

# South African Female Presidential Leadership and the inevitability of a donga as final destination? Reading the Deuteronomistic Athaliah the *bosadi* way



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In the 104 years of the existence of the African National Congress (ANC), many a black person in South Africa has been exclusively led by men. Also, 24 years into a democracy, patriarchy continues to raise its ugly head in our parliament, among other institutions. Against the call for a female presidential leadership Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the National Union of Mineworkers, together with the ANC leadership in the Gauteng province, are lobbying for a male presidential candidate, namely, Cyril Ramaphosa. In order to engage the issue of patriarchy in the South African politics, the Sepedi or Northern Sotho proverb *Tša etwa ke ye tshadi pele, di wela ka leope* [once they are led by a female one, that is, a cow, they will fall into a donga] will be employed as a hermeneutical tool to re-read the Deuteronomistic Athaliah the *bosadi* way. The interest of the preceding way lies in seeking justice for the transformation of many an African woman's life in present day South Africa. In the end, this article will investigate whether the tenor of the Northern Sotho or Sepedi proverb that once they (cattle [read: South Africans]) are led by a female, they are sure to fall into a donga.

**Intradisciplinary and interdisciplinary implications:** Drawing from the insight in the fields of the Old Testament, gender and social sciences studies as well as Indigenous Knowledge Systems (with particular focus on an African proverb), this article addresses the topic of the South African Female Presidential Leadership and the Deuteronomistic Athaliah the *bosadi* way.

## Introduction

The context from which we read the text of 2 Kings 11–12 about the Deuteronomistic Athaliah is an African context in South Africa. The preceding context demands that we re-read the character of Athaliah, the foreign queen mother in 2 Kings 11–12 informed by the experiences of African women in South Africa. Although South Africa is a democratic state, one with the most exciting constitution in the world, the women, whose experiences will inform our reading of the biblical text in question, are basically still steeped within the values and norms of the patriarchal African culture as well as the patriarchal cultures imported from the colonialists and the apartheid regime. Although the South African parliament may give us an impression that African–South African women are fairly represented, and thus the assumption that female presidential leadership cannot be an issue in this country, one thing for certain is that even today, 22 years into a democracy, patriarchy continues to raise its ugly head in our churches, institutions and even in our parliament, among others. The issue of the present glaring division between the members of the ruling party, that is, the African National Congress (ANC), about whether the present president, that is, President Jacob Zuma, should be succeeded by a female president is a case in point. In the 104 years of its existence, the ANC has been exclusively led by men. Also, the Republic of South Africa has never had a female president. The domination of men in the South African politics is an indisputable fact. Commendable are the efforts made by the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) on protesting for a female presidential leadership. However, against the call for a female presidential leadership, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), together with the ANC leadership in the Gauteng province, has expressed their support for a male presidential candidate, namely, Cyril Ramaphosa.

In our patriarchal African cultures, women cannot lead. The Sepedi or Northern Sotho proverb *Tša etwa ke ye tshadi pele, di wela ka leope*, literally translated as 'once they are led by a female one, that is, a cow, they will fall into a donga', is a case in point. A donga refers to a wide pit or a short dried up river which does not have the potential of producing life. The tenor of the proverb is that if men were to have women as leaders, they would land into trouble because they are being

controlled by ignorant and powerless people (Rakoma 1970:222). In a nutshell, within our African cultures, women are perceived as not having the capacity to lead men (and other women). In light of the preceding observations, we deemed it fit to employ the *bosadi* concept (cf. Masenya ngwan' Mphahlele 2004, 2005) with its preoccupation of seeking justice for the transformation of many an African woman's life in present day South Africa as a lens through which to re-read the Deuteronomistic Athaliah. The major hermeneutical focus of the *bosadi* biblical hermeneutics is the unique experiences of an African-South African woman, with a commitment to her emancipation. As a woman facing such multiple life-denying forces such as sexism in the broader South African society which, as already noted, was exacerbated by the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, sexism in the African culture, post-apartheid racism or ethnocentrism, classism, HIV and/or AIDS, xenophobia among others, but also committed to the position of the Bible as a norm in her life, our re-reading the character Deuteronomistic Athaliah through a *bosadi* approach, may prove helpful. Will our findings confirm the tenor of the Northern Sotho or Sepedi proverb that once they (cattle) are led by a female one, they are sure to fall into a donga?

This article is also meant to celebrate the activism and legacy of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Circle). What better way is there to sing the praises of the Circle theologians other than advancing the struggle of women in present day patriarchal South Africa? Based on the continuing patriarchal tendency displayed by both NUM and the ANC in the Gauteng province, among others, it seems that the imperialism of masculinity in Africa which scholars such as Musa Dube, Mercy Oduyoye and Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) strongly refuted in the Circle theologies remains a perturbing issue on the South African political landscape. The cardinal question to pose thus becomes: Will our findings confirm the tenor of the Northern Sotho or Sepedi proverb that once they (cattle) are led by a female one, they are sure to fall into a donga? The discussion of this article will follow the outline below:

- South African female presidential leadership.
- Woman and power dynamics in 2 Kings 11–12.
- From text to context and from context to text.

## South African female presidential leadership

This study critically investigates a variety of factors which influence the debate on the upcoming elections of the South African presidential leadership. Such factors are, but not limited to: (1) a call for a woman president, (2) competency and ethical concerns and (3) politics of patronage.

### A call for a woman presidential leadership – redress of patriarchy

In 2013, Angie Motshekga's statement that 'South Africa is not ready to have a female president' suggested that not only is the South African society still trapped in a patriarchal

paradigm but also exhibited a failure to address patriarchy (cf. Hunter 2013:1; Seale 2013:1). As Mtshiselwa (2015a:7) argued, patriarchy is 'illustrated by both the scarcity of female presidents in (South) Africa and the perception that women are incapable to lead a state'. However, the ANCWL's protest for the election of a female president in South Africa produces hope to the struggle against patriarchy. The memorandum presented by ANCWL to the government of South Africa on 30th of October 2015 at the Union Buildings revealed a demand on the part of the ANCWL for the South African female presidential leadership. On the issue of the female presidential discourse, Letsoalo (2015a) reports:

Until recently, Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa was widely expected to take over from Zuma as ANC president in line with the party's long-held tradition. But the ANCWL, the ANC Youth League and the ANC Veterans League are pushing for a woman candidate to be elected as ANC president. The leagues are supported by the so-called premier league, which consist of premiers from Mpumalanga, Free State and North West. (p. 10)

Although the politicians from the ANC must be lauded for such an important historical position that stands to redress patriarchy, the reservations that other ANC members have on the election of a woman candidate as ANC president raises some concern. For an attempt that promises liberating possibilities to many a woman who has been deprived of leading the political party for more than 100 years of its existence, one would have expected an uncontested support for a South African female presidential leadership. However, as mentioned previously, other alliances, such as the NUM, together with the leadership of the ANC Gauteng province, prefer to have Cyril Ramaphosa as president, against a female counter part, namely, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, a Zulu woman from KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province (Jika *et al.* 2015:1; Letsoalo 2015b:1). The general secretary of the ANC, Gwede Mantashe, also appears to be opposed to the idea of female presidential leadership. The headlines: 'ANCWL defies Mantashe and pushes for a woman president' proves the view that Mantashe is not supportive of the call for a woman candidate to be elected as ANC president (Letsoalo 2015a:1). Interestingly, 'while the league [ANCWL] is openly campaigning for Dlamini-Zuma to be the 104-year-old party's first woman president, Mantashe is being touted as a future deputy to Ramaphosa by those opposed to a Dlamini-Zuma presidency' (Jika *et al.* 2015:1). Worthy of note in the discourse about the female presidential leadership is Mantashe's reported perception of the struggle of the ANCWL. He views the attempts of the ANCWL as being 'some deviant behaviour'. In response to Gwede, the ANCWL's president, Jika *et al.* (2015) say that Bathabile Dlamini allegedly responded:

It can never be deviant behaviour ... I think that's very strong language that [*male leaders*] would not use [*to define*] their conferences. They fight a lot ... they also have groupings that support them, but they don't call that 'deviant behaviour'. They are brave enough to talk like that because it's women ... women are soft targets. (p. 1)

We are therefore arguing that there is no doubt that the rejection of the call for the South African female leadership is evident within the ANC.<sup>1</sup> Such rejection comes as no surprise in the South African patriarchal context. In a setting in which leadership among the VhaTsonga has been predominantly in the hands of men:

before she could assume power, *Hosi N'wamitwa II*, had to seek the intervention of a court of law to claim what she knew was her legitimate position as a child of her father, a *Hosi*, irrespective of her gender. (Masenya [ngwan'a Mphahlele] 2014:491)

*Hosi N'wamitwa II* is a VhaTsonga woman, who went through:

lengthy court challenges preferred against her by a member of the royal family, whose claim was mainly that she should not be allowed to reign because she is a woman. (Valoyi Traditional Authority 2015:1)

The story of *Hosi N'wamitwa II* reminded Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) (2014:491) of the preceding Northern Sotho or Pedi proverb, *tša etwa ke ye tshadi pele, di wela ka leope*. That in the Sepedi language, a donga refers to a wide pit or a short dried up river, which does not have the potential of producing life, and it suggests that in the patriarchal Sepedi culture (cf. also the Tsonga one), the leadership of a female person would inevitably lead to a disastrous situation. Thus, when interpreting the story of *Hosi N'wamitwa II*, Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) (2014:491) decisively argues that the rejection of the leadership of *Hosi N'wamitwa II* was based on her female gender. In this case, the patriarchal culture among the VhaTsonga lends the rejection of the female leadership. The latter point is further nuanced by the observation made by the Valoyi Traditional Authority (2015):

Customarily it was taboo for a female to rule a clan. Court cases ensued and culminated at the constitutional court in 2008 where the principles of human rights enshrined in the Constitution were observed and the rule of democracy was fulfilled. She became the first woman of the Vatsonga nation to become a ruler. A historic event indeed. (p. 1; cf. Masenya [ngwan'a Mphahlele] 2014:491)

Additionally, as Mtshiselwa (2015a:2) excellently perceived, in Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele)'s critique of the traditional Sepedi idea of *kgoro* – a meeting place of men, lineal group and clan – the patriarchal culture among the Bapedi still does not allow women to participate actively in matters pertaining to the *kgoro*. Thus, it becomes evident that from a cultural point of view, the patriarchal society that South Africa is continues to be suspicious about female leadership. Thus, patriarchy renders women as a proverbial cow which is not only unable to lead the masses, but one which could also lead them to destruction. The preceding point holds true in the debate about the election of a woman candidate as ANC president. However, there are other factors that require

careful considerations in the debate about the upcoming elections of the presidential leadership in South Africa. To these factors, we now turn.

## Competency and ethical concerns

Based on the apparent failure to provide effective leadership in areas we consider in this essay, there are claims that Dlamini-Zuma might not be a suitable candidate for presidential leadership in South Africa (Adebajo 2014:1; Butler 2015:1; Davis 2015:1). As Adebajo (2014) argued:

Dlamini-Zuma has not been able to enact many of the admittedly difficult institutional reforms she had promised. She had been accused of seeking to micromanage the organisation, slowing decision-making and alienating some of her fellow commissioners. The failure to reform the AU's finances has been particularly singled out. Two years after she pledged to reform the AU, more than 95% of its peace and security budget and half of its annual \$278m budget are still funded by external donors. A high-level panel to raise alternative sources of funding from tourism and other levies has failed so far to win the support of the AU's leaders. (p. 1)

Although the preceding text contains accusations, rather than facts, it throws light on some of the concerns raised by scholars on the effectiveness of Dlamini-Zuma as a leader. In addition, it is alleged that Dlamini-Zuma neglects her duties as the head of African Union (AU) as she frequently attends ANC meetings in South Africa. On this point, Adebajo (2014) remarks:

The final complaint often heard about Dlamini-Zuma's leadership of the AU is that she is frequently travelling to SA to attend African National Congress (ANC) national executive committee meetings. *Jeune Afrique*, the leading francophone African journal, caused a stir last year by calling for Dlamini-Zuma not to seek a second term in office in 2016 due to what it perceives as preponderant South African dominance of AU decision-making. (p. 1; cf. Boisselet 2016:1)

According to Adebajo, therefore, Dlamini-Zuma's leadership on the continent of Africa has not been without criticism. In his view, Dlamini-Zuma has failed to lead as the head of AU (Adebajo 2014:1). In addition, therefore, Butler (2015:1) states that, 'the commission's bureaucracy remains labyrinthine, dependency on Western donors continues and relations with the United Nations have worsened'. Furthermore, Butler (2015) argues:

In reality, Dlamini-Zuma would be a pitiful choice for president because 'She was at best a controversial minister, overseeing a lacklustre HIV/AIDS policy under Nelson Mandela, allowing the Department of Foreign Affairs to be marginalised by Thabo Mbeki and claiming credit for Department of Home Affairs reforms undertaken long before her arrival. (p. 1)

Interestingly, in line with Butler, Davis (2015:1) poses this question: 'But looking back at Dlamini-Zuma's record in government, does the idea that she produced sterling work actually hold up?' In her criticism of Dlamini-Zuma's leadership as a health minister in the first democratic government, Davis (2015:5) says, 'It is perhaps

1. Our bosadi reading of the divergent views between Bathabile Dlamini, a woman, and Gwede Mantashe, a man, would find such an approach to gender justice problematic as according to the bosadi approach, informed by the African corporeal mentality, the struggle for gender justice on the part of women should be a joint venture between both African women and men (cf. Masenya [ngwan'a Mphahlele] 2004).



understandable, then, that in the first few years of the new government the health minister neglected to consult with civil society' (cf. Nattrass 2007). Coupled with the observations made on Dlamini-Zuma's neglect to consult the civil society on the issue of HIV and/or AIDS is the *Sarafina II* scandal of 1996. As Davis (2015) remarked:

The *Sarafina II* scandal saw European Union funding to the tune of R14, 27-million channelled to playwright Mbongeni Ngema after he won a contract to write a play about Aids. As a result of concern from opposition parties over the amount being spent on a single play, the matter was referred to the public protector for investigation. The public protector's report found that the expenditure was unauthorised, the initiative mismanaged and that both Dlamini-Zuma and her department's director-general, Olive Shisana, had misled Parliament and the media. (p. 3; cf. Baqwa 1996)

The scandal in question incredibly damaged the credibility and integrity of the government of South Africa (Henrard 2002:157; Mbali 2013:112; Nattrass 2004:45). The view that Dlamini-Zuma's leadership also contains incidents of failure thus becomes validated. In this case, the argument that scepticism about Dlamini-Zuma's leadership is mainly based on gender becomes unconvincing. It makes sense, therefore, to argue that on the one hand the idea of basing the rejection of Dlamini-Zuma leadership on patriarchy is conclusive, while on the other hand the view that the above-mentioned failures and more importantly the *Sarafina II* scandal occasions a concern about her leadership is attractive. The apparent incompetence of Dlamini-Zuma, her failure to provide leadership in the above-mentioned areas as well as the *Sarafina II* scandal seems to render her as a proverbial cow, which on account of her inability to lead the masses, has the capacity to lead them to destruction.

## Politics of patronage

That patronage exists in South African politics is an intriguing observation. In Africa, patronage politics basically underpin the tendency on the part of political elites, to create and sustain power bases in the states (Arriola 2009:1339; Crook 2003:77, 86). As Habib and Taylor (2001:211) noted, particularly in the South African context, 'ethnic patronage' exists 'in the form of favouritism in bureaucratic appointments and state contracts awarded to business', and this 'produces a state-sponsored [black] middle-class whose commitment to the dominant party outweighs that to a neutral state or the need for opposition politics' (cf. Giliomee & Simkins 1999:346). The issue of patronage in the South African politics seems to embody an ethnic dimension. As early as 1995, Adam cautioned South Africans about the probable negative influence of the dynamics of ethnic identity to politics. He stated that a danger exists when ethnic patronage alters equal treatment of citizens (cf. Adam 1995:466). At issue here is the negativity that is associated with patronage which contains elements of favouritism, nepotism, partiality and preferential treatment. Agreeing with Arriola (2009:1358), 'although patronage-based governance is now widely thought to create an unstable political environment', it is however necessary

because 'leaders can employ patronage to facilitate intra-elite accommodation and thereby stabilize their regimes'. Put differently, the view that political leaders use cabinet appointments to expand their patronage coalitions in order to forge stable coalitions between the political elites and politicians who are located in the periphery casts patronage in a positive light (Arriola 2009:1359). However, in the South African context, patronage is viewed as a negative phenomenon.

The growing concern about the so-called KZN syndicate reveals the negativity associated with patronage. The point that Zulu people from the KZN province dominate in the politics of South Africa is problematic (Calland 2013:61; Mtshiselwa 2015b:8; Segar 2013:20; Welz 2013a:6, 2013b:21). Not only does the preceding point confirm that 'ethnic patronage' exists, it also throws light on the concern about the domination of a certain ethnic group in South Africa politics (cf. Habib & Taylor 2001:211). In our view, the scepticism about a possible election of yet another Zulu person, regardless of gender, thus makes sense. The fact that Dlamini-Zuma comes from KZN and that her possible election as South Africa's president will subsequently gratify the rising Zulu chauvinists, exhibits a concern around her candidacy among those who are not Zulus (cf. Butler 2015:2). In other words, the rejection of Dlamini-Zuma's candidacy could be based on the issue of ethnic patronage, and more importantly on the concern about the rise of the so-called KZN syndicate, rather than on her gender.

The call for the election of Ceryl Ramaphosa into presidential leadership also seems to be enthused by patronage politics. At issue here is the point that both Ramaphosa and Mantashe previously served NUM as general secretaries (Letsoalo 2015b:1). The association of Ramaphosa with NUM, which provides a window into the reasons for NUM's support for his presidency of the ANC and subsequently of South Africa, would not be an exaggeration. The relationships established during his term of office and beyond provide for patronage. In that case, the rejection of Dlamini-Zuma in favour of Ramaphosa could thus be motivated by the politics of patronage, particularly given the observation that both Mantashe and Ramaphosa have worked together in NUM. In light of the preceding analysis, it could be safe to conclude that patriarchy could not be a factor in the rejection of Dlamini-Zuma's leadership.

Based on the arguments examined above, it is clear therefore that scholars have begun to think about the next president of the ANC and of the Republic of South Africa. In our view, the issue of presidential leadership is so complex that it becomes difficult to support either side of the debate. While we would seek to challenge patriarchy by proposing that voters commit themselves to the election of an able female president irrespective of her ethnic origins, creed and age among others, we would encourage prospective female presidential candidates to lobby for support basically due to their commitment to serving the nation in that capacity rather than being persuaded by hidden agendas. In the following

sections, we would like to take the arguments further by providing an inquiry into how the Hebrew Bible may shed some light on the South African context, and how reversely the present day South African context may assist us with the reading of 2 Kings 11–12.

## Woman and power dynamics in 2 Kings 11–12

Based on the protest for as well as on the contestation against female presidential leadership in South Africa, the question asked by Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) (2014:491) on what exactly lies behind African people's challenge to female leadership becomes more pertinent. However, an attempt at answering the preceding question is partly dependent on an inquiry into how an Old Testament text may shed some light on the South African context, and how the present day South African setting may assist us with the interpretation of 2 Kings 11–12. With respect to the power dynamics in story of Athaliah, the issues of national or ethnic identity and religion; patronage and vested interest; and gender come to the fore. Noteworthy, though is that Athaliah was the daughter of Omri an Israelite king who was the only ruler in Israel and whose family ventured into idolatry (cf. 2 Ki 8:26; 2 Chr 22:2).

### A worshiper of Baal

As previously noted, some of the concerns dealt with within the *bosadi* approach is the issue of woman-as-stranger (foreigner) on own territory, post-apartheid racism, ethnocentrism as well as xenophobia within the African–South African landscape. In the present section, we are particularly keen to know how Athaliah's foreignness impacted on her purported incapacity to lead Israel. The association of Athaliah with Omri and Ahab lends a view that she was probably a worshiper of Baal in the land of Judah. In addition, the linkage of Athaliah to Baal, by implication as the text does not explicitly states, produces an idea that she was associated with foreign nationality or ethnicity because Baal was perceived to be a supreme male divinity of the Phoenicians or Canaanites. Thus, the problem that the Judeans as well as the Deuteronomistic Historians (DH) could have had with Athaliah probably lay with her religious affiliation. For instance, as Mtshiselwa (2015a:6) argued, 'if the DH was part of the group that supported Yahwism, portraying Athaliah as a righteous and good leader could have made him unpopular'. Thus, Athaliah was portrayed in a negative light. Noteworthy is the fact that the text of 2 Kings 10:18 shows evidence of monolatry in which the worship of Baal is presented in a negative light while the exclusive worship of Yahweh is promoted (cf. Otto 2007:48). The negative caricature of Athaliah comes as no surprise because of the noticeable evidence of anti-Baalism in 2 Kings 11 which is recognised by Dutcher-Walls (1996:126). That it is widely accepted that most of the DH texts support monolatrous Yahwism against Baalism (McKenzie 2009:17; cf. Mtshiselwa 2015a:6; Römer 2009:46–47) as well as the links of Athaliah to the worship of Baal, support the view that

Athaliah's leadership was probably rejected on the bases of her association with Baalism, even by implication, as there is no textual evidence directly implicating her to such a religion. The fact that Mattan, the priest of Baal at the time of Athaliah, was killed and the temple of Baal was destroyed supports the view that Athaliah's association with Baalism partly motivated the rejection of her leadership (cf. 2 Ki 11:18).

The issue of the association of Athaliah with foreign nations through the worship of Baal becomes intriguing mainly because it sheds light on an identity which could have been viewed as problematic. Put differently, if Athaliah was a foreign woman as Jezebel was, she would not have been accepted and supported in a context in which foreign women were unpopular (cf. Mtshiselwa 2015a:6). Thus, we cannot rule out the possibility that Athaliah's leadership was refuted partly because of her association with a foreign god.

### Patronage and vested interests

In addition to the observation that Athaliah was probably rejected in 2 Kings 11–12 partly because of her foreign religious identity, and her wickedness (2 Chr 22:10–12; 24:7), is the issue of patronage and vested interests. As Knight (2011:235) correctly points out, the priestly class often sought and attained more power. That the priest Jehoiada commanded the captains who were set over the army to seize Athaliah's power by eliminating her (cf. 2 Ki 11:15) supports the preceding claim. Based on the textual evidence of 2 Kings 12, it becomes clear that the priest Jehoiada stood against Athaliah because of the vested interests he had on the rise of King Jehoash to power. Interestingly, through the influence of the king Jehoash, Jehoiada received money which was set for the repairs of the house of the Lord (cf. 2 Ki 12:4–5). That 'by the twenty-third year of King Jehoash the priests had made no repairs on the house' suggests that at some point although Jehoiada received the money, he had not yet repaired the temple (cf. 2 Ki 12:4–7). The preceding point provides room for suspicion, specifically about receiving money and using it for own interests rather than for the designated project. Although there was an apparent delay in carrying out the repairs, there is no hint of the mismanagement of funds in the text. However, evidence reveals that after King Jehoash's intervention, Jehoiada took measures to ensure that the money was now safe, adequate and properly used (cf. 2 Ki 12:7, 9–11). Although 2 Kings 12:15 and 2 Chronicles 24:16 suggest that Jehoiada posed as an upright character, the fact that King Jehoash questioned the lack of delivery, and more significantly the fact that the money was given to Jehoiada, while the repairs were not made holds water. It is clear that Jehoiada rejected Athaliah's leadership. The suspicion around Jehoiada's delay on repairing the temple and King Jehoash's intervention suggest that his rejection of Athaliah's leadership was partly motivated by personal interests on the use of finances received.

Furthermore, the text of 2 Kings 12:2 reads: 'Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all his days, because the priest Jehoiada instructed him'. The fact that the priest

Jehoiada was giving the King Jehoash orders presupposes that the rejection of Athaliah's leadership was also motivated by the priest's desire for power. It can thus be safely concluded that Jehoiada duly benefited from the rise of King Jehoash. Based on the text of 2 Kings 12, it may be argued that the main person behind the rise of King Jehoash was against Athaliah's leadership because of the personal interest on power and financial gains. The implication of the preceding argument is this: the rejection of Athaliah's leadership was not motivated by the issue of gender. Generally, the rejection of the leadership of a person in power is often inspired by the issue of patronage and vested interests. However, in the case of Athaliah one cannot be oblivious to the argument that her condemnation was also inspired by patriarchy.

## Gender

The evidence that Athaliah was partly rejected because she was considered a wicked woman who had murdered the entire royal seed with the exception of Jehoash, who managed to escape, and usurped the throne, which cannot be overlooked (cf. 2 Chr 22:10–12; 24:7). As Olojede (2011:120) noted, Joash, the little prince, was hidden from Athaliah's sword (cf. 2 Ki 11:2). The view that Athaliah was evil is thus indisputable. However, the patriarchal bias against women which is mirrored in the scarcity of female rulers in ancient Israel, particularly in the context of 2 Kings 11, provides for a view that the rejection of Athaliah may have not only been enthused by her wickedness. It could also have been inspired by patriarchy (cf. Mtshiselwa 2015a:7). Thus, the gender issue may not be ruled out in the discussion of Athaliah's leadership.

Dutcher-Walls (1996:112) argues that the condemnation of Athaliah, particularly, her characterisation as a murderer and an unsuccessful leader (by implication), was primarily motivated by the fact that she was a woman. The fact that Athaliah was the only woman who led the nation during the monarchical period accounts for a patriarchal bias against women (cf. Masenya [ngwan'a Mphahlele] 2013:142–143). During that period, public life, including the political arena, was male dominated. Thus, the view that Athaliah's leadership was primarily challenged because of her female gender is valid. On the issue of being oblivious to patriarchy and the oppression of women, Oduyoye (2002) remarks:

The 'our women are not oppressed' stance is an ideological statement that emanates from Africa ad extra. It seeks to render feminism a non-issue for Africa. The rest of the world is expected to believe this, while the women of Africa are expected to collaborate with this essentially male propaganda. (p. 75)

With the preceding remark in mind, the argument that Athaliah's leadership was rejected mainly because of her female gender makes sense. Although Athaliah was an astute leader in ancient Israel, based on the disapproval, it becomes clear that she was probably viewed as being a proverbial cow (cf. Mtshiselwa 2015a:1–9; Masenya [ngwan'a Mphahlele] 2014:491). The Northern Sotho or Pedi proverb, *tša etwa ke ye tshadi pele, di wela ka leope*, [if they are led by a female one

(cow), they will fall into a donga] would fit in the situation of Athaliah. The perception that the male dominated society had about Athaliah was this: nothing good will come from a female leader. Like a female proverbial cow Athaliah was viewed as leading the nation to a donga. Thus, Athaliah's leadership was rejected by her patriarchal male counterparts who elevated King Jehoash.

## From 2 Kings 11–12 to the South African context and vice versa

On the hermeneutical level, Cone (2011:160) argues that both the context from which the modern reader of the Bible approaches the ancient texts and the biblical texts should interpret each other. In this case, he is referring to the American context. No doubt, Cone's hermeneutical approach highlights points of convergence between the biblical text and the context of the modern readers of the Bible. However, he is also mindful of the point that 'the cross and the lynching tree are separated by nearly two thousand years' (Cone 2011:xiii; cf. Mtshiselwa 2015c:272). In line with Cone, West calls for a dialogue between the modern context and the biblical text (cf. Mtshiselwa 2015c:272; West 2014:2). As a *bosadi* way of reading ancient text stands in continuity with the trajectory of African biblical hermeneutics which purports a dialogue between a text and context, our reading of the narrative of the Deuteronomistic Athaliah provides a reverse reading that moves from the South African context to 2 Kings 11–12. In other words, the present reading of the narrative of the Deuteronomistic Athaliah exhibits an attempt wherein both ancient texts and modern contexts interpret each other.

Based on the normative status that the Christian Bible is still enjoying within many an African context, a modern reader of the ancient texts cannot sway away from the bearing that the text and present context have on each other. Interestingly, regarding the issue of power dynamics in the story of Athaliah, the text raises ideas that have not been drawn to the light in the debate about the South African female presidential leadership. Although we are drawn to the view that the rejection of Athaliah's leadership was primarily motivated by patriarchy, the issues of national or ethnic identity and religion as well as patronage and vested interests are equally hinted at in the text. Thus, we wonder whether the reservations about the election of Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as president of the ANC are also motivated by the issues of ethnicity and patronage as well as vested interests that people may probably have on the election of Cyril Ramaphosa or Dlamini-Zuma to presidential leadership.

There seems to be a clear hint at the concern about the ethnic patronage on the reservations about the possible presidential election of Dlamini-Zuma. The growing concern about the so-called KZN syndicate supports the preceding view. At issue is the argument that the Zulu people from the KZN province dominate in the politics of South Africa (Calland 2013:61; Mtshiselwa 2015b:8; Segar 2013:20; Welz 2013a:6, 2013b:21). On that point, as aforementioned, the concern



about the domination of a certain ethnic group would not be an exaggeration. The argument that Dlamini-Zuma is not a preferred candidate could thus be based on the issue of ethnic patronage rather than her female gender. In a similar vein, there seems to be a clue about the issue of patronage that people may likely have on the election of Ramaphosa. Nonetheless, an indisputable point is the contribution of patriarchy in the debate about the South African female presidential leadership.

As there are clues about the reasons for the rejection of the female presidential leadership other than the issue of patriarchy and partly patronage and vested interests, namely, the issues of competence and ethical concerns, it is therefore reasonable to argue that the idea of a proverbial cow partly fits in the case of Dlamini-Zuma. The perceived inevitability of a donga as final destination in the discourse of a South African female presidential leadership caricatures patriarchy. That is, the idea of a proverbial cow may be confirmed in the discourse of the gender perspective on the presidential leadership in the way Dlamini-Zuma could be rejected because she is a woman. The idea of a proverbial cow is also validated by the discussion of the apparent incompetency of Dlamini-Zuma and the *Sarafina II* scandal. On that point, a proverbial cow [Dlamini-Zuma] could lead the nation to destruction. However, the argument on the politics of patronage invalidates the idea of a proverbial cow in the discourse of the female presidential leadership.

The present discourse on the election of the presidential leadership in South Africa provides a window into an interpretation of the Deuteronomistic Athaliah, particularly from a *bosadi* way which is contextual in orientation. To that end, of substance are the above issues, but not limited to: (1) redress of patriarchy, (2) competency and ethical concerns, and (3) politics of patronage.

A case in point in the present study which is *Tša etwa ke ye tshadi pele, di wela ka leope*, literally translated as 'once they are led by a female one, that is, a cow, they will fall into a donga', provides a hermeneutical lens at reading 2 Kings 11–12. The point is if men were to have women as leaders, they would land into trouble because they are being controlled by ignorant and powerless people, seem to be unconvincing (cf. Rakoma 1970:222). This holds true particularly when the latter point is read along with the biblical evidence because Athaliah was a successful ruler for 6 years (cf. Mtshiselwa 2015a:7). With respect to the idea of social justice, specifically gender justice, the idea of employing the *bosadi* concept with its preoccupation of seeking justice for the transformation of many an African woman's life in present day South Africa as a lens through which to re-read the Deuteronomistic Athaliah is liberating to the oppressed women. Based on the preceding view, noteworthy is the view that Athaliah sorting justice for all women in her context might not be inconclusive. This is based on the point mentioned earlier that we view the usage of the *bosadi* concept, particularly with its preoccupation of seeking justice for the transformation of many an African

woman's life in present day South Africa, as a lens through which to re-read the Deuteronomistic Athaliah. The view that South Africa has no female ruler just as ancient Israel had only one female ruler because of patriarchal forces that see female leadership as a recipe for disaster, that is, headed for the donga, confirms the tenor of the Northern Sotho or Sepedi proverb under consideration.

Worthy of note is the indisputable fact that Athaliah successfully ruled for 6 years before her overthrow (2 Ki 11:3; cf. Mtshiselwa 2015a:8). That fact renders the analogy with the South African context that has never produced a female president an imperfect one. Although patriarchy is a factor that influenced the decision about the rejection of Athaliah and which persuades the scepticism on the election of Dlamini-Zuma to presidential leadership, there are many other factors. The politics of patronage in both the biblical context and the South Africa setting influence the discourse on leadership. The latter view refutes the tenor of the Northern Sotho or Sepedi proverb under consideration, specifically the point that female leadership is a recipe for disaster. Furthermore, the wickedness of Athaliah and the implications of Dlamini-Zuma in the *Sarafina II* scandal equally provide a reason to refute the view that female leadership is rejected mainly because the election of a woman is a recipe for disaster. However, as way of concluding, Mtshiselwa's (2015a) argument is critical:

... the political astuteness of Athaliah during her rule yields empowering possibilities on two levels for women who have been allocated a secondary role in (South) African politics. Firstly, because such astuteness shows that women are capable of leading nations, women in South Africa need to realise that they are being marginalised in South-African politics. Secondly, all women as well as all men in South Africa need to blow the trumpet louder against patriarchy which presents the perception that women are incapable of leading South Africa as president. (pp. 8–9)

## Conclusion

The Northern Sotho or Sepedi proverb which formed the thread through which to engage the issue of female political leadership both in the context of present day South Africa and the text of 1 Kings 11–12 reveals the African mentality that women are incapable of leading (nations). Entrenched within the patriarchal African worldview, and if taken unproblematically, such a mentality can perpetuate the apparent notions still held in South Africa, even 22 years beyond independence, that South Africa is not yet ready for a female president. However, given the fact that Africa (cf. also the Queen mothers such as the Deuteronomistic Athaliah in biblical Israel) have been led by women such as the Asante Queen Mothers of Ghana, the Zulu Queen Mother Mkabayi kaJama of the amaZulu people, the legendary Queen Mother of the AmaSwazi, Labotsibeni Gwamile Mdhluli, the Modjadji Lovedu Rain Queen, Hosi N'wamita of the VhaTsonga people in Limpopo, the tenor of the preceding proverb needs to be problematised. Although in this essay we have identified that apart from patriarchy, other factors such as competency and

ethical concerns, as well as the politics of patronage, contributed to the plight of Deuteronomistic Athaliah as a political leader, that the same factors are also visible in the present SA debates as to whether Dlamini-Zuma, a woman, could be the successor of the male president, as justice seeking scholars, also noting that all human leaders irrespective of their gender have their own weaknesses, and persuaded by the bosadi concept, also committed to the transformation of African-South African women's contexts, we dare not support the notion that once cattle are led by a female one, they are bound to fall into a donga.

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### Authors' contributions

V.N.N.M. and M.M. of the University of South Africa were project leaders and as such, they were responsible for the conceptual contributions.

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