

# LECTURE SERIES PUBLIC THEOLOGY

An International and Intercontextual Assessment



Berlin Institute  
for Public Theology



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

A Communion of Churches

**The Bible and Public Theology  
On Wounds, Scars and Healing in  
the Book of Jeremiah and Beyond**

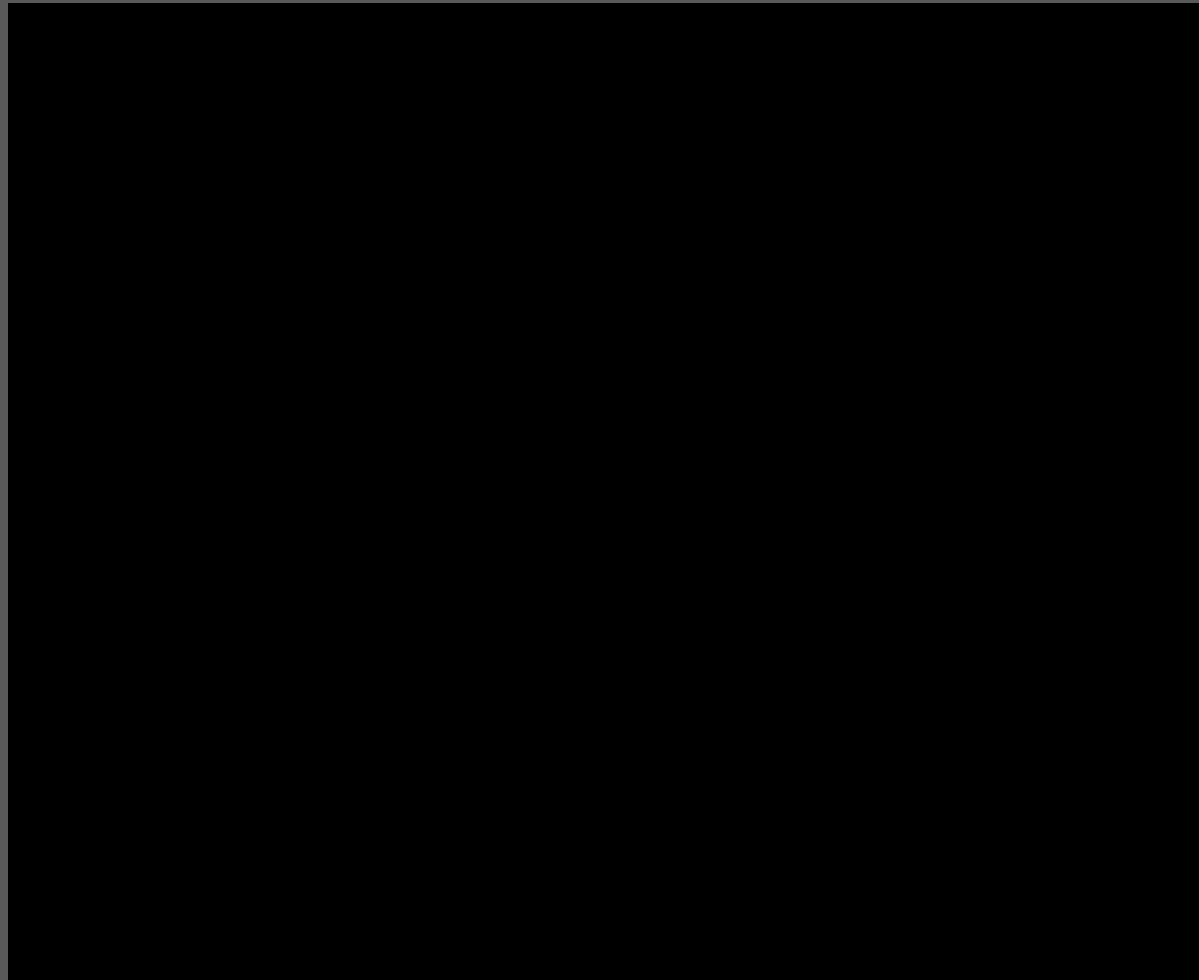
Prof Juliana Claassens  
Faculty of Theology  
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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Shelly Rambo defines a post-traumatic public theology as  
“hold[ing] up hope in the public square amidst the ‘injustice and  
the precariousness of life,”  
(Rambo, “Introduction” in *Post Traumatic Public Theology*, 17.

## 2. OUTLINING THE TASK AND FUNCTION OF A FEMINIST PUBLIC THEOLOGIAN

# 1) Light Shining in Darkness



“Proto-womanist Fannie Lou Hamer' theme song, ‘This Little Light of Mine’ was sung as a counter narrative confronting the racist ideology that there was nothing good in black people, nothing but darkness,” Mitzi Smith, “This Little Light of Mine,” 113.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/fannie-lou-hamer>



# Womanist Biblical Interpretation

Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

- Womanist is “a black feminist or feminist of color”
- Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender”



“Womanist scholarship includes the social, cultural, and religious experiences of African American women within scholarly discourse and draw on the artistic, literary, and intellectual production of these women as resources.”  
(Nyasha Junior, “Womanist Biblical Interpretation, p39)

In her article, “This Little Light of Mine,” Mitzi Smith, describes the role of the Womanist Biblical Scholar as

- Prophetess
- Iconoclast
- Activist



Watch at <https://youtu.be/Vq6FDnrIzv4>



## Womanist Biblical Scholars...

- “cannot...analyze texts, contexts, and readers through the framework of gender and ignore issues of race and overlook concerns of class.” (Smith, “This Little Light of Mine,” 111)
- “[r]ead against the grain and between the lines of the biblical text.” (Smith, “This Little Light of Mine,” p113)

## Womanist Biblical Scholars

“[p]rophetically lower their pens to paper and fingers to keyboards, raise their voices, and lift their feet to write and right, to teach and to preach, and to sing ‘truth to power’ with a goal toward transformation and the dismantling of oppressions and oppressive structures, towards revolutionary change”

Mitzi Smith

## Womanist Biblical Scholars

“will not only give voice to the marginalized and oppressed through [their] prophetic hermeneutical endeavours, but [they] will also, when possible, disrupt, interrupt, or create space for marginalized and oppressed women, non-scholars, ‘black women more commonly,’ to speak for themselves and others by freeing up and seizing space for their concerns in the classroom, in social media, and in our scholarship,”

Smith, “This Little Light of Mine,” pp123-124

# Prof Musa Dube, Honorary Doctorate acceptance speech, March 20, 2018

Watch at <https://youtu.be/d7mfzflX7ng>



I wish to congratulate all of you the 2017 class of graduates—for the degrees that you have earned from various disciplines and specialties. The world awaits and needs you. Go out there and light the world, where forces of death are persistently rising to rob individuals and communities of their God-given life. The graves of poverty, gender inequality, racial discrimination, ethnic strife, global warming, violence, global class, HIV & AIDS, national corruption, neo-liberalism, human trafficking, stigma and discrimination etc, await your work of resurrection

## 2) Uncovering Wounds



# Insidious Trauma

- Maria Root/ Laura Brown
- Insidious trauma can be described as the ongoing, traumatizing experiences that especially effect women and minorities in terms of systemic racism, sexism, homophobia, as well as poverty.
  - Micro aggressions
  - Abuse
  - Dehumanization
  - Discrimination

## b) Uncovering Wounds

- The Crooked Room and Systemic Racism (Melissa Harris-Penny)









“Let’s theologise shit. This guy looks into shit and he sees Jesus. Could it be that Jesus exists in shit? If Jesus is the least of these and the least of these are living in shit in the townships, then Jesus in South Africa is in deep shit” (Nkosi Gola)



“We can’t breathe” is a phrase often cited by students. Black students have to struggle or be extremely lucky to get into university and face family financial pressures or be lumped with future debt. By their nature, universities reproduce past knowledge systems before they create new thoughts, meaning Black students are not only usually taught by Whites but taught White. To breathe, or to survive, under financial constraints and repeated cultural domination seems impossible, or at least only tolerable to pay back, pay forward, family investment.” (Greg Nicolson. “Student Protests: Only the Start of Greater Pain,” *Daily Maverick*, September 28, 2016).

### 3) Binding up wounds

“Wound work:”

Going beyond merely surfacing the wounds, but also attending to the wounds by means of touching, cleaning, and applying balm with the distinct purpose of healing (Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds*, 92.

### 3. WOUND WORK IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH



### 3. WOUND WORK IN THE BOOK OF JEREMIAH

Jeremiah does the life-saving work of a preacher-poet-theologian. He looks at his people's situation, he lives among them and sees their world; he names it, and re-frames it by imaginatively re-inventing traditions they share. This interpretive work rebuilds them into a people (O'Connor, "Reclaiming Jeremiah's Violence," 41).



## a) Uncovering Wounds in Jeremiah

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<sup>7</sup>As a well keeps its water fresh,  
so she keeps fresh her wickedness;  
violence and destruction are heard within her;  
sickness and wounds are ever before me (Jer 6:7).

- And if you say in your heart,  
'Why have these things come upon me?'  
it is for the greatness of your iniquity  
that your skirts are lifted up,  
and you are violated. (Jer 13:22 )



The rape of Zion revisits memories of frightful violence and painful history through a narrowed window, as a drama of violence against one vulnerable figure who stands in for the whole people. Rape is what happened to them; it is their lives rendered symbolically, their fragmented memories drawn into a narrative, into new speech for a speech-destroying disaster.

(O'Connor, "Reclaiming Jeremiah's Violence," 46).



## **b) Binding up Wounds in Jeremiah**

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- “‘lament’ [can be defined as] socio-political protest that names woundedness and loss, making visible the vulnerability of cultural systems of meaning-making and declining to be complicit in the erasure of pain and brokenness from communal memory.”

• Carolyn Sharp

## b) Binding up Wounds in Jeremiah

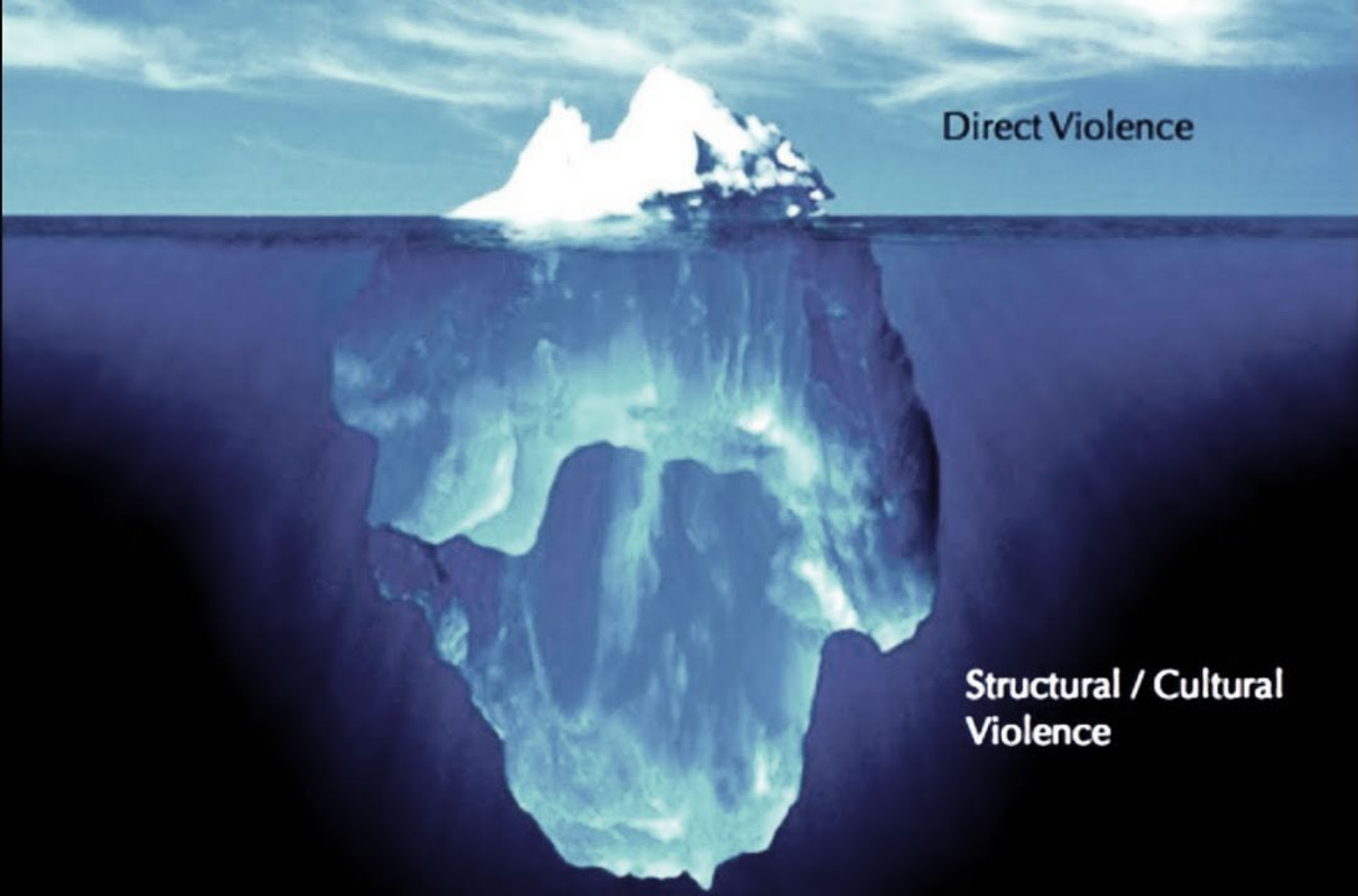
<sup>21</sup> For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt,  
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

<sup>22</sup> Is there no balm in Gilead?

Is there no physician there?

Why then has the health of my poor people  
not been restored? (Jer 8:21-22)

- <sup>26</sup> O my poor people, put on sackcloth,  
and roll in ashes;  
make mourning as for an only child,  
most bitter lamentation:  
for suddenly the destroyer  
will come upon us (Jer 6:26 ).



Direct Violence

Structural / Cultural  
Violence

# Unequal Scenes STELLENBOSCH / KAYAMANDI

