

**IN SEARCH OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS FOR ECOLOGICAL  
JUSTICE: A GENDERED ECOLOGICAL READING OF GENESIS I-3 IN THE  
CONTEXT OF THE TONGA PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA**

by  
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## DECLARATION

This dissertation, unless specifically indicated in the text is my original work. I therefore declare that I have not submitted this work to any other institution for examination apart from this University.



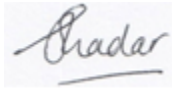
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Jonathan Kangwa

.....17/ 12/2014.....

Date

As the supervisor I acknowledge that this dissertation is ready for submission



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Professor Sarojini Nadar

.....17/12/2014.....

Date

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and the victims of climate change both in the global north and the global south. The souls of the victims of climate change are the seeds (*somos semillas*) which have power to help us grow a new and safer world.

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## ABSTRACT

The emergence of climate change and the current ecological crisis in recent decades, has prompted research on the role of religious and cultural traditions as well as sacred texts in either supporting or discouraging “anti-nature” attitudes. With regard to the use of sacred texts such as the bible, numerous techniques have been employed in the task of interpretation, moving away more recently from attempts to identify the text’s original community and its functions therein, towards an examination of its literary, rhetorical structure. This study sought to explore what insights an indigenous gendered ecological reading of Genesis 1-3 can provide in the context of the current ecological crisis.

This objective was achieved in the following steps. First, the study examined indigenous Tonga culture and the biblical myths of origin. Critical examination of both worldviews uncovered their complementary emphases on human responsibility toward planet Earth. Further, both worldviews uncovered leadership roles of women in social and religious rituals which promoted ecological wellbeing. Second, the interconnectedness of the elements of the universe in African cosmologies was explored through the Plateau Tonga and the Tonga of the Gwembe valley traditions and cultures. In line with other studies, it was found that in Africa an interdependent, participatory relationship exists between humans, nonhuman forms of life and the Creator. In discussing the annual Lwiindi (rain-calling) ceremony of the Tonga people of Zambia and the Lesa cult, the study explored gendered and ecological overtones of African indigenous culture. Such rituals illustrated the involvement of women, ancestors and the creator God in maintaining

ecological integrity. Third, a gendered ecological reading of Genesis 1-3 was offered. Across Genesis 1-3, it was found that the myths emphasise the value of life and the interrelatedness of human beings and nonhuman forms of life. Further, the myths exhibited the belief that the equality of man and woman is from God. The study found that a complementary reading of the biblical myths of origin that supports the equality of man and woman and the interrelatedness of humans and nonhuman forms of life can foster human responsibility to the Earth.

Fourth, the traditional ethical principles of *ubuntu*, *buumo*, *mwandanshi*, *mukowa*, *hikaumba* and *musio-tunya* were examined. The study concluded that such gendered and ecological cultural concepts in indigenous African culture should be retrieved to advocate for ecological emancipation. Fifth, the study recognised that over many centuries the motifs in the biblical myths of origin have been altered to promote the patriarchal interests of the writers and editors.

An indigenous African gendered ecological interpretive framework, woven together with gendered and ecological values in African culture was presented as a means to counter the dominant patriarchal interpretations of the text. The study concluded that a biblical interpretive model informed by ecological and gendered values in African culture can promote human responsibility to the natural world and help ameliorate the impact of the ecological crisis.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

AIC	African Indigenous Culture
CWM	Council for World Mission
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on climate Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UCZ	United church of Zambia

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

Ecological<sup>1</sup> and environmental concerns are now widely recognised as some of the most pressing issues facing the global community. Although environmental movements and pressure groups such as “Green peace” and “Friends of the Earth” became active in 1962 and 1971 respectively, it is only in recent years that there is a general consensus about the impact of anthropogenic global warming (Horrell 2010:1). The ecological crisis has now emerged as a central issue of discussion in many sectors of life including politics, economy and theology. As a result of public and political concerns about ecology and the environment, theologians have begun to engage with this topic (McFague 1987, 2000, Conradie 2006, Masenya 2010). Given the authority of the bible in communities that regard it as a sacred text, it is of interest to investigate how the bible has impacted on people’s attitudes to nature and how an ecology-friendly biblical hermeneutics can promote human responsibility for the natural world.

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<sup>1</sup> The words “ecology” and “environment” are often used interchangeably. However, they carry different emphases. “Environment” does not capture the dynamic interaction and interdependence of human and non-human forms of life, typical of the earth community. The word “ecology” is therefore used in this study to refer to the interrelationship between humans and non-human forms of life. “Ecology” involves the following aspects: The biophysical environment that includes water, air, soil, plants and animals; the social environment that includes communities of human beings; the economic environment which includes the means of production; the political environment which includes systems of governance and political ideologies and the religio-cultural environment which includes customs, beliefs, crafts, music, art and dancing (Meyer 1991:32).

Human beings construct their socio-economic and religio-political environments. At the same time, these human environments depend entirely on the biophysical environment, non-human forms of life and other life-support systems. There is therefore a need to correct the perception that ecological concerns refer to “nature” conservation. In this way, the ecological crisis is reduced to “nature out there”.

This study seeks to offer an African<sup>2</sup> gendered<sup>3</sup> ecological reading of Genesis 1-3 in the context of the Tonga people of Zambia in order to show how a patriarchal interpretation of the bible (Gen. 1-3) that is based on a predominantly heteronormative western worldview has promoted patriarchy and the subjugation of nature among communities who regard the bible as sacred text. This chapter will introduce the research topic and locate it within current research by African women theologians and biblical scholars. It includes the background information on the study, an overview of the impact of the current ecological crisis, literature review, research problem, research questions and objectives, the theoretical framework, the methodology and design of the study, the structure of the thesis and a conclusion. The chapter will also present an overview of the concept of African biblical scholarship in the context of the study and the validity of the study.

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<sup>2</sup> This study recognises that cultures across Africa are not the same. The study draws on an aspect of Indigenous Knowledge system (IKS) based on the myths and rituals of the Tonga people of Zambia. The Tonga African context of Zambia is used to demonstrate that many indigenous communities in southern Africa maintained a set of systems that enabled them to live in harmony with the natural world. The study does not use the word Africa to refer to the entire geographical area of the African continent. See Magesa (1997:15), Schoffeleers (1978:2), Ranger (1973:582).

<sup>3</sup> This study does not suggest that “gender” and “feminism” are synonymous. The study recognises that feminism as discourse emphasises the equal rights and freedom of women who are usually marginalised in society as compared to men, while gender discourse holds that both women and men should be treated equally. Gender refers to a system of social and power relations structured by a binary division between men and women while feminism focuses on the subordination of women by men. Feminism starts with the experience of women and examines how women are treated in relation to men.

A vital element that has emerged from the eco/feminist agenda is the concern for justice and integrity in the web of life and the affirmation that human beings, nonhuman forms of life and the entire earth are inextricably bound (Ruether 1996). Building on this political agenda, but pushing it forward by focusing on the marginalisation of African women and the natural world, the study uses the word gender to refer to the power relations between men and women in the entire God’s created order. Given that women and nonhuman forms of life are more marginalised as compared to men, gender discourse also emphasises the liberation of women and nonhuman forms of life in order to reach the ecological equilibrium. In this way, the study uses the word eco/ feminist where reference to women and the natural world as the most marginalised is made. See Njoroge (2002:45), Moyo (2009:75, 123).

## **1.2. BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION**

### **1.2.1. MOTIVATION**

Sub Saharan Africa is facing problems of climate change and ecological devastation. Rural women in Zambia are bearing a huge burden of suffering that is caused by the current ecological crisis (UNDP 2011, CWM 2011:5). One major example of exploiting nature for human benefit in Zambia is the damming of the Zambezi River in the region inhabited by the Tonga people in 1958. More than 57000 Tonga were forcefully resettled. Furthermore, no care was taken to address the fate of non-human nature present in the area (Colson 1971). The damming of the Zambezi River and the resettlement of the Tonga people have particularly and severely affected women to the present day, given that, in the process, their contact with the natural world was destroyed (Colson 1971, Cliggett 2005). The impact of capitalist western oriented development on non-human forms of life and on women among the Tonga people has served as a motivation for this study.

Research has shown that there is lack of interest among scholars to engage with gender dimensions of climate change in sub Saharan Africa (MacGregor 2010:223). This implies that there is need for scholars to develop a deeper gender-analytical approach, complementing materialist informed empirical research on women with critical gender theorising of the discursive constructions and categories that shape the politics around ecology and climate change.

In the past three decades, research in the areas of ecology and climate change has paid attention to the analysis of capitalist and colonial relations of inequality (Conradie 2006, Boff 1997, Nash 1989). This has, to some extent, served to challenge a westernized and Eurocentric environmentalism and scholarship that has dominated the discourse. However, a curious silence on Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) is maintained in the mainstream literature. There is, equally, a lack of research by African scholars, particularly African biblical scholars on how IKS can contribute to addressing the problems of ecology and climate change.

Since the resurgence of the global ecological crisis, biblical scholars and theologians have sought to address the situation by retrieving resources from both the bible and indigenous African cultures<sup>4</sup> that may promote egalitarian and more sustainable relationships both among humans and between humans and the natural world. However, until very recently biblical scholarship in Africa has not engaged much with the link between the oppression of women and the subjugation of non-human nature with the exception of Masenya (2010) who has attempted to read the book of Job focusing on aspects of the text that address both gender and ecological issues.<sup>5</sup>

The present study is built on my Masters dissertation which aimed at retrieving gendered values of African indigenous female initiation rites (*Chisungu*) among the Bemba people of Zambia as resources for responding to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The study demonstrated that there are (gendered) values in some indigenous African cultures that may be helpful in responding to both HIV and AIDS and the current ecological crisis (Kangwa 2011:54). In pre-colonial times for example Bemba and Tonga women of Zambia were guardians of territorial shrines that were central to ensuring the ecological sustainability of the land. However, Christianity and colonialism (western imperialism) robbed women of this leadership responsibility (Kangwa 2011:54, Kaunda 2010b:6, 7). Believing in a patriarchal interpretation of the dominion motif in Genesis 1:26-28, the Christian mission supported the destruction of territorial shrines and sacred groves to make space for human settlement (Hazemba 2002:2). The roles of women as priestesses and leaders of ecological rituals at territorial shrines disappeared. Given the devastating effects of the ecological crisis, the present study seeks to explore how the biblical myths of origin in Genesis 1-3 could be read in a way that challenges patriarchy and that

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<sup>4</sup> According to Heath (2001), the term “culture” is often used to describe patterns of beliefs and behaviour shared by a social group. This study follows the same meaning of the word culture. Thus, the phrase “Indigenous African Culture” is used to refer to pattern of beliefs, behaviour, norms, values and practices in Africa before the dawn of Christianity and western colonisation. The study uses the phrases “indigenous Knowledge Systems” and “Indigenous Cultural Values” interchangeably.

<sup>5</sup> African women theologians (Phiri 1996, Moyo 2009) have addressed ecological issues largely from a systematic theological perspective. However, recently Masenya (2010) has attempted to read the book of Job from an Eco-Bosadi perspective.



empowers women in the context of ecological concerns. It is therefore important to establish the impact of climate change and the ecological crisis and how these phenomena endanger life on planet Earth.

### **1.2.2. SKETCHING THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS**

Climate change has become a topic of immense interest and concern. Information about it pervades the media<sup>6</sup>. It is now generally recognized as one of the most challenging issues facing the world this century next to weapons of mass destruction (Houghton 2003). David King, the UK government's chief scientific adviser, has insisted that climate change is "the most severe problem that we are facing today, more serious even than the threats of terrorism" (King 2004:176-177).

Research has shown that apart from humans, much of the world's flora and fauna will be unable to adapt to the effects of climate change. All ecosystems will be affected and millions of species will be lost (Spencer and White 2007: vii). In the process many of the world's most vulnerable human communities like those in sub-Saharan Africa will suffer. Research shows that the world is getting warmer. Sea levels are rising, ice sheets and glaciers are melting and between 15 and 37 percent of all species that live on land could become extinct in the next 50 years as a result of climate change (Thomas and Cameron *et al* 2004:145-8). It is estimated that the temperature at the surface of the earth, measured over a decade and averaged across the entire globe is about 14<sup>0</sup> Celsius. If it rises due to the greenhouse effect, water will evaporate. The glass in a greenhouse transmits the incoming sun's radiation in the visible spectrum which warms up the soil and plants inside. The soil and vegetation then emit that energy in the infrared spectrum. Since the glass absorbs infrared radiation and re-emits some of it back into the greenhouse, the inside of the greenhouse warms up (Houghton 2005:1343-403). As more greenhouse gases are pumped

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<sup>6</sup> The IPCC report shows that Africa as a continent is vulnerable to climate change. Economic problems, ecosystem degradation, complex disasters and conflicts have contributed to Africa's weak adaptive capacity, further increasing its vulnerability to projected climate change.

See: <https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/wg2/ar4-wg2-chapter9.pdf>. Accessed 12/10/2013.

into the atmosphere, the thickening of the layer of the greenhouse gases causes an increase in the temperature of the surface of the earth called the greenhouse effect.

The IPCC (2007)<sup>7</sup> report shows that major human economic and technological activities such as deforestation and mining do not increase the water vapour content of the atmosphere but dramatically increase the carbon dioxide levels. It is this that is beginning to cause a major change in the global climate system with an overall increase in surface temperature that is commonly referred to as global warming. The report shows that global warming has increased steadily since the industrial revolution. The various reports make clear that a general warming of the planet, accompanied by erratic weather will have a severe impact on populations that are already marginalised or have low incomes such as those in sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, women bear the brunt of the impact given that they already find themselves in the margins of the social strata<sup>8</sup>. There are clear indications that in Zambia the rainfall and, as a result, food production have decreased. Both the bush and homesteads are affected. There is therefore an urgent need to take a multi-sectorial approach in addressing the problem in order to find solutions. For this reason the study of ecological issues is no longer confined to the field of science. Religious responses to the crisis can also make a valuable contribution.

Zambians are predominantly Christians (Mwanakatwe 1994:41, Gifford 1998:191). The state of Zambia was declared a Christian nation in 1991 (Gifford 1998:191, Njovu 2002:1-3). The declaration meant that the state has to be governed based on “biblical principles”. In other words,

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<sup>7</sup>The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) fourth assessment report in 2007 states that warming of the climate system is unequivocal and that it is very likely (more than 90 percent certain) to be caused by the observed increase in anthropogenic greenhouse gas concentrations. See IPCC, *climate change* 2007.

<sup>8</sup> The 2009 report by the Economic Commission for Africa on Gender and Climate Change indicates that women are likely to be disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change as compared to men, because they constitute the majority of the poor. Women’s traditional roles as primary users and managers of natural resources, primary caregivers, and as labourers engaged in unpaid labour, imply that they depend on those livelihoods and resources that are most at risk from climate change. See report:

<http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/publications/gender-and-climate-change.pdf>. Accessed 10/09/14.

religion, in particular Christianity, plays a major role in shaping people's perceptions and attitudes. Especially the bible as a sacred text may influence how people see the environment and the natural world. In that context I will try to assess with some precision the impact of the bible on people's attitudes towards women and towards the natural world.

Given that Christianity at its arrival in Zambia was largely influenced by dualistic western culture, the bible has been read and interpreted from a patriarchal and androcentric perspective. This hermeneutical approach has contributed to assigning women and the natural world to the margins of society (cf. Moyo 2009, Phiri 1996). This study will therefore seek to read Genesis 1-3 from an African, gendered-ecological and literary viewpoint in the context of the Tonga people of Zambia in order to demonstrate how such a reading can empower women and promote humankind's awareness of its responsibility for the natural world. In order to fulfil these aims it is important to review scholarly literature related to the study.

### **1.3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Scholars have written on ecology, women and creation myths in Genesis 1-3. A number of studies has also been carried out on ecology, territorial cults and ancestor worship among the Tonga people of Zambia by anthropologists and historians. By drawing primarily on the body of scholarly work<sup>9</sup> produced by African women biblical scholars and African women theologians<sup>10</sup>, this study attempts to develop an indigenous model of biblical interpretation that retrieves African indigenous values and knowledge systems in order to empower women in the context of the current ecological crisis and for the promotion of human accountability as regards the wellbeing of the natural world.

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<sup>9</sup> Only references to literature related to Christian theology and biblical studies, anthropology and history are included. References to scientific studies of environmental destruction and material on environmental education are excluded. Additionally, although a large corpus of literature on Christianity and ecology is available from numerous websites, such material is largely omitted from my literature review due to the more fluid nature of this form of publications.

<sup>10</sup> The work produced by African biblical scholars is brought into dialogue with the work produced by scholars from the global north.

The literature review is divided into the following sections: A gendered and ecological reading of Genesis 1-3, ecology from a theological perspective and ecological concepts among the Tonga people of Zambia.

### **1.3.1. Literature on a gendered and ecological reading of Genesis 1-3**

Feminist and eco-critical biblical scholars have analysed the creation myths in Genesis 1-3 to affirm the equality of female and male and humankind's responsibility for the natural world. Arguably one of the most prominent among these scholarly works is that of Tribble (1973, 1978 and 1999) who has analysed the creation stories in Genesis using a feminist literary-rhetorical methodology. She argues that in Genesis 2:7-21 *adamah* is a generic term for humankind, a sexually undifferentiated earth creature not yet female or male (Tribble 1973:251). She shows that God's operation on the earth creature has resulted in two equal creatures, female and male. In Tribble's interpretation, there is an original unity between male and female, humanity and nature. Before the creation of woman, there was a sexually undifferentiated earthling creature. The Hebrew word for male is only used after the earth creature's side (*zela*) is operated on to form male and female (Genesis 2:23). This therefore establishes the relationship between earth creature and earth (Tribble 1978:77). Tribble goes on to argue that the word "helper" in Genesis 2:18 is derived from the Hebrew words *ezer kenegdo* that imply the equality or superiority of the woman as a man's helper (Tribble 1978:15-115). She therefore concludes that an original unity of male and female, humankind and animals, gives way to oppositional dualisms and exploitation (Tribble 1978:124). Tribble's interpretation subverts the patriarchal portrayal of Eve.

Similar to Tribble, Bal (1987) offers a feminist literary reading of the creation stories in Genesis. She shows that retrospective fallacy is the mechanism that creates ideological, sexist interpretations. Bal defines retrospective fallacy as "the projection of an accomplished and singular named character onto previous textual elements that lead to the construction of that character" (Bal 1987:108). She argues that readers assume the first human is male "because they have a concept of character that includes sexuality that is thus read into the text" (Bal 1987:114). Given that she distinguishes between the sexist myth of Eve and the text of Genesis 2-3, she

makes room for women to read themselves into the text. Her work therefore opens up the possibility to develop new gendered and ecological myths from the text.

Bird (1981 and 1997) analyses Genesis 1-3 using a feminist historical-critical method. According to Bird, the first creation story (Genesis 1:1-2:4) uses the words 'image of God', an imagery reserved for the gods in the Ancient Near East (ANE). She contends that the first creation story does not refer to God as male and female but depicts male and female as equally created in the image of God (Bird 1981:146, 1997:138,144). She also insists that there is no statement of dominance or subordination concerning the relationship of man and woman in the second creation story (Genesis 2:18-23) (Bird 1997:166). Meyers (1988) and McFague (1997) discuss Genesis 2-3 on the basis of a feminist historical-archaeological methodology. Using a social-scientific approach the creation stories are traced back to the Iron Age period when the Israelites lived in family households in which women and men had equal status (Meyers 1988:80,120). Meyers argues that the creation myths in Genesis 1-3 were modified to make Eve subordinate to Adam in order to promote patriarchy during the Israelite monarchy period. She adds that the position of subordinating Eve to Adam in order to perpetuate patriarchy was strengthened by Greco-Roman dualistic thinking. Eve is therefore portrayed from a misogynistic viewpoint in early Christian literature (Meyers 1988:196). Meyers thus considers the interpretation of the creation myths as influenced by patriarchy and Greek dualism.

The above corpus of literature (Trible 1978, 1999, Bal 1987, Bird 1997 and Meyers 1988) shows that feminist biblical scholars have used different approaches to establish the equality of male and female in the biblical text. This study draws on these approaches to affirm the equality of male and female. But my study goes beyond an interest in gender equality by engaging with the natural world in the biblical text as a concern in the same way as the above scholars are concerned with gender.

The current ecological crisis challenges biblical scholars to interpret Genesis 1-3 with a view to use and misuse of the environment. Hiebert (1996, 2011) indicates that the misinterpretation of the "dominion" motif in Genesis 1:26-28 has resulted in Christianity promoting capitalist and selfish attitudes that serve humankind at the expense of non-human nature. Hiebert adds that the

creation myths demonstrate that humanity and human history do not exist separate from nature as the first sexually undifferentiated earthling creature ('*adam*') was made from the land ('*adamah*') (Hiebert 1996:76,77, 2011:345).

Jobling (1986) argues against sin and fall as the interpretive paradigm in Genesis and advocates for the paradigm of a human tilling the earth. He suggests that, although the text is patriarchal, structuralism can serve feminist ends by deconstructing patriarchal myths (Jobling 1986:22-27, 43). Given the "structures"<sup>11</sup> of earth dominance and patriarchy as discussed by scholars in the preceding sections, the interpretive paradigm of deconstruction certainly holds potential for an ecological hermeneutics.

The present section of the literature review establishes that the creation myths in Genesis 1-3 affirm the equality of male and female as well as the responsibility of human beings for the natural world. In view of the implications of a patriarchal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 for women and the natural world, theologians and biblical scholars have attempted to retrieve resources from the text that can empower women and address the current ecological crisis.

### **1.3.2. Literature on ecology from a theological perspective**

Eco-theologians respond to the ecological crisis by defining elements in Christianity that may help in addressing the situation. Drawing on White<sup>12</sup>, Nash (1991:72) correctly argues that Christianity cannot escape an indictment of ecological negligence and abuse. Christianity has too often focused on the salvation of the soul from this world. The natural world has been perceived as evil and morally immaterial. This has fostered the notion that the natural world may be freely exploited by humans.

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<sup>11</sup> David Jobling has further shown that "structuralism has intellectual roots in a 'hermeneutic of suspicion': to show the structures of sense-making (in a text for instance) is to show the structures of failing-to-make sense" (David Jobling.1986: *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*. II .Sheffield: JSOT Press.

<sup>12</sup> Lynn White (1967) in *The Historical roots of our ecological crisis* argues that the separation of God and humanity from nature has led to the loss of the sacredness (desacralisation) of the natural world and to its exploitation by human beings.

Boff (1997:78) has identified six anti-ecological values within the Judeo-Christian tradition: The adoption of the cultural framework of patriarchy, the separation between creature and creator through monotheism, the use of monotheism to justify authoritarianism and centralised power, anthropocentric human dominion over the earth, the tribal ideology of divine election, and the notion that nature has fallen and the earth is punished as a result of human sin. Boff critiques these values and instead (1997:78) advocates for values that embody an ecological holism. For him there is inter-relatedness between God, human and nonhuman life.

More recently, McGrath (2002:55) has argued that the notion of dominating nature “has its origin in classical Greek philosophy, was eclipsed through the rise of Christianity, and enjoyed resurgence from the sixteenth century onwards”. I would however argue that the problem is not Christianity itself or the message of the bible, but the destructive legacy of patriarchal interpretation.

Bauman (2007) proposes that underpinning the ideology of dominion is an understanding of a monotheistic God who creates *ex nihilo* and who transcends the natural world and cultures in which we live (Bauman 2007:120,121). This provides a justification for Christianising and colonising the world under the guise of spreading the truth about God.

Conradie (2006) in his book *Christianity and ecological theology: Resources for further research* explores the religious, political and economic causes for the current ecological crisis and the emergence of ecological theology. He adds that the exploitation of natural resources by human beings was overtly or explicitly legitimized by Christian notions of dominion over earth. The ‘dominion’ motif in Genesis has been highly destructive (Conradie 2006:63). In a similar way, Cock (1992) has observed that churches in Southern Africa have not given a sustained engagement with climate change and ecological issues.

From a biblical-ecological viewpoint, the volume edited by Horrell, David *et al*, *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives* (2010), provides scholarly theological and hermeneutical insights on ecology. It includes an essay on ecological

hermeneutics by Ernst Conradie. The material in this volume was a significant resource for the present study, especially because it exposes anthropocentric elements in the bible and in the Judeo-Christian tradition. However, the volume is not written from the perspective of ecofeminism and, thus, doesn't associate the oppression of women with the abuse of the natural world. It focuses mainly on retrieving the voice of the earth in the bible and the Christian tradition.

The book on the earth bible project (Habel 2000a) offers profound scholarly material on biblical perspectives on ecology. The corpus concentrates on the identification of ecological wisdom in the bible by reading it from the perspective of the earth. Furthermore, Habel (2000b) offers Ecojustice Principles that provide guidance for reading the bible. Habel's work was, thus, a great resource for the present study but, again, it did to a large extent not engage with the actual interrelatedness of the subjugation of the earth and women in the biblical text.

Within the African context, African male theologians (Daneel 1991:101-104, Setiloane1986, Kaunda 2010a) show that African people live in an interdependent relationship with non-human nature and that this philosophy or ecological wisdom is deeply rooted in African primal religion and culture. This body of work (Setiloane1986:4-6, 1976 and Kaunda 2010a) demonstrates the value of African creation myths of origin in the search for responses to the ecological crisis. Much of the work produced however, falls within the discipline of systematic theology rather than that of biblical studies. In addition, little attention is given to specific cultural contexts such as that of the Tonga people of Zambia on which this study focuses.

Ecofeminist theologians (Ruether 1983, 1992, 1996a, 1996b, 2011, Clifford 2005, Ackermann and Joyner 1996) demonstrate the link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of non-human nature. They also establish that patriarchy is behind the exploitation of women and the subjugation of non-human nature. Ruether (1983:52) points out that the concept of gender complementarity is absent from the myths of the Ancient Near East. For her, "Male monotheism reinforces the social hierarchy of patriarchal rule through its religious system in a way that was not the same in the case of the paired images of God and the Goddess" (Ruether 1983:53). Ruether seeks to draw resources from the bible, the ANE and the Christian tradition that are



helpful for “earth healing.” For her, religious cultures, including indigenous ones, have not only mandated patriarchal social patterns, but they also contain the resources that can reconcile “humans and humans and animals and the ultimate source of life” (Ruether 1996b:33).

Ruether (2011) in her article *Ecology and theology: Ecology at the center of the church's mission* proposes covenantal ethics and sacramental cosmology as major biblical and theological traditions that can be reclaimed by the church to enhance ecological commitment. She concludes that the church should aim at identifying those elements of both the biblical and the Christian tradition that foster ecological wellbeing (2011:354). The present study furthers Ruether's attempt to retrieve ecological resources from indigenous cultures in the ANE by identifying possible ecological resources in African indigenous culture. Sallie McFague (1993, 2000) has made a profound contribution to ecological theology from a western ecofeminist point of view. McFague (1993) articulates an eco-theology, proposing that the earth is a body of God.

African women theologians too, particularly in the circle of concerned African women theologians (Moyo 2009, Phiri 1996), have sought to reclaim resources from indigenous African culture that can contribute to ecological wellbeing. Their works (Moyo 2009, Phiri 1996) show that in African cosmology “there is a special relation between God, deities, ancestors, human beings, and nature” (Phiri 1996:161). Phiri (1996), in discussing the *Chisumphu* cult among the Chewa people of Malawi, provides a thorough examination of the contemporary role of women at the shrines in relation to the use and protection of natural resources. While territorial cults in central Africa may have common features, Phiri limits her work to the contemporary role of women in the *Chisumphu* cult for the preservation of nature. Moyo (2009:75) notes with concern that in pre-colonial Africa women were in close connection with nature (mother earth) and also fulfilled considerable leadership roles as overseers of territorial shrines. She concludes that these roles were significant in preserving the natural world and in empowering women to control their sexual life.

This section of the literature review shows that Christianity through its ideological elements inherited from western (Greek) dualism has contributed significantly to the marginalisation of women and non-human nature. What is clear, however, is that there are resources, both in

Christianity and African culture that can be used to promote ecological wellbeing. Given the importance of certain values of indigenous African culture for the preservation of nature, it is of importance to review some works written by historians, anthropologists and theologians on the Tonga people of Zambia.

### **1.3.3. Literature on ecological concepts among the Tonga people of Zambia**

Anthropologists, historians and some male theologians (Ranger 1973, Win Van 1981, Kaoma 2010, Colson 1971, 1977, 1997 and Schoffeeleers 1978) describe territorial and ancestor cults as having played a significant role in ensuring ecological wellbeing among the tribes in pre-colonial central Africa and the Tonga people in particular. Ranger (1973:582) asserts that,

A territorial cult is an institution of spirit veneration which relates to a land area or territory rather than to kinship or lineage groupings. Its main function is to ensure the moral and material well-being of the population of that land area, and it will be especially concerned with rain-making or the control of floods, with the fertility of the soil for agriculture or with the success of fishing or hunting.

Ranger (1973:584) adds that the Tonga people believed in a High God, Leza, who interacted with human beings through an intermediary spirit who took the form of a snake and was associated with the rain. According to the Tonga myths of origin, this intermediary spirit (*Nyaminyami*) personified the male deity and was married to a woman who was a priestess or guardian of the territorial shrine. Therefore, Van Binsbergen (1981:119,129) is right in asserting that there is a possibility of a politico-religious order based on territorial cults among the Tonga people, already in pre-colonial times. He adds that the shrine is a symbol of the ecological processes upon which depends the very life of the community and of its individual members. The ecological processes are negatively influenced if members of the community misbehave with regard to the natural order or the shrine itself. This may include disrespectful use of the natural resources, incest, murder and sorcery (Van Binsbergen 1981:118).

Kaoma (2010) in his thesis *Ubuntu, Jesus, and Earth: Integrating African Religion and Christianity in Ecological Ethics*, discussed how the African worldview supports the interrelatedness of life between humans, God, ancestors and non-human forms of life. Kaoma argues that the *Simamba Lwiindi* (rain calling festival) among the Tonga people of the Gwembe valley seems to be a combination of both the ancestor cult and the rain making ritual. In his view the time the chief spends “in the *ng’anda* [ritual house] is meant to reconnect with his matrilineal ancestors and entreat the *basangu* rain on behalf of his community” (Kaoma 2010:80). Like Schoffeleers (1978:2), Kaoma shows that rituals among the Tonga of Zambia involve ancestors and the high god in maintaining ecological integrity. He has however not probed how these indigenous values empowered women and promoted the ecological wellbeing of the society from a gendered perspective.

Colson (1997:49) points out that among the Tonga people all spirits with control over the rains and other ecologically important matters were called *basangu* or *baami baimvula* (lords of the rain). Some mountains, caves, pools, waterfalls, rapids, hot springs, dense forests and large trees were perceived as being imbued with sacred authority. Colson (2006) in her book *Tonga religious life in the twentieth century* gives a detailed account of the socio-economic and religio-political life of the Tonga people before colonialism and after the arrival of Christianity and European imperialism. Colson (2007) reflects on the nature of the identity of the Tonga, their historical perspective and their construction of political order in the course of the twentieth century. Colson’s empirical research on the Tonga people captures precolonial, colonial and postcolonial situations and was an important resource for this study.

Cliggett (2003) refers to the ethnic groups that constitute the Tonga people. According to her, the Tonga of Zambia are divided into two groups: The Plateau Tonga and the Tonga of the Gwembe valley (Cliggett 2003:543). Her categorization classifies the Tonga people of Simamba as belonging to the Tonga of the Gwembe valley who resettled on the Zambian side during the construction of the Kariba dam. Cliggett demonstrates the impact of globalization and the capitalist economy on Tonga indigenous culture. Cliggett (2007) further examines the support strategies available to elderly Tonga living in the rural areas. She stresses the very different

realities facing male and female Tonga and how women in general, whether young or old, face greater constraints and have fewer options than men.

Luig (1998) and Matthew (2007) both are of the opinion that the Tonga of the Gwembe valley had no centralized state in the precolonial era. Luig (1998:292) underscores:

The Tonga differ from their neighbours in matrilineal descent, a precolonial acephalous political structure and a deep seated desire for personal autonomy and equality. In precolonial days only few positions of leadership existed in their fluid and open power structure which were all related to religious functions belonging either to the cults of the ancestors (*mizimu*) or to fertility and rain cults (*basangu*).

This body of work (Ranger 1973, Win Van 1981, Kaoma 2010, Colson 1971, 1977 and Schoffeleers 1978) makes clear that the *sikatongo* (guardian of the shrine) represents the matrilineal descent group of the founder of the *melende* (rain shrine) and controls the order of the agricultural cycle determining when to plant and when to harvest. They are responsible for all rituals connected with the land, the neighborhood and the coming of the rains.

More recently, anthropologists, historians and political scientists have conducted empirical research work among the Tonga people of Zambia (Colson 1997, 2006, Cligget 2003, Luig 1998, Matthews 2007, Dan and Carolyn O'Brien 2007, Lancaster and Kenneth 2007, Siamwiza 2007 and Thomson 2005). This body of academic studies focuses on the social, religious and political life of the Tonga people in both the precolonial and postcolonial eras and my own study adds to this corpus of work by focusing, in the same context, on the sacred text.

Lancaster and Vickery (2007) as editors of *The Tonga-speaking people of Zambia and Zimbabwe*, offer detailed information on the cultural, socio-economic and religio-political life of the Tonga, before and after their colonization. While the majority of the contributors to this volume are anthropologists, with a smaller number of historians and one political scientist, it provides invaluable information on the Tonga of Zambia. Lancaster (2007) explores Tonga mythology and power in the Gwembe Valley. His work shows that the realm of spirit beliefs in

the Gwembe valley is rooted in the political and the economic spheres of life. Furthermore, Dan and Carolyn O'Brien (2007) present detailed research on the religious and group identity of the Tonga by examining the Lwiindi rain calling festival.

Giesler (2007) focuses on gender relations, showing the vulnerability of the Toka women among whom she did fieldwork in the early 1980s. The Toka people belong to the larger collectivity of Tonga people. They differ to a small degree from the Tonga of the Gwembe valley due to a century of intermarriage with their Lozi neighbors and rulers. Giesler (2007) links the marginalisation of women among Tonga people to the influence of the Lozi people who adhere to patrilineal descent patterns. According to Giesler, the resulting mix of patrilineal and matrilineal obligations has led to women being marginalised.

Gillett-Netting (2007) compares the growth patterns of Tonga children in the Gwembe Valley in the early 1990s with the data from a survey carried out in 1957 and 1958 in connection with the impending removal of massive numbers of Tonga to make way for the construction of the Kariba dam. Her work indicates continuing poverty in the Gwembe valley. Given that the data from the earlier survey show a similar pattern, the poverty in the 1990s cannot be attributed solely to the relocation of the Tonga people after the construction of the Kariba dam.

Keller (2007) explores Tonga spirit beliefs in the context of urban diviners, active in Zambia in the 1970s. She found that diagnoses of the causes of afflictions made by spirit diviners were shifting from unhappy, unpropitiated ancestral shades to blaming female–male relationships that were considered unacceptable by society.

From the historical perspective, Vickery (2007) looks at the first fifty years of colonial rule (1890 to 1940) during which period many Tonga people living on the Plateau responded enthusiastically to the introduction of new methods of farming by the Europeans. There was however some resistance on the part of the Tonga of the Gwembe Valley. Vickery is concerned with the issue of differentiation in postcolonial Zambia. His work points to evidence of the emergence of a capitalist class. In the same vein, Matthews (2007) provides a precolonial history of the Tonga people with emphasis on the Gwembe Valley and Victoria Falls area. Siamweza

(2007:237-261) considers the history of recurrent famines in the Gwembe Valley of Zambia in the period between 1850 and 1958.

Scudder (2007) provides an overview of the Gwembe Valley in the twentieth century in her work *Development and Downturn in the Gwembe Valley 1901–2002*. Scudder points out that since the eighteenth century the story of Zambia, and of the Tonga people in particular has been one of decline. Focusing on the postcolonial era, Thomson (2005) offers more recent information on the struggles of the Tonga people in the context of colonialism and globalization. He notes that colonialism and globalization have destroyed the efficacy of territorial shrines and ancestor worship among the Tonga people.

The different contributions to this volume add up to a series of interdisciplinary scholarly essays on the Tonga that served as a rich source of information for the present study. The literature presented in this section refers to a variety of historical moments and provides material on the religio-cultural outlook of the Tonga people both during the precolonial and the postcolonial periods. Critical assessment of this body of literature provides insights into the gendered ecological values among the Tonga people.

This section of literature review also shows that the African Tonga worldview conceives of an active interaction between God, humanity and non-human nature. Myths of origin, rituals, totems, taboos, and customs attest to the cosmological injunctions of the Tonga community. It is clear that women played a big role in ensuring the ecological wellbeing of the Tonga. The literature establishes how colonialism and western instigated developments such as the construction of the Kariba dam and the subsequent resettlement of the Tonga people destroyed the indigenous ecological fabric that characterized the people. This is because the social, economic and politico-religious relations of the Tonga people underwent dramatic changes and they had to reconstruct their relations with the ancestors. The existing body of scholarly studies on the Tonga has been produced mostly by western historians and anthropologists who have put no strong emphasis on religious resources in indigenous cultures nor on the ways in which these interface with Christianity and the sacred texts.

#### **1.3.4. Literature on African feminist biblical hermeneutics**

African feminist biblical hermeneutics are situated within postcolonial feminist theories although some scholars in the field have expressed a reluctance to use the term ‘feminist’ (Nadar 2001, Masenya 2001). The present section deals with the methodologies that have been developed by African women biblical scholars and will discuss how these methodologies have maintained a postcolonial stance. While there are a number of methodologies in the field, I will only review those that are developed from deeply rooted cultural practices. Sugirtharajah’s (editor, 2001) *Voices from the margin* demonstrates how postcolonial approaches to biblical hermeneutics can help to uncover colonial ideologies as well as negative portrayals of women in biblical texts (Sugirtharajah 2001:250-259). Postcolonial approaches seek to uncover colonial intentions (be they political, cultural or economic in nature) that have informed and influenced the context of the writer of a biblical text. They also engage with issues of hybridity in former contexts of colonisation. The work edited by Segovia and Tolbert (1995) is another example of research in this field.

Drawing on postcolonial and liberation theology, African male biblical scholars have sought to develop biblical hermeneutics that emanate from the African context (Mosala 1986:196, Ukpong 2000). Ukpong (2000) argues that “an ideological break with the western centrist ideology” is necessary if African biblical scholars are to formulate questions that are relevant to their own situations. However, the inculturation project in African theology and biblical scholarship largely excludes women. To challenge the exclusively male inculturation project, as I have pointed out earlier, African women biblical scholars have begun a search for new methods of interpreting the bible that are drawn from African culture and that may empower women in their search for liberation (Dube 2002:54).

Drawing on postcolonial theory, Musa Dube (1997, 2000, and 2001) employs post-colonial feminist hermeneutics in her reading of the bible. The methodology looks for features of domination and relationships in the biblical text. She begins with the experience of women and reads the bible for the purpose of decolonisation (Dube 2001:180,181). Although West (2000:35) asserts that postcolonial hermeneutics is foreign to African biblical scholarship, Dube’s

methodology is derived from deeply rooted African cultural practices, given that it uses basic cultural practices such as divination. Secondly, this methodology engages with social cultural issues behind the text and the African context. Women are usually victims of political ideologies and socio-cultural injustices. Dube's work shows that subjugation and alienation are a result of cultural domination and assimilation rather than cultural exchange (1997:20).

Using a postcolonial and liberation grid, Masenya has proposed *bosadi* (womanhood) as a methodology for African women's biblical hermeneutics. She argues that neither feminism nor womanism speaks adequately to African women (Masenya 2001:147,148). The method demonstrates the diversity in experiences of women in Africa and those in the global north. However, *bosadi* as methodology raises a number of contentious issues. It seems for example to affirm patriarchal Sotho notions of womanhood (Masenya 2001:154). *Bosadi* embodies cultural notions of womanhood which include the subordination of women to their husbands. This is the dilemma that Masenya is yet to resolve in her suggested methodology.

Reacting to the inculturation project by African male theologians, Kanyoro (2002: 61, 78) has proposed the use of feminist cultural hermeneutics. It involves a process of sifting out the harmful aspects of African culture while upholding those that are life-giving to women. This methodology is a good contribution to biblical scholarship in Africa given that it offers an alternative approach to the male project of inculturation. The major challenge posed by this methodology is how to overcome the danger of romanticising the African context. Maluleke (2000:94, 95) warns that there is no such a thing as African biblical scholarship.

This section demonstrates the diversity that characterizes African cultural, religious and social conceptions. Given this diversity, African women biblical scholars have made a bold contribution in developing new hermeneutical methods that take women's experience of oppression seriously. They demonstrate that the bible usually represents the ideological and political interests of the oppressor. And so, they take women's experience of oppression as a starting point (Nadar 2001:161,162, Dube 2001:180). Secondly, the methodologies provide new avenues for interrogating the bible as "a cultural product" as Pui-lan (1996:212) would put it. Thirdly, the methodologies challenge the notion of "triangular hermeneutics" which holds that



only western biblical scholars can produce authentic hermeneutics. Predominantly western biblical scholarship seems to suggest that the bible provides the text, western biblical scholars produce the hermeneutics and, thereafter, the rest of the world reads and appropriates those hermeneutics. Lastly, methodologies are adequately responding to issues arising in Africa such as race, class, gender violence and HIV. However, there is still a need to engage more decisively with issues of ecology and climate change that continue to subject women and the natural world to exploitation.

### **1.3.5. Research gap, significance and justification of the study**

As demonstrated by the preceding literature review, while significant strides have been made in the field of African feminist biblical scholarship, most of the work presently in existence remains largely western in outlook (Thomas 2005:6). There is lack of literature on indigenous African culture from an ecological perspective. There is a need to expand the research on ecology in relation to African indigenous culture, especially from biblical and theological perspectives. To do this, this study proposes that African scholars in social sciences should begin by retrieving and analysing African precolonial written material. Secondly, they should identify and review cultural values and verbal art, recorded from oral sources, genre fiction and written material from the diaspora. Until biblical scholars and scholars of ecology begin to unearth the riches that, due to centuries of colonial invasions and neglect, lie buried in African indigenous culture, Africans will continue to look outside their culture for answers in the context of the current ecological crisis. And yet, as this literature review makes clear, scholars have demonstrated that within an African world view, the spiritual, the natural and the human worlds are interconnected (Moyo 2009, Kaunda 2010a, Kaoma 2010, Phiri 1996). Additionally, indigenous African Tonga culture has gendered values that, reclaimed and integrated, are potential resources for responding to the ecological crisis. Although the African worldview can inform Christian ecological responsibility and action, very few studies are concerned with investigating such possibilities from a biblical and African gendered ecological perspective. Similarly, few studies consider ways in which, among communities that regard the bible as a sacred text, an indigenous interpretive model might challenge patriarchy and the subjugation of nature. This reality means that there is a gap

in the current body of knowledge. This study seeks to address this gap through the development of new conceptual frameworks as well as the retrieval of indigenous resources.

The above mentioned gap has informed the conceptual framework of this study.

## **1.4. RESEARCH PROBLEM, QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.4.1. Research problem**

A patriarchal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 that is based on a western worldview within a dominance paradigm, has promoted patriarchy and the subjugation of nature, among communities who regard the bible as sacred text.

### **1.4.2. Research question**

To what extent can the interpretive framework of an indigenous gendered knowledge challenge patriarchy and the subjugation of nature among communities who regard the bible as sacred text?

### **1.4.3. Key questions to be asked**

- How has a patriarchal and androcentric interpretation of Genesis 1-3 contributed to the marginalisation of women and non-human nature among the Tonga people of Zambia?
- What resources can be retrieved from indigenous Tonga culture to foster human responsibility for ecological wellbeing?
- What gendered values can be retrieved from indigenous Tonga culture to empower women in the context of the current ecological crisis?

### **1.4.4. Research objectives**

- To demonstrate how a patriarchal and androcentric interpretation of Genesis 1-3 has contributed to the marginalisation of women and non-human nature among the Tonga people of Zambia.
- To investigate the resources that can be retrieved from indigenous Tonga culture to foster human responsibility for ecological wellbeing.

- To analyse the gendered values that can be retrieved from indigenous Tonga culture to empower women in the context of the current ecological crisis.

## 1.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The principal theory upon which the study is constructed is an African gendered<sup>13</sup> ecological hermeneutics. This theoretical framework draws on postcolonial feminist hermeneutics, eco-feminism and African feminist cultural hermeneutics.

The study is premised on the assumption that women are more severely affected than men by the impact of the ecological crisis. Empirical research has shown that women are more affected by all forms of environmental degradation including climate change than men due to their social roles as carers and their social location as the poorest and most vulnerable at the bottom of the social hierarchy, alongside children (IPCC 2007). African women theologians correctly argue that African women are more affected by religio-cultural and socio-political evils than men (Kanyoro 2002:18). To demonstrate this, African women theologians have developed an African feminist cultural hermeneutics as a tool for reading the biblical text.

African feminist cultural hermeneutics analyses cultural issues in the biblical text with a view to discarding elements that are not life-giving while upholding those that are life-giving to women (Kanyoro 2002:18,61). I will, on the basis of this theory, scrutinise resources from indigenous Tonga culture. The bible is a product of the colonial history of Africa. At the same time, indigenous African culture as it exists today, has been partially conditioned by the process of colonisation (Sugirtharajah 2001:126,249)<sup>14</sup>. Thus, both the bible and African culture have to be scrutinised. While African cultural hermeneutics exposes how the bible has been used to justify

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<sup>13</sup>This study does not assume that men are not affected by the ecological crisis but that women are more severely affected. A gendered theory looks at the power relations between men and women.

<sup>14</sup> Some scholars have contested the postcolonial theory due to its failure to encourage the formerly colonised communities to take responsibility for their social, economic, religious and political development. After political independence from European imperialism, many African states have failed to manage their affairs properly. See Tenganenga (2010, 2006), Blaikie (2004).

patriarchy in African culture, thereby contributing to the oppression of women, it does not seriously engage with the link between the oppression of women and the misuse of nonhuman nature due to western imperialism. And so, to analyse how western imperialism and Christianity contributed to the disempowerment of African women, some biblical scholars have proposed postcolonial feminist hermeneutics (Dube 2000, 2001).

Postcolonial feminist hermeneutics begins with the experience of women and reads the bible for the purpose of decolonisation (Dube 2001:180). It contends that Christianity and patriarchal colonial ideologies were interwoven and have led to the oppression of women (Dube 2000:15, 16; Sugirtharajah 2001:249, Gandhi 1998). The theory is employed by biblical scholars as a tool for reading the biblical text “in an attempt to find political, cultural, economic and religious colonial intentions that informed and influenced the writer’s context” (cf. Rukundwa 2008:339). As Sugirtharajah (1998:19-20) and Tamez (1996:203-205) have rightly observed, the bible is a colonial text in character and ideologies.

While postcolonial feminist hermeneutics was sufficient to explore the role of the bible in justifying imperialism and the oppression of women, the hermeneutical theory fell short when it came to engaging with the role of the bible in justifying imperialistic patriarchal ideologies that have contributed to the marginalisation of nonhuman nature. Hence this thesis proposes to extend this hermeneutical theory.

Building on the premise of ecofeminism which holds that the oppression of women and the natural world are deeply interwoven (Clifford 2005:224) but focusing on the African context, I propose an African gendered ecological hermeneutics as a heuristic key in this thesis. An African gendered ecological hermeneutics puts the biblical text to the test by paying particular attention to the oppression of African women and the natural world. Upholding the feminist hermeneutics of suspicion (Fiorenza 1992:53), it begins with the experience of oppression by African women which is interwoven with the marginalisation of the natural world. The task of African gendered ecological hermeneutics therefore includes retrieving the ecological wisdom from both the biblical text and indigenous African culture. By retrieving and analysing gendered and ecological values from the biblical text and the Tonga indigenous African culture, the study exposes how

the patriarchal writers and redactors of the bible have underplayed the plight of women and ecological concerns in the biblical creation myths that are depicted in Genesis 1-3.

The theoretical framework enabled me to read and analyze the biblical text (Genesis 1-3) from an African gendered ecological perspective that affirms that the earth and all its creatures (human and non-human) are interdependent and intimately interwoven (Masenya 2010:57, Conradie 2010:295).

Carney (1975:8) defines a theory as “a basic proposition through which a variety of observations or alternative statements become explicable”. If we follow this trajectory, then a theory is a set of statements or principles developed and repeatedly tested to explain a group of facts or phenomena. Models on the other hand are used to articulate theories and test their validity (Elliot 1993:44). It follows therefore that a model can be defined as a link between theories and observation (Carney 1975:8).

In the social sciences, theology and biblical studies, sectarian models are employed in considering such features as communal identity, cohesion and ideological commitment. Elliott (1993:34-59) demonstrates the usefulness of sectarian models to explain tension based on a binary concept. Such models are also used to explain tension that results from cultural or identity differences such as occur between insiders and outsiders, colonisers and colonised, male and female, and male elite and nonhuman forms of life. In other words, a theory serves as a foundation on which models are built in order to produce a working methodology for a particular study.

It is worth noting that in the social sciences a method of analysis may include both “emic” and “etic” concepts. These are used as the means of analysis, distinguishing and clarifying the differences between the social location of the interpreter and the social location of the authors and the objects to be interpreted. West (2008:3) refers to this as the ideo-theological orientation. The social location of the interpreter includes gender, ethnicity, cultural values, religio-politics and socio-economic issues in time and space. In research “emic” identifies the information as narrated and perceived by the indigenes while “etic” identifies the perspective of the external investigator (Elliot 1993:38).

In investigating the research problem the theoretical framework and the methodology informed each other. It is therefore important to outline the methodology of the study.

## **1.6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, DESIGN AND APPROACH**

In this section of the study I will explain the methods and approach that the study employed in order to answer the main research questions. The section also describes the design of the study, data collection methods and data analysis methods.

Research has shown that the acquisition of colonies in Africa by western countries was accompanied by a profound belief in the possibility of restructuring nature and re-ordering it to serve human needs and desires (Adams 2003:23). This study therefore employs a postcolonial perspective for reading all the material. This strategy aims at detecting colonial intentions in the material to be analysed. My approach also benefits from African feminist cultural hermeneutics as proposed by Kanyoro (2002) for the analysing of resources from indigenous Tonga culture. This enables me to discard elements from Tonga culture that are not life giving in regard to women while retrieving and integrating those that may empower women and to promote that human beings accept responsibility for the natural world in the context of the current ecological crisis.

An African gendered ecological hermeneutic as demonstrated above, is both recuperative and deconstructive in that it attempts to interpret the bible in its social-historical and contemporary contexts while paying particular attention to resources that exist within Africa to advance a feminist and ecological reading of the bible. In this way the reading of the text was inter(con)textual. Inter(con)textual methodology reads the text within its social-historical and contemporary contexts (cf. Ukpong 1995, 2000).

An African ecological hermeneutic builds on existing methodologies in African biblical scholarship such as inculturation hermeneutics (Ukpong 1995) and feminist cultural hermeneutics (Kanyoro 2002). It however adds two key dimensions to the hermeneutic: an

exploration of how the oppression of women is interwoven with the exploitation of nonhuman forms of life and a mining of African indigenous knowledge systems such as myths of origin and rituals to see how they may inform the reading of the biblical creation myths to promote gender and ecological justice.

Given that the text (Gen. 1-3) under investigation, is a composite of myths, the study will draw on Rudolf Bultmann's (1953, 1960) concept of demythologisation to decode the meaning of the myths. Although, arguably a very dated theory, the concept of demythologisation is significant in the African context as it is well established that myths form an important part of the African cosmological worldview (Mbiti 1969:92-95, Phiri 1996, Setiloane 1986). It is also recognised that myths serve to entrench traditional thought patterns and can construct the world in gendered and other ways. In other words myths form an important part of "meaning-making," which is the process of how individuals make sense of knowledge, experience, relationships, and the self (c.f. Dirkx 1998).

The term demythologisation refers to the decoding of myths or the reinterpretation of ancient mythical patterns of thought in the biblical text in accordance with contemporary thought patterns. Bultmann argues that contemporary thought demands a modern scientific view of the universe which interprets reality in terms of a closed cause-and-effect natural order (Bultmann 1953:5, 1960:158). While Bultmann applied this concept to the interpretation of the New Testament in the context of miracles, this study will use the concept of demythologisation to detect and decode the ideologies and politics embedded in the biblical myths of origin and in the process of interpretation. As Macquarrie (1977:133) observes, the method of demythologising is not intended to eliminate the mythological statements found in the bible but to interpret them. Thus, the study seeks to unravel the message that is enshrouded in the myths in order to bring out the gender and ecological message in the biblical text. Such a message can challenge the communities who regard the bible as a sacred text to foster ecological justice. My research methodology and design thus follows steps that are presented below.

### **1.6.1. Library research**

My methodology for data collection is philosophical and non-empirical. It involved collecting written information on ecological issues found in published and unpublished materials at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and other libraries in South Africa. I consulted books, journals and internet sources such as e-books and e-journals, both in Africa and the global north. I also consulted materials from research centres and universities in South America and India where research has been undertaken on religion, ecology and indigenous knowledge systems. For resources on the Tonga people and territorial cults I consulted libraries and research centres in Zambia.

### **1.6.2. Data Analysis**

My methodology for data analysis was inter(con)textual, employing the gendered demythologisation analytical perspective outlined above. The study draws on the fundamental premise of feminist theory which holds that the starting point of any literary analysis including the bible is the experience of women (Loomba 1998, Fiorenza 2001:171). Fiorenza (2001:171) rightly points out that:

Personal experience is determined socially and religiously, it demands critical analysis and reflection that can explore the social location of experience. Experience is a hermeneutical starting point, not a norm. Only certain experiences, namely the experiences of struggle and liberation for justice and radical equality, can be articulated as feminist norms.

This helped me to measure the value of the resources that I collected. In collecting and analysing my biblical data, I drew on the tri-polar approach of African biblical interpretation. Draper (2001, 2002) shows that “biblical interpretation in Africa typically consists of three poles: the pole of the biblical text, the pole of the African context, and the pole of appropriation”. What this means is that the bible does not speak with one voice. It is a product of a particular community. Thus, there has been ideological and political contestation in the history of its formation and interpretation. This view is in line with postcolonial thought that contests the predominantly



western modes of biblical interpretation. Kwok (1995:30) suggests “the demythologisation of biblical authority, the demystification of the use of the bible, and the construction of new models of interpretation of the bible”. But, Segovia (2000:119-132) puts it even more succinctly.

Using the same grid of biblical interpretation as Kwok (1995:30), Segovia (2000) suggests three different but equally important worlds that readers of the bible must investigate. These are the world of the text, the world of modernity and the world of today. Similarly, an African gendered ecological hermeneutic of demythologisation as an analytical tool engages with the world of the text, the world of modernity and the world of today, but using a penta-polar approach.

Firstly, it engages with the pole of the world of the Ancient Near East, the world in which the biblical myths were written and edited. Secondly, this hermeneutic engages with the pole of the text itself. The language that has been used by the narrator or the editor can encode patriarchal and anti-nature ideologies. The third pole analyses what Segovia (2000) refers to as “the world of modernity”, analysing the history of biblical interpretation. The biblical text not only has its own historical world and environment, but has been interpreted in history and continues to rewrite its story, leaving its original text and readers far behind. The west and European imperialism have influenced the interpretation of the biblical text. In other words, bible and western modes of interpretation should be “demystified” (Kwok 1995:30). Demystifying the bible involves a sustained level of suspicion as regards the text, its culture, the culture of the reader and the influence of western imperialism.

The fourth pole consists of the African context. This pole holds that the analysis of the reality of the reader’s world is as important as the worldview of the writer or narrator of the biblical text. It is for this reason that African indigenous knowledge systems offer important resources for the reading of the bible. Thus, Tonga myths and other indigenous ecological resources have something to offer to reading of the bible in the context of the ecological crisis. The fifth pole consists of the method of appropriation. It brings the reader and the text into dialogue (West 2008:3).

The penta-polar approach shows that western models of biblical interpretation should not be universalized because they represent a limited worldview. Furthermore, the bible is a culturally conditioned book whose authority is contextual and dialogical (Schneiders 1991:55-57). And so, the starting point of biblical interpretation is with the marginalized, be they human or non-human. The penta-polar approach will be used as discussed below.

### **1.6.3. The pole of the world of the ANE**

This pole attempts to give a voice to the text by locating it within its social-historical context using historical-critical tools (West 2008:10). This is important in order to understand the biblical myths of origin. The social-historical context is used as springboard for understanding the text itself.

### **1.6.4. The pole of the biblical text**

Fiorenza (1998:67) insists that “all biblical texts are rhetorical texts”. This implies the need to locate the text within its linguistic and literary context. The concerns for external issues such as the world behind the text are therefore used in this study to create an understanding of the literary world of the text (Trible 1978:8). The exegesis of Genesis 1-3 is undertaken employing the traditional exegetical tools with the help of relevant literature to understand the literary text and then appropriate it in a Zambian context.

### **1.6.5. The pole of modernity**

As has been pointed out, the biblical text has been interpreted throughout history and it continues to rewrite its story in the modern context (Kwok 1995:30). This pole looks at the text and how it has been influenced by the history of European imperialism and by modernity.

### **1.6.6. The pole of the African context**

Nadar (2001: 161) underscores the importance of engaging with the biblical text and of being aware of ways in which the social location of the reader shapes its interpretation. This stage therefore considers the message of the text (Gen. 1-3) in the light of its meanings for the original

readers and for readers today in the Zambian context. Although I have not used a contextual bible study, I acknowledge the importance of engaging with the context in biblical interpretation. My data for the African context is produced on the basis of indigenous knowledge systems<sup>15</sup> among the Tonga people of Zambia. This stage leads to the appropriation of the message of the biblical text into the Zambian context.

### **1.6.7. The pole of appropriation**

As West (2008:3) puts it, the pole of appropriation brings the reader and the biblical text into dialogue resulting in praxis. At this stage there is a need to shift the focus from the reader and her individual interaction with the biblical text towards a consideration of broader social implications for women of reading such a text (Milne1997:48, 56). West (2008:3) notes that “the kind of contextual change and transformation envisaged in particular African contexts shapes how the biblical text and African context are brought into dialogue”. For West, inculturation hermeneutics, liberation hermeneutics, feminist hermeneutics and postcolonial hermeneutics represent forms of appropriation in African biblical scholarship (West 2008:3-6). This study adds ecological hermeneutics as another form of appropriation emerging in African biblical scholarship.

It must be noted that people in communities of faith who regard the bible as a sacred text view it as a source of inspiration. Nadar (2003:3) argues that “there is overwhelming evidence of the pivotal role the Bible plays in most communities of faith”. In other words, readers of the bible in communities of faith begin with a hermeneutic of trust. They do not regard the bible as a scholarly book to be critiqued. Recognizing that the way in which the bible is interpreted can either liberate or oppress, and given the implications that a patriarchal interpretation of the bible may have for women and the natural world, the study employs a hermeneutic of suspicion as its starting point. A hermeneutic of suspicion scrutinises the biblical text and holds that authority for biblical interpretation does not reside within the text (Fiorenza 1992:53). The study therefore,

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<sup>15</sup>“Indigenous knowledge systems” is a new field in the academy and has as such been contested by some scholars. I will use a gendered cultural hermeneutics (Kanyoro 2002) to critically analyse the resources collected.

develops an indigenous interpretative model that exposes patriarchy in the text but also retrieves that which empowers women and the natural world.

## **1.7. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

This section of the thesis explores the concepts of validity and rigour as applied in the present study. It also shows the limitations of the study and how these limitations are negotiated.

### **1.7.1. Limitations arising from the field study**

IKS is an emerging field of study with many aspects remaining underdeveloped (Gandhi 1998:151). This is both a challenge and an opportunity for research. It is a challenge because of the sense of the non-availability of literature, especially as the study is non-empirical. On the other hand, this study provides an opportunity to bring fresh ideas to the emerging field of ecology and IKS.

### **1.7.2. Limitations arising from theories and hermeneutical tools engaged**

African gendered ecological hermeneutics as a theory shares the challenges associated with postcolonial theory and cultural hermeneutics as biblical tools of interpretation. Firstly, gendered ecological hermeneutics should overcome the problem of viewing the text as the inspired word of God. Although interpretations of the biblical text are influenced by the different contexts of readers, many people in Christian faith communities regard the bible as the inspired Word of God. Okure (1995:55) rightly points out that how one safeguards the authenticity of the meaning of the text and how one guards against subjectivism are fundamental aspects of the interpretive process.

Secondly, the theory should overcome the problem associated with the right of the author to her meaning. In other words, any method used to interpret the biblical text must emanate from real life experience. Paradoxically, the real life experience of the reader of the biblical text may sometimes contradict the community's faith (Mesters 1995:415-416). Sugirtharajah (2001:218) observes that ordinary people in communities of faith look for "historical-explicit and implicit-prophetic" meaning of the text. Thus, a biblical hermeneutic can end up re-colonising the subject

that it intends to decolonise if it fails to channel its concerns towards deconstructing those religio-political and socio-economic ideologies that oppress people.

Lastly, it is difficult to establish what indigenous culture is and what it constitutes since it means different things to different people with different histories in different contexts. This is due to the continuity of the ideologies of colonialism in the postcolonial era (Iverson 1997:154). Furthermore, cultures are not similarly constituted. Thus, as is the case with any social-scientific method, the theory has to overcome translation problems. Many social-scientific theorists have warned against being vulnerable to the fallacy of ethnocentrism which arises when the method employed fails to fit the model or the method fails to fit the facts (Elliott 1993:38). Given that the interpretation of the biblical text is influenced by the context of the reader and that many people in Christian communities of faith regard the bible as the inspired Word of God, it is important at this point to explore the notion of the authority of the bible.

### **1.7.3. Authority of the bible**

African gendered ecological hermeneutics stands on the premise that biblical authority is dialogical. Both Schneiders (1991) and Bird (1994:36) insist that the authority of the bible is dialogical and relative. The dialogical theory of interpretation holds that the interaction between the text and the reader creates meaning. In other words, the authority of the bible (scripture) is contextual and relative to particular situations and relationships. The bible has different meanings for people living in different cultures and in different social and political situations.

The methodologies developed by African women biblical scholars draw on this dialogical theory and insist that women's biblical interpretation emerges from their experience (Nadar 2001, 2003; Masenya 2001, 2010). The implication of this insistence is that biblical interpretation emerges from a socio-economic and religio-political environment that is influenced by both internal and external factors. African male biblical scholars are also in agreement that biblical theory should be concerned with the socio-economic and religio-political context in which the voice of the other (the marginalized) is being silenced (Draper 2002, West 2008, Rukundwa 2008:339).

Drawing on postcolonial theory, an African gendered ecological hermeneutics engages with the situation of the coloniser, the colonised and the exploitation of nonhuman forms of life in former colonies in order to reconstruct a negotiating space for equity. The theory attempts to show that the biblical text has been used as a powerful rhetorical instrument of imperialism. Further, it attempts to show that the biblical text, if reconstructed, has potential to offer a voice of justice for both human and nonhuman forms of life. The reconstruction is necessitated by the fact that the bible was proclaimed in colonial settings. In this regard, therefore, the study maintains that the authority of the bible starts with the experience of the reader of the bible and emphasises such views of authority for African women who are marginalised together with nonhuman forms of life. Given that the study was inspired by the theories and methodologies developed by African women biblical scholars, it is important to discuss African biblical hermeneutics in terms of its relationship to African biblical scholarship.

### **1.8. REDEFINING AFRICAN BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP**

African women's biblical hermeneutics traces its origins to liberation, African and black theologies. The most significant source of African women's biblical hermeneutics has been the circle of concerned African women theologians. African theology and the project of inculturation spearheaded by male theologians and male biblical scholars largely neglected women. Because of this, African women theologians and biblical scholars challenged the exclusively male inculturation hermeneutics. They did so by calling for a gender inclusive inculturation hermeneutics and a critical consideration of African culture and the bible. They began a search for new methods of interpreting the bible that are drawn from African culture and can empower women in their search for liberation (Dube 2002:54). Until very recently, these methodologies have not engaged with ecological concerns in the same manner as they are concerned with, for example, issues of gender and health.<sup>16</sup> Hence, this study represents a critical engagement with ecological challenges as a concern in African biblical scholarship.

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<sup>16</sup> The circle of concerned African women theologians has established the link between women and the natural world from a theological perspective. However, the circle has not engaged with ecology from a biblical perspective as much as it has engaged with issues of class, race, gender and health. See Dube Musa W. (Ed.). 2001. *Other ways of reading. African women and the Bible*. Geneva: WCC publication.

Ukpong (2000:24) argues that the concern of biblical interpretation in Africa is to have a biblical text read through a grid developed within the African socio-cultural context to engender commitment to personal and social transformation. While this claim by Ukpong (2000) is valid, African male biblical scholars have been, to some extent, reluctant to address gender issues, arguing that the concept is non-African (Maluleke 2001). Ukpong (2000) refers to biblical scholarship in Africa in general, without making clear whether that includes African women biblical scholars.

African women biblical scholars also use a tri-polar approach in their interpretation of the bible. This involves, first, using a hermeneutics of suspicion which motivates the reader to read the biblical text with an alternative voice (Mosala 1986:196,197). Second, it uses appropriative hermeneutics that looks for the liberative elements in the text. Thus, Nadar (2001:161,162) is right that, even if the bible is patriarchal, there are texts which may empower women. Thirdly, it involves using a transformative hermeneutics that aims to bring transformation to communities who regard the bible as a sacred text.

On the basis of post-colonial feminist hermeneutics, Dube (2001) proposes a reading model that uses tools of divination to detect how social relations between colonialism, or western imperialism, and African culture have resulted in the promotion of patriarchal tendencies in Africa (Dube 2001:180,181). This methodology, as Maluleke (2001:245) observes, is derived from a deeply rooted African cultural practice. In addition, this methodology engages with social cultural issues behind the text and the African context. Women are usually victims of political ideologies and socio-cultural injustices. Dube (2001) however hardly discusses ecological issues as a concern. One would have expected a model of biblical interpretation that is deeply rooted in African culture to be more courageous and identify the link between the oppression of women and that of the natural world in Africa, largely as a result of capitalism and patriarchal Christian and western ideologies.

African biblical scholars, particularly women, are discussing emerging issues in Africa and, as Maluleke (2001:237) rightly points out, they are charting new methodologies that address contemporary issues in Africa. Given that they use sources from the African context to formulate

their methodologies while also drawing on hermeneutical tools from elsewhere to critique patriarchy, these methodologies are poised in the right direction.

The development of new models of interpretation in Africa has been criticised by some scholars. Maluleke (2000:94, 95) has warned that “there is no such a thing as African biblical scholarship”. In his opinion models of interpretation in Africa tend to romanticise the African context. Maluleke’s point seems to suggest that there is a standard methodology of biblical interpretation. To many, this would involve methods that are predominantly western such as historical and literary criticism. While one has to avoid being too individualistic or parochial, it is necessary to develop hermeneutical methods that draw on IKS. These should dialogue with other methods of interpretation devised by scholars from other contexts. Given the diversity of Africa from a cultural, religious and social perspective, there is in my view also a need to redefine African biblical scholarship by incorporating subjects such as ecology that seem to be perceived as peripheral. Using the same grid, but also bringing in a new paradigm, this study seeks to develop an interpretive model that draws on IKS in order to critique patriarchy.

This study is, therefore, in many ways a contribution to African biblical discourse. Using the theories developed by African women biblical scholars, it scrutinises the patriarchy of African cultures, the bible, and colonial ideologies. The study engages with the imperialism and patriarchy of historical and contemporary times, exposing their impact on women’s lives and the natural world (cf. Dube 2001:17). It explores the link between the marginalisation of women and the exploitation of non-human forms of life in Africa, particularly in the context of the Tonga people of Zambia. The thesis further seeks to propose an African indigenous interpretive model that is gender sensitive and promotes a greater awareness of human responsibility for the natural world.

In doing so, the study adopts a postcolonial<sup>17</sup> stance and challenges the authority of the bible and of interpretive models that use a grid which is predominantly western. Maluleke (2001:242) argues that in the work produced by contemporary African biblical scholars, especially by

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<sup>17</sup>Musa Dube suggests that a study that challenges the authority of the bible and western methods of reading is postcolonial in its stance (Dube 2001:17).



African women biblical scholars, “African contexts present the raw material and sources but the explanatory strategies are seldom fashioned out of local practices, beliefs, and cultures”. To fill this gap in African biblical scholarship, the present study proposes the use of an interpretive model that draws on Tonga IKS. It is critical that an interpretive model is life-giving in the context where it is employed. The biggest struggle in the process of interpretation is not so much concerned with sacred texts themselves but rather with the hermeneutical model applied and whether it is life-giving to human as well as nonhuman forms of life (Maluleke 2001:243).

The use of indigenous sources of knowledge in biblical interpretation is not without its critics. Phiri and Nadar (2006:5) argue that Masenya’s decision to use a Bosadi<sup>18</sup> approach, which is a specifically African cultural hermeneutic, suggests that she is reluctant to critique aspects of African culture that oppress women. While I do not agree that any specifically African cultural hermeneutic is necessarily reluctant to critique oppressive aspects of African culture, Phiri and Nadar’s (2006) observation points to the dilemma of using indigenous African resources to critique patriarchy from within. Their observation reveals the struggle implicit in employing gender categories of interpretation in African biblical scholarship while attempting to remain true to a commitment to liberate people, particularly women in indigenous African cultures (Phiri and Nadar 2006:6).

The methodologies developed by African biblical scholars demonstrate that no single methodology is exhaustive. While Masenya’s (2001) methodology may not readily lend itself to a critique of negative elements in African culture, the Bosadi approach brings to the fore some important issues in the development of an interpretive model that is indigenous and predominantly African. Firstly, the methodology shows an awareness of the need to critique oppressive elements in African culture while retrieving the good ones (Masenya 2001:148). Secondly, the methodology is equally aware of the need to critique the oppressive aspects of the bible while retrieving the good ones (Masenya 2001:148). Nonetheless, Masenya has not used the methodology to provide a sustained critique of some of the oppressive elements in African culture (Masenya 2001, Phiri and Nadar 2006:5).

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<sup>18</sup>Mmadipoane Masenya has developed a *bosadi* reading of the bible. The word *bosadi* comes from the Sotho word *mosadi* which means woman. Her methodology seeks to investigate what an ideal womanhood should be for an African woman reader of the bible (Masenya 2001:148).

Following a similar trajectory, African gendered ecological hermeneutics has four salient features or contours. It seeks firstly to expose and critique elements of the bible that have been used to support patriarchy and the marginalisation of women and nonhuman forms of life. The hermeneutic also attempts to retrieve those elements of the bible which are life-giving for humans and nonhuman forms of life. Secondly, it seeks to expose and critique elements of African indigenous culture that support the marginalisation of women and non-human forms of life while retrieving those elements that can empower women and promote human responsibility for the natural world. In the third place it investigates the interplay of colonial and postcolonial ideologies as factors that have contributed to the marginalisation of women and the exploitation of the natural world in Africa. Lastly, it attempts to retrieve and integrate the African indigenous ethic of interconnectedness (*ubuntu*) of all human beings (male and female) and nonhuman nature as a way of promoting human responsibility for the natural world.

### **1.9. DISTILLED THESIS (CENTRAL ARGUMENT)**

Anthropologists, historians and African theologians have shown that the African worldview emphasises the interconnectedness of humans and nonhuman nature. The present study attempts to show that both the bible and IKS offer values that can be retrieved to empower women and promote human responsibility for the natural world. This is demonstrated through the reading of Genesis 1-3 from gendered ecological perspective in the context of the Tonga people of Zambia. The study highlights and elaborates on the work of ecofeminists, African women theologians and biblical scholars who engage with the development of biblical methodologies that respond to contemporary issues by drawing on African contexts. Yet the present study also differs from the work done by ecofeminists as it draws on IKS among the Tonga people of Zambia. Whereas Rosemary Reuther looks for wisdom at sources from the ANE, the present study looks for wisdom at Tonga culture. Whereas African (women) theologians, ecofeminists and anthropologists illustrate the interconnectedness of creation with examples of rituals, the present study focuses on the values and on IKS that underpin the rituals in order to develop an indigenous biblical interpretive model that may promote the perception that humankind bears responsibility for the natural world. This study employs the African concept of interconnectedness as the dominant theme in promoting an indigenous gendered interpretive model. Similarly, while the present study also makes use of theories and methodologies

developed by African women biblical scholars, it differs by concentrating on the specific use of the Tonga ecological heritage.

## **1.10. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

This research is divided into six chapters.

Chapter two discusses a new indigenous ecological interpretive model that may be empowering to women and promote ecological justice.

Chapter three shows the gendered and ecological values that can be retrieved from indigenous Tonga culture to empower women in the context of the current ecological crisis.

Chapter four focuses on how a patriarchal and androcentric interpretation of Genesis 1-3 has contributed to the marginalisation of women and nonhuman nature among the Tonga people of Zambia.

Chapter five demonstrates how an African gendered ecological reading of Genesis 1-3 can challenge patriarchy, empower women and promote human responsibility towards the natural world.

Chapter six presents the conclusion by summarising and synthesising the findings of the research. The chapter also highlights possible new questions for research.

## **1.11. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I introduce the research topic and locate it within current research by African women theologians and biblical scholars. The chapter presents background information for the study, an overview of the impact of the current ecological crisis, a literature review, the research problem, research questions and objectives, the theoretical framework, the methodology and design of the study, the distilled thesis, the structure of the study and a conclusion. The chapter also discusses the concept of African Biblical scholarship as it relates to the study and presents arguments for the validity of the study.

The chapter demonstrates through its literature review that in an African worldview the spiritual, the natural and the human worlds are interconnected (Moyo 2009, Kaunda 2010a, Kaoma 2010, Phiri 1996). The chapter shows, based on historical and anthropological research, that women in indigenous Tonga culture held leadership positions as priestesses and guardians of ecological territorial shrines (Colson 2006, Kaoma 2010, Scudder 1962, Machila 1990). The chapter argues that, in spite of indications that some African cultures have resources that can empower women and promote ecological wellbeing, very few studies have attempted to explore how an indigenous African interpretive model can be constructed that may realise such an empowerment of women and a responsible caring for the natural world in the context of the ecological crisis. The next chapter demonstrates the new interpretive model that will be used in this study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AN AFRICAN GENDERED ECOLOGICAL INTERPRETIVE MODEL

#### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

The Greco-Roman culture and the Jewish background of Christianity shaped the Christian traditions that have influenced biblical interpretation to date (Rakoczy 2004:31). For example, in Judaism only men could be members of the Jewish covenant through circumcision. Greek philosophy held that the spirit is perfect and the body is made of matter which is imperfect. Men were seen to be perfect while women were considered imperfect. These notions reinforced patriarchal Jewish interpretations of the bible pushing women and the natural world to the margins. It is not surprising that patristic theologians who were much influenced by Jewish and Greek notions saw women and the natural world as lacking in perfection. For example, Tertullian (cited in Finlay 2003:508) stated:

In pain shall you bring forth children, woman, and you shall turn to your husband and he shall rule over you. And do you not know that you are Eve? God's sentence hangs still over all your sex and His punishment weighs down upon you. You are the devil's gateway; you are she who first violated the forbidden tree and broke the law of God. It was you who coaxed your way around him whom the devil had not the force to attack. With what ease you shattered that image of God: Man! Because of the death you merited, even the Son of God had to die.

To challenge such misogynistic interpretations of the bible, feminist theologians and biblical scholars have sought to interpret the bible in a more positive way. Ecofeminist theologians and biblical scholars have gone a step further by paying particular attention to the voice of the natural world in their readings of the bible (Ruether 1983, 1986).

For the past four decades, most contributions to the ecological debate by biblical scholars have been shaped by two factors. An attempt was made to defend Christianity from the notion that it is irredeemably anthropocentric and bears a huge burden of guilt for the ecological crisis

(Conradie 2006). In addition, there was an attempt to retrieve some ecological wisdom from the biblical texts whereby it was assumed that the bible contains profound ecological wisdom which is implicit or hidden in the text (Horrel and Hunt 2010, Reuther 2011).

As already asserted, feminist theologians have established that the bible is a patriarchal text. Using the hermeneutic of suspicion they show that religion as well as sacred texts are patriarchal (Rakoczy 2004:154). They expose and challenge the maleness of God in the bible. As such, they consider the experience of women to be a good starting point for biblical interpretation. During the 19th century, women began to apply a more intensive and critical reinterpretation of the biblical texts to expose their patriarchal bias. Elizabeth Fiorenza makes clear that the biblical texts are not only androcentric and kyriocentric, but that they are also rhetorical and must be understood in terms of their socio-historical situations. She developed several elements of feminist hermeneutics that serve to expose ways in which religion and sacred scriptures are patriarchal and oppress women (Fiorenza 1998:67).

Chapter two attempts to contribute to this body of knowledge and proposes an African indigenous feminist biblical hermeneutic in the context of the ecological crisis. The chapter argues that the principles established by biblical scholars in the Earth bible project<sup>19</sup> are not adequate for the reading of biblical myths of origin in a way that empowers women and the natural world. The chapter similarly finds that the methods employed by western ecofeminist

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<sup>19</sup> The “Earth Bible project” is an international project of biblical scholarship that was initiated in Australia in 1996. The project aims to develop ways of reading the bible from the perspective of the Earth. In spite of the considerable amount of literature that deals with ecology from a theological and spiritual perspective, it was observed that few scholars had undertaken a serious attempt to interpret the biblical text from an ecological perspective or from the perspective of the Earth and the Earth community. Also, no explicit ecological hermeneutic had been developed.

Thus, biblical scholars and experts from the field of ecology worked together to develop new ways of reading the bible from the perspective of earth (Habel 2008:1-8, Lamp 2012:4-5). The final product of the project was the publication of the Earth Bible series under the auspices of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). The publication consists of five volumes of studies that engage with the bible from the perspective of the earth. Entries in the series include *Readings from the perspective of Earth*, edited by Habel, and *The Earth story in wisdom traditions*, edited by Habel and Wurst, both published in 2000 by Sheffield Academic Press.

biblical scholars (Reuther 1996, 2011) do not suffice for the reading of the biblical myths of origin in a gendered and ecologically empowering way in the African context. The motifs in the biblical creation narrative (Gen. 1-3) are chosen for two reasons: firstly because of their centrality in supporting the domination of women by men (Trible 1978) and, secondly, because of their centrality in supporting the exploitation of the natural world by human beings (cf. White 1967).

To locate the interpretive model within current scholarship, it is important to analyse some key features of current biblical scholarship. Given that the methodologies are many, I will only analyze those used by scholars that are representative of a feminist, ecofeminist and ecojustice biblical scholarship. Through the analysis of certain interpretive models employed by ecojustice and feminist biblical scholars I will attempt to construct an African ecological interpretive model. The scholars are chosen for their methodological contributions to feminism, ecofeminism and ecological hermeneutics. Furthermore, they represent a range of postmodern critical methods, theoretical approaches and ideological motivations reflecting the diversity of postmodern biblical methodologies.

## **2.2. CONTEMPORARY HERMENEUTICAL APPROACHES**

The interpreter bears an ethical obligation to respect the authorial intention of the text because the meaning resides there. An interpreter who treats the text as though it meant something other than its authorial intent distorts the truth about the text. Such interpretations are unjust to the author (who imbued the text with its meaning) and are capriciously inconsistent with the stability we expect of textual meaning in our everyday lives. A meaning inherent in texts demands our interpretive deference (Adam 2004:27).

Current biblical scholarship is characterised by a proliferation of interpretive voices and perspectives, each reflecting different methodological, ideological or theological interests. In African biblical scholarship, these interpretive voices are motivated by a desire to respond to issues arising from contexts such as the oppression of women (Nadar 2001), the existence of oppressive cultural issues (Masenya 2001), and poverty (Mosala 1986). Other methodologies are

motivated by theological and confessional concerns (Conradie 2006). In emerging methodologies there is often a shift from a focus on the authorial intention of the text to a proliferation of competing methodological and ideological approaches.

As indicated in chapters three and four, the appropriation of biblical interpretation is done through the use of long-standing ideologies and hermeneutical tools of biblical interpretation. Embedded patriarchy in Christian traditions has influenced biblical scholars and ordinary readers of the bible throughout the history of Christianity (Conradie 2010:301). The way the biblical text is interpreted largely depends on the values, ideologies, creeds, customs, habits and worldviews of the reader of the text or of the community in which the text is read and appropriated.

Interpretive models are hermeneutical approaches employed in the interpretation of the biblical text. Hermeneutics refer to the methodological principles of interpretation. It is “a systematic and disciplined form of second-order reflection on the praxis of interpretation” (Conradie 2010:296). In other words, rules or principles are used as tools of biblical interpretation. It can be argued that interpretation is a form of praxis in which the biblical scholar continuously engages with contextual issues.

Religio-political and socio-cultural ideologies enable the interpreter to establish a link between the text and the contemporary context. This enables the interpreter to construct the meaning of the biblical text in relation to the contemporary context. It is for this reason that a hermeneutics of suspicion towards the text and the context has to be adopted (Fiorenza 1986:35). However, using a hermeneutics of suspicion poses its own challenges: not only do personal ideologies influence the selection of tools of interpretation but they also prescribe to biblical scholars what to be suspicious of.

Through the analysis of some interpretive models employed by ecofeminist and feminist biblical scholars, I will attempt to construct an African ecological interpretive model. In order to properly locate the interpretive model within current biblical scholarship I will review the hermeneutical and methodological approaches employed by Elisabeth Fiorenza, Cheryl Exum, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Norman Habel and Ernst Conradie. These five scholars use a range of postmodern critical methods, theoretical approaches and ideological motivations that reflect the



diversity of postmodern biblical scholarship. Most importantly, they represent methodological approaches that cover feminism, ecology, ecofeminism and patriarchy.

### **2.2.1. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza: Principles of feminist biblical interpretation**

Elisabeth Fiorenza is a major contributor to feminist biblical scholarship. Scholars (1987:410) have observed that the key elements of feminist biblical approaches employed by Fiorenza include: a hermeneutic of suspicion that questions patriarchal texts in the bible, a hermeneutic of proclamation that focuses on texts supportive of women, a hermeneutic of remembrance focusing on the retrieval of that which gives hope to women from biblical texts, and a hermeneutic of creative actualisation that seeks to encourage women to look at the bible and to create a perception of what it means to live as a woman in the Christian tradition today.

The methodological approach proposed by Elisabeth Fiorenza begins with a critical engagement of predominantly male interpretive models which are both Eurocentric and androcentric. She draws on hermeneutical and rhetorical theory to show that value-neutrality is not possible in scholarship. She insists that the biblical scholars' ability to understand the meaning of the text is defined by pre-understandings that they cannot simply cast off (Fiorenza 1999:59). Fiorenza (1999:60) employs a hermeneutic of suspicion towards the biblical text. She insists that biblical texts have served not only noble causes but have also been used to legitimate the subjugation of women and the natural world, and to promote colonial dehumanisation. For this reason, biblical scholarship must take upon itself the responsibility not only for interpreting the biblical text in its historical context, but also for evaluating the construction of its historical world and symbolic universe.

Fiorenza (1999:60) goes on to note that presuppositions do not inhibit interpretation but enable it to provide a conceptual framework which facilitates engagement with the text. This being the case, Fiorenza argues that the claims of different interpretations, competing for attention in the critical arena, must be negotiated in a new way. Fiorenza (1988) states that biblical scholars have to be held accountable for the consequences of the methodologies they use. She notes:

If scriptural texts have served not only noble causes but also to legitimate war, to nurture anti-Judaism and misogyny, to justify the exploitation of slavery, and to promote colonial dehumanisation, then biblical scholarship must take the responsibility not only to interpret biblical texts in their historical contexts but also to evaluate the construction of their historical worlds and symbolic universes in terms of a religious scale of values (Fiorenza 1988:15).

Fiorenza's methodological approach exhibits a radically democratic feminism in which she advocates the freedom of all people (wo/men) from cultural or political oppression by kyriarchal structures and systems. She understands kyriarchy not simply as gender-based dualism but as "more comprehensive, interlocking, hierarchically and ordered structures of domination evident in a variety of oppressions such as racism, poverty, heterosexism and colonialism" (Fiorenza 1999: ix).

She proposes interpretive moves that simultaneously interact and engage with both the biblical text itself and the contemporary reader who attempts to interpret it. These moves include a hermeneutics of experience and social location whereby the critic reflects upon how his/her experience with the biblical text is shaped by his/her socio-political context. This is linked with an analytic of domination by means of which the text's role in promoting or supporting social structures of domination and subordination can be systematically analysed. A hermeneutics of suspicion questions the underlying presuppositions and ideologies both of interpreters and biblical texts by querying ideological or theological 'truths' which they might take for granted. In this manner she insists that texts are not objective or factual reports of the past but rather politically engaged responses to particular circumstances. And so, they represent the views of the writers or redactors who were predominantly men. By critically scrutinising the canonisation process itself, the methodology goes beyond neo-orthodox models and liberation theology. No longer can one simply turn to the canonical Christian texts for insights or even imperatives for present social and political struggles. Rather, the formation of the biblical texts becomes a terrain of ideological and historical contestation.

A hermeneutics of ethical and theological evaluation assesses the values of texts and interpreters according to an external scale of values. A hermeneutics of remembrance and re-construction attempts to recover both the victimisation and accomplishments of those marginalised or repressed by the text or by the history of its interpretation. A hermeneutics of imagination both inspires and complements such a reconstruction, seeking “to generate utopian visions that have not yet been realized and to ‘dream’ a different world of justice and well-being” (Fiorenza 1999:53). The mutual complementarity of Fiorenza’s “moves” is demonstrated by her insistence that the hermeneutics of imagination must itself be subject to a hermeneutics of suspicion because the imagination engaging with kyriocentric texts is itself culturally located.

Further significant points in Fiorenza’s methodological approaches need to be mentioned. First, she sees the biblical texts as ideological products fundamentally bound up with the values and interests of kyriarchal social structures. She poses that the impact of a hermeneutics that involves suspicion and evaluation of the biblical text does not entail rejection and disengagement, but rather prompts continued grappling with the text as it is read in changing contexts (Fiorenza 1999:51). A second point: Fiorenza’s pursuit of a radically democratic vision of biblical interpretation in which all interpreters engage with the bible on a level playing field, is a profoundly theological one. The relation of power and domination that in her view underpins much biblical interpretation is structural sin.

It must also be noted that the interpretive dance envisaged by Fiorenza, describes an ongoing hermeneutical spiral in which readers and texts constantly re-engage with one another as interpretive contexts change. The community of faith is shaped by its interaction with the bible but it is an active partner in that shaping, exercising spiritual discernment and judgement, as all members of the community whose experiences are affected by the text or its interpretation are heard, valued and weighed. In short, this methodology requires that readers of the biblical text recognise both the subjectivity of their own interpretive perspective and the validity of that of others, and bring their differing interpretations into mutual dialogue. The result, she suggests, is a hermeneutical dance in which interpreters and texts are in constant motion, engaging, disengaging and re-engaging (Fiorenza 1999:89).

West (1985:1-5) observes that Fiorenza's methodology insists that the hermeneutical approach idealises the biblical and prophetic traditions by refusing to come to terms with the oppressive androcentric elements of these traditions. In his view, the idealisation results into romanticist claims about the "liberating" effects of recuperating past prophetic traditions. The model contains ambiguities that invite more theological critique.

West (1985:1-5) further notes that the model proposed by Fiorenza attempts to counteract post-Christian claims that the bible is irredeemably patriarchal. This apologetic attempt, as Fiorenza sees it, seeks to preserve the liberating elements of the biblical text within a patriarchal husk or framework. On this basis, Fiorenza criticises Mary Daly's methodological approach that aims at showing Christianity as irredeemably patriarchal. Fiorenza insists that the weakness of the approach is that it sees Christian practices as mere patriarchal enactments. Since the model focuses primarily on sexist language and sado-ritual repetitions of Goddess repression and murder, it provides shock effects to the ordinary readers who are not feminists. Furthermore, the approach does not pay attention to socio-economic structures of oppression and feminist opposition to these structures. Rather, it opts for marginality, "Otherworld sisterhood" and "sacred space" which reinforce the peripheral status imposed upon women in patriarchal society. Fiorenza then calls for the construction of a new vision and methodology that leads to the creation of feminist life-centers that generate alternative ways of naming reality and modes of women's empowerment. She further suggests that new models and languages in feminist discourses must be constructed.

Fiorenza's (1999) methodological approach is in line with views of feminist biblical scholars that portray the revelatory criteria for theological and biblical evaluation and appropriation of the past and present as trans-biblical – that is, the interpretation is linked to the biblical text yet substantively beyond it. At times ecofeminist biblical scholars like Ruether exclude the biblical text and offer as only way out Christian women's struggle for liberation from patriarchal oppression (Ruether 1986). This has attracted criticism from some Christian scholars who insist that feminist theology distorts the Christian identity. Hogan (1995: 107) argues:

To what extent can a theologian who gives priority to women's experiences and practice over and against texts and traditions, considered to be foundational and thereby preeminent, be considered Christian? Would not the identity of Christianity be too fragmented if each group claimed priority for their experiences, over Scripture and tradition, and yet called themselves Christian? Is there not a core which must remain, regardless of experience, if one wishes to call oneself Christian?

The bone of contention here is that the approach taken by feminist biblical scholars and theologians to adopt the experience of women as starting point, eliminates the authority of scripture and Christian tradition. The approach is also seen as eliminating any possibility for self-criticism. However, feminist theologians and biblical scholars only use women's experience as a lens to define what is life-giving and what is life-denying in the bible and the Christian tradition. While Fiorenza locates her methodological approach within the ecclesial setup where she sees "*ekklesia* as the public assembly of free and equal citizens in the power of the Spirit", her methodology is significant for the reading of the biblical text in the context of the ecological crisis. Its critique of anthropomorphism and androcentrism in the biblical text is empowering to women and the natural world.

### **2.2.2. Rosemary Radford Ruether: Ecofeminism**

Ecofeminist biblical scholars have interpreted the bible in a way that seeks for liberation of women and the natural world in the text. Their interpretations are inspired by the realisation that the biblical text has been implicated in many ways in the oppression of women and the natural world.

Rosemary Radford Ruether uses ecofeminist ethics as a basis for critical and selective re-interpretations of biblical material. In *Gaia and God* (1992) Ruether re-interprets the biblical motif of 'covenant' to encompass 'the covenant of creation' whereby she emphasises the need for human beings to have a right relationship with fellow human beings (Ruether 1992:228). Similarly, Primavesi (1991) analyses the biblical motifs of genesis in an apocalyptic way. In her analysis, she moves from contemporary judgments on human actions destructive of nature to the

possibility of an ecological re-reading of the creation stories of Genesis 1-3. Critical of the role of Christianity and western society in the subjugation of women and the natural world, she interprets the Spirit of God in creation as an image of the regenerative power of trees, oceans and human bodies (Primavesi 1991). Admittedly, the effects of deforestation witnessed in the past decades call for a divine prohibition of the human use of the natural world. The work done by Rosemary Radford Ruether is a good representation of the methodologies developed by ecofeminists.

Following the feminist claim that contexts are patriarchal and androcentric, Ruether demystifies mainstream biblical scholarship by revealing its captivity to androcentrism which has downplayed the marginalisation of women and the natural world in the past and continues to do so in the present. Further, she discloses the oppositional women's culture that was concealed by patriarchal interpretations of the biblical text. Ruether moves from this “hermeneutics of suspicion” towards proposing an alternative interpretive model for unearthing and understanding the voice of women and the natural world in the biblical text. This hermeneutical strategy dismisses the doctrinal exegetical model by rejecting its ahistorical claim of revelational immediacy in the bible.

Drawing on resources from the ANE, Ruether (1983, 1996) introduces the concept of God/ess arguing that the source of human beings is the cosmic womb. She insists that a patriarchal composition, interpretation and appropriation of the biblical message has suppressed the femininity of God. Ruether therefore proposes the term God/ess as a critique of male-dominated theological language. For Ruether, the God/ess is immanent and present among creation as opposed to a patriarchal transcendent God emphasized by a patriarchal interpretation of the bible. Ruether (1983) demonstrates that a patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition has downplayed the existence of the feminine attributes of God in the ANE. She thus draws on matrilineal and feminine values from the ANE.

Ruether (1983) argues that there are four factors that lead to sin. First, a distorted relationship between humans and the God/ess. Second, a distorted relationship between a human being and a fellow human being. Third, a distorted relationship between humans and the earth. Lastly, a distorted relationship between a human being and itself. To have a harmonious community

human beings should strive for right relationships with the God/ess, fellow human beings and the natural world. In her analysis of the bible, Ruether criticises the dominion motif in the myths of origin where human beings are purported to have been given rulership over other forms of life. Related to the dominion motif is the concept of “progress” that in her view has resulted in the oppression of women by men. Finally Ruether (2011) proposes a new model in the concept of the biblical Jubilee. This model advocates for a periodic suspension of debts and farming to return the social and natural world to a state of harmony.

Ruether’s hermeneutical model has been critiqued by both male and female theologians. Many have criticized her for challenging patriarchal oppressive structures in society by exalting traditional religions and practices in the ANE. Nonetheless, her contribution is positive as regards the understanding that the biblical text does not have one voice. It is a product of certain communities in history and as such it is a product of political, social and religious contestation. While we do not need to throw out the bible and go back to traditional practices in the ANE, we need to retrieve those ecological and gendered values in the biblical text that were inspired by traditions in the ANE but that have been downplayed by patriarchal male interpreters and redactors of the biblical text. More significant is the need to look for resources in our communities that may inform an ecojustice reading of the biblical texts.

Drawing on Fiorenza, West (1985:1-5) argues that feminist scholars like Ruether have appropriated liberation themes without critically examining the problems of the hermeneutical models they adopt. On this basis, he critiques the methodologies adopted by Phyllis Trible and Rosemary Ruether. He considers the notion that the bible has simultaneously patriarchal language and non-patriarchal contents as problematic (West 1985:1-5), because it implies ambiguities in the interpretation of the text.

However, it should also be noted that Rosemary Radford Ruther’s hermeneutical and methodological formulations need to be analysed without losing sight of her broader concerns. Any major challenge to prevailing paradigms in scholarship must build upon the profound and persuasive insights generated by predominantly male mainstream scholars, yet call into question their uncritically accepted presuppositions, prejudgments and prejudices that deny women and

the natural world the fullness of life. Ruether adopts this strategy with great effectiveness. She accepts the starting point of biblical historical criticism: the acknowledgement of biblical texts as neither verbally inspired revelation nor doctrinal stipulation but rather as historical responses within the context of religious communities over time and space.

The strength of the methodology employed by ecofeminist biblical scholars lies in their critique of patriarchy in the biblical text and the prevailing western patriarchal interpretive models. Their attempt to seriously analyse the historical context within gender systems as well as highlight the ideological conflicts within the canonization process is admirable. However, Ruether's methodology sometimes leads her into feminist history about Christian women rather than to Christian feminist historical reconstruction. A hermeneutic that wishes to promote liberation should provide a critique of both ideologies in the text and the Christian tradition.

### **2.2.3. Cheryl Exum: Ideological critique of the text**

The hermeneutical approach employed by Cheryl Exum rests upon the insight that, from a feminist perspective, the portrayal of women in the bible (whether positive or negative) is located in a text which serves androcentric interests. Exum (1996:88) argues that a critical approach that deals only with the surface details of the text and remains within the textual horizon, "limits us to describing, and thus to re-inscribing the text's gender ideology".

Exum (1993:11) also notes that the key objective in interpretation is to discern what sort of androcentrism the biblical text represents and to evaluate it from a standpoint outside the text's own ideological horizon. For Exum, the biblical text in its original setting served as a means of social control and to some extent modern women can still identify with these models (Exum 1996:88). In her view a feminist critical approach needs to recognise the differing experiences of male and female readers of the biblical text. She demonstrates that, if the biblical text was produced for androcentric societies, then the women portrayed within the text are necessarily male constructs created to serve androcentric interests. She suggests that a feminist critique must therefore read against the grain.



Exum (1996) further notes that, in the history of interpretation of the biblical texts, the majority of male biblical critics has not only adopted the texts' point of view but also endorsed it. For example, the explicit sexual violence of passages in the bible is ignored and the woman's point of view is usually not considered (Exum 1996:117). She suggests that an ideological critique of the biblical text is essential for women readers if they are to avoid producing conflicted and self-harming or even self-abusive interpretations. In Exum's opinion, the reader of the biblical text should step outside the ideological horizon of the text in order to find a place of safety from where to evaluate and assess the impact that the bible's gendered ideology makes on her as a reading subject and to decide for herself whether or not she subscribes to the vision of woman as presented by the biblical text (Exum 1996:122).

In sum, Exum's (1996) methodological approach is admirable given that it is deployed firmly in deconstruction and awareness of the influence of ideologies in the biblical text. In other words, it uncovers the patriarchal ideology. Although not sufficiently effective in the context of the ecological crisis, the methodology contributes to the identification of patriarchal ideologies in the biblical text. To complement methodological approaches like this one, biblical hermeneutics addressing different ideologies in the biblical text that have contributed to the suppression of the voice of the earth have emerged.

#### **2.2.4. Norman Habel: Ecojustice principles in reading the biblical text**

Since the provocative essay by Lynn White (1967) arguing that Christianity has contributed to the desacralisation of the natural world, biblical scholars have come to realise that certain traditions of interpretation and of bible reading, particularly those that are predominantly western, are implicated in causing harm to the wider Earth community. The Earth bible project initiated debates on ecological hermeneutics (Habel 2000a)<sup>20</sup>. Adopting a framework of

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<sup>20</sup> Ecological hermeneutics in this project is defined as an ideological hermeneutic. The goal is not to get at the meaning of the text as a literary product whose composition was conditioned by a myriad of historical, social, intellectual and other factors. Rather, the goal is to hear a suppressed voice of the Earth in the text. See Habel (2000, 200b)

ecojustice, the project sought to bring the voice of Earth and non-human forms of life into biblical hermeneutics.

The Earth bible project was initiated by a team of biblical scholars called the “Earth Bible Team” that wished to develop ways of reading the bible from the perspective of the Earth (Habel 2000a). According to Habel (2008:1-8), the aim of the Earth bible team included:

- i. acknowledging before reading the biblical text that western interpreters are heirs of a long anthropocentric, patriarchal and androcentric approach to reading the text that has devalued the Earth and that continues to influence the way the biblical text is read;
- ii. declaring before reading the text that readers of the bible are members of a human community that has exploited, oppressed and endangered the existence of the Earth community;
- iii. dialoguing with ancient biblical texts and becoming progressively more conscious that human beings are also members of the endangered Earth community;
- iv. recognising Earth as a subject in the text with which the reader of the text should seek to relate empathetically rather than as a topic to be analysed rationally;
- v. taking up the cause of justice for Earth to ascertain whether Earth and the Earth community are oppressed, silenced or liberated in the text;
- vi. developing techniques of reading the text to discern and retrieve alternative traditions where the voice of Earth and Earth community have been suppressed.

The scholarly contributions to the project reflect various ways in which biblical scholars seek to read the text from the perspective of Earth. In the volume produced, Habel (2000b:38-53) proposes six guiding principles in reading the bible from the perspective of Earth. These principles have largely influenced current biblical debates on ecology. The guiding principles for biblical scholars to read the bible from the perspective of the Earth include:

- i. The principle of intrinsic worth. This states that the universe, the earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value.

- ii. The principle of interconnectedness. This states that the earth is a community of inter-connected living entities that depend on each other for life and survival.
- iii. The principle of voice. This states that the Earth is a living entity capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice.
- iv. The principle of purpose. This states that the universe, the Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design and that each part has a place in the overall goal of that design.
- v. The principle of mutual custodianship. This principle states that the Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, the Earth to sustain its balance and diversity.
- vi. The principle of resistance. This states that the Earth and its components not only suffer from injustices at the hands of humans, but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.

The guiding hermeneutical principles are significant for the critique of anthropocentrism underlying the production and reception of the biblical text (Conradie 2004:135). The observation that anthropocentrism contributes to anti-nature attitudes was first made by ecofeminist biblical scholars and theologians (Reuther 1996). The hermeneutical principles can enable the biblical scholar to identify the voice of the earth in the biblical text. They serve as tool to show how the earth has often been marginalized in the biblical text. However, they are not sufficient for a reading of the biblical myths of origin. Conradie (2004:135) observes:

The Earth Bible's project's description of a set of six ecojustice principles offers an innovative and resolute articulation of such a heuristic key. Its strength is its critique of the anthropocentrism underlying the production and reception of biblical texts. Such a critique remains insufficient for an ecological hermeneutic though.

Firstly, the hermeneutical principles focus on earth as a physical object (Habel 2000a). Judging from the context of the ecological crisis this is a limited view of the Earth. In an African worldview the understanding of Earth is not limited to the physical world and human beings.

Rather, it includes earth-beings and earth-mysteries as well. Schoffeleers (1979) succinctly captures this worldview:

This idea of social causation of environmental ills was said to constitute an essential element in the ecological philosophies of African societies. What are the fundamentals of this African philosophy of the earth? What constrains entire communities to accept it and let their activities be directed? What institutional patterns are found?

A life-giving ecological hermeneutics should move beyond looking at the earth as a physical object in the text. The term “Earth” should be used to mean a home (*oikos*) for all earth-beings and earth-mysteries and how they are interlinked in a web of life.

Secondly, the hermeneutic principles do not make an explicit link between the exploitation of the natural world and the subjugation of women. This in itself is a patriarchal intention. In a society where women bear the huge burden of the effects of climate change and the ecological crisis, failure to link their position to the exploitation of the natural world is an unfortunate omission. It contradicts the foundations of an African worldview. As Guattari (2001:27) observes, the symptoms of domination in the current globalised world are evident in the suffering of the three interlocking domains of self, society and the natural world. Differently put, the symptoms of patriarchal forces of the empire (be it religious or political or socio-cultural) are evident in the subjugation of women and the natural world. Rosemary Ruether (1989:149) underscores:

Any ecological ethic [hermeneutics] must always take into account the structures of social domination and exploitation that mediate domination of nature and prevent concern for the welfare of the whole community in favour of the immediate advantage of the dominant class, race and sex.

It is for this reason that drawing on values from indigenous African culture may offer a valuable contribution to the construction of a biblical hermeneutics which is life-giving. Women have a close association with the natural world (as Mother Earth) through female initiation rites and their role as guardians of ecological shrines (cf. Moyo 2009, Phiri 1996, Kangwa 2011). Drawing

on these values may empower women in indigenous communities who regard the bible as a sacred text. Habel (2008:1-8) acknowledges that the Earth community is a part of creation reflecting massive diversity and forming a network of interconnected beings. However, he contradicts himself by stating that the orientation of reading from the perspective of the Earth should not be identified with the belief in Earth as a goddess. The experience of African women as shown in indigenous culture recognises human interaction with the Mother Earth. Failure to recognise such ecological values in indigenous cultures may work to support the marginalisation of women and the natural world.

Thirdly, the scholarly corpus avoids the use of the terms “God” and “creation” (Habel 2000). This lack of identification of creation with God (the creator) makes the hermeneutics problematic. It is probable that the reluctance to use theological categories in the discourse was to facilitate dialogue with scientists, biologists, ecologists and people from other faith traditions who may not necessarily share the same theological convictions. The other possibility is that avoiding the use of the terms “God” and “creation” enables the reader of the biblical text to conceptualise the earth as the object of investigation rather than as a subject of God’s creation. Nonetheless, such assumptions contradict the intention of a resounding biblical hermeneutics. In the process of composition and reception of the biblical text, there are some ecological traditions that have been suppressed. One such tradition is the identification of the natural world with female wisdom (Mother) (cf. Ruether 1996). The elements of God representing female and the natural world have been suppressed. Further, cultic traditions and principles pointing to the role of women as priestesses and guardians of religious and ecological shrines have been suppressed in the text (cf. Ruether 1996, Cashford 1993, Day 1986:385-408). Reclaiming such traditions can challenge the normative and dominant patriarchal hermeneutics that promote the subjugation of women and the natural world.

Lastly, Habel (2000) claims that in retrieving the voice of a wider Earth community, Earth also becomes an interpreter in the narrative. For Habel, an ecological hermeneutic demands a radical change of posture in relation to Earth as a subject in the text. This change of posture requires an openness, not only to Earth as a character in the text, but to the Earth as an agent in the interplay between all of God’s creation. This strategic appeal to the perspective and voice of Earth and the

nomination of Earth as interpreter in a biblical text require both a potentially problematic anthropomorphism in relation to Earth and a potentially transformative imaginative leap on the part of the interpreter. As Lamp (2012:117) and Brett (2000:73) observe, the approach risks exercising a hermeneutical lordship over Earth. This is where an interpreter of the bible is influenced by patriarchal ideologies and gives a patriarchal voice to the Earth in the text. This may be the reason why the link between the marginalisation of women and the natural world in the text is less readily evident in the readings of the initial volumes of the Earth Bible project. And so, there is need for readers of the bible to see themselves as part of both an ecological and an interpretive community in a relationship of interdependence with Earth.

The biblical myths of origin point in their various ways to a necessary interrelationship between God, Earth, cosmos and human beings. To date, however, Christian interpreters seem more at home with focusing on a male portrayal of divine elements in the myths. They also feel at home with the male human element of the text. However, the myths have more than just a human focus. They also refer to nonhuman members of the Earth community. The extent to which we emphasize the male divine or human side of the text normally depends on ecclesial contexts and experiences. However sophisticated our approaches, when as biblical interpreters we approach the text from the perspective of a male human or divine element, we marginalise women and non-human forms of life.

Excellent as they are, these principles tend to remain within the paradigm of word and writing and are removed from the wider Earth community to which their designers are open and to which they seek to respond. However, as David Rhoads suggests, because humans are part of the Earth community, reading with this more than human community “in mind” may open interpreters and their interpretations to the voice of Earth (Rhoads 2004:64-86). The Earth Bible has not provided a sustained engagement with the myths of origin from a gendered ecological perspective. To recognize the interdependence of readers and text within an Earth community is particularly pertinent for ecofeminist biblical interpretation.

In a similar vein, Brett comments:

The practice of biblical interpretation is not itself a listening to the earth, but perhaps in some indirect way this kind of interpretation might stimulate those who inhabit the biblical tradition to appreciate afresh the larger networks of interdependent life which we share (Brett 2000:74).

Reflecting on the Earth Bible principles of ecojustice, Habel (2008:3) has more recently argued: A revised ecological hermeneutics requires a radical re-orientation to the biblical text. The task before us is not an exploration of what a given text may say about creation, about nature, or about Earth. In this context, Earth is not a *topos* or theme for analysis. We are not focusing on ecology and creation, or ecology and theology.

Many other publications have drawn on and engaged with the ecojustice principles proposed in the Earth Bible. This research is contributing in different ways to the promotion of reading the biblical text from the perspective of the Earth (Habel 2003, 2006, Conradie 2004, 2010). Of particular interest for this study is the contribution by Ernst Conradie.

#### **2.2.5. Ernst Conradie: Ecological hermeneutics**

Ernst Conradie insists that the guiding hermeneutical principles proposed in the Earth Bible are not sufficient for an ecological hermeneutic (Conradie 2004:135). In his contribution *What on Earth is an ecological hermeneutics? Some broad parameters*, Conradie (2010) analyses the guiding hermeneutical principles proposed by the Earth Bible project. Conradie (2010:300-301) argues that the ecojustice principles of biblical interpretation impact on ecclesial traditions. For him, the principle of intrinsic value and interconnectedness of life suggests a more inclusive ecclesiology. Conradie (2010) further suggests that the principle of design purpose and orientation towards an implicit goal is an immanent eschatology in the making. In his view it describes the inherent tendency of matter towards life and of life towards increasing diversity, complexity and symbiosis.

From the foregoing it may be deduced that Conradie (2010) articulates a biblical hermeneutics of eco-justice based on typical models of the dominant beliefs, doctrines, values, customs, and habits of ecclesial traditions and communities<sup>21</sup>. As such, he argues that a hermeneutics of ecojustice should constitute the following ecclesial constructs:

- i. The notion of the liberation of creation which addresses the tension between God's good creation, the suffering of the vulnerable in creation due to oppression, prophetic critiques of such oppression and the hope for the liberation of creation.
- ii. The notion of wisdom which fosters the notions of earth keeping as opposed to notions of mastery and control over nature. In this respect, he argues with the suggestion of feminist biblical scholars that the notion of female wisdom (Sophia) can challenge the notions of male domination. He however, limits the notion with ecclesial constructs.
- iii. The metaphor of "the whole household of God" (*oikos*) which addresses injustices in the current economic order, thereby contributing to the ecological crisis. Here he follows the proposal made by Muller-Fahreholz (1995) to address the anthropology of stewardship or of being at home on earth (*oikonomos*), the notions of being sojourners (*paroikos*) and the notion of a household (*oikodome*).

Like the six principles suggested by the Earth Bible team (Habel 2000a), the hermeneutical principles of ecojustice suggested by Conradie (2010) offer an innovative articulation of an alternative way of reading the biblical text in the context of the ecological crisis. While the hermeneutical principles offer hermeneutical tools for the reading of the text from an eco-justice perspective, they don't suffice for the construction of an ecological hermeneutics that is empowering to both women and the natural world. Its weakness lies in its location of the hermeneutics within ecclesial ideologies which tend to be patriarchal. Feminist biblical scholars have shown that dominant ecclesial traditions, beliefs and values are often a patriarchal construct (Fiorenza 1986:35, Oduyoye 1995). Thus, a life-giving ecological hermeneutics should be able

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<sup>21</sup> For more details on the analysis of the hermeneutical principles by Ernst Conradie, see Conradie, Ernst M. 2010. What on Earth is an ecological hermeneutic? Some broad parameters. In Horrel and Hunt (Eds.). *Ecological hermeneutics*. London: T&T Clark.



to provide a sustained critique of patriarchal ideologies in the process of the production of the biblical text, its reception and its appropriation among communities of faith.

Although Conradie (2010:301) states that ecclesial constructs “are not derived directly from the biblical texts or from the contemporary world, but are precisely the product of previous attempts to construct a relationship between text, tradition and context”, he still insists that they have a soteriological and an ethical focus. Therefore, it can be argued that the ecological hermeneutics proposed by Conradie (2010) has a strong confessional motif and an inclination to consider confessional concerns in academic biblical interpretation<sup>22</sup>. This position is ideologically patriarchal. It is therefore of interest to analyse how the context plays a role in influencing the position of the interpreter of the text.

### **2.2.6. Context as precursor of interpretive models**

From the above contemporary interpretive models it is evident that the text, the reader and the context are poles to be analysed in the process of interpretation. Thus, the concept of an interpretive community is fundamental to the understanding of biblical interpretation.

Fish (1980:270) argues that it is readers in the collective form of interpretive communities and not texts that ultimately determine the results of interpretation. This assertion is based upon the epistemological argument that linguistic utterances are only intelligible when situated within a system of interpretive strategies and pre-understandings that provide hearers and readers with the means to make sense of them. The community in which the interpreter finds him/herself, serves as a precursor of interpretive models employed. Fish (1980:168) rejects the conventional notion that texts exist conceptually prior to interpretation. If texts are intelligible only in the context of interpretive strategies, then it is the strategies applied to the text which give shape to the interpretation, with the result that textual meaning is not discovered but produced by the interpretive process.

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<sup>22</sup> Francis Watson has shown that in the academy a faith position may result in an inclination towards confessional matters. However, for some people faith may take an anti-ecclesial form. This may leave behind a settled dislike of what is perceived as the dogmatism of ecclesial religion. See Watson (1994:14,107).

The key element in determining which strategies will be applied to a text in any given situation is the interpretive community, defined as a community of readers who share a common set of interpretive strategies that “exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around” (Fish 1980:171). For Fish, the interpretive community is the locus of authority in interpretation. Communities predetermine the generic categories to which texts belong and thus determine the interpretive strategies that will be applied to those texts. The agreed interpretive strategies further determine what interpretations will be acceptable and which will be ruled out. Fish (1980:304) insists that communication in biblical interpretation occurs only within such a system or context of the interpretive community. For Fish, the understanding achieved in biblical interpretation is specific to such a system and is determined only within the confines of the interpretive community.

While it is true that the context shapes one’s ideologies in the process of interpretation it is not true that the reader of the biblical text cannot think beyond the beliefs of the interpretive community. Nadar (2003) shows that the beliefs of communities of faith are shaped by creeds and doctrines. These creeds and doctrines have often been informed by patriarchal interpretation of the biblical text. This is confirmed by the feminist premise that insists on a hermeneutics of suspicion which facilitates the uncovering and critique of harmful ideologies in the biblical texts, the history of their interpretation and the context of the reader.

For a long time predominantly western biblical scholars have formed and shaped the interpretive community by determining both the conception of the biblical text as object of study and the critical methods which are appropriate to that study. It is for this reason that new models of biblical interpretation in Africa are being constructed to respond to contextual issues. A hermeneutics of suspicion leads to a hermeneutical circle. The predisposition to view the bible as ideologically suspect determines the choice of hermeneutically suspicious critical methods which in turn give rise to interpretations that confirm the initial preconception. The process again starts. It can be concluded therefore, that new models of interpretation are constructed when the dominant modes of interpretation become insufficient or life-denying. In this way, there are always personal or communal politics that influence the process of interpretation.

### **2.2.7. Politics and rhetoric in interpretive models**

Some feminist and liberation theologians who are deeply concerned with issues of social justice and the exploitation of women and the natural world argue that there is no reason to go to the bible for theological and biblical work (Ruether 1986, White 1967). They insist that the modern and predominantly western interpretation of the biblical text is irredeemably anthropocentric and androcentric. This, they argue, makes the bible problematic for theological reflection. However, as Sugirtharajah (2001: 259) states, the bible is “both a safe and an unsafe text” which is “a familiar and a distant one.” Sugirtharajah observes that, while there are ambiguities in the biblical text, the bible should be treated as both the problem and the solution. In other words, the bible is not irredeemably anthropocentric and androcentric (Sugirtharajah 2001:260). Therefore the biblical text has potential to make meaningful contributions to the gender and ecological debate.

It is for this reason that many contemporary interpretive models are in agreement with what Fiorenza would call the “interpretive dance”. That is to say that they use a hermeneutics of experience and social location. Thereby, they attempt to expose what they perceive to be dynamics and rhetorical structures of domination and suppression in the biblical texts through rigorous ideological analysis. Using a hermeneutics of suspicion, they also seek to uncover hidden motives and ideological presuppositions of biblical texts and their interpreters. A strong dimension of these approaches is that the biblical scholar has to be transparent about underlying motivations and commitments in interpretation. Scholars should declare presuppositions that inform their work and claims from the outset. Having outlined the approaches and components of contemporary interpretive models, in the next section I will demonstrate how the model that I propose to use extends as well as departs from the particular models discussed so far.

### **2.3. AN AFRICAN GENDERED ECOLOGICAL INTERPRETIVE MODEL**

The biblical myths of origin point in their various ways to a necessary interrelationship between God, Earth, cosmos and human beings. An exegetical treatment of the selected biblical texts, informed by an African indigenous ecological hermeneutics, uncovers the biases evident within the pertinent passages. These biases are linked to the interests of the author and the interests of

subsequent interpreters. For the author, there are two overarching interests guiding the rhetoric of the text, coupled with the methodological move that helps achieve the aims of the rhetoric. One interest guiding much of the discussion is the wish to protect the dominant position of men in society. The second one is to justify human dominion over non-human forms of life. In places where issues of ecological importance might have been examined on their own terms, the authors and editors have appropriated these issues as data in support of the patriarchal agenda. Creative agency, land, animals, plants, rivers, minerals, to name a few, are all mentioned only to support the patriarchal affirmations of the author. Furthermore, the benefits of the work of God in creation (which is a substantial component of the author's rhetoric) are all assigned to human beings.

African women theologians have shown that patriarchy is the source of the oppression of women in Africa (Oduyoye 1995, Nadar 2001, Dube 2004, 2000:15). The interrelationship between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world has also been established (Moyo 2009, Phiri 1996). In addition it has become clear that the exploitation of the natural world is related to the oppression of the poor masses of whom the majority are women. In many parts of the world, the exploitation of nature has its origin in the political and social structures of domination (Bookchin 2002:7).

In a patriarchal and authoritarian society, there is a close relationship between the way in which men understand and relate to women and the natural world. A society that devalues nature also treats women as weaker beings (Bookchin 1982:121). In short, as feminist scholars have shown, patriarchy can manifest itself in the domination of women by men (sexism), domination of men by men (classism) and domination of nature by men/humans (speciesism) (Sintado 2011:99)<sup>23</sup>. For this reason, an understanding of the relationship between the oppression of women and the subjugation of the natural world may contribute to the construction of a hermeneutical framework that is relevant and pertinent for an eco-justice centered reading of the biblical text. I

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<sup>23</sup>Latin American theologians and social ecologists have argued that poverty and environmental problems are closely linked. They argue that it is impossible to solve the present environmental problems without solving the problem of poverty and exclusion. They propose an engagement between theology and social ecology to respond to the claims and cries of the earth and the excluded majority. See Gudynas (1995:110-112), McFague (1997).

would propose that African Indigenous Knowledge Systems have something to offer to the formulation of such a biblical hermeneutics.

Until recently, African biblical scholarship has not really engaged with AIKS as a tried hermeneutical framework for reading the biblical text in the context of the ecological crisis<sup>24</sup>. The conspicuous lack of interest may be due to the generalisation that African culture is backward and may not be able to make any positive contribution to the discourse in a civilised and technologically advanced world (cf. Bujo 1992). An African gendered ecological hermeneutics endeavors to propose an ecological society (*ecodeme*) which does not support structures of hierarchy and domination. The salient features of an ecological society include being an egalitarian society that upholds communitarian values (*ubwananyina*). In an ecological society, hierarchy is replaced by interdependence (*buumo*). To achieve this among the communities who regard the bible as a sacred text, there is a need to demythologize the hierarchical and patriarchal orientation of the biblical text and of institutions that embody social domination. The hermeneutics enables the reader to reclaim the cultural ecological values that have been eroded by colonialism and patriarchal western modes of biblical interpretation.

### **2.3.1. Guiding principles of an African ecological hermeneutics**

An African gendered ecological interpretive model follows the same grid as is used by ecofeminist biblical scholars (Ruether 1996, 2011). Yet, it goes a step further by drawing on resources from indigenous African culture. It also extends the model by adding an analytical tool of demythologisation and demystification of the biblical text. The model emanates from a critical analysis of the principles of ecological hermeneutics proposed by biblical scholars in current ecological debates (Habel 2000a, 2000b, Conradie 2004, 2010, Sintado 2011). It offers an alternative reading of the biblical text, particularly the biblical myths of origin. As Adams (2004:14) observes, biblical texts have multiple voices and are not exhaustively interpreted, even when using various exegetical means. Interpretive models make meaningful contributions when they are “seen in their close interrelationship and interpenetration, as they overlap, reinforce and

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<sup>24</sup> Masenya (2010) offers an Eco-Bosadi reading of the book of Job.

complement one another” (Sintado 2011:104). In what follows I offer principles (poles) that constitute an African interpretive model in the ecological crisis.

### **2.3.1.1. The pole of preferential option for the marginalised (*Ababusu*).**

My mother, my mother what have they done? Crucified you like the Only Son! Murder committed by mortal hand. I weep, my mother, my mother the land (Mary Duroux 1992).

The interpretive model uses the subjugation of women and the natural world as its starting point in the interpretation of the biblical text. This pole of interpretation is in line with the contribution of liberation theologians and social ecologists that poverty and environmental concerns are interrelated (Evia 1991:24). Boff (1997:1) notes that “the most threatened of nature’s creatures today are the poor”. In sub-Saharan Africa it is the women who make up the majority of the poor people<sup>25</sup>.

Gustavo Gutierrez (1973:291) argues that “in the Bible, poverty is a scandalous condition inimical to human dignity and therefore contrary to the will of God”. He defines the poor as “the exploited and plundered social class” (Gutierrez 1973:301). In sub-Saharan Africa, the plundered social class consists of women (and children) who have been disempowered by patriarchy and are bearing the brunt of the problems associated with climate change and the ecological crisis. The marginalised include humans who suffer due to gender, racial, ethnic and religious categories of oppression. Further, the marginalised are not analysed outside the complex interrelationship with the natural world.

The hermeneutical pole may for instance enable the reader of the biblical myths of origin to read the text from the perspective of a marginalised woman who is a peasant farmer in sub-Saharan

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<sup>25</sup> In Africa women and children bear the burden of the effects of the global economic downturn and climate change. See the report of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

[http://www.cpahq.org/cpahq/cpadocs/Feminization\\_of\\_Poverty.pdf](http://www.cpahq.org/cpahq/cpadocs/Feminization_of_Poverty.pdf). Accessed 10/09/14.

Africa and who is struggling to grow crops for survival due to the scarcity of rains. For such a woman, rain, garden and land (*'adamah*) mean a place of life rather than a place of prohibitions. The reader of the text may also read from the perspective of dry and cracking land that needs water in order to produce vegetation (Gen 2). In so doing, the reader reads along the grains of Earth as a marginalized Mother.

### **2.3.1.2. The pole of interrelationships (*Mukowa*)**

The pole of interrelationship articulates the belief that the wellbeing of a person is dependent on other human beings (man and woman), earth-beings and earth-mysteries<sup>26</sup>. It emphasises respect for the value of God's creation. In the African worldview, the natural world and all that is part of God's creation do not only have intrinsic value, but they are part of the family in the household of God (*oikos*) in an ecological community (*ecodome*). Therefore, there are strict taboos that regulate human control of natural resources (Sorensen 1993:1, Colson 2006). In essence this pole summarises all the hermeneutical principles proposed by the Earth Bible project affirming that the earth has intrinsic worth/value, the inter-connectedness of life, the principle of voice, the principle of purpose, mutual custodianship and resistance (Habel 2000b).

The pole engages with the web of reciprocal relations in the household of God (*oikos*) in which subject and object are indistinguishable. In an African worldview, life that excludes dependence on the natural world, fellow human beings and earth-mysteries such as ancestors, is almost unthinkable. It would in any case contradict the foundations of an African ethic of interrelatedness of life. It can be argued that the observation of Hassel and Ruether (2000:xxxvi) that “all beings on earth make up one household (*oikos*), which benefits from an economy (*oikonomia*) that takes ecological and social stewardship (*oikonomos*) seriously” was long ago made by Africans.

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<sup>26</sup> Scientists have shown that every molecule of oxygen in the planet comes from plants. This oxygen is completely recycled by living organisms every two thousand years. See Birch (1993:18).

The hermeneutical pole may enable the reader of the biblical text to read from the perspective of the interrelatedness of life rather than from an exalted portrayal of man's place in God's creation. The biblical myths of origin affirm that all life is interrelated and should not be used as a tool to separate God from creation or to separate women and non-human forms of life from the rest of creation. This hermeneutical pole recognises that the history of interpretation has been shaped by anthropocentric views that regarded non-human forms of life as inferior. Furthermore, the Earth has been looked at as a controlled or mechanical structure consisting of independent parts. However, as Hefner (1995:121) puts it, humans are "indissolubly part of nature, fully natural". Each species and each member of each species is connected by complex webs of interrelationships. Humans, too, are dependent on trees, air and the wide diversity of life that exists in nonhuman domains on Earth.

Various communities among the Tonga have one totem or another that is protected from any kind of harmful overture from the natives. In that way the lives of people and of certain animals have been protected over the years. This practice, coupled with customs involving sacrifice and adoring, result in the preservation of nature. Africans attach ritualistic importance to nonhuman creation. Their view is, as they see it, ecocentric. Judo (1939:112) notes:

Totemism shows well one characteristic of the Bantu mind: the strong tendency to give a human soul to animals, to plants, to nature as such, a tendency which is at the very root of the most beautiful blossoms of poetry, a feeling that there is a community of substance between various forms of life.

Arguably, African indigenous culture may be characterised as friendly and open to the environment and the cosmos whereas a western dominated worldview takes a patriarchal and aggressive attitude towards nature which is the main reason for the present ecological crisis (Spijker 1994:90). Africans believe that order and cohesion can only be achieved when there is a "good relationship" between human beings and all the powers that are perceived as existing in the environment. From the perspective of Africans this web of relationships includes God, human beings, ancestors, ritual animals, plants, nonhuman objects and special places.



Indigenous Tonga people know what it means to revere nature as sacred. This is very evident in the attitudes of adherents of indigenous culture towards the earth and all that lives on it. As Mbiti (1979:48) observes, Africans believe that natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God. Thus, the well-being of human beings is intimately connected with the wellbeing of the total of creation. If human beings neglect the natural world, the consequences affect the order of God's creation in its entirety. It is for this reason that Mbiti (1977:31) observes that, if human beings abuse nature, nature will abuse them. It is true that human exploitation of the natural world has resulted in natural disasters in different parts of the world. Indigenous African culture puts restrictions in place to control the abuse of the natural world.

### **2.3.1.3. The pole of demythologisation and demystification (*Ukusefulula/ ukwilula*)**

In African culture any myth or folklore contains a moral teaching. The words used are usually symbolic (cf. Rasing 1995, Kangwa 2011, Richards 1982). The listener is expected to tease out the meaning from the myth and the words used (*ukwilula*). In the same way, the biblical text is characterized by a plurality of voices and a discernable ideo-theological diversity. Biblical writers represent different views depending on their social location, historical period and religio-political interests. Thus, it is not surprising to find in the text patriarchal and hierarchical cultural tendencies. Furthermore, the bible is a collection of literary texts, myths, folklores, sagas and legends that emerge from a people that were often the subjects of powerful empires such as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Rome (Dube 2000:15-16). The bible was later appropriated and used by western imperial powers as an instrument of domination of colonised subjects and of the natural world.

The pole of demystification recognises that the bible was initially a product of people who were on the periphery of the social strata in the ANE. Patriarchal ideologies in the text are social constructs. The task of the hermeneutic is to identify and decode such patriarchal social and religio-political constructs. As Bookchin (1982:41) observes, the effects of climate change and the ecological crisis “are too serious and the possibilities too sweeping to be resolved by customary modes of thought”. Thus, the pole uses the heuristic tool of suspicion (Fiorenza 1985) to detect patriarchal ideologies in the production of the biblical text, its reception and its

appropriation in the contemporary context. The pole is also critical of patriarchal centralised political power that has proven to have devastating effects on women, children and nonhuman nature.

#### **2.3.1.4. The pole of responsibility and care for life (*Ubuntu*)**

Reflecting on the responsibility of human beings to care for the environment, Clare Palmer (1992:74) notes:

The perceptions of stewardship have great difficulty in accommodating the idea of God's action or presence in the world. God is understood to be an absentee landlord, who has put humanity in charge of his possessions... Within the framework of this model, God's actions and presence are largely mediated through humans... God the Master leaves man in charge of his garden.

This principle reflects on the role of human beings in the earth community and on what it takes to be truly human (*ubuntu*). *Ubuntu* is a Tonga word expressing the belief that one is a human being through others. The principle of *ubuntu* articulates a basic respect and compassion for other human beings, nonhuman forms of life and ancestors or earth-mysteries (cf. Ramose 1999:49). In a Tonga matrilineal society, it is a sign of *ubuntu* to respect women. For this reason abuse of women in marriage is strongly discouraged (Colson 2006)<sup>27</sup>.

This hermeneutical pole seeks to identify and challenge ideologies of domination and exploitation as represented by the domination of humans by humans, domination of women by men and the domination of the natural world by humans. The assumption is that the domination of nature by humans has developed as a result of the domination of humans by humans (cf. Ruether 1996, Sintado 2011:108). The hermeneutical pole engages with the notion of responsible stewardship which has contributed to the marginalisation of the natural world by retaining anthropocentrism and a hierarchy of power that is based on an economic model of the ancient

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<sup>27</sup> In indigenous Tonga culture, if a woman died in labour the husband was accused of adultery. Such a person was ostracised from the community. See Colson (2006), Scudder (1962).

world (Habel 1998). As Hall (1990:41) observes, the steward (*oikonomos*) has responsibility for the planning and putting in order (*nomos*) of the affairs of the household (*oikis*). Thus, the steward is responsible for the economy (*oikonomia*) of the house. In this way, the model maintains an elevated portrayal of humans in the household of God. This view is contrary to the African ethic of what it takes to be human (*ubuntu*). The African worldview is succinctly captured in the following words of George Tinker (1992:147).

The circle is a key symbol for self-understanding, representing the whole universe and our part in it. We see ourselves as coequal participants in the circle, neither standing above nor below anything in God's creation. There is no hierarchy in our cultural context, even of species, because the circle has no beginning or ending.

The principle of responsibility and care for life helps the reader of the biblical text to view humans as equal partners with other members of the earth community. In this way an ethic of responsibility and care for life is promoted.

It has been observed that a patriarchal biblical interpretation which is predominantly western does not address the central values of African communities (Ukpong 2000, Dube 2000). The western context in which patriarchal modes of biblical interpretation were framed was nationalistic and closed to other cultures. Ideologically therefore, Christians who were conditioned by western philosophies found it hard to negotiate racial and cultural differences in non-western contexts. In addition to the oppression of the majority, western Christianity has promoted individualism, uncontrolled competition and exploitation of women and the natural world.

However, a life-giving interpretation of the biblical myths of origin recognises the respect and harmony defining the non-material order that exists in humans and among them. Such an interpretation fosters human respect for fellow human beings and for non-human forms of life. Unlike a predominantly western way of interpretation, an African indigenous way of reading the bible should integrate African values and systems that support the interrelatedness of humans and non-human forms of life. Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:548) contest the concept of *ubuntu*:

Ubuntu as a philosophical approach to social relationships must stand alongside other approaches and must be judged on the value it can add to better human relations in our complex society... The refusal to acknowledge the similarity between Ubuntu and other humanistic philosophical approaches is in part a reflection of the parochialism of ...Africans and a refusal to learn from others.

Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:548) further contend that the concept of *ubuntu* cannot support the value of nature as it exclusively focuses on human beings. On this basis they dismiss the concept as speciesist. Nonetheless, the concept of *ubuntu* (what it takes to be human) does not focus on humans as superior beings as Enslin and Horsthemke (2004:548) assert. The concept emphasises that violation of harmonious relationships between humans and other members of the Earth community can result in social and ecological problems such as droughts and climate change.

In contrast to patriarchal capitalist ideologies that value wealth over the plight of women and the natural world, *ubuntu* accepts the interdependence of humans and nonhuman forms of life. The African values of sharing and community solidarity are some of the characteristics of the concept of *ubuntu*. Given that the concept of *ubuntu* challenges individualism, the African individual and his/her identity remain part of the larger community of humans, ancestors and non-human forms of life who are considered to be all members of the living creation. The basic tenet of *ubuntu* is aptly captured in the biblical myths of origin where humans, both male and female, share a common humanity ('*adamah*'). The concept promotes the exercise of individual responsibility for the good of the person, for human community and the natural world.

African theologians have realised that concepts of African culture should be used in addressing issues arising from the African context (Ukpong 2000). Thus, African gendered and ecological values in Tonga culture can provide effective conceptual tools for redressing the current ecological crisis. African women theologians and biblical scholars need to present a sustained critique of the ecological crisis. This can be done in conversation with African culture. Human beings are born with the potential of *ubuntu* which can be realised in relationships with others. To possess *ubuntu* is to recognise that one has a place in the web of relationships between humans and non-human forms of life (cf. Battle 1997:44). The potential of *ubuntu*, inherent in humans, enables them to resist the forces in society which dehumanise.

The ecological value of the concept of *ubuntu* is succinctly captured in Desmond Tutu's words:

When Africans said, "Oh, don't treat that tree like that, it feels pain" others used to say. "Ah, they are pre-scientific; they are primitive." It is wonderful now how we are beginning to discover that it is true - that that tree does hurt, and if you hurt the tree, in an extraordinary way, you hurt yourself (Tutu 2004:29).

The relationship between human beings and the natural world should be defined by care. The myths of origin in Genesis 2 remind human beings to treat other forms of life with care. Tutu (2004:29) notes:

Caring as God would - caringly, gently and not harshly and exploitatively, with a deep reverence, for all is ultimately holy ground and we should figuratively take off our shoes for it all has the potential to be "theophanic" - to reveal the divine. Every shrub and by extension every creature has the ability to be a burning bush and to offer us an encounter with the transcendent.

The concept of *ubuntu* among the Tonga does not provide for an understanding of God, ancestors and Earth mysteries as someone or as something that is transcendent. Rather, God, ancestors and Earth mysteries are present in creation. This understanding clearly underscores that the exploitation of the natural world hurts God and other forms of life. It is for this reason that women bear the brunt of the impact of the ecological crisis and the exploitation of the natural world. The principle of *ubuntu* as such ought to foster human responsibility for taking care of earth. The principle of *ubuntu* emphasises that all God's creatures are interconnected in a sacred web of life.

A solitary person in Africa is considered sub-human. This implies the view that all human beings are part of a network of interdependence with fellow humans and the rest of God's creation. *Ubuntu* emphasises the recognition that on earth life is interdependent. One need to recognise that one's life is bound up in the lives of others. Santmire (2000:73) summarises the importance of humans supporting life on earth by emphasising that human beings should maintain "mutuality and cooperation between persons and other creatures of nature" as members of one family. Given that women suffer more than men in the context of the ecological crisis, there is a

need to employ the values of resistance found in African culture in the reading of the biblical text.

#### **2.3.1.5. The pole of resistance (*Ukotalila*)**

This pole of African biblical ecological hermeneutics allows for a sustained engagement with issues of power and equality in the biblical text with regard to marginalized forms of God's creation. The marginalised forms of God's creation find ways to survive and to resist sources of oppression. The assumption of the principle of *ukotalila* is that, when sources of oppression and exploitation are eliminated, there is still the need to remove the ideological residues of hierarchy and domination. These ideological residues may be in the form of cultural, religious, psychological or political systems of obedience and command (cf. Bookchin 1982:4). In this way, the pole offers an epistemological paradigm shift to the understanding of the notions of patriarchy and hierarchy. In indigenous Tonga culture for example, women were advised to take a trusted person into their confidence if they felt their lives were threatened in their marriage, rather than keeping quiet. This was a form of resistance and talking back (cf. Richards 1982)<sup>28</sup>. In the context of the ecological crisis, the reader of the text should pay attention to such ideologies. Furthermore, the interpretive model pays attention to the voice of the divine in relation to the creation order.

#### **2.3.1.6. The pole of the vital force (*Mwandanshi*)**

The pole of the vital force (*force vitale*) focuses on how the roles of women and the natural world in ritual and cultic functions have been suppressed or distorted in the biblical text. *Mwandanshi* (vital force) literally refers to power or energy or life force. In Africa in general and among the Tonga people in particular, this power is directly linked to Leza, a divinity that rules over humanity and the natural world and that determines human fate (cf. Setiloane 1989:34). This divine force penetrates all reality as a cosmogenic presence, but is not necessarily understood in terms of man. The divine force enables all earth-beings (human and non-human) and earth-mystery to thrive experiencing life. But for life to thrive there has to be a space of

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<sup>28</sup> Women in traditional African culture had ways of resisting oppression. For example, beads were used to resist being abused sexually. Red or black beads meant that a woman was not ready for sex. See Moyo 2009.

responsibility and care for life (*ubuntu*) and there has to be support for the interrelatedness of life (*buumo*) which can be exhibited in ecologically harmonious living.

In the light of the understanding of the vital force, it can be argued that the main inclination of religio-cultural and socio-political activities among the Tonga people is to achieve harmony with the divine force and the spiritual world(s) related to it. It is all about creating and maintaining the ecological equilibrium. Rituals are seen as a key to the effective performance of power and the attainment of ecological balance. The Earth priest and the Earth priestess perform rituals to ensure ecological harmony in the community (Colson 2006, Scudder 1962). The reader of the biblical myths of origin may for instance read the text from the perspective of Eve as a priestess or guardian of the sacred grove (Eden). Such a reading removes the condemnation that has been leveled at her by the patriarchal interpretation that focuses on the elevation of Adam.

Placid Tempels argues that the universe is interconnected through the principles of vital force that is present in every living entity. Gabriel Setiloane (1976) refers to this force as *Seriti* (the magnet which holds all things together). In other words, as Battle (1997:51) observes, this “concept assumes that a person is intelligible only by being connected to social and natural environments”.

Sallie McFague sees the earth as the body of God (1993:20). McFague (1993:20) argues that understanding the cosmos as the body of God is a way of seeing both the immanence and the transcendence of God. For McFague, God is “the inspired body of the entire universe, the animating, living spirit that produces, guides, and saves all that is” (McFague 1993:20). She defines sin as the unwillingness of humankind to allow other species the space needed to live. For her, sin is denying the reality of interconnectedness of all God’s creation. The model suggests that the body of God unites the immanence and transcendence of the divine and makes human beings and other parts of God’s creation into a sacrament of God and an image of divine transcendence (McFague 1993:20). McFague’s (1993) model resonates with the understanding of God in Africa and among the Tonga people in particular, given that it seeks to challenge dominant theological models that disconnect humanity from the earth. African indigenous culture holds that creation is a family of interconnected beings with a common origin in the

creator God. This view serves as a guiding principle for the way in which human beings should relate with other parts of God's creation.

The models suggested by Sallie McFague and Paul Santmire succeed in challenging anthropocentric conceptions of creation. However, the models are located within western mysticism and theology and therefore may not be sufficient for the African context.

The African understanding of ecology is succinctly captured by Mitchell (1977:55) when he notes:

Nature is involved in the primal spiritual ecology. This is in striking contrast to the modern technological view of nature. To Africans, nature is 'alive' in an important sense. Not only do animals have life forces, but many African peoples worship a god or goddess of the Earth and/or the sky and believe that spirits are associated with certain trees, hills, lakes and so on. As a result, the proper situation of humans in relation to nature is not exploitation or even conservation but relationship. This relationship is not passive reverence for life wherein humans treat all living things with an equal loving kindness, as did Francis of Assisi and famous missionary doctor Albert Schweitzer.

The emphasis here is on the perception that Africans do not look upon the natural world as a subject of conservation. Rather, they see the natural world from the perspective of relationship. It is therefore of interest to discuss the methodological considerations relating to this interpretive model.

#### **2.4. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF AN AFRICAN ECOLOGICAL INTERPRETIVE MODEL**

An African gendered ecological interpretive model makes a preferential option for the marginalised women and the natural world. As indicated before, this is because the majority of women, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, is impoverished, partly as a result of the ecological



crisis. Therefore, the interpretation begins with the marginalized women and the natural world (cf. Dube 2001:15).<sup>29</sup>

It is worth noting that hermeneutical reflection in the context of the ecological crisis entails a thorough consideration of the factors that may influence the interpretation of the biblical text. It is also worth noting that the bible is now being re-appropriated by the subjected indigenous people who consider it to be an important instrument of liberation. As Sintado (2011:108) puts it, “the bible was taken out of the peoples’ hands. Now they are taking it back . . . Now it is the people’s book again.” It is therefore necessary to develop an interpretive model which makes the bible relevant to the local context.

### **2.4.1. Interpretive strategies**

An African gendered ecological model considers three methodological factors. These emanate from a critical reflection on methodologies<sup>30</sup> proposed by (African) biblical scholars.

#### **2.4.1.1. African ecofeminism**

The first element is ecofeminism. This draws on the feminist political principles as a liberation movement, critiquing the oppressive structures of society which have marginalised women and the natural world (Clifford 2005:224, Rakoczy 2004:301). However, African ecofeminism goes a step further by addressing the link between the oppression of African women and the natural

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<sup>29</sup> African women biblical scholars have argued that Christianity and patriarchal colonial ideologies were interwoven and have worked to oppress women. See Dube (2000:15, 16).

<sup>30</sup> Feminist biblical scholars have produced an enormous amount of hermeneutical methodologies in the past four decades. These methodologies have attempted to re-interpret the biblical texts to counter patriarchal readings that have been used to discriminate against women (Trible 1978). Secondly, the hermeneutical approaches have sought to recover biblical texts and characters that have been ignored in patriarchal readings of the biblical text (Nadar 2001, 2006). Thirdly, the methodologies have attempted to identify androcentric politics and tendencies in the biblical text (Dube 2004).

world. Thus, the experience of African women is seen not simply as a construct, but also constructs.

#### **2.4.1.2. Social location**

The second element is culture or social location. This element mediates one's experience, worldviews and paradigms. An African ecological interpretive model draws on the resources from African culture that have often been neglected because of the privilege granted to the experience of western imperialism.

#### **2.4.1.3. Demythologisation**

The third factor is the interpretation of symbolic language. It is in language that social locators such as gender, class and speciesism are first submerged and first noticed. In short, this methodological approach holds that a life-giving hermeneutic is related to a reader's social location (cf. Thimmes 2003:134). It is essential to understand how a reader is socially located and to link this understanding with the interpretation of the biblical text.

### **2.4.2. Methodological steps**

The interpretive model considers five methodological steps when reading the biblical text.

#### **2.4.2.1. The world behind the text**

This step identifies the authorial intention of the text. The approach taken by feminist biblical scholars has been contested by some scholars. For example, Scholz (2007:28) argues that the weakness of many methodologies developed by feminist biblical scholars lies in their inability to locate the studies within the histories and cultures of the ANE. The first step in analysing the literary text, therefore, is to consider the process of interpretation in the historical context of the text.

#### **2.4.2.2. The world of the text**

This step considers various literary features of a text, its co-(n)-text and its rhetorical or ideological thrust as reflected in the text itself. The text has a voice of its own which may reflect its ideological or rhetorical intention.

#### **2.4.2.3. The world in front of the text**

This step considers the context of the reader. It takes account of contextual issues which may shape the readers views of the text (cf. West 2008). This step considers societal challenges and changing circumstances such as oppressive cultural practices (Masenya 2001) and gender violence (Nadar 2001).

#### **2.4.2.4. The world on top of the text**

This step looks at the political rhetorical thrust of the act of interpretation and appropriation of which the interpreter is aware and in relation to which he/she makes a choice. This may include the political choice of reading the text from an ecofeminist perspective.

#### **2.4.2.5. The world below the text**

This refers to the subconscious ideologies and distortions that the interpreter may not be aware of. These may include confessional traditions, creeds and liturgies. This factor shows that ecclesial traditions can exert ideological influence on the process of interpretation. They also influence the selection of ideology-critical tools (Conradie 2010:301).

In sum, an African indigenous interpretive model begins by looking at the authorial intention and how it aims to persuade the audience in Ancient Israel. It then identifies the concerns of women and the natural world in the biblical text. Next, the message of the text is appropriated in the context of the reader. These methodological considerations may help the interpreter of the biblical text to have a sustained engagement with a text in the hermeneutical cycle.

## 2.5. THE HERMENEUTICAL CYCLE OF AN AFRICAN ECOLOGICAL INTERPRETIVE MODEL

Numerous techniques have been employed in the task of interpretation, more recently moving away from attempts to identify the text's original community and its functions therein, toward an examination of its literary, rhetorical structure. In the process of interpretation biblical scholars constantly engage with the text and the community. This process of constant engagement with the text is called the hermeneutical cycle<sup>31</sup>.

Fowler (1989: 21) notes:

Reading and interpretation is always interested, never disinterested; always significantly subjective, never completely objective; always committed and therefore always political, never uncommitted and apolitical; always historically-bound, never ahistorical. The modernist dream of disinterested, objective, distanced, abstract truth is fading rapidly.

This observation indicates that the process of interpretation is ongoing. New forms of interpretation arise to challenge the dominant and traditional methodologies which no longer seem to be life-giving to people. In this case, African indigenous ecological interpretive models serve as a centripetal<sup>32</sup> biblical approach to challenge centrifugal<sup>33</sup> western modes of

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<sup>31</sup> The word "hermeneutics" comes from the Greek word "*hermeneia*", which means interpretation. The "hermeneutic circle" means the circle of interpretation. To understand a text, the interpreter must project before herself a meaning for the text. However, this meaning emerges only because the interpreter has brought some assumptions to the text. Otherwise no understanding could occur and a completely open mind understands nothing. The challenge that the biblical interpreter faces is to try to avoid biases and arbitrary fancies and to focus on the text itself to see what it means. In spite of this attempt to be objective, the meaning that the interpreter projects on the text is still shaped by her own assumptions and biases. In this sense, the interpreter cannot get rid of the biases completely, but must be aware of them and engage with the text and other scholars in the process of interpretation. See Fiorenza (1999), Exum (1996), Nadar (2003).

<sup>32</sup> The centripetal force is the force that counteracts the centrifugal force and prevents the object on which it works from "flying out", keeping it moving instead, with a uniform speed along a circular path. Centripetal force is the real force that keeps the object from flying out. Centripetal force attracts the object toward the center and prevents it

interpretation which are patriarchal and androcentric. Centripetal modes of biblical interpretation use the experience of the oppressed as their starting point. The process of interpretation moves towards the centre whereby the centre represents the oppressed. On the other hand, centrifugal modes of biblical interpretation which are predominately western move away from the centre that represents the oppressed in society.

As already pointed out, the readings of the bible, particularly of the biblical myths of origin, have been so conditioned by the history of western Christian exegesis that it is difficult to move beyond the “filters” of existing commentarial literature and methodologies. These centrifugal modes of biblical interpretation tend to appear as a norm. Furthermore, ecclesial constructs are drawn from such modes of biblical interpretation and, as a result, they appear to be “ordained by God.” Drawing on the principles of feminist biblical scholarship, African gendered ecological hermeneutics constructs an alternative grid for reading the text that retrieves the voice and the position of women and the natural word that have been suppressed in the text by patriarchal and centrifugal biblical interpretations.

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from flying out. The source of the centripetal force depends on the objects involved. For example, if an object is being swung by a rope, the centripetal force is provided by the tension in the rope and for a spinning object the force is provided by internal stress.  $F_c = mv^2 / r$ . The theory was developed by Isaac Newton in 1684. See Cohen and Smith (2002).

<sup>33</sup> The principle of the centrifugal force states that an object travelling in a circle behaves as if it is experiencing an outward force. This force, known as the centrifugal force, depends on the mass of the object, the speed of rotation, and the distance from the centre. The more massive the object, the greater the force; the greater the speed of the object, the greater the force; and the greater the distance from the centre, the greater the force. Centrifugal is derived from a Latin word meaning to “centre fleeing”. It describes the tendency of an object following a curved path to fly outwards, away from the centre of the curve. The tendency to fly outwards is observed because objects that are moving in a straight line tend to continue moving in a straight line. This tendency is called inertia and makes objects resistant to the force that makes them move in a curve. In other words, centrifugal force is not a real force but the inertia of motion. However, it appears real to the object being rotated. For example, an object traveling in a circular motion is constantly accelerating and is therefore never in an inertial frame of reference.  $F_c = mv^2 / r$ , Where  $F_c$ = centrifugal force,  $m$ =mass,  $v$ =speed, and  $r$ =radius. This theory was developed by Christiaan Hygens in 1659. See Landes (2000:128).

An African gendered ecological hermeneutical cycle creates space for engagement with factors that contribute to the subjugation of women and the natural world. For example readings of Genesis 1-3 have enjoyed a long and diverse history of patriarchal interpretation. Through the hermeneutical circle, an interpretation performed outside a predominantly western scholarly guild is done. In this way, an alternative hermeneutical procedure is generated by the understanding of the subjugation of women and the natural world and by positive values in indigenous African culture. Such a reading deconstructs, tears down, any fixed textual stability, confirming that truth is empty of any fixed essence and in the final analysis empowers women and the natural world.

Fiorenza (1999:101) refers to this hermeneutical cycle as “the interpretive dance”. For Fiorenza, this is an ongoing hermeneutical spiral described by readers and texts in constant re-engagement with one another as interpretive contexts change. In other words, in the hermeneutical cycle the interpreter and the text are in constant motion, engaging, disengaging and re-engaging. Fulfilling the need to engage suspiciously with the text constantly, the interpreter should detect the voice of resistance and of talking back. This creates awareness of the way embedded patriarchy has shaped the production, transmission and appropriation of the biblical text.

## **2.6. TALKING BACK IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION**

Biblical interpretation is not necessarily found in particular interpretive practices, but in the exercise of particular interpretive virtues which characterise the Christian interpreter’s relationships, both with the biblical text and with other interpreters and interpretive approaches. Most importantly, the task of ethical interpretation is never complete. Rather, the interpreter should commit herself to an ongoing dialogue that incorporates both challenge and affirmation. Dialogue is a two-way process. Watson (1994:107) sees all genuine communication as dialogical rather than monological. In monologue, individuals are manipulated. The domination of conversation by one party prevents the other from asserting its own interests and concerns. In dialogue, however, “space is conceded to the other so that she may become not only a respondent to the questions but also an initiator”.

Patte (1995b:25) similarly affirms the need for interpretive dialogue whereby each side affirms the legitimacy of the other whilst retaining its sense of self. As Patte (1995) observes, the problem with predominantly western modes of biblical interpretation is that they have for a long time been absolutised within academic scholarship to the exclusion of others. Thus, new models of biblical interpretation are necessary to make a contribution to the dialogue. Only when we recognise what makes us different from others can we acknowledge that which makes them different from us.

In the light of the ecological crisis and the oppression that women in Africa are subjected to, it is necessary that a biblical hermeneutic of protest to patriarchy and oppression is constructed. In indigenous African culture, protest and talking back was one of the tools that women used to fight for their liberation and to speak as equals with men. La Fontaine (1986:164,146) shows that in indigenous African culture women had a way of protesting against patriarchy. La Fontaine (1986) describes obscenity, mockery and licentious behaviour of women during initiation rites as a reversal of a patriarchal construction of what a woman should be. In this sense, initiation rites and ecological rituals which women presided over served as an opposition to cultural values that subordinate women to men and it implies a reordering of society.

Hazemba (2002:2) notes that Tonga women at the arrival of Christianity protested against the new religion because it emphasised the leadership roles of men while sidelining women. As a result women formed indigenous churches that upheld their cultural values. The Lumpa Church of Alice Mulenga Lenshina is another example of African women establishing a church in protest against western forms of Christianity (Hinfelaar 1994:194). Given that there are cultural values in African culture that encourage women to speak and participate in dialogue, the current practices of patriarchy among the Tonga people appear to have been fuelled by external factors such as a patriarchal interpretation of the biblical myths of origin and interaction with patrilineal societies.

As a response to these patriarchal ideologies, a biblical hermeneutics that is life-giving to Tonga women in the context of the ecological crisis ought to integrate the value of dialogue and of

protest where need be. Phiri and Nadar (2010:10) observe that talking back can be used by women as a form of protest against patriarchy to reclaim their voice and the power to speak as equals with men. Biblical hermeneutics can serve the same purpose. It is for this reason that attempts by African women biblical scholars to read the bible using the experience of Africans to challenge patriarchy is admirable. Maluleke (2001: 238) is correct in his assertion that the call for equality between men and women by African women theologians is not foreign to the African context as some male theologians have claimed. And so, an African gendered ecological interpretive model also attempts to negotiate gender and feminism as political discourses in theory and praxis.

## **2.7. NEGOTIATING GENDER AND FEMINISM WITHIN AFRICAN ECOLOGICAL INTERPRETIVE APPROACHES**

There are different views about what constitutes feminist biblical scholarship and who belongs to it. Anderson (1992:105) reasons that feminist criticism is distinguished from historical and literary approaches primarily because it is neither a discipline nor a method but rather a variety of approaches informed by the interests and concerns of feminism as a worldview and a political enterprise. Exum (1998a: 207) also argues that feminism is “not a method of reading, but rather both a set of political positions and strategies and a contested intellectual terrain.”

Despite differing views by scholars, feminist biblical scholars use diverse methodologies to push forward their feminist political agenda. The contribution of feminist biblical scholarship is well summarised in Janice Capel Anderson’s words:

Each feminist critic is a unique pearl with a unique colour and shape formed out of the variables of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, nationality, education, age, religion, and personal experience. Some of us use primarily literary, others historical or sociological methods. Together we form intertwining strands of pearls, pearls of great price (cited in Anderson 1992:105).



Collaboration and cooperation has been a notable feature of feminist scholarship and some feminists argue that feminist discourse itself needs to be superseded by an inclusive discipline of gender studies that includes insights from masculinist as well as feminist scholars (Exum 1998a:224-25, Bach 1993:192-93)<sup>34</sup>. For this reason, in Africa, some men have worked hand in hand with women. Chitando (2010:124) observes that men have a role to play in the emancipation of women as gender activists. For Chitando, feminism should be a social vision which accommodates women and men seeking the liberation of women from all forms of oppression. The step taken by African feminist biblical scholars to include male allies in the discourse brings a new wave of feminism.

This feature of feminist biblical scholarship is of fundamental concern for issues of gender in the interpretation of biblical texts, rather than in the adoption of any particular critical method. Scholars select methods which cohere with their fundamental commitments and that further their project of revealing and combatting gender bias in both biblical texts and biblical interpretation. For this reason African biblical scholars have used different names to suit their political interest in biblical interpretation. Nadar (2001) uses African womanist and Masenya (2001) uses *Bosadi* (womanist). The result of these approaches is that the impact of feminist criticism within biblical studies has been broad and cumulative. A significant element in this development has been a broadening of critical focus to include not only texts but their processes and methods of interpretation as well.

As Murphy (1999: xxiii) and Maluleke (2001) observe, the first major challenge to feminism is its fragmentation and dissonance produced by the proliferation of perspectives and approaches. But this challenge is not limited to feminism. It is a constructionist feature of postmodern scholarship. Secondly, it assumes that for feminist interpretation to be done successfully, the interpreter must be an insider. This means that the interpreter must be a woman who has gone through women's experience of oppression. In other words, it is difficult to do feminist biblical interpretation without going through the joys and the problems of being a woman in a patriarchal society. This view poses a challenge in the sense that there are diverse experiences of women.

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<sup>34</sup> This study uses the word gender to refer to power dynamics between men and women. However, the study focuses on women given that they are the ones who are generally marginalised in society.

Thirdly, it is difficult to accommodate the ordinary (non-academic) readers of the bible who reread the bible from their own experience as women. Some women in Africa for example will reread the bible from their experience of polygamy or of barrenness, but they will do so in a way different from the feminist hermeneutics proposed by western feminist scholars.

## **2.8. CONCLUSION**

This chapter seeks to propose an African indigenous interpretive model that is life-giving to women and the natural world in the context of the ecological crisis. A review of the ecological hermeneutical principles proposed by Ernst Conradie (2010), male biblical scholars in the Earth Bible project (Habel 2000b), and the approach employed by western ecofeminist biblical scholars (Reuther 1996, 2011) is undertaken. The chapter highlights how these hermeneutics are extended and/or challenged through an African feminist ecological hermeneutic.

This hermeneutic model provides an analytical tool to help biblical scholars to engage with the ecological crisis. The model is premised on the assumption that African Indigenous Knowledge Systems have values to offer for the reading of the bible in the context of the current ecological crisis. In the next chapter I show the gendered and ecological resources that can be retrieved from indigenous Tonga culture to inform the reading of the bible in the context of the ecological crisis.

## CHAPTER THREE

### GENDERED ECOLOGICAL VALUES IN INDIGENOUS TONGA CULTURE

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

Research shows that certain cultural activities serve as homeostatic mechanisms to keep society in balance with its physical environment (Schreiter 1985:47). Some cultural activities, such as rituals, are related to the environment and may have a bearing on people's worldviews. In other words, the configuration of the worldview and social relationships explain the choices that cultures make and some of the practices in which people engage.

This chapter discusses indigenous gendered values and knowledge systems that can be retrieved from indigenous Tonga culture and that may empower women in the context of the current ecological crisis. The chapter explores ecological and gender values in territorial shrines, the Leza cult and rain-calling rituals. The roles and ecological dimensions of ritual officiants and myths of origin are also explored.

#### 3.2. THE ORIGIN OF THE TONGA PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA

The Tonga people of Zambia live in the southern part of the country. They are considered as the earliest inhabitants of present day Zambia. In precolonial times, they had a culture that was based on their closeness to nature, especially to the Zambezi River (Moreau 1950:34-38). It is for this reason that they are called "people of the great River". The word 'Tonga' is believed to have been derived from *Kutonga*, a Shona word meaning "being independent" or "to rule" (Lancaster 1974:724). This suggests that originally the Tonga people did not have a centralised political structure but lived in independent family units. The Tonga were originally known as BaDonga (people of the river) (Moreau 1950:34-38) which later became BaTonga.

As the early inhabitants of present day Zambia, the Tonga people are divided into two groups: The Plateau Tonga and the Tonga of the Gwembe<sup>35</sup> valley, also known as Bawe (Cliggett 2003:543). The Tonga of the Gwembe valley and the Shona people of Zimbabwe are closely related and separated by the Zambezi River. The Tonga people of Simamba who were resettled on the Zambian side during the construction of the Kariba dam are part of the Tonga of the Gwembe valley.

Historians (Matthews 1976, Roberts 1976, Chaplin 1960, Fagan 1966) have all suggested that the Tonga people of Zambia originated from the Bantu-speaking people who moved into southern Zambia probably late in the first millennium. It is believed that the Tonga people encountered the earliest inhabitants, the San people (“Bush men”), from whom they learnt to treat an eland as a ritual animal. This reconstruction of the origin of the Tonga people is supported by the perception that Tonga culture, before the arrival of European imperialism, resembled the cultures, described around 1900, of speakers of Niger-Congo languages of which the Bantu languages are a branch (Roberts 1976).

Research also suggests that different Tonga ethnic groups (Bantu Botatwe) settled in Zambia at different times. Some came from the Luba-Lunda Empire in what is today the Democratic Republic of the Congo and others came from the Rozvi Empire in present day Zimbabwe (Lancaster 1974:711-713, 724). Despite lacking a common origin, western anthropologists have studied the Tonga of the Gwembe valley as a social and cultural unit (Scudder 1962, Colson 1971)<sup>36</sup>.

Both the Tonga of the Gwembe valley and the Plateau Tonga had rain shrines where women served as guardians. Ehret (2002:89) observes that the earliest speakers of Niger-Congo languages moved into central and southern Africa bringing a religion that centred on territorial cults and ancestor veneration. The rain shrines among the Tonga people of Zambia functioned

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<sup>35</sup>Gwembe is the Ndebele name for the Zambezi River. Thus, the Tonga of the Gwembe valley are also referred to as the Tonga of the Zambezi Valley. They are found in Siavonga, Gwembe and Sinazongwe districts of Zambia.

<sup>36</sup> There are also Tonga people in Malawi and Zimbabwe (Scudder 1962 and Colson 1962). In this study the word “Tonga people of Zambia” is used to refer to the Plateau Tonga and the Tonga of the Gwembe valley.

much like the rain shrines among Bantu people of Niger-Congo and the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Given the similarities between the Tonga people and other Bantu cultures in Africa, it is of interest to analyse the political organisation of the Tonga people in the precolonial era.

### 3.3. TONGA POLITICAL ORGANISATION

In precolonial times, the Tonga people did not have a centralised political leadership (Lancaster 1974:724, Colson 2006, Scudder 1962). Organised chieftainships were absent in Tonga religious-political life. In this sense, Tonga were an amorphous or stateless society. The term “*mwami*” was originally used to refer to sacred spirits (*basangu*) or spirit mediums (people possessed by *basangu* spirits) or the earth priest (*sikatongo*). The term was used for political chiefs in the colonial era.

Mathews (2007) suggests that raiding cultures in the nineteenth century forced the Tonga people to organise themselves around earth priests (*sikatongo*). Using rain-calling rituals (*lwiindi*), as rallying points the earth-priests managed to build communities that were able to defend themselves against raiding and against European imperialism. As Mathews (2007:15) observes, “there are signs that certain Tonga groups adapted to the exigencies of trade and defence in the nineteenth century, and in places earlier, by strengthening and secularising leadership positions”. For example, Chief Monze used his rain-calling powers to address social and political challenges of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In other words, the Tonga people had an ecopolitical state. The ecological leadership of the ancestors, the ritual wife and the *basangu* mediums as the guardians of the land provided the basis for the office of the earth priest (*sikatongo*) as both a political and an ecological leader. O’Brien (1983:23-42) notes that in times of crisis the ecological leadership of the earth-priest became a political leadership.

The Tonga society was matrilineal and knew no patriarchal centralised political system (Colson 2006:28). Lancaster (1974:724) observes that the Tonga people never had chiefs “except Mambo [a Rozvi king] south of the Zambezi whom they ran from so that they could be free people”. It is for this reason that they were called Tongas<sup>37</sup> by the Shona people. Tim Mathews (2007) argues

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<sup>37</sup> The name Tonga in Shona means “grunters” or “people who rebel against their Chief”.

along similar lines that the name Tonga should have been derived from the Shona description of outsiders. It can be concluded that the Tonga people had a precolonial acephalous political structure that was conditioned by a deep desire for personal autonomy and equality. A hereditary chieftainship among the Tonga was established in the course of the nineteenth century.

Unlike other tribes in central Africa, such as the Shona, the Lozi and the Ndebele who had centralised patriarchal political systems, the Tonga lived in flexible territorial (neighbourhood and homestead) units headed by the earth-priest and the earth-priestess (Colson 2006:28). In other words, the religio-political organisation of the Tonga emphasized a society of strong groups rather than a hierarchical centralised state. With this matrilineal background of the precolonial Tonga society in mind, we need to investigate the position of women in Tonga culture.

### **3.4. WOMEN IN TONGA INDIGENOUS CULTURE**

Women in matrilineal Tonga society were in a considerably high position (Hazemba 2002:3). Elizabeth Colson (2006) states that in Tonga indigenous religio-culture women and men enjoyed equal religious power at the time of the arrival of the missionaries. However, there is also evidence that in some Tonga communities women had more power than men with the exception of the earth priest Monze who was the highest authority at the Gonde shrine (cf. Hazemba 2002:3). Tonga women apparently were unrestricted in their activities and there were no circumstances in which they were regarded as ritually impure. Women played leading roles at all territorial shrines and during all rain-calling rituals at the *malende*. When they died shrines were constructed on their behalf and thus women as well as men became ancestral spirits (*mizimo*). Both women and men performed religio-cultural functions during rain-calling rituals and in other communal activities (Hazemba 2002:3).

The Tonga plateau and the Gwembe valley were among the areas that attracted a number of missionaries at the dawn of the colonisation of Northern Rhodesia (Scudder 1962). Women were at the beginning less attracted to Christianity than men (Hazemba (2002:2). This was because the missionaries condemned most of the gendered and ecological rituals and values of African culture in which the lives of women as leaders of sacred emblems (*imbusa*) were deeply rooted.

Rituals in which women played a leading role included female initiation rites and rain-calling rituals (*lwiindi*) while women also functioned as guardians of sacred groves. Later on, more women converted to Christianity than men. The Tonga plateau and the Gwembe valley therefore is a crucial area for the study of Christianity's contribution to the changing positions of women in African indigenous culture and the subjugation of the natural world. It is curious that this subject, until very recently, has received very little attention from gender analysts, theologians and biblical scholars alike.

While some historical, anthropological and theological research has been conducted in the area (Kaoma 2010, Hazemba 2002, Colson 2006), little work has been done to determine the contribution made by a predominantly western interpretation of the bible to the marginalization of women and the natural world among the Tonga people of Zambia. In this study I attempt to fill at least a part of this gap in African biblical scholarship by exploring how a biblical interpretive model informed by Tonga Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) can challenge patriarchy and the subjugation of the natural world.

In pre-colonial times, Tonga's religious beliefs centered on the worship of the God of Creation (*Leza*) and on the veneration of ancestors at the homestead on a daily basis and, when there was a need, at community and territorial shrines known as *malende*. Ritual leaders, mostly women, performed all religious rites. The leaders who performed these roles belonged to the same matrilineal clan, except at homestead rituals. The advent of Christianity gradually weakened Tonga traditional religio-cultural concerns as Christianity gained converts. While both men and women converted to Christianity, the roles of males in the context of religion were more dominant. Hazemba (2002:2) notes that, when Christianity was first introduced among the Tonga people of Zambia, women were brought into the church for the sake of keeping the enlightened new male converts in the church. The missionaries persuaded the men and encouraged them to enroll in schools. Girls only became members of congregations once the missionaries saw the need to teach them housekeeping so that they would become capable wives for the newly converted young men. This was aimed at discouraging the young men from going back to African culture. The mission's policy was, in short, to prepare girls for home management and marriage. Given this patriarchal attitude of the missionaries to Tonga women and claims that

missionaries often supported the colonial masters in their exploitation of women and the natural world, it is necessary to examine the influence of the patriarchal principles of western civilisation on Tonga women in Zambia.

### **3.5. INFLUENCE OF WESTERN CIVILISATION ON WOMEN AND THE NATURAL WORLD AMONG THE TONGA PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA**

Christianity and western imperialism have left the Tonga people a dual legacy, dual in the sense that it has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, Christianity is responsible for ending some bad cultural practices in Africa. On the other hand, western imperialism destroyed values in African indigenous culture that supported the interdependence of all created life. In addition, the process of colonization resulted in the unearthing of minerals and raw materials in Africa and in taking land from the indigenes.

Nash (1989:91) argues that Christianity played (and is still playing) a major role in encouraging western imperialism and capitalism<sup>38</sup> which have contributed to the exploitation of nonhuman forms of life for the benefit of humanity<sup>39</sup>. Nash' observation (1989:91), reveals three important

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<sup>38</sup> Capitalism is an economic system with the following characteristics. First, the means of production are owned by individuals or companies. Second, the workforce, goods, and the means of production are traded in free markets. Third, the profits are either distributed to the owners or invested in technology and industry. Lastly, the workforce consists of wage laborers. Most scholars agree with Max Weber that capitalism started in the eighteenth century around the same time as the Enlightenment. However, some elements of capitalism can be found much earlier than that in rural areas where monasteries began to rationalize economic life. While it is true that monks in some monasteries began to break away from the ethos of the "community of goods" that characterised sectarian groups like the Qumran community, protestant capitalism also played its part in fostering capitalist notions. See Hawken (1993:32, 72).

<sup>39</sup> Scholars in this field can be categorised into three groups: constructionists who seek to reconstruct the ecological wisdom in Christianity, apologists who seek to defend Christianity from the argument that Christianity is ecologically bankrupt, and the revisionists who seek to revise the teaching of Christianity by revisiting the major premises of Christian tradition. Other scholars have focused on the role of religion in providing a solution to the crisis. As such, they dialogue with other religious traditions and integrate them into Christianity. See Daneel (1991), Hart (2006).



points. First of all, there is a relationship between western Christian expansion in Africa and a capitalist economy. Second, the expansion of western Christianity has largely contributed to the establishment of religio-economic systems that exploit women and the natural world. In the third place Christianity has contributed to the exploitation of the natural world through its patriarchal and predominantly western bible interpretation.

However, some scholars contest the view that Christianity is responsible for the current ecological crisis and that it is porous and selective (Santmire 1985, Nash 1991). They insist that there are economic and technological factors that have contributed to the crisis. They further insist that the claim that Christianity has nothing to offer to the resolving of the ecological crisis is porous and does not address the ecological premises represented in Christian traditions. In agreement with this view, Rosemary Ruether (2011) draws on sacramental theology to promote the sacredness of the natural world. While it is true that a serious examination of the Christian tradition suggests that it contains ecological wisdom that can be retrieved, generally the Christian doctrine and teachings have to a large extent supported imperialistic tendencies. Lynn White (1967:1205) remarks that modern science emanated from the notions perpetuated by the medieval natural theology and the interpretation of the bible that emphasizes human mastery of nature. In other words, Christianity fostered the notions of exploiting land and the natural world for human advancement due to the anthropocentrism of the dominant theology of the time. The nineteenth century missionaries who came to Africa, and to Zambia in particular, were influenced by these notions.

McFague (2000:117) observes that the capitalist worldview is rooted in the protestant Reformation and in eighteenth century economic theories in Europe. No doubt, the Christian church provided a platform for the growth of the capitalist market. Firstly, the church owned nearly a third of all the land in Europe. Secondly, the new emphasis on clerical celibacy played an important role in advancing capitalism by strongly emphasising the separation between office and person in the church. This emphasis broke the traditional link between family (and marriage) and property that had been fostered by feudalism. Thirdly, the Christian church provided Europe with a highly motivated, literate, specialised and mobile labor force. Thus, the high medieval

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church had provided the conditions for the market to emerge. Furthermore, these notions supported individual achievement rather than community ties (McFague 2000:117). Due to these developments, exploitative attitudes towards nature became widespread.

The preconditions of a capitalist ideology included the availability of a mobile labour force, investment, the accumulation of long-term capital and wealth creation (Hawken1993:6-17, 32). In addition, the growth of capitalism contributed to technological discoveries. This was made possible by freedom of enterprise, markets, and competition. In all these respects, women were not considered as only men were employed as cheap labour.

The colonial state was characterised by patriarchal authoritarian patterns, designed to promote the extraction of natural resources and the control of labour. Hirmer (1981: x) notes that colonial states were marked by the paradox of having strong patriarchal and coercive powers and these were often sanctioned by Christianity. Such a religious approval sanctified patriarchal leadership and therefore a leader was, in a way, recognised as a divine nominee invested with all available power and accountable to the creator alone. In other words, the absolute authority (*patria potestas*) of the *pater familias* (head of the family) was seen as ordained by God.

At the heart of capitalist technological ideologies is religious sanctioning (Korten 2006:12-18). As already noted, the main factors for the success of capitalism and western civilization are mainly religious in character. Firstly, the religious value attached to hard and good manual work. Secondly, the Christian theological separation of the Creator from the creature resulting in the subordination of nonhuman to man. Thirdly, the Judeo-Christian sense of linear time as opposed to cyclical time which reinforces the concept and the ideology of progress. And lastly, respect for the market. Following this trajectory, it is evident that anti-nature attitudes that have contributed to global warming and ecological crisis are religiously conditioned.

It is therefore not surprising that the European missionaries supported the philosophy of commerce. Following this philosophy the natural world was considered as a “resource”<sup>40</sup> to be exploited for profit. In modern economic theory the term “resource” is conditioned by an insatiable desire for profit. In this sense the natural world is treated as raw material that serves in the production process in order to make a profit for the benefit of humanity.

The nineteenth century Christian missionary movement to Africa was conditioned by this capitalist philosophy of civilisation, evangelisation and commerce (Porter 1985:597-621, Tengtenga 2012). Missionaries such as David Livingstone<sup>41</sup> argue that Africans would abandon the slave trade once they were exposed to commerce, civilisation and Christianity. Whereas some missionaries promoted civilisation as an instrument for Christianising Africa, imperial governments as well as some missionaries emphasised the promotion of commerce. To them, the value of Africa consisted in its natural world which they treated as raw material for industries in the west. Consequently, Christianity and European imperialism worked together to promote human exploitation of the natural world in Africa for profit.

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<sup>40</sup> The words most commonly used to indicate the natural world is “natural resources”. Hart (2006:150) suggests the use of the term “natural goods” or “earth goods” in place of natural resources. For Hart, these terms accurately describe the abiotic aspects of nature that humans use for their own benefit. While it is true that the terms “natural goods” and “earth goods” describe the abiotic aspects of nature, the terms still carry business connotations. It is for this reason that the present study prefers “nonhuman nature” or “nonhuman forms of life”. The usage follows that of Clifford (2005) and Ruether (1996, 2011) and seeks to emphasise that the natural world is there to serve an ecosystemic purpose that benefits the entire biotic community rather than to serve human patriarchal interests.

<sup>41</sup> David Livingstone believed that Christianity, commerce and civilisation would support countries in Africa and a way to end the slave trade (Livingstone 1857). He believed that an involvement of Britain and Africa in trade links and commerce as well as Christian influence would bring money to African countries. While ending the slave trade was a good thing, the emphasis on commerce implied the exploitation of the natural world for human benefit. Livingstone once said: “Our first objective was to explore the Zambesi [Zambezi], its mouths and tributaries, with a view to their being used as highways for commerce and Christianity to pass into the vast interior of Africa.” In this way David Livingstone and other missionaries opened up Africa to the west for commerce, civilisation and colonialism.

Hence, the expansion of western imperialism with its focus on civilisation and commerce resulted in the exploitation of the ecological landscape in its African context. This development should be given sustained attention if the impact of the ecological crisis is to be reversed. Since Christianity is the most prominent religion in Zambia (Mwanakatwe 1994), and as the Tonga Christian community regards the bible as sacred and authoritative (Mwanakatwe 1994:41, Gifford 1998:191), the patriarchal and anti-nature worldview of the missionaries and of Christianity in general asks for an urgent investigation.

The early Christian missionaries among the Tonga people encouraged European settlements as a way to promote civilization (Machila 1990). Based on a patriarchal interpretation of the biblical myths of origin (Gen. 1:26-28), European missionaries believed that the natural world is a resource created primarily for the benefit of humankind. As McFague (2000:117) and Haynes (2007) have observed, these notions supported the establishment of environmentally destructive economic ideologies. For this reason Christianity has been linked to factors that have contributed to the ecological crisis. Conradie (2006:64) notes:

Following Weber's famous thesis on the historical correlation between Protestantism and capitalism, there is a further need to explore the complicity of a protestant ethos and the theological convictions supporting the establishment of environmentally destructive economic systems.

Among the Tonga of Zambia, territorial and ecological shrines were destroyed to make space for European settlements and for the construction of the Kariba (Lagus1959:37). Tonga sacred groves and forests were destroyed (Lagus1959:37). Thousands of animals were killed or displaced. Lagus (1959:37) and Weinrich (1977) show that, during the process of European settlement and the construction of the dam about fifteen Tonga Chiefdoms, located in the Zambezi valley, abandoned their homes. These activities by colonialists in collaboration with missionaries illustrate the negative impact of western civilisation on African culture.

O'Brien and O'Brien (1996) and Ute (1998:299) state that territorial cults among the Tonga people of Zambia no longer function as they used to before the arrival of Christian missionaries and western imperialism. Firstly, the early missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

accompanied Tonga converts when they went to destroy territorial shrines. Trees and structures at the shrines were taken down by the converts. Secondly, Christian converts refused to participate in communal rituals and ignored associated taboos. The missionaries taught Tonga converts that ancestors were non-existent and that spirits associated with nature were forces of the devil (Ute 1998:299). Attending rituals at shrines was considered to represent demon worship. In other words, Christianity and western education promoted anti-nature attitudes and scepticism as regards territorial shrines.

Thirdly, some shrines were destroyed to create space for European farms and settlements. As Machila (1990) shows, people now follow European methods of farming and they no longer wait for the earth-priest and the ritual wife to initiate farming activity. They plant, harvest and eat the farm produce as it suits them. Fourthly, territorial shrines were destroyed in the Gwembe valley during the construction of the Kariba dam in the Zambezi River. Land shrines linked to displaced communities were bulldozed or left to be flooded as the lake rose. After the resettlement, the reinstated shrines never regained their reputation of efficacy.

Lastly, some shrines that survived to the present day have been commercialised by the governed. For example, while the Gonde territorial shrine still functions as a land shrine for the surrounding community during times of drought, the Lwiindi ceremony in the dry season at the shrine has been commercialised to celebrate the unity of Tonga ethnic groups in Zambia (O'Brien and O'Brien 1996). In other words, the ceremony is now a tourist attraction to bring income to the country.

Given that the African worldview supports the interdependence of both human and non-human forms of life as clearly demonstrated by African theologians (Magesa 1997, Phiri 1996, Mbiti 1969), the influx of western civilization and commerce has undermined the balanced relationship between humans and nonhuman forms of life that existed in Africa before the nineteenth century. The African worldview never supported destruction of the natural world for individual gain (Magesa 1997). The emphasis on the sacredness of nature in indigenous religious Tonga culture has been negated by Christianity with its Judeo-Christian patriarchal interpretation of the biblical dominion motif. Thus, Christianity has significantly contributed to the marginalization of the natural world.

The impact of European civilisation on the natural world ultimately leading to an ecological crisis cannot be fully appreciated without considering the effect on women and their marginalisation. The impact of climate change and the ecological crisis in poor countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America has been associated with western imperialism and the capitalist globalised economy (Mosala 1986, Sintado 2011, Nash 1989:91). As social phenomenon, globalization has primarily been associated with the extension of the forms of production, the mobility of capital, the rapid spread of information and the penetration of western culture into modern indigenous cultures.

Political imperialism, cultural aggression and economic integration are some of the features of the larger phenomenon of globalisation with which the realities of ecological crisis and climate change are interwoven. Christians as members of the earth community are compelled by the ecological crisis to reconsider gender and ecological justice in theological and biblical discourse. Seen in this light, the ecological crisis touches on critical tools of theology and biblical interpretation. It challenges the dominant modes of biblical interpretation which are patriarchal and predominantly western. It also challenges the dominant notions of how humans conceive of themselves in relation to other forms of creation.

Feminist theologians argue that an interaction of the threefold oppression of women is evident in the politics of economics and imperialism. The three elements are gender, race and class. Fiorenza (1987: xviii-xix) reminds us that the suffering of the majority of women is found in “structural interconnections between the gendered economic system of capitalistic patriarchy, its racist underpinnings, and women’s global poverty.” In other words, the poverty and suffering of women is attributed to the process of colonization and systemic exploitation of women and the natural world. It is for this reason that the global economy which is based on unjust relations that have roots in socio-political and religio-cultural structures needs to be addressed.

To understand how the process of colonisation has disadvantaged Tonga women, it is instructive to read the works of Latin American female liberation theologians. They have conceptualised justice in terms of preferential options for the poor (Sintado 2011, Gutierrez 1988:12). Similarly,

black theology in Africa has given sustained attention to the poverty of marginalised black people (Mosala 1986). However, while, these theological trends offer a strong theological basis for the addressing of economic injustice, their scope does not allow for dealing with ecological issues and the marginalisation of women in sub-Saharan Africa.

First of all, the generic term “poor” is problematic as it is abstract. Putting women in the category of the “poor” as Vuola (2002:141-155) eloquently contends, does not necessarily interrogate the fact that poverty “has a female face”. This failure to integrate the gendering of economics in the discourse on the politics of economics marginalises women’s experiences and perspectives. As it is, women in sub-Saharan Africa suffer not only on account of poverty but also on account of gender. Thus, the preferential option for the poor should be an option for poor women.

Dealing with the marginalisation of women in the context of the ecological crisis requires the unmasking of the mechanisms that effect their oppression. There is also a need to uncover the dichotomy characterising the perceptions of private and public that contribute to the construction of power structures that oppress women. In this way justice for women will be understood as “equality of equals” (Gebara 1996:142-158, 2002:141-155).

Secondly, justice as an option for poor women in Africa has to be understood in the context of the interrelatedness of life, be it human or nonhuman. For example, women in sub-Saharan Africa are severely affected by climate change, due to their closeness to the natural world (cf. Moyo 2009). Gendering the quest for economic and ecological justice for women in Africa, therefore, involves expanding the usual feminist analytical categories of women, namely class, race and sex, to include women who share their experience of oppression with the natural world. To achieve this, theological and biblical discourses should integrate gender and ecological issues. In the case of the Tonga people of Zambia, a clear understanding of the role the process of colonization played in the subjugation of women and the natural world is of paramount importance. In that context the gender and ecological dimensions of Tonga indigenous culture that have been marginalised in the process of colonisation and western Christian missionary movement among the Tonga people of Zambia need to be investigated.

### 3.6. GENDER AND ECOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF TERRITORIAL CULTS

The religio-cultural shrines associated with women are some of the cultural values of Tonga people that were negatively impacted by Christianity and colonialism (cf. Bujo 1992, Dube 1997, 2002). Tonga cultural values that were of significant importance in ensuring ecological wellbeing were destroyed.

It has been generally agreed by many scholars that temples never existed among most tribes of southern Africa (Zahan 1979, Colson 2006, Scofeelears 1978). Zahan (1979:19, 20) suggests a number of possible reasons for the absence of temples. He asserts that the climate of southern Africa made a shelter when people gathered for public rituals unnecessary. Furthermore, he attributes the absence of temples to the unwillingness of shifting cultivators to expend effort on building when they knew they would soon move on. In addition, he argues, where descent groups such as clans and lineages provide the basic ordering of society, multiple places of worship are created diminishing the need for distinctive temples (Zahan 1979:20). Furthermore temples are unlikely to be built when ritual calendars are based on the rhythm of the seasons and the succession of natural events rather than on the cycles of development of human or divine beings.

However, Zahan's statement that temples never existed among southern African tribes cannot be substantiated. Firstly, there is evidence of temples among the Shona people of Zimbabwe (Mbiti 1970:95). Secondly, temples have been built by other tropical and sub-tropical shifting cultivators. On the other hand, Zahan (1979) is right when he attributes the absence of temples to the unwillingness of people to be cut off from nature at the moment of appeal during rituals. This is a valid observation in relation to the Tonga people of Zambia. During rain-calling rituals at the Lwiindi ceremony, the participants' exposure to the sun is essential to authenticate their cries for rain. Similarly, their feet have to rest on the bare earth when they study the sky for signs of rain and appeal to *basangu* spirits.



Although the Tonga people do not build temples, libation and offerings to the ancestors usually take place in a shrine that sometimes is an enclosed space. In other words, although the Tonga people do not build temples in the form of imposing structures, certain sites are regarded as appropriate for approaching spiritual entities. Such sites are called shrines (*malende*). Shrines may be natural sites associated with power or a small structure built at the grave site of a former leader such as an earth-priest or a room built in the courtyard of the homes of the earth priest or of *basangu* mediums.

Among the Tonga of Zambia, territorial (community) shrines were places of appeal to the spirits associated with natural phenomena, particularly rain. Anthropologists have concluded that the Tonga people had no shrines devoted to the creator God (*Leza*) (Colson 2006:66). However, a closer look at territorial shrines and at the rain-calling rituals reveals that *Leza* was involved in these. In the following section two different types of territorial shrines and their ecological significance are discussed.

### **3.6.1. Territorial shrines**

In indigenous pre-colonial Tonga communities, territorial shrines (*malende* or *kokalia*) served people who were kindred living in common territory (*cisi*). Ecological rituals serving the kindred took place at territorial shrines. There are two types of territorial shrines: places of power and land shrines.

#### **3.6.1.1 Places of power**

Some territorial shrines are natural sites such as the Victoria Falls (*musio-tunya*) while others are at grave sites. Territorial shrines associated with natural forces are called places of power. The natural sites may be large rocks, waterfalls, a deep pool, hot springs, large trees, caves and hollow trees (Colson 1997). Women usually serve as guardians of such shrines. Territorial shrines that serve as places of power do exist among other tribes of south-central Africa. For example, women serve as guardians of the Chisumphi territorial shrines among the Chewa people of Malawi (Phiri 1996).

In times of stress such as a drought, neighbourhood representatives make appeals to the spirits associated with natural phenomenon (*basangu*) at these shrines. Given that the shrines are associated with unseen powers existing in nature, they are regarded as sacred. They place a significant role in binding the community together through their dependence on the territory and on the natural forces inhabiting the territory. In this sense, Tonga communities could be seen as eco-political states.

### 3.6.1.2. Land shrines

The second type of territorial shrines are land shrines. These represent the neighbourhood as a place of human settlement associated with a common ancestor or leader (Colson 1997, Livingstone 1857:554). These shrines are served by the earth-priest (ritual husband) and the earth-priestess (ritual wife). A land shrine symbolises the house of the original forerunner of the current earth-priest. For example, Gonde shrine represents the burial site of Monze Mayaba,<sup>42</sup> the earth-priest who was visited by David Livingstone in the 1850s (Livingstone 1857:554).

Land shrines are usually marked by a shelter in the form of a small house (*kaanda*). Among the Tonga, each neighbourhood had at least one land shrine where people gathered in times of drought or to seek protection from an epidemic or other communal threats. The shrine and the area around it, or the area associated with it, were treated as sacred ground. It was prohibited to cut trees or grass near the shrine. No one, including the earth-priest and the earth-priestess was allowed to defecate or to have sex in that area. No one was allowed to visit the shrine privately. At the shrine there was a hoe blade (*ijaamba*) and a clay water pot (*inongo*) which symbolized food and water as essentials for life. Some land was purposely left to itself. Trees of various sizes were growing there and people who trespassed on this land or cut down trees would incur the wrath of the ancestors.

There are other forms of shrines such as lineage shrines (*cilyango*), household and personal shrines. Personal shrines were usually built by hunters. Hunting shrines were common in

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<sup>42</sup>*Monze* referred to the position of the earth-priest. However, the Europeans changed the position of the earth-priest to that of Chief. As result, earth-priest Monze is now referred to as Chief Monze.

Gwembe central. These shrines were found either in the bush or in the homestead (Scudder 1962:191). The centrality of territorial shrines to the ecological wellbeing of the Tonga community, means that we must now consider the gendered and ecological dimensions of the Leza cult at the shrines.

### **3.7. GENDER AND ECOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE LEZA CULT**

Research has shown that some African cultures have gender personifications for God. Abbey (2001) has reconstructed the Father-Mother (*Ataa Naa Nyonmo*) image of God among the people of Ghana. In a similar manner, Hinfelaar (1994) and Kaunda (2010b) have reconstructed the Mother-Father (*Mayo-Tata*) image of God (Leza) among the Bemba people of Zambia. However, the Tonga religio-cultural vocabulary has no gender personification of the spirits. European missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century variously designated Tonga religio-culture as heathenism, paganism and spiritualism. However, the Tonga people recognise a creator God called Leza, a name similar to that used by the Bemba people in the northern part of Zambia (cf. Kaunda 2010b:5-7, Hinfelaar 1994:12-17). This similarity may point to a common origin of the two tribes. Unlike the Bemba people who may refer to God as Mayo Tata Lesa (Mother Father God), the Tonga people often associate God (Leza) with the rains and with feminine attributes (Mother Earth). These attributes of Leza become apparent during the Lwiindi ceremony (cf. Colson 2006, Machila 1990).

Enret (2002) has traced the name Leza back to 1000CE among the Sabi-Botatwe people who occupied the area around the middle of the Lualaba River in the present day Democratic Republic of Congo. Enret (2002:196) thinks that the name Leza derives from a verb meaning “to nourish”. In Enret’s opinion, this indicates a belief in God as an active and supportive force in human life rather than a distant God. In other words, the Sabi-Botatwe people believed in a God who was present and active in the affairs of people. Enret (2002) concludes that both the Bemba and the Tonga people of Zambia trace their origins to this group of people.

Two observations can be made from Enret’s (2002) reconstructions in relation to the Bemba and the Tonga people. They show, firstly, that the concept of Lesa with gender connotations as

Father Mother God (Mayo Tata Leza) by Hinfelaar (1994:12-17) and Kaunda (2010b:5-7) was probably a later development and, secondly, that also the shift from a God who was present among the created beings to a more distant God is a later development. Colson (2006:51) notes:

The Tonga people spoke of Leza as creator or as a great first cause but never invoked Leza in personal or community affairs. They first involved the ancestors. Leza was never regarded as a personal helper or a protector of communities.

Colson (2006) considers invocations to Leza at communal shrines as a recent development among the Tonga people. But a closer look at territorial shrines and the Leza cult suggests the opposite.

### **3.7.1. Gender and ecological features of Leza at the shrines**

Western anthropologists and missionaries have given a distorted portrayal of women and the Tonga God (Leza). The feminine features of territorial cults and Leza have been suppressed in literary texts. For example, Scudder (1962) suggests that Leza was a male God. Furthermore, territorial shrines are seen as an instrument to inspire people to fight for the possession of territory.

Beach (1994:148) shows that the concept of a high god was widely known as *Mulungu* (one who creates) among the Bantu people. Daneel (1970:16) links the origin of the word Leza to *Mwari*, a Shona God of fertility. Both Leza and Mwari are believed to originate from Muali in East Africa. Like Mwari, Leza is believed to be a fertility God. This observation is important for an understanding of territorial shrines and the Leza cult. Nonetheless, western anthropologists (Scudder 1962, Colson 1997, 2006, Schoffeleers 1978) have emphasised a male focus of the territorial shrines and the Leza cult. This corpus of literary work portrays Leza as a *Deus remotus* (a remote god) who is not involved in day to day affairs as opposed to ancestors who are involved in the affairs of the family.

Leza as a divine being was envisioned as a kind of disembodied spirit who moved and lived among the people. The wonder of things gave the Tonga a sense of power, which is everywhere. This belief was inspired by a sense of life as being in the air around them and inside them and that led to the reasoning that there is a maker. Although Colson (2006) asserts that the Tonga people believe in a male God, the Tonga did not visualize Leza as a male or a female but as a being capable of being both, or either, or neither male or female. As Smith (1936) observes, the use of the words “he”, “she” or “it” in relation to God, is foreign to Africans.

Among the Tonga, Leza was thought to be directly connected with every experience and event in everyday human existence. Thus, Leza is called *hikabumba* (creator or potter). The word “*bumba*” is widely associated with a woman forming a pot with her hands. It is also used in reference to the creation of the earth. Hence the Tonga say *Leza waabumba cisi* - God has created the world. This characteristic emphasizes the feminine attributes of Leza. Leza is also believed to be the owner of all things (*hatwakwe*) who has instigated certain rules in order to preserve life on earth for humans and nonhuman forms of life.

The Tonga also believe in Leza as *chivuna* (deliverer). There is protection and provision for all their needs. During a crisis such as drought or an epidemic, they approach Leza directly during the Lwiindi ceremony or through mediums that are either female or male ancestors. The use of female mediums to approach Leza and to deliver Leza’s messages to the people makes the characteristics of *chivuna* seem more appropriate to a female God (*Sophia*) than to a male God. Finally Leza is called “ancient of days” (*munamazuba*) and one who cannot be confined in one place or trapped in terms of time and space (*namakungwe mutalabala*). All these attributes of God in Tonga indigenous culture emphasize that humans and nonhuman forms of life are perceived as interrelated.

Hazemba’s (2002:13) observation is inaccurate when he states:

In Tonga religion, it was believed that God was so great and very distant and hence could not be spoken to. Being so far away also made God seem to be unconcerned with people’s problems. Because of God’s being far away, the Tonga could not pray to Leza

directly as Leza could only be reached through the Mizimo-ancestral spirits and by making offerings and sacrifices so that God could address their petition.

A closer look at Tonga religio-cultural life shows the opposite. The Tonga people could invoke God directly during rain-calling rituals.

There were three important places of ritual in Tonga religio-culture. These were the homestead, the communal and the territorial *Malende* where women were leaders (Nchete 1956:37). In these places there were sacred groves or shrines where offerings were given for both personal or family needs and communal needs. Rituals related to the worship of Leza and the veneration of ancestors were conducted through the matrilineal clan at community and territorial (regional) levels. Only members of the same clan could inherit ritual leadership. Every homestead had its own home shrine where families made offerings to the ancestors. Women were in charge of such homestead rituals (Machila 1990).

For an understanding of the Tonga religio-culture, a distinction has to be made between ancestor belief systems and territorial cults. The two are interrelated but different religio-cultural systems. Territorial cults (*malende*) originate from the margins of society and are associated with female fertility concerns. The male leaders of the community downplayed the role of Leza as a fertility God in rituals. The cults were adapted to the ancestor belief system by a particular lineage group that tried to secure a central position for itself in the context of a kingdom. This probably occurred against the background of tribal wars and the dawn of colonialism. Historical and anthropological studies indicate that early Tonga communities were not centralised patriarchal political states and that Tonga women were leaders of territorial cults (Enret 2002:196, Scudder 1962).

Given their leadership position at the shrines and the fact that they were in close contact with nature, women, from the margins of society, provide the framework for the proper articulation and understanding of Leza as the fertility God of the earth. Some anthropologists, historians and theologians (Schoffeleers 1978, Colson 2006, Kaoma 2010) misrepresent Leza as a male remote God due to their focus on communities whose religio-culture emphasised ancestor veneration as

opposed to the Tonga religio culture of territorial cults. A consideration of Tonga religio-culture as a phenomenon originating in the experiences of marginalised women whose core activities are carried out in close contact with nature at territorial shrines, does not place Leza far away from the people.

The role of the earth-priest and the ritual wife at territorial cults reveals that Leza has two gender dimensions, the male dimension represented by the earth-priest and the female dimension represented by the ritual wife who symbolises the mother earth. It is significant that the belief system does not emphasize the sexuality of Leza but rather the fact that the gift of life comes through the mother earth. This is also depicted in the myths of origin (see chapter five). The ritual process at the territorial shrines shows the complementarity of male and female natures in ensuring that there is life and harmony among human beings and nonhuman nature.

The Tonga people have a gendered-ecological imagery that depicts Leza. Firstly, during rain-calling rituals at territorial shrines, the Tonga people see the rains as the presence of Leza among them. When rain comes after the rituals, people shout: *Leza wawa* (God has come). Secondly, a waterfall or a pool found in a cave marks the ideal place for the worship of the divine. A waterfall or a pool of water symbolises the woman's womb as a source of life. It is therefore not surprising that rivers and pools were places where Tonga women conducted initiation rites and taught young girls about sexuality, womanhood and the religio-cultural roles of women. During the ritual process at the Lwiindi ceremony, the ritual wife fulfils a role in which she impersonates Leza or the mother earth at the territorial shrines. In other words, the ritual wife is the representation of Leza on earth. This female dimension of the territorial cults associated with Leza has in discussions of Tonga religio-culture been overlooked by many scholars including Scudder (1962) and Kaoma (2010).

The origin of life, symbolised by pools of water and by the rains, depicts notions of femininity in Tonga culture. Through her labours in and outside the home, the woman in the indigenous Tonga community acquired a profound knowledge of the environment and she readily appreciated the importance of water in giving life to plants and in sustaining the lives of human beings and animals. I would argue therefore that Leza is a fertility God to whom the Tonga people pray for

rains. In addition, if Leza can be described as the source of life by enabling women to bear children and by letting the rains fall and give life to plants, human beings and animals, then Leza might as well be identified as a fertility goddess or mother earth. In view of the above, it may be concluded that the traditional interpretation of Leza as a male patriarchal and remote God is not a true reflection of indigenous Tonga religio-culture. The interpretation of territorial cults as the ancestral cult of a lineage trying to expand its area of influence through the establishment of a territory (*cisi*) is equally problematic. It is therefore important to engage with issues related to human existence in an ecological system where women function as agents in the creative process through rituals performed at territorial shrines. As persons who were constantly in close contact with nature, women contributed to the construction of ecological values and belief systems that have yet to be retrieved and integrated into current theology and biblical scholarship.

Christians in Zambia have adopted the name Leza for God. Against the backdrop of the preceding discussion of Leza and territorial cults, it is not surprising that the female image of Leza has been suppressed through a patriarchal interpretation of the bible. It must be noted that a community's conception of God has a bearing on how people relate to each other and to nonhuman nature. In other words, a community's conception of God provides a framework within which the community is constructed, lives its life, and relates to nonhuman forms of life. Thus, there is a need for an interpretive model that is ecologically-gender sensitive.

The Tonga people hold a sacramental view of nature, believing that humans and nonhuman life are interrelated. The Tonga people cannot imagine Leza without creation. For example, the *Mutaba* tree is the symbol of the presence of Leza among the people. This perception of the immediate presence of God in nonhuman nature shows how the Tonga people value one another and how they value nonhuman nature. Also, Leza is acknowledged on the individual level as opposed to the ancestral spirits and other spirit beings that are recognised in family and clan cults. Petitions may be addressed directly and individually to God as in *nafwa Leza ee* (Help me God) or they can take the form of a ritual at a territorial shrine.



### 3.7.2. Patriarchal portrayal of shrines

An interpretation of territorial cults by men in a patriarchal society tends to sideline religio-cultural insights developed by women. This includes insights about life in an ecological system concerned with fertility and natural phenomena such as rain.

Research shows that women in many parts of southern Africa were leaders of territorial cults in so far as these were concerned with ecological matters, as distinct from such questions as control of the land (Phiri 1996, Moyo 2009). Some earlier studies by historians and anthropologists on Tonga women (Scudder 1962, Schoffeleers 1978) overlooked the women's focus on earth and their high regard for the environment in which they carry out most of their work. Activities such as looking for firewood, fetching water from wells or the river, searching for wild fruit and going into the bush during female initiation rites highlight women's constant involvement with nature. In other words, although men belonged to the domain of the bush through hunting as Colson (2006) observes, women had a more intimate relationship with nature through initiation rites and their roles at territorial shrines. As a result, women played a significant role in developing earth-centered myths and folklore stories depicting animals such as the elephant, the hare, the hyena and the tortoise. This emphasizes the value of a peaceful world where human beings and animals share the environment (Aschwanden 1989:31-33, Posselt 1927:35-39).

The homestead (*munzi*) and the bush have a symbolic significance for the Tonga people of Zambia. The homestead is associated with a territory (*cisi*) that is composed of a number of villages and pays homage to a common land shrine or a set of land shrines under the leadership of an earth-priest. It is the area of human habitation and of the fields for farming. Contrasting with the homestead is the bush (*cisaka*) which is symbolically the abode of the ancestors and other spiritual forces. The bush is associated with wilderness and the absence of human control. It is the habitat of game and the habitat of spirits associated with natural phenomena. The domain of the homestead and the domain of the bush show how gender perceptions are constructed. Women are associated with the bush while men are associated with the homestead and human settlement (Morris 1998:124-125, Zuesse 1979:94, 95).

In indigenous African culture, order and cohesion can only be achieved when there is a good relationship between humans, nonhuman nature and the powers that are perceived as existing in the environment. This interrelationship includes God-Mother, human beings, ancestors, ritual animals, plants, non-living objects and special places such as territorial shrines (Schoffeleers 1978, Scudder 1962). For example, the mysterious death of a cow among the Tonga people of Zambia is as serious as the death of a human being. It may signify a violation of the natural order that has attracted the wrath of the ancestors. In other words, according to the Tonga African cosmology, some animals such as cows, eland and vipers are considered as members of the human extended family. Additionally, animals and other nonhuman forms of life that symbolize or that represent one's totem are regarded as sacred.

### **3.8. GENDER DIMENSIONS OF THE RAIN-CALLING RITUALS**

Rain-calling rituals were performed during the agricultural festival (*Lwiindi*). In precolonial times, agricultural festivals (*Lwiindi*) were held four times in a year (Machila 1990:73). The first festival was held to perform rituals for the cleansing of fields prior to planting (*Lwiindi lwakulyata makuba*). The second one involved rituals to inaugurate the planting of crops (*Lwiindi lwamwaka*). The third ceremony was concerned with weeding and bird scaring (*Lwiindi lwakuyamina*) and the fourth festival celebrated the collecting and eating of first fruits (*Lwiindi lwakuloka*). A fifth ceremony was held to perform rituals that inaugurated the harvesting of crops (*Lwiindi lwakutebula*). Communities along the Zambezi River that were not dependent on a single harvest did not emphasise the *Lwiindi* ceremony for harvest and planting. The two ceremonies could sometimes be combined. During the *Lwiindi* ceremony associated with planting and the beginning of the rainy season (*Lwiindi lwa kumwaka*), black goats or cattle were offered at the territorial shrines. A black cow or goat was also offered during land purification rites (*ingolomokwa*) if a murder or a suicide was committed. Among the Tonga people of Zambia black (*busia*) is not a sign of evil or bad luck. It is a symbol of goodwill, blessings and the coming of the rains on which human life depends. White (*butuba*) is a symbol of bareness, sorrow, filth, drought and sunshine (Colson 2006:84). Mourners daubed themselves with white clay or ashes during the early stages of a funeral. Those going to appeal at the shrines might also

rub their faces with white clay to indicate their pitiable state and their dependence on the spirits. Red (*busubila*) symbolised lightening, fire, blood and warfare.

As Machila (1990:73) writes, the *Lwiindi* ceremony included rain-calling rituals when there was a drought, or rituals for protection in times of danger. During the planting ceremony at the territorial shrine (*Lwiindi lwamwaka*), the seeds for planting were made fecund by the earth-priest and the ritual wife. The people of the neighbourhood (*katongo*) brought samples of the seed to the earth-priest (*sikatongo*) who mixed it with seeds from the store of the earth-priest and the ritual wife. The earth-priest then placed the seeds beneath the bed on which he had sexual intercourse with the ritual wife. In the morning they distributed the seeds among the people who mixed it with their seeds for planting. The earth-priest and the ritual wife were also responsible for announcing the first eating of each cultivated crop, initiating harvesting and the brewing of beer from the new grain. The earth-priest and the ritual wife were the first to eat wild fruits. They initiated the burning of the bush for hunting and the opening of the fish ponds and rivers for fish drives. All these regulations were made to prevent human beings from exploiting nonhuman forms of life for selfish interests.

There are a few Tonga communities that still follow indigenous practices that regulated human control of the natural world in precolonial times. As Machila (1990:112) and O'Brien and O'Brien (1996) have observed, the *Lwiindi* ceremony is now performed in a shortened form. Currently, the communities only celebrate the *Lwiindi* for planting and harvesting. Thus, not many communities still adhere to indigenous practices that regulate human use of the natural world. Indigenous practices that had ecological benefits, were undercut by the missionaries. After political independence in 1964, the Zambian government continued to undermine the reliance on indigenous rituals that regulated the agricultural cycle because there was now an emphasis on western education. Besides, the *Lwiindi* ceremony for harvest at Gonde territorial shrine (*Lwiindi lwakutebula*) had been both commercialised and politicised. Today the ceremony is a tourist attraction and a source of revenue for the government. As such, it is politically controlled and has less ecological significance.

There are two eco-political assumptions that underpinned rituals associated with territorial cults such as the Lwiindi ceremony among the Tonga people. The first assumption was that marriage is an institution of equality, appropriate to the human condition. The second assumption was that human life is based on agriculture or tilling the land (*Mulimo wacisi* or *Mulimo wa Katongo*). The neighbourhood rituals at territorial shrines emphasised the equality and the importance of the roles of husband and wife, represented by the earth-priest and the ritual wife who during the rituals gave efficacy to the soil, seeds and human labour by their sexual union (Colson 2006:118). Through sexual intercourse, the earth-priest and the ritual wife ensured the fertility of the land and the political unity of the community founded by the common ancestors, represented by the man (earth-priest) and the woman (ritual wife).

Anthropologists (Schoffeleers 2000 and Lan 1985) show that in some communities in Africa, territorial shrines are a palimpsest of former political communities. Following this reconstruction, Colson (2006:122) insists that the territorial shrine at Gonde in Monze represents ancient larger political communities. She observes that some of the spirits associated with recent mediums may represent ancient political rulers. However, large Tonga political organisations may have been a later development, probably due to threats by invading tribes during Bantu migrations. Indigenous Tonga communities were initially small eco-political communities organised around the earth priest and the ritual wife. In this way, the ritual offices were non-patriarchal.

### **3.9. NON-PATRIARCHAL DIMENSION OF RITUAL OFFICES**

There were no gender connotations among indigenous Tonga ritual officiants. Both men and women used to perform rituals in indigenous Tonga religio-culture. This suggests that the status of women was considerable.<sup>43</sup> In the past, before Christianity and colonialism, Tonga women did

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<sup>43</sup>There were also non-life giving taboos and practices that affected women in Tonga religio-culture. For example, while menstruating, women were expected to observe certain restrictions on their behaviour. They were not allowed to handle guns or hunting spears. They were also not allowed to add salt to food. Some men would not sleep in the same bed as a menstruating wife. Pregnant and menstruating women were not allowed to touch a newly born infant. However, as Colson (2006: 146) observes, the Tonga did not put great emphasis on sexual dichotomies that stress the separateness of male and female.

emphasize the importance of fertility and their role as mothers, but they were also conscious of their value as persons and of their rights to participate fully in religio-cultural life. Women had considerable control over resources and some were heads of their villages.

In Tonga culture men and women hold a joint ritual office. Both women and men serve as mediums and guardians of shrines. This fact has usually been misrepresented by patriarchal western anthropologists and historians. For example, Colson (2006:40) states that in Tonga culture “usually only men become earth-priests but an earth-priest works together with his ritual wife”. For Colson, the ritual wife is simply an assistant to the earth-priest. However, the earth-priest and the ritual wife hold a joint ritual office. There are also women who independently officiate at shrines. After their death, these women become ancestors and as such they exercise power over male and female descendants. Diviners who act as mediums (*mangelo* or *bungelengele*) at shrines are usually women.

Given that women did play a significant role as ritual officiants before the coming of Christianity and colonialism, the notion that only men can be ritual priests is foreign to the Tonga people of Zambia. Land or territorial shrines were associated with both men and women who had been mediums or leaders before their death. For example, the *Nangoma* shrine commemorates a female *basangu* medium (priestess) who was in charge of ritual activities in her neighbourhood until her death (Colson *et al* 1991:56-68). This female *basangu* medium was a niece of chief Chona.

The status of women among the Tonga people declined in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, due to the patriarchal biases of western missionaries, colonial administrators, development workers and western oriented education that was introduced in Zambia (Colson 2006:145). Zambian men educated in the west insisted that women should base their status on their roles as mothers and wives. The colonial administration introduced a political order that grouped people in villages and chieftaincies, ruled by headmen and chiefs respectively. Women who headed villages were called “headmen” by the early colonial administration. The new political order destroyed the powers of the earth-priest (ritual husband) and the earth-priestess (ritual wife)

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(Scudder 1962:196-7). It also destroyed the religious validation of the Tonga neighbourhood as the ritual community.

### **3.9.1. Women as household ecological ritual officiants**

Women also act as ritual officiants at household rituals among the Tonga people (Colson 2000:336-37). During the marriage ceremony, the bride was given fire stones (*masua*) brought and installed by two senior women who represented her father's lineage. The gift of fire stones established her as the priestess in household rituals. She was entitled to cook independently and to brew beer for rain calling rituals during the *Lwiindi* ceremony. The fire stones metaphorically stood for the marital sexual intercourse of the earth-priest and the earth-priestess which was significant for fertility of the land during rain-calling rituals. This shows that, while the role of the father and his lineage in the cult of the ancestors was prominent, women played a significant role in both household and rain-calling rituals. Lancaster's (1979) assertion that the Tonga people were gradually moving towards patriliney is not in line with Tonga indigenous culture. Patriarchal structures developed during colonialism.

### **3.9.2. The earth-priest (ritual husband)**

The earth-priest (*Sikatongo* or *Sibulongo*) is the ritual officiant for rain-calling rituals during the *Lwiindi* ceremony. The earth-priest is called *Sikatongo* to signify the relationship between a lineage and a defined area of land or neighbourhood (*cisi*). The earth-priest is also referred to as *Sibulongo* to signify his role as guardian of the earth (Colson 2006:41, Machila 1990). *Bulongo* means clay or soil. The role of the earth-priest was significant in relation to the ecological wellbeing of the Tonga community in precolonial times. Members of the neighbourhood could decide that the office of the earth-priest had to be filled after the death of the former earth-priest. They could also call upon the *Katongo* lineage to replace an earth-priest who failed in his duties. In either case, the newly installed earth-priest would inherit the earth-priestess (ritual wife).

### **3.9.3. The earth-priestess (ritual wife)**

During rain-calling rituals, the earth-priest (ritual husband) works together with the earth-priestess (ritual wife) called *Mukaintu walufulu* (wife of the calabash). The earth-priest and the earth-priestess belong to the lineage of the deceased earth-priest and earth-priestess respectively. Before western methods of agriculture were introduced by the Europeans, the earth-priest and the ritual wife were responsible for announcing the commencement of the agricultural year. The onset of the agricultural season could be detected by observing the vegetation, the weather and the stars. Colson (2006:42) indicates that people, possessed by spirits that were associated with the rains (the *basangu* mediums), could also give a signal for the coming of the rain. The earth-priest and the ritual wife were also in charge of initiating communal hunts and fishing with the assistance of the "guardian of the bush" (*ulanyika*) who controlled and regulated the hunting of game animals (Scudder 1962:11).

### **3.9.4. Owner of the Bush (*Ulannyika*)**

In carrying out their responsibilities which were ecological in nature, the earth-priest, the earth-priestess and the guardian of the bush (*ulanyika*) were usually assisted by men and women who were in a state of possession by spirits associated with natural phenomena such as rain (*mvula*). Spirit mediums (*basangu*) associated with the rains were called *baami bamvula* (chiefs of the rain) (Scudder 1962:11).

Mediums associated with the rains could advise the earth-priest and the earth-priestess to initiate particular agricultural activities such as field cleansing, planting, weeding, bird scaring and eating of first fruits. They could also advise the community when to visit the territorial shrine (*melende*). They advised the earth-priest and the ritual wife if someone in the neighbourhood had disturbed the social order by forestalling the earth-priest and the ritual wife by planting too early or by tasting the new crop or by any other behaviour unwarranted by tradition (Colson 2006:42). The roles associated with the earth-priest, the earth-priestess and the guardian of the bush (*ulanyika*) indicated that Tonga indigenous culture valued ecological wellbeing. It was believed that the earth is the God-Mother who oversees various activities of human beings. God was believed to punish any contravention of taboos. The abuse of nature, for example by cutting

down trees in a grave yard was a taboo. Abuse of nature was perceived as potentially harmful in respect of the entire community. Those who violated taboos related to nature and the mother-earth were ostracised by the community until prescribed rituals had been performed to appease the ancestors (Van Binsbergen 1981:56). The catastrophic effects of violating a taboo were also believed to affect a lineage. Other forms of bad behavior and bad deeds committed against nature included laughing at a singing bird or defecating on a road. Those who committed such offences might get lost in the bush or be attacked by wild beasts such as lions.

Some western anthropologists, historians and missionaries have misrepresented the roles of the earth-priest, the ritual wife and the *basangu* mediums as diviners or healers. For example, David Livingstone and other missionaries refer to the earth-priest as the rain doctor or medicine man (Blaikie 2004, Field 1985). The diviner (*Mung'anga* or *Musonde*) interprets the cause of personal suffering and prescribes action while the medicine man focuses on healing an individual person from an illness. The earth-priest, earth-priestess and the *Ulannyika* had ecological responsibilities that were performed at territorial (communal) shrines in the worship of God (Leza). The Tonga belief in the equality of human beings and the interconnectedness of all life was also exemplified in the myths of origin.

### **3.10. GENDER AND ECOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF MYTHS OF ORIGIN**

Many African ethnic groups have created myths that explain the origin of human beings and the world. These myths of origin are usually similar to the biblical myths of origin (Setiloane 1986). Like other African tribes, the Tonga people of Zambia have folklores and myths that explain the origin of humankind and the natural world (Saha 1994, Moreau 1924:359-361). These myths usually feature animal characters that convey traditional principles and customs referring to the origin of life. The Tonga myths of origin and of clan association with animals and other natural phenomena affirm the Tonga perception that animals and humans enjoy equal status. Therefore killing an animal for no good reason was forbidden (*cilatonda*) in indigenous Tonga religio-culture. Animal life (*buumi*) was as important as human life. Besides, totem animals were sacred and members of clans were not allowed to eat the clan's totem animals.



In indigenous Tonga communities, Tonga women used animal imagery in myths and folklores to communicate important gender and ecological values to the young ones. This was done during camp fire or during initiation ceremonies. The values imparted during one's youth contributed significantly to the way the Tonga reasoned with the natural world. Myths of origin reinforce the concept of totemism and taboos which had ecological significance. For example, those from the 'elephant clan' were not allowed to kill or eat an elephant. These taboos were central in protecting the natural world from abuse. Spijker (1994:90) is therefore right to note:

Asian and African spirituality may be characterised as friendly and open to the environment and cosmos, whereas western-dominated theology was seen as patriarchal, and aggressive towards nature, attitudes that are the main reason for the present ecological crisis.

It is worth noting that myths of origin are distinguished from folklore because they go beyond social values to provide explanations about the mysteries of the universe. In other words, myths of origin explain how the world came into existence and the place of humanity in it. Although it is sometimes difficult to follow the logic of some myths, they nonetheless provide a conceptual and theoretical framework for grappling with mysteries of nature and human existence. This is true of the biblical myths of origin as well. In this regard, a paradigm shift from a focus on ancestral cult to a focus on territorial cults and the origin of life on earth gives a rather different picture about gender and ecology among the Tonga people. In this case, there has been a missing link in the understanding of God and the natural world in predominantly male African theological discourses.

### **3.11. THE MISSING POINT OF PATRARCHAL AFRICAN THEOLOGY ON GOD AND THE NATURAL WORLD**

The patriarchal western worldview imbedded in the message propagated by western missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries influenced the understanding of God and nature in Africa. African theology has shown ambiguities in its articulation of God and the natural world.

As Boff (1997:78) has observed, some features of Christian theology do not foster human responsibility to the natural world. These include: The adoption of the cultural framework of patriarchy, the separation between creature and creator through monotheism, the use of monotheism to justify authoritarianism and centralised power, anthropocentrism of human dominion over the earth, the tribal ideology of divine election and the notion that nature itself is fallen and the earth is punished as a result of human sin. When tested using these characteristics as a litmus paper, male dominated African theology is found to be largely anti-ecological in its outlook. John Mbiti has presented an African God who is transcendent. Mbiti (1970b:18) argues that:

The Tonga refers to him as ‘the Ancient of Days’ The Akan believe furthermore, that God is eternal and infinite. These peoples’ concept of God’s transcendence would clearly indicate that for them there is no terminus or time when God was not, since from the most ancient time which man can think of God was in existence.

First, Mbiti makes reference to the Tonga people without elaboration. He has not specified whether he is referring to the Tonga people of Zambia or Zimbabwe or Malawi who seem to have some differences in religio-cultural beliefs. However, his assertion is a typical example of the notions of a God who is transcendent. The implication of this notion is that God is absent from the earth. This is contrary to the Tonga people of Zambia who see God in created objects and phenomenon such as sacred grooves (Colson 2006). Second, Mbiti (1970b:13) presents an African God who is above everything. This implies that God resides in higher regions and in principle is inaccessible. In other words, Mbiti suggests that in African consciousness, there is a geographical gap between the world of God and the world of humans. While this is not true of many African cultures such as that of the Tonga people of Zambia, male African theologians have consolidated this notion of a transcendent God.

Third, Mbiti (1970b:14, 16) insists that “the use of intermediaries between [man] and God, which is a widespread practice among many African peoples, readily suggests the concept of the transcendent God being linked with [men] through a ladder of intermediaries”. The implications of this assertion are that Africans do not petition or pray to God directly. A closer look at Tonga rituals and territorial cults with regards to rain-calling rituals suggests the opposite. During the

Lwiindi ceremony, the Tonga people appeal to Leza directly for the rains (Machila 1991). The Tonga people believe in ancestors as the “living dead elderly” members of the family. For this reason ancestors are venerated and consulted but they also pray to God directly. Lastly, Mbiti (1970b:13, 15) argues that people in Africa consider God to be “the Father of the gods’.” This assertion seems to suggest a rejection of polytheism and animism which some theologians, ethno-sociologists and missionaries have attached to African culture. Further, the assertion seems to have the influence of dualism<sup>44</sup>.

As such, these notions contribute to anti-nature attitudes and the erosion of the sacredness of the natural world. The sacredness of nature served as a fabric for the preservation of the environment in Africa. Mbiti further asserts that “God is beyond human laws, regulations, taboos, prohibitions, customs, traditions, and judgment” (1970b: 15). For him, taboos that were put in place Africans to preserve nature are not necessary because God is beyond customs and tradition. The essential quality of God in the context of the ecological crisis is that of being present to and within the Earth. For the Tonga people the very name of God means that God is present. They are always conscious of the presence of God. It is this primordial intuition which led the Tonga people to give a title to God as *Nyami-Nyami* (River God or Rivers serpent). They believe in a God who is transcendently immanent. This is elaborated in myths of origin, the *Leza* cult and rain-calling rituals at territorial shrines.

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<sup>44</sup> Dualism can be defined in different ways. Wright (2011:5) suggests, there are three types of dualism: A theological or moral dualism in which a good god or gods are ranged equal and opposite against a bad god or gods, a cosmological dualism as propounded by Plato in which the world of space, time and matter is radically inferior to the noumenal world. This type of dualism includes the dualisms of form and matter, essence and appearance, spiritual and material and an anthropological dualism which separates the soul from the body or the spirit from the body. Some elements of dualism can be found in Ancient Judaism. For example, the sectarian duality in which the sons of light are ranged against the sons of darkness, as in Qumran community. However, it is generally agreed that in Judaism including first-century Judaism, evil is not an essential part of the creation, but a result of a radical distortion within a basically good created order. To this effect, Christian tradition and literature demonstrate a turn away from Judaism towards the wider world of Hellenistic philosophy. See: Wright (2011:4), Irwin (1989:91, 92), MacCulloch (2009:31).

As demonstrated by Mbiti's assertions, African theology has been influenced by notions of monotheism and human dominion over earth. It has also been influenced by the ideology of divine election in Judaism. All these notions are conditioned by patriarchy. As already noted, the Judeo-Christian cultural framework has been informed by a history of interpretation of the biblical motifs such as humanity being created in the image of God, the command to have dominion over the earth and the notion of original sin (Gen. 1-3). African theology has also been influenced by the notion that nature is fallen and the earth is punished as a result of human sin (Gen. 3). As Boff (1997: 78) has rightly pointed out, this notion may result in people not taking good care of the Earth. This notion has contributed to the preoccupation with human salvation at the expense of the natural world, the perception that the ecological crisis confirms the biblical apocalyptic prophecies and the tendency to dismiss ecological issues as secular (Horrell 2010: 2).

Despite the influence of Christianity and western imperialism, the Tonga people of Zambia continue to put emphasis on human responsibility towards the planet earth (*ciisi* or *chalo*). In their cosmology, humanity, nonhuman forms of life and spiritual forces are interconnected. They believe that the abuse of the earth threatens the interconnectedness on which life depends. For this reason, certain elements of precolonial ethnography and ecological management have survived into the colonial and postcolonial periods. These practices have survived due to their continued relevance to the people.

In precolonial times Tonga ways of ecological management included the setting up of sacred grooves, territorial cults, rain-calling rituals, myths and taboos. Through these methods, scarce resources were managed by the local communities. However, as Schoffeleers (1979) has shown, the indigenous now face a number of challenges to preserve the natural world. The challenges include the bureaucratization of the chieftainship which has weakened indigenous socio-political support for the cults, Christianity which has questioned the religious base of the cults, land expropriation and wage labour which have drastically changed the structure of social organization and the rationalist interpretations of ecology in the form of land conservation.

In sum, as Adams (2003:23) has rightly observed, the acquisition of colonies in Africa was accompanied by, and to a large extent enabled by a profound belief in the possibility of

restructuring nature and re-ordering it to serve human needs and desires. The natural world came to be defined as the absence of European human impact. These ideologies and technological advancements have been supported by Christianity using the biblical motif of domination (Gen 1:26-28). Hence there is a need to rehabilitate the image of God in relation to God's creation.

### **3.12. REHABILITATING THE GENDERED IMAGE OF LEZA**

As indicated, the Tonga believe in a fertility God called Leza (Hazemba 2002:13). Leza is called *hikabumba* (creator or potter). The word "*bumba*" is widely associated with a woman forming a pot with her hands. It is also used in reference to the creation of the earth. Hence the Tonga say *Leza waabumba cisi*-God has created the world emphasising the feminine attributes of Leza. Feminist theologians in Africa and the global north have critiqued the long Christian history which portrays God in exclusively male language. Daly (1973: 19) has argued that "If God is male then male is God. The divine patriarch castrates women as long as he is allowed to live on in the human imagination". Portraying God as a male who is good and does what is good and femaleness as an opposing power that destroys God's goodness has created a distance between God and women (Oduyoye 2001: 42). These assertions suggest that envisioning God as male has implications for the way men and women relate to one another and on how women relate with God.

While both the myths contain male and female images of God, the patriarchal Christian tradition has disregarded the feminine images. Only the masculine image has been seen to be more appropriate to describe who God is. This oppresses women by suggesting that only men can image God. Men tend to think that they are like God and God is like them. This reinforces patriarchy by distancing women from God.

The biblical myths of origin places emphasis on the divine female God (Sophia). The reference to the woman and the serpent in the garden points to divine wisdom. As Clifford (2005:105) has shown, the image of Sophia the feminine wisdom is more empowering to women than exclusively male images. Re-imaging God in female symbols which draw on Sophia has potential to promote an inclusive Christian community. Although Rakoczy (2004: 70) argues that

this image is not appropriate as it stands outside the mystery of God as Trinitarian, the image of Mother Earth has been found to be empowering to women in Africa who are close to the natural world through initiation rites and ecological rituals. In this regard, drawing on these values for the reading of the biblical myths of origin may empower women and the natural world. African women theologians have drawn from the image of the Earth mother by taking the positive aspects of African culture. They have pointed out that Christianity rooted in western ideologies has contributed to the disempowerment and the subjugation of the natural world (Masenya 2010: 51).

In pre-colonial Africa, women had close connection with nature or the mother earth (Moyo 2009:75). They also held considerable leadership roles as overseers of territorial shrines. Reclaiming the image of the mother earth therefore, empowers African women to have a friendly relationship with nature and to exercise their religious roles as prophetesses and overseers of territorial shrines (*Malende*). God was not brought to Africa by the Christian missionaries. Rather, God has always been part of the African consciousness (Kaunda 2010:7). There are both masculine and feminine images of God in African cultures. There are also genderless images of God in many African cultures. The images of God in Africa do not imply that God is a man or woman. They emphasise God's relationship with people. Mbiti (1970:9) has rightly argued that,

African people do not consider God to be man, but in order to express certain concepts, they use anthropomorphic terms and images about him as an aid to their conceptualization of him whom they have not seen and about whom they confess to know little or nothing.

Unlike other African ethnic groups who call God as Father or Mother, the Tonga people of Zambia refer to God as the source of life<sup>45</sup>. These images of God in Africa emphasise the nature of God as the source of life as opposed to the masculine Judeo-Christian images which perpetuate a remote controlling God. However, like in other African societies, the European missionaries replaced the local images of God with an all-male concept of God. This has disempowered women by distancing them from God. Further, women cannot see themselves as

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<sup>45</sup> The Bemba people of Zambia refer to God as Mayo Tata Lesa (Mother Father God). See Kaunda (2010: 5)

reflecting the image of God who is masculine (Kaunda 2010:26). Nonetheless, the myths of God show that all God's creation carry the image of God.

Research has shown that women in precolonial times, in African matrilineal societies such as the Tonga and the Bemba had social and religious leadership roles Hinfelaar (1994: 12, 180). It can be argued therefore that although patriarchy is not foreign to Africa, Christianity with its exclusively masculine language and images of God has reinforced (even introducing) patriarchy in Tonga indigenous culture. Anthropomorphic images for God have implications on how men and women are viewed in society. Rakoczy (2004: 63) has rightly observed that gender violence and the discrimination of women in church and society are reinforced by exclusive male images of God. Further envisioning God as father excludes women and men who have had a bad experience of fatherhood. Clifford (2005: 102) has underscored that the images for God in the bible are both metaphorical and analogical. The church has however taken the images of God in a literal sense. Exclusive male images of God have been used to exclude women from leadership positions in Christian communities. Further, exclusively male images of God deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian formation have resulted in the conquest of nature or the mother Earth (Reuther 1983:47).

Admittedly, the current struggle of Tonga women has its roots in the all-male conceptualisation of God introduced by the western missionaries. The pre-Christian Tonga society was inclusive and ecological as demonstrated in this study. Further, female headship of the home was emphasised (cf. Corbel 1982: 17, Machila 1990). Tappa (1986:101) is right to point out that patriarchy has created God in Man's image. The function of God is reduced to male power roles and is perceived to have no female traits such as gentleness and sensitivity. Further God is not expected to have traits of nonhuman forms of life such as the serpent. Men see themselves as being more of the image of God than women. Ecological images of God like *hikabumba* (maker of rivers) may be life-giving to both human beings and nonhuman forms of life.

### 3.13. CONCLUSION

This chapter attempted to show indigenous gendered ecological values and knowledge systems that can be retrieved from indigenous Tonga culture to empower women in the context of the current ecological crisis. The chapter has demonstrated that research by western anthropologists and historians has portrayed women as unimportant in the pre-Christian religious heritage of the Tonga people of Zambia. Despite the roles they fulfilled in rituals associated with the natural phenomenon at territorial cults, women are still perceived as subordinates to men. This is largely because most anthropologists, historians and theologians have drawn their conclusions from observations made on rituals associated with ancestor worship (Colson 2006, Scudder 1962, Schoffeleers 1978). Further, this corpus of research work has portrayed a patriarchal Tonga religio-culture, emphasizing a male focus of the rain-calling rituals and the Leza cult.

This chapter has disrupted these patriarchal depictions through an exploration of the relation of Leza to the natural world where women function as creative agents, and this has produced new dimensions of Tonga religio-culture. The chapter has demonstrated that Tonga kinship system is basically matrilineal, which means that kinship through females is stressed over kinship through males. However, Oduyoye (1995) has warned that matrilineity does not always mean women enjoy power over men. Over the centuries men have constructed a political and religio-cultural system to consolidate their power in society. As a result, matrilineal descent remain a form of thanks to women for child-bearing but not a mechanism of giving authority to them. This seems true of the Tonga people. The good gendered ecological values that were present in indigenous Tonga community before the coming of the colonialists may be used in the construction of an indigenous African gendered and ecological interpretive model. This discovery has disproven the notion that indigenous African culture is primitive, outdated and has nothing to offer to contemporary concerns such as the ecological crisis (Campbell and Robins 2009:1, 2). In the next chapter I interrogate how embedded patriarchy has shaped the interpretation of Genesis 1-3.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### EMBEDED PATRIARCHY WITHIN GENESIS 1-3

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Drawing on Lynn White(1967) many scholars from different academic disciplines within Christianity have argued that western Christianity has largely contributed to the worldview of (post)modernity and the economic systems which have resulted in the present ecological crisis(Nash 1989). This school of thought insists that there is a relationship between capitalism and western Christianity and that Christianity has contributed to the desacralisation of nature. This view has been contested by some biblical scholars and theologians. For example, Granberg-Michaelson (1988:33) argues that the notion that Christianity paved the way for scientific and technological revolutions is questionable. He further argues that the assumption that environmental destruction has flowed solely from the mindset of Western culture, and not from others, is historically dubious (1988:33). To this debate I would add that the marginalisation of women and the natural world is as a result of patriarchal modes of biblical interpretation which has promoted the exalted stature of the male gender in society.

Ecofeminist theologians and biblical scholars have insisted that Judeo-Christianity has largely contributed to the subjugation of women and the natural world (Clifford 2005, Rackozy 2004 and Ruether 2011). Ruether (1975:204) notes:

Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination. They must unite the demands of the women's movements with the ecological movement to envision a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the underlying values of this society.

Ecofeminist theologians and biblical scholars have shown that the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world are connected to patriarchal structures in society. In communities of faith, religious sacred texts play an important role in shaping gender and

ecological ideologies by constructing the social order and people's world views. The bible as a sacred text plays this role through its portrayal of the relationship between God and creation and how humans relate with other forms of life. The portrayal of humans in the biblical text in relation to other forms of life effectively incites humans to adopt certain self-images attitudes and behaviour.

It must be noted that the bible does not speak with one voice. It is a product of particular community struggles in every phase of its formation. Hence, there has been ideological contestation and power politics in every period of the biblical history. Identifying these ideological and political voices make the bible a profound and relevant resource for communities who regard it as a sacred text. It is from this backdrop that this chapter will attempt to investigate how embedded patriarchy has shaped the interpretation of the biblical myths of origin in Genesis 1-3.

This chapter will make an in-depth engagement of a representative sample of major themes in Genesis 1-3 to investigate how embedded patriarchy has shaped the development and interpretation of the major corpora themes in the myths of origin. The chapter argues that biblical myths of origin cannot be perceived as an undifferentiated monolith, but must be understood as a dynamic process which developed over the course of many centuries. It shows that the exaltation of the stature of Adam crystallised during the period of the Monarchy when the myths were redacted. The myths were then re-edited, recycled and expanded in the later sources during and after the exile.

To show how embedded patriarchy has shaped the interpretation of the Biblical myths of origin, the chapter focuses on six themes in the creation narrative which comprise the arc of the biblical myths of origin. The narrative moves from events before the creation of humanity (Gen 1:1-20), to the events that lead to the creation of humanity (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 21), Eve's misogynistic portrayal and Adam's exalted stature in Eden (Gen. 2:8, 15-17), the description of the serpent as the wicked and craftiest of creatures (Gen. 3:1), the violation of the prohibition in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-7) and the expulsion from Eden (Gen 3:16-17). These themes are chosen because of their centrality to the Eden narrative and for their evidence of significant development of a

patriarchal interpretation of Genesis 1-3. These themes are analysed from an African gendered ecological perspective.

To expose embedded patriarchy in the text, the chapter will use an African ecofeminist demythologization<sup>46</sup> theory to detect embedded patriarchy in the text. Demythologisation entails the decoding of myths or the reinterpretation of ancient mythical patterns of thought in the biblical text into contemporary thought patterns. Recognising that the biblical text did not develop in a cultural vacuum, where necessary, I will draw on resources from the ANE. Thus, while using an African Ecofeminist demythologisation theory, the chapter also draws on inter (con) textual hermeneutics which attempts to interpret the bible in its social-historical and contemporary contexts. In what follows I will investigate the inception of embedded patriarchy which has shaped the interpretation of the myths of origin.

## **4.2. INCEPTION OF PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGIES IN ANCIENT ISRAEL**

### **4.2.1. Historical background**

To understand how patriarchal ideologies developed in ancient Israel, it is important to investigate the socio-economic circumstances under which the text was produced. Only once we understand the social world which produced the text can we move on to an “intrinsic” analysis of the ways in which the text reproduces and promotes particular ideological investments (Yee 1995: 150-151). Cheryl Exum (1993:11) argues that such an inquiry begins with the assertion that in ancient Israel, symbolic production was controlled by men, and that therefore, female characters or feminine metaphors in biblical literature need to be recognised and treated as “male constructs” which reflect androcentric ideas about women and serve androcentric interests. Even where the authors of a text might have been female or where one finds an ostensibly positive female character or feminine symbol, the world view expressed is that of “the dominant male world view” (Exum 1993: 10). Thus, the gender critic must, of necessity, read against the grain, stepping outside of the ideology of the text in order to subvert that ideology. On the other hand,

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<sup>46</sup> This hermeneutical approach draws on Rudolf Bultmann’s (1953 and 1960) theory of demythologisation. Bultmann used the demythologisation theory to read the New Testament and argued that miracles do not exist.

Keefe (1993, 1995) insists that there is need for biblical scholars to step into the ancient socio-symbolic world of the bible in order to glimpse its radical difference than “stepping out” from the ideology of the text in order to neutralise its continuing authority. For Keefe (1993, 1995), more attention should be given to the particularity of ancient worlds especially with respect to the position of women. The need to investigate the social and historical world from which the text came from has been set forth most forcefully by Carol Meyers (1988: 24-46) and Phyllis Bird (1989), both of whom draw on anthropological theory, and especially on work in the cross-cultural anthropology of women. The implication of this is that biblical literature encode predominantly negative views towards women and the natural world.

An extensive written tradition began in Israel during the monarchy. Memories of earlier times had been handed on orally often in form of sagas. Only after the migration into Canaan is it possible to deal with Israel as a self-contained subject for historical inquiry. Schmidt (2010:9) rightly observes that even after settlement in Canaan, much of the information about Israel is based on traditions from the time before the settlement.<sup>47</sup> Israel’s ancestors are rather to be sought among the groups of Arameans which emerged from the wilderness or steppe and pressed into the fertile arable region (cf. Gen. 25:20, 28:5, 31:18). They originally spoke Aramaic and adopted Hebrew, the language of their new home after the settlement (Schmidt 2010:12). Following this trajectory, the traditional interpretation that treats the Pentateuchal tradition as specific history of Israel is eliminated. The traditions embodied in the story of the patriarchal families and in the history of the people that begins in the time of Moses and in the traditions concerning the Exodus and Sinai represent various traditions that have differing milieus and contents and that originate in the experiences of independent groups.

The inception and development of patriarchy can be highlighted in four stages in the history of Israel: the nomadic antiquity, early period before the state, the period of the monarchy, and exilic and post-exilic periods. Firstly, the ancestors of the Israelites were largely matrilineal during the

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<sup>47</sup> It is not the intention of this chapter to explore the complex problems of historiography of Israel in its ancient Near Eastern context. The chapter will only show the framework in which events indispensable for understanding the myths of origin in Genesis 1-3 from a gendered and ecological perspective can be located.

nomadic antiquity (Meyers 1988:24-46, Bird 1989: 288-91). The nomadic period can be traced back to the beginning of the third millennium BCE. As a result of trade, removal to different pastures, visits to pilgrimage sanctuaries and need for new settlements, the seminomadic tribes came into contact with the indigenous Canaanites and then identified their own gods with the “El” divinities of the local sanctuaries. For example, they identified themselves with El-Bethel, “God of Bethel” at Bethel (Gen. 35:7) and El-olam, “Everlasting God” of Beersheba (Gen. 21:33, 16:13)(Schmidt 2010:14). As Meyers (1988:24-46) has noted, the seminomadic tribes that settled in Canaan were originally matrilineal. However, by the time they were settling into Canaan some groups had already become patrilineal due to interaction with patriarchal societies.

Secondly, some social changes in society took place during the early period before the state (settlement and age of the judges). The seminomadic ancestors of Israel made their way into Palestine during the transition period from the late Bronze Age to the Iron Age when the great empires in Egypt and Mesopotamia were experiencing a decline of their power. For the first time, they formed well-defined tribes. This process did not take the form of a military operation under a command of a leader. Rather, it took a form of peaceful stratified and protracted process in which the Israelites gradually adopted a settled life around the twelfth century BCE (Schmidt 2010:14). This was followed by a gradual development of land which was probably characterised by military conflicts with the Canaanite city-states especially in the battles associated with Deborah (Judg. 1: 17, 28; 4:1ff, Num. 21:21ff, Gen. 34). The Canaanites were subjected to forced labour (Judg. 1:28ff, Josh 9) and thus were gradually assimilated so that Israel could take over the religious ideas of the indigenous population. Yahwistic faith was promoted while other religions were excluded. As a result, the Baal-Asherah cult and the shrines that were associated with the rain and the fertility of the soil were destroyed (cf. Schmidt 2010:19, Birch et al 2005:258). In an attempt to prevent Baal-Asherah cult, the supporters of Yahwistic faith claimed that Yahweh was also lord of nature’s year and the agricultural cycle (Gen. 2:5, 8:21, Hos. 2). At such sanctuaries (shrines) as Bethel and Shiloh, Israel became familiar with the agrarian festivals current in the land (Judg. 9:27, 21:19ff, Exod. 23:14ff).

The tribes in support of Yahwistic faith made a coalition to defeat the Canaanites. As Schmidt (2010:19) cogently notes, a twelve-tribe federation “amphictyony” that worshiped Yahweh

together met for common worship at various pilgrimage sanctuaries (shrines) which were also associated with the ecological wellbeing of the community (Deut. 33:19). It must be noted that the twelve tribes of Israel depict a matriarchal background which has often been underplayed in biblical literature. The tribes were personified by the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob-Israel, and formed subgroups according to their respective mothers such as sons of Leah, sons of Rachel and sons of the serving Maids. Surprisingly, the symbol of the number twelve is absent in the monarchic period during which patriarchy was consolidated. It can be concluded therefore that the grouping within the list conceals an older history of the tribes that was to some extent different. The groups listed by the matriarchs had a history of their own. It seems the groups formed by the six sons of Leah settled in central Palestine before patriarchy and Yahwistic faith was introduced in Israel (cf. Schmidt 2010:20). Gradually, the tribes which were originally matrilineal were assimilated and the many and varied individual city-states in the plains and the areas settled by the Israelites in the hills formed a more close-knit structure which was more patriarchal.

In their efforts to reconstruct the social world of pre-monarchic Israel, Carol Meyers (1988) and Phyllis Bird (1989)<sup>48</sup> have come to the conclusion that ancient Israelite women were not merely the denigrated “sexual property” of all powerful males, but were empowered social actors in their own right. Their argument begins with a sociological reconstruction of early Israel as an agrarian subsistence economy within which economic production and decision making processes revolved around the domestic family unit and more broadly, the kinship network. This socioeconomic system can also be seen in the “familial mode of production” (Jobling 1991: 242,

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<sup>48</sup> Some biblical scholars have critiqued the methodology used by Carol Meyers and Phyllis Bird. For example, Danna Nolan Fewell (1993) characterises Carol Meyers’ interpretation of Genesis 2-3 as naive, but she does not address the credibility of the extrinsic analysis from which Carol Meyers reads, nor does Fewell work carefully to construct an alternative extrinsic analysis which would provide a foundation for a more suspicious ideological analysis of Genesis 2-3 as a profoundly androcentric text. Reading Meyers (1988) in tandem with Tribble (1978) on Genesis 2-3, Fewell argues that their reading of the text attempts to “rehabilitate the text’s gender code, making the story more palatable to modern women” (1993:241). For Fewell, Phyllis Tribble and Carol Meyers are manipulating the text in ways which are a distortion from its original meaning.

Yee 1995: 150). Comparative anthropological studies show that in such contexts, women could wield significant amounts of power and control at least the major portion of important resources and decisions (Rogers 1975: 728-29, Rosaldo 1974).

The centrality of women within the domestic and kinship-based social structure is suggested by the archaic term *betem* or “mother’s house” which appears in three biblical passages as an alternative designation for ancient Israel’s basic social unit, *betab* or “father’s house.” As Meyers (1988:24-46, 1991:47) and Bird (1989: 288-91) have rightly observed, the appearance of the female-oriented term “mother’s house” in these predominantly androcentric texts suggests the lingering presence of a matrilineal cultural setup from early Israel which located a woman at the center of the kinship-based social power network (Gen. 24:28, Ruth 1:16, Song of Songs 3:4, Prov. 9:1, 31:10-31). In this way, the assumption that Ancient Israel was patriarchal at every point in history is questionable. Further, the assumption that power in pre-monarchical Israel resided in the patriarchs rather than the matriarchs is equally questionable. It must also be noted that centrality of women within the domestic and kinship-based social structure suggested by the archaic term *betem* (mother’s house) points to the role of women as guardian of the shrines or sanctuaries which ensured fertility of the land and ecological wellbeing. This is where Meyers’ (1988) and Bird’s (1989) work can be critiqued. While their work has identified egalitarian values in early Israel, their reading of the biblical text does not pay attention to how the roles of women were related to the ecological wellbeing of the Israelite community and the neighboring nations.

In ancient Israel, personhood and personal dignity were not predicated upon the possession of bodily autonomy and individual freedom, but rather were defined in terms of one’s place within larger corporate structures of family and lineage and by one’s contributions to those structures. The basic social unit was not the individual but the kinship group, and individual existence was intimately tied to corporate welfare and survival. Even in death, one’s existence depended upon continuing ties to the family and its land through burial in ancestral tombs. In relation to the material conditions of the familial mode of production, communal orientations to lineage and land defined a world of sacred meaning and order which was significant for ecological wellbeing. The corporate unit rather than the individual was a primary locus of identity, value

and meaning. The family was a ritual unit, centered on worship of its teraphim, or family gods. These family gods or ancestral spirits provided protection and blessing of fertility (Bloch-Smith 1992: 97-100, Van der Toorn 1990). They also provided council through divination to the living family and the happiness of the dead, and therefore their blessings, depended upon their proper burial within the ancestral holdings and upon the continuing presence of their progeny (*Sikatongo*) on that land (Bloch-Smith: 97-100). While authority existed in certain spheres, there was however no connotation of misogyny, the oppression of females, or the notion of female inferiority.

Thirdly, patriarchal ideologies were consolidated during the monarchy. External political pressure around 1000 BCE led to the establishment of the monarchy and thereby to the formation of a state (1 Sam 8-12) (Schmidt 2010:23). During the reign of David, northern and southern tribes were united and Canaanite city-states which were still independent were also incorporated into Israel. By conquering the surrounding peoples using his standing army (Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites and Arameans), David succeeded in building a Syro-Palestinian empire (2 Sam 8, 12:30). He captured the Canaanite (Jebusite) city of Jerusalem which stood in a neutral area between the northern and southern kingdom and made his own residence there (2 Sam 5:6ff). He also made the city a liturgical centre by transferring the Ark to it (2 Sam 6) (Schmidt 2010:23). When Solomon became king, he built a temple in the capital (1 Kgs 6-8). The temple was closely connected with the royal palace and had the rank of an imperial sanctuary in which priests supplied the official personnel (1 Kgs 4:2). These developments eliminated the credibility of other sanctuaries (shrines) in the empire which were associated with women and the ecological wellbeing. The conviction that Yahweh dwelt in the temple (or on Zion) discredited other forms of religions such as Baal-Asherah. The city-state economy and the tributary mode of production resulted in the widening gap between the Aristocrats and the peasant farmers. The exploitation of the poor (who were mostly women) by the rich (who were mostly men associated with the royal palace) necessitated the rise of some prophets who criticised the kings (2 Kgs 9, 11:29ff).

The monarchical state brought a marked deterioration in social and symbolic location of women in Israel and Judah (Meyers 1988: 189-96). The centripetal force of growing monarchic power



weakened the power of the lineages and effected a shift from the familial to the tributary mode of production. As power was siphoned away from the kinship networks, the power of the nuclear family unit and the authority of the paterfamilias was strengthened. These transformations had a detrimental effect on women's status because the extended kinship network, ecological shrines, and the domestic based agrarian economy had been the arenas in which early Israelite women had claimed and exercised their social power (cf. Steinberg 1991, Jobling 1991). Further, feminine religious symbols which were important within the domestic and local forms of religious practice were stigmatized as non-Yahwistic as the centralising state tightened its control. This move resulted in the destruction of fertility and rain shrines which promoted ecological wellbeing. The politics of state centralisation brought about a deterioration of women's social power and a concomitant rise in negative and misogynistic attitudes towards women and their association with fertility and ecological shrines (cf. Tadmor 1982: 170-71). The deities associated with Baal were gods of vegetation, fertility, and rain. Their powers were associated with the provision of the daily needs of their worshippers. As Nichol (1979, 8:104) states, Baal was a God of nature who took care of vegetation and the increase of cattle and flocks.

After the death of Solomon the kingdom divided into Israel (northern kingdom) with its capital at Samaria and Judah (Southern kingdom) with its capital at Jerusalem. King Jeroboam 1 (926-907 BCE) attempted to make Israel liturgically independent by turning Bethel and Dan into royal sanctuaries (1 Kgs 12:26ff, Amos 7:10-13). On the other hand, Omri and his son Ahab attempted to incorporate Baal-Asherah cult into Yahwistic faith in order to achieve the integration of the Canaanite population (1 Kgs 16:31ff). This move elicited the resistance of the prophets, especially Elijah who advocated for the worship of Yahweh alone (Birch *et al* 2005:259). Thus, the attempt by Omri and Ahab to promote or even restore some shrines associated with the fertility of the land and the ecological wellbeing of the community failed. In 722 BCE, after a siege of three years, Samaria was destroyed by the Assyrians. This put an end to the history and tradition of the northern kingdom which was the centre of Yahwistic faith. The northern Israelite traditions such as the message of Hosea and probably other Elohist traditions were passed over to the southern kingdom. The Assyrians scattered the deported upper classes. As result, all trace

of them was lost (Schmidt 2010:27). It is for this reason that some of the traditions that are in the bible including Genesis 1 were reconstructed during and after the Babylonian exile.

While some texts produced or edited within the monarchical period sought to resolve ideologically the conflicts between the familial and tributary modes of production in favor of the latter (Yee 1995: 152-56), the classical prophets, and especially the eighth century prophets, stood in opposition to the growing power of the monarchy and its efforts to undermine the traditional social and economic systems of power and production (Chaney 1989, Coote 1981, 1992). Hosea, for example, like Amos and Micah, was an advocate for the embattled system of kinship-based power and familial modes of production. His attack on the cultic practices of his day was not an attack upon the fertility religion which had long been an essential component of the community but rather was an attack upon the national shrines and the monarchical power structures they sanctified (Bourdieu 1977).<sup>49</sup>

Fourthly, the exilic and post exilic periods were characterised by a decline in patriarchal tendencies which were consolidated during the monarchy. Unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonians did not install a foreign upper class in Palestine (Albertz 1994:35). In this way, no foreign religious cults gained access to southern kingdom. In addition, the Babylonians allowed the deported Israelites to live together (Ezek. 3:15). Despite several deportation, the major part of the population probably remained in Palestine (2 Kgs. 25:12).

The period of the exile became one of literary productivity. As Schmidt (2010: 24, 30) and Albertz (1994:35) have noted, scribes probably the Deuteronomistic school re-edited and transmitted the traditions. Much of the myths, folklores, legends, and traditions of the prophets were re-edited and transmitted. For example the priestly documents which includes the myth of origin in Genesis 1 was re-edited during the exile. From a traditional perspective, the rhetoric of the redactors or reformers seem to rest on the theological assumption that the time of Israel's

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<sup>49</sup> Keefe (1999:1) argues that prophetic literature uses metaphors of promiscuous women who are stripped and raped as punishment for their transgressions. She insists that the notion that these metaphors are indicative of misogynistic attitudes in ancient Israel is a generalization which should be challenged. Some prophets challenged patriarchal tendencies during the monarchical period.

salvation was the wilderness period, and that with the settlement in Canaan, apostasy from Yahweh began which finally led to the exile (Albertz 1994:23, Birch et al 2005:258). However, their ideology often embodied a confession of guilt for the mistakes committed prior to and during the monarchical period when social injustices including the exploitation of women became rampant. By counteracting an ideal monarchical period (and sometimes the period prior to the monarchy), the reformers wanted to create a basis for a new religious and social identity based on egalitarianism. In this manner, some patriarchal ideologies were challenged in the newer versions of the documents. It was on the basis of this conception that everything that late pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic reform groups regarded as indispensable to religious identity of Israel anchored in the early period of Israel before patriarchy was consolidated (cf. Albertz 1994:24). The considerable potential of opposition to domination intrinsic to Yahweh religion in the period before the state and the opposition movements of the early monarchy point to the gender and ecological oppressions which were going on.

From about 550 B.C., the Persians dominated the world. The early kings of Persia respected the traditions of the subject peoples and promoted the indigenous cults (Schmidt 2010: 30, 31). It was from this backdrop that Cyrus ordered the rebuilding of the temple and the return of the temple furnishings that had been carted off to Babylon. After the Persian domination (539-333 BCE), the Greeks dominated the world. Alexander the Great inaugurated the Hellenistic period with the victory at the battle of Issus (333 BCE). After the death of Alexander (323 BCE), as a result of the quarrels of the Diadochoi (successors), Palestine became for a century part of the Egyptian of the Ptolemies (301-198 B.C.), it then became part of the Syrian kingdom of the Seleucids (198-64 BCE). Finally, in 64 BCE Palestine fell under Roman control. Patriarchal ideologies became rampant again due to the influence of dualistic Greek philosophy.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the history of Israelite religion is full of uncertainties in the period before the state (from 1250 to 1000 BCE) (Schmidt 2010, Albertz 1994). There is evidence from the texts of ancient Mari (c. 1800 BCE) that Israelite families were engaged in both agriculture and nomadic rearing of sheep and goats (cf. Birch et al 2005:61, Albertz 1994:34). The patriarchs and matriarchs had cattle which clearly go with an agricultural community. However, what is recorded in Genesis 1-3 and the entire book of Genesis cannot be

confined to the middle Bronze Age (ca. 1800-1600 BCE) at least for three reasons. Firstly, the early period propagated in the Pentateuch derives in its present form largely from the early post-exilic period. Secondly, there is little incontrovertible evidence that all the traditions recorded in Genesis were composed, either in oral or written form, during this period. Thirdly, Patriarchs and Matriarchs like Sarah, Abraham, Rebekah and Isaac are impossible to root firmly in this particular historical context. In fact, what is called pre-Israel, emerged in Syria-Palestine only at the beginning of the Iron Age (1100-1000 BCE).<sup>50</sup>

Despite, a patriarchal manipulation of the literary biblical text, there are residues of texts in the Pentateuch that show that the agrarian and ecological community existed in Israel before the monarchy. This is because cultures have deep roots which includes patterns of language, thought and practice that have been elaborated over time to become part of the cultural core of that people's world. The patterns, which emerge out of a people's imaginative encounter with the material world, with the landscape and climate, with the available means of sustenance and survival given in the environment are perpetuated by the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Over the centuries, they become so central to that culture's modes of thought and metaphor construction that they cannot be easily eradicated. The argument for radical social change being accompanied by an intensification of patriarchal social structures and a concomitant rise of misogyny is evident in the portrayal of Eve and the Serpent in Genesis 3 (cf. Frymer-Kensky 1992: 151, Archer 1990). In this situation, women whose bodily processes frequently rendered them "unclean" were coded negatively as symbols of evil.

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<sup>50</sup> The primeval history and the stories of the patriarchs and the matriarchs presents poetry and prose that later religious communities found useful and essential. The stories in Genesis (1-3) became part of the canon even though they cannot always be anchored in specific historical events. The stories that depict a community that was entirely patriarchal mirror a later stage in the Israelite community. Some traditions in the biblical text refer to communities or tribes that were matrilineal (Gen. 25: 19-37:1) (Birch et al 2005:62).

#### 4.2.2. Inception of patriarchal ideologies

The pre-monarchical semi-nomadic Israelite<sup>51</sup> community that settled in Canaan<sup>52</sup> around the 13th century BCE lived in a pre-state ecological society (cf. Schmidt 2010:14, Hadley 2000). The patriarchal political state formation occurred, around the middle of the 11th century BCE (Day 1992:225, 2002, Coogan 1978, Bishop 2011). This process largely excluded women from the public and religious activities and strict sex regulations were also introduced on female sexuality (Clark 1989, Day 1986:399). It can be suggested that the myth(s) found in Genesis 2-3 were drawn from a tradition composed around this same time. This can be exhibited by its tendency to portray the woman and the serpent in a negative way. The change in the status of women in society was not confined to the Israelites. The entire ANE was undergoing dramatic changes due to the impact of Indo-European invaders whose social and religious institutions were largely patriarchal and patrilineal (Briffaut 1993). As a result, there was a downward shift in the status and role of women in society.

The changes in the Jewish society from a matrilineal and ecological society to a patriarchal set up largely accounts for the ambiguities found in the creation narrative (Gen. 1-3). Although a patriarchal interpretation emphasises a family structure which is predominantly patriarchal and androcentric, there is evidence in the myths to indicate that previously there had been in the Jewish community and the diaspora a matrilineal family structure. For example, the seven years

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<sup>51</sup> The term "Hebrew" is usually used to refer to the Old Testament patriarchs, beginning with Abraham and Isaac and ending with Moses. It is also used to refer to the period between the first half of the second millennium BCE and the conquest of Canaan (Palestine) in the 13th century BCE that followed the exodus from Egypt during the reign of Ramesses II (1290-1224 BCE). From the 13th century to the time of the Babylonian Captivity around 6th century BCE, the same people were known as Israelites. After their return from Babylon, they were known as Jews. After the conquest of Canaan, the Israelites started speaking Hebrew, which was a dialect of Canaanite, a Semitic language heavily influenced by Egyptian and spoken in the kingdoms of Israel, Judah, and Moab between 1500 and 500 BCE. See Schmidt (2010:14), Briffaut (1993), Hvidberg (1960), Day (2002), Coogan (1978).

<sup>52</sup> The Canaanites were the long term inhabitants of Palestine. They had the closest and most continuous relationship with the Hebrews (Livingston (1974:29).

Jacob spent in the service of Laban for each of his daughters, Rachel and Leah conforms to matrilineal marriage arrangement (Gen. 29). Secondly, there seems to be an ecological and non-patriarchal social system in the background of the stories of the “matriarchs” Sarah and Rebecca (Gen. 16:1-4, 17:15-16). It was common in ancient Israel for women to remain without bearing children in order to perform traditional and ecological roles as guardians of the sacred shrines (cf. Clack 1989, Hadley 2000). It was also common for women in Canaan and other cultures in the ANE to perform such functions (Day 2003, Briffaut 1993).

Given, this matrilineal and ecological structure in the background of the book of Genesis, it is not surprising that the myths of origin in Genesis 1-3 embody matrilineal and ecological family and community values which have been ignored by patriarchal modes of biblical interpretation. For example, Genesis 2:24 states that a man must “leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife”. The custom of a man moving to the wife’s family residence was common in many cultures in the ANE (Cross 1973)<sup>53</sup>. Secondly, the portrayal of a serpent talking to the woman while ignoring the man is suggestive of a matrilineal family arrangement where the woman is the head of family and ecological rituals(cf. Day 2002, Hadley 2000)<sup>54</sup>.

It may be argued therefore that, the myths of origin in the Eden narrative (Gen. 1-3) points to the historical shift from a matrilineal and ecological Jewish society to an increasingly patriarchal social and religious set up. Secondly, it is evident that myth(s) recounted in the narrative (Gen. 1-3) were drawn from the prevailing traditions (myths, legends, sagas folklores) which were edited

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<sup>53</sup> The Canaanite custom is an example of matrilineal cultural set up. It has been argued that this same custom accounts for Abraham sending his servant off to acquire a wife for his son Isaac from among his own patrilineal kinsmen of Harran rather than permitting him to marry a Canaanite woman and have Isaac adopted into her clan (Gen. 24). See Cross 1973, Hvidberg 1960.

<sup>54</sup> The Egyptian trinity Osiris, Isis and Horus has a divine feminine element. Many indigenous religions in the ANE had a divine feminine imbedded in them. Goddesses were co-creators, protective nurturers, gods of fertility and were the love and sanctuary that balanced the masculine qualities of the other gods. The patriarchal Judaeo-Christian writers, redactors and interpreters have removed all that. Instead, women have been portrayed as a threat to life and God’s creation. See Day 2002, Cross 1973.

and written down to serve as a key document in support of the new Jewish patriarchal order by claiming it to be divinely ordained. These patriarchal politics are exposed when the finer details of the text are analysed.

### 4.3. EVENTS PRECEDING THE CREATION

The narrative begins by recounting the events before the creation of humanity (Gen. 1:1-20). The narrator introduces the motif of Chaos (lack of order) in the “beginning”<sup>55</sup> (*B'reishit*) of the universe which God (*Elohim*) transformed into order. Gorg (1993) has suggested that the word “chaos” is not appropriate to represent the process of creation in the biblical myths of origin. The translation of the Hebrew word *ayg* as chaos in the Septuagint is suggestive. The word *ayg* is used in Mica.1.6 and Zech. 14.4 in both suggesting God’s feet standing on the Mount of Olives which would be split in two by a wide valley (chaos in Greek). Following this trajectory, it can be argued that the motif of chaos suggests a disruptive sphere under the control (feet) of Elohim (God). Elohim stands as a God of justice and mercy. In this sense, Gorg (1993) is right to suggest that the function of the motif of chaos in Genesis 1 is to stress the sovereign power of God in the world in whom life and the source of existence for humans and nonhuman forms of life are. I would add that the sovereignty of God to support life is symbolized by the divine Mother Bird (*nankoko*) hovering over water (Gen. 1:2). In other words, life and experience of life comes out of the experienced chaos (*umuyengeyenge*).

The motif of chaos was present in other myths in the ANE such as the Atra-hasis and the Babylonian creation epic. In this way, it can be argued that the narrator of the myth in Genesis 1 drew on the existing tradition and interpreted it to affirm Elohim as a God of justice and the source of life for both humans and nonhuman forms of life (cf. Van Seters 1988:7, 8). It is from

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<sup>55</sup> The origin of life on planet Earth has long baffled scientists. Although many theories suggest that the Earth is more than 3 thousand billion years old, there is no consensus as to how life first originated on the planet Earth. Scientists and anthropologists all agree that the human-like ancestors of human beings lived in East Africa in Ethiopia and Kenya around 3.2 million years ago. Scientists call these humanlike-creatures Australopithecus afarensis (Southern Ape of afar). See Johanson, DC. 2009. “Lucy (Australopithecus afarensis)”. In Micheal, Ruse and Joseph Travis (Eds.). *Evolution: The first four billion years*. Cambridge: Harvard University press, 693-697; Cart Mill, Matt et al. 2009. *The human lineage*. Wiley: Blackwell, 151.

this backdrop that the universalisation and democratisation of the concept of the image and likeness of God in the creation of humanity should be understood. Rather than having one King representing God, the myths of origin points to the entire creation being the *Imago Dei*.

#### **4.4. CREATION OF HUMANITY AND THE DOMINION MOTIF**

The myth of origin in Genesis 1 recounts the creation of humanity emphasizing human beings having dominion on Earth (Gen. 1:26-28). This text has been used down the centuries to consolidate human rulership and exploitation of natural goods. It has been suggested that the concept of the image of God was borrowed from the Babylonian myth of origin the *Enuma elish* around the sixth century BCE during the Jewish exile in Babylon (Westermann 1974). It is further suggested that the myth is a re-construction of Ancient Near Eastern royal ideology in which instead of the king being the image of the deity and placed over humans, the human is made in the image of God and placed over nonhuman creation (cf. Rogerson 1997:67, Wright 2004:119). It depicts an agricultural community where humans rule over the earth through practicing agriculture, a common feature of the ANE. This position is quite problematic given that it supports the marginalisation of nonhuman forms of life.

Genesis 1:26<sup>56</sup> records God as having said,

“Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

Two words are worth examining in this text: “image” and “dominion”. In the ANE, the word “image”<sup>57</sup> was associated with the idea of a king being a representative of God on Earth (cf.

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<sup>56</sup> All the quotations from the bible in this study are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless specifically stated in the text.

<sup>57</sup> The word translated “image” is derived from the Hebrew word *tselem*. The word is normally used in the Old Testament to refer to a model or idol of something. It is used to refer to similarity in physical appearance (Miller



Rogerson 1997:67, Wright 2004:119). In the same way a statue of a king would be sent to represent the king in absentia. And so, by using the concept of the “image” of God to refer to human beings, the narrator reverses the notion of the image of God in the ANE. First, it is no longer the male king who is the representative of God but all human beings. The concept is now universalised to include all human beings regardless of their status in society. Second, the narrator applies the concept of the “image of God” to both man and woman: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). In this way, the concept is de-patriarchalised. It is no longer a male king who is the representative of God on earth but all human beings regardless of their gender or age. The text therefore becomes the foundation of an egalitarian community in which all human beings (male and female) are created to reflect the image of God equally.

A patriarchal biblical interpretation has wrongly suggested that human beings were created in the image of God to have dominion over other forms of life (Rogerson 1997:67, Conradie 2006). However, a closer look at the text suggests the opposite. The narrator employs the dominion motif to show that the equality of man and woman as human beings is in relation to their cooperation to support life on earth their home (*oikos*). The notion that humans should dominate and exploit other forms of life is as a result of an inaccurate interpretation of the word dominion in Genesis 1:26-28.

As Middleton (2005:50-52) has observed, the text uses the Hebrew verbs *rada* and *kabas* (Genesis 1:26-28) in relation to God’s command to human beings. The verbs have inaccurately been interpreted to mean violent exploitation and domination. However, *kabas* represents the bringing of something under someone’s control through the exercise of power. The word *rada* represents royal dominion in which the king has the responsibility to take good care of the subjects. Further, the word dominion is derived from a Hebrew word *v’yirdu* which means “descend” or “sink” as well as “rule”. This means that the concept of dominion in the ANE was

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1972:291). The word translated “likeness” is derived from the Hebrew word *dmut*. The word is used in connection with visual similarities and often carries the connotation of “has the appearance of” (Miller 1972:292). Drawing on the two Hebrew words, Miller (1972) concludes that male and female are not only made in the likeness of God, but specifically the corporeal form of God.

eco-democratised. Dominion is no longer given to human beings in form of power and hierarchy, but in form of responsibility to be partners with God and all creation to support life on earth. In this way, the myth invites humans to relate with other earth-beings at an equal level. This emphasis on service to the earth as a home for God's creation is reiterated in Genesis 2:15. Thus, the notion of rulership to exploit the natural world comes from a patriarchal interpretation of the text.

Reed (2000:335) argues that humans have been given a mandate by God to dominate other forms of creation. In the same way, Middleton (2005:27) insists that rulership over other forms of creation is "the royal office or calling of human being as God's representatives and agents in the world". However, human beings were created to cooperate with other forms of God's creation rather than to rule. African indigenous culture illustrates the importance of human beings cooperating with nature. In African cosmology, the *Imago Dei* manifests by humans cooperating with other forms of creation. God is not considered to be transcendent but one who dwells among creation (Kaunda 2011 Setiloane 1986). For this reason, human beings and the natural world are expected to have time to rest and recreate.

The first account of the creation of humanity concludes by introducing the principle of rest for re-creation<sup>58</sup> (Gen. 2:1-3). The creator steps back to admire the beauty of God's creation. The time of rest to recreate is premised on the principle that land and nonhuman forms of life were not human property (Fox 1995: 488, 626). Rather, they belonged to God (Lev 25:2-4). In this manner, the time of resting was set aside for re-creation for humans, land and other forms of life. In other words the time of rest was guided by the ecological principle of *bal tashhit* (be not destructive). This principle was a prohibition to destroy a resource that might prove useful to humans and other forms of life. For example, the Israelites were forbidden to cut down the fruit trees surrounding the towns of their enemies (Deut. 20:19-20). The principle of recreation is also found among the Tonga people of Zambia. In precolonial times, people were not allowed to pick

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<sup>58</sup> Land was left to lie fallow during the year of resting (sabbatical year) which was observed every seven years to give it time for re-creation. See Fox (1995: 488, 626).

fruits from the trees at the shrine. Further, fishing and hunting was not allowed during breeding season to ensure that there was continuity of the species (Machila 1990). It can be noted that the principle of rest in the myth (Gen. 2:1-3) removes the notion of human being created to rule and exploit the earth and other forms of creation. Further, it can be noted that the myth was re-edited to sustain Israel during the time (of insecurity) when the marginalisation and exploitation of women and the natural world was common. The prevalence of embedded patriarchy can be seen from man's exalted stature in the creation narrative.

#### **4.5. MAN'S EXALTED STATURE AND MYSOGYNISTIC PORTRAYAL OF THE WOMAN IN EDEN**

The second chapter of Genesis recounts the creation of humans differently from that recounted in the first chapter of the same book. The narrative presents an exalted stature of man in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8, 15-17). The figures of Adam and Eve are central to the Christian understanding of the position of man and woman in society. The Christian community has often used the biblical text to define the role of man and woman in society based on a popular assumption that the myths and their sources are monolithic and uniformly ancient. However, as Kugel (2006) has shown, biblical writers or redactors (mostly scribes) were not simply copyists mindlessly churning out written documents but sentient people who found some utility in the texts they were perpetuating. As such, they not only read documents and referred to them, they frequently added or removed details from their sources.

The myths in Genesis 2 and 3 are narrated in a language of folktales, folklores or ancient myths derived from the "Yahwist" traditions (Campbell 1974, Patai 1990, Cross 1973). The narrator reconstructs and edits old traditions about the origin of human beings and the world. Due to many traditions that have been put together, the interpretation of the narrative is that God first formed man out of the dust and put him in the Garden of Eden. Then God created a woman from the man's rib who was tempted by the serpent leading to the expulsion of humans from the garden into the world of suffering. This view has been used to reinforce the subordinate role of women in society. Quoting Genesis, the Pseudo-St. Paul writes:

For I do not allow woman to teach, or to exercise authority over men; but she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor (1 Tim. 2:12-14).

In a similar way, the early Christian theologians claimed that women were wicked. For example, Tertullian (c. 155-220 CE) claimed that women were the devil's gateway (Brown 1998)<sup>59</sup>. The negative view of Eve and of women in general in Judaeo-Christian traditions supports male hegemony and is deeply rooted in the socio-religious ideologies of Western civilisation which have spread to other parts of the world including Africa. It is for this reason that re-reading the myths to recover the text from centuries of misogynist reading becomes paramount. Further, it is apparent that embedded patriarchy has exalted the stature of Adam in the Eden narrative in two ways. These two ways are interrelated.

#### **4.5.1. Support for the domination of woman by Man**

The myth has been used to support the domination of woman in society by man. Bouteneff (2008:47) argues that "Adam was created from the earth and Eve was created from Adam". This patriarchal view provides the background to the Christian understanding of the subordinate position of women in society (Bal 1987:5)<sup>60</sup>. Tribble<sup>61</sup> (1978) and Resienberger (1993) for

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<sup>59</sup> During the middle Ages, St. Bernard of Clairvaux stated that Eve was "the original cause of all evil, whose disgrace has come down to all other women." In the Vulgate, St. Jerome interpreted Genesis 3:6 by using the word *seducta* implying that Eve used her sex to seduce Adam into disobedience. Similarly, in many medieval liturgical drama of the creation of human beings, Eve and women in general were portrayed as wicked creatures. See Brown 1998, Clack 1986, Higgins 1976.

<sup>60</sup> For different approaches employed by feminist biblical scholars to show how women have been assigned to the margins in the biblical text see: Pardes, Ilana. 1992. Counter traditions in the Bible. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 2-3; Bal, Mieke. 1987. Lethal love. Bloomington: Indiana University press, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Drawing on the Rabbinic Midrash Phylis Tribble (1978) attempts to show that the woman was not an afterthought in God's order of creation. She argues that in the creation narrative (Gen. 2:7) *'adamah* (the man) was a sexually unidentified earthling creature. Gender differentiation appeared when the creature was divided to form a woman (Gen. 2:22) and a man (Gen. 2:23). Unlike the earthling creature, man and woman are sexually differentiated as *ish* and *ishah* respectively. See Tribble (1978). *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

example has shown that Eve was not created from Adam's rib. The Hebrew word translated rib in Genesis 2:21-22 is *Tsela*. The word *Tsela* does not mean rib (*ulubafu*). Rather it means side (*ichipandwa*). The translation of rib is derived from a late medieval rabbinical teaching that aimed at demonstrating the subordinate position of a woman in society.

Trible (1978) further shows that the word translated helper in Genesis 2:18 is *Ezeh Kenegdo*. In the Hebrew bible, God is usually designated as a help (Ps. 70:5; 121:1-2). The word is also used to refer to God's help in war (Is. 30:5, Hos. 13:9, 63:5). A closer look at the text shows that the concept of *Ezeh Kenegdo* has both gender and ecological significance. First, the possible root behind 'ezer may have been either '-z-r "to rescue" or 'g-z-r meaning to "to be strong". The word 'ezer as in 'eben-ezer (stone of help) means a help from the divine or someone stronger. In this way, the idea of helper is used to refer to the role of women as guardians and leaders of both family and community ecological rituals. The text (Gen. 2:18) can then be read as "I will make a power corresponding to the Mother Earth ('*adamah*)"<sup>62</sup>. In the same way, the Hebrew word translated, "bone of my bones" (Gen. 2:23) means "one of us" or "corresponding sameness". It is also worth noting that the word *negdo* means "that which is full view of" or "in front of". The related noun, *nagid*, means a "ruler" or "prince"; and the verb, *nagad*, means to "declare" or "reveal". The word also refers to the ability or wisdom to thrust into the unknown.

It can be argued therefore, that the woman was never meant to be an assistant or "helpmate" to the man. Rather, man and woman were created equally. The role of a woman as a helper points to the role of women in the ecological rituals. It can also be argued that the concept of a rib was borrowed from Goddess mythology. The Sumerian word "ti" means both "rib" and "to make alive" (cf. Lieberman 1975, Cross 1973). Further, in ancient Mesopotamian mythology, *Ninti*, the name for the Mother Earth means both "lady of the rib" and "lady who makes alive" (cf. Lieberman 1975, Cross 1973). *Ninti* is depicted being created by *Nimhursag* (God) to heal *Enki's* sick rib (Hadley 2000). It can be argued therefore that the use of the concept of the "rib" in the text does not refer to gender hierarchy. Rather, it refers to the central role of a woman as a giver

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<sup>62</sup> Old Jewish literature reveal a man and a woman facing each other with an arch between them emphasizing their equality. In a similar way, Tonga marriage emblems show a man and woman standing with straight stick between them to emphasise their equality (cf. Richards 1982:83, Kangwa 2011:29).

and source of life. This exemplifies why the woman is referred to as the “mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20).

#### **4.5.2. Support for the domination of nonhuman forms of life by humans**

The myth has been used to support the exploitation of nonhuman nature on earth by humans particularly the male elite. For example, Reed (2000:335) contends that humans and animals are not equal in the created order. For Reed, the naming of animals in the myth by *'adamah* (Gen. 2:19) indicates that humans were given the mandate to rule over animals and other nonhuman forms of life. However, a closer look at the text shows that humans were placed in the garden to tend and watch it (*leabdah u-l'shamrah*). The myth also puts humans and animals at the same level for at least two reasons. First, humans and animals come from the same source, the earth (*'adamah*) (Gen. 2:7, 2:19). Second, humans and animals are equally called “living beings” (*nepes chayya*). The myth therefore mirrors an ecological community where all living things are valued before the creator.

It is also worth noting that the concept of tending and tilling the land (Gen. 2:7, 2:27) suggests an agricultural economy in ancient Israel. Agriculture formed the basis for the economy and it was the fabric for the ecological community (*ecodome*). Finly (1973:123-149) and Sjoberg (1960) have shown that in ancient Israel nearly all towns were totally dependent upon the agricultural production of the land. The community had landowners who lived on revenue from their landholdings and central powers like kings and priests who extracted tribute from the production of the land. In this way, power meant control of land and of agricultural production. In the narrative however, the narrator portrays Adam as a peasant farmer rather than a king or landowner. It can be argued therefore that exaltation of the stature of man is a construction of patriarchal interpretation. The myth stands in opposition to current global religio-political and socio-economic ideologies that promote the exploitation of the natural world and the subjugation of women. It is against the building of patriarchal empires.

Unfortunately, throughout the Christian history, a patriarchal interpretation of the myth(s) has been canonized to legitimise woman's secondary status to man. Further, the myths have been

used to legitimize the exploitation of the natural world. One way in which this has been done is to depict the woman and the serpent as wicked creatures.

#### **4.6. A PATRIARCHAL PORTRAYAL OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SERPENT AND THE WOMAN**

The creation narrative introduces a new character in Chapter three, the serpent (Gen. 3:1). The narrator presents the serpent in a masculine and anthropomorphic way. Thus, the serpent could speak and didn't yet crawl (Gen. 3:1-3). A traditional (and patriarchal) interpretation of the myths has however, presented the serpent as a rebellious female reptile (Holter 1990:106-112). Women in communities who regard the bible as sacred text have been associated with the role of a serpent who tempted Eve (Brenner 1993); thus, identifying the woman with the serpent. This identification of the woman with the serpent is worth investigating.

Holter (1990:106-112) has argued the image of a serpent was used as a symbol of Israel's enemies. This view can be reinforced by reference to biblical texts where a snake is used as an image of betrayal, biting, hiss or world powers (Amos 5:19, Isaiah 27:1). Following this trajectory, the Hebrew word *nachash* has been interpreted to mean "to whisper", "hiss", "spell" or "magic" in reference to the serpent in Genesis 3. Thus, the serpent has been presented as the enemy of Yahweh and a threat to life.

However, a closer look at Genesis chapter three points to the serpent's association with female wisdom. The Hebrew word *nachash* also means "to shine", "fascinate", "enchant", "omen" or "divine". The words *nachash* and *Seraph* are sometimes used interchangeably. For example, Moses is reported to have been told to make a *Seraph* (a burning one) (Num. 21:8) and in response he made a *nachash* of brass (Num. 21:9). Towards the end of the narrative in Genesis 3 the concept of a Cherubim is introduced (Gen. 3:24). It can be deduced therefore that the myth points to the serpent who was of superior order and possessed superior cultic knowledge. Similarly, the word rendered "subtle" or "craft" (Gen. 3:1) means wise or state of having good and pure invention. It can be argued therefore that the association of the serpent with the fall of

humanity is a construction of patriarchal interpretation. The ideological elements of embedded patriarchy in the portrayal of the serpent can be seen in two ways.

#### **4.6.1. Removal of the woman from the role of priestess and guardian of ecological shrines**

The negative portrayal of the serpent and the woman in the Eden narrative mirrors the Jewish struggle with the Canaanite cult of Baal-Asherah where women served as guardians of shrines which were significant for ecological wellbeing (cf. Day 1986:385-408). In the cult of Baal-Asherah, Baal was the son and consort of the Mother Goddess Asherah<sup>63</sup>(Patai 1965:37-52, Day 1986:385-408). As a fertility god, Baal was primarily symbolised in three forms as a man, male bull and as a male serpent. By using these three forms of male potency and virility, Baal was represented as a masculine fertilising element of God who in union with the Mother Goddess fulfilled the functions of life-giving, life-renewing and life-preserving in the Canaanite community.

The knowledge of the Canaanite religion has been advanced by archaeological discoveries of documents and female figurines. These archeological discoveries have begun to reshape the understanding of the role of women in ancient Israel. Firstly, documents have been discovered from Ugarit (Ras Shamra) on the Syrian coast, dating from the middle of the second millennium B.C. (Birch et al 2005:258). Secondly, female figurines have been found in abundance at Israelite and Judean domestic sites. These ritual objects are found at a frequency of roughly one per household, and apparently served as the central feature of the household shrine (Holladay 1987: 278). They also appear in high concentrations at two subterranean sites (Holladay 1987:

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<sup>63</sup> Also referred to as Ashteroth or Astarte. The consort of Baal included Anat and Astarte or Asherah. Their mating was believed to be responsible for overcoming the powers of death and enabling a renewal of life, especially evidenced in the rains and fertility of the land (Birch *et al* 2005:258).

Asherah has also been translated as grove or wood or tree. The feminine connotation of the asherim cult object is suggested by both its name, (the plural form of Asherah), and by its wooden, pillar shaped form, which is suggestive of a tree which was a common goddess symbol in the region (cf. Birch *et al* 2005:258, Hestrin 1978a, 1979b; Olyan 1988).



259). Archeologists have dated the shrines back to the monarchical period when the worship of Baal-Asherah was contested by Jewish prophets (Holladay 1987:278).<sup>64</sup>

The meaning and function of the female figurines has been contested. Coogan (1987: 119) and Holladay (1987: 278) suggest that the figurines served as domestic icons of an Israelite goddess, most probably Asherah. Frymer-Kensky (1992:153-61) adds that the figurines represented the female body which served as an icon of sacred power. Women offered prayers for fertility and nourishment at the shrines associated with Baal-Asherah (cf. Frymer-Kensky 1992: 159). The discovery of the inscriptions at Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet Ajrûd which depict the invoked blessings of Yahweh and Asherah has made some scholars to conclude that Asherah was worshipped as a consort of Yahweh in monarchical Israel and Judah (Dever 1984, Freedman 1987, Olyan 1998). Some scholars have been reluctant to link the goddess Asherah with the worship of Yahweh. For example, Lemaire (1977:607) argued that Asherah was a sacred tree on the sacred shrine of Baal. But, Hadley (2000:7) insists:

It therefore appears that the interpretation of Asherah as merely an object (where sanctuary, groove, wooden pole or living tree) does not fully meet the requirements as presented in the Hebrew Bible.

In any case, Baal-Asherah cult had shrines that had ecological significance. Further, early ancient literature indicates that the Israelites subscribed to Baal-Asherah cult and at some point in time, Baal's father *El* was worshiped as true God (Baring and Cashford 1993, Hadley 2000:7, Day 1986:399). When the cult of Yahweh developed, it had much in common with the cult of Baal-Asherah including the consort of the Mother Goddess. Much in the worship of Yahweh was borrowed from Canaanite religion. For example the concept of Yahweh being the source of fertility (Gen 1-3) was borrowed from Baalism (Birch et al 2005:259, Patai 1990).

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<sup>64</sup> Under Ahab and Jezebel, the worship of Baal-Asherah was widely promoted in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. The Canaanite religion was polytheistic. Chief among the deities was El, the high God of the Canaanite pantheon whose consort was Asherah. Asherah was also believed to be the consort of Baal a male God of fertility (I Kgs 16:32-33, 18:19) (Birch et al 2005:258).

However, the adherents of the “Yahweh-alone party” which included prophets started a campaign to establish Yahweh as the one true God (Judg. 2:13, 3:7, 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:4, 12:10) (Patai 1990, 1965:37-52, Bishop 2011). As a result Baal became the enemy of Israel and the cult of Baal was presented as false and idolatry.<sup>65</sup> The campaign against Baal-Asherah resulted in the removal of women from their roles as priestesses and guardians of ecological shrines. Instead, a predominantly male Yahweh cult was established and shrines<sup>66</sup> in the hills and mountains where women performed family and ecological rituals were destroyed (1 King. 15:13). It is for this reason that women protested (Jer. 44:17). Like Adam (Gen. 3) men supported the protest but did not come in the open (Jer. 44:19). Despite the protest by Jewish women against the destruction of the ecological shrines, the adherents of the “Yahweh alone” movement prevailed. It has been observed that the worship of Asherah by the Jews as a consort of Yahweh did not survive into the Monarchy period and efforts by King Jeroboam 1 to restore Baal worship did not succeed (Birch et al 2005:259, Hadley 2000).

The move by the male Jewish elite to consolidate their dominance in society through the worship of Yahweh is mirrored in the myths of origin. The serpent approaches not Adam, as may be expected in a patriarchal society, but Eve pointing to the association of women with ecological rituals in indigenous culture. The narrative then moves to discredit the association of the woman with the serpent. The woman is reported to say: “The serpent deceived me and I ate” (Gen. 3:13). The narrative finally depicts Yahweh punishing the serpent and the woman (Gen. 3:14-16). In

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<sup>65</sup>To promote male dominance in society and the worship of Yahweh, the adherents of “Yahweh alone” frequently blamed women for leading the Israelites astray. This is because women were priestesses and guardians of family and ecological rituals associated with the Mother Goddess. For example, Solomon is said to have his heart “turned away” from Yahweh by women (I Kings 11:3) and he worshipped Astarte the goddess Sidon a Phoenician city (I Kings 11:5). In a similar way, Jezebel (Jeze-baal) the daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon is said to have caused her husband, King Ahab (873-852 BCE), to worship Baal and Asherah (I King. 16:31-33). Like Eve, Jezebel has been portrayed as a wicked woman throughout the history of patriarchal biblical interpretation. See Holladay (1987:278), Clark (1989), Brenner (1993).

<sup>66</sup>King Hezekiah (727-698 BCE) destroyed the shrines. He cut down the Asherah and broke into pieces the Brazen Serpent (Baal) which Moses had made (II Kings 18:4).

this way the narrative successfully separates the woman from the natural world by putting enmity between the woman and the serpent.

#### **4.6.2. Removal of the elements of God symbolising female and nonhuman forms of life**

Related to the removal of women from their role as priestesses and guardians of shrines, is the removal of the elements representing female and nonhuman forms of life from God. The narrator adjusted the myth to portray the serpent (representing the male potency of God) as a seducer and deceiver (Gen. 3:1-3) to discredit the cult of Baal-Asherah as Yahweh's adversary (cf. Mundkur 1983). By implication the natural world (represented by the serpent) was separated from the creator as wicked and therefore the abode of evil. In the same way, the woman (representing the female element of God) was removed. In this manner, the worship of Yahweh could only be identified with a male human being.

Genesis 3:14-16 recounts the curses pronounced on the woman and the serpent. The curses pronounced in the text seem to be a reversal of the matrilineal and ecological community setup. The association of women with the natural world is significant in a matrilineal indigenous society. Among the Tonga people of Zambia fertility, puberty and motherhood rituals are performed by women in the bush at shrines associated with the Mother-Earth (cf. Moyo 2009, Colson 2006). A similar matrilineal community setup is evident in the ANE (cf. Mundkur 1983). The concerns of women related to puberty, fertility, conception, pregnancy and motherhood were addressed through their association with the Mother Earth (cf. Mundkur 1983)<sup>67</sup>. This can be confirmed by the use of the word *beast* (Gen. 3:1) which is derived from the Hebrew word *chay* meaning "strong", "life" or "a living being". In this manner, the curses Yahweh enacts on Eve and the serpent are a reversal of the principal functions of the Mother Earth (Goddess) to protect women in child-bearing. It is also a reversal of an ecological matrilineal community set up where women are in charge of family and ecological rituals.

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<sup>67</sup> A Hebrew incantation text from the 7th century BCE shows a woman in childbirth seeking the help of the goddess Asherah. It was believed that Asherah had power to bestow power for childbirth to women. Every year rituals associated with women and often of sexual nature were practiced (Birch *et al* 2005:258, Day 1986:385-408, Hadley 2000).

Among the Tonga people of Zambia, the serpent (*Nyaminyami*<sup>68</sup>) is associated with the river Goddess who is the source of water, rain and life (Colson 2006). The serpent is also seen as the guardian of earth's natural treasures. It is also a symbol of the longevity of life and ancestry wisdom. It is for this reason that it is forbidden to kill snakes like a viper. In the ANE, Baal was a God of fertility and was represented by a serpent<sup>69</sup>. Fourth, the text states that the serpent would be made to crawl and eat dust for deceiving man and woman (Gen. 3: 14). Further, the words used to suggest crawling on the belly, *al gachown yalak* carries the connotation of being above as a superior reptile. However, all the good symbolic elements of the serpent have been twisted to make it look wicked and rebellious to Yahweh. It can be argued therefore that the neglect of rituals and practices which promoted the principle of egalitarianism and ecological wellbeing in indigenous cultures has largely contributed to the suffering of women particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (cf. Moyo 2009, Phiri 1996). For this reason, the motif of the expulsion of the woman and the Serpent from the garden and the curses pronounced on them needs further interrogation.

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<sup>68</sup> Among the Tonga people of Zambia, marriage emblems representing male genitals are symbolised as a snake (*Choshi wa ngoma*). This symbolises the fertilising element of God (cf. Richards 1982:210, Kangwa 2011:28).

<sup>69</sup> Gerstenberger (2002:54) has noted that *Bes* was a guardian demon of the bedroom and the events of birth and childcare. It was believed to have thick legs between which a long animal tail and long penis hanged down. Gerstenberger (2002:52) concludes that in an Israelite family, before exile, there was worship of a deity who guaranteed family fertility.” Given this background, some scholars associate the Serpent with Adam’s penis suggesting that Eve was tempted and seduced by Adam’s “serpent” (penis) and Adam touched Eve’s “apples” (breasts). This notion is problematic as it may result in sex being viewed as evil. St. Augustine argued that sex was part of God’s original purpose and it did not come as a result of the fall. See Aidinoff, Elsie V. 2004. *The Garden*. New York City: Harper Collins Publishing.

#### 4.7. EXPULSION FROM THE GARDEN OF EDEN

The creation narrative moves the concept of prohibition from destroying sacred trees common in the ANE (Campbell 1974). The narrator echoes the prohibition from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden (Gen. 2:16-17, 3:1-7). The human couple is then expelled from the garden (Gen. 3:16-17). It must be noted that the word prohibition is derived from two Hebrew root words, *harut* meaning law or restrictions and *herut* meaning freedom. Plaut (1981:652) argues that for the Jews, Torah (the Law) meant freedom if the Jews would obey it. At the same time, it meant prohibition if they would not obey it. In other words, the injunction in the garden may be interpreted in the context of restriction (*harut*) from destroying life or freedom (*herut*) to preserve life. The concept is found in Lev. 25:2-4 and Deut. 20:19-20 in relation to the protection of land and nonhuman forms of life. The relevance of the prohibition can be seen today in communities such as Sub-Saharan Africa where droughts are being experienced to deforestation (Dean 2012:82)<sup>70</sup>. The prohibition calls for human beings to have pragmatic wisdom not to destroy their earthly home and all that supports life.

The narrative concludes by stating that God “placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim (*bakolyokolyo*) and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life”(Gen. 3:24). In the text, the female side of the Cherubim (*K'rubh*)<sup>71</sup> has been downplayed. As Graves and Patai (1964) have observed, the Cherubim were not originally exclusively male. Both male and female Cherubim were associated with the Canaanite goddess Asherah (McCarter 1987:149). In fact, early Jewish literature show Cherubim either as single female or together as male and female functioning as guardians of the sacred space (cf. Smith

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<sup>70</sup> Research has shown that carbon dioxide levels in the earth’s atmosphere have gone up from pre-industrial levels of 280 parts per million to 389 in 2011, representing a current rise of about 2ppm a year. Further, climate change impacts negatively on the poorest communities of the world like Zambia where there are large landmasses that are more vulnerable to climate change or in island or coastal communities threatened by submergence from rising sea levels. See Dean 2012:82, IPCC 2007.

<sup>71</sup> According to Jewish cosmology, the Cherubim ranked in the highest group in the hierarchy of angels which included the seven archangels, the seraphim who were believed to have two or three pairs of wings which served as the guardians of God's throne or chariot and the *ofannim* (wheels). See Aymar (1956), Coogan (1978).

1990:88-94, Graves and Patai 1964).<sup>72</sup> It can be argued therefore that the narrator of the myth (Gen. 3) had access to the tradition which pointed to a time in Jewish culture when the Cherubim had been absorbed into the cult of Yahweh and symbolized God's male and female aspects. Later, however, due to the increasing patriarchal tendencies in Jewish culture only the male Cherubim were associated with Yahweh. By the 3rd century BCE the idea of female Cherubim had completely been eliminated. Given this inscription of patriarchy in the biblical text and the negative portrayal of the women and the natural world, it is important to analyse the impact of patriarchal interpretation of the biblical myths of origin on people's perception of the biodiversity.

#### **4.8. THE IMPACT OF PATRIARCHAL INTERPRETATION ON BIODIVERSITY**

The Bible as a document was written in the Ancient imperial and patriarchal world. In this way, embedded patriarchy has shaped the way the biblical myths of origin have been interpreted for many centuries. The biblical myths of origin shaped the human understanding of the universe until the modern scientific period. In the past curiosity was satisfied with myths and it took a long time for myths to evolve into science. In this way, it took time for the Christian community to begin to understand that the narrative in Genesis 1-3 consists of myths. The Christian community believed that the Earth was created about 4000 BCE. However, scientists have now shown that the Earth is about four and a half billion years old (McIntyre and McKirdy 2012: viii).

Until the dawn of modern science, the reading of the biblical myths of origin (Gen. 1-3) shaped people's understanding of the Earth. It was believed that the earth was only 6000 years old. For example, In 1658 Archbishop James Ussher wrote: "In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth. Which the beginning of time fell upon the entrance of the night preceding the twenty-third day of Octob[er] in the year 4004".

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<sup>72</sup> An ivory plaque dating back to the 9th century BCE found in the Louvre shows a single winged female cherub standing protectively next to a sacred tree. The Assyrian Ancient culture also depicts winged figures, both male and female guarding a sacred tree. See Graves and Patai (1964).

Ussher's date was included in the English bible and was accepted as part of scripture (McIntyre and McKirdy 2012:4). This view came from a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 which was believed to be God's own word and to question it was (and is still to some extent) believed to be heresy. Eusebius (c.260-340) and St. Jerome (c.340-420) also extended the chronology of human beings back to Adam. It was this Eusebius who sat at the right hand of Constantine and opened the council of Nicaea in 325.

The Christian date of creation also influenced the thinking of early scientists. Many scientists before modernity came from a theological background. For example, the scientist Johannes Kepler in 1619 wrote: "my book may wait 100 years for a reader, since God has waited 600 years for a witness" (McIntyre and McKirdy 2012:2). It was for this reason that Sir Isaac Newton's final work, *The Chronology of the Ancient Kingdoms Amended* (published posthumously) was an attempt to correct this wrong notion (McIntyre and McKirdy 2012:2). In his Principia, Newton estimated that a red-hot sphere of iron as big as the Earth would take 50,000 years to cool, but the result was ignored as inconsistent with scripture.

The influence of Christian belief on the creation of the world also perverted classical literature and popular culture. For example, in Shakespeare's *As you like it* (1600), Rosalind exclaims: "The poor world is almost six thousand years old". Soil erosion and decay was seen as punishment for human sinfulness (Gen. 3). However, as already touched on, the eighteenth century enlightenment provided unequivocal evidence that the earth was far older than generally believed by the Christian community. They began to see the possibility of evolution, not only of the physical world, but also of living creatures. These scientific discoveries began to show that human beings live in a historical universe, one in which stars and galaxies as well as living creatures are born, mature, grow old and die. Because of scientific discoveries, the earlier contribution of the Greek historian and traveller Herodotus (c. 484-425 BC) was retrieved. Herodotus, discovered that the sediments of the River Nile recorded past events and concluded that Egypt had formed from slowly accumulating river deposits. But the work was originally ignored (cf. McIntyre and McKirdy 2012:2).

In is clear from the foregoing that the Western missionaries who introduced Christianity in Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were highly conditioned with the patriarchal and dualistic western ideologies (Kwok 1995: 30). For example, in Zambia the missionaries condemned cultural practices which were aimed at preserving the natural world. Sacred groves, territorial shrines and forests were seen as sources of evil (Machila 1990). Thus, the objects and natural phenomenon that were the fabric of the ecological wellbeing of the society, which were consistent with the Genesis account, were destroyed. Three elements of embedded patriarchy are therefore evident in the way the biblical myths of origin have been interpreted and appropriated in Africa and particularly among the Tonga people of Zambia. These elements of embedded patriarchy shape people's perception of biodiversity.

First, a patriarchal view of the myths has constructed a God who is outside creation. Through a patriarchal interpretation of the myths of origin, as already shown, Christianity has introduced a cultural framework that is hierarchical (Nash 1989:91)<sup>73</sup>. This cultural framework places Yahweh (God) outside the natural world resulting in the desacralisation of the natural world. Additionally, the notion of monotheism ("Yahweh alone") has only served to justify a hierarchical worldview with God on top, followed by man while women and the natural world are pushed to the bottom of the pecking order. Human beings, particularly men are seen to have been given dominion to rule on earth (Gen. 3: 26-28). For this reason, western Christianity supported (and is still supporting) human exploitation of the natural world. The exploitation of the natural world is contrary to the tenets of an African worldview. In Africa, God is believed to be present in the natural world (Mununguri 1997:26). However, a patriarchal view of the biblical myths of origin has consolidated ideologies that have pushed God outside the earth so as to use the natural world as a resource for profit. MacCulloch (2009:2) is then right to argue that

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<sup>73</sup> African male theologians consolidated the notion of a transcendent God. John Mbiti suggests that in Africa God is up above everything. This view, can be construed to mean that in African consciousness, there is a geographical gap between the world of God and the world of humans. This contrary to the African worldview where the natural world is considered to be sacred and an abode of God. See Mbiti (1970b:13), Schofeeleeer (1979), Kaunda (2011).



Christianity's anthropocentrism, dualism<sup>74</sup> and hierarchical worldview lie at the root of the ecological crisis and leaves nature as "other".

Second, a patriarchal view of the myths has constructed a cultural framework of imperial domination. Based on myths of origin (Gen. 1:26-28), human beings see themselves as nature's absolute master for whom everything that exists was designed. As a result, they exploit animals and other earth's resources. As Vail (1997:129-155) indicates, the theory of western civilization and commerce was conditioned by embedded patriarchy and undermined the balanced relationship between humans and nonhuman forms of life in indigenous African cultures. Admittedly, the negative impact of the theory of commerce and civilisation are being felt by poor nations like Zambia. Adams (2003:23) observe:

The acquisition of colonies [in Africa] was accompanied by, and to a large extent enabled by a profound belief in the possibility of restructuring nature and re-ordering it to serve human needs and desires.

The principle of western civilisation and commerce was supported by the biblical notion of dominion and nature and came to be defined as absence of European human impact. It is also worth noting that Christianity emerged from a two-fold ancestry of imperial powers: Judaism and the Greco-Roman worldview (MacCulloch (2009:2). Christians have therefore, used the myths of origin to consolidate the notion that women and the natural are secular (non-sacred) and men are associated with the sacred. In this way women and the natural world are dominated and exploited.

Third, a patriarchal view of the myths of origin (Gen. 3) reinforce the view that the earth and the natural world are destined for destruction. As Boff (1997:78) has observed, the notion that nature and the earth have fallen due to human sin has anti-ecological bias and foster a view that the

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<sup>74</sup>Dualism is the doctrine that the world or reality is divided into two opposite principles: soul-body, spiritual-secular and mind-matter. It holds that the spiritual realm is more superior to the physical world. Thus, instead of engaging with contemporary issues such as the ecological crisis, Christians distance themselves from the affairs that affect the earth. The origin of Greek dualism is found in the ideas of the ancient Greek philosopher, Plato (428-348 BC). See MacCulloch 2009:2,

earth is a wicked place from which Christians will be rescued. This view promotes escapism<sup>75</sup> and the earth is seen as a temporary habitation that will be destroyed in a near future (Orr 2005: 291, Dyer 2002:45-49). It can be argued therefore that lack of care for the forests, soils, wildlife, air, water, seas and climate is entrenched in the view that the earth is not a permanent home due to human sin.

#### **4.9. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I set out to show how patriarchy has shaped the interpretation of the myths of origin in Genesis 1-3. The chapter made an in-depth engagement of a representative sample of major themes in Genesis 1-3. The chapter has demonstrated that embedded patriarchy has shaped the development and interpretation of the major corpora themes in the myths of origin. Using an African gendered demythologisation theory, the chapter has shown that the narrative in Genesis 1-3 moves from events before the creation of humanity (Gen 1:1-20), to the events that lead to the creation of humanity (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:7, 21), Eve's misogynistic portrayal and Adam's exalted stature in Eden (Gen. 2:8, 15-17), the description of the serpent as the wicked and craftiest of creatures (Gen. 3:1), the violation of the prohibition in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-7) and the expulsion from Eden (Gen 3:16-17).

The chapter argues that biblical myths of origin cannot be perceived as an undifferentiated monolith, but must be understood as a dynamic process which developed over the course of many centuries. It shows that the exaltation of the stature of Adam was crystallised during the period of the Monarchy when the myths were redacted. The myths were then recycled and expanded in the later sources during and after the exile. Throughout the chapter, it has been demonstrated that the inception of patriarchal ideologies was during Israel's struggle with the cult of Baal-Asherah where women served as priestesses and guardians of ecological and community shrines. To consolidate male dominance in society, and to eliminate women from

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<sup>75</sup> Some circles of contemporary Christianity dismiss ecological issues as secular or "new age". For them, ecological concerns are part of the satanic new age deception or nature-worship. They argue that Christians have a responsibility to save human souls from the coming judgment, not to sustain the material earth. See Horrell (2010:3).

public and religio-cultural roles, the adherents of the “Yahweh alone” cult waged a campaign against the cult of Baal-Asherah. This campaign resulted in the subjugation of women and the natural world because women had close association with the Mother Earth Goddess. The myths of origin in Genesis 1-3 mirror this development from a matrilineal and ecological society to a patriarchal society in Ancient Israel.

The chapter has further argued that the individual traditions that comprise the core of the creation narrative evidence the influence of the respective editors of the texts within which they were redacted or modified. Ultimately this chapter has shown that the interpretation of the particular motifs in the myths of origin are not static, but remain in a state of flux from text to text and from period to period. By undertaking a thorough analysis of how embedded patriarchy has shaped the creation biblical narrative by assigning women and nonhuman forms of life to the margins in the biblical text, I have demonstrated the importance of an African ecofeminist reading of the biblical text in challenging patriarchy and the subjugation of women and the natural world. It is to this reading that we now turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### AN AFRICAN GENDERED ECOLOGICAL READING OF GENESIS 1-3

#### 5.1. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I suggested a linear way of reading the myths which engages with the enduring political and religio-politics embedded within the creation narratives regarding the elevation of man and the subjugation of the woman and the natural world. The chapter drew on the work of feminist scholars who have shown that a persuasive and instrumental means of creating and maintaining gender hierarchy among communities who regard the bible as a sacred text is to draw on myths of origin imbuing it with patriarchal symbolic language. Eco-feminist scholars have also made the link between this patriarchal language and the domination of the earth, and the subsequent destruction of the earth's resources. This chapter proposes to theoretically and methodologically advance the eco-feminist shifts in biblical scholarship by adding an African feminist dimension to the hermeneutic. These shifts are illustrated through an African gendered ecological reading of Genesis 1-3 by combining a key analytical category of demythologisation proposed by Rudolf Bultmann. The chapter suggests that Genesis 1-3 consists of four different myths of origin knitted together by the narrator, and reads these four myths through the lenses of African creation myths and beliefs, thereby suggesting a more ecologically and gender just hermeneutic.

Phyllis Trible (1978) and David Clines (1990) succinctly capture the hierarchy present in the mythical language contained in Genesis 1-3, which portrays women and nature as entities for domination. Eco-feminist scholars (Clifford 2005, Ruether 1992, 1996a, 1996b:33) make a further link between domination of women and the domination of the earth and the subsequent destruction of the earth's resources, and see the biblical myths of creation as being partly responsible for these destructive worldviews.

Trible (1978) has further observed that it is not the text itself but the interpretation thereof that is responsible for centuries of patriarchal oppression. In this chapter the study seeks to further the approach adopted by Trible and other feminist scholars (Bird 1981, Meyers 1988, Bal 1987) who

have insisted that a patriarchal interpretation of the bible has contributed to the subjugation of women.

As already pointed out, the devastating effects of climate change and the ecological crisis, whose impact has largely affected women, nonhuman forms of life and poor communities in Sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP 2011, IPCC 2007)<sup>76</sup>, makes it imperative to decode the language and the interpretation of the myths in Genesis 1-3. The importance of the bible to communities of faith in Africa has been well documented (Masenya 2001, Nadar 2001, Maluleke 2001, West 2008). Hence, we cannot afford the approach that dismisses the Bible as inconsequential or condemns it as enslaving. In this way it is necessary to decode the biblical myths of origin.

## **5.2. DECODING MYTHS OF ORIGIN**

It is common knowledge that the interpretation of myths of origin in Genesis 1-3 using predominantly Western modes of interpretation is shrouded in patriarchy. This makes the Christian commitment to gender equality and ecological justice difficult. In Genesis 1-3 the woman is portrayed as inferior to man and the natural world is portrayed as being out there only to serve humanity. Such mythological language is difficult to decode unless a gender and ecological sensitive hermeneutics is employed in the process of interpretation.

In this chapter it is argued that, as a result of the devastating effects of the climate change and the ecological crisis, whose impact has largely affected women, nonhuman forms of life and the poor communities such as in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is an urgent need to decode the language and the interpretation of the myths in Genesis 1-3. To achieve this task, the chapter shall use an African gendered ecological demythologisation hermeneutic. This hermeneutical approach draws on Rudolf Bultmann's (1953 and 1960) theory of demythologisation.

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<sup>76</sup> The IPCC 2007 report (chapters 7 and 11) has shown that by the year 2050, average temperatures in Africa will increase by 1.5 to 3°Celsius. Between 25 and 40 percent of mammal species in sub-Saharan Africa will become endangered due to climate change which modifying natural mountain ecosystems through complex interactions and feedbacks. The report further shows that there will be a decrease in annual rainfall in southern Africa and droughts will become more common. By the year 2080 an increase of 5 to 8 percent of arid and semi-arid land is projected under a range of climate scenarios. Climate change and variability are likely to impose additional pressures on water availability and accessibility in Africa. As already pointed out, these factors are severely affecting women.

The term demythologisation means the decoding of myths or the reinterpretation of ancient mythical patterns of thought in the biblical text into contemporary thought patterns. Bultmann argues that contemporary thought demands a modern scientific view of the universe which interprets reality in terms of a closed cause and effect natural order (Bultmann 1953:5, 1960:158). While, Bultmann applied this concept to the interpretation of the New Testament in the context of miracles, this study will use the concept of demythologisation to detect and decode the ideologies and politics embedded in the biblical myths of origin and in the process of interpretation. As Macquarrie (1977:133) observes, the method of demythologizing is not intended to eliminate the mythological statements found in the Bible but to interpret them. Thus, the chapter will seek to unravel the message that is enshrouded in the myths in order to bring out the gender and ecological message in the biblical text. Such a message can challenge the communities who regard the bible as a sacred text to foster ecological justice.

While feminist scholars in the global north and the global south have read the creation myths to reclaim the position of women in society (Bal 1987:5, Pardes 1992:2-3), this chapter seeks to demonstrate that the pseudepigraphic work was composed by the narrator whose goal was to challenge patriarchy and reverse male dominance during the Monarchy period in Israel. It proposes that the corpus was edited several times in pre-exilic, exilic and postexilic periods.

While using the gendered ecological demythologisation theory, the methodological approach for reading the biblical text will be inter (con) textual hermeneutics which attempts to interpret the bible in its social-historical and contemporary contexts while paying particular attention to gender and ecological issues. The premise of this methodology is that the contemporary academic interpretive modes of reading the bible which are predominantly western and focus on the history of the text or the text itself and serves western patriarchal interests and goals are inadequate for addressing questions and ecological issues particularly from African contexts. Given that the African context has its own challenges, African biblical scholars have called for the development of interpretation frameworks that relate the text to the African context (Nadar 2001, Masenya 2001, and Ukpong 2000). Inherent within these biblical interpretive models is the newer social-historical approach which uses Inter-Contextual hermeneutics for reading the bible in its social-historical context and contemporary contexts using the mediation of African cultural

resources. In this way, the article will be informed by both the African context and the context of the biblical narrator.

One feature of African biblical scholarship is inculturation hermeneutics. In reaction to the predominantly Western forms of biblical interpretation, inculturation hermeneutics in Africa pays attention to the African socio-cultural context (Ukpong 1995:4, 5). This approach has been critiqued by African women biblical scholars given that it has not engaged much with the oppression of women which is a major factor in many African cultures. And so, to address issues affecting women in the African context, African women biblical scholars have proposed new methodologies (Nadar 2001, Kanyoro 2002, Dube 2000 and Masenya 2001). Drawing on inculturation hermeneutics but focusing on issues affecting women in African culture, Kanyoro (2002) has proposed feminist cultural hermeneutics which analyses African culture using a feminist lens. These methodologies demonstrate that a methodology is African if in its approach it seeks to bring the biblical text and the African context into dialogue. In other words, the meaning of the text is not found in the text itself but in the interaction dialogue between the text, the reader and the reader's context.

However, although new methodologies in African biblical scholarship such as inculturation hermeneutics (Ukpong 1995), feminist cultural hermeneutics (Kanyoro 2002) and Bosadi (Masenya 2001) have addressed issues in the African context using the mediation of African culture, they have not adequately engaged with ecological issues, how the oppression of women is interwoven with the exploitation of nonhuman forms of life and how African indigenous knowledge systems such as myths of origin and rituals can inform the reading of the biblical creation myths to promote gender and ecojustice. It is worth noting that there has been ideological and political contestation in the history of formation and interpretation. For example, as was shown in the previous chapter, a closer look at the biblical myths of origin with an African gendered and ecological lens reveals that much has been adapted to suit the patriarchal and political interests of the composers, redactors or narrators and interpreters. It is therefore of interest to see how an African worldview can inform the reading of the biblical creation myths.

### 5.3. AFRICAN WORLDVIEW AND TONGA MYTHOLOGY

The African worldview shows that ecological justice occupies a central part of human life above anything else. The issues of ecological justice in African societies are embedded in their myths of origin. It is taken for granted that all of these are part of God's creation and not a social construction of reality. By and large, many African societies have myths which account for the earthly existence of human beings and nonhuman forms of life. Many of these stories are similar but not identical with the Biblical myths of origin. Mbiti (1969:92-95) has shown a wide array of myths of origin collected from across Africa. They are found among the Tonga, Lozi, Mende, Zulu, Shona, and Luo to name but a few. The first human beings are said to have come from various sources including, among others, clay, a hole or marsh in the ground, a tree, a vessel, reeds, a leg, clouds, sky, sun or another world out there.

There has been attempts by African theologians in the past three decades to engage with myths of origin in order to understand the concept of God and how they can contribute to the understanding of ecology in Africa (Setiloane 1986, Kaunda 2010). However, no attempt has been made to integrate in African biblical hermeneutics. The common feature of African myths of origin is that human beings appear on earth in pairs as male and female right from the time of creation by divine providence. In some of the African myths, the man was created first and then the woman. In other myths, however, man and woman appear at the same time very much like in the first biblical story of origin (Gen. 1:26) where it is stated that when God created human beings God created them male and female by divine command. Connected with the general myths of origin of the African people, there are also specific myths which account for the importance of gender equality and ecological wellbeing. Tonga indigenous culture succinctly offers such ecological and gender resources. It is for this reason this chapter will draw on indigenous resources from the Tonga people of Zambia.

As already referred to in earlier chapters, the Tonga people of Zambia are an African Bantu group that subscribes to the Leza cult. Tradition holds that the present day Tonga are a composite of three groups of Bantu people (*Bantu Botatwe*) which came to settle in the present day Zambia



(Daneel 1979:24). The Tonga God (Leza) is worshipped as a God who gives rain and sunshine to all and is responsible for the fertility of humans, land and other forms of life.

The first Tonga myth states that, at the beginning, Leza (God) created two people who were to become the first man and the first woman. When God created them they had not been differentiated into male and female. They also lacked other organs to relieve themselves from unwanted body products. They, therefore, asked God for some help. God gave them some packets and ordered them to put them on their crotches before they went to bed. They did this and when they woke up the following morning they found that they were changed. One of them turned into a man while the other one turned into a woman. Then, suddenly, they desired each other and had sexual intercourse. The two became afraid of this new life. But God told them that they should not be afraid of knowing one another because this was the only way in which the woman would conceive and bear children and fill the earth (Ganly 2004:5-7). This myth is also found among the Kaonde people of Zambia and other similar Bantu people. The second myth states that Leza (God) began by moulding clay into small animals. Wearied of this, Leza used the remaining clay to make human beings and a few large animals. God made each animal with distinctive and beautifying marks. Thus, the Zebra who got no horns was given stripes instead (Moreau 1924:359-361). This myth is common among the Tonga of the Gwembe valley.

The third myth states that once upon a time *Leza* created the Earth and shaped it like a round basket used by women for winnowing (*ulupe*). *Leza* then took the water from the clouds, fire from the sun and placed both in the womb of the earth to make it fertile. Human beings and animals were then created together in the sky by *Leza* as clan associates and came to earth together. When animals and human beings arrived on earth they found that the land and the rocks were still fresh (Saha 1994, Moreau 1924:359-361). This myth is common among the Plateau Tonga. The proof of this myth is the footprints which are still seen in a large rock surface on the western plateau. The fourth myth holds that once upon a time there was darkness, water and the great creator God (*Leza*). One day *Leza*, in pain from a stomach ache, vomited up the sun. The sun dried up some of the water, leaving land. Still in pain, *Leza* vomited up the moon, the stars and then some animals: the cattle, the leopard, the crocodile, the eland, snakes and finally some human beings both male and female (Saha 1994, Moreau 1924:359-361).

A look at the above myths shows how Africans have encoded gender and ecological language used in the myths. Firstly, using anthropological, gender and ecological lenses, one sees that there are a number of terms used in the myths that have deep meaning. The terms such as the “water”, “womb of the earth”, “round basket”, “moulding clay” and “clouds” mean femininity. They represent women, womanhood, fertility and female genitalia in general. They are symbols of life for it is through them that life comes into existence. The fire in the myths represents manhood or male genitalia.

Secondly, the myths depict the creative power of God as manifested in the Mother Earth who gives life as the womb in which life on earth is generated. Further, they depict a close relationship between women and the environment. Thirdly, the myths’ emphasis on clan association with animals and other natural phenomena affirm that animals and humans are equal. It is for this reason that killing an animal just for the fun of it was forbidden (*cilatonda*) in indigenous Tonga religio-culture. Animal life (*buumi*) was as important as human life. Further, totem animals were sacred and members of the clan were not allowed to eat their totem animals. Given this revelation of the values in indigenous African culture that can contribute to an egalitarian and ecological community, how can the biblical myths of origin be demythologised?

#### **5.4. GENDERED ECOLOGICAL DEMYTHOLOGISATION AS A BIBLICAL ANALYTICAL TOOL**

Feminist biblical scholars have intimated that patriarchal ideologies are present in the biblical text and that the modes of biblical interpretations are predominantly western to enhance male domination and the subjugation of women (Nadar 2001, Dube 2000 and West 2008). One of the most efficient ways that patriarchy uses to create and sustain gender hierarchy among communities who regard the bible as a sacred text is by enshrouding myths of origin with patriarchal symbolic language. Brenner (1993:13) notes:

Perhaps more than any other biblical text, the texts which comprise the book of Genesis have traditionally been and are perceived to embody cultural emblems. The

attribution of emblematic properties to them facilitates their implementation for religious, spiritual, cultural, socioeconomic and political ends, a praxis which may be on the decline but is still widespread.

As a result, biblical myths of origin have become a barrier to the promotion of egalitarianism and ecological sensitivity among the communities who regard the bible as a sacred text. This, therefore, necessitates the demythologisation of the attitude towards nature and women as well as the patriarchal and anti-nature ideologies imbedded in the biblical myths of origin. This will include demythologising the figurative language. To expose the androcentric and patriarchal character of the biblical text which tend to make ecological and gender concerns marginal to the work of biblical interpretation, there is need to allow gender and ecological concerns to contextualise and subvert the readings of the text(cf. Habel and Wurst 2001:46). In other words, the biblical text is approached with full realisation of the need to challenge patriarchy and androcentrism. To achieve that, African gendered ecological demythologisation as an analytical tool engages with the world of the text, the world of modernity and the world of today using a Penta-polar approach outlined in chapter one.

### **5.5. AN AFRICAN GENDERED ECOLOGICAL READING OF GENESIS 1-3**

The traditional interpretation of Genesis 1-3, as shown in the previous chapter, focuses on Adam as the central figure and as the head of the first family while Eve, the serpent and other forms of life in the myths are dealt with peripherally. David Clines (1990:25) succinctly outlines:

...everyone in the garden of Eden knew their place. At the top of the pyramid, even though the garden was not in Egypt, was God. Under him was his under-gardener Adam, created to carry on the maintenance of the garden that the master-gardener had planted. On the next rung down, the pyramid having mutated to a ladder, came Eve, who had not originally been thought of but had been created out of Adam as a 'helper' once all the animals had been paraded before Adam without a single helper being found among them. Beneath Eve were the animals, obviously unsatisfactory as helpers, but not in every respect inferior to her; for the cleverest of them has theological insight that Eve lacks.

Clines clearly shows how the interpretation characterises Adam positively despite his ambiguous role in the myths while Eve is presented as an afterthought in God's creation. Further, the woman and nonhuman forms of life are put at the same level in the gender continuum. Therefore, it cannot be over emphasised that patriarchal modes of interpretation presents the myths in a way which is not gender and ecologically sensitive. It is for this reason that feminist biblical scholars have attempted to re-read the myths in a way which is life giving to women.

Feminist biblical scholars have insisted that the myths of origin are not about affirming the patriarchal position of Adam, but about affirming the equality of man and woman in creation (Bal 1987, Tribble 1978:72). For example, Tribble (1978:73) argues that the "traditional interpretations of male superiority and female inferiority are simply not present in the story itself". For Tribble, the first creature (*'adamah*) was unsexed. Thus, its naming as masculine is a function of Hebrew linguistic operation. Second, the earth-creature's loneliness necessitated the creation of another corresponding to it. It was at this point that sexuality is created, male and female emerge at the same time in the relationship of equality and solidarity. On the fourth myth (Gen. 3), Tribble (1978:113) argues that "the woman is a spokesperson and able to represent the man; she speaks with clarity and authority, while the man by contrast appears as "belly-oriented, passive, brutish and inept". However, like a patriarchal interpretation, Tribble locates the third and fourth myth (Gen. 3) within the "fall narrative", although she argues that male and female had joint disobedience.

Feminist readings of the biblical myths of origin have contributed to the positive portrayal of women where man and woman are seen to be equal. However, there are still some challenges with this approach. For example, Tribble's approach focuses on the power dynamics and the rhetoric of the text thereby leaving some ambiguities in the text. Secondly, feminist approaches, like patriarchal interpretations, are also largely human centered and do not address the plight of nonhuman forms of life in the text in the same way as they do with women. The focus on the equality of man and woman with no reference to nonhuman forms of life is in itself a patriarchal way of thinking. Even though Genesis 1-3 is a story about the creation of humans, male and female; it is also a significant story about the creation of nonhuman forms of life. The myths demonstrate the beauty of God's creation and how humans and nonhuman forms of life are

interdependent. As such, it is important to look at what the myths of origin meant to the first reader in Ancient Israel.

### **5.5. 1.Genesis 1-3 within Ancient Near Eastern myths**

Genesis as a book is traditionally located within the larger primeval history. It is part of the longer story of the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History (Genesis to 2 Kings). Like the myths in other cultures, the myths in Genesis 1-3 serve to explain the origin of the world, humans and other forms of life. For several theological and political reasons, the original author inserted the myths in the story of the beginnings. With this insertion, the author could explain the dominant position of men in society and the domination of humans over other forms of creation. The myths were re-edited several times to validate the ideologies of different rulers in Ancient Israel.

Biblical scholars have different views about the composition and the authorship of the myths in Genesis 1-3. Van Seters (1988:22) suggests that the primeval history as well as the J source has to be dated to the mid-sixth century BCE. This view, has questioned the traditional dating of the J source (Yahwist) in the tenth or early ninth centuries by showing that a number of passages, which traditionally have been assigned to the J source, display similarities with deuteronomistic theology and should be dated much later. On the other hand, Wittenberg (2007:59) has suggested that the most plausible date for the primeval history is the 10<sup>th</sup> century. For Wittenberg, the primeval history shows no trace of deuteronomistic theology which was dominant in the exilic period. Wittenberg further suggests that the absence of references to monotheism suggests an earlier date.

However, a closer look at the myths shows that the myths were part of the original traditions and were edited at different times depending on the prevailing ideologies. Further, the absence of the indication that Yahweh is the only God can be attributed to the narrator's sympathy for monolatry and the worship of the goddess (mother earth) as opposed to monotheism. It can be argued therefore that although, the narrator of the myths in Genesis 1-3 drew from P (Priestly) and J (Yahweh) sources, the myths cannot be attributed to the J source that had close links with

the Jerusalem court. As Rendtorff (1976:154) observes, the story of the beginnings (Gen. 1-11) cannot be entirely attributed to the literary section of the Pentateuch composed by the J source that had links with the Davidic royal court. In other words, the myths were composed and edited several times during pre-exilic, exilic and postexilic periods. In this way, the current corpus of the myths should not be confined to late monarchical efforts to consolidate the position of men in society and to forge a cohesive identity after the loss of political power to the outsiders as Wittenberg (2007) asserts, but were reworked to challenge the dominant theo-ideology of the day. Myths in the ANE were sacred stories that served to authorize the customs, rites and beliefs in society (Graves and Patai 2005:1). They also served to validate a political institution or ideology or to approve alterations to the ideologies of certain society. Most myths depict gods and goddesses who took sides in human affairs, each favouring rival heroes.

A closer look at the biblical myths shows striking similarities with the Hittite, Ugaritic, Sumerian and other bodies of myths in the ANE. The Atra-Hasis is even closer to individual motifs in the first myth (Gen. 1:1-2:3) and seems to agree with the overall structure of Genesis 1-11. After the return from exile in Babylonian exile, the so-called priestly myth (Gen. 1:1-2:3) and the so-called J myths (Gen. 2: 4-22 and 3) which were probably Judean and with Edomite origin, were knitted together. The first myth used the name Elohim for God while the other myths used the name Yahweh for God. The editor or narrator changed the name of God in the second and third myth to Yahweh Elohim. Thus, identifying the God of Genesis 1 with that of Genesis 2 and 3 making the three different versions of the myths appear uniform. However, the editors left a lot of ambiguities in the second and the third myths as compared to the first one. Given the narrator's sympathy for the ecological community more than the empire, it can be suggested that rulers in Ancient Israel, especially during the monarchy made reforms by writing a codicil to the old religio-political charter, or produced a new one to suit their patriarchal religio-political agendas. The best example is King Josiah who made extensive changes to the religious charter (2 Kgs 22:1-23:25). This process involved the manipulation or complete re-writing of myths.

It must be noted that during the monarchical period, most Israelites had embraced the Canaanite cult in which goddesses played the leading role, with kings as their consorts (male associates). And so, a guild of prophets reinforced the agenda that Israel's sole hope of national

independence lay in an authoritarian monotheism and establishing a strong political monarchy. This involved inculcating a stronger religious discipline and building a strong army.

With the king in command of its entire kingdom, the city became a permanently mobilized standing army measuring its strength and divine favour by its capacities for pillage and destruction. As a result, they disapproved of goddess-worship in the Canaanite sacred groves (cf. Whybray (1968:11). After the demise of the Davidic Empire, all the Jews from exile in Babylon were converted to this view. The worship of goddesses which was eco-friendly was completely replaced with monotheism, the worship of Yahweh. It is consistent with this view that the narrator of the myths shows sympathy for an ecological community rather than a patriarchal empire. Genesis 1-3 comes from scribes, or “people of the land” who rebelled against the oppression of women, poor peasant farmers and the establishment of a patriarchal kingdom. The narrator seeks to show that it was the patriarchal monarchy which was responsible for the spread of sin and violence on earth. This explains for the presence of four myths of origin in the Genesis (1-3) creation narrative: The first myth (Gen.1:1-2:3), the second myth (Gen. 2:4-17), the third myth (Gen 2:18-25) and the fourth myth (Gen. 3:1-24).

### **5.5.2. The first myth: The Earth Priest and the Earth Priestess**

The first myth (Gen 1:1-2:4) possibly with a priestly origin, present male and female created by Elohim (God) equally directly. The narrator uses the motif of human beings created in the image of God, giving them dominion over other Earth-beings (Genesis 1:26-27). Biblical scholars generally agree that Genesis 1:26-28 draws much from, *Enuma elish*, the Babylonian myth of origin and other traditions in the ANE (Middleton 2005:227-28, Richter 2010). The myth has been traditionally seem as suggesting that dominion in form of rulership is the purpose for which humans were created in the image and likeness of God. However, as suggested in chapter 2, a closer look at the myths suggests that the motif of the image of God has ecological significance. The motif of male and female being created in the image of God to have dominion implies that they were expected to fulfil their roles as Earth-priest (Sikatongo) and Earth-priestess (*mutantu walufulu* or mukaintu wamfula).

Giving an alternative ideo-theology to that of humans being above and exploiting other forms of creation, this myth introduces the concept of humans descending (*yrd*). In other words, *Imago Dei* implies humans dwelling among and caring for other forms of creation. This is consistent with the African cosmology where the image *Imago Dei* manifests through humans cooperating with other forms of creation. And God is not transcendent but is among God's creation. In this way, a patriarchal interpretation of the dominion motif (Gen.1:26-28) from the standpoint of God giving authority or violent rulership (*rada* or *kabas*) to humans over other forms of God's creation falls away.

The equality of male and female is important for the purpose of ensuring ecological wellbeing on earth. It mirrors the union of God and the mother earth for the fertility of the land. Among, the Tonga people during a drought for example, the Earth priest (Sikatongo) and the Earth priestess (*mukaintu wamfula*) perform a rain calling ritual by having ritual sex. In this ritual, seeds will be put underneath the bed and the priest and the priestess will have sex. The priest represents the male side of Leza (God), the priestess represents the female side of Leza (mother earth) and the seed represents the nonhuman side of Leza. The significance of this ritual is that the wellbeing of humans is linked to the wellbeing of other forms of life. When the rain comes it gives life to the entire of God's creation. It is from this perspective that the "image of God" and the "dominion" motif in the first myth should be understood. It is for this reason that a patriarchal dominion motif where human beings are seen to be given the mandate to abuse nature has largely contributed to the destruction of God's world.

The concept of rest introduced at the end of the first myth (Gen. 2:1-3) has ecological undertones. First, it gives time to land and nonhuman forms of life to reproduce. The pattern of work and rest is replicated in various ways from a weekly pattern (six days for work and one for rest), to yearly pattern including both the seven-year sabbatical and 49-year jubilee patterns (cf. Wright 1990:124-125). These patterns gave room for crop rotation and other forms of life to reproduce. Human beings and nonhuman forms of life share the time of rest with God as an affirmation that they all beneficiaries of God's created order. Second, the concept of rest was associated with the preservation of land in clan in the context of family or clan units (*katongo*). In ancient Israel, land allocated to families of other tribes could not be sold in perpetuity (Wright



1990:175-176). In this way, the depiction of time to rest depicted in the first myth is embedded within the larger context of interrelationship between human beings, nonhuman forms of life and God. It is also an attempt to preserve or periodically restore the economic viability and independence of the smaller family land units. As Wright (1990:124-125) observes, it is also an attempt to maintain the integrity of an egalitarian community where the socio-economic life of the nation benefits all.

Similarly, in indigenous Tonga culture, there used to be “the day of rest” associated with the founding (primogenitor) ancestor (*Sikatongo*). On this day, people were not allowed to till the land. It is believed that the ancestors punished those who did not observe the regulation while those who did, their crops and livestock were protected. People were also not allowed to cut trees in certain places such as shrines. Further, fishing and hunting were not allowed during breeding seasons to ensure that there was continuity of the species. It is for this reason that human beings as the image of God (Earth priests and Earth priestesses) have a mandate to ensure that there is continuity of life on earth. The continuity of life on Earth which the myth in has emphasized can be exemplified the Tonga concept of buumo (interconnectedness of life).

#### **5.5.2.1. Genesis 1:24-25 as buumo (interconnectedness of life)**

The myth states that God created living creatures of different kinds and said it was good (Gen. 1:24-25). The creation myth has not ended with the dominion motif which has often been read in isolation. Rather, the narrative depicts the building of the earth and the different creatures God created. The interrelatedness of life for all God’s creatures is captured further, in Genesis 1:29-31 where plants and fruits are not only given to humans but also to other living creatures.

The concept of buumo regards humanity as part of the eco-systems that lead to a communal responsibility to sustain life (cf. Abimbola 1994:4-114). Buumo enables Africans to share what they have on a principle of equity among and between generations. As a principle of eco-justice, buumo fosters compassion, collective responsibility and respect for the intrinsic dignity of all God’s creation. In the Tonga understanding of the interrelatedness of life, one is human because they belong to the human community and view and treat others accordingly. In this way, other

forms of life are not valued in relation to the benefit they offer to human beings, but according to their intrinsic value.

Further, the concept of buumo in African culture shows that the family cannot be limited to immediate relations (cf. Abimbola 1994:4-114). It includes all human beings, ancestors, nonhuman forms of life and Earth-Mysteries. The elimination of the voice of animals in this text by the author and the redactors is clear. It must be noted that God first brought into existence those animals and those creatures whose home is water, sky and ground (Gen. 1:20-25). After their creation, God approved the beauty of these animals in fulfilling God's purpose for creation (Gen. 21-25). The creation of human beings was then done in relation to the animals which were earlier created. This is demonstrated by creating human beings in the likeness and image of God with a mandate earlier given to animals to multiply in the Earth. This shows that the mandate to multiply and have dominion was not given to humans only (Fretheim 1994:346, Habel 2006:39). As such, the myth eliminates the understanding of dominion by human beings over other forms of creation as Von Rad (1972:196) asserts. (Gen. 1:26-27).

The emphasis in the myths on the interrelatedness of life is well exemplified in African culture. In African culture many aspects of nature such as rocks, trees, mountains, rivers and waterfalls demand respect from human beings because of their sacred nature. In this way nonhuman forms of life is respected rather than being seen as non-living things as it is seen in western cultures. The concept of buumo depicted in the text is also in conformity with the principle of Ubuntu.

#### **5.5.2.2. Genesis 1:26-27 as Ubuntu (what it takes to be human)**

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Gen. 1:26). In this text, the myths show that human beings are created in relationship with other animals which God created in Genesis 1:24-25. By emphasising the beauty of all creatures, the myth eliminates any possibility of dominion by human beings in the form of exploitative rulership. Further, as already shown, all God's creation reflect the image of God and God refers to them all as living things. In this way, it can be argued that the current scenario of exploiting the natural world such as cutting down of

forests, running roads through every wild place, killing off world animals may be seen as Eco-cide from the perspective of the Earth.

The exalted portrayal of human beings in this text in relation to other forms of creation by a patriarchal interpretation has negative ecological implications. In fact it is foreign to the values exhibited in the text itself. Lamp (2012:17) has argued that the idea of divine image in creation states that the “world is the image of a perceptible deity, characterised by unsurpassed greatness, beauty, and perfection.” In light of this understanding, the text suggests that the created order bears the image of God.

The myth shows that life on Earth is fashioned in a web of relationships. Like the Tonga indigenous principle of Ubuntu, human beings are reminded that life is shared and experienced in relationship with other human beings and the entire creation order. The community is seen as an interlocking of forces of life for humans, nonhuman and Earth mysteries (cf. Setiloane 1986:14). This principle explains and determines how people relate to one another in the community. This means that people become human as they share experience and live together with other human beings and other forms of life in the entire cosmos.

It must be noted that a patriarchal focus on human beings has suppressed the voice of other members of the earth community in this text. The sublimation of the voice of the Earth has been done by the redactors who focused on advocating for the supremacy of human beings over other members of the Earth community. Secondly, the community of subsequent interpreters have frequently mined the text to defend the notion that human beings are more superior to other forms of life. In this way, the text reveals the author’s and the redactor’s preference to issues deemed relevant to support patriarchy to the exclusion of those relevant to support life on Earth. It is for this reason that the concept of procreation has also been reworked to justify human occupation of the natural world.

### **5.5.2.3. Genesis 1:27 as *Kusanda* (replenishing the Earth)**

The motif of replenishing and subduing the earth in biblical myths of origin has been used to support over population and exploitation of land by humans. A closer look at the myths however,

suggests that land was valued in the Jewish community and it had to be protected from human exploitation (cf. Wittenberg 2007). In this way land was never regarded as human property.

The command in the myth to multiply has been used to justify human occupation of the Earth to the exclusion of other forms of life. Based on this text, it has been suggested that large families were considered a blessing throughout in Ancient Israel. But, a closer look at the biblical myths of origin suggest the opposite. While, it is true that procreation was encouraged in the Jewish society for the continuation of the human race, it was only encouraged in consideration with other forms of life on Earth. In fact, the politics of Genesis and the entire Pentateuch seem to be against human overpopulation. Over population is linked to sin, rebellion against God and the creation of empires like the Tower of Babel (cf. Wittenberg 2007). Uncontrolled occupation of land has been portrayed to invite God's intervention such as the flood (Gen.6). In this way, the concept of *Kusanda* in Tonga indigenous culture can help to retrieve and understand the motif of replenishing the Earth from an ecological perspective.

Africans have long practised family planning by employing different methods of reducing fertility (Adongo et al 1998:23-40). Caldwell and Caldwell (1977:193-217) have shown that postpartum and other female abstinence methods were common in most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. In indigenous Tonga culture, postpartum abstinence was used to control overpopulation. Postpartum abstinence provided time for the mother to nurse her baby. It was believed that the husband's semen would contaminate the child's milk and thereby bring illness and even death to the child. These methods also carried religious significance. This was the method used to allow child spacing. The other method which was used to control over population was to discourage early marriage for unplanned pregnancies. Thus, sex before marriage was discouraged. It was believed that sex before marriage will make the young man and the girl grow long fingers. Such taboos not only gave women power over their bodies but also controlled the number of children born in a given community.

From this background, it can be argued that the notion that African culture supports uncontrolled population is erroneous. While African culture values procreation for continuity of humanity and the family lineage, there are also measures in place to control population. It can also be argued that the current prevailing notion in sub-Saharan Africa where having many children is seen as

economically rewarding is not original to the African understanding of procreation. The value of population control in indigenous culture should be retrieved to address and challenge notions that emphasise uncontrolled procreation as abuse of land which is a home to all Earth species. The command to replenish the Earth was therefore to be practised in relation with the principle of Ubuntu. In other words, replenishing the Earth also involved tending the garden as it is depicted in the second myth.

### **5.5.3. The second myth: Wo/man to tend the ecological community (Katongo)**

The second myth (Gen. 2:4-17) begins by introducing the theme of the earthly paradise and the creation of wo/man (*'adam*)<sup>77</sup>. The myth depicts a health and natural earthly paradise. Like sacred groves in African indigenous cultures, the garden is not human-made and has not been subjected to human exploitation. Richter (1966) suggests that the tradition of an earthly paradise must have been derived from the royal theology at the royal court. If we follow this trajectory, one would think that in the second myth (Gen. 2:4-17), Adam is the royal man and that the garden, the animals and his wife constitute his court. Adam therefore exercises dominion over them and as a patriarch names them and wields power to know good and evil. This approach, like that of Clines (1990), interprets the myths along patriarchal lines. The focus is on the creation of Adam as the head of the family and community. However, a closer look at the text reveals an ecological community (ecodome) where wo/man (*'adam*) were peasant farmers in an eco-friendly environment. The myth (Gen 2:4-17) begins by showing how God formed life from and on the ground. The myth then, develops towards conclusion by putting in place a prohibition to protect the tree of the knowledge of good and evil(Gen 2:16).

In the beginning no plants and herbs had grown because Yahweh God had not sent rain and there was no wo/man (*'adam*) to “till the ground” (Gen. 2:5). The lack of rain is resolved by sending water. The water sent ranges from mists to streams which did not come from the sky but from

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<sup>77</sup> The Hebrew term *'adam* is a masculine noun that is understood to mean “man” in reference to an adult male. From the incorporation of male and female in *'adam* in Genesis 1:17 and its use in Genesis 2:4-7, *'adam* is used in this study to mean humanity, or humankind encompassing both male and female. The unitalicised name “Adam” is used to refer to the first male as distinguished from the original human pair.

below the ground. The absence of water implies that the ground (*'adamah*) was dry and cracking up and water was needed to give it life. The narrator further carefully narrates that the river flowed from Eden to water the land, then branched into four directions over what might have been the world of the first readers (Gen. 2:10-14). The ecological significance of water in this myth can be identified. First, water is a symbol of femininity. Second it is a symbol of life and fertility. That is to say that without water, life on earth cannot blossom. It is for this reason that the earth needed water in order to have the life giving power.

It can therefore, not be overemphasised that the myth demonstrates that water was crucial for life and living then, as it still is now. It is the soul of the sky, land and sea, and it flowed freely in God's garden. Unfortunately, water today has been polluted and commercialised making life difficult for humans and other forms of life on earth. Due to human abuse of the environment and the biosphere, there is global warming and water levels are rising in many parts of the world. Further, due to droughts, many communities in sub-Saharan Africa have no food to survive. And women are bearing the huge burden of this abuse to the environment and the biosphere. It is for this reason that human beings should realise that abusing the environment, is abusing their own home(*oikos*) as Mofokeng (1997:42-56) has rightly noted. In other words, the well-being of humans is intimately connected with the wellbeing of the total creation. Thus, this myth is a resource in the promotion of human responsibility to ecological wellbeing.

The narrative moves to indicating that there was no wo/man (*'adam*) to till the ground (*adamah*) (Gen. 2:5, 7). This problem is resolved by forming *'adam* out of the dust of the now watered mother earth (*adamah*) and breathed into the nostrils the breath of life to make them living beings. With water and wo/man (*'adam*) available, God made all kinds of plants, pleasant to look at and good for food. God then placed wo/man in the garden to work the ground. With plants and herbs growing in the garden (Gen. 2:9). It can be assumed that the soil was rich and dark (as it is the case in Zambia). Here the myth agrees with the African understanding that "land is your mother" (Mofokeng 1997:42-56). As mother and the great womb, land is the source of life and the eternal home (*ng'anda*) after death.

Given that God created wo/man from watered soil (*'adamah*) and placed them in the garden to till and keep it (*mulimo wa ciisi*), indicates that life close to the earth (*'adamah*) was seen as life with Yahweh and life away from the earth (*'adamah*) was seen as a curse and life away from Yahweh. The Tonga share the same belief. They believe that human beings originated from the soil, the place of the ancestors. As such, the soil plays a significant spiritual and ritual role in Tonga culture. As already noted, a visitor to Tonga land is expected to drink some water mixed with soil as ritual in order to be allowed by the ancestors to stay in the Land (Colson 2006). This ritual has ecological significance. Referring to African religio-culture, Mofokeng (1997:42-56) notes that it is imbued with elements of life on the land which include planting time, harvest, festivals, the sacramental rites of water and grain and fruits grown there. In this way, land has the greatest moral significance and constitutes the core of life.

Thus, the presupposition of the myths is in line with the Tonga African worldview which maintains an active interaction between God, humanity and the natural world. Both affirm the worthiness of all humans and nonhuman forms of life. It is against this backdrop that the assertions by Richter(1966:104) that the reference to the Garden of Eden, the snake and the cherubs(shining reptiles) guarding the gates(trees) of paradise all pointing to Jerusalem and its cultic traditions cannot be used to affirm patriarchy in society. Although familiar with the royal ideo- theology, the narrator sought to propagate the ideo-theology of an ecological community. In other words, the myth emphasizes the importance of humans realizing that their life is interwoven with nonhuman forms of life among whom God dwells.

The narrator moves to indicate that Yahweh God then placed two trees together in the middle of the garden: the tree of life, and the tree of knowing good and bad (Gen 2:9). The tree of knowing good and bad was good to look at but not good for eating (Gen. 2:16-17). The text states the limit but no reason is given, leaving the leader to speculate. Looking at the myth from an African Tonga perspective provides a clue: To violate this limit is to violate the ecological wellbeing of the community for which God's intervention would be invited. Among the Tonga people of Zambia trees in the sacred grooves, shrines and other special places cannot be cut down just for the fun of it (Colson 2006). And so, to violate the limit is to break the peace with God and *'adamah*. The restrictions were meant to preserve the precious natural world on which human

beings depend. The natural world also provided trees that were used for rituals and medicine. For example the Moringa tree (*oleifera*) is used for medicine. Similarly, the Mufungo tree (female tree) is also used as medicine for childbirth and fertility for women (cf. Richards 1982). Unfortunately, these trees are in danger of extinction due to deforestation. The motif of putting restrictions in place is also echoed in Genesis 3. Further, the need for protecting nonhuman forms of life from human exploitation exhibited in this myth shows that human beings in contemporary communities should strive to uphold the values of ecojustice. It is therefore important to interrogate the myth with regards to the importance of the rivers, water and the minerals on Earth.

### **5.5.3. 1. Genesis 2:4-17 as Mosio-Tunya (Water that thunders)**

The second myth (Genesis 2:4-17) has presented a cosmological view of water and the rivers in the Garden of Eden. The myth recounts the settlement of the human family in the Garden. But the translation of Genesis 2:5-6 is intriguing.

The myth states:

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. (Gen. 2:5-6).

A traditional interpretation of the word “mist” in the myth refers to the notion that the entire earth was covered in mist and there was no rain until the flood. Harris (1967:177) observes that following the flood a rainbow appeared for the first time. This view is associated with a canopy theory that sometimes involves the idea that prodigious amounts of water were held above the canopy until it was released at the time of the flood. In some instances the word “mist” is translated “flow” to mean that water beneath the earth welled up and irrigated the land in the Garden of Eden. The choice of the word “mist” probably arose because the original Hebrew word translated mist means “go up” and in many places water usually goes up in the form of mist.



Nonetheless, a close look at the original Hebrew word translated as mist makes interesting reading from an ecological perspective. The Hebrew word translated mist is *'ed*. This word was originally borrowed from the Akkadian word *edu* which means flood or waves or “to swell”. In other words, the *'ed* was used to refer to the rise of subterranean waters (cf. Harris 1967:77). In this way, the word *'ed* was also used to refer to irrigation or the overflowing of rivers. The association of the mist with water going up or swelling resonates with the understanding of falls in Tonga cosmology. The Tonga people refer to the water falls as musio-tunyam (thundering water or rising water) and it is associated with the River Goddess (*Nyami-Nyami*) who appears to the people in the form of a rainbow or a huge Serpent (cf. Colson 2006, Kaoma 2010, Machila 1990).

The second myth (Gen. 2:4-17) provide a clear location of the garden and the rivers which were cardinal to ensuring that life on Earth flourished. The myth also explains how the garden was rich in minerals. Genesis 2:10-14 states:

A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

It has been suggested that a river went out of Eden to water the garden. Harris (1967:178) has argued that the watered garden of Genesis 2:10 is parallel to the watered ground of Genesis 2:6. Based on this he insists that the narrative does not refer to a rain country. For him, Eden was a territory watered by river overflow and irrigation. However, *'ed* or *edu* as already indicated refers to the up-swelling of waters from the river (Mosio-tunya) or within the earth. It also refers to the repeated outpouring of waters from within the earth as the natural spring does. It can be argued that the assertion by Harris (1967) is unjustified. The outpouring of the water from the rivers and under the Earth indicate that plants grew before human beings were created. And so, the suggestion that Genesis 2 indicate that plants were created after human beings falls away.

The naming of the Rivers of Eden is suggestive<sup>78</sup>. Although a dated source, Speiser's (1955) observation remains important. He argues that the four rivers that parted from the river of Eden did not flow away from Eden but toward it. In this manner, the phrase, "four heads" refer to the four sources of the rivers. The four rivers united to form the river watered the garden. In other words, the big river ran through the garden and the four rivers from it all flowed towards the garden to water it. This indicates the importance the myth attaches to water and the rivers that supply it. Due to insatiable greed, human beings have destroyed rivers. In Zambia for example, rivers have been destroyed due to mines. Lindahl (2014:2) laments:

Environmental impacts from mining operations are significant and quite often severe, especially in developing nations which lack adequate management of the sector. In Zambia, impacts from mining results from both historical and ongoing mining operations, and the majority of them is located in the Copperbelt district. Recent investments in exploration and mine developments have, however, led to new operations also in other provinces. The main environmental problems associated with mines in Zambia are pollution of air, soil and water, geotechnical issues and land degradation. The contribution from old mining legacy sites have shown to be minor compared to current mining operations.

This shows the extent of human impact on the wellbeing of the Earth and its habitat. Lakes, seas and oceans have also been polluted thereby putting aquatic life and the entire ecosystem at risk. The four rivers can be identified as the Euphrates, Hiddekel (Tigris), Gihon which winds through Ethiopia (Cush) and Egypt in Africa and Pison which winds through the land of Havilah in Arabia. By identifying Gihon with the land of Cush which was in Ethiopia, the myth was referring to River Nile which runs through Egypt and Ethiopia. Hence the suggestion by Harris (1967) that Gihon was in the country east of Mesopotamia among the Kassite people also falls away.

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<sup>78</sup> Some scholars suggest that Eden was in the general region of southern Mesopotamia or under the present Persian Gulf. How the limits to the region of the Eden cannot be properly set. See Harris (1967).

In any case, the description of the rivers and the richness of the land in minerals emphasizes the ecological importance of the myth. Whether there was a canopy of roaring water (Mosio-tunya) or rivers overthrowing for irrigation the myth clearly indicates the importance of preserving rivers and water for life on Earth to continue. It also indicates sacredness of water and the rivers as abodes of the divine. The rainbow is associated with God's covenant to protect life on Earth. In the same manner, the rainbow is associated with the River Goddess (*Nyaminyami*) among the Tonga people of Zambia (Colson 2006, Scudder 1962).

The reference to the richness of the Garden in minerals or precious stones also indicates the need for humans to protect land and the precious stones. Unfortunately land and precious stones have been used by the powerful to deny the poor majority fullness of life. In Africa, minerals have been extracted to create wealth and build patriarchal empires. Lindahl (2014:6) observes:

Since 2001, most of the previously state-owned and unprofitable copper mines have been revived through extensive investments by new owners. As the mining operations are scaling up production to make profits on the invested capital, the concern for the environment is prone to be overlooked. A number of serious environmental impacts are directly linked to operating copper mines

This confirms the exploitation of the natural world and the poor Zambians by the Chinese and western investors. And in all this, women are bearing the huge burden both as people who are every close to the natural world for their daily activities and as people who constitute the poor majority.

The belief that God created human beings as part of a larger web of life and affirmed the goodness of the whole creation lies at the heart of the Eden narrative. The whole community of living organisms that grows and flourishes is an expression of God's image. The different species depicted in the myths give life to the earth and connect one generation to the next to sustain the abundance and diversity of God's household (*oikos*). The understanding of life by the Tonga people recognizes that the lives of people, ancestors, nonhuman forms of life and God are woven together in mutual interdependence. Thus, they believe that the being of God and all

creation are intertwined. The ecological crisis has become a significant challenge to peoples' livelihoods. It endangers the existence of nonhuman life and diminishes Earth's biodiversity. It has far-reaching impacts on food security, the health of people and the living habits of a growing part of the population. As already discussed; challenges of climate change and the ecological crisis come from uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources that lead to the destruction of the Earth and to a substantial change of the habitat.

The exploitation of land and the mines due to greed, injustice and seeking easy profit are motivated by life-destroying values that aim at dominating the poor, women and the natural world. All these ideological features of the (post)modern world should be identified and challenged. The myth motivates humans to protect minerals, serve the common good, stand against all forms of marginalisation and seek the redemption of the whole Earth. In order to enable this protection an understanding of economy and justice is needed.

### **5.5.3. 2. Negotiating the three “Es” of ecology in Genesis 2:4-17**

The myth states that human beings were put in the garden on condition that they support life for all God's creation by tending it. As members of the garden or Earth (*oikos*) Wo/man had to ensure good management of the garden's affairs. In other words, the first human couple had the responsibility of negotiating the three “E's” of ecology in order to support the interdependence of life. The interdependence of life on earth can be seen in the three “Es” of ecology. The word ecology refers to the interrelationship between God's creations of which human beings are part. The first “E” of ecology is economy which derives from the Greek word *oikos* (household). The whole work of God in creating the earth and all that dwell therein (‘economy of the triune God’) is captured here. This concept holds that all God's creatures are at home on Earth. It invites human beings to manage their affairs with a realisation that there are also other forms of life who are members of the earth community.

The second “E” of ecology is Ecodome. The concept of ecodome (*oikodome*) refers to the need for humans beings to inhabit the earth as members of the household instead of dominating it. The concept emphasizes the conviction that the whole household (*oikos*) belongs to God and humans

are just members of the household (Martusewicz 2011:10, 15). In like manner, Christian communities become ecodomic communities that respond to the contemporary ecological crisis as part of the economy of the triune God (*oikonomia tou theou*). Consequently, the earth also becomes an ecodome (ecological community) for all God's creation. The concept has potential to foster human commitment to the reversing of the impact of the ecological crisis.

The third "E" of ecology is Ecojustice. The concept of ecojustice combines the concept of ecological living with that of economic justice for the earth and all its inhabitants both human and nonhuman (Meyer 1991:31, 32). Ecojustice speaks of the ways in which eco-systems interact to ensure a good functioning of the biosphere (earth) capturing the need to treat the inhabitants of the earth as a household or a single family. As Hessel (1985:12) observes, ecojustice refers to the interlocking web and earth's capacity to support the lives of its inhabitants (both human and nonhuman) to live together in harmony. Further, it highlights the interrelatedness of humans and nonhuman forms of life on earth. The need to tend the earth includes ensuring the biophysical environment which includes the water, air, soil, plants and animals; the social environment which includes communities of human beings; the economic environment which includes the means of production and access to capital; the political environment which includes systems of governance and political ideologies and the cultural environment which includes customs, crafts, music, art and dancing managed based on the principle of equality and justice.

The myth does not envision human patriarchal socio-economic and religio-political environment. Rather, it envisions an ecological community where human beings depend entirely on the biophysical environment and other life-support systems on earth. It is for this reason that the task for human beings to tend the garden does not mean nature conservation which reduces nature to "something out there". Rather, it refers to the relationship of interdependence between all forms of God's creation. In taking care of nonhuman forms of life, human beings acknowledge that nonhuman forms of life belong to an order and harmony of which they are part. For this reason ecojustice includes a concern for reversing the ecological crisis and at the same time securing justice for those who are marginalised on earth. This fits well with the principles of ecojustice which challenge patriarchal ideologies and policies that contribute to the subjugation of women

and the natural world. The three interlocking words of ecology emphasise that all forms of domination on earth be removed to support the interdependence of life. Conradie (2006:18) argues:

The image of the earth as a house does not take the self-productive activity of the earth into account satisfactorily. If anything, the earth is portrayed in the creation narrative in Genesis not as a house but rather as an active empowering agent which brings forth life.

Conradie is right to observe that the biblical myths of origin depict the earthly paradise as an active agent which brings forth life. However, the concept of a house of God does not refer to a static patriarchal setup. Rather, it speaks of a need for human beings not to dominate other forms of life on which their survival depends. The concept of the earth as a house (*oiko*) emphasises the need for human beings to take responsibility for the ecological wellbeing of the earth.

It is also worth noting that in a patriarchal family setup the household is a social construct that can easily be employed to serve patriarchal interests and reinforce the marginalisation and privatization of women. On the other hand, the concept of a house can empower women in a matrilineal society where women have social and religious leadership roles. There is need therefore, to discount the elements of patriarchy from the concept of the earth as a household.

Tutu (2004:21) has suggested that the model of the family of God can support harmonious relationship among human beings. Admittedly, viewing the Earth as a household of God where human beings live in harmony with one another and where human beings live in harmony with other forms of life can help address the injustices that cause the subjugation of women and the natural world. To do this the notion that woman derived from man rather than being created by God need to be addressed

#### **5.5.4. Third myth: Wo/man emerges from 'adamah (*Shimweshimwe*)**

The third myth (Gen. 2:18-25) begins by stating that in the beginning God created an earthling mystery ('adamah) who had inherent female and characteristics. This earth mystery (*shimweshimwe*) was both androgynous and hermaphroditic because it was the womb of life for

both humans and nonhuman forms of life. In this way, the universe is an organic whole composed of mystical correlations and humanity ought to look at nonhuman creatures as members of the family. To break up that unity is to destroy the entire universe.

Drawing on the Rabbinic Midrash, Tribble (1978) has suggested that the earthling mystery was sexless. However, Vanderkam (1989) and Amaru (1994:610) have contested this view by suggesting that 'adamah was a male with an undeveloped female aspect. The use of wo/man ('adam) in the text makes it unlikely that the narrator thought of 'adamah as an androgyny. Further, the use of the 'adamah as an earthling source of life (mother earth) also makes it unlikely that the narrator thought of 'adamah as a hermaphrodite.

The first earthling mystery is located in the text in the midst of sexually differentiated animals and is assigned to name the other creatures. In the process of naming, the earthling mystery becomes gender aware, experiences loneliness and unsuccessfully attempts to find the opposite gender (Gen. 2:18). It was at that point that God decided to divide the earth mystery into two, taking one side (*zela*) to form a woman and the other side to form a man. In the process of creation both sides (*zela*) are closed up using watered earth (soft clay) (Gen.2:22-23).

The woman in the third myth, like the earth mystery from which she emerges, is created in an entirely neutral setting devoid of all the signals associated with sin, wickedness and subordination (Gen. 2:21-24). There is no statement of divine foresight of man's need for a subordinate helper. There is also no divine command prohibiting man and woman from consumption of the fruit of a certain tree like in the second myth (Gen. 2:17). Instead, the discovery of existential loneliness and need comes from the earth mystery's own desire. Further, both man and woman emerges in the course of the task of naming, the first and only activity which the earth mystery undertook before the creation of woman and man. In other words, the myth of origin shows that the creation of woman and man involved explicit sexual differentiation requiring physical separation yet demanding wilful reunion in marriage. It is for this reason that when the man saw the woman he stated "This is now my fellow human being and my opposite gender; she shall be called 'adam for she was taken out of 'adamah" (Gen. 2:23).

The fact that man and woman emerged from the same earth mystery implies the future interdependence (*ezer*) of male and female. This is why in a Jewish matrilineal community before the patriarchal monarchy, land inheritance was through the mother (Gen. 2:24). The mother also had a right to name her sons and intermarriage was discouraged for fear of men being adopted into non-Jewish clans (Gen. 36:1). It can be argued therefore that, this myth does not show that woman was created from a man's rib to be a helper as some biblical interpreters assert (Clines 1990). Further, the task of naming was given to the earth mystery (*'adamah*), not a man.

A biblical interpretation which puts man above woman is a work of patriarchal politics to affirm that masculinity is the dominant principle of the natural order. It creates a hierarchy where man's network of relations, in which power is played out, extends from God and ground, plants and herbs, toward woman and animals. In this trajectory, a woman does not appear until later in the narrative (Gen. 2:18-24). However, femininity is at the center of the myth. Water and ground (mother earth) are all images of womanliness and that is the source of life and fertility. It is also interesting to note how a patriarchal interpretation of this myth has removed the participation of the Mother Goddess in the process of creation.

#### **5.5.4. 1. Genesis 2:18-23 as Hikabumba (Maker of clay figurines)**

A patriarchal interpretation of the biblical text has downplayed the feminine attributes of God in creation. Christianity has presented God in exclusively masculine language (Tappa 1986:101). While the myths contain male and female images of God, the patriarchal Christian tradition has disregarded the feminine images. Only masculine images have been seen to be more appropriate to describe who God is.

The biblical myths of origin have also pointed to the Earth Mother Goddess (*'adamah*). The image of the Earth Mother goddess was used in the Ancient Near East to emphasise that God is the source of life and fecundity. The worship of a Mother Goddess in relation with a male consort was common (cf. Day 1986, Hadley 2000:1). For example, Asherah was a mother goddess identifiable with other goddesses in other cultures in the ANE (cf. Day 1986, Hadley



2000:1-7). The Jewish God (Yahweh) also had a female consort. But this information has been eliminated in the creation narrative.

Major archaeological excavation in Palestine has also unearthed small naked clay female figurines. Further, two altars have been found at archaeological sites in the Near East. These altars stand one smaller than the other. It has been suggested that these altars belonged to Yahweh and the goddess (cf. Hadley 2000:7). Following this view, it is apparent that the small clay figurines represent the activities of creation by the Goddess who was the consort of Yahweh. It can also be argued that the activity of creation recorded in Genesis 2:18-23 was originally associated with the Mother Goddess. It is probable that Yahweh took part in the activity but the Goddess was the chief architect. The male Jewish Scribes edited the tradition to attribute it to the male God. The narrative was most likely edited from Yahweh-Asherah to Yahweh-Elohim. However, the portrayal of a male God making clay figurines in community where men are not even close to such activities does not make sense. Further, the reference to nature and the serpent also point to the goddess of wisdom (Sophia). The inclination of the myth to nature has been linked to wisdom traditions such as proverbs in ancient Israel (Wittenberg 2007). Further there are also close links between the Genesis chapter with wisdom literature given its reference to the tree of wisdom and the serpent.

A look at the myth through African gendered cultural lenses casts fresh ecological meaning on the myth. In Tonga culture making clay figurines is the activity of women. The creation of the earth and all living things is also associated with women clay figurines made during female initiation ceremonies (Tappa 1986). Women in African culture make clay figurines. The images of the clay figurines embody religious, historical, moral and cultural themes. Some of the figurines found on shrines serve as the centre of power, linking the physical world to the spiritual world (cf. Ray 1972:35-48, Zahan 1974:10). The figurines also link the human community to the natural world. Through the figurines women express pertinent issues such as fertility, human connection with the natural world and the general African way of life.

African women theologians have drawn from the image of the Earth mother by taking the positive aspects of African culture. They have pointed out that Christianity rooted in western ideologies has contributed to the disempowerment and the subjugation of the natural world

(Masenya 2010: 51). In Tonga indigenous society, God was understood in relation to equality between men and women. Further, women were in charge of the family and territorial or ecological shrines. At shrines, women had close contacts with nature and the Mother Earth. God was made present among people through the clay figurines created by women (cf. Hinfelaar 1994:192). This created a web of relationships between people, nature and God. By destroying the shrines in Ancient Israel, the supporters of the “Yahweh alone” movement technically eliminated the concept of the mother God and the relationship of the close contact relationship that women had with the natural diminished. As Moyo (2009:75) has observed, women were disempowered and transformed “from priestess and matriarchs to menstruating vulnerable women”. Reuther (1983:53) is then right to observe that male monotheism reinforces the social hierarchy of patriarchal rule by empowering men as heads of the family and society and thereby relegating women to the margins.

The Tonga indigenous culture resonates with the biblical myth of origin (Gen.1:26-28) in affirming that both men and women are made in the image of God. The image of God is also extended to unhuman forms of life and is also a symbolic representation of God. In this way, it can be argued that as long as the image of a male God inherited from western androcentric Christian tradition continues to dominate biblical interpretation and Christian history, it will be difficult for Tonga women to experience God as empowering and liberating in their community especially in the context of the ecological crisis (cf. Clifford 2005:122).

Rakoczy (2004:70) has indicated that some Christian theologians argue that the image of the female God (Sophia) is not appropriate as it stands outside the mystery of God as Trinitarian. However, the image of Mother Earth has been found to be empowering to women in Africa who are close to the natural world through initiation rites and ecological rituals. In pre-colonial Africa, women had close connection with nature or the mother earth (Moyo 2009: 75). They also held considerable leadership roles as overseers of territorial shrines. Reclaiming the image of the mother earth therefore, empowers African women to have a friendly relationship with nature and to exercise their religious roles as prophetesses and overseers of territorial shrines (*malende*). In this regard, retrieving the feminine attributes of God in the myths of origin empowers women and the natural world.

The Tonga indigenous culture resonates with the biblical myth of origin (Gen.1:26-28) in affirming that both men and women are made in the image of God. The image of God is also extended to unhuman forms of life and are symbolic representations of God. In this way, it can be argued that as long as the image of a male God inherited from western androcentric Christian tradition continues to dominate biblical interpretation and Christian history, it will be difficult for Tonga women to experience God as empowering and liberating in their community especially in the context of the ecological crisis. A patriarchal interpretation of the text has removed the female attributes of God to provide an exalted portrayal of Adam in the biblical text. This has disempowered women by distancing them from the creator in the text. Further, women cannot see themselves as reflecting the image of God who is masculine. Nonetheless, the myths of God show that all God's creation carry the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28).

Unlike other African tribes who call God as Father or Mother, the Tonga people of Zambia refer to God as the source of life<sup>79</sup>. These images of God in Africa emphasise the nature of God as the source of life as opposed to the masculine Judeo-Christian images which perpetuate a remote controlling God. In precolonial times, women in a matrilineal Tonga society had social and religious leadership roles (cf. Hinfelaar 1994: 12, 180). It can be argued therefore that although patriarchy is not foreign to Africa, Christianity with its exclusively masculine language and images of God in the interpretation of the biblical text has to a large extent introduced patriarchy among the Tonga people. As research has shown, exclusively male images of God can result into notions that portray men as representatives of God while relegating women to the margins (cf. Reuther 1983:53).

Admittedly, the current struggle of Tonga women has its roots in the all-male conceptualisation of God introduced by the western missionaries. The pre-Christian Tonga society was inclusive and ecological as demonstrated in this study. Further, female headship of the home was emphasized (cf. Corbel 1982: 17, Machila 1990).

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<sup>79</sup> The Bemba people of Zambia refer to God as Mayo Tata Lesa (Mother Father God). See Kaunda (2010: 5)

Tappa (1986:101) is right in pointing out that patriarchy has created God in Man's image. The function of God is reduced to male power roles and is perceived to have no female traits such as gentleness and sensitivity. Further, God is not expected to have traits of nonhuman forms of life such as the serpent. Men see themselves as being more of the image of God than women. However, ecological images of God like *hikabumba* (*maker of rivers*) may be life-giving to both human beings and nonhuman forms of life.

Given that Christianity came to Africa with its patriarchal and dualistic ideologies, the bible has been read with androcentric lenses marginalising women (Tappa 1996: 106). The exclusively male images of God have perpetuated patriarchy by empowering men while disempowering women and the natural world. Biblical scholars should seek to read the bible in ways which are life-giving to both human and the natural world. One of the ways of doing this would be to reclaim the voice and the image of the female Goddess suppressed in the myth of origin in Genesis 2.

#### **5.5.4. 2. Genesis 2:24 as *Mukaintu wa Cisi* (Mother of the community)**

Genesis 2:24 states that "Man shall leave his family and be united to his wife." The significance of this verse with regards to economic empowerment of women has often gone unnoticed. Research has shown that women in pre-monarchical Israel were considerably economically free (Hadley 2000). However, with a centralised religio-political system, women were pushed to private life. The myth in Genesis 2 therefore echoes a matrilineal and ecological community where women are empowered.

In indigenous Tonga community women were economically independent. Usually women sustained the family through farming (cf. Touwen 1984: 38). The husband was usually the hunter and regularly assisted the wife in farming. Industry in an agricultural economy consolidated the position of the wife as the breadwinner of the family. The relationship between wife and husband was based on equality and their roles complemented each other. As Poewe (1981:55) has observed, matrilineal ideology in indigenous African tribes encouraged separate but parallel participation of men and women in the economic and political affairs of the society. The political

and economic contributions of women were given great importance and value. However, Christianity and western civilisation introduced the husband as the head of the household. The husband became the breadwinner and the wife had to do domestic duties and look after children.

Given that in the traditional Tonga society the husband lived with his wife's family and that the wife was the head of the household, assigning the woman to the private sphere weakened her economic position and status in society (cf. Epstein 1981: 68, 70). Christianity and western civilisation have therefore disempowered Tonga women by enhancing the position of the husband and this is problematic in the context of the ecological crisis. As research has shown, the impact of the ecological crisis is severe on women who have low economic empowerment. A holistic response to the crisis should therefore address gender inequalities and issues concerning the economic empowerment of women in society.

In a pre-colonial matrilineal Tonga society the status of a woman was comparatively high. They held positions equal to men (cf. Rasing 1995: 30). The Earth priest and the Earth priestess held a joint office and both ensured the ecological wellbeing of the Land. In some instances women held high leadership roles. This can be seen from the religious roles women held as guardians of home and territorial shrines.

#### **5.5.5. Fourth myth: Protecting life on earth (Chisi)**

The fourth myth (Gen. 3:1-24) opens by indicating that man and woman are in the sacred space of the Garden of Eden. The narrative moves toward the expulsion of man and woman from the garden to the world of the peasant on the Palestinian uplands where they have to till the meager soil with its thorns and scarcity of rain.

The third myth, is located within Eden. The location of the myth in Eden pictures the agricultural community in the ANE (Day 1986). The land depicted was fertile like Canaan which was in the middle of successful farming communities - Sumerians in the Tigris and Euphrates valleys and Egyptians in the Nile valley. These countries had good irrigation and cultivation methods.

The influence of the Levitical purification laws can be identified after childbirth (Lev. 12:2-5). The narrator interweaves the purification code (*halakah*) into the story line (Gen. 3: 8-9). This

encodes the requirements for purification for the man and the woman to enter the sacred space of the Garden of Eden.

This view is in line with Anderson's (1989:121-148) identification of the garden as the site of the Temple. However, the narrator reverses the purification code by depicting both man and woman in sacred space of the garden. In this way man and woman are presented as earth priest (*Sikatongo*) and earth priestess (*mukaintu walufulu*) to tend and dress the garden. In this way, Adam is not a patriarchal farmer as Steck (1970:39), Westermann (1984:221) and Wittenberg (2007) have asserted. He is a member of the community, and as an earth priest he depends on his wife (*ezer*) for the success of ecological rituals that ensure continuity of life on earth.

The narrator depicts Adam and Eve having a conversation with a beautiful serpent (*nachash*) while eating the fruits in the garden (Gen. 3:1-7). This part of the myth was most likely drawn from the Babylonian creation epic. The Ancient Babylonian seal depicts a man and a woman seated on either side of a tree, and reaching out their hands to pluck the fruit. A serpent rears its head behind the woman, and seems to be whispering in her ear (Collins 1913:38). In a similar way, an old sculpture at East Moen Church in the UK, depicts the story of Adam and Eve in relation to 1 Corinthians 15:22, "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive". And so, the woman is depicted taking the fruit out of the mouth of the serpent, while the Man has already begun to eat (Collins 1913). Given that this myth was narrated in the context of opposition to the patriarchal establishment, it is unlikely that the narrator thought of Eve as a gate way for wickedness on earth. It is also unlikely that the narrator thought of the serpent as a rebellious and evil reptile.

The reading of Genesis 3:6 in the Geneva Bible<sup>80</sup> is suggestive: "So the woman, seeing that the tree was good for meat, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to get knowledge, took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also (*gam*) to her husband with her (*imah*), and he did eat. The Hebrew words "*gam*" (also) and "*imah*" (with) show that Adam was alongside Eve and the serpent when Eve ate the fruit gave one to Adam who had already eaten some. The myth also states that Eve found a tree to be desired to get wisdom or knowledge (*le-*

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<sup>80</sup> For more details see the Geneva Bible, 1564, Genesis 3:6.

*haskil*). It can be suggested therefore that the serpent was the first one to eat the fruit and was aware of the consequences of eating the fruit. But what is dangerous about getting wisdom? Further, the response of the woman (Gen. 3:2-3) suggests that both man and woman were aware of the command prohibiting the fruit of the tree, and both violated it. As a result, the consequence of eating the fruit to the serpent, man and woman is structurally parallel. Three observations can be made. First, the serpent (representing nonhuman forms of life) violates the prohibition by being the first to taste the fruit. Second, the man (representing those in positions of power) violates the prohibition. Third, the woman (representing those on the margins of the social strata) violates the prohibition.

The significance of both Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit lies in the fact that both man and woman have equal knowledge (*le-haskil*) and both have equal access to God and the sacred space. In the entire myth woman emerges as an active equal partner to man. In this manner, the woman is far from being portrayed as the agent in the man's transgression. In an attempt to reverse the patriarchal myth the narrator radically concludes the narrative by portraying that only the man was driven out of the garden (Gen. 3: 22-24). The phrase *va-yeshallehehu* (Gen 2:23) is singular which suggests expulsion from the garden for man alone. However, reading this verse in relation to Genesis 2:24 suggests that both Adam and Eve were withdrawn from the garden as one flesh. In this way, Anderson (1989:122-39) is right to observe that in contrast to the notion that only Adam was exiled from the garden, both the man and the woman were dismissed. Further, it must be noted that God also sent out all the creatures in the garden to replenish the earth.

In the fourth myth, the prohibition is first mentioned in the context of the woman's response to the serpent (Gen. 3:2-3). The tree of life was not off-limits until Gen. 3:24 and its fruits were free and available for picking. As Habel (2011:51-52) observes, the narrator leaves the reader speculating what would have happened if the first humans had chosen the fruit of the tree of life rather than the tree of knowledge? It is clear however that God felt that it was necessary to protect the tree of life. At the beginning of the narrative, life and the tree of life were freely given. But the end of the narrative shows that life and living are important to God, and it was necessary to protect them. In this way the fourth myth invites readers of the bible in communities

that regard the bible as a sacred text to look for what is needed for the earth to come to life and green up. Okupu (1993:77) posits that humanity is part of nature and is expected to cooperate with it. The belief that human beings and nonhuman forms of life live in the same community is often expressed in terms of identity and kinship. It is believed that every creature, human or nonhuman possesses the “vital force” (Tempel 1952:23). Muntu (person) signifies the vital force endowed in the intelligence and will. Everything in God’s creation is interdependent on every other creature according to the principle of ubuntu (being human). Ubuntu is the state of being fully human in a dynamic process of the God-human-nonhuman mutual relationship. Actions which are good such as respect for fellow human beings and other forms of life increase one’s personhood and the reverse is true for bad actions. A person who has no respect for the life of humans and nonhuman human forms of life is considered to be a phantom or not fully human (*ichinkula*). Apart from illustrating the active interaction between humans and nonhuman life (Gen. 3:1-6), the myth and the taboos given to the first humans exemplify the ecological injunctions. This vital interconnectedness regulates human relationship with God and the rest of creation.

Similarly, the reference to the beautiful and shining serpent (*nachash*) and the feminine wisdom (Sophia) encode the narrator’s sympathy for nature. As already noted, Israel’s contact with other nations in the ANE reignited the desire to go back to pre-monarchical worship of the mother earth (goddesses) (cf. Whybray 1968:11, Ruether 1996). Thus, reading the myth from the perspective of gender, ecology and knowledge for good and bad rather than sin as a patriarchal reading suggests means that many apologies are owed to the woman and the serpent. The fourth myth show God interacting with creation (Gen. 3:21-22). God is presented as *hikabumba* (creator of all things), *chimba milonga* (maker of rivers) and *mwine conde* (owner of the forest). Thus, the myth presents a worldview which demonstrates that God is not a *Deus remotus* (remote God). Given that God lives in and among creation attention to how the myths of origin show this by emphasizing the sacredness of all God’s creation is important.



### 5.5.5. 1. Genesis 3:1-13 as Mukowa (*Totem*)

The biblical myths of origin portray human beings and the serpent in the garden. The reference to human beings and the serpent echoes the association of the serpent with the divine (*imipashi ya fokolwe*) and how human beings and nonhuman forms of life belong to the same family through the totem (*mukowa*). In this way, the serpent is not an intruder into the human space but a member of the family.

If Genesis 3 is read from the perspective of mukowa (totem) and how human beings, nonhuman forms of life and earth-mysteries are interdependent as members of the one family in the household of God, misogynistic and patriarchal language in the text is removed. Tutu (2004:25) notes:

Members of the family have a gentle caring and compassion for one another. If we could but recognise our common humanity, that we do belong together, that our destinies are bound up in one another's, that we can be free only together, then a glorious world would come into being where all of us lived harmoniously together as members of one family... In truth a transfiguration would take place. God's dream would become a reality.

As already noted, the understanding of family in African contexts does not only include humans. It includes ancestors, nonhuman forms of life and Earth-mysteries who are part of the kindred through the totem. The exploitation of the natural world therefore has implication for the entire ecosystem. The envisioned ecological community in Genesis 3 is succinctly summarised in the words of Leonardo Boff who underscores the need of challenging the structures of patriarchy in society.

Human beings live ethically when they decide to stop placing themselves above all others and decide instead to stand together with others. To be truly ethical, humankind has to be able to understand the urgent need for ecological balance, of being human together with nature, and of being human together with other human beings (Boff 1995:31).

It can be concluded that contrary to a patriarchal interpretation of the text which has condemned the woman and the serpent for human suffering on earth, the text has values that can help challenge the injustices mounted by patriarchal political, social and religious structures on Earth.

### **5.5.5. 2. Genesis 3: Women as victims of the “Yahweh alone” crusaders**

The biblical myth of origin certainly contains references to the divine female God (Sophia). The reference to the woman and the serpent in the garden points to divine wisdom. As Clifford (2005:105) has shown, the image of Sophia the feminine wisdom is more empowering to women than the patriarchal image of the logos (Clifford 2005: 105). It is more appropriate to reimage God in the myths in female symbols which draw on Sophia – as female wisdom and promote an inclusive Christian community. Given that the serpent was associated with the worship of Baal- Asherah, patriarchal writers of the biblical text portrayed the serpent and Eve as wicked to discredit the cult of Baal-Asherah. It is for this reason that Eve cannot be blamed for talking to the serpent given her responsibility as guardian of the sacred space. However, the myth has been edited to make Eve and the serpent look wicked.

The crusade the followers of “Yahweh alone” movement waged against women had serious ecological implications for women who had close contacts with the Goddess due to their ecological activities. One of the victims of this crusade was Jezebel. She was accused of plotting to eliminate the crusaders (prophets) of the “Yahweh alone” movement. The portrayal of Eve in the biblical myths (Gen. 3) resonates with the attitude of the prophets toward Jezebel.

Contrary to the human and male-centered value system exhibited by the “Yahweh alone” crusaders in destroying ecological shrines, Tonga indigenous culture in precolonial times, recognised the values that inhere objectively in natural world independently of human wants. By way of direct experience of nonhuman nature, human beings recognised the equal intrinsic worth of all biota as well as one’s own ecological interconnectedness with other forms of life. Further, women were in charge of the family and territorial or ecological shrines. At shrines, women had close contacts with nature and the Mother Earth. God was made present among people through the clay figurines created by women (cf. Hinfelaar 1994:192).

## 5.6. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN AFRICAN GENDERED ECOLOGICAL READING OF GENESIS 1-3

The myths speak of the interrelationships between God and humans, man and woman, and humans and animals. The concept of arable soil (*'adamah*) and man and woman tending the garden show that land is familial, communal and sacramental. As such, land is a gift from God through the ancestors. The symbolic understanding of land as a gift from God through the ancestors lays emphasis on the natural world being a heritage to be passed on to the future generations rather than being exploited by humans (Gen 3:2). Among the Tonga people of Zambia the myths bring home four things.

First, territorial integrity is maintained in the home soil where one is buried (Gen. 3:19). The Tonga people maintain ties with their home land (where the umbilical cord was buried) and come from the diaspora to be buried in their ancestral land. When entering alien territory, the Tonga have a ritual of *licking* or drinking the soil. The significance of the ritual is to redeem oneself from alien spirits and to be welcomed by the ancestors of the land. Further, if one dies and is buried in foreign land, the Tonga have the ritual of taking the funeral to one's home village (taking the spirit back home). They take the soil from the grave for ritual burial of the deceased person in the ancestral land. This ritual emphasizes the principle of togetherness and interrelatedness of humans with other forms of life. In other words the myths emphasize the Ubuntu principle of *cognatus ergo, sum ergo* (I am related therefore we are).

Second, the myth uphold the principle of togetherness. Contrary to the patriarchal notion that the myth show that the woman's function is primarily that of negative catalyst who is always associated with breaking God's law (Amaru 1994:612), the myth exemplify the principle of togetherness. Steck (1970: 38, 124) has rightly observed that there are indications in the myths of origin in Genesis(2-3) which show that human society was seen as a large group of people closely knit together by community relationships(*ubuntu*). The entire (human and nonhuman) community participated in the eating of the fruit and the entire community learnt of the importance of protecting life. In other words, relationships within clans (*mukowa*) and tribal communities (*katongo*) are of fundamental community and ecological significance and form the

perspective from which the narrator of the fourth myth structured the work. Further, the myth exhibits the Tonga principle of togetherness shown during the practice of *ichima* (working together) in which people gather to a common task such as ploughing, weeding, harvesting, threshing and winnowing of grain. The interdependence of human beings be it male or female is also exemplified in the proverb *umunwe umo tausala inda* (one finger cannot pick a louse).

Third, the narrator inserts the naming of the woman as Eve (giver of life) in the narrative to show that the woman is the source of life. Bal (1987:128) has suggested that the naming of a woman by man was an affirmation of woman being imprisoned in motherhood. Drawing on the Midrash, Amaru (1994:612) adds that the myth shows Adam's overzealous concern for the law and lack of trust in the woman. However, a closer look at the text shows that the man was not naming the woman, rather he was confessing her wisdom (Sophia) and appreciating her as the giver of life, the symbol of the mother earth (*'adamah*).

Fourth, the restrictions put in the garden are not looked at as bad (*harut*). Rather, they are looked at as freedom (*herut*) because they were meant to preserve life. And both humans and nonhuman forms of life are called "living beings" (*nepes chayya*) as they came from the same source (Gen. 2:27). In many African cultures (Tonga indigenous culture inclusive), taboos prevent human beings from exploiting the natural world. Ancestor as guardians of the land ensure that those who break the taboos are punished.

It is from this ecological perspective that restriction in the third and fourth myths should be understood. In this way, I would submit that the biblical myths of origin (Gen. 1-3) do not share the falsehood that human life is more valuable than that of other species neither do they share the concept of biota egalitarianism as proposed by Albert Schweitzer and deep ecologists<sup>81</sup>. Reading the biblical myths from an African Tonga perspective also challenges the patriarchal notions held

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<sup>81</sup> Deep ecology is a philosophical belief that the living environment as whole should be regarded as having certain inalienable legal rights to live independent of their benefit for human use. It holds that the motivation for western countries to conserve the natural world is invariably tied to human welfare. For deep ecologists, western methods of nature conservation are fundamentally anthropocentric. See: Sessions, G. (ed.).1995. *Deep Ecology for Twenty-first century*. Boston: Shambhaha. Naess, Arne .1989. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

by some African Theologians. For example, Kaoma(2010:10, 11) points out that bantu philosophy has humanity at the center, and yet the center is connected to a web of hierarchical interacting vital forces with God at the top, followed by clan founders, ancestors, humanity, animate, and, finally inanimate forces. To the contrary, Tonga indigenous culture like the biblical myths of origin show an ecological community (ecodome) where all God's creations are equal. Further, both worldviews concur with eco-feminist postulates of the world as Gaia (God's body) (Ruether 1996). This is the vital energy, participation and recycling matter.

Fifth the myths show that order and cohesion can only be achieved when there is "good relationship between human beings and all the powers which are perceived in the cosmos. In this way life is sacred, be it human or nonhuman. It is for this reason that not everything in God's creation should be eaten by humans (Gen. 2:16-17, 3:3). Thus, the myths are ecocentric and attach ritualistic importance to human life. They are friendly and open to the environment and cosmos. This is contrary to the western-dominated worldview which is aggressive towards nature, the attitude which is the main reason for the present ecological crisis as Spijker (1994:90) has rightly observed. This interrelatedness of human and nonhuman forms of life can be illustrated by the concept of totems in Tonga indigenous culture. The totem (*mukowa*) is derived from animals such as a lion or an elephant; or birds or plants or other created reality such as a pool of water or a natural phenomenon such as rain and is acquired through a matrilineal lineage. The characteristics of clan animals are attributed to the members of the clan and are used in praise names and slogans. In a similar manner, cattle receive ancestral names ritually bestowed on them. When someone dies totem praise names are recited during the funeral rites as a requirement for proper burial.

The ecological significance of totems is that human beings have a group value and every person is in a web of connectedness with other humans and nonhuman forms of life. Further, there are taboos linked to the totem. These include abstaining from eating the totem animal. In other words, totem animals are part of the human community and are members of the kindred. All of these are encoded in the myths and they make sense only to the initiated (senior members) of the community. This is why demythologising the myths is important. In many parts of the world, people on the margins and nonhuman forms of life have been used as resources.

Anthropocentrism manifesting itself in obsession to dominate the natural environment has seen the distortion of the God-human-nonhuman mutual interdependence relationality and thus upsetting the balance of nature.

To reserve the negative impact of climate change and the ecological crisis, human beings ought to take responsibility for ecological wellbeing. The holistic worldview shown by biblical myths of origin and indigenous African culture has communal and sacramental value. The sacramental and mutual value of a reciprocal relationship of humanity to the natural world are accentuated in the understanding that forests are holy and things like mushrooms, wild fruits, animals and medicinal shrubs should be used sparingly so as to be made available to the next generation.

## **5.7. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, it has been argued that Genesis 1-3 has four myths of origin which have been put together and presented as a single creation narrative. It has also been argued that the biblical myths of origin in Genesis 1-3 are replete with patriarchal, androcentric and anti-nature figurative language which conceal the real ecological meaning of the myths. To demonstrate this, the article began by showing that during the Monarchy, presumably because of the increasing autocratic tendencies of the state a group of people who were against the patriarchal establishment edited the myths of origin. These people were most likely educated and shared in the great tradition of the ANE, although they no longer shared the patriarchal imperial values. This is the reason for a strong rural and ecological perspective of the narrator. For example, when David and Solomon tried to establish an empire according to the Egyptian model, they joined the opposition (Wittenberg 2007:57). The myths were edited several times during the pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic periods. In this way it has been argued that the myths of origin in Genesis 1-3 are a document of opposition against patriarchy and the establishment of the Monarchy. The narrator sought to show that human hands are for tending the ground (*'adamah*) who is the origin and end of humanity. They are not for making bricks out of ground (*'adamah*) to build patriarchal empires that destroy life on earth for both humans and nonhuman forms of life.

The chapter went on to show the myths of origin in Tonga Indigenous culture which account for the origin of humanity and nonhuman forms of life and the general importance of ecological wellbeing. This revelation of the egalitarian and ecological view in African culture was used as a lens to read Genesis 1-3. It was demonstrated that although a patriarchal and predominantly western worldview portray an elevated view of humans in a patriarchal community where humans who were created from the dust (*'adamah*) end up not much “less than god” (Ps. 8), the perspective of the myths is that of an ecological community (ecodome). The myths reflect a critique of the establishment of patriarchal empower.

The chapter went to suggest that the African Christian response to the ecological crisis should build on the principle of interconnectedness of life reflected in the myths of origin and the African culture. Both the biblical myths of origin and African heritages suggest nature's sacramental value by affirming that the earth is the God-given home (*oikos*) for all creatures-human and nonhuman.

The chapter concludes by arguing that in the context of the current ecological crisis, biblical myths of origin ought to be read in a gendered and eco-friendly way by decoding the figurative patriarchal and anti-nature ideologies embedded in them. The biblical myths of origin challenge nations and communities that build patriarchal religio-political and social economic structures that threaten the fullness of life on earth. Athalya Brenner (1993:13) has noted:

Perhaps more than any other biblical text, the texts which comprise the book of Genesis have traditionally been and are perceived to embody cultural emblems. The attribution of emblematic properties to them facilitates their implementation for religious, spiritual, cultural, socioeconomic and political ends, a praxis which may be on the decline but is still widespread.

This chapter has attempted to bring these “cultural emblems” within the biblical myths of origin into dialogue with the “cultural emblems” found within Tonga indigenous resources. In this dialogical process the figurative patriarchal and anti-nature ideologies embedded in the myths were decoded. The theoretical and methodological advancing of eco-feminist readings of the

creation accounts to include African indigenous resources, as was shown in this chapter certainly contributes to the expanding discourse on ecological well-being. This chapter has therefore succeeded in contributing to knowledge by showing a new way of reading the biblical myths of origin. In the next chapter I will offer a summary of the conclusions drawn from and the questions the study has raised for further research.



## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

#### 6.1. INTRODUCTION

As I was putting the final touches to this concluding chapter, the United Nations' annual climate summit was being concluded in Lima, Peru. Naomi Klein, an acclaimed journalist and writer reported:

on its penultimate day, something historic happened...The historic event was the decision of the climate-justice movement to symbolically join the increasingly global #BlackLivesMatter uprising, staging a "die-in" outside the convention center much like the ones that have brought shopping malls and busy intersections to a standstill, from the US to the UK <sup>82</sup>

Klein's observations point to how the problem of climate change is linked to patriarchal social and political structures in society. The demonstration was dubbed *what would governments do if black and brown lives counted as much as white lives?* People from communities which are severely affected by climate change have vowed not to entertain empty promises from powerful western governments. Wealthy western countries have been reluctant to spend huge sums of money on climate change initiatives pushing their strategic plans to as far as 2030 when people in Africa and Oceania are dying due to climate change. This timely demonstration on the eve of the submission of my thesis convinced me again of the several important lessons and values that this thesis may hold. The demonstration in Klein's assessment thereof, highlighted several factors which are significantly related to the arguments I have made in this thesis.

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<sup>82</sup> See *What would governments do if black and brown lives counted as much as white lives?* 12 December, 2014. <http://www.thenation.com/article/192801/what-does-blacklivesmatter-have-do-climate-change>. Accessed 13/12/2014.

The first is the recognition that for people in developing nations, climate change is a matter of life and death. As Gerry Arances<sup>83</sup>, the national coordinator for the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice puts it, it means “either death or climate justice”. There is need for western countries to commit themselves to responding to the climate change and the ecological crisis on the basis that people in marginalised communities which include women, black people and people of colour matter. This will avoid people from marginalised communities shouldering the burdens of uncontrolled emissions from technological projects in the west. Despite the fact that climate change is being primarily caused by people in wealthy countries, people in developing countries bear the brunt of the impacts. Micah Challenge (2014: 3)<sup>84</sup> magazine records:

The current climate change that the world is experiencing has historically been caused by those of us in wealthy countries as we have developed our economies. However, the people who stand to lose the most are people in impoverished countries, who have historically contributed least to the problem.

People in marginalised poor communities bear the huge burden of the crisis due to lack of financial resources to cope adequately with the problem. Developing countries are also more vulnerable to climate change because they are more directly dependent on their immediate natural resources than are developed countries. In this way, there is need for economic and technological investments in some of the most neglected parts of the world such as Oceania and Africa.

Second, there is a link between contemporary responses to climate change, western imperialism and racial superiority. Western imperialism and notions of racial superiority are at the centre of non-response to climate change. If wealthy white people in the western countries had been the ones left without homes, food and water like the poor people in Sub-Saharan Africa due to the impact of climate change, more money would have been spent to mitigate the crisis. Similarly, if western countries like America and Britain were the ones at risk of disappearing due to the rising

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<sup>83</sup> Cited in the Nation. 2014.

<sup>84</sup> See *Micah Challenge Magazine* at <http://www.micahchallenge.org.au/assets/pdf/Theology-of-climate-change.pdf>. Accessed 11/12/2014.

sea levels like Bangladesh and Kiribati, technological projects that contribute to the rising of the global temperature would have been shut down. This means that racism informs how the wealthy western countries respond to the crisis. This manifests in the continued refusal to provide serious climate financing to poor countries so they can protect themselves from heavy weather. Wealthy western countries are also putting strict policies in place to prevent victims of climate change in developing countries from migrating to their countries.

Third, the economic order which is built on white supremacy is largely responsible for the ecological crisis. It is also responsible for delayed efforts to ameliorate the impact of the crisis. The unequal distribution of the impact of climate change where poor communities are affected more than the wealthy western countries is due to policy decisions western countries make. McFague (2008: 85) observes:

Individualistic anthropology is deep within our consumer-oriented culture and is presently supported not only by religion but also by government and contemporary economics. When these three major institutions—religion, government and economics present a united front, a sacred canopy is cast over a society, validating the behaviour of its people. It legitimates human beings continuing to feel, think and act in ways that are basically contrary to the just distribution of the world's resources and the sustainability of the planet itself.

Whites in western countries make policies without considering that “black and brown” lives in poor communities matter as well. Further, they prefer solutions that favour them while putting people in poor continents like Africa at risk. Further, they have also continued to rob indigenous people of land which they use for mining to extract wealth.

Fourth, there is need to recognise the contribution of indigenous knowledge systems to the ecological strategies. The wisdom of indigenous people and indigenous knowledge systems is a vital ingredient in the response to the climate change and the ecological crisis. This includes learning from women's wisdom and traditional knowledge in developing and practicing eco-just cultural and religious rituals and values. However, solutions offered by people with darker skin

are often neglected. For example, western countries have been reluctant to support reduction of emission.

Fifth, climate change and ecological crisis is a justice issue. It demands more than sympathy for the marginalised. The deep injustice of patriarchal wealthy countries which has disproportionate effect on poor communities, women and the natural world requires a moral and ethical response. Given the disproportionate consequences of climate change on those in poverty throughout the world, it is necessary to pursue justice for the ecologically marginalised.

I humbly submit that this thesis makes an important step in this direction for the pursuit of such justice. In this chapter I will offer a summary and a synthesis of the findings of this study towards this goal of ecological justice. Through an African gendered ecological reading of the myths of origin in Genesis 1-3 in the context of the Tonga people of Zambia, this study has attempted to provide insights on retrieving the gendered and cultural values of indigenous Tonga culture that may contribute to the reading of the myths in a way that is empowering to women and the natural world. The study sought to respond to the research problem of a patriarchal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 which is based on a predominantly heteronormative Western worldview promoting patriarchy and the subjugation of nature, among communities who regard the bible as sacred text. Hence I attempted to answer the question: *To what extent can the interpretive framework of an indigenous gendered knowledge challenge patriarchy and the subjugation of nature among communities who regard the bible as sacred text?* This question was premised on research problem that: *A patriarchal interpretation of Genesis 1-3, that is based on a Western worldview within a dominance paradigm, has promoted patriarchy and the subjugation of nature, among communities who regard the bible as sacred text.*

## **6.2. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS**

In chapter one I attempted among other things to introduce the research topic and locate it within the current research by African women theologians. Chapter one concluded that the body of work that exists on African theologies, African biblical scholarship and ecofeminism show that in an African worldview, the spiritual, the natural and the human worlds are interconnected

(Moyo 2009). The chapter argued that the ecological values in African culture having been neglected to due to the influence of western imperialism and women in sub-Saharan Africa continue to bear a huge burden of the current ecological crisis. It also demonstrated that indigenous African Tonga culture has gendered values that can be of help in response to the ecological crisis if reclaimed and integrated.

Although this worldview can inform Christian ecological responsibility and action, very few studies are dedicated to the investigation of the same from a biblical and African gendered ecological perspective, the chapter showed. Further, very few studies are dedicated to investigating how an indigenous interpretive model may challenge patriarchy and the subjugation of nature among the communities who regard the bible as a sacred text. To achieve the task of reading the text in a way which is life-giving to women and the natural world, the chapter proposed gendered ecological hermeneutics as a theoretical framework. It also proposed a penta-polar approach as a methodology for reading the biblical text.

Chapter two presented an indigenous interpretive model that may be empowering to women and promote ecological justice. The chapter analysed interpretive models in contemporary biblical scholarship. It also analysed the development of ecological hermeneutics while highlighting its limitation in addressing the oppression of women and the subjugation of the natural world in the biblical text. Finally, the guiding hermeneutical principles for reading the text from a gendered and ecological perspective were presented.

Chapter three demonstrated the gender and ecological values that can be retrieved from indigenous Tonga culture to empower women in the context of the current ecological crisis. These values include the gender dimensions of rain-calling rituals, territorial shrines, the cult of Lesa, the roles of ritual officiants and myths of origin. The chapter showed that in Tonga indigenous culture women play a reading role in ecological rituals such as rain-calling.

Chapter four demonstrated how a patriarchal and androcentric interpretation of Genesis 1-3 has contributed to the marginalisation of women and nonhuman nature among the Tonga people of Zambia. The chapter demonstrated that an exalted portrayal of Adam in the biblical myths of

origin is as a result of a patriarchal political agenda by the composers or redactors of the myths; and that in pre-monarchical Israelite community women were in charge of rituals that ensured the ecological wellbeing of the community.

Chapter five demonstrated how an African gendered ecological reading of Genesis 1-3 can challenge patriarchy, empower women and promote human responsibility towards the natural world. The chapter offered a reading of Genesis 1-3 using an African ecofeminist lens while drawing on the analytic tool of demythologisation to decode symbolic patriarchal language in the biblical text.

Overall, the study has shown that while African culture and Christianity have sometimes been condemned for being anthropocentric and androcentric, both worldviews indicate a complementary emphasis on human responsibility to the natural world. Most significantly both worldviews view the Earth as a home of intimately related beings. The study has shown that the Bible is not ecologically bankrupt. Certainly, Christianity has too often supported the subjugation of women and the natural world but that has been done through patriarchal interpretations of the biblical text. In this respect the study has made methodological (with regard to the methods applied to the biblical text), social; theological and theoretical advancements to the body of knowledge on ecology and biblical scholarship.

### **6.2.1. Methodologically**

The study has shown that the biblical text illustrates ambivalent ecological and gendered premises which have resulted from different political interests of the writers or editors. For example, the male elite in ancient Israel edited the myths of origin which originally supported the matrilineal family setup to consolidate the dominant position of men in society. In an African context, these myths would recognise the leadership roles of women at rain-calling rituals and ecological shrines. The myths would also recognise the equality of man and woman in performing religio-cultural functions. The study has also shown that the male elite in Ancient Israel edited the myths which originally supported the sacredness of nonhuman forms of life to give an exalted portrayal of man in God's creation. In the African context these myths would

recognise the sacredness of nonhuman forms of life such the river serpent (*Nyami-nyami*), lions, leopards and birds.

African indigenous culture and the worldview presented by the biblical myths of origin are fundamentally compatible when it comes to the human relationship with creation. This does not suggest that they are fully ecological in outlook, rather, they contain insights which can contribute to the healing of marginalised women and the natural world. For example, given that the biblical myths of origin and African culture confirm the social and religious roles of women as guardians of ecological shrines where ancestors are believed to be guardians of the land, an ecological biblical hermeneutics that is life-giving in Africa should integrate this value. Further, the study has argued that a life-giving giving ecological hermeneutical interpretive model should also explicitly integrate the value of a God who is non-transcendent but dwells and is symbolically reflected through creation.

In this regard, the formulation of an African indigenous biblical interpretive model becomes instrumental in helping to read the bible in a way which supports ecojustice. For example, the ecological hermeneutical principles proposed by the earth bible project and Ernst Conradie help to read the bible from the perspective of the earth. The hermeneutical strategy used by Rosemary Ruether to draw on resources from indigenous cultures in the ANE is also significant. Extending these hermeneutical innovations, an African ecological interpretive model was proposed. This new alternative way of reading the biblical text, seeks to read the biblical text in a way which is life-giving to women and other forms of life. As Ruether (1986, 2011) has observed, the false idea that women and the natural world were created solely to serve man's need should be corrected. Human beings ought to recognise that they share a common origin with non-human forms of life in the creator God.

### **6.2.2. Socially**

The study has shown that in indigenous Tonga culture social relations had a bearing on the wellbeing of the entire earth. For example, murder could result in the community having a drought until the culprit is incarcerated from the community. The core of such taboos was to

uphold the value of the interconnectedness of life between humanity and the natural world. Most significant was the concepts of *ubuntu*, *buumo* and *mukowo* which affirmed the principle of ecological interconnectedness.

The study has shown that women bear the huge burden of the ecological crisis and the negative impact of a patriarchal global capitalistic economy. Most of the patriarchal western driven economies do not pay attention to the plight of women and the natural world. As a result, women and the natural world are threatened by these patriarchal ideologies. Further, land has also been exploited. Hence, the theme of arable land (*'adamah*) in the biblical myths of origin is valuable for the establishment of an ecological community. Given the destruction has been done to land, the study has argued that the Tonga indigenous culture has values that can be instrumental in Earth healing. For example, the Lwiindi (agricultural) ceremony and the *Leza* cult all support the sacredness of life. These Tonga religio-cultural establishments resist the oppression of women and the exploitation of land.

Furthermore, the motif of replenishing the earth in the biblical myths of origin (Gen 1:26-28) does not mean populating the world irresponsibly. While it true that procreation is highly emphasised in African indigenous culture, the tradition did not allow people to have children irresponsibly. The study has argued that there is sufficient evidence to show that African indigenous culture had mechanisms for family planning and consequently population control. Integrating this value in the appropriation of the biblical myths of origin to the contemporary African community and beyond may help in addressing the negative effects of uncontrolled human population on land and the earth in general.

The study has also demonstrated that the significance of nonhuman forms of life in the biblical myths of origin (as is the case also with indigenous African culture) is at three levels. First, nonhuman forms of life possess a vital force and are all called “living things” or “living beings”. Therefore, human attitude toward other forms of life need to recognise their intrinsic value. A human being with the values of *ubuntu* and *buumo* will have to live in harmony with other forms of God’s creation. To deny nonhuman forms of life their natural rights may provoke the



intervention of the God. In the biblical myths of origin, this has clearly been demonstrated in the expulsion of the human beings from the garden to protect life (Gen. 3).

Second, the nonhuman forms life support the chain of life. The study has demonstrated that the prohibition to destroy nonhuman forms of life in the biblical myths of origin and Tonga indigenous culture was to allow human beings benefit from the chain of interconnectedness. For example, to destroy a fruit bearing tree was to destroy one's food security. Third, the study has shown that the biblical myths of origin and Tonga indigenous culture respect the natural world as the symbolic abode of the Divine. The many taboos associated with the natural world point to the association of the natural world with the Divine. In other words, God is believed to be present in creation.

### **6.2.3. Theologically**

The study has demonstrated that the biblical myths of origin show a God who is present in nature. To the contrary however, patriarchal interpretations of the bible have resulted in Christian traditions that present a transcendent God who dwells outside God's creation. The study has maintained that patriarchal Christian traditions which present a transcendent God have much to learn from an indigenous African worldview regarding human-God relationship. The African worldview, illustrate the intrinsic value of all God's creation as *Imago Dei*.

The study has demonstrated how the early nineteenth European missionaries destroyed sacred groves among the Tonga people. However, the Tonga African worldview upholds the value of the interconnectedness of life, the view demonstrated in the biblical myths of origin. Dismissing African culture as fetish and idolatry in a continent where indigenous values have persisted for centuries despite the influence of Western imperialism and Western Christianity will not help to mitigate the negative impact of climate change and the ecological crisis. Rather, attempts to integrate the African indigenous worldview on the sacredness of all creatures and the place of human beings in God's creation can lead to the building of an egalitarian and ecological community. The myths of origin demonstrate that creation originates from God. Since God is present in the natural world, the natural world is another form of divine revelation. It is on this

assumption that the study has contested the position of the Earth Bible project to avoid any reference to “creation” and “Creator”.

The interconnectedness of life in African worldview is the basis for the recognition of how life is sacred. In indigenous Tonga culture, God, ancestors and other spirits are understood to reveal themselves in sacred groves, rivers, hot springs, mountains and animals. Unlike in a patriarchal Christian view of creation where humanity claim to be the only *Imago Dei* (Gen. 1:26-28), Africans perceive humanity to be one part of nature and not the only representative of God on earth. A cow and a python are considered to be sacred animals. Destruction of such animals was considered to be an offense to the ancestors and the Supreme Being. Hence, indigenous African culture does not separate life into spheres as the western patriarchal worldview does. Social, economic, political and spiritual issues are interwoven. In other words, there is no sacred and secular. The study has argued that due to the influence of a patriarchal biblical interpretation of the bible, within theological discussions ecological issues have been presented as secular. They have viewed issues to do with the preservation of the Earth as non-spiritual and therefore diabolical. Consequently, the study contends that theology in general and African biblical scholarship in particular, could draw on values from indigenous African cultures which construct a biblical interpretive model that is ecologically friendly.

As demonstrated in the reading of biblical myths of origin, such understanding may foster human responsibility towards the care of the earth. The study demonstrated that God did not create humans in isolation. Instead, God created the entire ecological community and affirmed its goodness (Gen. 1:31). It has also been demonstrated in this study that indigenous Tonga community believed in ancestors as guardians of the land. Territorial shrines where women served as priestesses served this purpose. Ancestors reinforced taboos and prohibitions towards the good use of the natural world. Members of the community knew that land and the natural world were not human property but belong to God and the ancestors. Community problems such as droughts and other natural disasters were attributed to human failure to live in harmony with the natural world. This was also exemplified in the discussion of the rain-calling rituals during the Lwiindi ceremony. It was demonstrated that human beings were not allowed to eat first fruits before the announcement of harvesting period by the Earth Priest and the Earth Priestess.

#### 6.2.4. Theoretically

The study demonstrated that the concept of interconnectedness of life exhibited in African indigenous culture and the biblical myths of origin ought to be integrated in other Christian theological and biblical initiatives such as inculturation and contextualisation. While African theology has done well in inculturating the Christian gospel in Africa (Bujo 1992, Ukpong 2000); African women theologians have also done well in cultural hermeneutics to include issues of the oppression of women in the inculturation project (Kanyoro 2002). However, ecological values in African culture are yet to be integrated.

The study has argued that African theology and biblical scholarship can benefit from African culture which possesses certain ecological insights which can foster human responsibility towards the care of the Earth. The concepts of *ubuntu*, *buumo* (interconnectedness of life), *mwandanshi* (vital force), sacred grooves, totems (*mukowa*) are among the many insights that may contribute to a well-articulated Christian ecological concept. The concepts suggest that every creature is sacred from God. The manifestation of God and ancestors in nature is not only limited to human beings. God and ancestors also manifest in nonhuman forms of life such as Serpents (beautiful shining reptiles). This reminds human beings of their interconnectedness with other forms of life.

Gonzalez (2007:168) notes:

For centuries the doctrine of the *imago Dei* has been misinterpreted to benefit male authority and render women subservient in their “defective” humanity. A critical feminist reconstruction counters centuries of misleading the Christian tradition, arguing that both men and women reflect the divine image fully. This theological anthropology presents an egalitarian vision of humanity that reflects the relational, Trinitarian God in whose the image we were created.

In line with the African worldview, the study has extended the ecofeminist agenda further by arguing that all creatures created by God (human and nonhuman) reflect the *imago Dei*.

### **6.3. REFLECTION ON THE FINDINGS**

First, the Christian response to climate change and ecological crisis is rooted in the wholeness of creation and the biblical imperative of the commitment for justice which pays special attention to the marginalised. The aim is to empower the marginalised to have a voice to articulate their demands for the fullness of life. Commitment to justice, peace and integrity of the creation should not be at the periphery of the Christian way of life. It should inform the way the bible is read, the way dogmas are constructed and the policies are made in the contemporary society.

Second, within the context of climate change and the ecological crisis, the Christian community should strive to highlight the fundamental transformation of the economic patterns and structures that have been set up since the dawn of industrialisation. Abbate (2009: 40) notes:

Along with Adam, we were created to be gardeners of Eden. This is the critical concept of stewardship that helps understand true job responsibilities from God. God gives us this universe freely, wanting us to discover the joys of responsible stewardship, of moderation, and the freedom that comes with self-discipline and caring for a flock, of not squandering resources.

Nonhuman forms of life and the entire natural environment are part of the social and ecological capital (infrastructure) of society and not a mere “resource” to be exploited for human benefit. For example, water is not an economic commodity but a social, cultural, medical, religious and mystical value. It is for this reason that the myths state that in the beginning Mother God (*Nankonko*) was moving upon the face of the waters (Gen.1:2). Humanity has been given the responsibility to work with and care for creation, whilst acknowledging that creation is a gift from God. This principle provides a lens through which human beings ought to evaluate social and economic policies.

Third, the response to the ecological crisis requires efforts which go beyond mere disaster-management and natural conservation. It requires a re-conceptualisation of the understanding of human relation to the natural world and the entire created order. This entails realising that the biblical mandate to care for the nonhuman life and the natural environment as existed in the myths of origin is to preserve the earth and the earth community in which human beings are members. Fourth, there is need to challenge existing power relations between western communities and economically less privileged communities who bear the huge burden of climate change and the ecological crisis. To consolidate the voice of the marginalised or economically less privileged communities, their concerns as grassroots communities should be at the same level with the concerns of the economically privileged communities in the west.

Fifth, Christian commitment for ecological justice and the eradication of poverty is and must continue to be rooted in the Bible. The bible provides primary resources and wisdom that all human beings have a common source of life in God the creator. The myths of origin provides a critique of the constant problem of the concentration of power in the hands of a few privileged people at the expense of the majority of poor people. The myths also give a constant critique of the concentration of power in the hands of men at the expense of women and the natural world. They show that the future of the earth community as a whole requires that patriarchy is overcome and all human beings share with each other what is necessary for life in dignity (WCC 1992:6).

Sixth, wealth, poverty and ecology are intertwined. This means that climate change and the ecological crisis have become a development issue. It is not possible to eradicate poverty without addressing the consequences of climate change and the ecological crisis. The methods used by western countries to increase wealth are counterproductive and contribute to growing inequality and environmental destruction. In Zambia for example, the approach by western multi-national organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to eradicate poverty based on economic growth has failed. Instead, it has resulted in the destruction of the natural world (Lindahl 2014:2, 4). Further, their approach has continued to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. This means that there is need to re-think the models used by western multi-national organisations to support the poor communities.

Seventh, the plight of the poor is worsening because of devastating natural disasters such as violent storms, floods and droughts. Poor people are largely affected in drought stricken areas of Africa, the ice-melting region in the Arctic Circle and the Pacific Islands that are bound to disappear because of rising sea levels (IPCC 2007).

#### **6.4. NEW QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE STUDY**

This study has raised some new questions for future research. First, the study has demonstrated that biblical myths of origin are shrouded in patriarchal symbolic language which should be decoded in order to understand the hidden meaning of the myths. This suggests that biblical scholars especially in Africa should develop a sustained engagement with issues of symbolic language in contemporary and biblical cultures. Second, the study established that Tonga indigenous culture contain gendered and ecological values that may be retrieved to empower women and the natural world. This suggests that there may be other cultural practices in African culture that can be used as resources in biblical scholarship too. It further suggests that there is a lot that Christianity and science is yet to learn from indigenous African practices.

Third, the study has shown that women in pre-Christian Tonga society held religio-cultural and ecological roles. This suggests that issues of climate change and the current ecological crisis cannot be discussed in isolation from the disempowerment of women in Africa by the patriarchal Christian ideologies. Lastly, the study has proposed a new model of reading the bible in the context of the ecological crisis. This suggests that, the biblical text has many voices which biblical scholars should continue to identify.

#### **6.5. CONCLUSION AND A CALL TO PRAXIS**

The study has achieved its objective demonstrating that there are gendered and ecological values in indigenous Tonga culture that can contribute to the formulation of an eco-justice centred reading of the biblical myths of origin. This has been demonstrated from chapter two to five. Given the impact of the ecological crisis and the contribution of a patriarchal reading of the biblical text in supporting the subjugation of women and the natural world, a new way of reading the text can prove to be life-affirming and empowering to women and the natural world.

However, this cannot stop at the level of theory. Practices of ecological justice must be commensurate with theory. This entails making a praxis. A praxis means a shift from theory to practice based on reflection (Boff 1985:38, Gutierrez 1999:29). Vidales (1980: 38) succinctly captures the need for praxis in biblical and theological discourses:

A theology with a sound historical dimension realises that “theory” and “praxis” can be separated only for pedagogical and methodological purposes, but in reality they are two dialectical moments in one and the same dynamic, all-encompassing process. The practical application is a structural feature and phase of truth itself. In the modern view of truth it is not simply a matter of interpreting the world but of changing it as well.

Feminist biblical scholarship is committed to both theory and praxis. In this manner, a reflection on the biblical text using an indigenous gendered ecological hermeneutics must result in a commitment to uphold an ecojust community. And as demonstrated in the principles of an indigenous ecological hermeneutics, the marginalised are invited to resist the forces of oppression and marginalisation.

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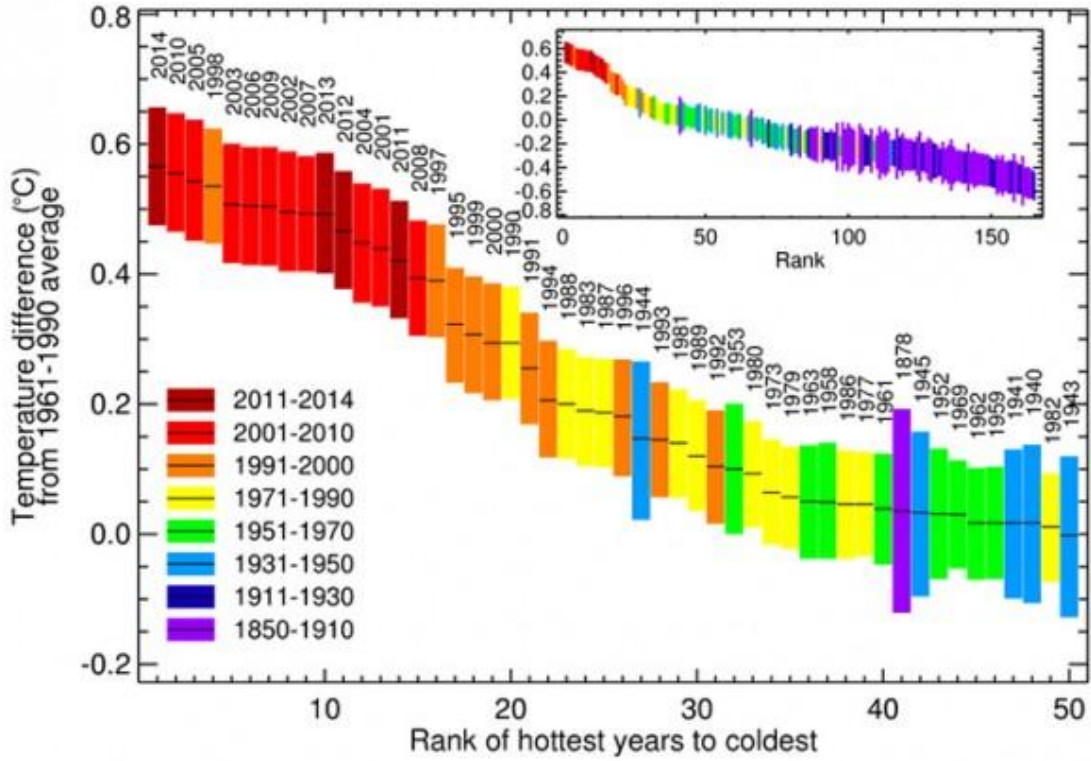
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# APPENDIX 1



Produced by the Met Office. © Crown copyright 2014

Graph showing the rising temperature due to climate change.

Source: [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk).

## APPENDIX 2



A protest by the #Black Lives Matter movement at the 2014 UN conference on climate change on 11<sup>th</sup> December, 2014 in Peru.

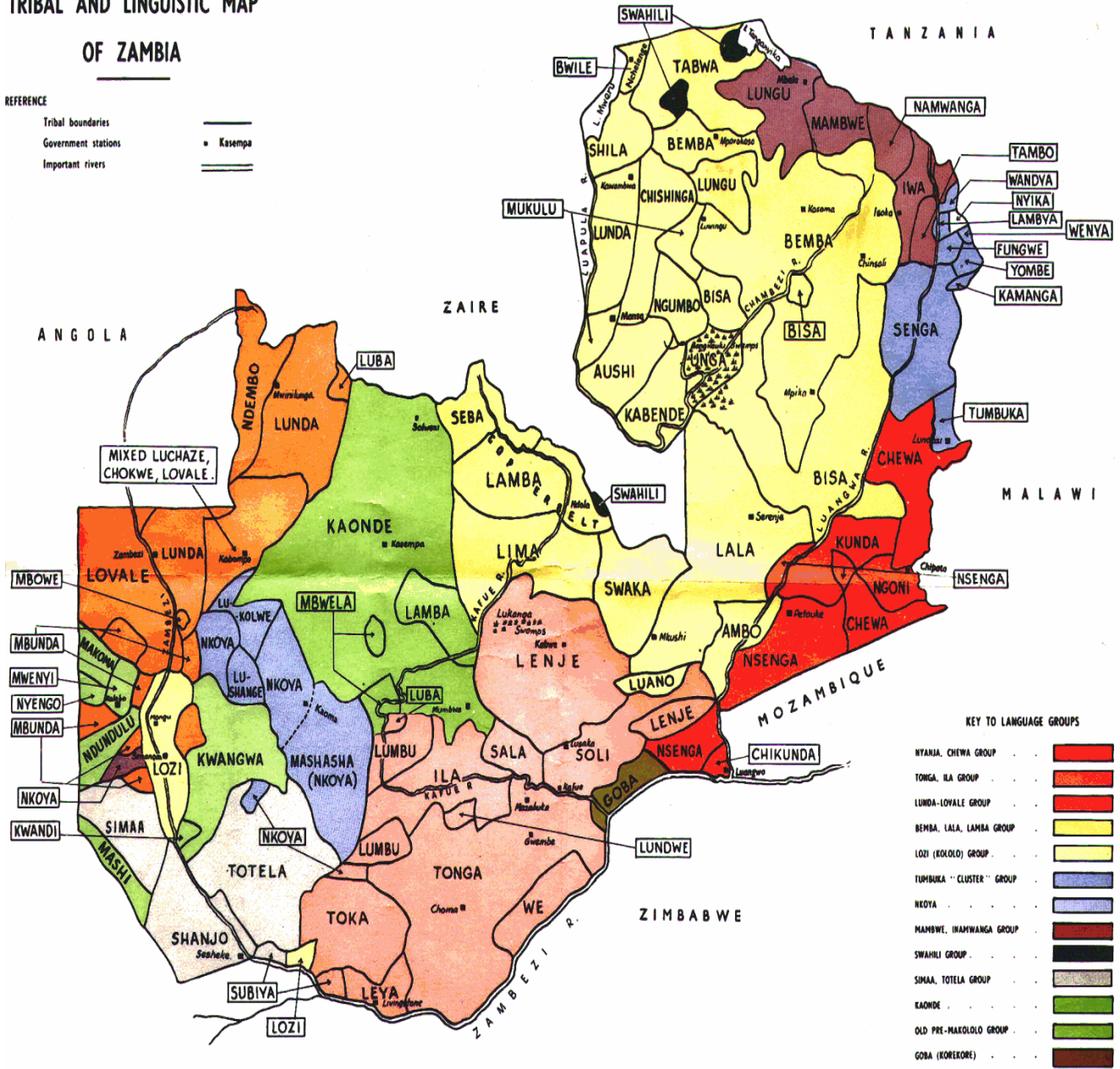
Source: Nation News Paper.

### APPENDIX 3

## TRIBAL AND LINGUISTIC MAP OF ZAMBIA

REFERENCE

- Tribal boundaries ————
- Government stations • Kasempa
- Important rivers ————



PRICE: K1 00

Source: Tribal Maps of Zambia.