Dear Makhosazana,

First of all permit me to say that it has been a privilege to get to know the designer of Imbokodo hermeneutics in person. The examples of violence in the South African situation of apartheid you used to begin your presentation at the Stellenbosch conference are still impressed upon my retina, but fortunately, so are the beautiful colours of the wonderful garments you were wearing. Of course, we should have had more time for an exchange and especially for the question of whether and how reading the bible can actually contribute to the changes in the world we both so passionately yearn for. I hope with all my heart that we will still be granted this opportunity.

Your paper, “Reconfiguring Jezebel: A Post-colonial Imbokodo Reading of the Story of Naboth’s Vineyard (1 Kgs. 21:1–16)”, has been on my mind for quite a number of reasons. The metaphor you use for your hermeneutics—that of the grinding stone (Imbokodo)—is special. This metaphor is at odds with the concepts fostered in modern hermeneutics: dialogue, hermeneutic circulation, merging horizons. Whatever the concept or metaphor, here, in modern hermeneutics, it always concerns double transformation: something is happening with the text, but also with the reader. I understand that by your metaphor you mean something other than what it evokes in me. You talk about the Imbokodo as a symbol for “unity, solidarity and strength”. However, to me your approach evokes the image of an almost fundamentalist reading process. Who or what leads the hand of the person using the grinding stone? When I think of grinding stone I think of demolishing, pulverizing. A power relation: grinding without oneself being ground. You also express it that way: “The Imbokodo is dependable: no matter what the task, it remains intact and unscathed”.

You forge your weapons by combining insights from recent hermeneutics into one grinding stone. You place your text approach within the broad field of current postcolonial approaches. In line with Spivak,
Dube and others who are critical towards Western feminist analyses of biblical texts, you want to read ‘with’ poor, black South African women whose story no-one has ever listened to, whose tears no-one sees. You want to fight for all those nameless women whose identity was stolen and who, endlessly repressed, died too soon en-masse. You are furious over all that unspeakable and unimaginable suffering, as well as deeply wounded by it. Your rage is focused on a legion of adversaries. Adversaries in your immediate surroundings—white and black South African men, African queen mothers, but especially adversaries from the outside: those carrying-on and collaborating with the old or new empire. You pour out the heat of your wrath especially on those Western feminist exegetes who allow their exegesis of 1 Kings 21 to turn into “A caramelised juxtaposition of feminist historical reconstruction and the annihilation of another woman’s husband”. Your perspective, the one of the Imbokodo, results in something entirely different: “Naboth is…a victim of the ethnic othering imposed by a powerful Phoenician foreign Queen who was not interested in amalgamating her identity, traditions, and religion with those of the foreign subjects over whom she reigned”.

Your tone is fierce, your accusations vehement. The grinding stone allows little room for nuance.

I commend your courage in engaging so many adversaries. You make yourself vulnerable as well. You are not prepared to romanticise your own context or history nor do you find evil only among those who are beyond your horizon or borders.

An incredible amount has been written about the story of Naboth and also about the fact that two religious and social systems with different modes of production are colliding here. So far, exegetes usually focused on socio-economic components in the story from 1 Kings 21. You read the story from a post-colonial perspective and add the cultural perspective and the ethnicity and identity components, which is new and seems very fruitful to me. This makes the figure of Jezebel even more horrible and arrogant: she is a ‘pure-blooded coloniser’ and seems to merit no honour whatsoever.

You agree with Mosala and others that the struggle, the fight, is the mother of all biblical texts. It is very important to you not to silence the voices of the oppressed who form the basis of the text. You are not willing to go along with those Western feminist authors who try to rescue Jezebel from the hands of the patriarchal Deuteronomist and in whose opinion she was actually a wise queen. I find that one of