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David and Shimei: innocent victim and perpetrator? The ethics of reading the Bible

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the wake of a belief that fosters a reading of the Bible that is devoid of any critical faculty on the part of the reader, the door is left wide open for other people to manipulate the belief systems of the unsuspecting faithful and pious men and women, admonishing them to do things or follow certain cues that a thinking person would think twice about before following or doing.

The ability to read in a benevolent way a biblical story that links God to cruelty, has been fundamental to the perpetration of apartheid by church-going faithful men and women, people like me, my parents, my grandparents and great-grandparents. They (we) thought apartheid was biblically just. But as the realisation set in regarding the effect of the apartheid system on those who were excluded because of their race, this belief system started to crumble. During apartheid no ethical questions concerning the way we read the Bible and the effect that our Bible reading would have on other people were asked. We never made a link between the way we read the Bible and the social injustices committed within the apartheid system.

I am not sure that we have moved away significantly from a racially biased hermeneutic or have developed a critical sensibility towards apartheid so that it can become an irritation for our belief in a just God. This is what the ethics of reading is about: questioning reading practices and inquiring about the effect and affect the reading of the Bible in a particular way would have on other people. An ethics of reading inquires into those reasons why readers read the biblical text in particular ways and why authors produced the texts they did (cf. Snyman 2007a).

In the mean time, the context has changed. In terms of the current discourse in South Africa, Eurocentrism, whiteness and so-called Western hermeneutics are under scrutiny. At issue is the effect of apartheid, racism and colonialism on the different African peoples in the country. What is required but not yet achieved is a recognition of our racial bias. Hampering this recognition is a subsequent shaming and scape-goating process whereby whiteness is experienced in terms of perpetration. Failure to recognise racial bias relates directly to a failure to develop a post-apartheid theology, or a theology for the retributed, those within white culture who need to accept the responsibility for the past (Snyman 2005).

On the one hand, the blame that is laid on whiteness and the subsequent shaming and scapegoating leave the impression that there is not any redemption for whiteness. On the other hand, there is nothing done theologically to redeem whiteness (without reverting to white supremacy) and rehabilitate it. Those churches in whose midst apartheid was theologically justified and whose members supported the previous regime remain silent about how to reconstruct their theology that would help their members in changed circumstances. One of the aspects in need of attention is the role of perpetrator these church members inevitably have to play in South African culture. It is a role not always explicitly mentioned, but alluded to in political discourse.¹⁷³

2. READING THE BIBLE AS A PERPETRATOR

Accepting the collective responsibility for apartheid in my own daily practice (cf. Snyman 2007b), and thus 'playing the role of the perpetrator who has been found out', I am looking for clues of redemption for the perpetrator in the Old Testament. But I find myself continuously in a dead end, since perpetrators are not supposed to live within the community in which the perpetration took place. They are either killed or banned.

173 A good example is a particular interpretation of the tale of the lion and the rabbit (cf. Ndebele 2007) where black people are compared to the lion (strength, courage, care) and white people to the rabbit (deviousness, fraud, hedonistic). See also Masenya 2008.

I am part of a group that is tied to a past that defines me as perpetrator on three levels:

Being male, I am part of that gender that has enforced heteropatriarchy on society, creating second-class membership for those who do not conform to heteronormative patriarchy (cf. Snyman 2002 and 2006b).

Being white means that I carry the blame for racism, sometimes even to the point of being regarded as racist just for being white (cf. Snyman 2006a). My integrity as a South African biblical scholar has been rendered dubious as I lack contextual authenticity within an African context.

Being part of the Western population in South Africa, means sharing the responsibility of colonisation in terms of the West's intellectual heritage. But this is also the most difficult level to gauge, since it pertains to one's being, or operating system (cf. Snyman 2008). If the latter becomes tainted, how does one redeem oneself?

To think of myself in terms of perpetration is rather distressing. The way the third generation of Jews and Germans currently (60 years after the fact) follow a process of reconciliation could provide a few pointers. I bear fully in mind that we are scarcely 14 years after the official demise of the apartheid system, and I stand nearer to the experience of the system than my children ever would.¹⁷⁴ Germany has been struggling to come to terms with the Holocaust for 60 years! After the Holocaust a discourse of victim and victimiser helped to preserve and define collective identities with respect to and memories of the past.

However, to Krondorfer, in his book *Remembrance and reconcilia-*

174 Bjorn Krondorfer (1995:1) writes as follows in his book regarding reconciliation between Jews and Germans of the third generation: 'Third-generation American Jews and non-Jewish Germans are divided by their national, cultural, and religious identities and the history of the Holocaust, or Shoah. But the Holocaust memory also unites them: both groups are tied to the past that has defined them as descendants of victims or victimizers. Some Jews and Germans of the third generation have begun to work together to understand the effects of this traumatic past, struggling against the mistrust and suspicion that characterize their interactions to this day. To transform their strained relations, they must learn to trust each other and allow their long stored anger, guilt, grief, and pain to emerge. Reconciliation demands a willingness to become vulnerable and honest in the presence of one another.'

tion: Encounters between young Jews and Germans (1995:24) this discourse attained a ritualistic quality over the time span of 60 years, so that it failed to achieve further transformation.

He argues that the following happened (1995:25-28):

Victims and victimisers got stuck in claims and counter claims over the 'correct' interpretation of the Holocaust. What Jews claimed to be an appropriate description was perceived as accusation and what German society saw as a proper depiction was received as a mere apologetic attitude.

The terms 'victim' and 'victimiser' started to serve as an indication of one's socio-political identity and one's place in the power structure. The more Germany wanted to get rid of its role as perpetrator, the more Jewish communities asserted their victimization.

Repeated exposure to the Holocaust, however, provokes emotional resistance against the victim/victimiser dichotomy. The dichotomy's potential for subconscious and ideological misappropriation has become destructive, because it obtained a power to prescribe and inscribe the roles young Jews and Germans ought to play.

Although Krondorfer (1995:46) acknowledges the legitimacy of describing the relationship between Jew and German as that of victim and victimiser, he also warns that to hold onto an inscriptive and prescriptive reading of victim and victimiser would inhibit any possibility of transformation of that dichotomy.

In another book Bjorn Krondorfer, Katherina von Kellenbach and Norbert Reck (2006) inquire into what happened to theology just after the war. From the examples they cited, one gets the impression that it was really difficult to digest the devastation and to come to grips with the realisation that so much evil originated from their own soil. It was not possible to look the perpetration squarely in the eye. Salvation was looked for in instances of becoming the

victims of the Allied forces.¹⁷⁵

James Perkinson in his book *White Theology. Outing supremacy in modernity* (2004) suggests a programme according to which a specific kind of cultural perpetration could be confronted and be dealt with. He refers to white privilege and suggests a way of coming to consciousness by looking into black eyes without denying the reflection. It is an attempt to deal with black critique and deal with the embarrassment of being found out. As part of my own endeavours (cf. Snyman 2008) to give effect to this coming to consciousness of racist perpetration, the question regarding the continued presence of the perpetrator amongst his or her victims has become of considerable interest. Each day the victims of racism have to look the perpetrators of apartheid in the eyes. As a theologian, I started to look for models of cohabitation of victim and perpetrator, and the story of Shimei and David presented itself. Shimei seemingly survived his curse and stoning of David, only to be killed later by Solomon at the behest of David!

Has he become a scapegoat? Was his death justified? Has he been killed for his cursing and stoning of David, or for his failure to comply with the house arrest conditions laid down by Solomon, or has he been killed in order to secure the Davidic dynasty? In the story David, at the end of his life, wants to revenge himself on Shimei, but he feels himself bound by an oath he took not to kill Shimei. He obliges Solomon to find a way to deal with Shimei. Solomon does, on the pretence of failure of complying with certain house arrest conditions Shimei is said to have agreed to. However, the reader remains aware of Shimei's connection to the Saulide dynasty.

What do I say to people who experience the South African

¹⁷⁵One example from the book is Helmut Thielicke, who recognised his guilt towards the victims of the Holocaust. He was prohibited by the Gestapo to publish books and to deliver public speeches. His teaching permit was also withdrawn (cf. Krondorfer et al 2006:96). However, on closer scrutiny, thus Krondorfer et al (2006:85), his rhetoric is filled with self-pity and cast as a national Passion narrative. The real victim is the ill-treated German, and the perpetrator the Allied justice. His autobiography is regarded as total absorption with the own suffering to the exclusion of the suffering of other (2006:105). Thielicke rejected the denazification process, and renounced it as 'Seelenmord' and 'Glaubensmord', an anti-Christian course of action with a murderous goal (cf. Krondorfer 2006b:109).

government's programme of redress in terms of affirmative action and the redistribution of land as new oppression? What do I say to someone who lost his or her job because of the former or a farmer whose land has been grasped because of a land claim? Most do not experience the situation as one of justice. They would regard themselves as innocent victims with the government as the defiled takers. But from the government's point of view, it is a question of white privilege that is being taken away. White people have benefited and profited from white privileges economic power in getting farms, and in case where they did not get those farms but bought it later with hard earned money, white privilege is still at stake, since that privilege was not allotted to black people.

In as much as the story of David and Shimei is a play between innocence and perpetration, it constitutes a theme that plays out in a real drama in South Africa when it comes to reconciliation and redress. This play of innocence and perpetration forms the background in my own reflection on the embarrassment of looking into black eyes and seeing the reflection.

Before looking at the story, let me first put my theoretical frame of an ethics of reading on the table.

3. THE ETHICS OF READING THE BIBLE

Just as the world of text production influenced the authors in their construction of the stories and text, so would the world of text reception influence the act of reading those stories in later historical periods. When the influence of the world of text reception is not recognised, the frameworks of that world could be carried into the text and then inferred as if they were always there. Such a reading can then become oppressive. An ethics of reading implies an inquiry into the reasons why an author constructed the story in a particular way and why readers understand the story in a particular way.

I base my idea of an ethics of reading on the hermeneutics of Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza (1988) as expounded in her presidential address at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical literature in the USA in 1987 and on the philosophy (those bits I have

understood so far) of Emanuel Levinas, a French philosopher who fled the Russian Revolution in 1917.

3.1 Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza

Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, in her 1987 presidential address at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical literature in the USA, refers to the public-political responsibility of Bible readers. Value-free interpretation and neutral approaches to the biblical text are fallacies, she argues. In her approach she wanted to demonstrate how biblical texts and their contemporary interpretations involve not only authorial aims and strategies, but also audience perceptions and constructions.

She based her arguments on social location and political ethos. One's social location determines how one constructs reality and how one interprets the biblical text. Social location is determined by positions of power, i.e. race, gender, economy, age, status. The reading of the text is not done within a political vacuum. The reader of the bible does not stand outside the common circumstances of collective life.

The effect of this approach is that different and competing reading exist along side each other, with the categories of right and wrong no longer that pressing. But this position raises the question of power: the question is no longer how meaning is constructed, but whose interests are served, which values are encouraged, which socio-political practices are legitimated. Once social interests (race, gender, culture) are put on the table, and once a pluralistic approach regarding meaning is accepted, an ethics of reading is called for.

Schüssler-Fiorenza distinguishes between two aspects that are two sides of the same coin: an ethics of historical reading and an ethics of accountability.

An ethics of historical reading transforms the interpretive task from finding out what the text meant to the question of what kind of reading will do justice to the text in its historical context.

An ethics of accountability makes the interpreter responsible for not only the choice of theoretical interpretive model, but also for the ethical consequences of the biblical text and its meanings.

Reading the Bible is no longer a straightforward affair. Readers should take care when they intend to transfer values found in the biblical text to contemporary issues, as the Bible is not always a benign text. The question one has to ask is how these values will affect the reading community. The issue of power is perhaps important to bear in mind:

For the text one asks who wrote for whom with which ideological ends in mind.

For the reader one asks for which community he or she is reading and what he or she intends to achieve by this particular reading.

3.2 Emanuel Levinas

Levinas (1981) brings into focus the other person for whom one reads and to whom one will be obligated in some way or the other. His emphasis on the Other is in a way also symbolic for our reading of the biblical text: just as one should refrain from absorbing the other person through which that person could lose his or her identity, readers of the Bible should refrain from reading the biblical text in such ways that its strangeness and alterity are lost and the text reduced to a text contemporaneous to the reader.

Levinas' concerns are not the nature of people and a set of rules based on knowledge about their nature. His ethics is not a doctrine of moral norms, but a radical obligation that precedes and infuses our thinking. It is a radical obligation toward other people, a group or an individual. Ethics pertain to the concrete level of person-to-person contact. In the encounter between two persons, the other person is metaphorically without any familial ties. One meets the other person alone, as a widow or an orphan, a stranger or a foreigner in need of help. One meets that person in his or her vulnerability. The point of departure is that that other person is destitute, naked, not someone bent on deception, but someone alone in the world crying 'Do not kill me' (cf. Levinas 1985).

The presence of the face of the other stops one from usurping the other (Levinas 1969). There is an obligation between the two, an obligation that assumes that duty one has towards another person based on the moral values prevalent in a particular society. Regar-

ding the reading of the biblical text, this obligation says: Remember, when you read the Bible in whatever way, bear in mind that I may be affected by your reading.

Levinas based his idea on the concept of totalisation. Totalisation refers to an act whereby one consumes something and whereby nothing is left over. Totalisation constitutes total consumption. It is the denial of the otherness of the other, taking the person in one's idea to be the real person. But the real person exists apart from one's interpretation of that person. To overcome that problem, Levinas employs what he calls 'the ethical moment'. It is that moment when the other resists consumption.

The act of reading the Bible is an obligated act. One encounters the face of the other in the Bible, i.e. the otherness of the text itself (the text is in Hebrew / Aramiac and Greek), the otherness of the authors of real flesh and blood (they wrote in contexts and circumstances struggling with particular problems they sought to address by telling a story or writing a letter), the otherness of the readers (whose composition is multifaceted, coming from different perspectives with different ideologies and goals in mind) and the otherness of those who are caught up in the Bible's signifying power as it is deployed as a weapon or a tool.

4. DAVID AND SHIMEI

When Absalom usurped the throne, David fled from Jerusalem, realising that the hearts and minds of Israel found a new leader (2 Sam 15). As he entered Bahurim, a Benjaminite town on the main road just north of Jerusalem connecting Judah with Israel, he encountered Shimei, a man of the family of Saul. He threw stones at David, labelling him a murderer and a scoundrel (16:7-8):

'Out! Out! Murderer! Scoundrel! The LORD has avenged on all of you the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. See, disaster has overtaken you, for you are a man of blood.'

And as David made his way towards the Jordan, Shimei remained on the opposite side of the hill, cursing him and throwing stones.

David did not kill him. Instead, he accepted Shimei's curse as Yahweh's way of dealing with his (David's) distress.

Absalom has driven out David, unsettling him, turning him into a migrant metaphorically speaking. Shimei, a resident in Bahurim, is settled. He is what one can call a settler. The mobile David is vulnerable. He finds himself in a situation that favours the settled, a situation that has been exploited by Western powers in history in the persecution of mobile people and the construction of narratives depicting them as inferior. Early South African history is a case in point with the destruction of the San in the early days of Dutch settlement and the construction of narratives of inferiority of those who became unsettled by their settlement. Brighenti (2006: 102) considers the opposition between settled and migrant subjects of fundamental importance to settled society, because the question of settled or mobile constitutes the basis of inclusion or exclusion from the group. David's mobility makes him an easy target for Shimei's attempt at banning him from the kingdom.

When David returns after the death of Absalom, he is no longer the migrant runaway, but a king returning to his settlement. Shimei came down from Bahurim as David crossed the Jordan, bowing before him and begging for forgiveness (2 Sam 19:19-20):

May my lord not hold me guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem; may the king not bear it in mind. For your servant knows that I have sinned; therefore, see, I have come this day, the first of all the house of Joseph to come down to meet my lord the king.

David did not kill Shimei. In fact, he gave him an oath to this effect. However, as David lied on his deathbed, he instructed Solomon 'to bring his [Shimei's] grey head down with blood to Sheol' (1 Ki 2:9), which Solomon did with what looks like trumped up charges (1 Ki 2:36-46).

Does the killing of Shimei constitute justice? Should one conceive here of retributive justice, in the sense that Shimei is killed after all for his curse on and irreverence towards David as anointed of Yahweh? Or should one perhaps regard his death as a kind of purification, safeguarding the throne from any future Saulide intervention? What is constructed with the death of Shimei: a sacrifice or a scapegoat?

René Girard (1972:76) refers to the crisis of sacrifice (la crise sacrificielle) when the difference between impure violence and purificatory violence disappears. Any difference is eliminated when the victim ceases to be a good conductor, and increases the prospect of further violence, for example, a chain reaction of revenge.¹⁷⁶ Girard (1972:65) acknowledges that the difference between pure and impure violence is arbitrary, but the distinctive moment is the question whether the violence is purificatory (purificatrice) as in the case of a sacrifice.

Sacrifice is a social act. Its consequences are not limited to a particular individual marked for a sacrificial destiny (1972:68), but concern the well being of the entire community. Sacrifice has a real function and the problem of substitution relates to the entire collective. A particular individual who is endangered or threatened is not substituted for the victim of the sacrifice (the animal or person to be sacrificed). The latter is sacrificed for the entire community by all the members of the community. The sacrifice protects the entire community from violence (1972:22). The crisis of sacrifice is its loss (1972:76), for example the loss of difference¹⁷⁷ between impure violence and purificatory violence. Then no purification becomes possible and impure violence becomes contagious, and expands within the community.

The creation of the victim of the sacrifice, the scapegoat, is ideological. The scapegoat (la victime / le bouc émissaire) is convicted without a trial, and his or her guilt is unquestionable. The scapegoat is constituted for the effect the group needs (1972:115). However, its reality is hidden in order for it to function (1972:122). If the ideological construction is revealed, it loses its cathartic effect (1972:120). What is important to realise, is that the victim's body disappears. The victim is removed from the scene, as if in a removal of a stain (1972:413). Its violent death constitutes a pious act. Death constitutes an expulsion outside the borders, an expulsion

¹⁷⁶Girard (1972:66) says: 'La violence, une fois de plus, se déchaîne contre les êtres que le sacrifice aurait dû préserver'.

¹⁷⁷'Si la violence d'abord cachée de la crise sacrificielle détruit les différences, cette destruction en retour fait progresser la violence. On ne peut pas toucher au sacrifice, en somme, sans menacer les principes fondamentaux dont dépendent l'équilibre et l'harmonie de la communauté' (Girard 1972:77).

of the remains of sacrileges. The expulsion is real and not merely symbolic.

Shimei is permanently removed, excluded to the extreme, annihilated. And the question is whether his violent expulsion serves retributive justice or whether his removal serves purificatory purposes. The story, so it appears, provides a juridical reason for Shimei's death: his original curse is visited upon him when he fails to comply with the conditions of his house arrest. His death is attributed to his own devices. His death is simply retribution for what he did wrong. His death is divine justice. But his removal relates also to the disappearance of the Saulide claims to the throne, in which case his death might be considered purificatory.

Kirsch (2000:126) argues that in the portrayal of his story, David is never represented as blatantly yearning for Saul's kingship. Nor is he depicted as actively conspiring against him. But whenever David acts, Saul's shadow appears somewhere, with the Davidic dynasty benefiting directly or indirectly.

He killed the Amalekite (2 Sam 1:9 ff) who claimed to have killed Saul himself in the battle with the Philistines (whom David once begged to fight with against Saul). However, the Amalekite brought Saul's battle outfit with him, and David would soon wear it. Nevertheless, the story presents to the reader a David distancing himself from a political murder that worked to his advantage, with the people seeing a face of unrelieved grief and despair (2 Sam 1:17 ff).

Saul's death did not mean David became automatically king. He was only crowned king over Hebron in a tribe of Israel, making him more a tribal chieftain than royalty. Ishbaal, the eldest son of Saul became king (2 Sm 2:8), but the power behind the throne appeared to be Abner, Saul's army chief. When a rift¹⁷⁸ appeared between him and Ishbaal, he turned to David, bringing the rest of Israel with him (2 Sm 3). Not everyone trusted Abner. Joab, David's army chief, still had a grudge against Abner who killed his brother Asael in battle (2 Sm 2:18 ff). With Abner gone, Ishbaal had no real power. He became the victim of two other captains in his army who followed Abner's route in coveting David's favour by bringing his head

178 Abner overplayed his hand by taking a concubine of Saul, Rispa, as his wife. It was an act of treason as it amounts to usurpation of the throne.

to David. Despite David being not pleased (he ordered them to be executed), it meant that the way was open for David to become king of the entire tribal structure. So Abner's death enabled him to complete what Saul failed to achieve, namely extending the borders of the kingdom in subjugating the Philistines, Moabites, and the Aramaeans.

But David was not finished with Saul's legacy. Shortly afterwards he will take in his house Saul's grandson, Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, yet he will sacrifice seven other sons and grandsons of Saul.¹⁷⁹

After bringing the ark back to Jerusalem David is apparently looking for more survivors within Saul's dynasty. Mephibosheth fell upon his knees before David. Did he feel anxiety? The reader does not know, but David says he should not fear, acknowledging most likely the expression of anxiety on Mephibosheth's face before David. Who would not be filled with fear when one takes the Gibeon incident into consideration? The reader has the impression that David acted out of his love for Jonathan who made David promise that he would remain loyal to his family. But Mephibosheth was lame and the latter were the object of David's hatred when he took possession of Jerusalem (2 Sm 5:8).

At some stage under David's kingship there was a famine that lasted for several years. David sought a divine oracle to explain the presence of the famine (2 Sm 21). The story then reports that God revealed that there is indeed bloodguilt on Saul and his family for killing the Gibeonites who lived under Israel's protection ever since the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 9). The Gibeonites requested blood-vengeance: seven men of Saul's sons to be hanged. David found two sons and five grandsons, whom he promptly executed publicly. One cannot deny that each of the victims here, son or grandson of Saul, posed a threat to David's assumption of the throne. They were potential rivals. The story, however, clothed their slaying as human sacrifice, or the offering of royal blood, to appease an angry god who is punishing his people with famine.

¹⁷⁹The latter episode is thought to have happened before David took in Mephibosheth, but it appears much later in the royal account. In fact, the Mephibosheth episode does not make any sense if the sacrifice of the rest of Saul's sons and grandsons happened later.

Human sacrifice violates the official theology of the Bible (Kirsch 2000:175). In the royal history, David keeps his distance: it was the Gibeonites who spilled the blood, not David. Whenever David sinned, it would be other people who suffered: the child out of wedlock will die and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will suffer the consequences of God's wrath at the census.

As David's reign became embroiled in the succession soap opera, Absalom's usurpation of the throne with the murder of Amnon caused David to flee. But in this chaos, it appears as if Mephibosheth also had plans to get his father's throne back. However, David's survival skills neutralised him by drawing his servant and only ally, Siba, into his (David's) sphere.

Kirsch (2000:235-6) evaluates David's predicament as follows:

Here we are reminded that God's favor and public acclaim are two very different things: Saul may have forfeited the affection and confidence of Yahweh, but he never faced a general rebellion against his kingship. Here and now, all the old grudges were boiling up against David, and the notion that he was God's anointed king seemed to matter not at all to the general populace. The fact that the people of Israel rallied so readily to Absalom confirms that David may have been the beloved of God, but he was despised of men.

The extent of the hatred towards him can be seen in Shimei's bitter cursing¹⁸⁰ and stoning of David (2 Sm 16:5 ff). Shimei was a blood relative of Saul and he held David accountable for all the slayings of the sons and grandsons of Saul. To him David cannot distance himself from these killings as it benefited him directly.

In the Books of Samuel, nothing happens to Shimei. Abishai wanted to kill him on two occasions, the first when David fled Jerusalem as a fugitive and was confronted by Shimei who cursed him (2 Sam 16:9) and the second when David returned with the kingship firmly established yet again, when Shimei met him begging for forgiveness (2 Sam 19:21).

David, in his status as a refugee, refused to kill Shimei and spared

¹⁸⁰Fokkelman (1981:198) declares the main emotion permeating Shimei's speech as poisonous and savage rage. Shimei lived through Saul's kingship and the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, as well as the murders of Abner and Ishbosheth. He held David responsible for these deaths, and his current fate is simply retribution for these crimes.

his life (for the moment), interpreting Shimei's curse as a curse of Yahweh¹⁸¹. After Absalom's death, whereby the security of David's tenure on the throne has been firmly established¹⁸², David pardoned three members of the Saulide dynasty in a general amnesty. Shimei received an oath from David that he will not die (2 Sm 19:23) whereas Siba and Mephibosheth both received reprieves.

In receiving reprieve, Shimei masked his Saulide relations in marking his tribal affiliation as that of Benjamin. Fokkelman (1981:299) interprets the sudden tribal link in terms of a shift in Shimei's interests. With David again secure on the throne, he cannot raise any Saulide pretensions to the throne. Instead he becomes part of the collective and not the individual crusader imprisoned in his own world.¹⁸³

It is only at David's deathbed and after his death that his dynasty benefited when he advised Solomon to deal with Shimei in 'wisdom': '[Y]ou are a wise man; you will know what you ought to do to him, and you must bring his grey head down with blood to Sheol' (1 Ki 2:9). David quotes himself by saying that he swore to him by the LORD not to kill Shimei (2 Sam 19:23-24), but then implores Solomon not to reckon Shimei innocent (1 Ki 2:8). The implication

181 David does not seem to address Shimei. Fokkelman (1981:200) argues that David refused to relate to him, rather talking over him. In fact, it is as if Shimei did not make any contact with anyone around him, thinks Fokkelman (1981:201): '[H]e has no intention of a real encounter, but he is occupied wholly in an ego trip, acting out his own frustrations which are not pertinent to David's case or past.' The absolute use of the word for curse (*qll*) makes Fokkelman (1981:201) think that Shimei is cursing in every direction, yet he remains captive in his own frustrated world, unable to make contact with any one any more.

182 As David's fortune turns for the better, his relationship with Shimei also changes: he can now afford to settle his score with him. Shimei knows this and he tires to pre-empt David in meeting him at the Jordan.

183 Fokkelman (1981:330) is sceptical about Shimei. Shimei's grim cursing is thought to be ineffaceable, so that David cannot forgive Shimei, despite engaging directly with him when the latter met him at the Jordan, albeit it much shorter than the first time. In the first confrontation David's speech is 6 lines and in the second meeting, he speaks only two words in Hebrew: "You will not be killed". Moreover, when compared to Mephibosheth's change of heart, Shimei's adaptation is thought to be external and compared poorly with Mephibosheth's inner self and true presence (Fokkelman 1981:304).

is clear: David made an oath to spare Shimei's life, but Solomon is not bound by that oath.¹⁸⁴

David appears to be deceptive. Czovek (2002a:196) argues that deception is the tool of the powerless. In his initial confrontation with Shimei David was on the run from Absalom, and hence powerless. On his return to reclaim the kingship, he was not yet restored to full power. Moreover, the fact that Absalom could have made inroads in the traditional support of David, suggests that everybody was not satisfied with David as king any more. There seems to be a lack of enthusiasm for his return into Jerusalem, which was far from triumphalistic (cf. Czovek 2002a:192).

In his old age, those around David deceived him.¹⁸⁵ His return is not a success, because he long since made a transition from a charismatic leader to that of an oriental king. He failed to re-establish himself as a charismatic leader. In fact, after his restoration, says Czovek (2002a:192), David simply resumes his position of the old king sitting in the palace without venturing any military operations of his own.

Abishai is rebuked for wanting to kill Shimei by David saying that today is not a day for killing: 'What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruah, that you should today become an adversary to me? Shall anyone be put to death in Israel this day?' Perhaps David is simply pragmatic and exhibits a bit of Realpolitik: one does not kill a chieftain when there are a thousand people of Benjamin present (2 Sam 19:17). Later it is Realpolitik that resembles very closely a clan-based vengeance whereby David can avenge himself against his foes, Joab and Shimei. However, earlier, Abigail succeeded in restraining David from vengeance (1 Sam 25:31-33). But his tolerance of Joab's crimes counts now against his clan interests when Joab killed Absalom. In order to keep Solomon's throne 'safe', Joab with all the make-up of a potential kingmaker needs to be removed. Realpolitik would also require from Solomon to execute Shimei, who as a Saulide will pose a continuous threat to Davidic rule.

Czovek (2002a:197) observes that David's charisma later in his

¹⁸⁴Wozniuk (1997) suggests that the oath can be circumvented to suggest that Solomon or someone else can perform the task in David's stead.

¹⁸⁵Czovek (2002a:196) remarks that a powerful leader who is deceived and not deceiving cannot be characterized by charismatic features of leadership.

kingship only functioned in crises. The Absalom revolt shook David up and for the first time after a long absence Yahweh is recognised in the situation when David refers to Shimei's curse as coming from Yahweh (2 Sam 16:10). And in his last words to Solomon, with the crisis of succession at hand (Czovek 2002b:248), David's deception (a typical feature of charismatic leadership) comes to the fore: he circumvents the oath not to kill Shimei by appealing to Solomon's wisdom.

Wozniuk (1997) assesses the situation as follows:

And yet, the vengeful violence that David required of Solomon would also inevitably have the practical effect of contributing to a fulfilment of Nathan's curse upon the house of David, staining as it would from the very start Solomon's reign with injustice, through pursuing clan-based blood vengeance without any sanction from Yahweh, and killing a man whose curses David had not only earlier recognized as just, but whom David had also taken a public oath against harming. So while all this could hardly be interpreted as a positive, pro-monarchic representation of a legacy of political wisdom, it could be understood as an anti-monarchic depiction of Yahweh's sovereignty being rejected in favor of purely realpolitik concerns about any threats to David's "eternal throne". Significantly, it is just after David's charge to Solomon to engage in this vengeance that the narrative unambiguously affirms that his "rule was firmly established" (2:12).

Solomon obeys David and thereby strengthens his kingship, affirming himself as the legitimate heir of the throne and silencing any opposition to his assumption to the throne. The narrative provides Solomon with ample reason to act as David requested without really attributing the killing of those David suggested to David himself. Solomon found personal reasons to act against Joab and Shimei whom David wanted removed and against Adonijah and Abiathar whom Solomon regarded as a threat. Joab and the latter two opposed him in his usurpation of the throne, whereas Shimei simply trespassed geographical boundaries and thereby the conditions of his house arrest. The problem is that their deaths do not conceal political expediency (Walsh 1995).

Adonijah's request for Abishag is regarded by Solomon as a direct threat to his assumption of the throne. Abiathar and Joab sup-

ported Adonijah against Solomon. It is understandable that they should be removed from the power scene. Joab and Adonijah are killed and Abiathar is banned to Anathoth.

Shimei is summoned to Jerusalem where he was placed in house arrest and forbidden to cross the Kidron Valley. His house arrest in Jerusalem separated him from his power base in Bahurim in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, who still harboured sentiments for the Saulide throne. Shimei is depicted as in agreement with his fate.

Three years later two slaves ran away to Gath and Shimei went and brought them back from Gath (the opposite direction of the Wadi Kidron). The narrative puts his subsequent death on himself: he did not keep to the house arrest conditions and was thus killed. At the end of 1 Kings 2:46, the author remarks: 'So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon'.

Bodner (2005:153) has found that the opening chapters of Kings (1 Ki 1 and 2) abound with oaths. Solomon assumes his royal duties with the 'creative use of oaths' and consolidates his power 'through an equally creative and dubious use of oaths'. Of concern is the oaths regarding Shimei. In 2 Kings 2:8, David claims to Solomon that he swore to Shimei by Yahweh that he will not put him to death by the sword. In verse 42, when Shimei is confronted with the break of the conditions for his house arrest, Solomon says: 'Did I not make you swear by the LORD, and solemnly adjure you, saying: 'Know for certain that on the day you go out and go to any place whatever, you shall die'? And you said to me, "The sentence is fair; I accept." Why then have you not kept your oath to the LORD and the commandment with which I charged you?'

In both instances, the dealings with Shimei appear to be selective. David does not refer to his initial remark that Shimei cursed him at the behest of Yahweh. Nor is Shimei's apology mentioned as well as the men with whom Shimei arrived to meet David on his return to Jerusalem. David depicts his 'forgiveness' as an act of leniency and Shimei's cursing a crime of considerable proportions. In his own construction of the event, David changes his initial general promise of clemency to a specific limited scope. He substituted 'I will not put you to death by the sword' for 'you will not die'.

Bodner (2005:165) says this scene adds
to the rather malodorous fog that has clouded the use of oaths to this point in 1 Kings. [...] Solomon mounts the throne of Israel due to David's recollection of an earlier oath; now he is instructed to circumvent a bothersome oath "through wisdom".

It is as if David's licentiousness with oaths sets for Solomon an example.¹⁸⁶ In Solomon's confrontation with Shimei (1 Ki 2:36-37) Bodner (2005:170) does not see any oath language. In fact, one gets the feeling of deception all the way. Shimei's leaving of Jerusalem does not sound hostile or conspiratorial against Solomon, but rather the result of economic risk (cf Brueggemann 2000:36). Moreover, the conditions of house arrest stated that Shimei is not to cross the Wadi Kidron, that is, go east. Shimei went to Gath, in a western direction. Yet Solomon felt justified to act. Moreover, in Solomon's retort, he substitutes a general prohibition against any travelling for the specific geographical prohibition of crossing the Kidron valley (cf. Bodner 2005:170).¹⁸⁷ Solomon refers twice to an oath that has not been recorded in 1 Kings 2:36-37.

The depiction of Shimei's demise has a foul fragrance (Bodner 2005:171). Solomon gets round the oath David is purported to have sworn to Shimei by using another oath. Not only undermine both depictions each characters' relationship with Yahweh and claim to divine election, but also their respective integrities to act as charismatic leaders. The ingenious use of oaths leaves the impression of something sinister when it concerns power. As Bodner (2005:174)

¹⁸⁶In Barnard's (2004:131) reshaping of the narratives, he has Nathan reminisce on David's conversation with Solomon: 'Again, is he speaking here as he would think that the Lord would have him speak? Or is it one final attempt on his part to remove the last remaining threat from the house of Saul so that his own dynasty will be unchallenged?' Later on he (2004:157) has David himself deliberating on his talk with Solomon: 'I have had to pass on to Solomon the responsibility for a few loose ends in the kingdom. There are some who have not demonstrated the support he will need as king, and I have had to leave these for him to deal with. I am too old to face these issues myself.'

¹⁸⁷Bodner (2005:171) observes that in the midst of Solomon's modification of the initial meeting with Shimei, Solomon plays with Shimei's name. The words he put in Shimei's mouth (I will obey – *shamati*) is a play on Shimei's name (*Shimei*).

argues, there is a negative subtext underneath Solomon's presentation that signals his fall.

The use of oaths in 1 Kings 1 and 2 renders the killing of Shimei a politically expedient act, turning the victim into a real victim and not a perpetrator on whom retribution has been visited. In fact, the perpetrators seem to be those in power: David and Solomon. In any case, the story is not very sympathetic towards Shimei and his death is attributed to (divine?) justice. In the process, he is 'othered' in such a way that the reader should feel he receives his just dessert. However, a reader struggling with the concept of perpetrator because of being in the same boat (and I can only speak for myself) finds this kind of justice difficult to digest. And given the lack of integrity of David as well as of Solomon, Shimei's death as a sacrifice in terms of a purificatory violence, does not sit well. In fact, it seems the difference between impure violence and purificatory violence has disappeared.

5. PERPETRATORS AND THE PROBLEM OF (DIVINE) JUSTICE

Affirmative action was instituted to redress past injustices caused by racial discrimination that deprived black South Africans for decades of opportunities to participate in the mainstream economy.¹⁸⁸ Very few would deny its validity, yet its effect amidst whiteness as an instrument to achieve social justice,¹⁸⁹ still needs to be explored. On a theological level, I am confronted with the following situation: on the occasion of a white man losing his job, or not being appointed to a particular position because of affirmative action,

¹⁸⁸That it is going to take decades is clear from the common knowledge that corporate South Africa is still white and masculine. However, in the low skilled sector, certain blue-collar jobs are notably void of whites. Cf M Nyathi 2007.

¹⁸⁹Pincus (2003:84) argues that within whiteness affirmative action is regarded as reverse discrimination, a 'code word' for those who feel threatened by increased competition. He thinks it is 'a socially constructed interpretation of reality that exaggerates and misinterprets that problems that whites genuinely have'. Rather than perceiving affirmative action as reverse discrimination that constructs a new white victim, he regards it as a question of reduced opportunities where a relatively privileged group loses some of their unearned privilege (2003:85).

can one surmise a situation of (divine / retributive) justice being done?

In other words, that person would be deemed to suffer the consequences of racial discrimination practiced by the white collective in the past. One can go even further and suggest the loss of the job opportunity constitutes punishment, but then the Christian doctrine of Jesus' death and the salvation of humankind are rendered problematical. This line of thought constructs the white male as a cultural perpetrator. But there is nothing salvific about being branded a perpetrator. We all know what happens to perpetrators. They are removed, either to prison or simply from life. This is what happens with Shimei and the citizens of Dogville (Lars von Trier 2003).¹⁹⁰

The film *Dogville* by Lars von Trier (2003) conspicuously and unapologetically confronts one with this kind of justice, or should one say, hell and damnation.¹⁹¹ The setting is a fictional mining town in the Rocky Mountains during the 1930s. The viewer is told that the town is on a dead end road at an abandoned silver mine. On the 4th of July, the day the USA celebrates their nationhood and independence, to the sound of gunfire, the main character whose name bears an obvious religious connotation, Grace, appears in town, disturbing its quiet equilibrium.

Grace encounters Tom Edison, who hides her in a nearby mine when approached by the mobsters looking for her. One of them hands Tom his card with his phone number in case Tom finds her. Tom, whose surname is Edison, and thus alluding to one of the icons in American culture, is the town's would-be writer and philosopher. He decides to use Grace to educate the townspeople on the subject of acceptance and openness. Though sceptical towards Grace, Tom succeeded in persuading the townspeople to give Grace a chance to prove her worth. In the two weeks she is allowed to

190I am indebted to Hugh Pyper of the University of Sheffield for the link between justice and *Dogville* in his paper 'Rough justice: Lars von Trier's "Dogville" and the theology of wrath' at a conference on Bible and Justice at Sheffield in 2008.

191Morton (2004), reading *Dogville* as a religious film instead of a political one, claims it to be unapologetically moralistic, displaying and justifying 'the most unpopular Christian doctrine' of all, namely Hell.

prove her worth, Grace offers to do chores for the citizens on Tom's suggestion. After some reluctance they accept her doing things they would like to do but do not think it necessary to do. Grace succeeds in earning the trust of the townspeople, who indulges in a bit of friendship and comradeship with the beautiful fugitive.

After a few months, though, the mood in the town darkens when the police put up a missing poster with Grace's name and picture on it. It was the first time in living memory that the police visited the town, and they would come thrice: first to put up the missing poster, secondly to put up a poster declaring Grace dangerous and a third time with the FBI. It suddenly became dangerous in the town and against the law to harbour Grace. Instead of sending her away, Grace is forced in a quid pro quo to do more chores. She is exploited with her day being scheduled, wages cut and tasks increased and made more strenuous. Eventually the town reveals its true nature as Grace is oppressed and abused, to the point of becoming the object of sexual assault by most men of the town.

Deciding she had enough and renouncing the privilege of being hidden, she attempts to leave the town with the help of the truck driver, Ben, who tricks her, rapes her and delivers her back to the town. The money Grace spent on her liberation was taken by Tom from his father. Grace is accused of theft and Tom does not come to her rescue. Her enslavement is intensified with her being collared and chained to a large iron wheel she had to carry around all day. A bell is attached to the collar so as to announce her presence. Tom is the only man in town not raping her.

In a meeting where Grace narrates what she has endured from the town, the embarrassed townspeople decide to get rid of her. At this point, Tom consoles Grace and wants sex with her. Angered by her refusal, Tom calls the gangsters. The town expected the execution of Grace, but learns instead that she is the boss mobster's daughter who ran away because she could no longer face her father's dirty work. In a complex discussion with her father on morality and power, Grace asks why she should not be merciful. Her father replies: 'You should be merciful when there is time to be merciful, but you must maintain your standards, you owe them that. The penalty you deserve for your transgression they deserve for their transgressi-

ons.' Grace protested that they are human beings, upon which her father claims: 'And does every human being need to be accountable for their own actions? Of course they do. You don't even get them that chance, and that is extremely arrogant.' The film ends with the townspeople being killed by the mobsters and with Grace killing Tom. The only survivor is Moses, the dog of Dogville, who never wronged her.

It is the scene with the father and Grace's decision to have the town eliminated that calls forth the issue of justice. The scene of Grace's transformation from being shackled to being unshackled alludes to the eschatological move from Christ as the sacrificed son to a revengeful Christ on Judgment Day (cf. Elbeshlawy 2008). In *Christianity Today* Overstreet (2004) reads Grace as a Christ figure who bewilders Tom because of her resilience to intense evil and generosity. But in the end, the film is read as Von Trier's wrestling with the difference between a God of fire and brimstone and a God of grace. He asks whether human beings who have been given so much can be forgiven for their gross abuses of each other.

Grace is a theological signifier of grace, the suffering servant and Christ (Morton 2004). The film portrays the consequences of rejecting the saving grace of Christ with the townspeople rejecting Grace. And the result is damnation. The coded theology in the discussion between Grace and her father shows that if the Father and Son is one, justice and mercy have to come from the same side, or else one has gangsterism with the Father alone or victimology with the Son alone (cf Morton 2004). In the end, Grace's transformation from an all-forgiving Christ to an avenging angel, the film shows that forgiveness without judgment is indulging and infantilizing (Morton 2004).¹⁹² In fact, the first 160 minutes of the film seems to reveal 'the deeply problematic of a doctrine of unlimited ever-patient grace, a Son with no Father, a salvation with no damnation' (cf Morton 2004).

An 'all-luvving' Jesus causes a problem in Dogville. Without Grace's revenge in the end, her suffering makes her only an object

¹⁹²Morton's review of the film stands in the light of Matthew 11:20-24 which he quotes at the very start of the discussion. In these verses, Jesus expresses God's wrath and judgment over the cities in which he performed miracles and that rejected him.

of pity. Representing the very meaning of grace, Grace surrenders to the unreasonable demands of the town. Says Fibiger (2003): 'She constitutes the notion of absolute, boundless love, ... [with] obvious allusions to Jesus, who also – as a result of his unconditional, boundless devotion – ends up being sacrificed on a cross.' For the first 160 minutes of the film, Grace is seen as turning the other cheek, but when her gangster father appears on the scene, Grace chooses the Old Testament maxim of an eye for an eye. And with the dog called Moses the only survivor, it is clear that it is the Law of Moses that prevails in *Dogville* (Fibiger 2003).

Using Girard's ideas on violence and scapegoats, Brighenti (2006:105-108) reads into the film retributive punishment as well as sacrificial purification. The violent elimination of the town at the end of the film constitutes retribution: the townspeople pay for what they did to Grace.¹⁹³ Grace, representing God's grace, encounters exploitation, domination and violence. She responds by firstly accommodating her to the needs of the town, then by trying to escape the town and finally by exercising retributive violence that destroys the town and its inhabitants, alluding to the Mosaic law of retributive justice, an eye for an eye (cf. Sinnerbrink 2007). In this retribution her father's gangsters help her, causing the source of judgment to turn into a source of crime.

Sinnerbrink (2007) calls this violent retribution 'an aesthetic expression of the perverted morality of "infinite justice" that is characteristic of contemporary neoliberalism.'¹⁹⁴ However, her violence is not pure or divine violence, but retributive 'once Grace abandons her compact with the community, and takes up her "proper" place in the symbolic and social order – an order predicated on the kind of symbolic violence and naked exercise of power that her grace and forgiveness had attempted, in vain, to overcome.' (Sinnerbrink 2007).

Whereas in the retributive justice model a personal identification

¹⁹³Schwartz (2004) regards *Dogville* as a bitter allegory of failed Christian hospitality and Old Testament revenge clothed in 'what goes for American justice'.

¹⁹⁴He says that the questions *Dogville* leaves us with are disturbing and unsettling: 'We are left hovering between the deadening nihilism of forced liberal democratic consensus, with its moral hypocrisy and social exploitation, and a violent destruction or *passage à l'acte* that would annihilate the corrupted democratic community while also cancelling itself.'

is required, this is not the case with the purification model. A categorical identification suffices. The victim does not properly belong to the group, but is 'categorically identified' as a plausible subject (2006:108). The person does not really matter and the violence is not divided or attributed singulatum (Brighenti 2006:105). All that matters is that the victim belongs to a class of sacrificeable beings. The question of who is bearing the brunt of the violence is not a matter of personal identification, but a matter of strategy. The issue of punishment is irrelevant. The aim of the sacrifice is to contain the violence and tensions within a group. If the collective violence is out of control, the group will destroy itself through a chain of infinite vengeance. The sacrifice fails when its cathartic or purifying effect becomes contagious, spreading like a virus (2006:108).

Brighenti (2006:108) argues that the treatment of Grace is similar to that of the sacrificeable prisoners of war in primitive societies: from inclusion into the community to preparation through provocation, incitement to escape and eventual chaining and locking. From Grace's side, there is an element of retributive justice in the elimination of the town, but in the end there is a sacrificial element too when she proclaims it is for the sake of other towns too. Says Brighenti (2006:108):

But, while at the biblical level the slaughter is aimed at establishing an exemplarity of the punishment, at the mythic level the same slaughter is aimed at ritual purification through the concentration of violence against a single subject. The only difference is that here the sacrificeable being is not individual but collective.

6. CONCLUSION

Reading the story of David and Shimei with a view on the issue of being a perpetrator is unsettling. Whether the story is interpreted in terms of the sacrifice of a scapegoat (purificatory violence) or in terms of divine justice, the hard part is that it would be a human being who would undergo that purification or justice. Whether it is purificatory or divine justice, is merely a question for those who observe. For the one undergoing it, it is much more existential. The story is othering Shimei to the point of having Solomon eliminate

him. The scary part is that any process that labels an individual or a group as perpetrators, initiate the possibility of violence against them. Shimei's Saulide kinship makes him a plausible subject: posing a threat to the throne, he belongs to a class of sacrificeable beings. However, with the story identifying him personally and not categorically the impression of retributive justice served on Shimei hovers over the story. Lars von Trier's *Dogville* pushes justice to the extreme. For the inhabitants of *Dogville* there is apparently no redemption. Did Shimei receive his redemption with David not killing him and then squandering it under Solomon's regime? Not likely, because the story seems to be bent on removing Shimei in 1 Kings 1-2.

The death of the perpetrator in the story of David and Shimei, amplified by the example of the meaning of divine wrath and judgment in *Dogville*, make it rather difficult to give effect to one's own acknowledgement of perpetration without a proper theological framework that would have an element of redemption not only in the eyes of God, but also in the eyes of the community in which the perpetration was done. Identification with Shimei is then cathartic in that one understands the dark side of justice and experience shock or relief to the position of the one undergoing justice.

In terms of the redress of the apartheid past, a category of sacrificeable beings or entities has been created, i.e. whiteness, maleness and Western culture. Justice requires that the perpetrator do something or undergo something as an indication of not getting off scot-free. Affirmative action and land redistribution create necessary scapegoats as markers of justice. However, those who undergo justice are in need of a theology for the retribution visited upon them. And I am not sure how to proceed in this regard except to state the inevitability of the process. If those who undergo this justice do not accept its terms, the table is laid for revenge, and then their sacrifice is not purificatory.

Who is the victim and who is the perpetrator? Here's my dilemma and the link to whiteness, privilege and racism. Whiteness is suggestive of a perpetrator culture. After apartheid, whiteness continued unabatedly to exert its influence without anyone within whiteness itself inquiring about its structure of power and privileges it

created and apparently is still creating. The perpetrator culture is neither eradicated nor reformed. On the one hand, those measures instituted after apartheid as a way of redress, are interpreted in terms of a new victim-perpetrator scheme. On the other hand, despite whiteness having lost political power, it is still projected as a major force that necessitates counter measures.¹⁹⁵ In terms of one set of perspectives, redress may serve justice. With another set of perspectives, it may not be experienced as such. And perhaps that is what the story of David and Shimei illustrates: the issue of justice is never a cut and dry case.

In terms of the story, Shimei is the perpetrator apparently forgiven by David, yet eliminated by Solomon. Shimei as perpetrator lived a restricted life, never really at ease. In the end it turned out David never forgave him and he is removed. David's offspring need not be confronted by anyone in Saul's house. The story attributes credibility to David in suggesting Shimei brought his death all over himself since he failed to comply with the conditions set out by Solomon. And if he did not insult David in the first instance, he would not have been in this predicament. David is the innocent victim and Shimei the defiled taker. Yet one cannot escape the feeling that Shimei's cursing of David that created his own death sentence, is directly linked to David's benefiting of the deaths of so many of possible successors to the Saulide crown.

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¹⁹⁵Recently, the Forum of Black Journalists refused a few white journalists entrance to a meeting where the newly elected president of the ANC would speak. One journalist lodged a complaint at the South African Human Rights Commission and the latter ruled that the exclusion of particular people on the basis of race is unconstitutional. The FBJ inverted the matter in arguing that the problem is not that of being black, but, yet again, whiteness: white journalists lamenting their exclusion because they are white. In other words, whiteness succeeded to take centre stage again, claiming its dominance in society (cf. Harvey 2008).

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