*, Berith Olam Studies Hebrew Narrative & Poetry. Collegeville, Minesota: Liturgical Press.

Schreiter, R. J. (1997). *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*. Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis.
Sugirtharajah, R. S. (2001). *The Bible and the Third Word: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sugirtharajah, R. S. (2002). *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press,
Szpek, H. M. (2007) "The Levites Concubine: The Story that Never Was," *Women in Judaism,* vol. 5. No. 1.
Udoekpo, M. U. (2010). *Rethinking the Day of YHWH and Restoration of Fortunes in the Prophet Zephaniah: An Exegetical and Theological Study of 1:14-18; 3:14-20*. Das Alte Testament Im Dialog; an outline of an Old Testament Dialogue, volume 2(Bern: Peter Lang.
Udoekpo, M. U. (2005). *John 4:4-42: A Postcolonial Interpretation of the Discourse with the Samaritan Woman: A Theological Implications in An African Context*. MA Thesis. New York: St. John's University.
Udokepo, M. U. (2020a). *The Limits of a Divided Nation with Perspective from the Bible*. Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publication.
Udoekpo, M. U. (2020b). "Studying Corruption in the Household Shrine of Micah in Judges 17:1-6 In Nigerian Context," *Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN*), vol. 12. Pp.1-18. Edited by Bernard Ukwuegbu et. al., Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Catholic biblical Association of Nigeria, November.
Udoekpo, M. U. (2005). *John 4:4–42: A Postcolonial Interpretation of the Discourse with the Samaritan Woman and Its Theological Implications in An African Context* (master's thesis, St. John's University, 2005), esp.13–26.
Udoekpo, M. U. (2017). *Rethinking the Prophetic Critique of Worship in Amos 5 for Contemporary Nigeria and the USA*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick.
Udoekpo, M. U. ed., (2022). *A Biblical Approach to Mission in Context: A Festschrift in Honor of Sr. Prof. Teresa Okure, SHCJ*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.
Udoekpo, M. U. (2022). *Second Inaugural Lecture: Biblical Studies and the Complementarity of Theology and Other Discipline*. Abuja: Veritas University Press, 2022.
Udoekpo, M. U. (2021). "A Contextual Re-evaluation of Humanity's Responsible Identity in Genesis 1:26–28, in the Light of African Sense of Ubuntu," *Light in Once-Dark World* 4 (November 2021): 196–220;
Udoekpo, M U. (2023). "A Study of the Ministry of the Royal Priesthood in Exodus 19:6 and Its Theological Expansion in 1 Peter 2:5, 9–10," *European Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2023): 1–7, https://doi.org/10.24018/theology.2023.3.1.82.