


**RE-DEFINING STEWARDSHIP: A NIGERIAN
PERSPECTIVE ON ACCOUNTABLE AND RESPONSIBLE
LAND OWNERSHIP ACCORDING TO THE OLD
TESTAMENT**

BY

AMADI AHIAMADU



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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature

Date

SUMMARY

This dissertation has explored the Biblical basis for a redefinition of stewardship, and has done so in the light of land ownership customs and ethos in some parts of Africa. It has employed a postcolonial hermeneutics in interpreting Genesis 1:26-28 using also a functional equivalence approach in its translation and exegesis.

In chapter one the conceptual scheme is outlined, while providing a highlight of the problem, the hypothesis, the methodology and various definitional terms which feature in the discussion. In chapter two various scholarly views are examined in order to critically assess the criteria for either a humans-above-nature or humans-in-partnership-with-nature mindset. The implications of such divergent views have been critically examined. In the third chapter views of African scholars were brought to bear on gerontocracy which has transcended pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial economic and political influences and has sustained an ongoing cultural practice of a “giraffe principle” of stewardship, land ownership and use.

In the fourth and fifth chapter, the use of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics in interpretation is rationalised. A functional equivalence approach in translating our *pericope* into Ogba is used, and then re-read using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics. The *imago Dei* and the cultural mandate which goes with it has been re-interpreted in line with a hermeneutics that is humane and sensitive to a post-colonial context. In the sixth chapter a redefinition of stewardship has been attempted, using the fruits of our close reading, functional translation, and the cultural perceptions derived from our empirical research.

In the final chapter, a conclusion has been drawn to show how this study contributes to a new appreciation of the concept of stewardship when applied to land ownership and use especially when humans are properly located in a relationship with God and with nature that is ongoing.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis het die Bybelse grondslag vir 'n heromskrywing van rentmeesterskap verken, en het dit gedoen aan die hand van grondeienaarskapsgebruike en kulturele waardes in sekere dele van Afrika. Dit het 'n postkoloniale hermeneutiek ingespan om Genesis 1:26-28 te interpreteer, terwyl dit ook 'n funksionele gelykwaardigheidsbenadering volg in die vertaling en eksegetiese daarvan.

In hoofstuk een word die konseptuele oogmerk in breë trekke beskryf, terwyl die probleem, hipotese, metodologie en verskeie definiërende terme wat in die bespreking gebruik is, uitgelig word. In hoofstuk twee word verskeie vakkundige sieninge ondersoek ten einde die kriteria vir òf 'n mens-bo-die-natuur òf 'n mens-in-vennootskap-met-die-natuur ingesteldheid krities te beoordeel. Die implikasies van sulke uiteenlopende sieninge is krities ondersoek. In hoofstuk drie is die sieninge van vakkundiges in Afrika toegepas op gerontokrasie wat pre-koloniale, koloniale en post-koloniale ekonomiese en politieke invloede oorbrug het en 'n voortgaande kulturele gebruik ondersteun het van 'n "kameelperd-beginsel" van rentmeesterskap, grondeienaarskap en grondgebruik.

In die vierde en die vyfde hoofstuk word die gebruik van 'n postkoloniale kritiese hermeneutiek in interpretasie gerasionaliseer. 'n Funksionele gelykwaardigheidsbenadering word gebruik by die vertaling van ons perikoop na Ogba, en daarop herlees deur deurgelees terwyl van 'n postkoloniale kritiese hermeneutiek gebruik gemaak word. Die *imago Dei* en die kulturele mandaat wat daarmee gepaardgaan is geherinterpreteer in lyn met 'n hermeneutiek wat menslik en sensitief is teenoor 'n post-koloniale konteks. In die sesde hoofstuk is probeer om rentmeesterskap te herdefinieer, terwyl gebruik gemaak is van die vrugte van ons noukeurige opleeswerk, funksionele vertaling en die kulturele persepsies wat afgelei is uit ons empiriese navorsing.

In die laaste hoofstuk word 'n gevolgtrekking gemaak om te wys hoe hierdie studie bydra tot 'n nuwe waardering van die konsep "Rentmeesterskap" wanneer dit toegepas word op grondeienaarskap en grondgebruik, veral wanneer mense hulself bevind in 'n voortgesette verhouding met God en met die natuur.

ONUOSA

Okwu nde anị ye tūza gba y'edo je da nyopiya onodu madu leshitabaga hne okwnaba wo nde madu akwnaba, m'aburu enye okwnaba wo ali - a ya omelali ya nsọ snoje, ya egwnade ali-mba ka Aprika. O werie enya ka nde whukiramapo ma nde ozo ba chi wo kowaba hne Obibe 1:26-28 di ya oznizni, weriago suachniba okwu nwinye gu go ka ogbatoma mkpuru-olu okwu nde dijea.

Ya chaputa k'ibuzo ka odeshi oda uka ba di, le go hne do uka ado kpo ewhna, le oda abene lepiya hne nw'ikne di, ya uzo o bo sno wo achopiya ede ishishi ka uka di kowa go, legu go mkpuru olu okwu nde nyi ernu ya osa-okwua le me ka o gba ewhe ya oghota. Ya chaputa ka nw'ebo ka ogilaga le osa hne o gnupiya y'ime ekwukwo be be nde nw'uche gba wo gbasira ma okwua di le go weri goshiba uzo ebo o gnulaba wo ishi – nde kwu wa madu-a-ka-okike ya nde kwu go wa madu-ya-okike-bu-wo-nde-ukpa. Hne udima uche nde nwinye ba kpapiyamali ka o le wo lepotakubebiri oka sa nde hne-omirna dima mkpa. Ya chaputa ka gbua nw'eto ka uche ka nde mirna go amirna ma omelali di ya Aprika piyapo. Opiya ba le ma omelali agadi nde gbo debe, mega ka opuru wo hne ochichi mgbeke whema awhema chodi ka omekpu apuru, legu wo ememe omega wo y'ede enye-igolo-wani-ya-okwu-ornu di weri debetagu. Ememe a ya hne gbasira ileshitaba ali okwnaba wo madu akwnaba enya a weria a mepiyaba uru snotaje.

Ya chaputa ka nw'eno ya nw'isno ka ye goshi sa iweri agnugnu ishi ka nde whukirama ma nde ozo ba chi kowaba okwu, le go okwu nwinye suachnipo ya olu Ogba, ya uzo o ga ntni oka lashi go ya hne bu uzo dima adima y'ekwukwo di ok'oka. Wa o ke wo madu ma oyi Chukwu Abiama, ya wa oniga wo madu ikne ikpa agwa oka, le go nwe munwodebe – bu okwu ye kpiraju eka lea kowa ya ma olashi alashi madi madu iweria kpeba ntni ya hne di ime ya ali. Ya chaputa ka nw'ishini ka ye lepora hne – ibu enye okwnaba wo hne gbe – kowachnama, ma o gba ewhe dubagu ya hne shibe ya okwu ka osuachnima wo asuachni. Dubago ya ka ye nyopiya ya ijuje ajuju nde je jumadi nde ye ya wo kpari uka ka hne okwnaba. Ya chaputa ka kpnepo aznu ka ye weri osa okwu ndo gbaba etu ka hne buni ye nde owhnurnu bashi ya hne omirna madu nw'ikne mirna ya onodu guwo sa nde wo ya Chukwu-Abiama di ikwu anutari, ya sa nde wo ya osa okike di wo ya irita ukpa ok'oka rumagre ekile.

DEDICATION

To

**Julia Uchenna Amadi Ahiamadu
(nee Onuoha nwa Ogbado)**

who being my wife, became also my co-worker, daughter, friend and sister!

And

Mehanim-Uzo, Chukwuabuenyikpe, Chukwuanigam, ya GbaniChukwuetuoma

who being my sons, became also my co-workers and kinsmen!

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In the heat of this research I took a trip to Sweden as part of a Human Rights exchange programme between Dalarna University in Falun, Sweden and Stellenbosch University, during which I was exposed to a more holistic and systemic understanding of the issues at stake with respect to my field of research. Many thanks therefore go to Prof. Kalie T. August, Chairperson of Practical Theology and Missiology Department, Stellenbosch University and also to my Finnish friend, Dr. Michael Toivio for their many insights which sharpened my focus and facilitated this research in a way beyond my imagination.

In the course of my study at the University of Stellenbosch I became involved in several Christian projects one of which has actually absorbed my spiritual and physical energy over the years, namely the Youth Outreach Street Children project. My small group Bible reading with the boys here stimulated my interest in a deeper search for meaning in life. I am grateful to all those friends and colleagues who worked with me each week as we strove to bring the love of Jesus to an otherwise destitute children.

Yet none of these supports would have counted for anything without the unobtrusive role played by my wife – Julia, and by my sons – GbaniChukwuetuoma, Chukwuanigam, Chukwuabuenyikpe, and Mehanim-Uzo in caring for one another and praying for me so that I did not have any cause to look backwards while pursuing this rigorous Doctoral study at the University of Stellenbosch. Moreover, their occasional phone calls, e-mails and

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It is my hope that the completion of this dissertation will serve as a catalyst for further research in the ongoing quest for clean air, green environment, freedom of persons and sustainable development in the Niger Delta. May the good Lord grant that the present work shall count whenever issues of such a social and economic importance as stewardship in respect of land ownership and use in the Niger Delta is being discussed.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABC:	African Bible Commentary
ARP:	African Resource Publishers
ASV:	American Standard Version
AJBS:	African Journal of Biblical Studies
ANEP:	The Ancient Near East in Pictures, ed. J.B. Pritchard [Princeton 1954, (2) 1959].
ANET:	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, ed. J.B. Pritchard [Princeton 1954, (2) 1959].
BCE:	Before the Common Era
BDB:	Brown, Driver and Briggs
BHS:	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BJRL:	Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, Manchester.
COS:	Context of Scripture (Canonical Composition from the Biblical World).
CSR:	Corporate Social Responsibility
DOT:	Dictionary of Old Testament
GP:	Government Printer
ILO:	International Labour Organization
ISBE:	International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia
JEDP:	Jahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomist, and Priestly
KB:	Koehler and Baumgartner
KJV:	King James Version
LXX:	Septuagint (i.e. Greek Translation of the Old Testament).
MNC:	Multi-national Company
MNOC:	Multi-national Oil Company
MT:	Masoretic Text
Nabis:	Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies
ND:	Niger Delta
NECCSA:	Network of Earth Keeping Christian Communities of South Africa
NIDOTTE:	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis
NIV:	New International Version
NRSV:	New Revised Standard Version
OECD:	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OML:	Oil Mining Lease / Land
PSCE:	Presbyterian School of Christian Education
RLT:	Receptor Language Text / Context
RSV:	Revised Standard Version
SLT:	Source Language Text / Context
TDOT:	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
THAT:	Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum AT, ed. E. Jenni-C. Westermann, 2 Vols (Munich, 1971-79).
UDHR:	Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
UTS:	Union Theological Seminary
WBCSD:	World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

This study deals with Old Testament views of stewardship, land ownership and use as depicted principally in Genesis 1:26-28. The latter is a text situated in the context of the creation narratives in Genesis 1-2 as well as within the broader context of Genesis 1-11 both of which are programmatic not only to the immediate context of the Pentateuch, but also the Old Testament. As such Genesis almost serves as an introductory text not only to the Old Testament, but even more so to the entire Bible, viewing it at least from a Nigerian perspective. It also employs a postcolonial¹ critical hermeneutic to examine how an accountable and responsible ownership of land is conceived in the Old Testament (Fager 1993:91). It is a multi-disciplinary study undertaken in order to provide a re-definition of stewardship in respect of land ownership and use based on a level of best practice which is theologically responsible and ethically accountable according to the Old Testament, within the industrial context of the Niger Delta as part of a globalised world (Holmes and Watts 2000:2)².

It recognises the terrestrial function of humans as stewards of the earth, who make actual use of the land and are responsible to God who ultimately owns the land (Bosch 1991:174). Moreover, it conceives of humans in this unique role of not being masters but servants. It also recognises the fact that humans and nature are mutually co-dependent and at the same time generally co-dependent upon the Deity within the earth's greater community of life (Wasike 1999:176). Using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics informed by a Nigerian perspective of best practice or "giraffe principle", it endeavours to provide a

¹It is important right from the onset to distinguish between the terms **colonialism**, **neocolonialism**, and **postcolonialism**. **Colonialism** is a political term used to depict the spatial and temporal engagement of European powers with various non-European nations transformed into territorial annexes and used by them as imperial outposts during the period which lasted from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. **Neocolonialism** is colonialism disguised as direct self-government by nationals to whom internal political control is granted but with economic ties still maintained and fostered by erstwhile European colonisers. **Post-colonialism** with the hyphen is a spatial and political concept. In this dissertation we are using **postcolonial** without the hyphen: to depict a theoretical critical stance which seeks (with the help of critical hermeneutics) to transcend the bastardising influences of colonial readings of Biblical texts with a view to extricating readers from all oppressed conditions of previous non-liberative readings using a critical hermeneutics. [See Spivak 1999:172; Moore and Segovia (ed) 2005:43; Dube 2000:117-118].

² Welford (2004:32)

re-definition of stewardship, moderated by facts emerging from an Old Testament close-reading on the subject. Further, it uses a functional equivalence approach to translate the re-reading into Ogba so as to bring the language of the Biblical message into a context in which the prevailing moral values of stewardship, land ownership and use along with a gerontocratic culture which bolstered it, are both being eroded (Niang 2005:319-329).

As a study which uses a Nigerian perspective and is rooted on a Judeo-Christian or Old Testament holistic emphasis on a responsible and accountable stewardship, it attempts to sustain, if not facilitate a similarly responsible and accountable land ownership and land use attitude, particularly in the Niger Delta. For that reason, a specific focus is given to the Ogba and Ekpeye of the Niger Delta as the primary subjects of this research. The implication of this study can be far-reaching in addressing the perennial problem associated with stewardship of land in the Niger Delta – a problem traceable to misconceptions of both the Biblical mandate in Genesis 1:26-28 (Wenham 1987:xlvi) as well as to the neglect of certain cultural principles of land tenure in various African, albeit Nigerian communities (Amadi 1982:96).

As will be seen subsequently, the present state of land ownership and use in the Niger Delta leaves much to be desired. Experience has shown that land is a principal agent in sustainable development, a green environment and the maintenance of clean air. At present in Nigeria and more specifically the Niger Delta, there is a perpetration of deforestation, desertification, ecological destruction, environmental pollution, and general land degradation, inevitably due to oil exploration, exploitation and exportation by multinational oil companies (O'Neill 2007:88ff; Evuleocha 2005:328ff; Frynas 2005:581ff; Ukpong 2004:77ff; Ahiamadu 2003:1ff; Manby 1999:281-301; Hattingh 1997:15ff).

This study therefore examines the people's self-understanding of what in their opinion constitutes responsible and accountable land ownership and land use, considering the fact that various stakeholders including multi-national oil companies, federal and state government agencies as well as private individuals depend on available land resources both for the operations of the oil industry which is strategic to both global and national (Nigerian) economics and politics, but which in turn has impacted on the social and economic life of the Niger Delta inhabitants, using Ogba and Ekpeye as case examples. An empirical research carried out in the area apparently reflects various opinions of what to the Niger Delta peoples constitutes a responsible and accountable stewardship, land ownership and use, and the research being qualitative presents a modicum of such views.

This is due to the fact that we have limited our focus group discussions in our empirical research to six including two personal interviews involving an employee of the state government. The other also involved an employee of one of the major multi-national oil companies with operational rights in Ogba and Ekpeye. The results of the focus group interviews are given in the context of a general understanding of a principle of justice and equity inherent in the culture of Ogba and this was assumed as the underlying principle during discussions and views expressed by participants in both the focus groups and interviews. A qualitative research does not pretend to be representative but concentrates on a select group of participants in a particular location considered strategic to the oil industry, deliberately constituted for purposes of generating spontaneous discussion on the people's self-understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use among Ogba and Ekpeye.

On a literary-critical level and using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics that is sensitive to the African and specifically the Nigerian understanding of stewardship which extends from land to all other human and natural resources (Punt 2006b:280; Dube 2000:49), the study attempts to assess the extent to which both company, government and community have lived out the creation, cultural or dual mandate in Genesis 1:26-28³ within the host communities affected by the industrial and chemical operations of Total⁴ oil company in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The choice of a post-colonial critical approach to the exegesis of Genesis 1:26-28, especially the concepts of *Imago Dei*, "being fruitful", "multiplying", "subduing the earth", "ruling over it" and "exercising dominion over moving creatures" is not without good reason (West 2007:11). It is indeed in consonance with the quest by Biblical scholars for a theological-ethical response to the prevailing social and economic need for all stakeholders within the Oil industry in Nigeria – community, company and government – to be overtly sensitive to ecological harmony, clean air, green environment and sustainable development in our precarious planet, especially in the Niger Delta (Hattingh 2001:6). Above all, it resonates with the needs of a post-colonial developing economy like Nigeria to generally evolve more responsible and accountable land ownership and land use practice (Watson 1990:857).

³ This mandate is sometimes referred to as a "dual mandate" because it has a double component of not only being fruitful and multiplying but also on the basis of that, to rule the earth and exercise dominion over it (Gen.1:26-28).

⁴ Total is a multi-national oil company granted an exclusive oil mining rights among Ogba and Ekpeye by the Federal Government of Nigeria, and has been in this business within the area since 1964, except for the period of the Nigerian civil war 1967-70 when its operations were temporarily halted.

Evidently, such a postcolonial critical hermeneutics would be rooted in Nigerian perspectives which presumably would conceive of a responsible and accountable stewardship as requiring that each stakeholder – community, company and government – in the oil industry and humans in general, make transforming choices against self-centredness. Such a perspective, having been duly informed by sound Old Testament exegesis of Genesis 1:26-28, emphasises the need for such communities, companies and governments to cultivate attitudes and habits which eventually enables each community, groups or persons better to act responsibly and relationally⁵. Such stakeholder sensitivity to the rights of others ensures that the pursuit of the human rights to happiness, self-fulfillment and freedom of religion is not jeopardised in the Niger Delta. Already such rights have been guaranteed in successive Nigerian constitutions in line with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. It therefore behoves stakeholders, particularly multi-national oil companies such as Total, to exhibit a spirit of love and compassion towards all those who are affected or connected to their industrial operations to enable the inhabitants of the Niger Delta to fulfill their legitimate individual and collective responsibility of stewardship. Otherwise their human rights and human dignity becomes compromised.

In other words, neither the government nor multi-national oil companies are exempted from the ethical demand for an appreciation of the social, economic, cultural and spiritual potential in other human beings who live and work within the Niger Delta, despite the obvious social and economic differences portrayed by such potentials. Such a recognition⁶ of the human dignity of the inhabitants of these oil bearing communities by the government of Nigeria, for instance, could encourage Total among many other oil companies to share in our common humanity as well as to accept and cherish the uniqueness of the people inhabiting the Niger Delta. It means protecting the rights of inhabitants of this region to sustainable development, green environment, clean air and freedom of movement by the government. It also means that multi-national companies are by their industrial operations seen to be placing these Niger Delta peoples above corporate “profit”. This, as we shall see, are in accord with both African cultural understanding of stewardship and Old

⁵ This responsibility entails the maintenance of ongoing relationship with the Deity and nature in a continuing creation and is in keeping with the special place in which Yahweh has placed humans on earth. This role of humans continues to attract the attention of theologians and scholars. (See Fretheim (2005:9); Akao (1993:53).

⁶ An Ogba proverb amplifies this notion when it says that: “*Enye nwe oba kpo oba gaa mkpokoro, enye opiya, piya dia ya ozokpo*”, literally “If the owner of an earthen vessel regards the vessel as worthless, those who come in would simply trample it (to pieces)”.

Testament approaches to the same (see Gen. 43:16,19; 44:1,4; I Chr. 27:31; 28:1; Isa. 22:15; Dan. 1:11,16).

It is interesting to see how this problem has developed and thereby necessitating a redefinition of stewardship.

1.2 Problem

This problem is primarily one of a theological-ethical response to land ownership, land use and ecological destruction in the Niger Delta. It has to do with an ongoing destruction of nature and pollution of a peoples' environment. Typical of this problem is the ecological destruction, devastation of nature and environmental pollution in the Niger Delta which has been perpetrated by multi-national oil companies in collaboration with the government of Nigeria at both Federal and State levels (Evuleocha 2005:328ff; Ahiamadu 2003:7-11).

In the Niger Delta it is common knowledge today that the verdant mangrove forests – one of the largest in the world – has been drastically depleted by oil drilling installations, flow stations, access routes and pipeline constructions. These industrial oil extracting installations have displaced people's farm lands, fishing areas, and virgin forests. Forests and swamps which provided habitat for game, birds and fish of all varieties in the last fifty years have disappeared from the areas due to oil company operations resulting in environmental pressure, land degradation, impoverishment, loss of lives as well as general land, air and water pollution (Ahiamadu 2006a:19-24; Jenkins 2005:525ff; Lund-Thomsen 2005:619ff; Manby 1999:281-301; Huntington 1993:22-28)⁷.

Apparently, in the last forty–five years, the Niger Delta and in particular Ogba and Ekpeye have seen how much of arable and wet land, forests and streams have passed into the possession of multi-national oil companies in a *latifundia* hitherto unknown in the area (O'Neill 2007:88-117; Frynas 2005:581-598; Ahiamadu 2003:4-5). This ongoing practice of *latifundia* refers to the practice of acquiring land to the tune of several thousand hectares for each single drilling site, as well as clearing access link roads to such drilling sites which most often involve no less than 12 metres by 2 kilometres from the main road to each drilling site. The excavation of such sites completely ignores ecological principles to the

⁷ Huntington (1993:52-56) also views these developments as spill over effects of Western civilisation, in which more and more of European or Western ideas find expression and fulfillment in other cultures, thus redefining the composition and boundaries of Western civilisation.

detriment of rivers, arable land, wild life habitats and environmental integrity. As at January 2007 over 811 oil locations exist in the Ogba and Ekpeye (so called OML 58) area (Ahiamadu 2003:4-5)⁸. In the course of this research, the author visited Obagi (Egni/Ogba), Ubeta (Ekpeye), and Opomani (Isoko) oil fields in order to assess the extent of ecological damage being inflicted on the Niger Delta environment by the operational recklessness of oil companies and he could see the extent of environmental pollution, impoverishment, and land degradation that has gone on in the area due to the oil extractive endeavours of Total in particular (Ahiamadu 2003:5).

Why do we have this alarming rate of ecological devastation and destruction in the Niger Delta? How can we explain such *latifundism* or land grabbing which goes hand in hand with ecological destructions, land degradation and environmental pollution which leaves unsuspecting communities impoverished and robbed of valuable land assets? Why is Total interested in grabbing more and more land in the area, taking away the oil but leaving nothing with which to sustain both the inhabitants and the land? Why is a sense of stewardship of natural resources not matched by a responsibility to maintain and use land in a sustainable manner so that the interest of present and future generations are protected?

Many have been impoverished in the Niger Delta and are losing their land through indebtedness to rich land acquirers – most of them multi-national oil companies, so that a situation in which every family, kindred or clan owned their own plot of land is today being looked upon as an ideal (Butler 1991:862). *Latifundism* has set into different parts of Nigeria and particularly in the oil bearing Niger Delta region in alarming proportions, and similar to ancient Israel the removal of boundary markers by caterpillars and bulldozers no longer parallels theft (Evuleocha 2005:330ff). Industrialisation is a product of Western civilisation often mistaken for Western Judeo-Christian religion⁹. Consequently, many

⁸ This figure has been on the increase since 2003 when the author's first Seminar paper on it was written (see A. Ahiamadu 2003:1ff). In 2007 the author visited the area and obtained these current figures, albeit from oral sources based on calculations from an unobtrusive research in Ogba and Ekpeye.

⁹ Apparently, the Papacy in Rome recognises that various continents of the world appropriate and practice the Judeo-Christian religion in dissimilar, if not totally different ways based on facts of historical and cultural circumstances which results in different forms of human civilisation with its attendant effect on culture and environment. See for instance a Papal Encyclical: ***From Johannesburg to Stockholm: An Historical overview of the Concern of the Holy See for the Environment 1979 – 2002***, Vatican City 2002, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. In the period following the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro 1992 in a series of Papal Encyclical and Apostolic Exhortations John Paul II continued to refer to the obligation of Europe and America to care for the land and environment in which their

have attributed the present ecological problems facing mankind today as being the handwork of Western Christendom with its Biblical hermeneutics. Might the ecological problems in the Niger Delta not be the result of the way Western hermeneutics have interpreted the Judeo-Christian concept of *dominion* in Genesis 1-2? Or might such an abuse of land and nature not be attributed to a misunderstanding of the African cultural values, particularly with respect to land ownership and use of “sacred” land?

Some have misread the Judeo-Christian mandate in Genesis 1:26-28 to “increase, multiply, replenish the earth and subdue / dominate it” as portraying humanity in superlative terms, and as pointing to humans being the crown of creation. Many have traced these problems to Western political domination, economic conquest, and rulership over nature and the nations, and this due to a prevailing Western philosophical definition of the concept of stewardship. The creation ordinances in Genesis 1:26-28 have been given such an interpretation as to encourage Western explorers, entrepreneurs, and investors to engage in economic activities especially in a global quest for energy sources, which has resulted in *latifundism*, ecological destruction, environmental pollution, land degradation, deforestation, desertification and impoverishment especially in oil mining within the Niger Delta (Butler 1991:862; Wybrow 1991: 17; Primavesi 2000:188; Dibeela 2001:396).

At the other extreme are those who point at African traditional world-views as responsible for the recklessness of multi-national oil companies in their industrial and chemical operations. Yet some others think that it is a problem resulting from the government’s inability to enact appropriate environmental and ecological protection laws which could serve as guides and checks on the multi-national oil companies. In respect of the earlier objection, there are certain misconceptions of man’s role in creation inherent in the traditional African world-view. For instance, in some parts of Africa, including Nigeria, human role in creation is seen as subservient not only to the spirits of the ancestors, but

corporations do business around the globe. Such encyclicals and exhortations included the Apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adventiente*, issued in November 1994, the Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae* 25 March 1995, the Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, 14 September 1998, and particularly, the Apostolic Exhortations *Ecclesia in America*, 22 January 1999, *Ecclesia Asia* 6 November 1999 and *Ecclesia Oceania* 22 November 2001, which dealt with environmental problems arising from the abuse of land in these particular regions of the world. Although no specific missive from the Pope was addressed to *Ecclesia Africana*, there is a recognition that Africa has not been in the forefront of this global problem and was not rife for such addresses from the supreme Pontiff. The importance of his encyclicals however is that they not only aroused the conscience of the Church in various continents, but also strengthened the resolve of the Church in Africa to support ecological justice and environmental rectitude.

also to forests and wild life¹⁰, thus placing humans at the mercy of creation (Wybrow 1991:63). Human role is surrounded with various superstitious beliefs which reduce him or her to the status of a servant to every created being on earth, and never a master (Parry-Davis 2004:48).

The Batswana of Botswana in Southern Africa and their Yoruba counterparts in West Africa for instance believe that the responsibility for earth-keeping is a joint one between the living dead – the ancestors and the living living – the elders. Consequently, the land is seen as sacred space which must neither be abused, nor used to any advantage beyond the ordinary search for the means of economic, social and cultural survival (Dibeela 2001:395-96; Idowu 1969:97). This meant especially for the Batswana that the land had to lie fallow for a year after a year's use.

Such a time of “rest” allowed for the restoration of the earth after each year's use similar to what is observed in the Niger Delta among for example the Ogba and Ekpeye (Amadi 1982:55). Interestingly, this hallowing of land resonates remotely with the Judeo-Christian belief that land belongs to *Yahweh*, and so must be left fallow each 7th year. In both African and Judeo-Christian understanding, the concept of “rest” for the land is considered an integral part of man's responsible and accountable use of land. Experience has however shown that neither the government nor the multi-national oil companies have paid attention to the Judeo-Christian and African traditional beliefs which might have lessened the alarming destruction of natural environment and the *latifundism* that has gone hand in hand with it in for instance the Niger Delta (Ahiamadu 2003:11-18).

It simply denotes a dominion mindset on the part of multi-national oil companies and perhaps the government, and it tends to distort and even disparage the concept of stewardship in particular, and of responsible and accountable land ownership in general, invariably creating a problematic scenario in which man is seen as ruling over all of God's creation on earth, with a view to using the earth's abundant resources in a practically non-sustainable manner. Some have accused a Western interpretation of texts such as Genesis 1:26-28 and Psalm 8:4-8 as possible sources of such a (mis)-definition which regards humans instead of the whole earth, as the center-piece or the pivot of creation

¹⁰ The fear of nature and natural phenomena is usually a feature of primordial and pre-Christian societies. It was indeed during the enlightenment in the Middle Ages that Europe was rid of morbid fears as a result of the work of the Scholastics and the mission of the Gothic cathedrals. See Wybrow (1991:163-164).

(Wybrow 1991:48f; Dibeela 2001:396; White 1967:1214). It creates a human rights problem of inequality not only before the law, but also of incomes and abilities (Noebel 1999:702).

The practice of *latifundia* by multi-national oil companies has turned out to be a portent socio-economic means of mass impoverishment in the Niger Delta in particular and the developing countries in general with a severe circumscription of community and individual rights (Benhabib 2002:61f; Blum 1998:73-99; Fager 1993:27). Other factors which impoverished the people included crop failure as a result of land degradation and ecological disruptions. Such impoverishment have also affected the social values as all social regulations intended to protect the individual's rights to equality before the law, rights to life, to property, to liberty and to the pursuit of happiness have been distorted. Neither is it any longer a boost to an individual's freedom of worship, of association, of religion, of conscience and of movement. Instead, *latifundia* has seriously compromised these eternal values as people are progressively becoming landless, impoverished and subservient (Hattingh 1997: 12; Amnesty 2005:199-200).

1.3 Hypothesis

Our hypothesis is that a theological-ethical re-definition of stewardship rooted in both African ethical principles and a sound exegesis of an Old Testament text such as Genesis 1:26-28 can correct the reductionist view of creation which places humans above nature in an exploitative way. It can also correct previous colonial (mis)-reading of the same Biblical text. By a re-definition that is ethically and theologically palpable, we are helping to eliminate a false picture in which man sees himself not as an accountable and responsible steward, but as conqueror, ruler and sole beneficiary over nature in general. It is of course true that traditional non-critical interpretations of Genesis 1:26-28 and others like Psalm 8:5-8 have resulted in a dominion mindset which invariably has influenced the traditional understanding of stewardship. Even truer is the extent to which this, in turn, has resulted in *latifundism* and to aggressive economic exploitation of nature, including the destruction of the ecological and natural environment for personal gain (Bromiley 2001:12; White 1967:1215)¹¹. A dominion mindset and the negative impacts it has created on the earth's environment, particularly in the Niger Delta in Nigeria, is partly due to a (mis)-reading of

¹¹ There is an ecological integrity or wholeness to the earth in particular and creation in general that must be preserved if human life is to endure and if non-human life is to flourish. See Bromiley (2001:12).

Biblical texts, which in the alternative can be read closely using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics that may lead to a re-definition of stewardship.

Using a postcolonial critical hermeneutic informed by a Nigerian perspective which is orientated towards values resonating with the African respect for, rather than an unhealthy dread of nature, we can interpret the priestly text (Gen. 1: 26 – 28) in such a humane and responsible manner as to elicit a re-definition of stewardship (Fretheim 2005:45). A re-definition that transcends a purely literal interpretation of “dominion” (Gen. 1:26-28), have been couched in a postcolonial and more liberating critical exegesis. Such a re-definition becomes more synonymous with “protective care” than with “destructive use” of both human and material resources. In doing so we will correct erstwhile views of stewardship which (mis)-interprets these Biblical texts and which results in the views of nature as an enemy, as something outside of man’s orbit, something to be mastered, conquered, and exploited (Barton 1998:41-42). Not only have such views failed to do justice to the exegetical significance of our pericope, but has also provoked a postcolonial critical re-reading of this text in order to provide a re-definition of stewardship of a post-colonial Nigerian Christian perspective (Fretheim 2005:12-14; Enuwosa 2005:130ff; Ukpong 2001:582; Brueggemann 2002:xliv-xxli; Akao 1993:53; Watson 1990:857).

1.4 Methodology

This study adopts a two-fold methodology of literature study, of a critical exegesis using a postcolonial critical hermeneutic; and of empirical research using focus groups and personal interviews. With these methodological resources it is able to critically assess the Old Testament perspective as well as the people’s self-understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use involving all the stakeholders – community, company and government – especially in the oil industry in the Niger Delta.

1.4.1 A critical overview of existing scholarly views

A critical assessment of existing scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and use is part of our methodology. In other words we have undertaken a critical overview of the trend of discussion and most relevant theological and ethical reflections on creation, and the *Imago Dei*, for instance, with its implications for stewardship and rule over the moving things on the land. The emphasis of course is on interpretations of our pericope which tends towards a better appreciation of stewardship as a holistic concept not limited to

ecclesiastical financial or household management but which can also be applied to an accountable and responsible ownership and use of land and natural resources. It presupposes that a more holistic conception of stewardship in general and to land ownership and land use in particular can be achieved.

The discussion divides into three main scholarly categories, namely views on the ancient Near East, Old Testament views, and African scholarly views¹².

1.4.1.1 Human rights report¹³

The concept of human rights have become a paramount ethical issue because of events around the globe in which human, ecological and environmental rights are being violated with impunity by a “caucus” of Western industrial interests. A report which brings into focus the commonality of the interests of workers, women, peasants and local peoples will therefore be given from the points raised in the writings of Charles Taylor (1994), Lawrence Blum (1998), and Anand Singh (2001).

As Charles Taylor (1994:13) pointed out “the withholding of equal rights of participation (e.g. in the enjoyment of benefits accruing from the society to which one belongs) and self-governance from minority groups (e.g. those in whose property nature has bestowed abundant human and material resources) either through marginalisation or elimination of vocal interests is tantamount to a destruction of their inalienable right, human dignity and self-respect. The net result would be restiveness and militancy on the part of the people whose self-esteem and human dignity is being shattered. When applied to the various minority groups confronted with the issue of the denial of human rights such as ethnic minorities, women, peasants, the poor and marginalised the difficulty in providing a uniform solution begins to loom large.

¹² Western philosophical views such as of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, and Marx to name a few, can be read in Appendix 1

¹³ As part of this research, I visited Dalarna University in Sweden primarily to study the human rights culture of the *Saami* Scandinavians with respect to land ownership and use. The visit provided me with the opportunity of discussing the issues not only with the academia, but also to hold scholarly seminars for the academia of Dalarna University department of Religion and Ethics and for Amnesty International Business Group (AIBG) Stockholm, Sweden. In both Seminars the *latifundia* and environmental pollution perpetrated in the Niger Delta by various multi-national oil companies and the lingering restiveness it has foisted upon an otherwise peace-loving people were critically examined and I noted various comments made by participants (Amnesty 2005:198).

It also brings into focus the whole issue of multi-culturalism and relativism which comes into play in any discussion of human rights and human dignity. Lawrence Blum (1998:73-78) has pointed out that the issue of multi-culturalism poses a serious challenge to the human rights debate globally. He insists that each human rights context and constituency must define its own predicaments and proffer its own solutions, but with the benefit of the collective experiences of various contexts in mind. On relativism, he insists that the human rights path is relatively a well beaten one. In order to find contemporary solutions to violations of human rights, the experiences and records of solutions proffered in other contexts to such violations in the past could be of immense value, especially where past injustices and economic imbalances were redressed.

A third contributor to the debate is Anand Singh (2001:3-6) who, in underscoring the important role of minority groups in democracies in Africa and Europe, calls for corporate modification of constitutional processes which inhibit the rights of minorities including the rights to the use of minority languages. Human rights today is as synonymous with individual rights as it is with group rights. Taking this and applying it to, for instance, the restiveness involving unemployed youths and dis-empowered women in the Niger Delta, one sees the importance of the campaign to restore the rights of inhabitants of oil bearing communities so that more women and youths can be involved in public life. Thus underscoring the need in Nigeria to grant men, women and youths financial and social empowerment which facilitates their being able to contribute meaningfully and sustainably to the development of individual families and to the communities of which they are a very significant part.

To summarise the points of the debate, every successful treatment of the scourge of any violation of human rights must begin with the individuals who experience such abuses. Yet on a macro level, group and minority rights has to be recognised as this is the basis on which social and economic resources can be equitably and judiciously managed in an egalitarian and more democratic style in Nigeria for instance.

1.4.1.2 Re-reading and translation of Pericope – Genesis 1:26-28

Be that as it may, part of our literature study involves a re-reading and translation into Ogba (a Nigerian language) of our pericope. It depicts the literary-critical objective of our study on three levels. First, it is my objective to employ a postcolonial reading of the Bible's unique and universal message as it stands the best chance of satisfying that, which

is implied in our own indigenous concepts of God as Creator and Sustainer of life. Second, we are translating Genesis 1:26-28 using a functional equivalence approach¹⁴ (Wendland 2004:62; Nida 1984:76). Third, such literary-critical resources helps us to highlight aspects of the Biblical interpretation which resonates with experiences of stewardship, land ownership and use that is uniquely African both from the empirical research and from the principles of an underlying gerontocracy.

A study of this magnitude of necessity assumes a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary posture for two reasons. Firstly, it does this in order to bridge the gap between several millenia of time and thousands of kilometres differences between the ancient Near East, and the contemporary African cultural context, the former in which is rooted the Biblical world from which interpretive meanings of that Biblical world is derived and then applied to the latter context in a post-colonial Nigeria (Ahiamadu 2005:106; Segovia 2000:24-25). Secondly, it seeks multiple, but valid grounds for eliminating the dis-continuity which erstwhile colonial readings has imposed on the Bible in Africa with respect to culture in general and African traditional concepts of God in particular. In both ways, we are inadvertently answering the call for the recovery of continuity from the Judeo-Christian land ethics which in many ways are similar to the land tenure customs of Africa, albeit Nigeria (Mojola 2001:524). This also results in a restoration of confidence in the Biblical text through an ongoing engagement using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics and a functional equivalent translation that is decolonised, de-mythologised and essentially liberating (Moore and Segovia 2005:5-6).

1.4.1.3 Exegesis: postcolonial criticism

Mention has already been made of the adoption of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics, and as such only additional comments will be made. Our use of a postcolonial Biblical criticism in exegeting our pericope, Genesis 1:26-28 is not to hold any Western hermeneutics in contempt, but to decolonise the Biblical texts from all forms of colonial interpretive trappings using a critical hermeneutic derived from and appropriate to a post-colonial African or Nigerian context (Adamo 2005:3; Dube 2000:19).

¹⁴ Later in Chapter 5 we shall see the emphasis on the *Skopos* concept of a “written *Brief*” in which the goal and objectives of the Translation are stipulated, and in which information about the target-text functions and addresses are outlined. In the case of the Ogba and Ekpeye the choice of a functional equivalence, rather than on a more literal approach in the translation of Genesis 1:26-28 is in keeping with prevailing social and translational norms in the Nigerian society today (See Wendland 2004:26; cf. Moomo 2005:151).

By exegesis we mean to bring out the sense of a text, interpreting the meaning of a sacred, usually Biblical texts, as well as trying to establish what the authors of the Bible intended to say in their original context, in order to interpret the message of the text for today's audience (O'Collins and Farrugia 2000:84-85). To exegete a text therefore means explanation of the meaning of such a text, particularly of a Biblical text (Deist 1984:89). The idea is one of a critical exposition of the lexical, but perhaps even the grammatical content of a Biblical text in a way that is textually accurate and contextually relevant.

Evidently, a postcolonial hermeneutics can serve a contextual purpose when it is employed to re-interpret texts in such a way as to alleviate poverty and bring about social transformation. It can also be used in such a way as to focus on the local, indigenous, ethnic and culturally contingent matters "with the aim of recovering, reasserting and re-inscribing identities, cultures and traditions that colonial Christianity has erased, suppressed, or pronounced idolatrous" (Moore and Segovia 2005:5-6).

Apparently the colonial enterprise of 18th and 19th century Europe had been foisted on certain basic distinctions within the human estate like spatial or geographical location, and secondly on indices such as differences of skin colour (Dube 1994:122). It is on the basis of such distinctions that the colonial enterprise was foisted, and so necessitated inter-racial and inter-ethnic conquest (Donaldson 1996:3-4). Our postcolonial critical hermeneutic therefore seeks to transcend the wrong notions of the erstwhile colonial enterprise in order to arrive at meaning and re-interpretation in a presumably post-colonial context (Donaldson 1996:7-8). Such meanings so arrived at forms the exegetical resource with which a translation of our pericope into Ogba (Nigerian) have been attempted. Such a translation reflects on the yearnings and aspirations of a Nigerian society – one of many Black nations who were once colonised but who are now in the process of re-defining their self-identity and re-locating their status in the overarching Divine plan of a renewed faith community existing with other faith communities in a multi-cultural and multi-racial world (Adamo 2005a:6; Ahiamadu 2005:105).

The implication of all this for a re-reading of the same pericope (Gen.1:26-28) is to educe a fresh interpretation and reformulate the message of the creation mandate, to cater for the needs of those whose image and identity has been shattered by previous (mis)-readings. It implies "re-investing the text with new meanings and nuances" (Sugirtharajah 1991:353). Furthermore, it means letting the text speak with an authentic African voice with an aura of postcolonialism and one that is subversive of colonialist structures and neo-colonialist or

imperialist functions usually encountered in philosophical, ethical, theological and even exegetical reflections. The Bible itself inspires such a re-reading. The way in which colonial reading has imposed oppression and domination on poor and unsuspecting peoples is tantamount to a curse or abuse. The people themselves must be awakened from their stupor, so as to return to the Bible and to use postcolonial hermeneutic as an alternative means to extricate themselves from erstwhile colonial, but jaundiced (mis)-readings with its oppressive undertones (Sugirtharajah 1991:324).

Our study will entail doing two things which will also form the point of departure in this present discussion.

First, to interpret the experiences of stewardship, land ownership and use in the light of our pericope (Gen. 1:26 – 28).

Second, to interpret the same pericope in the light of the experiences of stewardship, land ownership and use in a complex web of interactions among various stakeholders – community, state and multi-national companies¹⁵.

In doing so, our intention is to steer clear of colonial readings with its obvious twist of encroachment on “native” ways of thinking, the latter having ingredients of logicity, humanity and responsibility (Dube 1994:112). Such inculturative or contextualised reading inculcates a new sense of value for the Biblical text because of moral and ethical standards resonating with the culture and ethos of “native” communities in Africa, Nigeria and in particular among Ogba and Ekpeye (cf. Dube 1994:123). A substitution of colonial with a postcolonial critical hermeneutics is in a more functional than aesthetic sense, aimed at being non-European in origin and tone, but instead being oppositional in kind, and corrective in mode (Gugelberger 1995:581-84).

The reason for this is that various Niger Delta ethnic groups including Ogba and Ekpeye, are engaged in a titanic struggle for clean air, green environment, resource control and sustainable development which stands in opposition to the poststructuralist neocolonial enterprise of multi-national companies in which a binary fusion of center / periphery is

¹⁵ This compares favourably with Sugirtharajah (1991:51) in the analysis he makes in connection with the tenets of a Black theology. He pointed out as follows, that Black theologians, using the Bible as their hermeneutical tool has been enabled to re-define themselves in a way different from what European colonists intended. The extent to which this is also true of the present study will be seen subsequently.

being sustained in the name of globalisation (Ukpong 2004:72ff; Donaldson 1996:5). Therefore, a postcolonial critical hermeneutics uses a Nigerian Christian perspective designed as a practical mode of dialogue not only with the Biblical text itself, but also with the problems of identity, hybridity and mimesis extant in Nigeria resulting from the neo-colonial impact of oil exploration, exploitation and exportation hosted by a post-colonial Nigerian government (cf. Bhabha 1994:7-17)

1.4.2 Empirical research

A second methodology involves an empirical study of the ecological and land-grabbing (*latifundism*) problems in the Niger Delta with particular focus on the way this is being done among Ogba and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities, the Total oil company, Federal and State Governments in Nigeria (Blowfield 2005:515ff). The foremost negative impact of *latifundia* on the communities have been the inevitable result of the industrial oil operations of multi-national oil companies such as Total with the collaboration of Government agencies such as the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Rison Palm Nigeria Limited, and private contracting firms (Frynas 2005:581). It has resulted in large expanses of land being acquired for commercial oil mining and extraction purposes at the expense of the peoples' wellbeing and survival (Ahiamadu 2003:8-9; Evuleocha 2005:328).

The empirical research therefore took into consideration the views and opinions of all three major stakeholders. On the part of the community we chose Ogba and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities. Besides being the most affected by the land-grabbing tactics of multi-national oil companies, Ogba and Ekpeye seem to be the most peaceful and tolerant of oil company manoeuvres and *latifundia*. Similarly, management level personnel of Total – that was also acquainted with the oil extracting efforts of the multi-national company in Ogba and Ekpeye areas – were chosen for the interview. Last but not the least, a senior official of the Rivers State Government's Local Government Directorate was chosen for the interview and he too is acquainted with the peoples in question and the issues at stake.

The research was more of a qualitative rather than a quantitative one (Schute 2000:25). Qualitative researches do not result in generalisations, neither can the views of a selected number of participants be made to represent the community, company or government. Instead, such views from the focus group interviews are taken to be as reflexive as possible of what is the general views and opinions of the various stakeholders on the problems of the Niger Delta such as the ecological problems, *latifundia*, and land

degradation experienced by the people (Schute 2000:21). The problem created by the industrial operations of multi-national companies stares everyone in the face, and all of my 35 interviewees, including community leaders, company and government officials – seem to express views that suggest a desperate need for sustainable development, clean air, green environment and freedom of persons (Ballard and Banks 2003:292-295).

A comprehensive overview of personal opinions and views of stakeholders in Ogba and Ekpeye has been attempted, and I have used what has been referred to earlier as focus group discussions and a few interviews¹⁶ to assess what in the opinion of the people would be a responsible and accountable stewardship, land ownership and use (Schute 2000:42). Some words on the texture of the focus groups will suffice at the moment, and in chapter 3 the discussions would be reviewed.

1.4.2.1 Focus groups

This empirical research involving personal and group interviews were conducted in one community, Erema, which has a good representation of kindred-families of both Ogba and Ekpeye origin in its population, and the time was during the months of July - September 2005. This was done in order to effectively assess the people's understanding of stewardship, land ownership, land use, responsibility and accountability, and to evaluate such understanding in the light of the present need to provide a redefined understanding of what true Biblical stewardship entails in consonance with African cultural values and norms. Similar interviews involving one principal officer of the Rivers State government and another executive employee of Total were also carried out so as to arrive at a more inclusive, critical assessment of the way both individuals would understand the issues at stake.¹⁷

¹⁶ In this respect we have been greatly assisted by our colleagues in the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, Stellenbosch both in training and in the use of Schute (2000) **Identifying Community Needs**. Stellenbosch: TPLR, in which he describes the formation and conduct of focus groups, and which method we used in our field research with Nigeria's Ogba and Ekpeye participants. Details are given in Chapter three below.

¹⁷ This process recalls the global compact requirement that governments in developing economies should provide an enabling environment in which multi-national companies exercise a high sense of corporate social responsibility and accountability in all areas of their operations within the context of their host communities. A full discussion of the Global Compact is contained in Frynas (2005:581-598).

1.4.2.2 Locations

This empirical research was carried out first in Erema involving host community leaders and later in Port Harcourt city involving one company manager and a government official.

Erema is a community in the Niger Delta inhabited mainly by peoples of Ogba, Ekpeye, Igbo, Efik and Delta communities with Ogba constituting a majority of its inhabitants. It is politically situated in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State (Ahiamadu 2000:17). With over 40,000 inhabitants, the community provides a good base for the kind of empirical research needed to determine what in the opinion of the people can be regarded as a more humane approach to land use and ownership within the area. Not only are the major kindred-families in both Ogba and Ekpeye represented among the inhabitants, but also the natural philosophy and culture of both Ogba and Ekpeye finds its “melting pot” within the community’s rich cultural heritage (Sam 1979:43). Within the community also can be found that both Ogba and Ekpeye languages and cultures have over many centuries undergone a unique synthesis as distinctive cultures of both “ethnic nationalities”¹⁸ (Ahiamadu 2000:1-2).

Port Harcourt on the other hand is the capital of Rivers State and the headquarters of both government and most of the major oil companies including Total, Shell and Agip. This study focuses mainly on Total’s activities and only makes references to the other companies for purposes of clarity or illustration. Total is the major oil company operating in the areas covered by this research, and shall be constantly referred to during these subsequent discussions. It is a company with roots in France but has global oil connections. In Nigeria it operates a joint venture with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) – a parastatal of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

1.4.2.3 Composition

With respect to the host community, there are six focus groups¹⁹ of 33 adult persons – 16 men and 17 women – with an equal number of participants per focus group. There are three focus groups of 6, 4, and 6 men, as well as others of 8, 5, and 4 women respectively

¹⁸ The term ethnic nationalities is used to refer to the different ethnic groups which constitute the South-South geo-political zone in Nigeria, also known as the Niger Delta.

¹⁹ Focus group interviews involves 4 – 8 persons in a discussion group centred on the same subject. See Schute (2000).

representing a cross section of the age categories within the community. Invitations to participate in focus group interviews were sent to chiefs, community and youth leaders of both men and women, and those who responded to the invitations did so voluntarily. Their ages range from 16 to 65 years. They were grouped according to their different age categories (Schute 2000:9-10). The oldest group is made up of those men and women whose age ranged from 45 – 65 years old. The middle aged group is made up of men and women whose age ranged from 35 – 45 years, while the youth group is made up of young men and women whose age ranged from 16 – 35 years.

All six focus group interviews were conducted by me in separate group sessions, and in more than one location, all within the community and each lasted for over an hour and half. The sessions were held mostly during the day. Each session consisted of leading or basic questions posed to participants one after the other which provoked a narration of stories as known to each participant. There are of course follow-up questions necessitated by the unique stories told by some of the participants. Some stories are told in response to basic questions designed to elicit such stories, usually meant to clarify the issues raised during the discussions.

More about this will come later in chapter 3 when we present the results of the empirical research. Meanwhile, some concepts employed throughout this discussion can be specifically defined to show the sense to which they are being applied in this context.

1.5 Definition of key concepts

In order to provide a conceptual framework in which the study can be more proactive, certain key concepts such as “accountability”, “culture”, “dominion”, “gerontocracy”, “human rights”, *imago Dei*, “land”, “nature” “responsibility” and “stewardship” need to be clearly defined. Our attempt at a theological-ethical response to land ownership, land use and ecological destruction in the Niger Delta is intended to deal with a problem situated in a specific culture (Evuleocha 2005:328ff; Ahiamadu 2003:7-11). It is also within the context of these cultures that the exercise of dominion is possible according to Genesis 1:26-28²⁰ in order to literally address a problem of a colonial interpretation of the concept

²⁰ See also Psalm 8:5-8 for a more or less sagacious commentary on the creation narrative in Genesis 1:26-28. Other helpful commentaries can be found in Wenham (1987) **Word Bible Commentary Vol.1 Psalms**. Waco: Word Book Pubs and Gibson [(ed) 1984] **The Daily Study Bible (Old Testament) Psalms Vol 1** Pennsylvania: Westminster press.

of stewardship which invariably resulted from a (mis)-reading of the relevant Biblical texts. Man is the *imago Dei* and by virtue of that is entrusted with a land (the earth) and nature which needs care and which resources needs responsible utilisation or management.

Being part of everyday language, we have attempted to provide the senses in which these terms are being employed for the purposes of this study as follows:

1.5.1 Accountability

Accountability is the quality or state of being accountable, liable or responsible (Bloomquist 2004:17). At the onset accountability is tied to one's ability to be responsible (West 2007:8). The age of accountability is generally viewed as the chronological stage in a person's life when he or she is responsible for his or her conduct before God. In Biblical thought authentic freedom brings with it the knowledge of good and evil, and essentially, the knowledge of God. Moreover, the divine demand for accountability lies behind repeated Biblical (see Isa.1:10-17; Am.1-3; Hab.1:5-13) calls for decision on the part of both individuals, corporations and nations (Hall 1990:48). Moreover, it is important that we extend this meaning of accountability to embrace the whole question of exegetical practices that affirm the legitimacy of different interpretations (Patte 1995:37). This entails foreseeing the multi-dimensional nature of our pericope as well as our accountability in using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics which impacts on our primary target audience (Patte 1995:43).

1.5.2 Culture

A bulk of this study is rooted in a critical assessment of culture as known in the Old Testament (ancient Near East) times, and culture in what is generally regarded as Western culture, as well as in culture as today understood in the African or Nigerian context. This preliminary observation is made in order to clarify its usage. There are several definitions of culture including the ones given by F. Deist (1990:62), C. Geertz (1973:67), and G. W. Bromiley (1999:746) all with a common feature: culture refers to people's way of life and to human activity shaped by experience and action. When related to the divine image of God, culture means people's accepted mode of life as reflected in art, development, enlightenment, education, and tools which are prone to adaptation and change.

Culture in this broadest sense thus includes all the labour which human power expends on nature. It is the total pattern of human behaviour and its products embodied in thought, speech, action and artefacts, and dependent upon human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to successive generations through the use of tools, language and systems of abstract thought (Geertz 1973: 67). Humans are the fulcrum around which revolves all culture. Evidently, the faculties and powers which humans possess have not been acquired by them, but are given to them by God as natural endowments, talents, or gifts. These gifts are a means of cultivating the external world, as well as an object which itself must be cultivated.

Such a conception of culture paves the way for our understanding of its relationship to the *imago Dei*, as humans are supposedly appointed by God to be stewards of His creation and as humans do so in a responsible and accountable manner (Van Dyke 1997:149). Human ability to cultivate or decimate their environment and ecology has a direct impact on human self-actualisation or self-annihilation as the case may be (Beisner 1997:186). The link between these human potentials and the creativity imbued in them as the “*imago Dei*” has been underscored in both a positive and negative light (Beisner 1997:181-186)

1.5.3 Dominion

Dominion comes from a Latin word which is written “*dominium*” and has to do with lordship or dominion. It more specifically refers to the dominion given to humans over creation in Genesis 1: 26-28 (Bryant 2000:36). It is associated with the *imago Dei* referred to earlier but later to be discussed (Muller 1985:95). Dominion is a term which depicts a supremacy in determining and directing the actions of others or in governing them politically, socially, or personally (Butler 1991:1303). Dominion implies an acknowledged ascendancy over human or non-human forces such as assures cogency in commanding, restraining and being obeyed (Deist 1984:89).

Thus Genesis 1:26-28 carries with it the idea of human dominion over the world, which the Psalmist so aptly comments on when it expresses the *imago Dei* as the likeness of humans to the members of the Divine council (Ps.8:5a-8) (Westermann 1984:156-157). Moral responsibility and dominion of any kind attributed to the human estate “clearly involves the ability to act responsibly” (Boice 1986:154). As has further been observed,

“we can do great things, or we can do terrible things for which we must give an account before God” (Boice 1986:154).

An argument later put forward by Hall (2004:210) is that the Biblical injunction of “have dominion” could be interpreted not literally, but etymologically so that it reflects a meaning different from what it could be. That we should have “dominion” means we should be servants, keepers, and priests in relation to the others. It involves our representing them to their Maker, while at the same time representing to them their Maker’s tender care (Hall 2004:210-11). We shall also later look at Israel, as a prototype nation, to whom stewardship of Canaan was entrusted by *Yahweh*.

1.5.4 Gerontocracy

This refers to the rule by elders. It is a form of social organisation in which a group of elderly men or council of elders dominates or exercises control (Gove 1997:952). In the Nigerian context they carry with them the “sacred sceptres” supposedly handed down from the ancestors, and speak or act with the interest of both the living and the dead in mind (Amadi 1982:94-96).

1.5.5 Human rights

A straight definition of human rights is better appreciated when the component meanings of “human” and “rights” – as used in everyday conversation – are clearly understood. Obviously, human pertains to mankind individually or as nations. It refers to the things characteristic of man’s essential nature (Blum 1998:77). Similarly, a right is referring to something which one may justly claim either as a natural, inalienable or special right. An example of inalienable or natural right has been reflected in the 1999 Nigerian constitution and it includes “equality, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” much the same as the American and South African bills of rights (Botman 2003:26). Special rights on the other hand would include the rights to property, inheritance and self-fulfillment.

Human rights, from the point of view of the Old Testament laws, pointed to the rights of the individual to his share of the land, his personal pursuit of happiness, and his liberty all of which are deeply ingrained in the Hebrew Canon (Wright 1990:136). For instance, the decalogue protected individual human rights such as the right to conscience, to recreation, to life, to family, to property, to a good association or reputation, and the right to liberty. In

this way the individual's relationship to God is protected so that a violation of an individual's rights was considered an interference with that individual's commitment or devotion to God (Wright 1990:136).

Both the apodictic and casuistic laws of the Old Testament were enacted along with the sanctions which went along with them. These were meant to provide Israel with both a legal and social framework structured in line with tribal or communal solidarity and mutual responsibility (Fager 1993:91). It is the laws that distinguished Israel from the nations which were comparatively steeped in pagan norms and rituals. Not only were Biblical laws enforceable at various levels of kinship organisation in Israel, but also they provided the moral resource for the retention of kinship wealth within a broader kinship group. It also made it possible at the individual nuclear level, for property, particularly land, to be used and rights to it enjoyed (Fager 1993:91).

There is a sense in which the ancient Israelite legal system contrasts with the norms, laws and values which govern the use and enjoyment of rights over land among the nations, particularly in the communities of Nigeria. The one is seen as of divine origin, whereas the other is considered of human origin – the laws of the ancestors! However, in recent times, civil governments have sought to withdraw from the private sphere the enjoyment of individual property rights as stipulated in the ancestral legal heritage, and attempted to relocate the use of property rights at the corporate or public sphere as stipulated in canon or received law, instead of as a natural endowment (Ayandele 1969:69; Yakubu 1985:263).

“Rights” are now enforceable under canon law in the context of modern governments. It is designed to express a legal status (Runzo 2003:11,13). In other words, “rights” are enforceable under law. This modern usage can be traced to the English bill of rights of 1688. The Puritans on migrating from England to the Americas took with them this political/legal/philosophical notion, and by 1779 Thomas Jefferson, one of the fathers of modern America had turned the “bill of rights” into a cornerstone concept of the nascent American Republic:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that amongst these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”²¹.

²¹ Thomas Jefferson was one of the 56 eminent colonists who bravely endorsed the American bill of rights - the basis of a new Republican constitution. See also Robertson (2000:6).

Sadly enough, early American Republic's commitment to inalienable rights suffered a twist with the subjection of people of Mongolian and Negro races to subordinate positions, which meant a state of slavery in which such persons were not treated as persons, but as "tools" dispensed with at will or used by the "masters" in horrible labour conditions (Runzo 2003:11,17).

By 1787 it took men of courage like Alexander Hamilton to hammer on the theistic – or at least deistic view of human rights by adding a dimension of its being natural to all men irrespective of race, class or creed. Said he:

"The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for amongst old parchments or musty records. They are written, as with a sun-beam, in the whole volume of human nature by the hand of divinity itself, and can never be erased or obscured"²².

In recent history the sad events of the first and second global war and its sordid end in 1945 precipitated what in 1948 was tagged a "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (UDHR) with a preamble which affirmed "faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women". Article 1 went further to harness the prevailing quest for global peace and harmony in these words:

"To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion".

It was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1948.

Since then other declarations has sought to protect the rights of minors (1959), the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (1963), the elimination of discrimination against women (1967), the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religious beliefs (1987), the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities (1992), and as an extension to environmental rights, the Rio Declaration (1992) was enunciated. As the 1987 declaration stated, the purpose of all human rights protection laws was to ensure that individual access to dignity, recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights on an equal basis remained un-impaired (Runzo 2003:23).

A global awareness of the rights of individual persons and the conferment of independence status on many parts of colonial Africa beginning with Liberia in 1848, but

²² Robertson (2000:8).

more particularly Nkrumah's Ghana in 1957 resulted in national constitutions in which fundamental human rights featured prominently. Both the 1959, 1963 and especially the 1999 Nigerian constitution entrenched the rights of every Nigerian to life, to person, to movement, to association, religion, conscience, held opinion, and equality before the law. One of the weaknesses of successive Nigerian constitutions, and indeed of the Nigerian nation has been the absence of commensurate responsibilities and accountability before the law in the enjoyment of personal and corporate rights (Ekeh 1978:90; Ahiamadu 1982:59).

Apparently, in the colonial and post-colonial era, Western intellectual thrust has been towards the secularisation of human values (cf. Sporre 2003:16-17). Furthermore, this secularisation has come to symbolise a misguided belief in the probity of rationalism and a sense of hostility towards the Judeo-Christian tradition which all along had informed Western mechanistic ethics, and provided guidance in the public sphere. In the United States it has meant the withdrawal of the ten commandments from public view, and the removal of religious instruction from public schools. In Nigeria in 1971 it resulted in State take over of all schools and colleges including ones with previously good records of religious and moral instruction²³.

Thus a link is forged between stewardship and human rights when issues such as these are presented. Rulers as we have seen are also stewards, and decisions to secularise religious values with or without the consent of the governed as was the case in Nigeria²⁴ leads inevitably to misconceptions of rights. Apparently, the key feature of secularism is its ability to safeguard ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism within the polity (Taylor 1994:62). In a country where Muslim fundamentalism sometimes erupt into violent uprisings against adherents of other faiths, the secular protection of pluralism against, among other dangers, religious egoism, may be crucial to a just society (Runzo 2003:23). The secular must not be held captive to the values proclaimed by any one religion. Instead the secular and sacred must be governed by values which all religions share in common,

²³ A contemporary example of this is South Africa which recently has engaged in the debate as to how much religious instruction should be allowed in public schools, and which of the various religious groups should be allowed to give such instruction including of course Christianity.

²⁴ Undoubtedly, Yakubu Gowon who ruled Nigeria for 9 turbulent years used this as an argument in fostering a united country without any religious bias in all state schools and colleges throughout the then 12 political units (States) of the country, with Lagos as federal capital. The young Head of State as is characteristic of most military dictatorships received the support of a cross section of the political and bureaucratic elite, but definitely did not seek a consensus of Nigeria's public opinion before the "decree" was promulgated by his supreme military council on April 2 1968.

such as personal and group accountability to Deity and mutual responsibility to one another.

In my opinion, without such a sound moral and ethical base, it is difficult to incorporate a social ethic or morality that is both responsible and accountable. It becomes even more difficult to strike a balance between religious inclusivism and secular rationalism. The experience of Nigeria in the last two decades has proved that African traditional values alone are insufficient to support corporate governance and national co-existence, let alone good stewardship of the natural resources with which the country has been endowed. Neither has the Western mechanistic ethic – which has been derived from a superficial hermeneutic of the Judeo-Christian tradition – exemplified the stewardship of care and nurture which is prized in the Biblical canon. This point becomes clearer as we consider human rights from the perspective of the *imago Dei*.

1.5.6 *Imago Dei*

An image can be described as the reproduction of a person or thing. Viewed from this perspective, several Scholastic theologians of the medieval era like Thomas Aquinas have described creation as an expression of divine love which God bestows on the existence He thus called into being (Kline 1992:28-30). Creation is a theocratic kingdom ruled by God (Fretheim 2005:3-4), and humans are identified as occupying a pre-eminent position in the hierarchy of created beings “next only to the angels” and indeed becoming by adoption actual “sons and daughters of God” (Birch 1991:87). It is in this sense that humans convey the *imago Dei* – be they male or female (Antonelli 1997:xxi).

The capacity for knowing good and evil as a further reflection of the *imago Dei* or the image likeness of God is ascribed to humans in Genesis 3:22. This ability to exercise judicial discernment is elsewhere noted as a God-like characteristic depicted in I Kings 3:9, 28 – a passage further indexing the prominent place of the official-judicial aspect of the Biblical concept of the image of God (Kline 1992:28-30). The image of God in Genesis 5:1ff, and 9:6 therefore, is closely aligned to the concept of sonship either of descent from Adam or of Noah. It clearly identifies the image bearing and judicial authority of humans as inherent in the image of God which they bear. Furthermore, it is an image corroborated by the authorisation of human governments to inflict capital punishment upon murderers (Von Rad 1970:144-45).

The evidence of the book of Genesis will suffice to illustrate the point, but a survey carried out by J.M.Boice (1986:149-50) of all the Scriptural data would disclose that consistently the image of God is identified in terms of a glory akin to that of God Himself. Humans are thus “rulers” of the earth under God. They possess the ethical glory of a state of simple righteousness, with the prospect of moving on to greater glory of confirmed righteousness. Humans were given the hope of an eschatological glorification that would change them into a transformed glory image of a radiant Glory-Spirit (Boice 1986:149-50).

Be that as it may, humans made in the image of God are responsible moral agents in God’s universe. The creation of the first man shows this: the subduing of the earth, that is, the whole of culture, is given to him, and can be given to him, only because he is created after God’s image (Cassuto 1978:58). Humans can be rulers of the earth only because they are servants, sons and daughters of God. It is doubtful, however, if humans have built on this foundation of sonship. Instead, humankind has taken a subservient role and not always followed a normal course as evidenced in the numerous wars, revolutions and catastrophes all over the world. There has always been a time of flourishing followed by a time of decay and ruin for humans. Thus a re-definition is apt from time to time, not only of human’s role as a cultural agent, but also as one entrusted with the stewardship of the earth. One area in which human’s exercise of this function comes into focus is the ownership and use of land or property.

1.5.7 Land

Land generally refers to the solid part of the surface of the earth in contrast to the oceans and seas water generally. It does also refer to any portion (as a country, estate, farm, or tract) of the earth’s solid surface considered by itself or as belonging to an individual, family or people (Gove 1997:1298). In the Biblical narratives in general, land, ground, soil, earth, country, forest, and field all refer to the same ecosphere (Bandstra 1995:71-72). For our purposes the concept “land” embraces all these definitions with specific references to agricultural / arable land and marine areas seen as property in all geographical regions and territories of peoples.

It can be understood under the Hebrew terms “*adamah*” and “*eretz*”. The ASV and RSV reflect the difficulties in deciding which of the English words to use in translation. Originally, the word *adamah* signified the red, arable soil. From this it came to denote any cultivated, plantable ground and / or landed property (Harris 1992:947). On the other hand

eretz referred specifically to earth, land, city (-state), (under)world. According to Koehler and Baumgartner (KB 2000:89) this word appears approximately 2,400 times in the Old Testament. More specifically THAT 1:229 remarks that *eretz* is the fourth most frequently used noun in the Old Testament, appearing 2,504 times in the Hebrew section and 22 times in the Aramaic section (Harris 1992:947).

A little digression will enable us appreciate this Biblical understanding of land, especially when considering some issues of contemporary land problems such as deforestation and land degradation capable of truncating or interfering with responsible and accountable stewardship of land. Deforestation is also a major cause of modern mass extinction of plant and animal species. Due to deforestation, as many as one million species of plants and animals could become extinct by the end of the first quarter of the 21st century²⁵. The use of fluorocarbons is depleting the crucial ozone layer and threatening human health (Geisler 1995:293). Moreover, the negative impact of land degradation is altering the precarious ecological balance of the Niger Delta. The impact which the exploitative activities of multi-national oil companies is having on land ownership and use in the Niger Delta will necessitate a critical analysis of the operation of all stakeholders in the oil industry especially government, Total and host communities in subsequent chapters (Evuleocha 2005:328-340).

Host communities, like the Ogba and Ekpeye in particular, run the risk of chemical wastes entering the human food chain and are found in human body fat as a result of a reckless flaring of natural gas into the atmosphere. Seventy-seven percent of adults in the Niger Delta, and ninety percent of children are carrying more lead in their bodies than the Environmental Protection Agency says is safe (Jackson 2003:2-3). Ten thousand people die every year from pesticide poisoning and another forty thousand become ill. One third of all household garbage come from materials infested with pollutants.²⁶

²⁵ Each year a tropical forest the size of Scotland is destroyed on planet earth. The Niger Delta alone has lost more than 65 percent of her original mangrove forests as has the rest of Nigeria having lost more than 49 percent of forests to oil exploration and lumbering. Nearly one half of all forests in developing countries, particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America have been cut down in this and the previous centuries.

²⁶ During the last Annual Conference of South African Council of Churches and National Ecumenical Environment Groups which held in Hartebeespoort, Pretoria March 11-14 2005, these figures were given in various papers and the issue of land use and accountability especially as it affects the earth-keeping strategies of various faith communities were raised. The author who served as an "observer" from Nigeria, gleaned these data from some of the papers and leaflets distributed at the SACC/NEEG Conference.

In view of this dangerous environmental and ecological situation, what are the ethical responsibility of humans to the physical environment in which we live? What are the moral implications of pollution that is destroying flora and fauna? Is there any ethical obligation on the part of the government and multi-national oil companies in Nigeria for instance to work for the preservation of pure water and air? Or should not this involve all stakeholders in the quest for a green environment, clean air, sustainable development and freedom of movement in the land? (Fagerfjall *et al* 2001:15).

It is characteristic of Western mechanistic mindset to extol the virtues of technology over nature and show little concern for the natural environment (Beisner 1997:181)²⁷. On one end of the spectrum can be found materialistic views which totally disregard the order in natural creation (Wybrow 1991:15), while at the other end of the spectrum are pantheistic views which virtually worship nature (Runzo *et al* 2003:61; Aderibigbe 1999:334-35). It is good to drill for oil on-shore or offshore, build dams, kill animals for food, use insecticides or fumigants, but do this in such a way that human interventions do not disturb the environment (Ukpong 2004:75).

Between the two extremes of the materialist's wastage of nature and the pantheist's worship of it, there is the Old Testament Theistic respect for and use of natural resources which resonates with African cultural values and norms with respect to the natural creation. Similar respect for nature and a proper utilisation of our physical environment can also be encountered in other cultures around the world (White 1967:1203-07; 1994:45-57).

Moreover, the Christian concepts of creation and our divinely appointed obligation to be good stewards of what God has given us need to be explored and extricated from colonial trappings into which successive centuries of antagonism, religious bigotry and imperial wars have dumped it.²⁸ As important as overcoming ignorance of the world's ecological crisis is, in and of itself this will not solve the problem. Our ecological system – the earth

²⁷ Henry Binswanger an American congressman, for instance, speaks blatantly of raping the environment to advance society.

²⁸ Although the controversies which weakened the North African Church in the 5th century were many, the ones centred on Christological issues were more prominent. Debates on Christology with its implications for anthropology stirred the discord. Christ becoming human has since then elevated the human estate to the realms of "deity" and stimulated man's thinking along supra-natural and transcendental lines with tremendous implications for the land, man's primary habitat see Falk (1998:42-49).

and its fullness – will not be transformed until certain “Western” theological and ethical systems are. After all, it is people who are abusing the environment. Hence we must transform people before we can hope to transform the environment (Fretheim 2005:45).

1.5.8 Nature

Nature is used here to mean the created world in its entirety, the totality of physical reality exclusive of mental things (Gove 1997:1508). There is a conception of nature in Africa which contrasts with the mentality that nature must be dominated. Although such a “dominion” mind-set has been in vogue in modern societies in Africa upon contact with such ideas “floating” from a Western mechanistic mind-set, people of the continent have reacted negatively to it particularly during the last three decades or more (Eze 1997:103).

Apparently, such a “dominion” mind-set has also influenced theological and ethical discussions of both priestly and *Yahwistic* creation narratives in Genesis 1-3²⁹. Due to (mis)-readings of Biblical imperatives in regard to subduing the earth, man have tended to misuse that dominion. In most parts of Africa nature is considered sacred and worthy of responsible care and use, especially with respect to land owned. This also resonates with conceptions of nature prevalent in the ancient Near East which produced the Bible. As John S. Mbiti of Kenya has observed, traditional Africa is immersed in a religious environment where natural phenomena are intimately associated with one God or the other (cf. Gitau 2000:33).

There is an African spiritual wisdom in regard to the environment and ecology which has suffered greatly under the impact of “scientism” borne out of a “dominion” mind-set (Dewitt 1996:19; Gitau 2000:31). In providing a re-definition of stewardship, we may have to dig deep into the wisdom of our fathers, while standing on a theological and ethical framework of a Judeo-Christian bias in order to address the ecological problems affecting

²⁹The Bible has been translated into several African languages, and the first two Nigerian languages with translations of the whole Bible were Efik (1868) and Yoruba (1884). As at 2005 104 out of 432 languages have either the whole Bible or New Testament translations now read in churches in the country, and scores of other translations are at different stages of completion. A New Testament translation into Ogba can be visited online: <http://www.ogba-obtlt.org> See Gordon (2005). His *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* 15th edition can be visited online: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>

the inhabitants of the oil rich Niger Delta in Nigeria. In order to do this successfully, both individuals, company and government agencies have to contribute their own ideas as well.

1.5.9 Responsibility

Responsibility literally means the quality or state of being responsible, or moral, legal or mental accountability. It has also to do with something for which one is responsible or accountable (Gove 1997:1935). Theologically, it could be defined as the relation which a free moral agent has to a decision or act for which the agent is accountable, answerable, or responsible (Orbitts 1992:937-38). The counterpart to responsibility is imputability in which the decision or act is attributable, chargeable, or imputable to the agent.

Responsibility and imputability, or culpability are particularly concerned with the extent to which a decision or act owes its origin to an agent's will guided by reason. Orbitts (1992:938) treats responsibility as a moral phenomenon but without ignoring its legal connotations. He considers the concept of freedom as being at the core of both a moral or legal responsibility. He insists that no one holds a person responsible for a decision or act when that person's will is not free.

This leads us to a consideration of the whole debate on "determinism", that is, that every action of humans emanate from their collective or individual will, even though this has been fore-determined or fore-ordained by a higher power or a higher law. Hence they do not see how man's will can be free. Hard determinists believe that the will can never be free and so moral responsibility is an anachronism. Hard determinists are of two categories – theistic and naturalistic. Theistic determinists such as Martin Luther and Jonathan Edwards, trace man's actions back to God's controlling hands, whereas naturalistic determinists like Thomas Hobbes and B.F. Skinner argue that man's behaviour can be fully explained in terms of natural causes (Geisler 1992:428).

Soft determinists on the other hand, see the will as capable of a free rational choice between contending alternatives or options. It is true as hard determinists would say that a person's decision is influenced by such factors as heredity, character, sinful nature, and God's foreknowledge or decrees. Moreover, soft determinists still maintain that one or more of these determining factors are still compatible with the freedom required for responsibility, as long as the agent is not hindered from carrying out his or her decision.

Another condition necessary for moral responsibility is knowledge of what is expected of one. In the academy for instance ethical responsibility demands that we not only use the appropriate methodology in our quest for experiential knowledge, but that we also recognise the multi-dimensional nature of the Biblical text (Patte 1995:18). A person who is ignorant of a rule or law is either not held responsible or is thought to have a reduced degree of responsibility, as long as he or she did not willfully bring about that ignorance (Orbitts 1992:938). Although responsibility is usually reduced to an individual matter, it can also be extended to the influence which our interpretation of the Biblical text can have on family, or large group level up to a nation, or group of nations, and even to the entire human race. The primary focus of responsibility is “the morality of knowledge” which guides our appropriation of the text as well as our willingness to see the multi-dimensional nature of our critical exegesis (Patte 1995:20).

However, the role of free will in human decisions cannot be overemphasised. Free will is the belief that humans cause their own action or behaviour freely, and that no causal antecedents can sufficiently account for human actions (Geisler 1992:430). Soft determinists conclude that “some form of self-determinism is the most compatible with the Biblical view of God’s sovereignty and human responsibility”.

Human responsibility is first toward God who gave dominion initially to humans. Second, our responsibility is towards other people – in the actions which bring us into a relationship with them (cf. Gen. 3:9,11,13; 9:6). Third, we have responsibility towards nature. With respect to the latter, there is a moral dimension to our treatment of nature – whether we cultivate and advance it or whether we use and destroy it. Fourth, we have responsibility towards ourselves, in the sense that we stand with the rest of the created order in a unique position of being made “a little lower than the angels” (Ps.8:5). As Boice (1998:155) has so aptly observed, “our place and privilege is to be a mediating figure, but to be one who looks up rather than down”.

1.5.10 Stewardship³⁰

A steward is someone called to exercise responsible care over possessions entrusted to him. In that sense, stewardship then will be referring to the administration of the office of a steward, and of the goods and duties entrusted to humans. Stewardship has been defined as responsibility for property which belongs to someone else (Watson 1990:857). Ryken equates stewardship with authority at the human level and with leadership (Ryken *et al* 1998:814), whereas Watson considers stewardship as similar in some respects to what we would consider “power of attorney” (Watson 1990:857). Bromiley (1987:617ff) defines a steward as one put in charge of a house, in the sense of the Hebrew rendering it as “*aser al bayit*”.

The idea that a human is a steward of God in his or her relation to the world and his or her own life is inherent to the creation story in Genesis 1 – 2. Here humans are appointed “steward” or lord (in a relative sense) of all things, except themselves (Elwell 1992:1054). There are about 26 direct references to steward and stewardship in the Bible – both Old and New Testaments (Hall 2004:25)³¹. All the uses of the term in Scripture are uniformly literal or technical, that is, it describes an actual office or vocation in society (Hall 2004:31-32). Suffice it to say that alongside the teachings of Scripture about the proper attitude to property (land) is a parallel assertion that all human possessions are humans not in an absolute sense, but as a trust from God. As the Psalmist puts it “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it” (Ps. 24:1).

Stewardship in a Biblical sense implies therefore that we are merely managers of what belongs to the Lord and we are responsible to manage those resources for His benefit. We are trustees or stewards, who will have to give account to Him for the use or misuse of what He trusts to our care. This stewardship extends to every department of our lives,

³⁰ The English use of the word “steward” began in manuscripts of the 11th century. Originally, the word was not “steward” but “stigweard”, “stig” probably referring to a house or some part of a building, and “weard” (later “ward”) meaning of course “warden” or “keeper” (Hall 2004:40). Stewardship (*Gk Oikonomia*, the “management of a household”) refers to the administration of duties or goods in one’s care. The person who administers the household is called a steward (*oikonomos* – “law of the house”) or an overseer (*epistropos*).

³¹ A great number of these usages in the OT have inherent significance in portraying the “steward” in various terms: 1) *aser al bayit* lit. “one over the house” (Gen. 44:1,4, 16, 19); 2) *sar* “chief” (I Chr.27:31; 28:1); *soken* “master, treasurer” (Isa.22:15); *melsar* “guardian” (Dan.1:11,16). Other references in which “steward” is rendered as “leader”, “officer”, “commander”, “manager”, “administrator”, “pilot” includes – (Gen.15:2,4; 43:16,19; 1 Kgs.15:18; 16:9; 1 Chr.27:1,3,5,22,31,34; 28:21; Pr.1:5; 11:14; Eze.27:8, 27-28; 43:3,7) – a total of 26 references excluding numerous NT uses.

including our time on earth and all the powers of the mind and body that God has bestowed upon us. It also embraces the material gifts and objects, including money, which He entrusts to us. As such we will refer an account of our stewardship to the Lord, like those called to account in several of our Lord's parables (Shields 1996:57).

Be that as it may, stewardship is a human calling. God intends that the human creature should live as God's steward within a creaturely sphere. Stewards know that the property with which they are charged is the property of another, and that in the final analysis they must report on their use or misuse of what they have been given. A definition of accountability and responsibility given earlier, assumes a spectacular proportion when viewed against the background of stewardship. Indeed, accountability and responsibility are both built into the metaphor of stewardship (White 1975:517) as two mutually informative roles.

1.6 Conclusion

A narrow conception of stewardship will not do. Hence a conception of stewardship which is freed from ecclesiastical trappings, individualism and privatism will be the result.³² There must be a holistic re-thinking, which on the positive side, means that God's people have to re-learn how to live our oneness with nature. This must be done in such a way that we may at least approximate the partnership with both the Creator and His creation which we are meant to uphold, and so support the drive towards community, wherever we find it in the world (Hall 2004:137).

³² There is hardly any discussion of stewardship that is not closely associated with integrity in financial matters. See for instance Ajah (2006:57,97,200). See also West and Dube (2001). Judeo-Christian concepts of stewardship seem to be more in consonance with post-colonial African views which of necessity are a holistic view of stewardship similar to what is obtainable in both the Old and New Testament. This can be seen in the royal psalms – Psalms 72, 89:15-45; 101 etc, in the prophets – Isaiah. 22:15-24; Daniel.1: 1-10; in the parables of Jesus our Lord – see Luke 12:41-48; 16:1-13 etc and in the Pauline epistles – 1 Corinthians 4:7; 1 Timothy 6:17-20 etc. Western “colonial” hermeneutics has often restricted its meaning to domestic and fiscal matters. See for instance Hall's exposition on the impact of philanthropy on stewardship (Hall 2004:142), and its critique by Johnson (2007:71-73). Using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics our study is geared towards ridding the term –stewardship - of narrow fiscal trappings in order to elevate it into the lofty context of stewardship of capital assets in general including land, skill, time, management and of course money.

There is a present attitude towards the ecology which orders “if it grows cut it down, if it moves shoot it down”³³ and this is alien to African culture and norms (Parry-Davis 2004:42). The African regard for nature as “sacred” may therefore once again be brought to the fore in contrast to the destructiveness in Western mechanistic systems.

Of course, the problem cannot be solved by a theological-ethical discourse of stewardship alone; it reaches into the very core of the Gospel, affecting not only our doctrine of creation, but perhaps even more intensely, our doctrine of redemption. Our oneness with Christ as redeemer must be reflected in our oneness in nature as partners. Moreover, as Hall (2004:143) puts it, a doctrine on stewardship which entertains the thought of a redemption of human species alone as though this species were entirely separable from all others is a jaundiced one, and cannot be entertained.

A Judeo-Christian approach to stewardship encompasses man’s responsibility to all of creation, and does not only involve the philanthropy of religious capitalists who contribute substantially to the life of the faith communities. There is no doubt that philanthropy is part of stewardship but definitely not all of it. As has been pointed out elsewhere³⁴, when philanthropy was passed off as stewardship it often was used as a canopy to cover up a great deal of injustice perpetrated by the same Christian philanthropists, who were held up as models of charity. Such concepts of stewardship are myopic and one-sided. A Nigerian perspective will be provided in order to give a re-definition which seeks to touch on all aspects of true stewardship, while attempting to provide an authentic African voice on the subject of land ownership and use.

1.7 Summary of chapters

In this first chapter we attempted to set the parameters within which a re-definition of stewardship can be provided first by outlining our conceptual scheme, as well as by providing a highlight of the problem, the hypothesis, the methodology and various definitional terms which do feature in the discussion. Various concepts were also defined to show the special sense in which they can be understood in the context of this study. We

³³ The story is told of a group of land surveyors who having located several large chestnut trees full of ripe fruits, simply destroyed the trees in order to have the chestnuts more conveniently at hand. When one of them, Byrd the Observer was accosted for such a barbaric act, he simply answered, “Our men were too lazy to climb the trees for the sake of the fruit, but...chose rather to cut them down, regardless of those that were to come after” (Hall 2004:137).

³⁴ See Hall’s exposition on the impact of philanthropy on stewardship (Hall 2004:142).

pointed out that a priestly text Genesis 1:26-28 is the primary pericope which is interpreted using a postcolonial critical hermeneutic. The essential features of our methodology which included empirical research and literature studies are all intended to lead to a redefinition of stewardship that impacts on a responsible and accountable land ownership and land use particularly in the Niger Delta.

In the second chapter, the various trajectories into which stewardship, land ownership and use lead us in the quest for a re-definition of stewardship have been underscored. These trajectories include ancient Near Eastern views, Old Testament views as well as African scholarly views. Such a diversity of views served as sources of enrichment to the entire discussion in critically assessing relevant scholarly interpretations. Although the humans-above-nature mindset pervades the subject of stewardship in some of these trajectories, its implications for proffering an alternative approach is challenging, a theme which creation theologians have pursued with scholarly vigour (Fretheim 2005:12). There is certainly no theological-ethical ground for justifying ecological destruction, environmental pollution and land degradation, which means that a postcolonial hermeneutic of our pericope extricates the Biblical text in particular and Biblical religion in general from the accusation of being the source of the present ecological problems facing mankind today.

In the third chapter, we have presented a principle of stewardship which resonates with, and is indeed derived from African scholarly and cultural views. An accountable, humane, responsible management of land and its resources is of great value both to the elders and peoples of Africa. We have therefore examined how gerontocracy transcended both pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial economic and political influences in sustaining an ongoing cultural understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use among various stakeholders. The impact which oil exploration, exploitation and exportation on the one hand and a post-colonial Nigerian economics and politics is having on the gerontocratic institution to the point of erosion of its values has also been evaluated. Such an impact is viewed against the background of postcolonial theory of domination and of binary fusion of centre / periphery, metropolis / marginal, developed / underdeveloped categories of relationship between erstwhile colonised economies and their former colonial mentors. A second feature of this chapter is the findings of an empirical research conducted in Ogba / Ekpeye among the three major stakeholders – community, company and government – in order to assess the people's self-understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use in a developing community such as Ogba and Ekpeye. This is critical in providing a Nigerian perspective to stewardship, land ownership and use in the Niger Delta.

In the fourth chapter, a postcolonial method of exegesis has been employed to facilitate our appropriation and interpretation of the text: Genesis 1:26-28, keeping in mind the various interpretative insights of the *imago Dei* in particular and the inconclusiveness with which scholarship has enriched the debate. We also provided some fresh insights according to which our use of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics can be seen, along with an evaluation of the lingering problems of a post-colonial Nigeria which run parallel with a postcolonial hermeneutic. Similarly, the fifth chapter witnesses an application of our postcolonial critical hermeneutics to a close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28, along with a critical examination of the context provided for such a re-reading. By way of application, the Genesis pericope has also been translated into Ogba using a functional equivalence approach to show in very clear, accurate and natural language how concepts such as *imago Dei*, blessing, rule and subdue can be understood in a post-colonial Ogba (Nigerian) context, and according to which a redefinition of stewardship in line with Old Testament theology can be attempted.

Moreover, it is in the sixth chapter that such an attempt at a redefinition of stewardship have been made based on both the cultural perceptions from various Nigerian perspectives on the one hand, and on the other hand, the facts derived from our close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28 which is based on a postcolonial critical hermeneutics. In so doing we have inadvertently married both ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament cosmogony to African worldviews as depicted in various scholarly perspectives. This is to foster a fresh understanding of the concept of stewardship in both church and academy. The criterias of accountability in making the close-reading relevant to the community and of responsibility in using an approach that is multi-dimensional relevant also to the academy, were used as valid criterias for arriving at a re-definition of stewardship resonating with an Old Testament theology.

Our re-definition of stewardship has further been elaborated using all of the various scholarly views that motivated its phraseology including the ancient Near Eastern, Old Testament, and African culture especially its various West African and Nigerian components in particular. Such a multi-dimensional study fosters a sense of communality which in my opinion will prove particularly helpful in the Niger Delta where the true marks of stewardship as known in the Old Testament is yearning for an activation. As part of the cultural values of a Christian Africa the core Judeo-Christian values, mores and ethos such as justice and righteousness can be integrated into a more global context of partnership

with God and with nature in which both “primordial” and “civil” interests merge in a practice of accountable and responsible land ownership and use especially in Nigeria.

In the seventh and final chapter we have drawn conclusions which invariably strengthens our presuppositions of a creation mandate of care and nurture. We have also made suggestions for further research which highlight various areas in which such research are not only pertinent and helpful, but above all where they can be seen to be relevant.

CHAPTER TWO

EXISTING SCHOLARLY VIEWS ON STEWARDSHIP, LAND OWNERSHIP AND USE

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we provided a framework of analysis for the issues raised in the concept of stewardship, land ownership and land use making specific allusions to the perennial problem associated with stewardship of land in the Niger Delta – a problem traceable to misconceptions of both the Biblical mandate in Genesis 1:26-28 (Wenham 1987: xlvi) as well to the neglect of cultural values of land tenure in various African, albeit Nigerian communities (Amadi 1982:96).

We are now to examine some existing scholarly views on the subject in order to engage with such views in areas where they are explicit or otherwise in addressing the need for a new sense of stewardship (with respect to land ownership and use) that is responsible and accountable (Vallet 2001:1-3). Thus we will critically examine scholarly views of ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament concepts of stewardship, land ownership and use, and do the same with the Western and African views. We do this keeping in mind the trend of scholarly discussion of the issues involved and the interpretive atmosphere surrounding various scholarly interpretations. In other words, various scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and land use as it affects different perspectives such as from the ancient Near East, the Old Testament, and African culture are presently to be critically examined.

Various scholarly views are presented not necessarily in a synchronic outline, but in a diachronic manner in which various views across time and space are mutually engaged in a critical dialogue irrespective of chronological prioritisation or cultural distinctiveness. In this way the discussion can contribute to a new synthesis which enhances our ability to appreciate humans and creation more. This chapter therefore uses as a core theme the concept of creation in a relational sense (Fretheim 2005:1-2) at the centre of which is the *imago Dei* - the human personality to which both nature and land constitute veritable realms of rule and dominion.

The etymology of the Hebrew word *rādāh* “to have dominion” in Genesis 1:28 has been much discussed as is its parallel with *kābash*, “to subdue” the earth. We have also tried to show the literal sense which both words have in other texts of trampling, enslavement, and harsh rule by the powerful over the weak (e.g. *rādāh* in Ezek.34:4; see also *kābash* in Jer.34:11,16; Zech.9:15). Clearly, it means that God created humans and conferred on them a kingly or royal status which literally invites humans to rule or exercise stewardship over the rest of the living creatures as God’s viceroy. As Fretheim (1994:15) so aptly puts it: “God is a power sharing, not a power hoarding God” The question arises as to the manner in which this “rule” or stewardship is to be exercised keeping in mind that God pronounced everything which he has made as “good”. The question is put by Towner (2005:347-48) in a very illustrative way:

“When the other creatures look upon ‘*adam*’ as a royal or even a god-like figure, what will they see – a tyrant, an exterminator, or satanic figure? Or will they experience the ruling hand of ‘*adam*’ as something tender and gentle as that of their Creator?”

Apparently this means treating creation with tenderness and appreciation for its intrinsic goodness and beauty (Towner 2005:248). In other words, the human vocation of stewardship implicit in the creation mandate must be exercised in a manner consistent with the Creator’s own intention – a strong, universal and loving “dominion”! Humans are created primarily to oversee the creative works of God on a physical plane, and this fact is illustrated in three contextual ways as seen in the ancient Near Eastern, Old Testament, and African culture of which various scholarly views are hereby presented.

2.2 Scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and use in the ancient Near East

The scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and use in the ancient Near East is derived from scholarly writings based on ancient documents from ancient civilisations such as is known of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia (Ottoson 1974:389). Perhaps, we cannot do this in isolation as most ancient Near Eastern studies have been the product of scholarly enquiries into the ancient Near Eastern context of Israel in particular and of the Old Testament in general (Ottoson 1974:389). Thus, scholarly views overlap in some areas in a very critical manner, whereas in other areas ancient Near Eastern views by scholars have obvious and inescapable implications for what follows in the next section, most of which need to be clarified on the spot (Dybdahl 1981:71). For example, Old Testament and ancient Israel share underlying cultural similarities as well as dissimilarities

with their ancient Near Eastern neighbours and that is a good place to begin our discussion (Boecker 1976:91-92).

2.2.1 Ancient Near East in general

The implication of this for stewardship, land ownership and use in ancient Near Eastern cultures would no doubt be far-reaching (Dybdal 1981:163,172), and has been made more explicit in the views of Old Testament scholars some of whom see in *imago Dei* discussion a reflection of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology. It is a culture of representation of kings by images in provinces in which they themselves could not be present (Curtis 1994:35-36).

For instance, the excavation of the *Fakhariyah* Aramaic inscription in 1979 at *Tell Fakhariyah* in northeast Syria (Bordreuil 1997:301) – a statue which stands 1.65 meters high with a bilingual inscriptions, in Akkadian and Aramaic – was clearly a confirmation of similarity of traditions and historisation between the ancient Near East and ancient Israel's Genesis account (Mikaya 1981:52). The Akkadian text of the *Tell Fakhariyah*, thirty nine lines long, is engraved on the front of the statue's tunic; the Aramaic, twenty-three lines long, is on the back. The inscriptions are similar in structure: they are presumably dedicated to the storm god Hadad; the identity of the dedicator is Hadad-yis'i, son of Shamash-nuri king of Gozan. In its first line is the earliest occurrence of *dmwt in* Aramaic which approaches a virtual proposition when combined with *demuta* "image, likeness", or even with its parallelism with *šelem* in Genesis 1:26 (cf. Ezek.23:14-15) and is revised in Gen.5:1,3.

The concrete use of *dvmūta* in the Hadd-Yith-i inscription in complete parallelism with *šalm* weighs against the general consensus that *demuth* in Genesis 1:26 reflects a theologically motivated qualification of the more concrete *šelem* (Preuss 1978:259). To be sure, humans in Genesis 1:26 is regarded not as a statue, but as a living image. There seems to have been a fluidity in terminology between living, visible images and their static representations in stone, wood, or metal. It is rendered as *dmwt'zy hdys zy – zy* as a genitive particle is used in an emphatic state and it seems quite restricted in this dialect. Normally, the absolute state seems to be neutral with respect to definiteness (Gropp and Lewis 1985:46).

Some archaeologists date the inscription to 800 BCE pointing at internal evidences in the text such as word breaks which are identical to those of more ancient Greek inscriptions

from about 750 BCE. By this they come to the conclusion that “the Greeks borrowed the Phoenician alphabet in the eighth century, probably by still-undiscovered northern channels” (Bordreuil 1997:301). However, other scholars relying on late iconographic parallels prefer a later date of the mid-seventh and early eighth century BCE (Lipinski 1990:43). Be that as it may, the *Tell Fakhariyah* remains so far the oldest known Aramaic inscription dating to the 11th or 10th century BC. (Mikaya 1981:52-53). Gropp and Lewis (1985:45) observes its importance describing it as “the earliest Aramaic inscription of any length so far attested, as well as in its being a rare and early bilingual, with remarkable orthographic, palaeographic, and compositional features, full of interest for early Aramaic dialectology”.

Such a famous and important inscription, carved on the skirt of a life-size “black” basalt statue of a king, the *Tell Fakhariyah* depicts a statue with historical allusions in the text, as well as on iconographic features which point at *demuth* and *şelem* as terms which were used inter-changeably to depict representation in the ancient Near East (Lipinski 1990:42). It underscores the fact that in both ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia there were creation accounts and other stories with motifs and themes which in one way or another were similar and dissimilar to those of Genesis 1-5 (Arnold 1998:47).

2.2.1.1 Similarity of traditions and historisation

Specifically, a discussion of similarities in ancient Near Eastern concepts of stewardship, land ownership and use in general when compared to traditions extant in ancient Israel, can be derived from the ancient stories on creation extant in the Memphis creation story, the *Epic of Atrahasis* and the *Enuma Elish* (Coats 1983:37-46). As has been mentioned, ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia had creation accounts and other stories with motifs and themes similar to those of Genesis 1-4 (Arnold 1998:47).

However, the precise relationship between these ancient Near Eastern accounts and those of the Old Testament is a constant source of scholarly speculation which cannot be ignored by conscientious scholars (Van Seters 1992:50). It brings to mind the whole concept of myths and mythologies. Instructively, Genesis does not mince words in referring to Israel’s nearest neighbours like the Egyptians and Mesopotamian deities even in ancient times and context (Gen.6:1-4; 31:19, 30). Ancient Israel as an emerging nation did not exist in isolation but shared certain social and religious values with other ancient Near Eastern communities with their own theories of creation and by implication of stewardship, land ownership and use. This is the general emphasis of scholars – Herman

Gunkel and James Barr inclusive, and they have attempted to depict the uniqueness of each ancient Near Eastern, including ancient Israelite tradition.

For instance, Herman Gunkel (1862 – 1932) one of the most influential and learned Old Testament scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries, underscored these similarities when he asserted that Old Testament scholarship without acquaintance with ancient Near Eastern life – history, culture and literature – was an impoverished one (Gunkel / Scullion 1994: xv).

He also led the way in what later came to be known as form criticism (Gunkel / Scullion 1994: xv). He was apprehensive of Israelite traditions, especially when they did not resonate with ancient Near Eastern culture in general. His scepticism however, did not prevent him from seeing an Israel which was a late actor on the ancient Near Eastern literary scene, but which boasts of historical traditions dating back beyond primeval times as is contained in Genesis. There are recollections of unique ancient Israelite traditions which so far are difficult to find in Egyptian and Babylonian prehistory. This uniqueness does reinforce the scepticism of Gunkel, particularly because he considers Israelite imagination too young to capture primeval events. Primeval events were to Gunkel so ephemeral due to the countless millennia which passed between the origin of the first ancient Near Eastern peoples and the appearance of the people of Israel (Gunkel / Scullion 1994:4).

On the other hand and in respect of Mesopotamia, Gunkel considered as myth, the sort of cosmogony found in *Ugarit*, or in *Enuma Elish*, or in other expressions of culture which in some way corroborated the Israelite version in a rather indirect way. A myth is defined by Van Seters (1992:25) as:

“A traditional story about events in which the gods are the primary focus, and their action outside historical time, though replete with structures of meaning that is concerned with the deep problems of life and offers an explanation for the way things are”.

That some Mesopotamian legends had their origin in “myths” as Gunkel has opined is beyond any doubt. However, a description of “myth” while being associated with certain ancient Near Eastern traditions in general would certainly be transcended by the Biblical traditions as a higher form of literary development (Gibson 1984:301). The layman’s understanding of “myth” is simply a tale or fable that has nothing to do with human history or time, but from which lessons relevant to human history and time could be learned

(Gibson 1984:301). With reference to historicisation, in the case of Israel, it is instructive to note that Israel utilised the historical way of thinking as a decisive tool of its religion, and so took whatever non-Israelite myth it inherited and transformed the same by a process of historicisation. This is an overtly simplistic argument on the part of Van Seters, because this so called historicisation process is not a uniquely Israelite habit, as there are texts reflecting a mythological mode of thinking which can also be found in all the ancient civilisations – Egypt, Greece and Mesopotamia.

Since the layman's understanding of "myth" usually carries the day when it comes to applying it to Biblical narratives, its use in this discussion shall be minimal (Gibson 1984:301). Furthermore, ancient Near Eastern traditions, ancient Egypt and ancient Israel in its Genesis portrayal would essentially reflect ancient Near Eastern traditions comprising Egypt and Mesopotamia alike (Gibson 1984:301). Gunkel is right in pointing this out when he noted that such Babylonian or ancient Near Eastern influences surround the Biblical narratives as well (Gunkel / Scullion 1994:xv,4). He is convinced that Egyptian and Babylonian records point in the same direction as do Israelite stories and historical traditions (Gunkel / Scullion 1994: xv, 4).

As Hamilton (1990:56) has pointed out myth is not only a figurative expression of "truth" but also a false expression of truth as well. By this token, myth essentially refers to a story about God or gods or any kind of supernatural powers. If myth can be referring to "the use of imagery to express the otherworldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side" (Hamilton 1990:57), then in my opinion it runs the risk of an anthropomorphic reductionism in which mythological phenomena is concretised in finite categories with the possibility of distorted application of meaning.

2.2.1.2 Dissimilarities in celestial and concrete universalistic ideas

There is however, also a basic dissimilarity in the essential features of ancient Near Eastern creation stories and those of ancient Israel. This is borne out in the important work of Gunkel / Scullion (1994:5), even though it is with its own flaws. Gunkel rightly underscored the point that both the terrestrial and celestial features of Genesis defy human reason, when it not only gives details such as how much water there was during the flood, but also gave details of what transpired in the Divine Council (Gen.1; 2:18; 6:3, 6-7; 11:6-7). Evidently, some elements of ingenuity attend the appropriation of ancient legends and stories by Israelite minds. Yet the infusion into these legends of the spirit of

higher religion still remains, in the words of Gunkel / Scullion (1997: liv), “one of the most brilliant deeds of the people of Israel – even though lots of legends have been modified to fit into a new mould”.

Nor should we ignore a second dissimilarity between ancient Near Eastern and ancient Israelite creation stories. This has to do with the Israelite predilection for universalistic ideas, which might have characterised Israelite religion even in ancient times, but in a way which did not totally ignore the base ideas of earlier states of religion (Van der Toorn 1999:673-64). As Cassuto (1978:13) pointed out, Semitic thought often saw the world in concrete universalistic terms, not in abstract theoretical concepts (Cassuto 1978:13). Consequently, generalisations are alien to Semitic thought. This is the reason parallelisms can be observed in traditions current in the ancient Orient, and such parallelisms as do not necessarily place the two traditions – ancient Near Eastern and ancient Israel – on the same literary footing (Barr 1959:1-10). The reason for this dissimilarity can be explained in simple terms.

On the one hand, there is an attempt to concretise universalistic ideas such as is extant in Genesis which results in what Gunkel describes as a “metamorphosis of higher ideas of religion” and is in tension with base materials. Nevertheless, Genesis manifests a mature, well-developed, highly energetic art. As Gunkel (1997:li) has pointed out an Israelite creation story such as is portrayed in Genesis, and which has parallels in Babylonian, Assyrian, and even Iranian cultures will undoubtedly be influenced by Egyptian sources as well (Gibson 1984:300-01). On the other hand there is the process of transmission which might mean an incremental transformation of the original materials. Yet one of the characteristic distinctives of this process was an uncompromising and unmitigated monotheistic tendency (Gunkel / Scullion 1994: lviii).

This can be seen from the way Israelites themselves understood the texts which they have inherited over the millennia. Cassuto for instance does not hesitate to assert the view that Israelite cosmogony actually infiltrated the narrative poems about the creation and the beginning of the world’s history, especially when other parts of the Biblical canon are considered (Cassuto 1978:8-9). There are oracles in the prophetic corpus which alludes to creation events directly or indirectly which are not mentioned in Genesis 1:1-6:8 for instance.

Apparently, various unfolding creation traditions existed but were in tension with an accretive process guiding the choice of materials in an incremental process of redaction (Sarna 1989:13; Gertsenberger 2002:89). Therefore, an investigation which leads us to the views closer to the source is important for our purpose. In view of the fact that our analysis leans heavily on scholarly views on the ancient Near Eastern cultures, it is important to consider, as we have done, those views meaningfully, and to do so by critically examining their reflection of ancient Near Eastern contexts in general (Speier 1987:xxiii-xxiv). In my opinion the dissimilarity points in the way of the distinctiveness of ancient Israelite's creation saga and its unique incremental unfolding and accretive process (Speier 1987:xxiii-xxiv).

Evidently, it is Cassuto (1978:8-9) who underscores this Israelite distinct difference from the various creation sagas of the ancient Near East, and notes as follows:

The actions "credited to various deities in the pagan literature are attributed in the Hebrew Scriptures to the God of Israel and are portrayed in a form more in keeping with Israel's religious conscience" (Cassuto 1978:8-9).

Two other scholars who unlike Gunkel places ancient Israelite Biblical traditions on a literary footing slightly loftier than similar ancient Near Eastern traditions include Barr (1962:1-10) and Gibson (1984:300-01) both of whom literally insisted that Biblical scholarship may fall short of its objective by trying to force English conceptions of "myth" upon the Bible or the ancient Near Eastern culture.

Thus in a survey of scholarly views, there are Biblical scholars who, like Gunkel, place ancient Near Eastern traditions on the level with ancient Israelite Biblical traditions. There are also others, who consider ancient Near Eastern traditions as more of "myth" in the common understanding of it, and ancient Israelite Biblical traditions as of a higher recension (Barr 1962:1-10).

In our discussion of these ancient theories of creation from the perspective of several scholars, it is important that we keep in mind the diversity and trajectories of scholarly views which in my opinion helps us to get a synopsis of ancient Near Eastern concepts of stewardship in a unique way. The similarities in both ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia creation accounts depict the same motifs and themes similar to those of Genesis 1-4 (Arnold 1998:47). On the other hand, the dissimilarity between ancient Near Eastern creation accounts and those of ancient Israel brings the universalism and concreteness inherent in the latter in contrast with the abstractions of the former (Speier

1987:xxiii -xxiv). In my opinion, a link is forged in all these creation accounts between creation and humans' indomitable role as stewards of both land and labour. Looking at this in specific terms a few more comparative and contrastive indices can be pointed out.

2.2.2 Ancient Near Eastern concepts of creation (stewardship) compared

At the centre of ancient Near Eastern conceptualisation of stewardship is the theme of creation or of nature which is entrusted to humans as an inalienable patrimony (Brueggemann 2002:191). For this reason, it might be necessary to keep the priestly creation narrative in Genesis 1:1-2:4a in mind as we critically examine scholarly views on stewardship in the way ancient Near Eastern communities related to creation in general – including days and seasons.

2.2.2.1 Six days creation and a seventh day rest

Let us begin with the whole concept of a six day creation. Israelite conception of the creation of humans on a sixth day of creation after which a seventh day of rest was inaugurated can also be found in both Akkadian and Ugaritic literature (Van Seters 1992:50). Those who managed God's creation were to observe the natural cycles of days, months and seasons. In the case of a six day creation which idea pervaded the ancient Near East, it proves that a series of seven consecutive days was considered a perfect period in which to develop an important work, the action lasting six days and reaching its final conclusion and outcome on the seventh day (Cassuto 1978:9-22). Cassuto's argument in support of a six day creation proves that even this was part of ancient Near Eastern traditions (Cassuto 1978:13). It is remarkable to note, however, that creation stories of the ancient Near East like the Babylonian creation story features a succession of various rival deities. This is as far as comparison can go. Henceforth, the Biblical version on the other hand, is dominated by the monotheistic concept in the absolute sense of the term. This we pointed out in our discussion of contrasts below.

2.2.2.2 The creation of humans

Moreover, Van Seters (1992:50) has shown that the narration of the creation of humankind in *Enuma Elish* has its parallels also in *Atrahasis*, and that both accounts seem to run alongside similar details with the Biblical account. This line of thinking runs parallel to that

of Gunkel (1997: li) who literally assumes a Babylonian origin for most of the legends in Genesis. As in Genesis, both *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis* mention clay as the substance used in moulding humankind, and creation was for the purpose of filling a gap existing in the service of the gods (Bosman 2006:3). The mention of clay as a substance from which humans were moulded is one point of similarity, and the creation of humans for the purpose of filling a gap for the service of the gods is another (Van Seters 1992:50). In the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish* for instance human beings were created to provide the gods with food, clothing and honour (Clifford 2002:70). There are also similarities of the creation of humans resulting from a great assembly of the deities in mutual consultation in which the gods were duly informed of the creation of humans (Schüle 2005:2-3). This is perhaps the idea behind the heavenly court summoned by God to witness the creation of humans (Gen. 1:26-28; Job 38:7).

In the *Epic of Atrahasis* as in *Enuma Elish* and the Memphis creation story, stewardship as part of ancient Near Eastern cultures is embedded in the treatment of the creation of humankind (Coats 1983:46). All such accounts seem to run alongside similar details with the Biblical account (Garr 1996:22). The implication of this for the ancient Near Eastern concepts of human stewardship and accountability to the gods is that humans are not an autonomous entity but made with a purpose of rendering services which the gods consider to be below their dignity (Bosman 2006:4).

2.2.2.3 Events of a primeval flood

Again, the events of a primeval flood are mentioned in both Genesis (Gen. 7-9) and in *Atrahasis* as a direct act of the gods to check overpopulation of the earth (Beisner 1997:173). There are in both *Atrahasis* and Sumerian mythology, creation accounts which abound with events of a natural disaster that once threatened the survival of the human specie. Even the events of the flood in Genesis 9 are not without parallels in ancient mythologies (Van Seters 1992:50). It must be emphasised that few scholars have questioned the parallelisms in such primeval accounts with the Biblical accounts (Van Seters 1992:50). In most ancient Near Eastern traditions, as in Genesis, the anger of the gods which is traceable to some kind of deviant behaviour on the part of humans is usually the reason behind such occurrences.

The clarity and conciseness of scholarly views can be further pursued from the perspective of Egyptian myths as well as those of Mesopotamia. Both represent the two main strands of ancient Near Eastern mythology.

2.2.3 Ancient Near Eastern concepts of creation (stewardship) contrasted

2.2.3.1 Egypt

We have already pointed out earlier the similarities and dissimilarities observable in any critical analysis of ancient Near Eastern texts and traditions.

We mentioned Cassuto's argument in support of a six day creation and that even this was part of ancient Near Eastern traditions (Cassuto 1978:13). It was also pointed out that those creation stories of the ancient Near East like the Babylonian creation story features a succession of various rival deities. On the other hand, the Biblical version on the other hand, is dominated by the monotheistic concept in the absolute sense of the term. Thus, while we claim that creation accounts in the ancient Near East are genetically related (ANET:60-62) they are indeed poles apart from the Biblical account (Speiser 1987:25ff).

A second contrast is located in Herman Gunkel's classification of ancient Near Eastern traditions as "myth". It is difficult to separate "myth" in ancient Egypt from the broader ancient Near Eastern tradition of which she was a leading influence, and so most of what we have said so far is relevant. All that is needed is to depict specific areas not already mentioned. For instance, there existed a *Memphis* theology which drew extensively from creation texts such as the Pyramid Texts in which the role of *Ptah* the god of *Memphis* is heightened. The stewardship of humans is sandwiched between the creative activities of the gods – *Ptah* and *Anum* and their ability to create order out of a chaotic watery mass which then makes their dependence on the material service of humans for their edification possible (Arnold 1998:47). In another ancient Egyptian text can be found similar concepts in which land is seen as a gift, and others in which concern for the land and its sustainability extends to a future:

"*Ammunenshi* gave me ...land ...because he knew my character and has heard of my skill, ...having borne witness for me." (COS Vol.1:78a).

“*Tilpenu* came home and concerned himself for his land.... he concerned himself for them in regard to life, vigour and future” (COS Vol.1:153).

Creation for instance is one concept which in Egyptian cosmogony stands out clearly in concrete forms (Bergman 1978:242). It is also linked to events that are understood abstractly similar to Mesopotamian cosmogony with its predilection for abstractions such as wisdom, strife, adjuration, and righteousness (Ringgren 1978:244). All of these abstract qualities occur in creation as part of the creative process in ancient cosmogony and though similar to cosmogony and the creative processes found in the Old Testament, yet they are significantly different (Bernhardt 1978:245).

Be that as it may, a preview of the foregoing shows that the concept of stewardship is deeply embedded in the cosmogony of ancient Egypt and the concept revolves mainly around a trust in which domestic, land and natural resources are involved (Hoffner 1978:107ff). The trust is from the gods and is over an estate in which the gods have interest, and it goes with the expectation of a responsible and perhaps accountable use (Garr 2003:209). Ancient Near Eastern cosmogony does not ignore the cajoling and manipulations to which the gods are sometimes subjected by their human adherents (Garr 1996:120). This is another point of contrast: *Yahweh* – the God of Israel cannot be cajoled or manipulated (Is. 42:17; Mal. 3:6-12).

However, a responsive attitude towards *Yahweh* by Israel is the same attitude required by all other gods from their respective ancient Near Eastern adherents. It marks a response depicting a full human awareness that the earth and its fullness being of a Divine origin has been bequeathed to humans for both nurturing and sustainable care (Hamilton 1990:137-38).

2.2.3.2 Mesopotamia

Hermann Gunkel’s classification of “myth” covers also the Mesopotamian creation story – *Enuma Elish* – which has attracted scholarly attention since the nineteenth century. Not only is it in resonance with the Genesis creation story, it adds the unique feature that humans were created by the gods solely to do the hard labour of the universe leaving the deities to concentrate on more sublime and lofty duties (Hamilton 1990:17-21).

The fact that such resonance does not obfuscate the disparity between Genesis and the *Enuma Elish* for instance but rather stands in contrast to each other has been noted. Thus

the theory of an unfolding Genesis can be contrasted with similar documents in the ancient Near East which were collected in a rather accretive form (Hamilton 1990:27-28). Critics of the Documentary hypothesis are convinced that the absence of a parallel hypothesis in the ancient Near Eastern context is enough to invalidate the supposition of it in ancient Israel (Hamilton 1990:28).

It is interesting to note that both the *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis* make mention of creation as an act of the gods, and of man as the result of the need to fill the labour gap resulting from the mutual conflict of the gods and their unwillingness to serve. There is also a contrast in the *Gilgamesh Epic* where a story similar to the flood story in Genesis 6-9 is told, but without any similar Genesis evidence that humans were restored to a pre-eminent position after the event. In the *Gilgamesh Epic* humans were rather depicted in a role subservient to the gods (Van Seters 1992:51-58). This is a significant contrast which we will later re-visit in our discussion of humans and their place in both creation and as stewards.

A similar observation can be made of the Akkadian (Sumerian and Assyrian) cosmogony. Although the major gods hold counsel and fashion the humans from the blood of some slain gods, there is no hint that the purpose of this creative act was for the placement on earth of a dominant figure that was to serve as nature's prime mover (Van Seters 1992:51-58). Instead, what we find is humankind equally vulnerable and totally at the mercy of the gods.

“The purpose of their creation is given at length as providing the necessary labour to do the agricultural work, to build sanctuaries, and to render service to the gods” (Van Seters 1992:58).

Indeed humans are created out of the gods to serve the gods. A neo-Babylonian creation myth has an episode of the revolt of the gods and the death of one of them as material for the creation (Van Seters 1992:60).

In the Mesopotamian tradition, there occurred some primeval events with a common note, namely humans are created to relieve the gods of their work; they are made of clay and yet are engendered by Deity (Van Seters 1992:58-61). The *Gilgamesh Epic* conveys some concepts of the creation mandate that were known in ancient Near East, concepts which the Bible shares to a greater or lesser extent. For instance, the *Gilgamesh Epic* conveys some concepts of kingship and rule that is tied to the land:

“Do not neglect my speech, which lays down all the laws of kingship, which instructs you, that you may rule the land” (COS Vol.1:66).

Another neo-Babylonian mythical text speaks of the creation of humankind, and later of the king whom the gods furnish with extra-ordinary splendour. It is interesting to note that even the *Gilgamesh Epic* evolved from separate Sumerian sources, to a more integrated form of Old Babylonian period to a final form in the neo-Assyrian period. Although a multi-faceted *Gilgamesh Epic* is empirically verifiable, a multi-faceted Genesis remains, at best, a hypothesis. So far the debate have raged, but there has never been found in any of the archaeological results of several editions of Genesis or the discovery of the antecedent documents to put the issue to rest once and for all (Hamilton 1990:28-29). In my opinion, this is an important contrast as the ancient Near Eastern literary dilemma remains unresolved; it obviously strengthens the point of the transcendence and loftiness of the ancient Israelite Biblical Genesis narratives on creation to which the former stands in very sharp contrast. The concept of creation in a relational sense (Fretheim 2005:1-2) has at its core the humans made in the *imago Dei* and assigned the responsibility to “rule” and exercise “dominion” over both nature and the land.

There is an objective link between creation on the one hand and land ownership and use on the other, and this is first noticed in the etymology of the Hebrew word *rādāh* “to have dominion” in Genesis 1:28 and its parallel with *kābash*, “to subdue” the earth. As humans creatively fulfilled the dual mandate first to reproduce the character of God as his divine “images” and on the basis of that to procreate and fill the earth with humankind, the impact of this on land ownership and use will be widespread. In my opinion, the whole concept of the *imago Dei* depicts the fact that humans are creatures surrounded by a host of created natural order, and given responsibility over that order, over which they could be called to account for its use, misuse or abuse (Webber 1979:169f). Hence land ownership and use is one area in which this responsibility and accountability comes into focus. Humans are to fulfil God’s purposes by carrying out his will as stewards not only of nature but more specifically of land in the way they utilise and manage it (Webber 1979:177-78). Interestingly, ancient Near Eastern culture emphasised this to a very large extent.

2.2.4 Ancient Near Eastern concepts of land ownership and use in general

In both the *Memphis* creation story, the *Epic of Atrahasis* and *Sumerian* mythology the focus is more on theogony (origins of the gods) than on the creation account (Matthews 1996:117). The ancients' understanding of origins was tied to their concept of the natural world as alive and personal. Consequently, natural phenomena were related to the activities of the gods (Matthews 1996:119). Humans are pawns in a theogonic chessboard even in the exercise of their functions as stewards of the earth and its resources.

2.2.4.1 Egypt

We have already indicated the paucity of accounts of creation in most of the ancient Near Eastern theogonies. Such a scanty detail impacts on our assessment of their land ownership and use. In Egypt there are other creation accounts such as the ones associated with *Ptah* and *Anum* in the *Memphis* theology, though there are separate works embedded in larger literary works which give an account of how the world began and the placement of humans as representatives of the gods in the physical realm. Egyptian creation accounts fortunately are characterised by diversity with an underlying cosmological unity (Arnold 1998:47; Lohfink / Bergman 1974:201). Creation begins with watery chaos (the god *Nun*), who is nevertheless not a creator god but who orders the process of creation in line with the will of the gods (Arnold 1998:47). In the *Memphis* theology, *Ptah* is the creator god, but elsewhere it is *Anum*. The accounts depict the role of humans as subordinates of the gods in the physical tasks of working the earth, a clearly embedded note (Arnold 1998:47). The gods desperately needed human labour on the land to fill the gap resulting from the mutual unwillingness of the gods to serve (cf. Bosman 2006:4). As says an Egyptian text:

“When free men are given land, they work for you like a team” (COS Vol.1:64).

This depicts the centrality of land and the Nile in the conception of the king as the image of 'Ra – the creator God from whom all natural resources emanated. Those who work the land are serving not only the Deity but also his representative on earth – the Pharaoh!

2.2.4.2 Mesopotamia

Land and sea in the Mesopotamian creation story – *the Enuma Elish* – has since its discovery in the nineteenth century attracted the attention of scholars and amateurs because of its parallels with the Genesis account. The story tells of a cosmic battle between the leading deities in which the young and daring Marduk kills the monstrous Tiamat, mother goddess personifying primeval ocean. Marduk split her corpse in two, making heaven and earth from the halves. Using the blood of her co-conspirators, Kingu, Marduk and his father created humankind to do the hard labour on the earth, leaving the deities free from work. This resonates with the concept of land as the scene of human labour. In the *Epic of Atrahasis* the comparison with Genesis comes out even more clearly. It shows that the basic plot of Genesis 1-11 was well known throughout the ancient Near East (Arnold 1998:48).

In the Mesopotamian mythology humans are of course “regalia” placed on earth to be adorned with care because of the important service they would render on land. The word of a neo-Babylonian mythical text in which this idea comes out clearly is this:

“With goodness envelope his entire being. Form his features harmoniously; make his body beautiful. ...The great gods gave the king the task of warfare. *Anu* gave him the crown; *Enlil* gave him the throne. Nergal gave him weapons; *Ninurta* gave him glistening splendour. *Betet-ili* gave him instruction and counsel and stands at his service” (Van Seters 1992:61).

It would almost seem from ancient Near Eastern creation myths that humans were created solely to serve the purposes of the gods, and it is to the extent that they fulfil this role that they are regarded as stewards of the earth and its resources (Fretheim 2005:49-50). Slavery or servitude is not co-terminus with stewardship, though responsible and accountable stewards cannot but be of service to both the gods, to fellow humans and to the lower creatures (Parker 2005:447):

There are some ancient Near East creation myths of humans which resonate with creation stories of ancient Israel. One of such views is that humans were fashioned by the gods and that “dominion” was given to them. Ancient myths such as the *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis* mention is made of creation as an act of the gods, and of land as being a primary motivator for human labour.

In practice, there were times when opulent families in Mesopotamia included land gifts as part of dowry (Ahiamadu 2005:34). Texts at Ugarit, which Mishnah mentions confirm this practice. However, Westbrook (1991:89) has pointed out that land dowry comes in for consideration in some family quarters only after a marriage has produced issue(s). “Slaves” could be given as dowry from the consummation of a marriage, but land could

only be given as dowry, and this only rarely, when the couple have got issues (i.e. offspring). This according to Westbrook is part of Mesopotamian marriage law. Such a land gift forms part of a husband's estate which at death is divided so that the surviving widow can live on the land as on her own personal estate (Westbrook 1991:89). Thus, we see a human receiving the gift of land and the responsibility to tend and care for it in ways which take cognisance of human vulnerability and leaves them totally at the mercy of the gods (Van Seters 1992:58).

This brings us back to the point of the loftiness of the Genesis account. Against a backdrop of ancient Near Eastern and indeed universal superstitious beliefs and pagan misconceptions about the Deity, the Genesis account speaks volumes in its status as Biblical revelation. It is instructive to note that Biblical revelation is also distinct from pagan myths. The former usually is timeless and stands aloof from history, whereas the latter is an account of creation in which history is seen as inaugurated (Matthews 1996:120). Most Judeo-Christian scholars alluded to earlier are agreed on the fact that a revelatory creation account as in Genesis was required to liberate antiquity from its superstition and fear of the world that was viewed as a playground for capricious deities. Hence the absence of a Hebrew theogony is related to the fact that Biblical cosmogony has to be carefully distinguished from pagan ideology and misconceptions. Hebrew cosmology declares that the existence of all things including the human stewardship role on earth is due to God's own free and determined will (Matthews 1996:119).

It is important to keep these facts in mind in our consideration of Old Testament scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and use. Taking the creation and *imago Dei* theme further we are faced with concepts which are both relational in many ways and various scholars presumably have taken this relationship for granted (Fretheim 2005:19; Youngblood 1999:12-14).

2.3 Scholarly view on stewardship, land ownership and use in the Old Testament

A lot has already been said in our discussion of the ancient Near Eastern traditions as analysed by various scholars most of whom have done their analysis from the perspective of Old Testament studies as well. The fact of the loftiness of the Genesis creation account is stated against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern beliefs and pagan conceptions.

Again, we reasonably assume the status of the Genesis account as a Biblical revelation, and various scholarly reflections exist who make this presumption based on the context of the ancient Near East in general. It is important in this section to look at various views which have shaped the trend of Old Testament studies in general, especially studies which have influenced the interpretation of the Biblical Genesis as we know it today.

The trend of Old Testament discussions during the last hundred years or so has shifted from a purely historical-critical, to a literary-critical, and until recently a socio-rhetorical approach³⁵. The reason for this divergent views can be accounted by the presuppositions which scholars bring into the field. Apparently each approach contributes to the enrichment of the texts in Old Testament studies. An African proverb puts it that: “no one discards the soup prepared by his mother.” Evidently, the various interpretive developments in respect of *imago Dei* and creation has been shaped by and in different contexts and times. Hence in order to appreciate Old Testament scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and use we first of all are attempting a survey of the scholarly trends of interpretation of the root concepts of creation and the *imago Dei*. These are scholarly views which shaped the trend of the discourse in the last hundred years or so which are beautifully illustrated in the writings of Gunnlaugur A. Jonsson (1988)³⁶, Terrence E. Fretheim (2005)³⁷, Walter Brueggemann (2002)³⁸ and many others whose scholarly views on the theme of creation and the *imago Dei* has set the trend of subsequent discussions in the present discourse.

This survey does not pretend to be exhaustive, but it does take a critical look at salient features of various scholarly views especially those which are in consonance with our overarching theme on human stewardship of creation, particularly with reference to land ownership and use in a post-colonial context. Stewardship derives from a sense of belonging to the Deity which human beings have, and of being his representation on earth. This is depicted in the context of creation through the *imago Dei*, which means that stewardship, rule or dominion is presumably to be exercised over nature and everything that moves on land (Gen.1:26-28). As the years went by so has scholars struggled with

³⁵ Our preference for a postcolonial critical hermeneutics in our close reading of Genesis 1:26-28 is a step in the same direction and is the focus of this discussion in the fourth and fifth chapters.

³⁶ G.A. Jónsson 1988. ***The Image of God. Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research***. Lund: Almqvist and Wiksell International.

³⁷ T.E. Fretheim 2005 ***God and World in the Old Testament – A Relational Theology of Creation***. Nashville: Abingdon press.

³⁸ W. Brueggemann 2002. ***The Land – Place as gift, promise and challenge in Biblical Faith***. 2nd Ed. Minneapolis: Fortress press.

this idea over the years and have used different approaches in understanding and applying it.

Suffice it to say that ancient Mediterranean societies were imbued with the concept of creation, *imago Dei*, and stewardship. In the various cosmogonies discussed earlier, creation is an act of the gods in polytheistic terms in the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian theogonies, but an act of *Yahweh* in monotheistic terms in ancient Israel. Similarly, the *imago Dei* as an anthropomorphic term was the exclusive quality of the royalty, but has been democratized in the Genesis creation narratives in which humans in general bear the divine image corporately and individually. In the same way, stewardship seemed to be the exclusive reserve of the men and household management was for the women, but in the ancient Israelite creation account the responsibility to tend the garden and till the soil was both for the men and women (Gen.1-2).

Thus various creation narratives have a certain measure of concern for human vocation involving the land and environment as well as the integrity of other creatures (Towner 2001:13). In the particular narrative of the creation of humankind (Gen.1:26-28) is embedded the key element of relationships as a reoccurring theme. Humans are created to be in relationships first with God, then with others including nature and the land, and themselves (Towner 2001:21). Literally speaking, relationship is the hallmark of stewardship and this is a latent *imago Dei* quality. Let us explore the subject further from the point of view of various Old Testament scholars.

2.3.1 Old Testament scholarly views on stewardship – *The Imago Dei*

Jónsson's (1988:4-12) approach is both historical-critical, and we shall spend some time examining this view. Generally this approach attributes the *imago Dei* passages in Genesis to a priestly source (P), with the implication that the P document is shaped within a context and character distinctively priestly. Since the documentary hypothesis of Wellhausen has been modified and later abandoned, it will not consume space here. Suffice it to say that Old Testament scholarship has not completely resolved the issues as to the origin of various creation narratives extant in the ancient Near East, and particularly the Biblical accounts. It is interesting to see the way Gunkel's views on this shifts between the opposite poles of oral origin on the one hand and written sources on the other in determining the veracity of the narratives put together by J and E in Genesis 1:1-2:25 (Van Seters 1992:12-13). Space will not permit a detailed examination of Gunkel's source

critical analysis.³⁹ Yet of importance is his association of P with the final redaction of materials already put together by J and E. As though having access to some esoteric but undisclosed source, Gunkel insists that the collectors⁴⁰ of Genesis legends, and by extension the Old Testament, were persons “filled with reverence for the beautiful, old accounts, striving to render them to the best of their ability, their chief trait being fidelity” (Gunkel 1997: lxxiii).

2.3.1.1 Before the Second World War

Each discussion of the creation narratives easily calls up the question of the *imago Dei* which we have dealt with extensively in the fourth and fifth chapter. In the first place, when it comes to the trend of scholarly opinion, the historical-critical view often do not hesitate to interpret the *imago Dei* as consisting of human dominion over creation, or as being a “human divine image” seen in terms of human function in relation to creation rather than human essence in creation (Curtis 1984:21). Jonsson totally agrees with a functional view of the *imago Dei* (Jónsson 1988:12), and situates the priestly and *Yahwistic* redaction in historical contexts, perhaps as written during the era of Solomon when the Kingdom was one in Israel (cf. Cowan 1988:30-32).

Secondly, it is a historical-critical imperative that the Bible should be investigated in the same manner as all other ancient literature. In the opinion of Jonsson this is a novelty that needs to be emphasised, especially in contrast to the late 19th century more literary era when scholars⁴¹ generally reflected a more sacramental view of the Old Testament. Yet the definitions given to the *imago Dei* by such scholars of 19th century fame have helped to clarify the modern day notion (Westermann 1984:149). By the beginning of the 20th century the trend of interpretation proceeded along the lines of German scholars – Dillmann and Driver who depicted the *imago Dei* as consisting of human spiritual essence apparently still under Greco-Roman dualistic influences. That Dillmann and Wellhausen

³⁹ It is Gunkel’s view that even when the legends began to be written down the process of oral transmission continued until the whole tradition of written accounts were collected. With respect of which generation of Israelites would be most apt to think of writing these traditions in order to save them from extinction, Gunkel provides no answer though he associates the writing to a period when the “guild of legend narrators” may have ceased. See Gunkel (1997: lxix).

⁴⁰ Herman Gunkel’s idea of J as a mere collector of legends making up Genesis sounds repugnant to Gerhard von Rad and the latter considers it as too reductionist a view. It is also not credible to think as Gunkel does that the Hexateuch developed gradually and incrementally from the ancient creed of Deuteronomy 26:5-9 plausible as this may sound to critical ears. See Van Seters (1992:12-13).

⁴¹ Like Franz Delitzsch (1813 – 1890), August Dillmann (1823-1894) and Samuel Rolls Driver (1846-1914) were proponents of a more sacred view of the Testaments – Old and New.

differed in their view of the *imago Dei* is noteworthy. Yet the only observable difference lies in the fact that the latter sees *dəmut* as a loan-word with supposedly Egyptian or Mesopotamian origin, whereas the former does not see any sharp distinction among various ancient Near Eastern cultures, especially due to their tendency to overlap with each other (Jonsson 1988:36).

Thirdly, the long standing method of locating the meaning of a text in the intention of the author, which is an author-centred approach to exegesis, resulted in the historical-critical method. It is instructive to note that Dillmann's view of the *imago Dei* fuses into a holistic view of humans which came into prominence with the interpretations given to the concept in the 1940s and 1950s as a result of the writings of Karl Barth and Theodorus Vriezen – both Reformed theologians. Although the historical-critical method of interpretation was still in vogue, yet the approaches have diverged with scholars like Samuel Driver maintaining the dualism of the earlier interpreters. The latter's acquaintance with both Biblical primeval history and some extra-biblical texts fostered an inclination in him to tow a line slightly independent of others. According to him, *šelem* in Genesis 1:26, 27; 5:1-3, and 9:5ff could not but refer to the form of the Deity which resembles the human body, although inner spiritual similarity might not be discountenanced (Jonsson 1988:51). *Yahweh* always had anthropomorphic features in the Hebrew mind. This view stands in contrast to Herman Gunkel and August Dillmann who sees *Yahweh* as transcending anthropomorphism though humans are created to embody his image and likeness in very limited capacity (Jonsson 1988:52).

Another approach in the historical-critical tradition is taken by Johannes Henn (1913: v)⁴² who draws extensively from extra-biblical comparative texts to show that *šelem* in Hebrew is a cognate of *zikru* in the Babylonian *Gilgamesh epic*, and the latter is often taken to mean image. Henn however maintained that *zikru* does not always mean that. Instead *zikru* can also mean name or character. Thus “name” “essence” “image” and “likeness” can be considered identical according to the Babylonian way of thinking. It is remarkable to note, as Henn does, that the concept of *imago Dei* is used in Genesis 1:26-28 in ways similar to other ancient Near Eastern peoples in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Old Testament. In both Egyptian and Babylonian view the king is often described as the image

⁴² Henn (1913:V) ***Die Israelitische Gottesauffassung im Lichte der altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte***. In the preface Henn claimed that the special character of the Israelite religion emerges clearly only when it is understood within the framework of parallels in other ancient Near Eastern religions.

of God, and an image can stand in the place of the god it represents. This view has been further expatiated by Caspari (1929) and Von Rad (1934) to show that God has established humans as his image to represent his authority on earth in the same way that “earthly rulers, when they cannot be present in person, usually set up images as a sign of majesty” (Von Rad 1970:144-45).

This was as true of the era of the twelfth century scholasticism as it was of the early 20th century naturalism resulting from complex contextual factors paving the way for a theological reflection more dialectical than natural with Karl Barth’s *Römerbrief* leading the way (cf. Brueggemann 1996:177). It was an era in which the understanding of “God’s mighty acts in history” suffered a diminishment. Instead, Old Testament studies witnessed a renewed concern with real humanity, real estate – indeed specific real estate that was invested with powerful promises and with strategic arrangements for a Divine / human relationship in the place as well.⁴³ Instead of the kind of binary interpretative mode with an either religion or faith, history or nature, time or space focus, interpretation was moving more in the direction of a dialectics that was more literary-critical than historical-natural in mode.

In the wake of such a dialectical theology in the 20th century, the *imago Dei* was consistently seen as partnership or immediate relationship with God and human, but which basically ignored the data from extra-biblical sources. Karl Barth since the end of the Second World War introduced this new dimension to the discussion on the *imago Dei*, and he did so with a liberal theology that literally dogmatized human’s role almost to the point of deification. In the views of Barth the best that could happen to a theological conception of humans is to distance them from the Creator who is incomparable, in-imitable and wholly other. There is however a “point of contact” between humans and God in which Barth positions the relational likeness of the *imago Dei*, keeping the saving grace of Christ in view. This “point of contact” for Barth as for Emil Brunner consists of divine grace (Jonsson 1988:69-70). However, Barth and Brunner disagree as to the quality of this “contact” when other creatures are considered. How is a human “contact” with his maker different from a cat’s contact with its maker? Barth does not answer the question, but Brunner insists that a distinction is important between human’s *imago Dei* and animal creatures of God. Both do agree however that the *imago Dei* consists not so much in what humans do or are, but in their created status (Jónsson 1988:73).

⁴³ See Brueggemann (2002:xi).

In my opinion, each successive generation of interpreters swing like a pendulum from ascribing “being” to ascribing “doing” and *vice versa* as the essence of *imago Dei* and as it relates to “rule” in the Genesis creation narratives (Ukpong 2004:74). In retrospect, neither Barth nor Brunner has come up with an adequate answer. In fact both have ended up with still a physical interpretation which re-enforces von Rad’s scepticism that any debate on either side – spiritual or physical – will prove unhelpful. Moreover, Ludwig Koehler made a philological study on the *imago Dei* and arrived at the same basic conclusion: human’s distinctive upright posture is expressive of Deity! Other scholars like Gunkel, and Hubert also see the divine likeness as consisting in human’s external form, but unlike them, Koehler sees more than a human external form but includes the corporeal qualities of innate humanity. Yet the idea of the *imago Dei* which enables humans to be dominant in creation is the watershed for a constructive re-definition of stewardship (Towner 2005:347). The royal categories attached to the *imago Dei* by interpreters such as Ivan Engnell whose traditional-historical method of interpretation was in vogue in the mid-60s made it possible for the idea to receive a serious emphasis both within and outside theological circles. Humans’ pristine role on earth is to serve as the Creator’s vice-regents! (Towner 2005:347).

2.3.1.2 After the Second World War

With the coming of other theologians like James Barr and Walter Gross with their interest in natural theology, the tone of the discussion changed (Barr 1962:11-26). The latter two ascribed dominion springing from Genesis 1:26-28 to humans, but as of a secondary importance. Primarily the *imago Dei* has to do with human’s essential nature, and not his essential activity. This position was shunted by the more recent views of Jonsson in favour of a functional interpretation. Jonsson’s view apparently has been built on the views of earlier interpreters like H. Holzinger who in his interpretation of Genesis 3 also represented humans as functional beings (Jónsson 1988:131-32).

From the 1970s onwards this connection made by theologians between the *imago Dei* and the mandate to rule over the earth became even more intense, and the older word studies in a historical-literary tradition began to fade into the background along with a decreasing emphasis on dialectical studies. A Swedish scholar – Tryggve Mettinger brought a peculiar feature to the interpretation of the *imago Dei*, namely divine revelation which he describes as a two story building with human reason situated on the first floor, and inspiration or

revelation which results from Divine grace occupying the second floor to which humans are occasionally but rarely invited. Those who do get invited do so as Christians, not as scientists. Divine transcendence is sometimes fostered by such occasional invitations (Jónsson 1988:154ff).

A further consideration of interpretive trend by this time shifted from the German school to the Scandinavian school, with Mettinger's unique emphasis on transcendence. The latter of course re-introduced the use of extra-biblical materials particularly bringing in the Egyptian wisdom dimension into the analytical study of Old Testament. Mettinger emphasises that the *imago Dei* passages belong to the priestly material in Genesis and must be understood in the light of its theological goal of foregrounding the institution of the tabernacle and restoring its central place in the worship of *Yahweh*. Hence the explicit prohibition of images in both versions of the Decalogue mirrors a theological development that arises no earlier than the sixth century BCE (Schüle 2005:2). By examining P in this way Mettinger finds a surprising analogy between humans and the tabernacle. Both are said to be made after/according to (*kə*) the heavenly pattern. He concludes that humans and the tabernacle belong together – both are made to turn in worship to the Lord and to live in communion with God in true worship! (Jónsson 1988: 153).

Another contributor to the *imago Dei* discussion was W. Gross who was largely influenced by Wolfgang Richter who stressed that a distinction between a diachronic and synchronic study is important for understanding the Biblical text. The outcome of such a distinction could be seen in Gross' "Biblical structuralism" which has an unmistakeable emphasis on literary objectivity and draws a critical line between observation (diachronic) and evaluation (synchronic). Evidently the impact of these scholars – Mettinger, a Scandinavian and Gross, a German – is still being felt today in both Old and New Testament scholarship, and has been absorbed by other scholars like the German-born Claus Westermann⁴⁴ who also introduced another dimension to the *imago Dei* debate.

Like his German predecessors Claus Westermann was not content with a historical-naturalistic theology preferred by scholars like James Barr and others. Instead, he took Karl Barth's dialectical approach in forming the basic principles upon which his

⁴⁴ Claus Westermann was born in Berlin in 1909, and was educated at the Universities of Tübingen, Marburg, Berlin and Zürich. He worked as a minister in Berlin before becoming Professor in Old Testament at the Church of the Firstborn (Kirchliche Hochschule), Berlin in 1949. Nine years later in 1958 he moved to Heidelberg where he became a Professor of the Old Testament.

presentation of Old Testament theology is based. Interestingly, his Old Testament theology – particularly his epochal treatise on Genesis revolved around his interpretation of the *imago Dei* in the immediate context of Genesis 1:1-2:4. To give a famous quote from the great commentary of Westermann (1984:80-81):

The narrative of Genesis 1 is characterised by its outward, irresistible and majestic flow that distinguishes it so clearly from the drama narrated in Genesis 2-3. No tension is built up in Genesis 1, and the steady, onward movement is effected by constantly recurring sentences which begin in 1:3 and end in 2:4a.

Whether or not Westermann is right in considering Genesis 1 as marginal to the Pentateuchal tradition in the Promised Land motif is an argument yet to be resolved. Our interest lies in his analysis of the *imago Dei* within the literary form of Genesis and especially Genesis 1-2. He considers the creation of humanity as the high point or climax of the narrative. However, he does not think that Genesis 1:26-28 is that very high point because as was earlier pointed out in his own words “there is no tension in the story which is resolved by it” (Westermann 1974:30). In other words Genesis 1 is not the result of a struggle, the dramatic element is missing. Therefore the account in Genesis 1 must be situated in a context of similar creation accounts which preceded it.

Such in-built suspicion present in the exegetical and theological discussion of the *imago Dei* has on a deeper level been mistaken for something questionable in Western Christian traditions (Schüle 2005:2-3). The tendency for scholars to eliminate this in-built suspicion is by taking the whole idea of *Toledot* as the pivot of Genesis 1-11, and especially as employed in the priestly narratives to emphasise the “promised land” motif. This is the motif so extant in the creation accounts presented in a succession of generations, and it is a device which is of great importance not only in Egypt, Sumeria and Babylon, but also in primitive cultures (Westermann 1984:81). In my own opinion, this trend of scholarship has resulted from a proclivity for dialectics – thesis, antithesis, and then a synthesis leading to a new thesis⁴⁵.

This proclivity can be seen in the way Westermann stands on both legs with one leg on German scholars’ predilection for dialectics and the other on the Scandinavian scholars’

⁴⁵ A discussion of the role of thesis, antithesis and synthesis and especially the long tradition of synthesis in exegesis is said to be influenced by Dionysius, and exemplified for instance in the commentaries by Origen, who considered the process of synthesis in exegesis itself as being the mystical way. This process of analysis aims at the communal discovery of the hidden (and therefore mysterious and mystical) senses of the Scriptures see P. Rorem (1984) ***Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis***. Toronto: Pontifical Institute Studies, 71. For a contemporary version of this discussion see Astell (2005: 382-391).

predilection for extra-biblical supplementary sources in Old Testament studies. Westermann used the *imago Dei* as his point of departure in illustrating the value of dialectics in a comparative method of exegesis, and how fitting it can be to a holistic study of Genesis and its pre-history (Westermann 1984:30). He does this against the contextual background of an earlier scholarly trend which was naturalistic and treated the text in a piecemeal or “piece by piece” comparison – a method used by earlier exegetes (Jónsson 1988:163). Moreover, Westermann was reacting to Herman Gunkel’s stark assertion that “Genesis 1-3 is not a free construction of the author but one that goes back to a very ancient tradition” (Gunkel 1997:117).

Therefore Genesis 1-3 should not be treated as an isolated unit but rather as a link in a long chain (Gunkel 1997:117). To Westermann Genesis 1-3 prefaces the rest of the treatise and is the work of a latter hand, preferably P (Westermann 1984:30, 80-81). Westermann’s preface theory has not gone uncriticised. In the opinion of Van Seters (1992:19) “it is important that the kind of literary-critical study dealing with the relationship of the Yahwist source to the Deuteronomist should be done *pari pasu* with form-critical study of the Yahwist as a historian”. This is to enable Biblical scholarship arrive at a point where it can make tentative observations about the history of the traditions within the Pentateuch (Westermann 1984:19)⁴⁶ It is not clear in my opinion what kind of historian the Yahwist can be in Van Seter’s view. For instance, how does Genesis as history compare with works of ancient historiography? The answers provided by Van Seters and the way he defines history makes for interesting reading but does not directly lead to understanding the human’s role in creation.

Returning to Westermann, it is instructive to note that his favourite motifs in Genesis 1:26-28 included *imago Dei*, “blessing”, and the distinctiveness of the priestly hand, and that his interpretations depicted a combination of a traditional-historical approach and a dialectical analysis. Van Seters considers this approach insufficient unless it is combined with a form-critical analysis which sees the historical significance of the narratives. However, as we have pointed out in our discussion of the ancient Near East, the creation narratives in Genesis does not inaugurate human history as ancient cosmogonies do, and can therefore be considered trans-historical, but not a-historical (Speier 1987:xxiii-xxiv; Cassuto 1978:9).

⁴⁶ There is a British-American tradition which sees the collections in Genesis and indeed the Hexateuch as one of Israel’s national epics, which in some way could be linked to early historiography. Apparently, the German-Scandinavian tradition would incline towards a legend theory at best or a “myth” theory at worst in considering the authenticity of the Genesis creation accounts. See Van Seters (1992: 20-21).

2.3.1.3 Between the Nineties and early in the New Millenia

During the period 1990 – 2007 two main arguments which point in the direction of human identity and responsibility in the interpretation of creation in Genesis have emerged.

First, God has created humans to “correspond with him” in order to facilitate a Divine-human, or better still, Creator-creature relationship and fellowship (Westermann 1984:160).

Second, the bestowal of blessing “of multiplication” by the Creator on the human estate is to facilitate similar relationship and fellowship, (or communion) between God and humans (Towner 2005:348).

A few comments on the first and second points will suffice. Taking Westermann’s concept of blessing and Fretheim’s concept of creation *continua* in Genesis 1:28 we can see how this helps us to understand the *imago Dei* and the blessing associated with it in the text.

It is generally stated that blessing is bestowed on both male and female by *Yahweh* who created both male and female in the image of God (Westermann 1984:160). The concept of blessing is a relevant one which inheres in the correspondence of humans to God and in human sexuality (Gen.1:26-28; 5:3; 9:7). Both correspondence and sexuality are part of the blessing bestowed upon humans by *Yahweh*. In my opinion, the blessing of sexuality is preceded in the Divine utterance “be fruitful and multiply” by the first requirement to reproduce a divine character in humans and this should be seen as one of two separate kinds of implementing actions necessary to answer the imperative to “have dominion” (Gen.1:28). The importance of character and sexuality as blessings inherent in the divine image lies in the fact that it is by a process of a responsible and accountable stewardship of creation and of sexual “re-generation” that the transmission of the *imago Dei* is possible. Seth the third son of both Adam and Eve is a good primeval portrayal of this combination of godly character and godly offspring (Gen. 5:1-3).

Fretheim (2005:4) prefers to describe this as a process of continuous creation rather than of blessing. In my own opinion the understanding of blessing and of continual creation in the views of both Westermann and Fretheim is more a matter of semantics than of exegesis. The dynamics of being the *imago Dei* literally issues in blessing itself which in

Genesis 1:28 lead to continuity of creation and vice versa. Again, Fretheim's (2005:4) idea of the confinement of creation as the ultimate meaning of providence does not tell the whole story. It is fairer to view Westermann's category of blessing as not being necessarily synonymous with creative "*inertia*". It will be inconceivable to think of blessing where the character of God is lacking. The implication of this in Genesis 1:28 is that the procreative process of humans becomes more meaningful within the context of a reproduction of the divine image in humans, and this image is godly character! (cf. Westermann 1984:160).

This brings us back to the third point in our argument with respect to the distinctiveness of the priestly hand in Genesis. Westermann picks up Gerhard von Rad's tendency to differentiate between the theologies of the priestly and the *Yahwistic* editors. His commentary on Genesis became an example in this trend in which he ignored the traditional documentary hypothesis and presented all the authors of Genesis – priestly, Elohist, Yahwistic or Deuteronomistic as mediators of oral, but ancient traditions. Therefore the redactors whose works brought the Biblical material into its contemporary shape and form could only be evaluated against the background of their predecessors. Furthermore, it necessitates a gleaning from both extra-biblical materials and ancient Near Eastern literary culture to better appreciate and exegete the Biblical text (Westermann 1984:38). As stated by Bruce Vawter (1997:30) such an interpretation of Genesis would almost assume an unfolding of revelatory data rather than an accretive process of historical matter, yet the seriousness of the historical motif in Genesis itself cannot and need not be ruled out (Vawter 1997:31).

Finally, Westermann's perspective on tradition-history included the use of extra-biblical material in the interpretation of the *imago Dei*. It is almost like making a u-turn from the dialectical method with which he began when he clearly emphasised "It is not possible to explain (*imago Dei*) without taking into account the history of its tradition" (Westermann 1984:38). He denied the veracity of the claim by older Genesis commentaries that the *imago Dei* is a peculiarly Biblical theme, by giving examples of similar concepts extant in ancient Egyptian and Babylonian culture. In this way he underscored the possibility of encountering similar concepts in other human cultures.

Apparently, Westermann's commentary on Genesis 1-11 like his later commentary on Genesis 37-50 attempts to provide answers to form-critical questions using a literary-critical approach. In attempting to determine the genre of Genesis a combination of

tradition-historical and literary-critical method were then used by him (Westermann 1986:20). Since 1779 when the enquiry into the nature and origin of Genesis 1 began several views on it have been bequeathed on Biblical scholarship.⁴⁷ He would consider the Yahwistic narrative on the fall and its consequences for the burgeoning human estate as not central in understanding salvation history.

He does not associate this with salvation history, because he treats Genesis 3 as accretive to the genre rather than as unfolding from within its immediate narrative context. Humans are therefore portrayed in the text as in their proper creaturely state for every place and time (Fretheim 2005:71). While avoiding a literary-historical approach in his close reading, Westermann also does not take an ideological-dogmatically principled approach. As far as he is concerned those are two extremes that should be avoided (Westermann 1984:158-161). This, in my opinion, is a crucial flaw in Westermann's interpretations of the events in Genesis. Perhaps, one should not pre-judge his motives but it is clear that his close reading of the text has rightly excluded a fall language. However, it should not by that token ignore human vulnerability and responsibility (Fretheim 2005:71). Moreover, his work at the recovery of creation as a defining theological theme is noteworthy. Also noteworthy is a variety of his writings especially his views of God as a benefactor who has infused creation with capacities for fruitfulness and abundance (cf. Brueggemann 2002:xiii).

The final part of our overview of existing scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and land use has benefited from the vast scholarly insight on two re-occurring themes, namely the *imago Dei* and creation theology – the latter to be taken up presently.

2.3.1.4 Jewish perspectives of interpretation

Prior to doing that, it is important to point out a general Jewish perspective of interpretations which essentially has been critical of the literary-critical mode of interpretation. The latter has tended to a dualistic, even a trichotomic interpretation of the

⁴⁷ The scholars who have in one form or the other contributed to the ongoing discussion as to the origin and content of Genesis 1 includes: W.H. Schmidt, J.G. Eichhorn, W.C.L. Ziegler, J.P. Gabler, E. Ewald and E. Schrader, H. Gunkel, F. Schwally and B. Stade, R. Kittel, J. Morgenstein, M. Lambert, B.P. Humbert. In Westermann's opinion, the precise significance of the structure of Gen.1 can only be grasped in the context of the overall theological outlook of the Priestly writing. The situation in life (*Sitz im Leben*) of Gen.1 is that it is not only part of the Genesis 1-11 primeval account and the Pentateuch, but also that it is part of a particular cycle of creation narratives or stories. See Westermann (1984: 85-91).

imago Dei, whereas the Jewish interpretation has been more holistic with an ideological-dogmatically principled view (Jónsson 1988:170). Although there is not much difference in the outcome of both modes of interpretation of the *imago Dei*, it is important to note that Jewish scholars have not taken kindly to a Western hermeneutics which seeks to apply dualistic standards in the authorship and dating of the *Torah*, not the least the priestly document.

Instead, Jewish scholars like Benno Jacob, Yehezkel Kaufmann, Moshe Weinfeld, and Umberto Cassuto consider Julius Wellhausen's JEDP theory (or even its EDJP modification by Van Seters)⁴⁸ as essentially derogatory of Jewish Torah and orthodoxy. In their attempt to bring about a corrective, Jewish scholars particularly Umberto Cassuto, Moshe Weinfeld and Samuel Loewenstamm have introduced a new dimension as Biblicists to the discussion of the *imago Dei* in particular and creation in general. In all of their exegesis the Jewish scholars emphasised that the Biblical text constitutes the primary tool of exegesis regardless of the interests of the author. Their approach has therefore not deviated from a literary-critical approach (Fretheim 2005:36).

Umberto Cassuto maintains that the phrase "in our image and likeness" is better understood in the light of anthropomorphic conceptions of Deity that was prevalent not only in the ancient Near East, but also in other parts of the world as well. Man is like other creatures in terms of his corporeality, but not like them in terms of his thinking faculty and conscience (Cassuto 1978:56). Moreover, Cassuto is of the opinion that editorial circumstances of Genesis 1-2 perhaps impacted on the understanding associated with this passage which with the passage of time shifted from a corporeal to a more spiritualised one (Cassuto 1978:56).

On his part Weinfeld maintained that the divine image consists of the physical form of humans; and he certainly does not, like most of his other Jewish scholars share in the general consensus among Christian exegetes that the Old Testament puts forward a holistic view of humans (Weinfeld 1972:184). Weinfeld does not berate the link of Genesis 1 with ancient Near Eastern creation myths, but insists that "the Israelite school which roots lay in the temple drew its inspiration from the divine sphere" as did the Deuteronomic

⁴⁸ In the opinion of V.P. Hamilton there are several reasons to disagree with the purely literal motives behind the documentary hypothesis in its original form as well in its various modifications. A purely literal work would not take various recensions of the same text into account, nor would it be guided by the same patriarchal motif based upon earlier rather than concurrent traditions. It is important that not much attention is paid to such hypothesis today. See Hamilton (1990:22-26).

school “which was rooted in court reality” and so “drew its inspiration from the political-national sphere”. Genesis 1:26-28 to Weinfeld is certainly older than the exile, and its imagery of humans as created in the image and likeness of God is not a product of an exilic or post-exilic imagination but one deeply ingrained in the theological antiquity of the Jewish people. Evidence of similarly held theological value is extant in ancient Near Eastern antiquities as well (Weinfeld 1972:198-201).

Finally, Loewenstamm follows a line which subsequently has attracted an increasing number of adherents within this area of study (Jónsson 1988:177). He maintains that the notion of the divine image in humans developed according to patterns of Oriental thought, in which the king is compared to a god. He links the concept of the image of God to an inbred Jewish consciousness of their “elect” status in the committee of nations. The *imago Dei* serves to portray the Jewish nation as one with a royal calling which identifies them with *Yahweh* – the God of creation whose representation they bear – an idea that would be resonating with similar ancient Near Eastern concepts of the royalty as an embodiment and representation of Deity (Jonsson 1988:177). On the whole it is observed that Jewish interest in the *imago Dei* is not as great as it is among Christian scholars (Jónsson 1988:178). In fact, there is a reluctance to define the meaning of the *imago Dei* even in rabbinic circles, perhaps due to a general Jewish cultural commitment to challenge anthropomorphic descriptions of the Divine (Krause 2005:362).

From the foregoing trend of scholarly views, we arrive at the following conclusions: First, on the part of the non-Jewish scholars – that is the German and Scandinavian school – there is much more agreement now than ever before on what the whole *imago Dei* debate really entails or means, yet it has not been totally rid of ambiguity (Towner 2005:341). There is the hermeneutical principle of letting each Biblical context interpret the meaning of a particular text, and in the case of Genesis 1:26-28 humans, designed in the image of God are - by the principle of context – to rule over the natural animated creation – the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field as well. It is not clear if the rule over fellow humans is intended even when Genesis 9:6 are brought into the picture. However, it is those violations of humans or of nature by other humans that constitutes a violation of the *imago Dei* principle and must be retributively corrected.

With respect to land, it is a natural habitat of all of these creatures and belongs to *Yahweh*. Therefore it cannot be bought or sold on an individual or corporate basis permanently:

“The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev. 25:23).

Second, on the part of the Jewish scholars, the *imago Dei* provides a link in the royal ideology between Jewish people and their God in the same way that ancient Near Eastern monarchs are often described as representations of the gods. In the case of Jewish interpretation, it is the same ancient Near Eastern idea writ large or democratised (Sarna 1989:13).

Finally, in bringing this second part of the discussion to a close we no doubt have gained a clearer definition of the meaning of the *imago Dei*, and this enhances our understanding of the Biblical concept of stewardship rooted in human status as representations though not representatives of the Divine (Middleton 2005:46-47).

Next we are to examine the scholarly views on the relationship between the *imago Dei* and creation or nature, the very context in which land is situated, and to see the extent to which dominion and rule in Genesis 1:26-28 can be applied to land ownership and use in a general sense keeping in mind the universal concept of Divine ownership of the earth and its fullness (Middleton 2005:50-51). To do this will require that we critically examine the Jewish, the historical-critical, and the evangelical positions on creation (Fretheim 2005:1; Brueggemann 2002:xi) in order to see the scholarly trend portrayed in their respective views, along with other scholars whose views will contribute to the discussion. We have reserved a discussion of the relational aspect of the *imago Dei* which is the central theme of creationism (Fretheim 2005:1). That is the aspect in which is emphasised the humans-in-partnership discourse which is a perspective of creation later to be discussed (Fretheim 2005:269).

2.3.2 Old Testament scholarly views on land ownership and use

The Old Testament invites a return to an alternative style of land ownership and use which respects boundaries and upholds the principle of integrity for land owners and users alike. However, it is one that is constantly in need of interpretation in order to be related to contemporary problems and opportunities of land ownership and use (Brueggemann 2002:xxiii). W. Brueggemann (2002:xii) identified a trend of Old Testament analysis that has overtaken an earlier horizon of historical-critical analysis, and according to him this trend can prove invaluable in the recovery of creation theology. The latter has become a

major motif in Old Testament studies but has also benefited from all the previous insights gained from the beginning in the wake of “Blood and Soil” religion. At that time movement was from creation to history with G. von Rad and G. Ernest Wright leading the way until the 1980s and 90s when the trend of scholarship once again shifted from history back to creation (Brueggemann 2002:xii).

This renewed emphasis on creation theology is expressed in all the analysis so far done on the ancient Near East and in the Old Testament scholarly views. Interestingly, a discussion of creational theology has revolved around Jewish, historical-critical, and evangelical trends of interpretation with scholars such as Nahum Sarna (1989) and E. A. Speier (1987) belonging to a Jewish category. Other scholars like Claus Westermann (1984), S.B. Parker (1994), J. Blenkinsopp, T. Fretheim (1994), W.S. Towner, and G. Von Rad basically employ the historical-critical method. There is a third category – the evangelical – into which K.A. Matthews (1996), V.P. Hamilton (1990) and G.J. Wenham (1987) all fit.

Westermann has worked at the recovery of creation as a defining theological theme in a variety of writings but none is more important than his programmatic essay of 1974 in which the God of deliverance (through historical deeds) is seen to be as well the God of blessing who has infused creation with capacities for fruitfulness and abundance (Westermann 1984:3-30, 160-61). He has been followed by others like Brueggemann (2002) and Fretheim (2005). However, whereas Westermann has depended on a historical-critical mode of analysis, the latter scholars have employed similar literary-critical methods prominently along with historical criticism. Others like Brevard Child went even further to employ a “canon-critical” approach with the result that research results and write ups have lacked in theological rigour and clarity.

We have dealt extensively with an aspect of the historical-critical tradition in the preceding section on stewardship and the *imago Dei*, and can now consider its Jewish scholarly views on creation and land ownership, leaving us with a third component – evangelical scholarly views which will be taken up following the Jewish interpretation.

2.3.2.1 The Jewish interpretation

A Jewish view of creation represented in the writings of Nahum Sarna (1989), E.A. Speiser (1987), and Umberto Cassuto (1978) is essentially theocentric. It underscores the fact that

humans were created last in a manifestly “ascending, gradational order” (Sarna 1989:10-13). Humans unlike the rest of creation, were created after a careful Divine self-deliberation *na-aseh* ‘adam signalled in the Genesis 1:26-28 narrative by the replacement of the simple impersonal Hebrew command (the jussive) with a personal, strongly expressed resolve (cohortative). The divine intent and purpose are solemnly declared in advance, and the stereotyped formula “and it was so” gives way to the thrice repeated avowal that God created the man, using the significant verb *bara* in Genesis 1:27. The various interpretations surrounding this shall be dealt with extensively in the fifth chapter.

It is instructive to note however the fact that humans are conferred with special privileges including stewardship rights over nature in ways specifically depicted in the Jewish view (Cassuto 1978:8-9). In this regard Sarna’s view does not differ in any significant way with the representation view of Von Rad, and shows a convergence with the historical-critical approach (Sarna 1989:12). Essentially, Von Rad’s idea which Sarna also shares is that the creation of humans “in the image of God” furnishes the added dimension of humans being the symbols of God’s presence on earth. While humans can be said to be far from divine, their very existence “bears witness to the activity of God in the life of the world”.⁴⁹ This awareness goes with an awesome responsibility particularly in the way humans treat nature and the environment in which they live.

The heart and essence of the Jewish view is this special relationship of humans to God almost equalling the status of kings and queens of God on earth (Sarna 1989:12). Humans are to enjoy such a unique relationship with God who communicates with them alone and who shares a unique relationship with them in the custody and administration of the world. That notwithstanding in the Jewish language it does not mince words that though exalted to represent divinity, yet humans are to be sustained on the same level as the beasts of the field – through feeding on the terrestrial vegetation and crops (Speiser 1987:7). They are to share in common vegetarian diet with the animals, thus depicting the likeness to creatures and to the earth as well as the Godlike qualities. In the commentary on this mysterious duality in the Genesis 1:26-28 narrative, the awesome power at the command of humans and their utter insignificance compared to God in Psalm 8:4-7:

“When I consider your heavens, the moon and stars the works of your own hands, what is human that you are mindful of them, or the children of humans that you care for them? You have made them the rulers over the works of your own hands and have crowned them with loving-kindness and with honour, and you have

⁴⁹ Sarna (1989:12).

put all things under their feet – the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and the beasts of the field”.

Consequently, various scholars have linked human stewardship, land ownership and use to these same verses and some scientists have traced our present global ecological crisis to the interpretations which scholars have given to these same verses (Birch 1991:89; Vallet 2001:28). However, it is a regal vocabulary which implies nurture and care. This becomes even more vivid, when compared to the terminology employed in Genesis 2:26, and betrays its ancient Near Eastern origin. In the latter context such texts served to elevate the king above the ordinary run of humans, but do not exonerate the king from *sedeqah* – the maintenance of an order in the realm in which no human or animals is oppressed. If anything, the Bible narratives have democratised what in Mesopotamia and Egypt was a royal prerogative: the observance of *ma’at* by those who bear the image of God.

In the same vein the author of Psalm 8 amplifies this basic and unique position occupied by mankind in creation. While humans are not divine, they are characterised as the image of God with the implication that humans are the symbol of the presence of God on earth, much like the Assyrian gods are symbolised by a winged disc, sun disc etc. Human existence bears witness to the activity of God in the life of the world. An awareness of the special place occupied by humans entail an awesome responsibility and imposes an ethic of living that brings human purposes into conformity with those of Deity as originally intended. Neither should much fuss be made about *şelem* and *demuth*, “image” and “likeness”. Investigations of Assyrian-Aramaic sources have shown that the two terms are used interchangeably and indiscriminately and should not here be used as a source of differentiation. Parallelisms are a feature of Hebrew literary art.

It is important to underscore this point because the two major world religions which have a considerable following in Nigeria, namely, Judaism and Christianity hold these Hebrew Scriptures as the authentic “received” text. Interestingly, the Hebrew Scriptures which are synonymous with the Masoretic Text have been the basis of scholarly analysis through the centuries. In its *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* rendering, it is also synonymous with the Old Testament as known to us today (Tov 1992:393-412). Its resonance with culture as depicted in Africa has been a subject of much interest and discussion (West 2005:64-65).

2.3.2.2 The Evangelical interpretation

The evangelical writings of K.A. Matthews (1996), V.P. Hamilton (1990) and G.J. Wenham (1987) have been of much interest in the critical analysis of the trend of scholarly opinions with respect to creation and especially the *imago Dei*. Generally, it is stated that Genesis 1:26-28 must be interpreted within the broader context of Genesis 1:1-2:25. In the opinion of the leading proponent of this view:

“We live in a world in which God’s word does not change, but in the context of a changing world we have to interpret and apply God’s Word for God’s people in the light of new findings by scholars and a new variety of challenges to the Gospel message” (Matthews 1996:7).

With such a strong heritage in which the divine inspiration, inerrancy, complete truthfulness, and full authority of the Bible is affirmed, the evangelical position leaves less room for critical hermeneutics such as is warranted by a postcolonial hermeneutics. The standard of interpretation of texts such as Genesis 1-2 must be its “confessional” position and its rootedness in the evangelical tradition stated above. The theological structure and content of Genesis for instance is likely to illuminate its historical meaning as well as contemporary significance (Matthews 1996:7). Such uncritical reading has been minimised by the need to apply Genesis 1:26-28 to a context in which previous colonial readings has proved a handicap in providing explanations to the present ecological crisis in the Niger Delta. Yet it is important to note the way the evangelical views are expressed.

Genesis 1:26-28 is one of the three divine programmatic expectations first mentioned in Genesis. The others are God’s ultimate victory over the enemies of humankind (Gen.3:15) and God’s purposes brought about through the Abrahamic seed (Gen.12:1-3) – namely the man Christ Jesus. This core narrative belongs to a single tradition of redaction – the priestly – and embraces the two complementary creation accounts Genesis 1:1-2:25. Although Matthews (1996), Hamilton (1990), and others like, Westermann (1978), Rendtorff (1992), and Lohfink (1994) approach the issues differently each from his own theology and presupposition, they are all united in the view that a majority of the promise speeches in Genesis are accretions rather than an unfolding of an overarching divine intention⁵⁰. However, as J. Antonelli (1997: xxi) has pointed out the principle of context in exegesis is crucial to the proper interpretation of any text. The same point is also made by Wenham (1987: xlv-xlvi) that correct exegesis of Genesis 1:26-28 demands that we know

⁵⁰ See Westermann (1984:49).

what it meant to its final editor and its first readers as well. Modern readers with a world view moulded by modern science find it hard to relate Genesis to the rest of their thinking.

It is therefore the conviction of evangelical scholars that many of the problems are caused by a misunderstanding of the original intentions of Genesis (Wenham 1987: xlv-xlvi). Only when the editors' major points are grasped can many of the clashes between his and our worldviews be eliminated (Wenham 1987: xlv-xlvi). Words are not univocal like scientific symbols, but they have a variety of meanings. The context makes clear which meaning is intended. The primary meaning of man in Genesis is "human being" or "human race", and a hearer or reader generally understands this term in this way, unless the reference is clearly demanding a sense of "adult male" in the context in which it is used (Wenham 1987: lii).

In my opinion the interpretation of any text begins with its exegesis (Goldsworthy 2000:526). Exegesis aims at finding out what the text meant to its original audience or Biblical context. Hermeneutics or interpretation requires that we limit our understanding of the text to its meaning in its original context, but more importantly in the light of the overarching theme of humans as the "image of God" (Goldsworthy 2000:526). A text which resonates with the cosmology of various ancient Near Eastern contexts can be an unfolding of a long standing tradition rather than an accretion from sources external to itself. Be that as it may, the recognition of a mediatory function by humans between God and the rest of creation is quite in consonant with the Biblical symbolism of human's imaging capacity of the divine (Wenham 1987:32-33).

This symbolism in Genesis 1-2 in Hamilton's opinion makes it an interesting book to read (Hamilton 1990:42-52). The text and context of the narrative suggests a paradisiacal world and the family that inhabits that world are introduced. Their initial home is a place of blessing and one unsullied by sin. The God-hating snake is absent, a phenomenon that is true again in the last two chapters of Revelation. However, the titanic struggle between the forces of God and the forces of evil is seen in the parenthetical chapters of Genesis 3 – Revelation 20⁵¹. In these chapters the human mediatory function becomes sublimated to

⁵¹ According to a report from the Centre for Health and the Global Environment a third of Nigerian electorate believes in the literal truth of the apocalypse. Millions of Christian evangelicals may therefore believe that environmental destruction is not only to be disregarded but actually welcomed – even hastened – as a sign of the coming apocalypse. Views such as this run counter to the express need for ecological justice and environmental rectitude.

the Divine plan to bring all things under the perfect human – Christ Jesus (Goldsworthy 2006:526).

In the meantime, Genesis 1-2 introduces humans who are not yet fruitful and multiplying, but live under the blessing of God. His relationship with God, with himself and with his spouse, with the soil, and with the animals is in order. They are blessed. That means the absence of friction, with everything working in harmony with God's avowed intention. The same scenario is created in Revelation 21-22 which is reminiscent of an Eden of celestial scenery depicting the final triumph of good over evil and the reinstatement of redeemed humanity in a paradisiacal condition of life "in the presence of God" forever (Hamilton 1990:42-52).

It is instructive to note that the evangelical position, uncritical as it may seem does not endorse the views of absolute rule over the creation by humans, particularly from an Old Testament perspective. There are various eschatological understandings of creation which portray it as being in desperate need of a final redemption. Such views are altogether outside the purview of our discussion. Yet this cannot be implied even in the New Testament texts, when the rule of context is applied and the intention of the original author or the interpretation of the original audience is discerned (Birch 1991:89). A correct reading of the text demands that the rule of context has to apply. Moreover, Jewish readers do not read exploitation or subjugation of animals or humans, but a nurturing utilisation of the earth's resources in a humane and responsible manner. The evangelical position, as Matthew (1996:174-75) has noted, sees this appointment of humans by God in Genesis 1-2 to prominence as a privilege granted to the human family with a corresponding responsibility as "caretakers" (Gen.2:15).

Such a responsibility reflects in the Hebrew love for life or the sacredness of all life which, in the evangelical purview, links the human *ṣedeqah* (righteousness) to the welfare of the earth (Matthews 1996:174-75). The ancient Israelites believed that they were in a covenant relationship to *Yahweh* and then to one another. This idea was deeply ingrained in the religious life of ancient Israel and was an all embracing theme in their liturgy. Genesis 1-2 is usually seen, in evangelical circles, as belonging to an unfolding ancient Israelite liturgical tradition more than it does to an accretive liturgy. The prevalence of

polytheistic mystery religion in the surrounding pagan world of the ancient Near East makes the accretive option so unlikely (Evans 2003:897-99).

A third point is that the evangelical interpretation does not shove the creation narratives aside by simply dubbing them as mythical and therefore a-historical. Instead, it creates a “tag” – theological or kerygmatic – attached to them such that these creation stories are not simply dismissed by so called “scientific” form-critical analysts. From the point of view of the latter, these creation narratives usually fall under the category of myth because they are pre-scientific or non-scientific in their world view. The evangelicals dismiss this simplistic understanding of “scientific” by insisting that these narratives depict the work of a supernatural being, as well as of impersonal laws and forces which by nature cannot be subjected to scientific analysis.

Thus a process of hermeneutical engagement with Genesis 1-11 has to be in an objective “demythologised” style in order for ordinary people to appreciate and understand that portion of Scripture. Rudolf Bultmann’s hermeneutical presupposition, however, is also problematic, namely, whether the story is historical is inconsequential; what is important is its teachings. Hamilton (1990:57) considers it too rationalistic and philosophical. In order to be hermeneutically relevant in the understanding of ordinary readers, an approach to hermeneutics which is phenomenological is important.

A few scholars who take this phenomenological option also consider Genesis 1-11 as neither mythical nor historical. If Brevard Childs’ definition of myth is considered as “a form by which the existing structure of reality is understood and maintained” and as one which “concerns itself with showing how an action of a Deity, conceived of as occurring in the primeval age, determines a phase of contemporary world order” then “demythologising” the text for Bultmann and for Childs meant different things (Childs 1985:388; Hamilton 1990:58). Whereas the former sees the process as involving excising from the text those elements that do not fit within the parameters of Old Testament faith, the latter considers the process as conspicuously lacking in phenomenology. In my opinion, Old Testament faith calls for phenomenology in Genesis 1-11 as well as for an understanding that is *so/a fide*.

It is only with a phenomenological option that we can appreciate the seriousness in the way the Old Testament seems to handle the issue of land ownership and use, ecological integrity and environmental sensitivity. It is also within the parameters of Old Testament

faith that the Jewish, the evangelical and the literary-historical methods converge in showing particularly how each interpretative model of Genesis 1:26-28 impacts on man's stewardship, responsibility and accountability. This convergence has not been and need not be ignored by Biblical scholars (Wright 1978:58). As both Wright and Hall (1990:33) have observed, all human rights exercised over the land emanated from a strong sense of land as a gift from God. Similarly, the realisation that God owned the land also inspired a high level of responsibility on those who used the land. Responsibilities in this case were wide ranging embracing responsibility to God, to one's family, and to one's neighbours on a routine basis. This point has been elaborated in a nutshell but need not detain us.⁵² In the following section a literary-critical method of analysis which stands on the shoulders of the historical-critical method is further examined (Brueggemann 2002:xxiii).

2.3.2.3 Historical-critical interpretation

A brief account of the historical-critical approach to interpretation will be given from a pre-war and a post-war perspective in the following sub-sections.

2.3.2.3a Before the Second World War

The seminal article by G. von Rad in the 1930s on creation had focused on creation in reaction to theological anthropomorphism which seemed to limit theological discourse to cultural-social political realities giving no vent to an eschatological hope. During this period creation was understood from the point of view of redemption. As part of salvation history, Genesis 1-2 has served as a generative piece in furthering reflections on creation in the

⁵² It is stated that first, there was the responsibility to God, which included the payment of tithes and first fruits of the harvest, other harvest laws, and the observance of the sabbatical regulations as it affected land – the fallow year and the release of debt-pledges. Second, responsibility to the family included the fundamental law of inalienability – that is, that land was not to be bought or sold commercially but preserved within the kinship framework. Other kinship responsibilities, which supported kinship land retention, were – the redemption procedures, inheritance rules and Levirate marriage. Third, responsibility towards one's neighbours included motley of legislations and civil obligations ensuring safety precautions, share-cropping, respecting the integrity of boundaries, generosity in leaving harvest gleanings for the less privileged, fair treatment of employees, and indeed of working animals. According to Wright (1983:58-59):

“So many of the detailed instructions of the law come into the category of responsibility in respect of the land directly or indirectly, that it is easily the most comprehensive of the ethical-theological principles governing the law. It is believed that God owns the land. He demands accountability in the use of it from His tenants.”

Old Testament, but the subordination of creation to redemption proved worrisome to scholars like Walter Brueggemann (1993) who in critiquing Von Rad's article pointed out that the creation theme rather than being sublime, actually depicts humanity's essential purpose. Yet the recovery of the creation theme from the doldrums into which natural theology has dumped it made Von Rad's article even more timely and commendable.

Other scholars who critiqued Von Rad's article were Norbert Lohfink (1994) and Reventlow (1994). In his own opinion there were at least eleven reasons why creation had to be neglected for so long which space does not permit a listing of all of them. Mention can be made of 1) a focus on history, particularly salvation history at the expense of nature; 2) an existentialism that tends to see all reality from the perspective of human existence, and 3) an emphasis on the spiritual and other-worldly dimensions of religious life to the neglect of the bodily and earthly dimension of spirituality (Fretheim 2005: ix-x). Thus the historical-critical method had as its theme a soteriology that was humanistic and ignored naturalism. This served the primal purpose of a dichotomy between humans and nature which fostered existential ends. This point is reiterated in Fretheim's eleven point analyses; even though he does not ignore a concept of creation *continua* which ultimate end is eschatological.

However, the inadequacies of the tradition-historical method led to a consideration of other methods such as the historical-critical method and the rhetoric that goes with it (Brueggemann 2002:xxi). The earlier method was noted for its inability to deal with the contemporary crisis of land, contemporary in the sense of the many land disputes and ecological issues of the day including that of Israel and the Palestinians, as well as presumably the Niger Delta "restiveness" agenda. The need to move away from a static mode of reflection into a more dynamic mode of reflection makes the use of a historical-critical approach imperative.

2.3.2.3b After the Second World War

You would recall the royal categories attached to the *imago Dei* by interpreters such as Ivan Engell whose traditional-historical method of interpretation begun in the early 40s was in vogue even in the mid-60s. It made it possible for the idea to receive a serious emphasis both within and outside theological circles with a consensus of opinion that humans' pristine role on earth is to serve as the Creator's vice-regents! (Towner 2005:347).

In all of this emphasis and indeed against all odds, scholars have enabled creation theology to assume a more prominent (and rightful) place in Old Testament theology by several other important Biblical-theological developments in the last generation. It has been a generation of renewed interest in books and articles dealing with creation in the Hebrew Bible, and this dissertation is another step in that direction. Thanks to Biblical scholars who took the issue of creation, nature and humans in the Bible out of its purely Hebraic applications to a broader perspective including the ancient Near Eastern perspective. The latter emphasis had begun with Gerhard von Rad, but it is Claus Westermann's book on Creation in 1984 and on Blessing in the Bible and in the life of the Church in 1986 which traced the origin of creationism to both the Bible and Hellenistic influences, and was followed by others. For instance H.H. Schmid focused specifically on an understanding of justice in the context of creation similar to the work of Klaus Koch with which Schmid's work has been linked (Fretheim 2005:xii).

The unique thing about Schmid is that he brought together the writings of several important articles into one volume – articles by W. Anderson; H. Gunkel; Von Rad; W. Eichrodt, D. J. McCarthy; C. Westermann; H.J. Hermisson and G.M. Landes. A publication similar to that of Schmid which also proposed the centrality of creation in Old Testament theology is that of Rolf Knierim (1995:43) who in a series of essays removed creation from the margins of theological reflections and made it the pivot of salvation history. His statement that “*Yahweh's* relationship to universal reality as expressed in the theology of creation can be discerned in the final analysis as what is at issue in the Old Testament” makes a very interesting reading. By means of the writings of these scholars apparently from a Western milieu, one can already see how creation became central in the understanding of justice and righteousness in relation to for instance environment and ecology. This pointer to the importance of environment and ecology has been in a holistic view of human stewardship of creation and comes from O.H. Steck in 1980 who apparently was influenced by W. Anderson's creation / chaos dichotomy. Later in 1988 John D. Stevenson – a Hebrew scholar interpreted this dichotomy as due to the titanic struggle between the forces of good and of evil reflected in the Jewish drama of Divine omnipotence.

However, the slow pace of creation theology in taking hold of mainline theological reflections in the Biblical disciplines has also been underscored by Fretheim (2005:xi) following on Brevard S. Childs (1985) who earlier traced this slow pace to an over-

dependence on Israel's historical encounter with God as Redeemer, with only a secondary incorporation of creation theology into the faith. H. D. Preuss (1995:185-208) seem to be making similar allusions to the marginalisation of creation theology in the Old Testament.

In line with prevailing trends Preuss (1995:114-140) subsumes creation under history as a "historical act" or as "an extension of salvation history". In 1994 there was an article which appeared in a translation by Linda Moloney, and another by Reventlow "Creation as a topic", an article which formed part of a bigger book by Reventlow and Hoffman, *Creation in Jewish and Christian tradition*. The overriding objective was to free creation, nature and humanity from the margins to which Israel's overwhelming theme of salvation history has cast it. Lohfink (1974:193-201) took up this theme in an extensive discussion, but G.E. Wright's (1950:9, 17-19) work have been the most influential in pointing out the need to separate creation, nature and history and to stimulate the academy's interest in an area in which Israelite theology seemed least interested. These writers apparently justified Fretheim's thesis that the sublimation of creation to salvation history is unwarranted, and along with Von Rad emphasised the need to recover creation, nature and humans from such an obscurantist theology.

Obviously the discourse was becoming more circular until 1999 when B.W. Anderson came out with his book *Contours of Old Testament Theology* published by Fortress. In this timely book Anderson transcended traditional categories and moved Old Testament discussion from chaos to creation, then to new creation. He depicted creation as a central theme in the Abrahamic covenant and sees the Noachic covenant as prefacing the former. Not only would this capture the attention of Jewish scholars, but it also stimulated the interests of non-Jewish scholars like E. Gerstenberger (2002) *Theologies in the Old Testament*.⁵³ The tendency in Gerstenberger's treatise is to give a general overview of various theological configurations in Israel at the domestic, communal, local and national levels and so his interest in ecological matters did not go very far.

On the whole therefore creation theology suffered from a marginalisation syndrome in all but Brueggemann's theology of the Old Testament (1997) in which he arrived at a mid-point of theological reflections on creation as it now stands. Interestingly, also

⁵³ Admittedly Gerstenberger focused on the historical approach to Old Testament theologies; his ecological sensitivity is clearly stated in the opening pages 7-12 but with little sustained reflection on the theme of creation.

Brueggemann's theology of land also concludes on an eschatological note the same way Fretheim's does, adding that "It has never been well with those who use military-political powers to crush opposition in order to control more land". In other words those who forget the warning voice of *Yahweh*, the ultimate land owner, imagine that "the might of my hands have gotten me this wealth" (Dt. 8:17), and in so doing have chosen death both directly for themselves in less visible but inescapable ways (Brueggemann 2002:xvii).

Beside a historical-critical approach, it also necessitated the use of socio-rhetorical analysis of the Biblical data in an attempt to integrate insights from other methods of Biblical analysis. This is with a view to achieving two objectives:

First, exploring the world behind the text in order to open the text to the world before it, both present and future; and,

Second, drawing attention to the text as a rhetorical discourse seeking to persuade its audience to accept its culture and possibly adopt them (Megbelayin 2005:51ff).

Rhetoric as a tool of a historical-critical analysis of the Biblical text has proved invaluable in the hands of scholars like Walter Brueggemann. Such usages might entail an understanding of texts as acts of constructive imagination that playfully generate, entertain and legitimise thinkable social arrangements concerning the land providing alternatives to the facts on the ground (Brueggemann 2002:xxii). Yet both methods of analysis remained inseparable in their commitment to the Biblical canon as a historical literature which can be studied more critically in order to unravel its diverse literary genre and redaction. Interestingly the creation, land and *imago Dei* theme have been approached in this way, from a purely historical-critical analysis by Fretheim (2005), and with a pinch of rhetoric by Brueggemann (2002: xxii).

In referring to Genesis 1 in his earlier writing, Fretheim (1994:343) had underscored what he described as divine vulnerability in the creation narratives, whereby God is willing to share power with created things in the process of creating others. In other words God has always been in dialogue with creation in a process which resonates with what he describes as *creation continua* (Fretheim 2005:9). Continuing creation has to do with the ongoing development of those earthly conditions that are most conducive to the flourishing of life in view of new times and places. Given the realities of sin and evil in the world, such continuing creational activity will not proceed without significant opposition. But God will

be overtly and creatively at work in the often tragic effects of such overt and covert resistance, unceasingly seeking to bring good out of evil, to liberate the captives and to build up communities (Fretheim 2005:9).

Fretheim sounds eschatological in his attempt to engage the emerging conversation aimed at recovering a proper role of an Old Testament theological perspective of creation in Biblical theological reflection. The background to Fretheim's interpretation of Genesis does not seem so promising, when the works of Gerhard von Rad are considered. Brueggemann was not alone in the use of a socio-rhetorical approach, neither was Fretheim. There were other scholars like Walther Zimmerli (1971:1-165) whose optimism for the royal estate of humans on earth guided his study, but declared the older method of historical-criticism "bankrupt" and like Brevard Childs opted for "Canon criticism". Due to the paucity of materials the tendency is to critique "research result/write ups" as lacking in theological rigour and clarity. Such methodological crevices demand fillers which are contextually relevant and socio-rhetorically sensitive to both the text and context. In fact this has been the emphasis since the 1990s and methodological matters have tended to be clearer with social scientific approaches being adapted to suit both rhetorical criticism without dumping the historical-critical method of analysis (Brueggemann 2002:xxi).

Be that as it may, Fretheim (2005: xi) opines that the recent upsurge of interest in creational matters can be credited neither to the academy nor to the church. Instead, the credit will go to the recent emergence of an ecological consciousness, deeply set within an increasing number of individual psyches, with an expanding societal concern. In my opinion this is a correct assessment in view of the global outcry against the insensitivity of multi-national companies to the ecological integrity and environmental cleanliness of the areas in which they operated.

There is an interesting resonance between Old Testament theology of land and African concepts of custodianship of land. Both affirm that humans are stewards of land which has been inherited from the ancestors who in turn obtained land from the Deity as a gift, along with the enjoyment of creation. This resonates with the general belief of Ogba and Ekpeye people that creation *continua* is hinged on the upright character of the inhabitants of any particular territory. There is a "moral fibre" inherent in the created order which the Creator has built into the very infrastructure of creation and which makes for harmony. It is self-evident that the Biblical concept of creation *continua* means that God originated creation and ensures its rejuvenation through what the Egyptians call "*ma'at*" which is synonymous

with the Hebrew “*šedeqah*” or English “righteousness”. It is therefore the practice of righteousness by humans in the socio-political spheres which enhances this harmony in a proper integration of social and cosmic orders through human acts that are in tune with the rest of creation – a violation of which can have adverse consequences (Fretheim 2005:xiii).

An Old Testament scholar who expressed this notion earlier is B.C. Ollenburger (1987:60). He stated that a relationship exists between “*ma’at*” and the cosmic order, and that this link can be broadened to include not only origination and sustenance but also ultimate preservation. There is an *epigenesis* in the history of nature “that is, the continued emergence of new forms of reality at various stages in the history of nature.”

Thus a trend can be observed in this brand resurgence of interest in creation. As put by Rolf Rentoff (1992:204):

“The Hebrew begins and ends with creation. Old Testament theologies usually do not. How is that? The answer is obvious: because of the theologies of the respective authors of Old Testament theologies”.

His emphasis made an indelible but neglected mark on creationism and the concept of “theologies” has received further emphasis in the writings of Erhard Gerstenberger who deliberately identifies such diversity of theological trajectories with individual theologies, but also with communal, local and national theological worldviews. Even in ancient Israel theology – particularly creation theology was not uniformly conceptualised for instance as one moved from the Southern to the Northern Kingdom during for instance the first temple period (Gerstenberger 2002:224, 242-44). A visible evidence of this would be the Priestly narrative in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, which differs though in a complementary way from the Yahwist version in Genesis 2:4b-25.

In all of this there is not one author who addresses the question of stewardship of nature, land and creation in a head-on manner; even though James Barr (1993:33) succeeded in making stewardship an important part of human’s responsibility in creation. The advantage of Barr’s works is that he obviously points natural theology to its roots in Biblical theology, and thus removed the earlier objections that have been raised against naturalistic theology. One can observe the direction in which Barr’s work moved in making natural theology acceptable in the field of Old Testament scholarship, even though its relevance to the practice of stewardship by humans in respect of nature has been minimised. Moreover, there are lots of insights brought into the field of theological reflections by the intellectual

perspicuity of scholars like L.G. Perdue (1994) and R.A. Simkins (1994) respectively which are invaluable in a dissertation of this nature. Whereas Simkins analyses the Biblical and ancient Near Eastern texts with respect to Israel's view of nature, Perdue does the same but with a special focus on the relationship between Wisdom and Creation, thus pointing theologians to the invaluable resources available to creation theology in both ancient Near Eastern and ancient Israelite wisdom literature.

In my view, the theme of creation is presently an overarching one. A dissertation of this nature cannot but build on the seemingly solid foundation laid in both Biblical and theological ethics, nor can it ignore to tread on well beaten paths of scholarly insights into the issues at stake on stewardship, land ownership and use though not in a direct and non-polemical manner. Nevertheless, in both ways the route open to us requires a measure of an eclectic putting together of divergent views from for instance Barr's (1993:33) natural theology rooted in proper Biblical exegesis to theological and ethical notions in creation. Such a diversity of inconclusive reflections with respect to human responsibility for the present ecological crisis rocking our planet has been taken up in the fourth chapter, but suffice it to be said that bringing together polarised opinions to a point of convergence is useful in furthering and enhancing the ongoing debate on creation and human responsibility and accountability in the use of natural resources and in maintaining a healthy ecology, clean air, a green environment, and freedom of persons in all fields of human endeavour.

Such an interlinked perspective has also received added emphasis in scholarly circles with a focus on the ethical issues on creation, nature and humans in a way which merits attention. Fretheim (2005:xii) describes for instance the work by W.P. Brown as "perhaps the finest study on the creation in the Old Testament so far". The latter also combines Old Testament theology and ethics in a way described by Fretheim as "thoughtful exegesis and an imaginative use of language" (Fretheim 2005:xii). Creation has also been viewed from the point of view of the early prophets by W.R. Garr (2003:80-82) with much helpful discussions of exegetical and historical issues. Garr's detailed and sophisticated historical study focused on the priestly account of creation, especially on our pericope in Genesis 1:26-28, along with its Biblical and ancient Near Eastern parallels. A study edited by N.C. Habel appeared in a five-volume series and titled *The Earth Bible* (2000-2002) and consisted of introduction, Genesis, Wisdom Literature, Psalms, the Prophets and the New

Testament. It more or less became the first in a series of books in which the issues of eco-justice hermeneutics was taken up.⁵⁴

The awakening of interest in creation, land use, nature and stewardship has cut across various disciplines with special focus on eco-justice and eco-theology or eco-practice, but they are discussions which make the Old Testament texts their point of departure. These are too numerous to mention except for a few examples like the two by D.T. Hessel⁵⁵. Again, the examples of R.R. Reuters and H. Eaton shows that not even feminist theologians have been left out of the discussion. Evidently, the issues raised by eco-justice, eco-theology and eco-practice have attracted the attention of several scholars, including systematic theologians as, but space limits the mention of all of them.

Fretheim (2005:270-273) underscored the important work of J. Moltmann, D.J. Hall, K. Ward, L. Gilkey, C.E. Gunton, C. Keller, K. Tanner, F. Watson, P. Clayton, and P.R. Sponheim are all vital to the present conversation, especially in D.J. Hall's analysis of the looming danger resulting from creation and land use handled by humans in ways which show insensitivity to ecological and environmental issues. Besides helping us to deepen our theological reflections, such writings by Systematic theologians have also provided an interface between theology and science especially when the writings of J. Polkinghorne, Ian Barbour, A.R. Peacocke, T. Peters, R. Russel and N. Murphy are brought into focus⁵⁶.

Moreover, Fretheim (2005: xii) is also an example of an Old Testament scholar who has integrated the various insights of all the preceding authors into his discussion of a relational theology of creation. He makes occasional references to the work of these scholars in places where their links with the Biblical material seems pertinent. In his article of 1991 which appeared in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* under the title: "The Plague as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster", Fretheim was able to show that the Exodus 1-15 is not simply about historical deliverance, but it is about the disruption of creation. Taking up this theme, Brueggemann suggested that the manna narrative of Exodus 16 exhibits the

⁵⁴ The question which the book attempted to find answers to included, if the way the earth was being treated can be justified from the Biblical text, taking the earth as the subject and not the object of the treatment. It is more of reading the Biblical text from an earth perspective. See Habel [(ed) 2002].

⁵⁵ D.T. Hessel 1992 *After Nature's Revolt: Ecojustice and Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress, and his second book in 1996 *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide*. Maryknoll: Orbis

⁵⁶ Fretheim (2005) has given a very thorough-going discussion of these numerous contributors to creation theology and the reader is encouraged to consult his book *God and World in the Old Testament*.

full fruition of creation whereby even wilderness is made to be a place of nourishment by the creator God who turns every environment of disruption into a place of viable life (Brueggemann 2002:xiii).

In this way Fretheim captured an idea of what it means to be in partnership with creation, and later in his book *God and World in the Old Testament (2005)*, he is in a partnership with nature and describes this relational mode of life as one in which the “non-human but material life depends on various forms of human ‘dominion’ to subsist” (Fretheim 2005:270, 273). Although his creation theology is relational and by that token ethnocentric, he builds on interrelationships between God and humans, among humans, and between humans and nature in a way in which each is relatively independent of the other while being still mutually dependent. Thus he forges a hierarchy of interdependence among the creatures by placing the earth as needing the rains from the sky (Gen. 2:5) and as needing human care (Gen. 2:5,15) in order to fulfil its role of supporting life.

On the next level are the humans who innately depend on what the earth produces (along with the trees (Genesis 2:9,16) in every way but more importantly for sustenance, livelihood, and humans’ general wellbeing (Gen.1:29-30; 2:5-7,19). At the lowest level are the non-human but material life whose subsistence largely depends on human exercise of “dominion” over them. Apparently, Fretheim’s use of the word “partnership” in referring to this ongoing relation between nature and humans brings us to the pivot of this present discourse, because it clearly demonstrates the important role of “human care” in fostering a sustainable and prudent management of the earth’s depleting resources.

In my opinion, partnership is precisely what stewardship entails. In order for it to be responsible and accountable the inter-relationships does not necessarily have to be in a hierarchical order as Fretheim seems to have placed them, but in a partnership in which equity and justice are the watchwords. It is difficult to be in true partnership with nature until one is placed in an equal standing with nature. A superordinate / subordinate conception of humans in relation to nature does not improve upon the old Aristotelian conception that:

“Human beings participate in the divine as other animals do...but they ...participate more fully because they have understanding.” (Reeve 1998: xlv).

The participation depicted in the philosophical dimension has to be theologically rooted in a partnership in which relationship is not only with the Creator himself but also with fellow creatures. In this respect Paul Santmire’s praise of God for creation and nature makes an

interesting hymn. Moreover, Santmire (2003:32)⁵⁷ also observed such participation does not entail anything but a partnership requiring a relational role human vocation requires towards the non-human (Fretheim 2005:274). Thus participation and partnership in a relational role must transcend stewardship in the traditional sense, and bring it into a transformed sense in which humans exercise “rule” in a caring and nurturing way. Such are the corporate features of partnership which equates with a new sense of stewardship of an inclusive nature (Santmire 2003:32).

2.3.2.4 A summary of various trends of discussion

A summary of the various trends of discussion in Old Testament scholarship can be given briefly below: First of all, the historical-critical view considers any investigation of the Bible as similar to an engagement with any literary text, or more succinctly as all other ancient literature. In the opinion of Jónsson (1988:43.) this is a novelty that provides a basis for assessing the various approaches to Old Testament interpretation through the centuries. All four approaches investigated show that the historical-critical, the Jewish, the evangelical and lastly the socio-rhetorical are all in agreement that the text of the Old Testament is the primary object of analysis.

Whereas the Jewish interpreters consider the ancient Near East as providing a parallel source of authenticating the Genesis creation narratives, the Evangelical interpreters think that inter-textuality is the key to a correct hermeneutics. In the case of Jewish interpretation, the *imago Dei* is the same ancient Near Eastern idea writ large or democratised (Sarna 1989:13), whereas to the Evangelicals it is stated that Genesis 1:26-28 must be interpreted within the narrow context of Genesis 1:1-2:25, or at most the broader context of Psalm 8. Finally, a socio-rhetorical analysis have attempted to integrate insights from these other methods of Biblical analysis with an exploration of the world behind the text, that is the Israelite literary context gleaned from both the prophetic and sapiential oracles in order to better appreciate for instance Genesis 1:9 and open the text to the world of today.

⁵⁷ H.P. Santmire 2003 *Partnership with Nature According to Scriptures – Beyond the Theology of Stewardship*, CSR 32. See also his 1985 *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*. Philadelphia: Fortress; and 1986 *Toward a New Theology of Nature* Philadelphia: Fortress.

The next section will attempt to explore the scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and use in Africa as a distinct discourse which directly or indirectly influenced Biblical hermeneutics, the same way in which the ancient Near Eastern world of the Biblical text may have influenced the Genesis creation narrative. In other words, let us return to Africa by examining scholarly views based on the culture itself.

2.4 Existing scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and the use in African culture

In this sub-section we are considering existing scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and use in Nigerian, albeit African culture, beside Ogba and Ekpeye which will be the focus in the next chapter. In a vast continent such as Africa it is difficult to embrace all of the creation narratives one by one, and we have focused on West Africa in particular and the Akan of Ghana, the Bini, Igbo and Yoruba of Nigeria as representative of extant views on creation and humans' role as custodians of the material creation, especially land (Armstrong 1986:72). In the third chapter we shall offer a brief analysis of the Igbo and Yoruba, and then focus the rest of our discussion in that chapter mainly on Ogba and Ekpeye also of Nigeria. The latter of which share lots of cultural similarities with the rest of West Africa's coastal tribes from Barmenda in Cameroun to Dakar in Senegal (Ahiamadu 2005:68; Alagoa 1966:405-419; Jones 1956:90).

Most of the scholarly views on the aforementioned subject are embedded in various narratives, folktales, proverbs and anecdotes and some have only recently been reduced to writing by African scholars. Apparently, not much writing has been done on the subject under discussion, but the few that are found written on stewardship by African scholars are cursory allusions which scholars make to creation, time, hermeneutics, translation, world-views or ideology (Mbiti 1969:36). Creation narratives have at the back of them the concept of stewardship of creation, ownership of land, and land tenure traditions for which humans are responsible and accountable to the Deity (Aderibigbe 1999:328).

Moreover, these scholarly views are integral to extant cultural views both of which derive from primordial concepts of Deity and human stewardship in Africa. The sublime qualities in some of the creation accounts are capable of elevating the native mind beyond mundane life and away from a "servile" attachment to nature. The point was alluded to in the previous section that Africa has been endowed with exotic human and material

resources which facilitate the tendency for sharing and caring, which in some circles has been described as communalism (Koopman 2003:201). On the other hand, it can also create an artificial contentment with no more than a subsistence use of Africa's abundant natural resources.

These are the views to be critically examined under the sub-heading African cultural views on stewardship, land ownership and use. In order to harness the scholarly and cultural resources at our disposal, it is suggested therefore that we examine both scholarly and cultural views *in tandem*.

2.4.1 African cultural views on stewardship, land ownership and use

In general African cultural or ethnographic views on stewardship, land ownership and use are deeply ingrained in our general conception of God, creation, and man's place in the entire created order (Mbiti 1977:49; Idowu 1996:20-22; Ahiamadu 2005:7-8). A broad spectrum of creation narratives can be found in Africa, and is reflected in the concepts of God and creation found among, for instance, the Akan of Ghana, the Bini, Igbo, and Yoruba of Nigeria – the few which we are to examine critically. Apparently, a single thread runs through all of them, namely one universal Deity created the heavens and the earth by means of lesser deities which afterwards served as intermediaries between the Supreme God and human beings.⁵⁸ This fact is borne out by the examples of some of the various peoples of Africa.

2.4.1.1 Akan people of Ghana

Among the Akan of Ghana the Creator God *Nyame* created all things and was pleased to be resident among the humans and natural things He had created. On a certain occasion, however, some members of the human family mistakenly hit the "sky" while pounding *fufu*. In anger, *Nyame* changed His abode and moved into the heavens and since then His actual whereabouts has been shrouded in mystery. Animistic as this sounds, its core theme of one Creator to whom humans owe their existence and the use of all created things stands out clearly (Appiah 1996:226ff).

⁵⁸The belief in a Supreme Deity is deeply ingrained in the African mind, hence Africans are 'notoriously' very religious beings. See Mbiti (1969:1). However, in some African cultures God's creative act is assumed to be expressed through nature and other created objects see Moiseralele (2001:384-392).

2.4.1.2 The Bini of Nigeria

Similarly, the Bini of Nigeria, for instance, have interesting creation narratives which far from being animistic, remotely resonate with the Judeo-Christian story⁵⁹. According to the Bini traditional religion, *Orisa* first appeared as a human being on earth, and having moulded the earth with his own hands, he proceeded to procreate humans. However, due to the ingratitude of humans he bid them goodbye and decided to make the heavens his home, while still supervising the affairs of men on earth. He is before everything else. *Orisa* is a creator of everything in the world, *Uwa* which also refers to the created physical world. *Orisa* is *Ogene* (omniscient). He has knowledge of everything; He is all-wise, all-knowing, all-seeing and all-hearing. *Orisa* is omnipotent. Nothing is impossible with *Orisa*. *Orisa* is the source and lover of truth. *Orisa* is pure. *Orisa* is intolerant of injustice, crime, sin and all falsehood. The Bini never worshipped carved statues, trees, rivers, mountains or animals as substitutes (cf. Kelbassa 2001:115-123). Instead, humans use these resources as a gift from or of *Orisa* to whom they owe worship and gratitude.

But who is the creator of *Orisa*? *Orisa* is not a created being. *Orisa* does not have an elder. There is nothing that has power over *Orisa*. For the Bini *Orisa* is eternal and the final cause of all things. *Orisa* is the self-existing Being. He is immortal. In other words, He is ever-living. The Bini thus had the concept of the monotheistic supreme God from time immemorial. They however subscribed to the idea of divinities and humans as being *Orisa*'s representatives on earth doing his bidding by taking care of nature and the living animals (cf. Kelbassa 2001:115-123).

2.4.1.3 The Yoruba people of Nigeria

The Yoruba in Nigeria tell their own creation story involving *Olodumare* who dispatched "carmelion" to space with a calabash from which he was to spread ashes upon space which will eventually form the earth and seas. It was *Oduduwa* – the progenitor of the Yoruba race who was commissioned eventually to populate the earth at the conclusion of the chameleon's task. Until today the Yoruba still venerate the "chameleon" as a totemic

⁵⁹ Such resonance is not without historical and cultural adaptation of Ethiopianism by the Bini. Its resemblance to the Coptic church of Ethiopia seems to be a strong one. The latter for instance has been there since the 3rd century AD and Abyssinian trade links with the Near East antedates Christianity. Ancient Israelite geographers recognized their own kinship with the inhabitants of Sheba (Gen.10:28) but also associated them with Africa (Gen.10:7), though archaeologists are hard pressed to find out where exactly Sheba would be [see NRSV, p.532. See Kelbassa (2001:115-123).

symbol.⁶⁰ Thus the concept of creation *ex nihilo* is not a very well established one on the continent outside Judeo-Christian circles, but the concept of a Creator and his creation is well grounded. In the Yoruba mythology there was a watery mass below, which *Olodumare* decided to turn into solid earth (Aderibigbe 1999:330). The resulting land therefore became a heritage which the Deity bestowed on the dead ancestors, the present generation, and unborn members of the family (Yakubu 1985:262).

Apparently, theology in many cultures find the use of such creation “myths”⁶¹ indispensable in communicating divine truths which otherwise would not be easily understood by a finite mind (Akao 1993:68). It should be noted that this is a perspective of African moral religion which is in consonance with both Old Testament and Islamic laws, and which considers stewardship as deriving from the Deity, while land ownership and use is a social responsibility pointing primarily to individual’s participation in the sharing of the produce from the land; but which also connotes individual self-fulfilment and human dignity. There exists in Africa a very high sense of responsibility with respect to matters of stewardship, which invariably are in congruity with African moral religion expressed in such myths as well as in oral traditions⁶².

In African creation folk-tales is mooted the idea that stewardship, land ownership and use is intended to foster a sense of belonging not only to the Deity but also to the community. As so aptly put by J.S. Mbiti (1969:8), “I am” is because God is, and also because “we are”. However, most of the creation narratives found in different cultures on the continent are not as concise and superb as the Genesis account. Yet that does not exonerate the latter from an ideological twist (Gunkel 1994:54).

Taking the creation narrative from the Akan of Ghana, we see the underlying assumption that all of “creation” was once one, until humans while pounding “fufu” hit the sky God, *Nyame* and caused him to withdraw from his creation. In other words, humans were responsible for the separation, which today exists between Deity and humanity, but humanity and nature remained inseparable (Aderibigbe 1999:334-35; Idowu 1998:21-22; Kelbessa 2001: 115-123).

⁶⁰ Idowu (1992: 10-16) gives a slightly different version of the Yoruba creation mythology. See also Oduyoye (1998:6-8) in which *Obatala* and *Oduduwa* mated and populated the whole earth.

⁶¹ The meaning which theologians attach to the word “myth” is quite different from what the layman understands the word to mean, and usually the common understanding of the word carries the day. Hence care need to be taken in the way theology employs the word in order to avoid conveying a wrong message (cf. Gibson 1982:24).

⁶² For deep moral values see Land use traditions in Ahiamadu (2005:74-75).

In my opinion these views resonate with principles of stewardship, land ownership and use that are also deeply entrenched in the Canon of both Islam and Old Testament. For instance, in the Old Testament the Decalogue protected individual rights to land ownership and use within the *bêṯ ab*. In this way the individual's relationship to God is protected, so that a violation of an individual's rights to property was considered an interference with that individual's commitment or devotion to God (Wright 1990:136).

2.4.2 African scholarly views on stewardship

African scholarly views on stewardship are directly traceable to the general belief that the land belongs to humans dead or alive, born or unborn. The following narratives from Bini and Igbo of Nigeria has been derived from the writings of African scholars, most of whom originated from the cultures whose views they wrote about (Onyeocha 2006:66-7).

2.4.2.1 The Bini of Nigeria

To the Bini for instance the land is the private property of the dead; they were buried in the land, and nobody can force them to leave the land or to change their place. Human beings originated from the land and do ultimately return to it at death. A key role in inscribing the ownership of any land to anyone (him or her) is in remembering those who have passed away (cf. Lethare 2001:474-480). This is in consonance with the Igbo of Nigeria and most West African ethnic nationalities. In West Africa the ownership of land is ascribed to the ancestors, identified with the living and associated with the unborn as well (Lethare 2001:474-480).

Generally, the living beings get the necessities of life from the land. The dead were buried in the land. The unborn will be born on the land. The general belief that the land belongs to all, living, dead and unborn seems to be prevalent in Africa as it is in other parts of the world too. For instance:

For Africans, land belongs to all, living and dead. We will live in this land where our fore parents lived and where our great-great-grand children will live. To make sure that {the benefit from this wealth accrue to} all, we have to take care of it properly now. This value system cuts across all ethnic groups in Africa (Kelbessa 2001:115-123).

2.4.2.2 The Igbo people of Nigeria

Among the Igbo of Nigeria for instance, offences committed against nature are generally regarded as offences committed against the land, and by implication against one's stewardship role which is tantamount to "*imeru ala*" (defiling the land). The Igbo also knows that the land is the heritage of the living obtained through the ancestors from the Deity *Chineke* (Ikengah-Metuh 1987:114). The laws of the land are derived from two levels. First there is the visible order consisting of members of the community, plants, animals, inanimate objects. Laws are made which safeguard the relations of humans to the visible order. Second, there is the spiritual order made up of the ancestors, deities, spirits, disembodied spirits and the Supreme Deity. The laws in this second order flows from the Supreme Being to members of the community, animals, plants and inanimate objects bound up in a chain of inter-relationships. As stated by Chris Obi:

Man must obey the laws of the universe as shown in the moral, religious and mystical laws. If he shows negligence or disobeys them, he has to suffer for them.

Nowhere are these laws observed as in the use of land and in the title deeds of ownership. Not only are boundaries sacred, but also killing of certain animals are taboo (Obi 2006:115-116). The aim is to engender "perfection" in people's ethical behaviour in order for the land not to "*ala akwupuola odu*" (literally "knock one out of his seat"), or to cause one's "*ama nna gi echnie*" (literally your "father's compound to be closed to weeds"). In other words the land is a living entity capable of detecting whatever wrongs are committed on it and capable of yielding abundant benefits to those who carefully observe its ethos. Onyeocha (2006:63-80) lists these as

"Be upright and do the right thing at all times. Know and keep your place and respect that of others. Let humans be humans and animals be animals. Let men be men and let women be women. Protect the weak, the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the ignorant and never oppress or take advantage of them. Do not punish the innocent and allow the guilty to go free. Debtors pay up your debts; traders deal fairly and trade on genuine wares".

More than one century of Igbo contact with Christianity would undoubtedly have influenced her ethos. As we can see from the above, most of these are in resonance with the Deuteronomic ethics (Nkwoka 2001:326-335). It is interesting to note that the Igbo share lots of ethos in common with other African ethnic communities.

The Igbo of Nigeria believes that the land belongs to the living beings only, for they use the resources of the land for survival. They maintain that dead persons have already left the land and could not claim any responsibility. They cannot benefit from the land. The

living will hand it over to the next generation. When the land was asked to whom it belongs, it said, “I am the property of those living beings that stay on me” (cf. Kelbessa 2001:115-123).

In my opinion, an African cultural view of stewardship cannot ignore the claim made from the foregoing discussion, of a human ownership of the land, and the right of everyone to use it in a responsible and accountable manner. Stewardship is a collective responsibility of all adult members of the communities' component units. It is a general conception that the present generation is under a moral obligation to preserve the land and hand it over to future generations. One of the bases of this obligation is the belief that a person should not endanger the prospects of future generations by destroying the land. One has to make sure that his or her lineage will continue to flourish in the future. The society condemns those who deprive their children and their children's children of access to the earth and to nature in general.

An Engenni proverb says that what is good for the goose is good for the gander⁶³. In other words what is good for the present should be made better for the future generation. This is the direction in which African scholarly views on land ownership tend to go.

2.4.3 African scholarly views on land ownership and use

In speaking about African cultural views on land ownership and use, the points which we have inadvertently touched on while discussing African cultural views on stewardship, will of necessity be applied here with some expatiation. It is instructive to note that most African communities investigated by this study (cf. Ayandele 1969:69; Mbiti 1969:35-38) generally acknowledge God as creator, and the land as belonging to God as well. Most Nigerian peoples, for instance, see themselves as holding land in trust for the past, present and future generations (Nwabueze 1972:92; Yakubu 1985:6-8). Land to the people is of unlimited utility. Every piece of land, whether swampy, marshy or dry, belongs to someone or some kinship group. While land may be unsuitable for agriculture, it might still be very valuable during the rainy season for fishing, or during the dry season for burying the dead (Akolokwu 1981: 8 -12).

⁶³ Literally, an Engenni proverb states this as “while the right hand washes the left, the left also washes the right”, which expresses very passionately the urge for environmental sanity and ecological conservation on both an intra- and inter-generational levels. The Engenni are Southern neighbours of the Ogba and Ekpeye and often they meet in the market places.

2.4.3.1 The Igbo of Nigeria

Among the Igbo, as in some other acephalous communities in Africa land is such a valuable possession to the ethnic group because it determines an individual family's subsistence and gives dignity to human beings in the community (Nwabueze 1971:170-171). Its use is at some stage the collective responsibility of the entire land owning unit, usually the kindred or clan. The eldest *di-opara* holds the "sceptre" or title to the use of kindred land. No single individual can use land without the collective consent of the land owning unit. Neither can the *di-opara* dispose of ancestral land at will.

2.4.3.2 The Yoruba of Nigeria

In contrast, among the Yoruba, as in most patriarchal societies in Africa, there are powerful cultural or religious rulers who might hold the title to all communal land, but it is rare to find one in which such a chief disposes of the land at will without taking the collective interest of the land owning community, kindred or clan into consideration (Ayandele 1969:69; Mbiti 1969:104-108). Whereas stewardship is a temporal trust, land ownership and use impacts on values which are transcendental. A popular belief among the Yoruba people is reflected in the statement credited to a Yoruba chief whilst testifying before the West African Land Committee in the 1930s:

"Land belongs to a vast family of which many are dead, a few are living and countless numbers are still unborn" (Yakubu 1985:6-8).

A general conception of land in Africa therefore is that it belongs ultimately to the Deity⁶⁴ and has been passed on to the present users through the ancestors. The responsibility of those who own and use land is to do so in a sustainable and acceptable manner so that the lives and well-being of future generations are not jeopardised. The past, present and future generations collectively are stake-holders in it, and their interests have to be protected wherever and whenever matters of land ownership and use are being considered. The measure of responsibility assumed or accountability given to such uses or abuses of land apparently challenges other models of stewardship and land ownership.

⁶⁴ In most Niger Delta communities a multiplicity of ancestral deities exist but they all owe allegiance to one supreme God, hence monotheistic values governing land use and ownership is evident as one moves from one community to the other (Turaki 1999:27-28). For individual features of polytheism in the Niger Delta see Hattingh (1997:27).

In the next chapter these issues will be taken up as we look specifically to the land situation in the Nigerian context. In the last few years a lot has been said and read about Nigeria, and in particular the Niger Delta⁶⁵ concerning the issue of resource control with implications for stewardship, land ownership and use; for sustainable development of host communities, for corporate social responsibility of multi-national companies, and for accountability of the government. These developmental issues hopefully are the final marks in an ongoing process of decolonisation. It is a process that has taken in its trail several inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts generated in parts of Africa by the activities of multi-national business interests engaged in exploration, exploitation and exportation of natural resources from a post-colonial Nigeria, especially the Niger Delta (Hoadley 2002:294).

2.5 Conclusion

The scholarly views on ancient Near Eastern, and Old Testament and African cultural approaches to stewardship, land ownership and use have been critically examined, and salient features emerge for our benefit.

First of all, such views presents us with an emerging theology and ethics of creation in which can be situated a responsible and accountable stewardship of the land and its environment. It also challenges us to think of a more sustainable way in which humans can relate to creation and exhibit a culture of care and nurture that includes the health and well being of both human and non-human creatures in the ultimate task of stewardship (Garr 2003:209).

Secondly, the views present us with a stewardship of the land which *Yahweh* has given to Israel for instance, and which must be retained and utilised in creative ways befitting their *imago Dei* status and marked by both enjoyment of and care for the land so received from God (Gen.1:27-28; 2:15).

Of significance is the fact that there is a servant status inherent in the concept of stewardship when the context of ancient Near Eastern cultures and the Old Testament are

⁶⁵ Several of such writings are replete in Nigerian newspaper reports: ***Thisday*** of Feb.9th 2006; ***Thisday*** of June 10, 2005; ***Daily Champion***, March 3, 2006; ***Thisday*** March 3, 2006; ***Thisday*** March 9 2006; ***Thisday*** February 19, 2006; ***The Guardian*** June 16 2005; and ***Daily Vanguard*** May 31, 2005 among many others.

critically evaluated. Obviously, humans occupy a central role in the entire created order, particularly in the harnessing of nature and the maintenance of its ecology, but this role has to be exercised in a responsible and accountable manner (Towner 2005:353). As crucial as ancient Near Eastern, and Old Testament theological-ethical and African cultural understandings is to the enterprise of redefining stewardship, we have attempted to link these trends of scholarly views on the subject with the various conceptions of “rule” and “dominion” implied in the cultural or creation mandate given in Genesis 1:26–28 (Preuss 1995:196).

Third, the views of Preuss (1995:126-86) and Brueggemann (2002:5-15) that land is a gift to which humans are not naturally tied, and so could be lost through ungodly lifestyles resonates with cultural views on land extant in the Niger Delta as has been indicated towards the close of the previous section. By this is meant that, the theology and ethics of stewardship with regards to Israel as depicted in some of the scholarly views could not be an autonomous theology or ethic, but one shared with neighboring ancient Near Eastern communities, and by implications with other cultures. It has been suggested that humans are appointed “steward” or lord of the earth (in a relative sense), and of all things, except themselves (Elwell 1992:1054).

It is inferred from the same passage that there is a proper attitude to property (land) that can be gleaned from Scripture. Briefly stated, all human possessions belong to humans not in an absolute sense, but as a trust from God. Apparently this entails a sphere of interrelation between *Yahweh* and humans which borders on the ethical, both for him and for mankind. As so aptly put by Hempel (1962:161):

“God’s ethics was the self-control of his truth; human ethics is not to abuse this self-control but to refrain from all overestimation of his position to be God’s image and partner of His covenant.”

The difference however is that ancient Israelite ethics has an utterly theocentric focus, whereas in the Niger Delta and parts of Africa, ethics has become anthropocentric, or at least less theocentric. For instance, there is a deeply ingrained concern for succeeding generations in Africa and the need for future generations to be sustained by the heritage passed on to them from the ancestors. Again, the scholarly views of African cultural contexts resound with a theology for stewardship, land ownership and use that is essentially one of a humans / nature partnership. A humans / nature partnership is capable

of providing a nurturing and responsive care on the part of humans over the creation as a whole.

A view of nature as an integral part of humanity is necessary for a sustainable human well-being on earth as well as for a responsible conservation of nature for future generations. In alliance with specific Old Testament strictures, African cultural views tended towards responsible care and concern for propagation of human species and non-human species alike. This fact is borne out in various creation narratives from parts of West Africa such as the Akan of Ghana, the Bini, Igbo and Yoruba of Nigeria to name a few.

It is my opinion that African cultural understanding of stewardship is primarily eco-centric, but that does not detract from the paradigm shift needed to be made in order for stewardship to be exercised in a meaningful and responsible manner. A shift has to be made from both an African eco-centric veneration of nature on the one hand and on the other hand from the much criticised “Western” anthropocentric over-exploitation of nature, in order that a more humane and responsible utilisation of nature’s gifts and endowments which promote accountability, conserve the ecology, and preserve a green environment, clean air, freedom of persons and a sustainable development might emerge.

At present there is a humans-above-nature mindset which is not directly traceable to any of the three views examined and whose reasons should be sought elsewhere (see Appendices 1), but which portends a future of exploitation and devastation on the part of creation. It is instructive to note some Western philosophical views of stewardship, land ownership and use which never shy away from an increasing portrayal of humanity as of a royal status *in tandem* with nature and the visible creation. This carries with it the obligation of exercising extra-ordinary lordship over the natural world (Middleton 2005:304). Might such a deviant view be sustained in the light of the present ecological crisis?

It is to the credit of the three major approaches, that they present us with the reality of our universal dependence on land for sustainable human and animal life, both for human health and well-being. There is this underlying notion of land as a fruitful and indispensable gift entrusted to humans for sustainable and proactive use. It is here that we see a sense in which human “rule” and “dominion” in Genesis might not be conceived with any sense of absolutism or of human rule over nature that is totally independent of God. The management and dispensation of human, animal, material and mineral resources must be

done with a sense of responsibility and of an inescapable accountability. Therefore in the three approaches – African cultural views as well as those of Ancient Near Eastern, and Old Testament theological-ethical views – are to be sought the cultural perceptions and the emerging facts which shape a re-definition of stewardship.

Moreover, the basis on which social responsibility of humans over the lower creatures is emphasised among the Ogba and Ekpeye people of Nigeria for instance is the upright character of the elders or gerontocrats in the particular territory inhabited by them and by their kinsmen and women. The practice of righteousness by humans in the socio-political spheres is in the final analysis the moral quality which enhances the existence of harmony and a proper integration of social and cosmic orders. Through human acts that are in tune with the rest of creation nature is able to restore its harmony and equilibrium, and any violation of nature can have adverse consequences (Fretheim 2005:xiii).

In the third chapter, the gerontocratic basis of stewardship will be further examined in a critical and philosophical manner to see the ways in which several of Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial history has impacted on this institution. There are moral and ethical values associated with the institution of gerontocracy which enhances the stewardship, land ownership and use functions of humans, but upon which a colonial and post-colonial dual legal system and new land policies have had a serious impact. This also has serious human rights implications.

Furthermore, our empirical research findings attempt to evaluate this impact (bordering almost on an erosion of values) in the light of the people's self understanding of what constitutes a responsible and accountable approach to stewardship, land ownership and use among Ogba and Ekpeye for example. Thus, the cultural experience in which pre-colonial values and post-colonial ones have constantly been in dialogue is to be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVES OF STEWARDSHIP, LAND OWNERSHIP AND LAND USE

3.1 Introduction

In the second chapter we highlighted, among others, the African cultural and scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and use. It will now be appropriate to examine Nigerian perspectives of stewardship, land ownership, and land use. There is a gerontocratic culture which governs stewardship, land ownership and use among many Nigerian communities especially among Ogba and Ekpeye. This is based on what I would like to call a “giraffe principle” with the following definition:

The “giraffe principle” is a tripartite ethic of sharing, based on a win - win situation, on a compensatory use of land, and on good neighbourliness illustrated through a just, fair and equitable human response to an emerging social and economic reality, involving the cultivation, sharing and use of natural resources by stakeholders.

The “giraffe principle” will be narrated and discussed fully in the anecdote and proverbs in section 3.3 below.

Meanwhile, gerontocracy has at the back of it a sense of an orderly rule by the elders. It has transcended the limits of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, and has impacted on stewardship, land ownership and use in cultural, economic, legal and political ways. Another term for describing gerontocracy is “rule of and respect for the most elderly” and it has the “giraffe principle” of equity and justice underlying it (Ehusani 1991:91; Amadiume 1987:22; Amadi 1982:94).

A fitting introduction to the anecdote below will be a thorough understanding of what gerontocracy – a rule by elders – mean in a context in which all land is seen as belonging to God, and the people as having received it from Him as a heritage. It is a heritage of stewardship which is impacted by the “giraffe principle” in both land tenure and land use practices (Amadi 1982:59). Simply put, it is a principle that revolves around the most elderly in traditional Nigerian ethnic communities (Sofola 1973:50). A brief review of the

“giraffe principle” as one in which the gerontocratic culture from a Nigerian perspective revolves, is to be attempted in the present chapter (Ehusani 1991:91).

It is instructive to note that a gerontocratic culture binds various Nigerian communities together. In applying the same to Nigerian culture in general, Ehusani (1991:93) stated:

“The status (of gerontocracy) is acquired progressively and not fully until old age, during the final phase of existence”.

Or as stated by Sofola (1973:50):

“The cardinal virtue of the typical African is a wholesome human relations among people; respect for elders; community fellow feeling, and hospitality”.

Moreover, we limit our analysis of the “giraffe principle” of a gerontocratic culture to its practice among the Ogba and Ekpeye peoples of Nigeria, and by extension among the Igbo and Yoruba realising of course that culture itself is a dynamic and pervasive process.

3.2 Gerontocratic stewardship in Nigerian cultures

In Ogba and Ekpeye the culture of gerontocratic stewardship is a shared one with neighbouring cultures in especially among the two dominant Nigerian communities – the Igbo and Yoruba. This was alluded to in chapter two as part of African scholarly views. Ogba and Ekpeye share the gerontocratic culture with other Nigerian communities even in the Niger Delta. An understanding of the workings of gerontocracy can give us a better appreciation of what generally has been a Nigerian perspective to stewardship, land ownership and use managed through gerontocratic structures over the generations (Jean-Marc Ela 1991:263).

Although Ogba and Ekpeye are geographically situated in the Niger Delta, they have affinity with the Igbo and Yoruba as their “remote”⁶⁶ eastern and western neighbours respectively. Interestingly, through the institution of gerontocracy, various Nigerian ethnic groups – small or large, have come together to make or forge a new national identity. This identity is one in which the older members of the community or group lead. In these cultures gerontocracy is synonymous with patriarchy, but sometimes older women do exercise influence directly or indirectly. However, certain features mark out a gerontocratic

⁶⁶ Ogba and Ekpeye are “remote” neighbors of the Igbo and Yoruba in the sense of geographical distance, though not in a cultural sense. There are other ethnic groups which separate Ogba and Ekpeye directly from the Igbo and Yoruba on the east and west. This includes the Ikwerre and Etche / Awarra on the east and the Ijo, Edo and Etsako on the west. See A. Ahiamadu (2000:1-3,19-24).

culture, namely, it is patriarchal in matters of government and law-making, patrilineal in matters of inheritance and stewardship of land, as well as patrilocal in matters of marriage and domiciliation. These points need no elaboration as they are self-evident in most African cultures. Perhaps we need to mention that there is an interface between religion and gerontocracy in these cultures which has been captured in the words of John Mbiti (1996:174-180):

“To the African this is a deeply religious universe, whether it is viewed in terms of time or space, and human life is a religious experience in that universe.”

The process of erosion which has set into this interface between religion and gerontocracy in Africa is evident in the writings of African scholars (Ehusani 1991:91-92)⁶⁷. The writing underscores the point that coming to grips with transcendental values such as respect for elders, the demonstration of care and concern for women, children and human well being in general, the practice of hospitality and above all living in communalism is becoming an issue in theological reflections in Nigeria, due to external fissiparous influences⁶⁸.

A perspective of gerontocratic values reinforces this sense of community in Nigeria albeit Africa, and can be seen in a brief recapitulation of what it means to the Igbo and Yoruba of Nigeria in particular. This can then be understood better when it is narrowed down in a similar discussion about Ogba and Ekpeye with a special elaboration of the already mentioned “giraffe principle”.

3.2.1 The Igbo

In addition to what we have learned about the Igbo in the previous chapter, Amadiume (1987:22) points out that, among the Igbo the elderly males allocate land for use at the nuclear family levels, but the actual control of the usufruct of the land economy is in the hands of the women. In other words, Igbo economy was marked by “a clear sexual division of labour and an associated gender division of crops” (Amadiume 1987:22). In the same way, the elders among the Igbo of Nigeria for instance, are considered the stewards, custodians, if not guardians of the land. For one thing the land is a living entity created by God and capable of detecting whatever wrongs are committed on it by its inhabitants. It is also capable of yielding abundant benefits to those inhabitants who carefully observe its

⁶⁷ See for instance Chinua Achebe 1994 *Things Fall Apart – the Centre Cannot Hold*. London: Heinemann, which is a classic book written from a Nigerian perspective to show how colonialism negatively impacted on African traditional values and institutions leading to social and cultural fission.

⁶⁸ See Ehusani (1991:77-120).

ethos (Onyeocha 2006:63-80). Stewardship consists of a careful observance of the mores and ethos of the land. Offences committed against nature are generally regarded as offences committed against the land, and by implication against the ancestors as well as against the elders.

Such offences infringe upon the stewardship role of the elders or gerontocrats and are tantamount to “*imeru ala*” (defiling the land). You will recall the two levels of laws governing land ownership and use among the Igbo – the visible and spiritual, with the former deriving from humans for the protection of interpersonal relationships on the one hand, and on the other preserving the humans-nature partnership (Ikengah-Metuh 1987:114). The latter of course are laws which ensure that people respond to the requirements to worship God in a spiritual line made up of the ancestors, deities, spirits and the Supreme Deity (Obi 2006:115-116). It is instructive to note that Christianity came into Igbo-land more than one century ago and undoubtedly have influenced Igbo customs and ethos, and so their resonance with Deuteronomistic ethics is not in any doubt (Nkwoka 2001:326-335).

3.2.2 The Yoruba

Moreover, these customs and ethos also have a horizontal resonance with customs and ethos in neighbouring African communities such as among the Yoruba in the fact that the oldest members rule. The Yoruba cosmogony is imbued with the idea of a gerontocracy which has at its centre the concept of creation that is not necessarily *ex nihilo*. In order for the earth and seas to be created, the compliance of elements such as the calabash, the ash and the chameleon to the will of the Creator was necessary. Thus, the earth and seas were formed through the intervention of these elements on the orders of the Creator who already had made the heavens for his own habitation. In Yoruba mythology there was a watery marsh below, which *Olodumare* decided to turn into solid earth (Aderibigbe 1999:330), and which he bequeathed to the first gerontocrat – *Oduduwa*!

Thus, the Yoruba generally tell of *Oduduwa* – the progenitor of the ethnic Yoruba – who was eventually commissioned to populate the earth and who still rules through the oldest members of the ethnic Yoruba, using *Obas*, chiefs and elders in a gerontocracy (Aderibigbe 1999:330). Therefore, land among the Yorubas is the heritage which the Deity bestowed on ancestors, the present generation, and unborn members of the family (Yakubu 1985:262). The myth that *Oduduwa* the progenitor of the Yoruba people

employed the chameleon in creating the earth and humans, has left its mark upon the Yoruba who still regard the chameleon as a totemic symbol.⁶⁹ Generally, the concept of creation *ex nihilo* is not a very well established one among the Yoruba, Igbo or Ogba for that matter outside of Judeo-Christian circles. However, the concept of a Creator and his creation is a well-grounded belief among the Yoruba, Igbo, Ogba and Ekpeye.

It has been noted that the reason behind the practice of gerontocracy in Nigerian cultures is the fact that the oldest members of the community are regarded as representatives not only of the ancestors, but also of God in the management of land and natural resources which belonged to God (Ehusani 1991:212). Such management is meant to result in the general well-being not only of the living and the yet to be born, but also in the honour and veneration of God through the ancestors (Assohoto and Ngewa 2006:11).

3.3 Stewardship heritage and the “giraffe principle”

The preceding discussion of the Igbo and Yoruba practice of gerontocracy has been quite brief. Literature tells us that, in those cultures one’s status in society is determined by age as the previous chapter showed. Hence, the stewardship of land, its ownership and use is ascribed to God, to the ancestors, to the living elders and kindred, and lastly to the unborn generations. As the practice of gerontocracy is true of most Nigerian communities, it is even truer of Ogba and Ekpeye. The practice of gerontocracy is deeply rooted on a principle which I prefer to call the “giraffe principle” and which has influenced their general understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use. This is also reflected in their migratory history. Ogba and Ekpeye trace their origin to one ancestor, Akalaka, who migrated south to the Niger Delta from the famous monarchical Bini Kingdom during the 15th century (Ewoh 1952:13).

The belief and values of Ogba and Ekpeye clearly demonstrate their perception of the place occupied by humans as those living under divine precepts and postulates (Ehusani 1991:89). They believe that *Chukwuabiana* owns the land and that he also punishes those who ignore the “giraffe principle,” which is deeply embedded in their consciousness and governs their general outlook on life. We shall discuss this presently. The “giraffe principle” is at the heart of a gerontocratic culture among Ogba and Ekpeye. It is the principle around which the cosmic order revolves and it facilitates an equitable use of land,

⁶⁹ Idowu (1992: 10-16) gives a slightly different version of the Yoruba creation mythology. See also Oduyoye (1998:6-8) in which *Obatala* and *Oduduwa* mated and populated the whole earth.

of nature and all its abundant resources (Amadiume 1987:22). In the “giraffe principle” is contained the role of humans to use natural resources discretely and responsibly with a view to prudent management and a systematic preservation of such resources for the present and future generation. Trees, games, crops, fishery resources etc. all require a prudent and judicious use in order to avoid the disappearance of species.⁷⁰

At the core of the “giraffe principle” is the veneration of the Deity, and an expression of gratitude for granting the land to the living, through the ancestors and for making the land a blessing and the source of survival. A general name for the Deity among Ogba and Ekpeye is *Chukwuabiama*. He lives in the world beyond the blue sky *elu-igwe nwa abiama*, and his rule reaches down to the depths “*tumiro*” of the earth. He is the one who allows humans and other creatures to use the produce from the land. As a mark of veneration, the people should not use the land in a ravaging way, but in ways in which the actual purpose of *Chukwuabiama*, the ancestors and of future generations are practically realised. Therefore, the general belief is that anyone who does not harness the natural resources of the land, including its vegetation and the lower creatures that move on it in an acceptable way within the community and in line with good sense is not only undermining the stewardship role of the elders, but also frustrating the ancestors, the future generation and thereby incurring the displeasure of the Deity (Ahiamadu 2005:70-72).

There is no hindrance placed in the way of those – company or government – who come to acquire land in the area for industrial or developmental purposes because in the final analysis the people accept their role as being that of stewards of that which ultimately belongs to God. Therefore, no acquisition fees are charged beyond the customary token fees. However, Ogba and Ekpeye in the Niger Delta see the land as belonging to God, and therefore do not give away or sell land to anyone, no matter how wealthy, on a permanent basis. By the same token no individuals or groups – not even the elders or gerontocrats – have absolute right to dispose of land at will. The consent of all the units making up the kindred must be sought before land can be put to any particular use either at the individual or communal level (Amadi 1982:41). In their communities both the Ogba and Ekpeye people have retained the essential characteristics of a well-developed

⁷⁰ The author grew up more or less in a pristine culture in which the land and wetlands meant everything for the survival of the various communities of the Niger Delta. The Ogba and Ekpeye for instance taught their children how to cut trees selectively, how to harness dairy products of wild birds judiciously, and how not to disturb the “soldier” and “tailor” ants in their ceaseless march from one end of the land to the other depending on the changing seasons. It was taboo to catch a bird in the bush where it was laying eggs or to return home with all the eggs so laid.

gerontocracy – keeping the “giraffe principle” in mind. Their common progeny in a kinship system in which stewardship, land ownership and use is by virtue of their history, primarily based on the triad principles of win-win, compensatory use, and good neighbourliness. These principles are as important to the males as to the females, to the young as to the elderly, to patriarchal as to matriarchal context. In the exercise of the “giraffe principle,” women as co-members of this gerontocratic system of rule, often plays a very significant, but unobtrusive role (Sam 1979:21). This unobtrusive role of females will be discussed with reference to the focus group discussions which follow below.

3.3.1 The “giraffe principle” in proverbs and anecdote

The following proverbs and anecdotal tale describes the “giraffe principle” around which a gerontocratic culture revolves, and which helps us understand the focus group discussions and personal interviews given in the subsequent section. It also helps us to see how colonialism has impacted on the erosion of these values. These proverbs and anecdote are but a “tip of the iceberg” in the world-view of Ogba and Ekpeye, and has been taken from their oral tradition. To the best of my knowledge they have never been written down and are being used in this section from oral sources encountered during our field research in Nigeria. It is important to see in this anecdote the underlying philosophical world in which people’s thinking has been shaped, especially when it comes to stewardship and use of land. Also when it comes to sharing the benefits accruing from a land given by God and which they in turn offered to multi-national companies for oil exploration, hoping that the win-win principle, the principle of compensatory utilisation of land, and the principle of good neighbourliness would apply.

The non-application of these principles in the stewardship of land by both the oil companies and government has created a situation of restiveness and frustration among the people, as the focus group discussions and the personal interviews would later show. Interestingly, as has been pointed out in the next section, the whole colonial enterprise facilitated the erosion of the systems of gerontocratic rule based on the “giraffe principle”. It was replaced with the “elite rule” based on a “lion share” or “win-loose” principle. At the back of these few proverbs and anecdote from the Ogba and Ekpeye culture can be seen

an illustration of the “best practice”⁷¹ level in the exercise of stewardship, land ownership and use in responsible and accountable way. We now turn to the proverbs and anecdote.

3.3.1.1 Three Proverbs translated from Ogba

There are three Ogba proverbs and the third one goes with an anecdote.

First: *“Enyim kwu wa enye gbadebe ya, gbadebe hne bu ibu.”*

“The Tortoise says he who ignores it, ignores a great gift.”

Second: *“Agha ka anu Eni bu agha ka ignra bu Eni.”*

“The fight for Elephant meat must equal the fight of an Elephant.”

Third: *“K’odi enye mirna enye Igolo ba wani ya okwu ornu.”*

“No one knows in whose farm land the giraffe will emerge.”

3.3.1.2 Comment on Proverbs translated from Ogba

The proverbs convey a single meaning which can be understood as three inter-related ideas. First, great gifts or things can only be ignored to ones detriment. Second, great purposes are usually achieved through efforts that are equally great. Third, no one knows in whose court (literally – farm land) wealth may suddenly emerge! Opportunities and gifts should never be taken lightly. Wealth could arise from or upon anyone by chance, if not by choice.

⁷¹ Under the cover of “best practice” **Total’s** development priorities have often been designed in partnership with specific government officials without necessarily being of value to those for whose benefits the **CSR** initiatives were ostensibly undertaken. Accountability in that case has suffered an abuse at the hands of a MNC. They do all corporate transactions within the developing world at the expense of their host communities, and even without the consent of their host governments under the cover of best **CSR** practice. Hence such abuses have not only been felt at the economic level, but also at the social, cultural, ecological, environmental and theological levels. For a discussion of Corporate Social Responsibility and what is considered a “best practice” level. See Frynas (2005: 581-598).

3.3.2 Anecdote⁷² Ogba Folktale: “The giraffe principle”

Ogba is a land whose economy has been based on communal agriculture for centuries. It is a land of forests, wetlands, rivers and streams that team with creatures on “sky”, “land” and “sea”. The “giraffe” is one such rare animal which, along with the elephant, the buffalo, the tiger, antelope, leopard, and numerous others, roam the forests along with creeping animals, flying birds and insects. There are times when farm lands have to be jointly protected from these roaming creatures. The giraffe, the elephant, or even a horde of pigs can invade the crops to feast from it, usually at night.

In this anecdote we are told a story of an incessant invasion of farm lands by such animals notably the “giraffe”. In order to protect the crops on the farm lands, all the kinsmen kept vigil over the farm land belonging to each kindred group, and like hunters each had a weapon and a torch on hand. They kept their vigils in turns and in alternating group order – with weapons of war both to scare the invading animals and if possible to kill the giraffe – known to be the largest and the most visible animal. Otherwise it would rob the community of their only means of livelihood – destroying the crops in their attempt to feed on the new farms. As each hunting gang kept watch during their respective night-duties, they did so completely unaware of the point at which the “giraffe” may emerge, but they knew that the one on whose farm the animal not only emerged but is also killed is the lucky one. Therefore, each one held his weapon of war, be it a spear, a forked but strong wooden pole, a machete or cutlass, a Dane gun⁷³ or even a hatchet. Among the hunters, some came with their bush lamps and torches as well as with forked poles for pinning the “beast” down.

At a time the watchmen least expected it, the invading “giraffe” suddenly emerged along with other foraging animals. A long and injurious battle ensued in their bid not to let the animal escape and if possible to kill it. After a long and hard battle with the huge and

⁷² Folk-tales told by the “fire-side” to children by their parents or peers and which the present author heard as a boy from his late father, Pa Enock Orukwo Ahiamadu (1906 – 1994) and from his boyhood friend Johnson Peter Amadigwe (1954 –).

⁷³ A Dane gun is made of wooden canon and hollow metal pipes fitted into a trigger barrel into which gun-powder and sharp missiles are stacked. It explodes when the trigger is pulled and its spring-barrel hits at the gunpowder to cause an explosion through the hollow metal pipe and so unleashing the missiles on its target. Dane guns were in vogue in Ogba and Ekpeye before colonialism.

towering beast, it was eventually mowed down in the farm land of one of the farmers and watchman. This huge animal was hewn down with spears and arrows, but not without it putting up a big struggle which resulted in the devastation of the farm land and crops of the one on whose farm it was eventually killed.

As the great “giraffe” fell under the heavy shots of this band of hunters, they gave a big shout which attracted the attention of other villagers to the scene of the incident. As they arrived, they noticed that the struggle to mow down the giant animal had led to the destruction of crops and plants in the farms and surrounding areas. While they rejoiced that a big animal had been killed, they also consoled the host whose crops and plants have suffered tremendous damage. The cost was considered so huge because the planting season comes only once in a year and to lose one’s crop for a year means to go hungry for that period of time unless one receive assistance from neighbors. The impact this might have not only on the immediate household of the host, but also on the community in general during the harvest season is better imagined than described, and so everything is done to support the lucky one.

In order to make up for the losses sustained by the host and the negative impact it might have on the survival of his household and the community at harvest time, the following principle of sharing the slain animal is usually adopted as reflected in the statements 1 - 3 below:

3.3.2.1 Inferences (F), Translations (T), and Principles (P)

3.3.2.1a The win-win principle

(F) *Enye Igolo wani awani ya ornu ma ohna le gbakata lea gbu bumehni enye omani mma, enye agadima ihni oma kpo. Hne ruma kwirizu olo, okodigre icho hne iribe irni acho.*

(T) The one in whose farm land the “giraffe” emerges and gets killed by the men of the community has become the fortunate and is the favored one. For many days his family shall not be in any kind of want because of abundant meat that will be available to them.

(P) The host gets the leading share to make up for his crops and plants.

3.3.2.1b The principle of compensation

(F) *Odani ohna wo gbu anu ya ornu ga, ehne o bo vokirekama wo ya oda osotari wo, odi wo enye ani nwe ornu ituwsheshimani oke. Ma aya adidigu ika iri oke anua – ishi ga, odudu ga ya okpashi ga bumagre ka ay'egnini. M'abu ori oke ya ede odua, ma abu nde oke tunijepoa wo tuniwheshima wo sagbe imebichinia hne nde otashinia wo ya ornu duba ya uka ka Igolo ani o gbu wo ya okwu ornu ga.*

(T) Everyone who took part in the killing of the animal, will share in its meat according to the order of seniority, whereas the host, that is the one in whose farm land the giraffe finally emerged and was killed, will receive a three-fold share. The animal head and tail automatically will belong to him, along with his own main share, and the hunters also contribute from their own shares to him as compensation for the damages done to his farm land during the struggle that ensued before the “giraffe” was eventually killed.

(P) In this way equity, justice and fair play is maintained and perpetrated within the community and in the homes. Then the host can make up for the crops and plants which he has lost and can be sustained along with his family with sufficient meat until the next planting and harvest season.

3.3.2.1c The principle of good neighbourliness

(F) *Agadima ishi ikne ya olewheri ya mmegbu adi gbe ma o bu ka ma o sno wo gbu anu ba lepo ornu ede ani o gbu wo Igoloa gbadebe gbe, le enye nwea tunikwna oke ntiyi, le owhuru anu vokirema ma enye nwe ornu ka ri hne o gbu wo ya ornu ga. Ogamara o bu wa o ko dia y'ehne ani o gbu wo ka bu anu gbe. Ma nde ajuju digu o'ju lea wo kejeni oke ba dudia ma o bu hne o dia, legu wo go oke ga nigaa. Ya egwnade hne o dikwnabirie wo o'me bu ituwsheshimania oke, ma nde obu so uso digua wo otuni ka ori irni ka enye igolo wani ya okwu ornu!*

(T) It is a very great wickedness, mistreatment, and scorn for those who (together with him) killed the “giraffe” to share the gains from the animal, abandon the farm land where the animal finally emerged and was killed, and to simply compensate the owner in small ways, while sharing the bulk of the animal for themselves without giving the farm land owner his fair share (in all three ways mentioned above). Unless of course the farm land owner never knew of the incident and the animal had been killed without his participation in the struggle to catch and kill it. In that case, questions will be asked

to find out who owns the devastated farm land, and then a fair share of the giant animal will be sent to him in appreciation that such a giant animal eventually was subdued in his own territory instead of others. Some grateful ones will in addition still send to the absentee host their due contributions, because he had the fortune of being the one in whose farm land the ravaging animal emerged and was killed!

(P) People have to be fair and equitable because no one knows on whose door fortune could knock tomorrow, and what one did to others can be done to him or her.

These are self-explanatory principles, but with some implications for stewardship, land ownership and land use that need to be pointed out more clearly.

3.3.3 Implication of anecdotes and proverbs for stewardship, land ownership and use

Embedded in the anecdotes and proverbs described above are the three core principles which govern the values and norms of a gerontocratic culture in respect of a sharing of communal property – land, natural resources, spoils of war etc. It can imply several things, but the most notable is that a responsible and accountable stewardship, land ownership and use is a matter of top priority to the elders who are custodians of land given to the people by God. It is in realisation of the divine origin of all land and natural resources that land acquisition in Ogba and Ekpeye is not associated with outright land sale or land ownership, because no one knows in whose land fortune may emerge, and the obligation rests on the “users” of the land through which fortune comes to the community to religiously observe the three principles of win-win, compensatory use, and of good neighbourliness. As was indicated in the introductory section, the belief among the Igbo, Yoruba, Ogba, Ekpeye and many other gerontocratic cultures in Nigeria is that the non-observance of the principles enunciated above can lead to the displeasure of the Deity, the barrenness of the land, as well as the breaking out of an epidemic. Therefore, every effort is made to restore the sanity of the people and the fruitfulness of the land by sticking with the “giraffe principle” in times of conflict and in times of benefit.

The discovery of oil is similar to a “giraffe” which suddenly invades one’s agricultural space. Oil is a “giraffe” unexpectedly caught in the web of multi-national oil companies operating in Ogba, Ekpeye and in the Niger Delta region as a whole. Oil exploitation and

exportation can be likened to a struggle resulting in the killing of the “giraffe” in a non-sophisticated culture where hunting weapons are crude and primitive.

Thus the oil is being exploited like the butchering of a “giraffe”, through the combined efforts of hunters or stakeholders as the case may be. The Niger Delta territory as for example Ogba and Ekpeye land is the territory in which the “giraffe” emerges and was killed like the emergence of in Ogba and Ekpeye now being exploited by multinational companies. In the process Ogba and Ekpeye land like other parts of the Niger Delta region have been and is still being devastated and polluted in the ongoing “struggle” to get the oil, like the “struggle” resulting in the death of the “giraffe”. The sharing of the “gains of oil” is likened to the sharing of “the meat” from the “giraffe”. Those in whose land the benefits are derived have a leading share as the anecdote shows, followed by those who provided the weapons for killing the animal, and last but not the least are the shares to all those whose interest was involved in the ensuing struggle. In other words, even the government which provides the enabling socio-political environment for industrial and agricultural activities to go on, are shareholders in the gains from the “kill”. This last point depicts the taxes that are due from the beneficiaries to the government.

The principles of win-win, compensatory use of land, and good neighbourliness enunciated above derives from the “giraffe principle” of sharing. It implies a desirable situation in which the government, company and communities are collectively involved in a joint effort to ensure that host communities in particular and the Niger Delta in general are made co-sharers of the benefits deriving from the “kill” obtained from their land which they gave out but never sold to the multi-national oil companies on the understanding that, should fortune emerge from the land, the “giraffe principle” will be applied in sharing it, and in so doing they will be benefited. This can be done in three ways:

Firstly this can be done by providing those living and doing business in the “oil bearing” regions with adequate health care facilities, social welfare amenities, education and craft-making utilities, so as to enhance the physical health, moral integrity, socio-economic and psychological advancement of host communities while at the same time investing in a programme of revamping the farm lands, rejuvenating the ecological structure, and refurbishing the environment. This is crucial if the “curse” of a distorted ecology, environmental pressure and impoverished farm lands will be lifted from the area along with the oil.

Secondly it can also be done through a direct capital and infrastructural investment in the affected land or host communities using some fraction of the gains accruing to both company and government from the land so used. This will be done for their social, economic and sustainable development and wellbeing, so that when the oil assets become depleted, as most natural resources do with time, the livelihood of host communities may not be impaired (O'Neill 2007:111-113).

Thirdly more can be done by sharing the oil revenue not in trickles, but in bulks so as to actually involve the inhabitants of host communities at the grass roots level, using each affected nuclear family as a point of contact. This can be done through economic empowerment, skill development and gainful self-employment.

In my own opinion, it is like creating an iterative process of rewards and investment which must complement each other in order to pave way for a level playing ground in which stakeholders mutually engage in proactive investments that enhance the survival and advancement of host communities, government and company in a responsible and accountable atmosphere.

Again, there are at least three theological reasons for providing such an environmental refurbishment, land revamping, and ecological rejuvenation.

- 1) A responsible and accountable land use and "ownership" is not only a communal issue, but also one that involves both corporate and state entities all of whom depend on available land and natural resources for sustainable social and economic development. Nevertheless, it is primarily the community's responsibility to ensure that land is put into beneficial use for the interest of present and future generations (Ayandele 1969:69).
- 2) The notion of stakeholder responsibility and accountability which originated as a result of multi-national business enterprises has become a subject of debate and disaffection today, more than ever before.⁷⁴ The implication is that any use we make of social virtues such as stability, justice and righteousness, must be integrated into the paramount theological conviction that both the social existence of host communities

⁷⁴ This has resulted as it were from a global response to militancy and restiveness within resource owning communities in the developing world, which impede further exploitation of natural resources by multi-national companies. It became clear to international observers that the inhabitants of areas whose land and resources are being exploited and expropriated are without adequate or alternative means of livelihood. See Evuleocha (2005:328-340).

such as Ogba and Ekpeye, the economic endeavors of multi-national corporations such as Total, and state authority such as the Federal Government of Nigeria and its State counterparts, all derive from the will of God!⁷⁵ As in African cultural views, humans are responsible and accountable to the Deity for what they do with and in God's land. They are also responsible for the indirect impact this creates on their fellow human beings (Adeyemo 2006:615-617).

- 3) In order to foster stability, justice and righteousness within resource owning or host communities, a structured set of stakeholder rights and obligations based on a unique Nigerian perspective is needed. Moreover, a broad idea of corporate social responsibility and accountability by multi-national companies which provide the same set of social virtues both of which derive from a supernatural and transcendental Other is required (cf. Bromiley 2001:12). Simply put, justice demands that profit must be subordinated to the legitimate aspirations and yearnings of resource "owning" communities by multi-national companies (cf. Birch 1991:90; Wright 1983:28).

With the cultural background of the "giraffe principle" in mind, let us critically examine the ways in which colonialism interrupted or enhanced the development of gerontocracy in Nigeria, and its impact on the practice of the "giraffe principle" in the Niger Delta in respect of oil exploration, exploitation and exportation – the 3Es⁷⁶.

3.4 Colonial enhancement of stewardship in a gerontocratic context

The cultural links foisted on Niger Delta communities such as Ogba, Ekpeye and their neighbours were further enhanced as a result of colonial contact with Great Britain with one single theme running through them: gerontocracy! The contact with Britain began formally in the late 19th century, and has continued after Nigeria's independence from British rule in 1960. It has enhanced the institution of gerontocracy as well as made a very significant impact on stewardship, land ownership and use within these communities (Oyediran 1979b:27; Ahiamadu 1982b:2-3). Stewardship for instance has been the sole responsibility of the senior members of the kindred groups simultaneous with a land ownership that has been patrilineal, and a land use which has been primarily patriarchal

⁷⁵ Yeats (1995: 797-798).

⁷⁶ The 3E's – is short for oil exploration, exploitation and exportation activities of multi-national oil companies engaged in the oil extraction business in the Niger Delta of Nigeria see Ahiamadu (2003:3-17).

among various Nigerian cultures – Ogba, Ekpeye, Igbo and Yoruba inclusive (Uchem 2001:74; Dybdahl 1981:61).

Such elders are holders of their respective ancestral sceptres, and collectively they make decisions on behalf of both the living and the dead (Akolokwu 1981:19). In pre-colonial and post-colonial times they administered the affairs of the family and society in an informal way as eldest members (Nwokidu 1974:6). At the core of a gerontocratic culture lay a sense of justice and equity which invariably followed the “giraffe principle”.

Although gerontocracy was a transformed patriarchy which literally extended men’s rule over the micro family to the macro or extended family and from there into the community in the economic, political and social sphere (Ahiamadu 1982a:44-45), it also protected women from marginalisation and mistreatment. As is the case in a patriarchal society in which women were in equal partnership with their male counterparts once they have married, women’s role in a gerontocracy is essentially complementary and unobtrusive (Ahiamadu 1982a:45; Ekeh 1974:112). Moreover, gerontocracy essentially signified the authoritarian control of both the male and female elders over the community. The oldest members were often under the influence and power of the younger and more articulate sections of the community, including women in matters demanding justice and equity (Uchem 2001:46). Yet the “giraffe principle” was at the core of the gerontocratic system of rule, and the one in whose farm land “fortune emerged” was considered by all very fortunate because the elders ruled fairly, equitably and justly.

No human system is ever perfect, in the sense that it is flawless. In a gerontocratic culture, “whoever paid the piper dictated the tune”. Gerontocracy suffered from an endemic problem of a ruthless enforcement of the laws of the land. Usually, the poor and the weak easily fell prey to some prohibitive laws of the system. It was difficult to rid the system of its incipient oppression until the advent of colonialism in the late 18th and up to the mid 20th century (Jones 1956:72-80) when Britain ruled Nigeria.

Nigeria was under British colonial rule during the period until independence was granted by the British Colonial government. The British principle of “indirect rule” employed in the administration of her colonies in West Africa utilised the gerontocratic structures. Such structures were already in place in different forms and levels throughout Nigeria with one essential feature: “respect for the elders.” On the eve of Nigeria’s independence in 1960, a Constitution was brokered, in which constitutional powers were distributed among three

tiers of government: federal, regional and local. It left federal government to make laws on national defence, marine, mining, power generation, postage and aviation among others⁷⁷. These are exclusive areas which must be handled by the federal government. On the other hand law making in respect of education, health, social welfare, agriculture and industry were to be done concurrent by both the federal and regional governments. The third tier of government was left with legislations related to local roads, local languages and the local police in conjunction with regional governments as the case might be⁷⁸.

Subsequently, Nigeria's experience of colonialism ended in 1960, with gerontocratic structures in place at both local and regional levels in the post-colonial era. The moving away from the gerontocratic to a more democratic culture in the 1940s and 1950s, in which the majority and not the elders ruled, still tends towards a relationship of ethnic and patriarchal domination and subordination (Moore and Segovia 2005:47-49). This study therefore aims at exploring alternative ways of fostering a liberating interaction between the various ethnic nationalities and especially among people of the Niger Delta on the one hand, and on the other hand the various levels of government, and multi-national oil companies (cf. Punt 2002:61-63).

Evidently, gerontocracy has triumphed in Nigerian culture today (Amadi 1982:14-34) and has impacted generally on the Nigerian culture, economics, law and politics. Moreover, the "giraffe principle" which is by no means unique to Ogba and Ekpeye, does seem to feature in gerontocracy among the Igbo, Yoruba and Epira, along with the basic principle of "respect for the elders" and solidarity among persons which is still the norm today in most, if not all Nigerian communities (Ehusani 1991:221).

An Igbo proverb says: "*Oke pe mpe, ma mmadu baa uba*" (Let the shares be small, but let the human beings be many) and it underscores a win-win situation which places people above personal gain and which is inherent in the "giraffe principle" (Ehusani 1991:223). We can also learn from the saying among the Epira that "*A vayi engwu*" (let us be 'compensatory' towards one another), that there are members of the community who harbour hatred in their hearts, whose unforgiving spirit finds expression in evil acts, and who must be addressed in words such as the aforementioned Epira words (Ehusani 1991:138). Or as the Yoruba would say: "*Enia l'aso mi*" (People are my clothing) literally

⁷⁷ See *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1959, 1963, 1976, 1992, 1999, 2003 Preamble and Sections VIII – XII*.

⁷⁸ Lots of books have been written on the constitutional development of Nigeria as a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, but the most incisive has been Nicolson (1978) and also Dudley (1973).

underscoring the benefits of being a good neighbour, which in our case also illustrates the “giraffe principle” of a humane and responsible approach to matters of wealth distribution and sharing (Ehusani 1991:237).

It is a value which cuts across ethnic and religious boundaries in the country. Specifically in the Niger Delta it has transcended the colonial experience particularly as it relates to stewardship, land ownership and land use. The elders are still the custodians and stewards of the land, wetlands, rivers and streams inherited from the ancestors. The discussion below takes the argument further through three main periods – pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial (Ahiamadu 2003:2). Let us begin with pre-colonial Nigeria.

3.4.1 Stewardship, land ownership and use in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial gerontocracy

Some of the issues have been alluded to in the preceding discussion, and in the previous chapter. In order to avoid repetitiveness, our focus will revolve around the perspective of gerontocracy keeping in mind the “giraffe principle.” The closest resonance of the “giraffe principle” with Biblical culture is the episode recorded of David and his men by the Deuteronomistic editor in which the “spoils of war” was distributed fairly to those who had a stake in the “recovery” of both humans and materials from the Amalekites (1 Sam.30:1-31). Although separated from contemporary Nigeria by several millenia of time and kilometers of distance, ancient cultures and ancient Israel in particular gives this kind of biblical evidence or story which shows that the “giraffe principle” in a gerontocracy discussed here resonates with practices encountered even in ancient cultures.

A few observations can be made in respect of the ensuing discussion. Firstly, we make no pretence at covering the gerontocratic culture in all of Nigeria, or even of the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta itself, as Nigeria’s and indeed Africa’s oil rich region, is divided into a motley of ethnic nationalities and its major “cities” like Port Harcourt, Warri and to some extent Calabar are very cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural in demographic composition. It provides a home to people from across the country and across the globe (Gordon 2005:46ff; Grimes 1992:98ff).

Secondly, our understanding of stewardship, land ownership and land use in gerontocratic cultures such as we have in several parts of Nigeria, and particularly in the Niger Delta is better appreciated with the few examples gleaned by our research, but cannot therefore

be used as a generalisation for the whole country, not even for the Niger Delta itself. This research is one that focuses on the Ogba and Ekpeye ethnic nationality whose population of nearly one million can be construed as covering a significant section of the Niger Delta population, and by extension Nigeria.

Thirdly, one important thing is that, on a macro level the same cultural practices can be encountered in various degrees among the people, be they Ikwerre, Etche, Egbema, Ndoni or Abua – all in the Niger Delta (Amadi 1982:66-72). We have already shown the degree of cultural affinity that exists among various Nigerian ethnic communities particularly with the Igbo of South-West and the Yoruba of South-West Nigeria in physical, geographical and cosmological terms (Armstrong 1986:72).

3.4.1.1 Stewardship as practiced in pre-colonial gerontocracy

Nigeria's pre-colonial and colonial antecedents were of such a nature that no part of the country was known to be either uninhabited or free of ownership. British merchants came in the trail of adventurous missionaries and explorers during the 1860s, and they signed treaties with various gerontocracies, be they chiefdoms or kingdoms. There were pre-existing concepts of stewardship, land ownership and use which existed in different parts of Africa, founded, nurtured, administered, and developed by the gerontocrats. These same gerontocrats were progenitors of the diverse ethnic and sub-ethnic groups and communities that inhabited the country at various times.

The unwritten customs, norms and laws which governed the moral and social life of various communities in Nigeria were inevitably passed on from generation to generation in the form of folk tales, oral traditions, stories, farming techniques, fishing styles and accounts of war and conquests. Land ownership and use followed customary systems of shift cultivation, communal sharing, and cultural performances. Disputes sometimes erupted over land ownership and use, but it was usually neither of such a proportion as to warrant external intervention, nor went beyond adjudication by third parties. Each community's rights over land were mutually recognised, depending on which of three criteria applied: inheritance, group merit, and / or ascription.⁷⁹ The "giraffe principle," as we

⁷⁹ The issue of land ownership is a very complex one. Some have owned land as a result of an inheritance received from the ancestors, and this is how most of the land in the Niger Delta came to belong to its constitutive and component ethnic nationalities most of which has been enumerated in the earlier sections. However, there have been cases of land ownership not necessarily by inheritance but through personal or group merit. In this case such a land has been

have noted, could have applied in various ways to the more than 434 ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, as it does among Ogba and Ekpeye.

The Ogba and Ekpeye, who occupy the north of the Niger Delta inhabit parts of the Niger river banks with the Igbo on the east and the Yoruba on the west (Akolokwu 1981:8-12). Together the Ogba and Ekpeye number about 900,000 people and speak a language which to some extent are mutually intelligible with those of their immediate neighbours – the Abua, Awarra, Biseni, Egbema, Engenni, Etche, Ikwerre and Ndoni (Ahiamadu 2000:50). These languages all belong to the larger linguistic block described as Niger-Kordofanian (Grimes 1988:90). The various ethnic clusters in the Niger Delta are therefore linked culturally, and to some extent even linguistically (Williamson 1989:45).

In pre-colonial times, gerontocracy or government by the elders and heads of families was the norm among both Ogba and Ekpeye ethnic nationalities (Sam 1979:45). A hegemony was established in the communities and clans, and rules were enforced by a council of the most senior elders, who were holders of ancestral sceptres and who met on major market days to rule on matters pending before them and to discuss issues as they arose in respect of the cultural, economic and social affairs of the land (Ahiamadu 1982:10-11). The self-understanding of the people is that the land belong to God, and the elderly people are stewards of the land, who as custodians see to it that everyone who needs land gets land to be used with the overarching aim of serving the interest of past, present and future generations (Yakubu 1985:6-8). "Ownership" of land is therefore not in an exclusive, capitalist sense, but in a communal and inclusive sense.

Moreover, stewardship and land use primarily remained a kinship issue. Whereas stewardship of land is in the hands of the eldest members of the community, the distribution and use of land for agriculture and housing is primarily at the nuclear family level, involving married members of the community or kindred groups, including married "strangers" and lessors (Meek 157:186). By means of inheritance, ascription or merit land

won through hard work and exploits carried out in the interest of the generality of the people. Examples are no go forests, which only the brave dared to enter and cleared and used for both farming and other economically viable purposes. Still a third way in which land has been owned in the area has been through ascription. In this case, the people came to the point where they recognised an individual's or family's rights over a particular piece of land because of previous associations with it, or through friendship with an original owner who then passed it on as a mortgaged territory and neither himself or his descendants have been able to re-claim such land. In all three manners of land ownership, covenant rights are enacted and some forms of exchange or payments are made either to the gods or to the living ancestor.

is identified with certain kindred. Instructively, men and women became stewards and users of land only as married couples. It is difficult to allocate a share of land to single persons be they male or female (Yakubu 1985:74-75). There always however has to be a male “guarantor” in order for women to purchase and use any piece of land. Otherwise, women “own” part of the kin-group land in partnership with their husbands and for the duration of use (Nwabueze 1972:170-71). This is due to factors such as patrilineal descent and patrilocal marriages (Amadiume 1987:24).

3.4.1.2. Stewardship and land disputes in colonial gerontocracy

On 01 January 1900 these ethnic nationalities⁸⁰ were brought together and constituted into Lagos, southern and northern Nigeria “protectorates”. It was in 1914 that the then Colonial Secretary, Sir Harcourt constituted Lagos and the “protectorates” into what then became the western, eastern and northern regions of a federated Nigeria⁸¹. The forging of a national identity based on the “geographical expression”⁸² of the country even in today’s post-colonial era is still in vogue, and this is closely related to stewardship, land ownership and use.

The colonial background to a modern Nigeria was facilitated by British missionaries, merchants, managers and administrators with Sir Frederick Lugard (1882-1947) serving as Governor-General – an office which today is occupied by a Nigerian president. Even the federal structure which Nigeria adopted has its roots in the colonial policy of separate development for the north, west and east of Nigeria with Lagos serving as the Federal capital. Until 1994 when Nigeria’s capital moved to a central location in Abuja, Lagos had served as federal capital as designed under the British colonial policy. Similarly the policy of the erstwhile British Empire to make each constituent part of the empire pay its own cost

⁸⁰ The Niger Delta alone has ethnic nationalities such as **Abua**, **Biseni** (Emegni), **Degema**, **Ekpeye**, **Eleme**, **Gokana**, **Ibani** (Bonny), **Izon** (Ijo), **Ika** (Ibo Southwest), **Ikwerre**, **Isoko**, **Itsekiri**, **Kalabari**, **Khana**, **Nembe** (Ijo South east), **Obolo** (Andoni), **Oduval**, **Ogba** (Egni/Igburu), **Ogbogolo**, **Tai**, and **Urhobo**. The population of 10 million in the Niger Delta is distributed among the 21 (or more) groups listed above, the least being **Ogbogolo** (15,000) – a language cluster of Ikwerre; and the largest being the Ijo (3 million). See Gordon, R.G. Jr (2005) or online version <http://www.ethnologue.com/>

⁸¹ For a concise discussion of this political developments and an exhaustive bibliography on the subject, see A. Ahiamadu (1982:34-37,116-122). See also I.F. Nicolson (1971:3ff).

⁸² “Nigeria is a mere geographical expression” is a statement made by one of the architects of Nigeria’s independence late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, while reacting to Newspaper reports that he was a Yoruba tribalist and not a Nigerian nationalist. He introduced free primary education to the Western region ruled by his political party the then Action Group in 1959, and maintained that policy when in 1979 his Unity Party won the votes in all of the Western States of Nigeria, including the Niger Delta state of Bendel. See A. Ahiamadu (1982:116ff).

of administration⁸³ is no longer in vogue today in a post-colonial Nigeria due to the oil boom. Prior to the advent of oil as a major source of revenue, each constituent region had to pay its own cost of administration and at the same time support the federal government.

Structurally, the erstwhile government which depended largely on gerontocracy and patriarchy were being marginalised. With the introduction of representative democracy in 1951 onwards, representative democracy became deeply entrenched culminating in the post-independence constitution of 1959 with a bi-cameral legislature – one representative and the other gerontocratic, with the latter serving more or less in an advisory capacity. Since the political and economic power was concentrated in the hands of the educated elites, instead of the elderly members of the legislature, the power of control changed hands from the elders to the educated and political elites. No longer were the elders in control of land ownership, but the elected governors held such authority at state levels. The elders and chiefs were consulted and co-opted from time to time to participate in the process of decision making affecting land use in the various local, regional and federal councils. At the grassroots level a modicum of power to dispense with land, was then left at the hands of the elders – the gerontocrats.

Yet the erosion of the hegemonic powers of gerontocrats began with the way legal matters of land tenure in the coastal regions of Nigeria were dispensed particularly in Calabar, Lagos, Onitsha, and Port Harcourt. We also see erosion at work in the implementation of federal government's new land policy, and lastly in an evolving human rights culture.

From the onset there was a general tendency in former colonial administrations to legally un-protect indigenous⁸⁴ land holdings in the adjoining areas of cities, towns and municipalities in which the administration took special interest. Moreover, the economic and legal framework within which government policies were made never changed,

⁸³ See Lugard (1965: 280-301). A war veteran and administrator, the late Lord Lugard made this point over and over again in his book, *The Dual Mandate*. He stated that revenues which were derived from the land were rather remitted into the government coffers "to swell the public revenue" instead of paying directly to the native owners, thus setting a mischievous precedence for what is happening all over the country today whereby foreign interests do not feel accountable to their host communities but pay royalties to some centralised government machinery which is then expropriated by government officials who in turn do not see their responsibility to the people who presumably gave them the mandate to rule.

⁸⁴ Indigenous in most cases is synonymous with the elders and chiefs – gerontocrats who lived and worked on the land along with the ordinary people on a day to day basis.

regardless of the faces of the administrators – be they white, “mulato”⁸⁵ or black. This was highlighted in an increasing number of litigations related to land ownership and use, and the use which the colonial government made of “Europeanised” indigenous lawyers of the coastal cities – particularly in Calabar, Lagos, Onitsha, and Port Harcourt in order to unprotect the indigenous land holdings (Nwabueze 1972:88-9). In this way the structure of the colonial government was being built on the ignorance, which pervaded colonial assessment of indigenous land tenure systems, and so helped to exacerbate the problems facing indigenous landowners.

The so called “legal luminaries” did not stand on their African “roots” when such issues such as government or private acquisition of so called “derelict” land came up in the courts for adjudication (Nwabueze 1972: 88-89; Lugard 1965:71). As in the dual legal systems of most ancient Near Eastern communities during the first and second temple period, when Canaanite land tenure systems co-existed side by side with ancient Israelite land laws, Nigeria’s indigenous land tenure practices continued to exist side by side with the British alien legal system. Although it appeared humane and civilised, the British legal system was not as accessible as its indigenous legal counterpart. Alternative means of adjudication was employed at various levels to properly fill the vacuum, which an alien legal system and the neglect of indigenous norms and values had created⁸⁶.

Although the “received” alien legal system witnessed an ever increasing sphere of influence throughout Nigeria, neither Muslims in the north and west, nor Christians in the west and east of Nigeria, ignored the use of alternative means of adjudication, even if, as a last resort, because litigants have come to understand the lapses inherent in a legal system not deeply rooted in the customs and manners of the people. While the Muslims were to use the *Shar’ia* law as an alternative, the Christians returned to customary laws of land holding, guided by oral traditions and by the wisdom of the elders.

There have been four observable procedures through which major land disputes have had to be resolved out of law court, simply because “Europeanised” courts do not appreciate the values and customs which underlie the land tenure practices in the Niger Delta, albeit

⁸⁵ ‘Mulato’ or ‘mulatress’ is a name used generally of persons of hybrid culture or ethnicity especially of a person of mixed parentage – either of the parents being black or white.

⁸⁶ Hence with decolonisation in the mid-50s through to the 90s Africa experienced a relief from foreign domination. This in some areas meant a revival of cultural values that made more sense in the social, economic and political life of the people. In the area of land tenure the colonial legacy have tended to obstruct a fair, just and equitable system of land use and has often fuelled the use of violence to sort out land disputes.

in Africa. So the people sometimes resorted to more familiar and convenient methods such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration.

Firstly, in negotiation, the disputing parties resolve their differences out of court by negotiating and agreeing amicably. “Europeanised” lawyers and other outsiders are generally not involved at this stage. The process is not founded on any particular fixed rules and neither are there any technicalities and complex procedures. Should a solution not be forthcoming at this stage, the parties may agree to advance the solution-seeking mission to the next level, which is mediation.

Secondly, in the mediation stage, a natural, third party acting as a facilitator is usually enlisted to serve as a link between the contending parties as well as solicit the counsel of opinion leaders within the community. The procedure to be followed during the mediation exercise is formulated by the mediator who may not make decisions for the parties but merely provide a forum for discussion as well as create an enabling environment for the parties to resolve their differences and terminate the dispute with dignity. Mediation focuses more on the interests of the parties as opposed to “rights” as understood in law, and more often than not relationships are preserved. Any agreements or decisions arrived at under mediation are not binding on the parties. However, where the contending parties are engaged in an ongoing land dispute, the mediator can solicit the services of an “expert” at a cost borne by the parties. The expert then investigates the merits and demerits of the case on the one hand, while on the other hand he assesses the relative strengths or weaknesses of the claims and counter claims brought forward by the contending parties, so that the expert is enabled to give his⁸⁷ honest evaluation of the dispute and make appropriate recommendations for a quick and lasting resolution.

Thirdly, it is at the stage of adjudication that a neutral third party who has been fully acquainted with the background and social implications of the case or dispute, gives a summary interim decision, which is binding on the parties for a specific period of time, pending the outcome of a fuller investigative process which is then set in motion. Such an interim decision is intended to assuage the feelings of the contending parties; provide them with enough room to re-think their claims and positions while at the same time

⁸⁷ In patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal societies such as we have here, women play unobtrusive roles and scarcely get involved in the technicalities of land disputes, hence the use of a masculine pronoun here is not deliberate but contextual. See Amadiume (1987:22), and Ahiamadu (2005:66-76).

preserving the customs and values of the community of which the parties are seen as a part. This decision is binding unless the parties wish to proceed to a more formal arbitration⁸⁸.

Suffice it to say that in an agricultural economy such as Nigeria is, it is quite easy to see how the two legal systems complemented each other. Events later proved, with the advent of oil exploration, exploitation and exportation that it has become increasingly difficult to defend the indigenous land holding systems against a *latifundia* necessitated by the development and maintenance of the oil industry with its view of land as a commercial entity (Mutonono and Mautsa 2006:290). This nascent view of land with commercial value became the norm even in post-colonial and post-independent Nigeria.

Although stewardship was primarily exercised through the gerontocracy of the kindred, it basically served the interest of the colonial powers when it came to land acquisition and use. The commercialisation of land became prevalent in Ogba and Ekpeye as it also is in some other Nigerian and Niger Delta communities, such as the Etche, Igbo, Ijo, Ikwerre, Kalabari, and Yoruba to mention a few. It negated the concept of land as belonging to God, the concept that land cannot be sold or given out as a gift on a permanent basis, and more importantly, it negated the concept of an inclusive use of land such that the benefits derived from the land belonged to the community and not to an individual particularly in cases similar to the “giraffe” anecdote. Generally, it upheld gerontocracy as the norm among the inhabitants of the Guinea Coast of West Africa and inland among the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (Alagoa 1966:405–419).

Such stewardship, land ownership and land use traditions extant among the Ogba and Ekpeye, is better appreciated by looking at practices among some of their neighbouring communities in the Niger Delta; communities with which they share both social and cultural values, and with which comparisons and contrasts can be made.

⁸⁸ Arbitration: The regulatory framework for the arbitration process in Nigeria is the Customary Courts Judicial Procedures Act (CCJPA) of 1979. Arbitration is recognised under the statute as a quasi-judicial means of resolving such disputes out of court, and decisions reached by the arbitration panel on the parties are binding and to be duly communicated to the appropriate legal authorities. Appeals against such decisions by an aggrieved party could however lead to a disannulment of it by a High Court. “Experts” such as land surveyors play a major role as well as other forensic auditors whose professional services assist the panel in providing a fair and amicable solution to an otherwise complex dispute, particularly in setting and settling boundaries of disputed land without impairing the integrity and rights of the land owners’ or claimants.

Around the Guinea Coast in West Africa – which runs from Bamenda in Cameroon to Dakar in Senegal – gerontocracy at the kindred level is synonymous with land ownership and land use. Towns or villages are named after the eldest founders who are also the “title-holders” as well as custodians or stewards of its land (Jones 1956:90). To take a modern example of settlements which existed for a little more than a century ago, among the Kalabari for instance, the towns of Buguma, Abonnema and Bakana refer to territories occupied and owned by the three Kalabari kindreds of Amakiri, Nyemoni, and Iyalla respectively. These three kindred have in little more than a century grown into many kindred and are collectively the inhabitants of the islands of Bukuma, Abonnema, and Bakana in Rivers State. They see themselves as the custodians or stewards of the wetlands inhabited by them and which bears their ancestral names. Thus, Buguma now has grown into the Amakiri, George and Princewill clan; Abonnema similarly has grown into the Georgewill, Jack and Bob Manuel clan, while Bakana is now known to have the Braid, Black, and Iyalla clan (Ahiamadu 1982a:4-6). Although the territory inhabited remained the same, the kindred have increased to reflect the manner of land ownership and use in the area to which each kindred name has been attached.

Similar identification of the land with its original inhabitants are also noticeable inland in the more ancient settlements of Ogba and Ekpeye. Taking the Ekpeye as an example, there are more than six major clans to which names such as Imeagni, Ediwuru, Uchii, Ishikoloko, Agwu, and Uji (among others) are ascribed. Today there are about sixty-four kindreds which are offshoots of the original clans. The same is also true of the Ogba, where more than five major clans can be found, and to which more than thirty kindred trace their descent, some criss-crossing from Ekpeye into Ogba and *vice versa* (Ahiamadu 2005:68).

Rather than being inhabited by descendants of one kindred, every town or village is a combination of inhabitants belonging to different kindred. Hence it is possible to find in larger communities, kinship groups of all the “clans” or kindred living together. In living together, each owns land and streams on which economic and social life thrives. This is true of Omoku, Oboburu, Erema, and Akabuka in Ogba, and of Ahoada, Edeoha, and Ogbo and Abarikpo in Ekpeye (Ahiamadu 2005:68).

The ownership of land in the vicinity of a community entitles the kindred or extended family to send representatives to the Council of Elders or “*Amala ka Ohna*” meetings where important political, social, cultural, legal and religious matters are discussed and

laws connected to them enacted. There are descending orders of such Councils as one move from the community level to the kindred and extended family level, and it terminates at the household level which of course is headed by an eldest man. Elderly women also play governmental or priestly roles more or less in an advisory and unobtrusive manner (Ahiamadu 2005:69).

Implicit to this gerontocratic kinship system is recognition of women's joint ownership of land in partnership with their husbands, and in a few cases with their fathers. In a culture in which rotational planting is practised, once the land is shared at the kindred level and each individual family unit builds its own farm, the women's right to the land is acknowledged over the area in which she planted her crops. In the event of an invasion or damage, the "giraffe principle" also applies to the women in whose farm land the "giraffe" emerged, as our anecdote showed. Crops include a variety of root-crops such as yams, cocoyam, cassava and all other fruit crops like corn, maize, pumpkin, melon, pepper, etc. A woman can harvest and market all crops except yams, which essentially are costlier and considered a male-owned crop (Ahiamadu 2005:69).

While men own the costlier crops, like all yam varieties, they do not use the farm crops, including the male-owned crops such as yam, except through their wives. Once they stand in the right relationship to their husbands, women for all practical reasons have the final say as far as the farms are concerned. However, their rights are automatically withdrawn once they prove insubordinate to or are involved in acts inimical to the interests of their husbands (Ahiamadu 2005:69).

The foregoing inadvertently raises a point that has been discussed earlier. This point will further be explored with the application of a postcolonial theory or mode of analysis in the next chapter, namely, that the Nigerian experience of for instance gerontocracy made for certain cultural inequalities especially between men and women, and socio-economic imbalances as some kindred groups or for that matter ethnic groups owned and used more land than others. That such inherent inequalities existed right from the pre-colonial and colonial times is an important fact to note. Moreover, the "giraffe principle" suggests that such inequalities did not amount to inequity in pre-colonial times because of the inclusive sense of ownership of land alluded to earlier, which is the norm (Ehusani 1992:91-92). However, once the colonial concept of exclusive land ownership and democratisation of governance and law was introduced to these hitherto pristine cultures, it impacted adversely on the very institution used by colonialism to legitimise itself, which is on

gerontocracy (Eze 1997:26-32). It also modified the people's self-understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use (Amadi 1982:110).

Meanwhile, this background provides a basis for assessing Nigeria's post-colonial cultural, economic and political developments. Taking the example of the gerontocracy that binds most Nigerian communities or ethnic nationalities together, one can see how this institution has flourished. There is an array of traditional and religious chieftaincy stools in Nigeria whose primary role is to serve as custodians or stewards of the land of various ethnic nationalities along with the "giraffe principle" underlying its judicial customs and traditions associated with land ownership and use.

3.4.1.3 Stewardship as practiced in post-colonial gerontocracy

Similar perspectives to stewardship, land ownership and use transcended the colonial experience and continued to undergo modifications in post-colonial Nigeria, but with the leadership of the eldest members of the community remaining uncontested. This has been supported by a configuration of historical, ethical, and moral values which existed in various forms of oral traditions including oral culture, arts and performance (Makinde 1988:32). The modification has resulted from two constitutional developments: the issue of rights and the scrapping of the "house of chiefs" in both Federal and State parliaments.

The issue of constitutional rights will require a dissertation of its own. Here only the salient issues will be touched upon. In 1960, when Nigeria gained political independence from the United Kingdom, it inherited a constitution with fundamental human rights. It introduced a plethora of rights, some of which transcended the natural rights of humans in gerontocratic cultures. A distinction can be made between natural and inalienable or special rights on the one hand and between these rights and what is generally termed "civil" rights. Natural rights are synonymous with moral rights which in turn are limited to inalienable rights (Benhabib 2002:18).

In Nigeria and perhaps continental Africa, the human rights culture emphasised more rights than duties in so called "freedom clauses" which of course are considered fundamental to human survival and self actualisation in the new nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America. In Nigeria the right to life, rights to freedom of person, conscience, movement, association, speech, opinion, and rights to personal safety and integrity or self actualisation are deeply entrenched in the constitution. While not denying anyone the right

to property or land, this natural right was not stressed in the post-colonial constitution. It is in a secondary sense that the right to property was not included, because in a primary sense nearly all Nigerian citizens has customary and un-trammelled right to property and land in particular (Yakubu 1985:126). The post-colonial erosion of gerontocratic land tenure systems in Nigeria, and particularly in the Niger Delta lies in the principle of equal rights of all Nigerian citizens – be they elderly or young, and the constitutional recognition of the rights of individuals and corporate bodies to acquire land or property in any part of the country. Although land could not be acquired without the consultation of the elders and chiefs who are custodians of land in their respective territories and domain, in practice the “Land Use Decree” of 1978 has tended to incapacitate such right claims.

The land tenure situation in Nigeria has gradually been changing for the better in the last two decades. In order to facilitate economic and social development, the Federal Military Government under General Olusegun Obasanjo (who until recently has been the 3rd Republican Civilian Democratic President of Nigeria) promulgated a decree tagged “Land Use Decree” in 1978, which vested the title to all lands in Nigeria’s city and urban areas in the hands of State Governors, rather than in the eldest members and chiefs of local communities as was the case in pre-colonial and colonial times.

The law also defined some hitherto traditional communities and elevated them to “urban” status by Law, bringing such areas under the government’s radical land laws, and facilitating both individual and corporate land acquisitions in such areas for social, agricultural, industrial, and economic development purposes generally (Evuleocha 2003:328-340). This decree empowers corporate bodies and individuals to acquire land for developmental purposes in any part of the country, and the authority to make such land grants has been vested in State governors, no longer the gerontocrats of the traditional kinship groups, which may still hold such rights in the non-urban areas (Yakubu 1985: 74-75, 257).

In principle land ownership and use has by this decree been moved from the natural to the civil domain, and stewardship of land from the communal to the civil sector. In other words all land ownership rights have been invested in the Federal Government of Nigeria with the State Government as its surrogates, instead of the usual communal ownership through a gerontocracy recognised by government, reflecting the tradition and customs of the people.

By attempting⁸⁹ to make the ownership of land a “civil” rather than an inalienable or “natural” right, the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1978 had constituted itself as the chief custodian of all land in Nigeria. So they paved the way for the multi-national oil companies in particular to collude with key government officials in “grabbing” large hectares of land⁹⁰ in the Niger Delta and other parts of Nigeria, but largely in those areas richly endowed with huge deposits of hydro-carbon (Obi 2006:59).

By virtue of that decree the Federal Government withdraw the right of stewardship, land ownership and land use from the gerontocrats, and vested such rights on the authority of state governors (Yakubu 1985:263). Thus, the enjoyment of communal land holding or property rights is now relocated from the gerontocratic sphere to the corporate or civil authority sphere (Ayandele 1969:69). In that case a special or natural right of custody and stewardship have been moved into a civil right sector with the implication that a primary right is being made civil or secondary from the point of view of the human rights debate (Blum 1998:77). In other words a right which inheres in one’s status as a human being is being made dependent upon one’s ability to assert or claim such rights without which State protection is denied or deferred. Yet God created human beings with certain natural and inalienable rights which of course include stewardship, land ownership and land use rights along with the norms, laws and values which govern the use and enjoyment of such rights.

If anything, unilateral land decrees especially as has been experienced in post-colonial Nigeria have often been used to a great advantage by corporate bodies and multi-national companies to the detriment of the elders and chiefs who still uphold the institution of gerontocracy in Nigeria. It has often resulted in an erosion of the stewardship, land ownership and land use rights of the people in general and of gerontocracy in particular. It was Lawrence Blum (1998:77) who pointed out that the greatest challenge to the human rights debate is the issue of globalisation (a euphemism for neo-colonialism). Each human rights context faces a global challenge of economic and political subjugation by others –

⁸⁹ It has been a “successful” attempt from the perspective of multi-national oil companies as they now gain untrammelled access to land acquisition or *latifundia* in the Niger Delta, whereas it has been an “unsuccessful” attempt from the perspective of the general public as the “decree” remains abhorrent and un-endorsed by successive Nigerian parliaments both in the second Republic 1979-1983, and in the present third Republic 1999 – 2007. Politicians have consistently contested the “validity” of the Land Use Decree of 1978. For a recent statement on it see **Thisday**, November 5 2006, in which the decree was referred to as marginal and irrelevant to the people of Nigeria. See also this mention of the “Land Use Decree” as “unpopular” and “oppressive” in the interview with him under Empirical Research below.

⁹⁰ For a rudimentary statistics on the various hectares acquired by MNOCs and their subsidiaries see the paper by the present author: Ahiamadu (2003:4-5).

more powerful and wealthier. Therefore each global constituency must define its own predicaments and proffer its own solutions without, however, ignoring the collective experiences emanating from other contexts.

A second issue is the scrapping of the “house of chiefs” on both Federal and State parliamentary levels. Only a resume of its salient features can be attempted. The post-colonial Presidential constitution of 1979, which marked the beginning of the second Republic in Nigeria, scrapped the house of “chiefs / elders” in the Federal and State Parliaments, and replaced them with a Western type “Senate” whose composition is similar to the house of representatives – consisting mainly of educated and young elites (Ahiamadu 1982:67; Oyediran 1979a:43). The implication is that the elders had no formal forum in which to deliberate on sensitive issues such as stewardship of land as it is being practised in post-colonial Nigeria.

It paved the way for the erosion of gerontocracy along with the principles of justice and equity which it represented. The result is one in which an inalienable right to stewardship, land ownership, and land use by the senior members of the community have gradually being transformed into a civil rights exercise more or less at the discretion of governors. Their appointees are mostly “civil” servants not rooted in the customs and norms of the local cultures.

Little wonder then that the land decree which was enacted by military fiat in 1978, has never been endorsed by any of the successive Federal Parliaments marking Nigeria’s wobbling democracy since 1979 until date. Not even by the one of 1999-2007 of which Olusegun Obasanjo himself served as incumbent President. The refusal to recognise or ratify the land decree is not unconnected with its alien and neo-colonial character. Instead it has created a “restive” civil society in which oil bearing communities are engaging the Federal police and army in an itinerant struggle for economic and social liberty – a struggle which is tagged as “militancy” in those parts of Nigeria. It is nothing but the result of erosion of pre-existing gerontocratic authority and of the principle of equity and justice underlying it (Obi 2006:65).

3.4.2 Theological and ethical implications

In a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious context such as Nigeria, one can see the theological and ethical implications of such an erosion of a pre-existing authority.

Theologically, and from the perspective of Old Testament and Islamic laws, human rights is understood as pointing to the rights of the individual to a share of and from the land; to a personal pursuit of happiness, to life and liberty which are in conjunction with numerous other rights deeply entrenched in the canon of both Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The Decalogue for instance protected individual human rights such as the right to conscience, to recreation, to life, to family, to property, to a good association or reputation, and the right to liberty. In this way the individual's relationship to God was protected, so that a violation of an individual's rights was considered an interference with that individual's commitment or devotion to God (Wright 1990:136).

Such laws and the sanctions which went with them provided Israel with a social organisation built upon a substructure of tribal or communal solidarity and mutual responsibility even at the so called *bet ab* level. The *paterfamilias* in resonance with gerontocracy is what made the relative strength of the tribe as a whole desirable. Not only were laws enforceable at various levels of kinship, but they also provided the moral resource for the retention of kinship wealth within a broader kinship group. It also made it possible for individual nuclear families to enjoy the ownership and use of property – particularly land (Fager 1993:91). On the one hand erosion of such a stabilising institution as *paterfamilias* or gerontocracy in the Nigerian context has tended to stultify the processes of an accountable and responsible land ownership and use. On the other hand it has challenged, if not distorted the congruity existing between Biblical Israelite and African culture.

Ethically, it will be appropriate to make a few observations about gerontocratic care and nurture of nature which form part of norms and ethos in post-colonial communities in the Niger Delta, not to speak of Nigeria and Africa. In a cultural context such as has been known since pre-colonial times, there is a sense of stewardship, land ownership and use which tend to place emphasis on humans-in-partnership-with-nature rather than a humans-above-nature mindset (Aderibigbe 1999:334-35). It would therefore frown at a reductionism which not only places humans at the apex and centre of creation, but which also drives a wedge between humans and nature, such that the former treats the latter as if it were an enemy to be mastered and subdued (Towner 2006:28).

By complying with the ethical requirement of a humans-in-partnership-with-nature mindset, the gerontocratic culture easily falls in line with earth-keeping traditions world-wide and with their Judeo-Christian counterparts in correcting the misconceptions and indictments

associated with a too literal and uncritical reading of Genesis 1:26-28 along with the challenges it poses to a post-colonial critical hermeneutic (Runzo *et al* 2003:61; Bryant 2000:35).

The long standing practice of gerontocracy and the “giraffe principle” of win-win, compensatory use and good neighbourliness is in vogue among the Ogba and Ekpeye. It has made a great impact on their self-understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use in a context in which the community, government, and multi-national oil companies like Total are equally engaged in matters of land acquisition and use. This self-understanding measured through my empirical research that was conducted in the area is reflected in the discussions by the focus groups and also by the personal interviews to which we now turn.

3.5 Empirical reseach findings⁹¹

This is an empirical research which illustrates what, in the opinion of the people,⁹² is a more humane approach to stewardship, land use and ownership within the area. It was conducted on two separate occasions in Nigeria⁹³. It consisted of two parts – focus groups and personal interviews, though both used the same investigative indices and topics. The locations in which a series of focus group discussions were held is Erema⁹⁴ in Rivers State, whereas a couple of personal interviews were conducted in Port Harcourt, Nigeria’s main oil city.

The focus group participants were selected to reflect three main age categories (Schute 2000:9-10). The older category was in the range of between 45–65 years old. The middle-aged adults, most of whom were self-employed and in micro business, were of the ages

⁹¹ I have been assisted by colleagues in the Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, Stellenbosch University in the use of Schute Scale – a method I have employed in describing the formation and conduct of focus groups. Accordingly, I have used a qualitative rather than a quantitative one in measuring the results of our field research with Nigeria’s Ogba and Ekpeye focus group and interview participants.

⁹² This being a qualitative research, neither the opinion of the focus groups nor those of the persons interviewed can be used to arrive at any generalisation to the views or opinions of the Ogba and Ekpeye either in Erema where the focus group interviews were conducted or in Port Harcourt where the personal interviews took place. Instead, these serve as indicators of some prevailing concerns within the community.

⁹³ All focus group discussions took place in various “zones” or compounds within Erema Town, Ogba – Egbema – Ndoni Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria, on different dates and each group with different participants.

⁹⁴ Erema is incidentally the home town of the researcher in which he spent his early primary school years and in which he learnt so much about African culture and the Christian faith (Ahiamadu 2000:3).

35-45 years old, while the youngest group were between the ages of 16-35, mostly students. On the other hand the personal interviewees were selected not on the basis of age, but being based at the offices held by each in government and the company. The director of local government affairs and a company manager from Total, who is the manager of Health, Environment and Safety were selected to reflect two main themes: land tenure in the local areas; and environmental sensitivity in the local communities by Total – the major generators of pollution.

Incidentally, the Erema community has over the centuries been the historical and cultural “melting pot” of both Ogba and Ekpeye’s ethnic nationality, its culture and language. It provides a home to a cross section of peoples indigenous to both ethnic nationalities in which cultural norms and religious values have experienced more or less a synthesis. Port Harcourt on the other hand has served as the economic nerve centre of Nigeria for more than four decades since commercial oil mining began, with Shell, Total, Agip and Texaco multi-national oil companies leading the way.

The focus group participants were invited from most of the major kindred-families originating in Ogba and Ekpeye. The invitations were done using oral messages extended to participants who then assembled in an agreeable venue: the chief’s house, the youth leader’s house, and on three occasions we met in the house of the researcher. For the personal interviews I met with the officers in their respective offices.

A total of six focus groups⁹⁵ of 33 adult persons – 16 men and 17 women were organised, whereas the interviews were with 2 persons. The theme of both the focus group discussions and the personal interviews focused mainly on individual or the group understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use.

The focus groups were conducted respectively on 10, 13, 15, 17, 19 and 20 August 2005 in Erema community, while one year later the personal interviews were conducted on 19 and 25 January 2006 in Port Harcourt city to verify some of the assertions encountered during the previous year’s focus groupings (see Appendix 2-4).

In addition to the age and office of the participants, they were also selected on the basis of their marital status. Most of them were married men and women with the exception of

⁹⁵ Focus group interviews involve 4 – 8 persons in a discussion group centred on the same subject. See D. Schute (2000:53-9).

those in the younger groups (16-35 years) some of whom, having attained the age of marriage, are engaged but not married. Marriage is one criterion for land ownership and use in the community, and each nuclear or extended family is involved in one stewardship role or another. In this culture people have to respect the land bequeathed on the “present” generation by the ancestors.

In my opinion (Ahiamadu 1982b:43ff; 1993:3; 2000:3-7; 2005:64-76) the customs and manners of Ogba and Ekpeye people can be evaluated in terms of a theological and ethical sensitivity to humans, nature and land as was indicated in the “giraffe principle”. The land of course is a property over which individual or corporate body have real control. Theologically, the general conception that land is a gift from God which cannot be sold or given to anyone as a permanent gift is what informs the people’s placid attitude towards stewardship, land ownership and use of the land. It also informed the lease of their land to very low bidders at traditional fees in the hope that gains from the land would be mutually shared with the land “owners” – now the custodians or stewards. This liberal conception of land use and stewardship inculcated by African culture in individuals as well as in corporations, runs counter to the more personalised or private ownership. Because of different understandings of ownership of land in these cultures, it resulted in land being given out to companies on the basis of the “giraffe principle”, to be received by Total on a largely different “winner takes all” principle. The companies have a different idea of land lease than what the land “owners” have in mind.

The latter consider land lease as requiring no more than a one year affair, and if something more beneficial or permanent is to be done on the land the “giraffe principle” is immediately followed. On the other hand the companies coming from Europe consider such leases as giving them the right of exclusive ownership over the piece of land along with everything that it is used for. Therefore any benefit from investments made on the land goes first and foremost to shareholders, management and staff of the company, before it gets to the land owners. This conflict of values and expectations has given rise to the impoverishment of the people and a degradation of both land and water resources in the area and the companies seem oblivious about it.

The government’s poor governance practices have not helped matters. They have not successfully made laws that protect both the land and environment leased to the multi-national companies. They have also been politically inept in enforcing international

conventions such as the Rio Declaration of 1992⁹⁶, and the Johannesburg Convention of 2002. In theory both civil government and multi-national companies depend on the judgement of the elderly on all matters of land acquisition and use, but in practice the elders cannot refuse to lease a land that has been pin-pointed for use by either government or company. Furthermore, as we saw in the previous section, a gerontocratic culture is gradually being eroded by government's policy to make land ownership in a modern Nigeria, a "civil" rather than a "natural" right.

3.5.1 Participants' self-understanding of stewardship, land ownership and land use in gerontocratic contexts

The focus groups and personal interviews were conducted primarily to assess the participants' self understanding of stewardship and what constitutes responsible land ownership and use in a community in which the elders rule. Ogba and Ekpeye, like most of their Nigerian neighbours, e.g. the Igbo and Yoruba practise, a gerontocratic culture at the grassroots.

The discussions followed three identical lines. Firstly, the same basic questions were addressed to both focus group participants, and to the individuals interviewed. The questions were essentially directed at what constitutes their self-understanding of the issues at stake, namely stewardship of land owned or used by them or by their families, company or government (see Sample of basic questions in Appendix 2).

Secondly, both the focus group and personal interviews were conducted in the same way as the others; first an introduction of persons, a statement of the purpose of the interview, and ten questions posed each one at a time to which one participant after another answered.

⁹⁶ In 2002, ten years after the Rio de Janeiro Convention of 1992, where a Global environmental convention was signed, a conference was held in Johannesburg in which issues pertaining to water, energy and access to healthcare, as well as agriculture and biodiversity were addressed. Energy emerged as a central theme, but its implication for human rights in participating nations and communities were not touched upon. Each national unit was left to enact its own environmental laws and enforce it within her own national boundaries. Nigeria is a signatory to the Rio Convention. Since then it has remained on paper and not been implemented.

Thirdly, both focus group and personal interview proceeded in an interactive atmosphere and discussions or answers were, with participants' permission, recorded via a tape recorder and later transcribed.

When the views of focus group participants are weighed against those from the personal interviews, certain points of convergence emerge: a gerontocratic culture operating on the "giraffe principle" but confronted with a democratic Western culture operating on a "winner takes all" culture. The focus group discussions as well as the interviews revolved around 10 basic issues dealing with stewardship, land ownership and use as follows:

3.5.1.1 Beneficial land use

3.5.1.1a Introduction to responses

Erema in Ogba and Ekpeye is situated in the heartland of the oil industry of the Niger Delta. Total, a major multi-national oil company, runs several oil flow stations in Erema and the surrounding areas of Obagi, Obite, Ebocha, Elele-Alimini, and Obrikom. Government also runs several post-secondary institutions in the area such as a maternity home and a hospital within Erema and in Omoku. The focus group participants were therefore asked to assess the benefits they consider themselves as deriving from company used land and government used land.

The men and women were clearly of the opinion that not much benefit is derived from land leased to either multi-national oil companies or government. Though the weight of the opinion is on government as doing better than the oil companies in assisting the communities through employment and other benefits. Their understanding of stewardship is that it is a collective and not a personal responsibility. At best stewardship is a matter of ensuring adequate and regular gratifications from the land leased to either multi-national oil companies or government. These views are reflected in their responses below:

The women felt that: *"They gain nothing from the land that is leased to the oil company, because the company has already used the land. We cannot go back there to plant, we cannot make use of that land any longer."*

The group of men supported the view of the women: *"Previously, the government compensated the landlords in terms of employment, and sometimes by providing the*

community with social amenities. But this time around government is not paying any compensation to the community as far as land is concerned.”

The men also felt that: *“A man who has removed or literally given his land to the project, will survive. The government or companies that acquired the land should now give us enough compensation in order to sustain our living. What is obtainable in other developed countries should now be applied to us this way, because the land has already been taken away from us. So there is nothing we can do than to ask the company or government to do something that is in our interest. As it concerns land in Nigeria, we give land to government for offices, schools, hospitals but we cannot charge them anything, because such projects are beneficial to the community. We will be very happy if government or the oil company will come and build better things for us to develop, because we live in interior villages. And if they come, they should treat us kindly. That is to meet the land owners and pay adequate and regular compensation. I am a landlord to Risonpalm, who has acquired my land – acres of land. They are not treating us well ... the landlords are not benefited.”*

The views of the persons interviewed were more sympathetic towards the government and the company. The latter according to them has the expertise needed to tap and use the resources located underneath the land. So the people are to seek to participate in owning not just land but the capital with which to generate benefits out of it. However, the benefits from the land should be shared with the land owners.

There were two very significant opinions expressed with respect to land acquisition:

“There can be no development without the acquisition of land, and both government and the oil company will need land to develop or begin their operations. The communities own the land, but lack the capital and skill with which to tap the natural resources in the land. The benefit lies in the development it brings.”

“The benefit to a community in which land has been acquired by the oil company is primarily in the job creation for the children of those whose land has been acquired.”

3.5.1.2. Personal involvement in land lease

3.5.1.2a Introduction and responses

In this discussion the attention of participants were drawn to prevailing land lease practices within the community, and they were asked to state their involvement in the process of

negotiating and granting land for acquisitions whether to government, company or private individuals. They were asked to take into consideration the option of refusing to give land and the consequences that can bring.

Firstly, the participants generally saw the eldest men and women as the custodians of land and as accountable to present and future generations for the way and manner land is distributed and used, especially for purposes other than agriculture. Beside the customary role of the elders and chiefs in giving their consent, there is a deep sense of collective rather than individual responsibility for land or property ownership. The obvious reason for this is that property or land is never customarily owned at any level beside the kin-group, and most kin-groups occupy literally the same community. Therefore it is sometimes difficult on the part of government and the oil company to pay compensations to any individual, because of conflicting claims from kin-group members which make it easy for government or the company to evade the payment of compensation.

Secondly, the role of government policy in the present predicament was also highlighted by the participants in focus groups and interviewees. Not only has government acquired land in the area through its agencies for agricultural, social and educational purposes, but also land so acquired has not been responsibly managed for the benefit of the communities whose land has been acquired. The case of Risonpalm Nigeria Limited was cited in two discussion groups as a glaring example of the irresponsible management of vast land acquired from a group of communities, i.e. Elele, Eligbo, Erema, Itu and Omudioga communities of Rivers State, without paying any compensations or giving them alternative land allocation.

Thirdly, some views were more apprehensive of the looming danger of poverty as a result of government and company's indiscriminate and non-compensatory acquisition of land in the area. The elderly men and women said that the way land is being acquired and used in the community by government, company agents and private individuals leave much to be desired. Their views contrast with the views of the younger men and the middle-aged women on the matter of desirability or undesirability. These latter groups sounded some note of optimism at the way land is being acquired in the community. Apparently they are the more articulate, if not militant sections of the community and one of them was being gratified with some job by Total. A sample of opinions from both sides are listed below:

Generally the response was: *“When an oil company comes to your land, they must first of all consult with the owners of the land through the chief or any one of the elders who is closer to them. The family may disagree with them initially but in the end they will reach a consensus. There has never been any case where the oil company came to meet the owners of the land, and it resulted in a total disagreement.”*

Some responses sounded like a lament: *“We are asking of government to look into it. Landlord should be compensated for having giving out land in order to survive. At present the whole gain from the land is going into one purse (i.e. Risonpalm). The landlords are suffering. We are not happy. The disadvantage is that, as they do this, they forget that the unborn children are yet to come. The forest has been taken away from them, and the company has done what they wanted with the land. They spoiled the land, forgetting that those they are affecting are the children. Once the company has gone, the forest land has been spoiled.”*

Other responses were more optimistic: *“The government and company are trying, though we say they are not doing anything. Especially about two weeks past the electricity light has never shone. To me as an individual, it affected me because there is something that I do pursue at the place where light is switched on. Since the light stopped shining for over two weeks now I have never been there. I have been told that light will be restored before the end of the day, and I am looking forward to that. So I take it that such people are trying and the community will be worse without them.”*

“The Nigerian government issued a ‘Land Use Decree’ in 1978. Still it does not change our land tenure traditions whenever a government or oil company comes to acquire land. We believe in leadership by seniority; so our elders are responsible for leasing the land. I could go to give my own ideas, especially to ask for our surface rights, since by law the annual land rate or royalties has been usurped by the government.”

“Normally, the elders of the kindred-group hold the land on behalf of the whole kindred. In order to acquire land from the family the Oil company has to discuss it with the elders of the kin-group who are then able to lease the land. It is true though from what I know that by virtue of a Federal land law all land belongs to the government.”

The land use law of the Nigerian government has greatly eroded the gerontocratic culture, and must be respected by all, so that decisions taken by the elders on behalf of the

kindred with respect to the lease of land cannot but recognise governmental authority over land. However, each land acquisition should be in the overall interest and sustainable development of the community, including those at home and those abroad. The elders have to make both the government and company to be aware of this.

3.5.1.3 Values impacting on land

The younger male participants most of whom were high school leavers emphasised on the numerous benefits derived from the land: We build houses on land, practice agriculture on land, and do our fish farming on fish ponds. The values with which the land is impacted are similar to the ones with which a child is protected, so that the benefits of land can reach to the child born today and to the yet unborn child. This is the general trend of the responses:

As one participant so aptly put it:

“Even if it is a swampy place, it is beneficial. Even if it is on dry land – so long as it is called land – it is beneficial in many ways.”

Speaking on values attached to land leased to either government or company the female participants felt that: *“Even as married women we feel sad whenever a land is taken from us, especially when we come back home to visit our people and find that there is no place to get food. So anything done to the land taken from us makes us sad and sorry.”*

Those who are not resident in local areas often make suggestions as to the best way communal land should be distributed and used, but their suggestions are usually outweighed by those who are on ground sharing the benefits from the land. Major investments on land such as large scale industries must be based on Environmental Impact Assessment standards. Besides, with respect to government policy, there has been the Federal government’s lethargy in implementing international conventions. This point was alluded to earlier. Government has not provided the legislative instrument for enforcing and monitoring multi-national oil company with respect to environmental safety standards meant to govern both their industrial and chemical operations.

Sometimes absence from home by the elites during important kindred meetings in which major decisions are made affects the quality of some decisions:

“Since I am not resident at home, I cannot influence the way the community or my kindred customs and traditions are applied when it comes to land acquisition by either government or the oil company. Even when I am at home, I am only a member under the family heads. It is my duty to give suggestions and air my opinion on such matters, but whether it is accepted or not is not of my own choice. I am aware that decisions taken have implications for every member”.

“Actually, land leased has to be used for the purpose of which it was leased; otherwise it reverts back to the kindred. If land is acquired for the citing of an industry, then an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will be carried out for bigger industries only, not for small scale industries. Whether or not the oil companies abide by such EIA is a matter for government to check”.

One of the women leaders spoke at length on this: *“In our own (Ogba) custom women do speak their mind on land matters because they have been married. The owners of the land are the men to whom we are married. Even when it comes to buying land, it is the men who contribute money to buy; the majority of the women do not have money with which to contribute. However some capable women do contribute for their children, and in that case they have a share and a say. However, when the men gather to appraise their land, the women do not go there. Women’s right in land matters is very small”.*

On the other hand the men did not see this as a problem. Instead they spoke about certain taboos which militate against a responsible and accountable land ownership. One of the chiefs said that:

“We have places in our community that are considered sacred but are well situated for siting, e.g. schools, the university and the hospital, but which cannot be leased out by the community due to our taboos and customs.”

Interestingly, such customs and taboos have been impacted by what an elder described as “religious revolution”:

“As before, all these areas are forbidden. Nobody can enter them, but due to religious revolution people are trying to cut those places because of their search for land”.

The opinion of the individual interviewees tended to favour a more democratic arrangement than a gerontocratic one. They opined that government is imposing land lease laws on the people, instead of allowing the laws on land acquisition to come from the people themselves, leaves much to be desired. In the same vein they suggested that land should be given for developments that are not to the people's detriment, and this means that more investments should be geared towards land reclamation, rejuvenation and to an agricultural development that has an industrial component on its margin. The trend of their answers resonates with those from the focus groups. Although God has ultimate control of all situations and circumstances, careful planning on the part of humans – community, company and government, is needed to ensure that environmental and ecological disasters are minimised while sustainable development is maximised.

The younger male participants summarised the two sources of land laws known to the community, namely the customs of the elders and the civil laws. One individual opinion summed up the general feeling of all the other groups on this question:

“The customs of our community forbids murder or manslaughter on the land and it can lead to land loss where the family of the assailant decides to forfeit a large parcel of land in lieu of execution of the culprit by the aggrieved family. Custom also forbids rape or adultery on the land – an offence that is punishable with heavy fine. This can also lead to land loss where the aggrieved party decides to accept no reparation beside a piece of land. Another source of law is the Nigerian government in Abuja which has made a law that all land now belongs to government.”

3.5.1.4 Hindrances to responsible land ownership and use

The opinion of participants were that the present practice of land acquisition in which the location of oil mineral deposits overrides the interest of food and agricultural crops cultivated on the land, leaves much to be desired. It destroys existing vegetation and renders the people vulnerable to impoverishment and underdevelopment. It is a major hindrance to sustainable land use in the area.

Some of the women pointed out the activities of multi-national companies which are inimical to responsible land ownership. They pointed out that mining and industrial locations are on agricultural land, as activities such as the installation of flow stations, excavation of burrow pits and construction of access roads usually take place on land.

In an earlier research, I discovered that Total alone has in the last 51 years or more, acquired more arable and wet lands in Ogba and Ekpeye than anyone – individual or group – has ever done in all the previous centuries put together⁹⁷. Besides the indirect impacts, there has been a growing awareness of the negative impact resulting directly from the operations of various multi-national companies in the area. Consequently the land's rich resources are being exploited and expropriated without any agenda of land revamping, environmental refurbishment, and ecological rejuvenation. It became necessary to address these issues in the interest of the welfare and safety of host communities.

In view of the present expansionist tendencies of multi-national oil industries which place “profit above the people”, there appears to be not enough land and water to meet food demands of the teeming population for the next one-century⁹⁸. There appears to be not enough land and water to cater for the people's social and economic needs. Participants responded to questions asked in this regard, even by citing prophetic remarks from the Old Testament. The statement of one of the participants started with a quotation from Hos. 6:4 as follows:

“Evidently, most ‘people perish because of a lack of knowledge’ and so land is sometimes given out usually to the highest bidder whether it is occupied or unoccupied. The principle of best practice requires that land must be vacant before it is given out; neither should a kin-group give out land if that is the only land available. How else can they survive if they give out an only piece of land? You make a temporary offer for another land which you may not use, say in the next decade or two. The present practice is that, once mineral oil is found in a particular land, the interest of both the government and the oil company comes into play and immediately that land is taken without giving the land owners any choice to say ‘no’. Such a practice undermines sustainable development.”

“Individuals own and use land primarily for housing and agriculture which does not affect the vegetation of an area dramatically as do the land leased to the oil company for industrial location, and usually the demands of the latter overrides the need of the former with implications for the vegetation.”

⁹⁷ See A. Ahiamadu (2003:8-9), see also Ballard and Banks 2003:287-313.

⁹⁸ An apt expression borrowed from Bromiley (2001:11-12).

3.5.1.5 Factors responsible for land degradation

The opinion of the interviewees is that increased population, company expansion, and the “Land Use Decree” are major factors that contributed to the pressure on the land. The increasing population included both increased birth rates and high migrant rates with the advent of an improved security delivery and of government health care regulations. The tendency is to move large numbers of company personnel into this so-called “petroleum enclaves” in a way not tolerated in the past. Thus the Niger Delta environment becomes demographically pressurised.

Also identified is the indirect impact of the expansionist tendencies of multi-national oil companies such as Total. The present practice by the company (Total and her subsidiaries) is to take away vast areas of land from the people for industrial purposes at the expense of arable agricultural land. This is the “profit above people” syndrome which robs the people of their chances of growing food on their land for immediate uses.

A third factor is the government policy on land through the enactment of the so called “Land Use Decree,” which some of the participants also mentioned. The two individuals interviewed said among other things:

Population growth is one factor, and the leasing of land to oil companies is another factor. Land is a static asset, whereas population and acquisitive instinct of oil companies is a growing problem. Multi-national company operations usually claim so vast an area of land for oil well and oil storage purposes and this causes difficulty to the people. To their own detriment, the people do not always realise that they are leasing so much land at once. An example is the Ikwere of Port Harcourt which, in 1979 gave out so much land for the building of a University by the government. Until now the people are regretting the land they have so given out.”

A second view was that: *“It is a combination of those factors, but in my area population increase is due to the presence of oil migrant workers and the extensive industrial installations by oil companies which have led to land degradation, impoverishment and a loss of the usual crop harvest and returns from the agricultural sector.”*

A view which is representative of the views expressed by focus group participants is this: *“Actually, population causes our land to diminish. Another factor is government’s*

interference by taking over land and not immediately building on it. There is also the oil company factor which acquire land and use it to dig burrow pits and these pits can never be used for farming or to build houses again.”

Among some lapses in the manner in which both government and company acquired land in the area, and over which the elderly men complained, were the lack of compensatory use of land as well as a lack of a sense of good neighborliness:

“When the government come, they come to the chiefs or the elders. And after they acquire the land, they do not pay much compensation because they believe that they own the land. So they see it as a kind of formality to inform the people that they want to take the land. Because of that the people themselves do not have the say on the kind of project that should be sited on their land. It depends on the program of the government. Well government is government, we know that they have the power, but they too must have to consult the owners of the very land. The government should not believe in the ‘Land Use Decree’ which was advocated by the military administration in 1978.”

3.5.1.6 Sources of land legislation

Under normal circumstances legislation on matters related to land tenure or use should come from the people themselves. There is the present situation in which government enacts unilateral decrees on land ownership and use moving it from the traditional gerontocratic structures and into the civil sector. This is still problematic to say the least. Such legislation on land ownership and use has to be implemented in the light of the customs and manners of land owning communities at least.

“Government is a mechanism. The people have to organise themselves as a group. Government has a constitution in which they have entrenched the ‘Land Use Decree’ and people seem to have no choice. Under normal circumstances every decision on land acquisition and use should come from the people themselves. The so called ‘Land Use Decree’ is tantamount to a forceful entry into people’s land and should be abrogated if the rights and dignity of human person is anything to talk about.”

“The ‘Land Use Decree’ is one source of law in Nigeria which defines criteria for ownership and use of land. There are also land use and land tenure customs in various communities which are not documented, and so are oral laws. In order to achieve fairness and equity

the 'Land Use Decree' has to be interpreted in the light of customs and traditions governing land tenure and use in various ethnic and religious communities in Nigeria."

3.5.1.7 Suggestions for improved land utilisation

The issue of a responsible management of land was brought to the attention of the participants and they were asked to place themselves in the shoes of stewards or custodians of land, and to say what other beneficial uses land could be put to other than is presently the case with government or the company.

The men generally considered investment in agriculture and industries with minimum negative impact on the environment as the best kind of investment needed in Ogba and Ekpeye. In their opinion, such environment-friendly industries and agriculture make for sustainable development. Similarly, the female participants viewed their own personal capability to own land and to make investments on it in a very positive light. They could own land and embark on sustainable investments and projects. Generally, the women saw no problem if they owned land especially in partnership with their male counterparts – their husbands, brothers or male offspring. The views are represented in the statements of the participants below in which some focus group participants also pointed at agriculture and small scale industries⁹⁹ as something to always think of once they own their own land: *"We will build houses, schools, shops and banks. We will plant palm trees, rubber plantation, develop fishing ponds, cultivate large scale pineapple farms. We will also like to build industries and refineries around this place so that we will have enough petrochemical companies."*

In my opinion the women's views were formed on the assumption that women usually make good use of land. They sometimes however do not receive the same economic and social empowerment given to their male counterparts at the levels of community, company and government. The latter however are not given such empowerment without being married. In this way the women are generally co-recipients.

One interviewee had this to say: *"In Ogba there is no way in which one person can have an overall planning power over our land as this is owned by several communities, kindred and families. However, assuming that such an overall planning power was possible in my*

⁹⁹ Small scale industries like oil mills, kernel crushing mills, timber sawing plants, sometimes includes mechanised farms that uses tractors and equipments to facilitate land ploughing, seed planting and harvesting.

hand, I would invest more land in agriculture so that the land is available for a sustainable development that can impact on present and future generations. Agriculture, as far as I am concerned, is the key to sustainable development in our own kind of society today. Industrialisation processes should go hand in hand with significant investments in land rejuvenation and in agriculture.”

Another interviewee also said: *“Predominantly our people are farmers but not so now due to the oil company activity and the absence of any land rejuvenation programme for areas where oil has been mined. To mine oil in a sustainable way can enable our people and all stakeholders to achieve their goal, particularly as the original land owners make use of reclaimed or rejuvenated land. By sustainable I mean a development of an area that does not impact negatively on the environment, though you can never totally have 100% of the habitat being un-impacted by such development whether industrial or agricultural. The important thing is to do something about such negative impact in order to restore the lost areas”.*

3.5.1.8 Responsibility for unsavoury occurrences on land

In an area where the people live close to nature and place great value in communal solidarity and harmony, they are often confronted by natural disasters and occurrences such as seasonal flooding, wars, violence, or famine. The focus groups and interviews generally pointed at humans as responsible for the things that go wrong for instance when someone drinks and drives. However, nothing occurs outside of the sovereignty of God. In other words, there are last day's events which occur as fulfilment to New Testament prophecies (Mt. 24). These are generally portrayed in the views of both interviewees and focus groups.

In the views of both interviewees: *“It is a bit difficult to classify what natural disaster is, especially when certain things happen and we are tempted to attribute it to God. An accident is a natural disaster but its cause can be due to negligence on the part of drivers through overloading, sleeping behind the steering, drunkenness etc. Such accidents can be investigated and the causes known to be due to human factor. However, air disasters usually are caused by factors beyond the ordinary humans and so the causes could be attributable to God, as if that is the way God wanted it”.*

“As a Christian I believe that according to Matthew 24 the end time events and signs are on us. So everything that happens shows that we are drawing closely to the end of the age. It has been predicted that this end will bring about lots of disasters. The Saviour will soon come back and so everything is coming to an end. While we wait for his return, we need to be godly in the way we live and treat other people. (It is God who determines everything that happens on earth)”.

On the other hand the general feeling in the focus groups was: *“If anything went wrong in the land, we do not blame anybody. First and foremost we take it as natural occurrences demanded by nature. Secondly, we have to ask if it is flood, why this flood? Is it nature taking its toll? Or is it the way government has treated water, because government dredge water to some place and we do not know where the water will stop and what will happen. Sometimes we ask that question to government. Sometimes we take the blame straight to government or some other body. Another one is war. Sometime we blame government for causing a war. If accident happens, we do not have anybody to blame. We find that it may be the way God wanted it”.*

3.5.1.9. Identity formation and promotion

The general opinion is that their personal identity has been shaped in infancy at home and at school by parents and teachers, and later in life in one’s chosen profession. Below are typical of the answers given:

In the men’s opinion: *“Identity is formed as one is born in a family, and goes to a particular school, and chooses a particular career. As one through the direction of God works in a particular place and understands the aim and objectives of his or her organisation, the individual is enabled to function according to such aims and objectives. For instance in the Ministry of Local government, needs vary from community to community according to their own routine requirements. The problem with identity is self-centredness of those involved in Local Government. Instead of them reflecting the felt needs of their community they take care of only themselves. They fail to realise that it is only those projects in which the people were made to participate that can earn their support and respect.”*

The men further opined that: *“Basically, identity is formed by your birth-place and parental background as well as by your social upbringing, and lastly by the kind of job you do and the people among whom you work.”*

The response from the women was: *“In Ogba and Ekpeye custom first and foremost when you are born they know you by your parents, by your husband or wife when you are married. That is how they identify us. After that the third place they know you is during your education time, but mainly by parent or your partner. Some of the people will know me by my original birthplace, or by the community in which I have married, or by the community in which I was raised.”*

All of the women admitted that they were either wives of their husbands or daughters of their fathers, with one of the women pointing at her *alma mater* as a source of identity prior to her marriage. The men mentioned their *alma mater* but more in the context of their jobs and profession.

3.5.1.10 Sacred space, time and conflict resolution

The participants identified some sacred areas within the community: the playground, cultic ground, cemetery, swamps as areas where *“no feet will enter”* to farm, raise a building or any structure for that matter. The keeping of sacred space contributes to the environmental and ecological integrity of an area. However, poverty has necessitated the desecration of such sacred spaces and has also generated conflicts. In this case the structures for conflict resolution are set in motion to resolve it.

“Those places have been part of our culture for a long time. There are places where people can acquire land, but places such as we have mentioned above is never given to any human being”. “The elders of old have kept it so; it is not the people of today who have done it. A place which has been seen as sacred is a place that no one dare to go and desecrate it except for specific public purpose like meeting, worship, burial, lumbering.”

“Under normal circumstances nature demands that certain spaces be preserved, but due to poverty it is given away. Where it is necessary to move a sacred space due to a project or industry several options should be considered and this should be done only as a last resort. Ideally the people must give their sacred space but not at the expense of the whole community.”

With respect to time, the women pointed out: *“Beside sacred places, there are also sacred days in which no work is allowed to be done on the land, but this varies according to*

kindred. If you go on the holy day that means you have violated or polluted the land. The things you planted in that land may not do well, and anyway you attempted such a violation of a sacred day, whatever you see there (in the land) you will have to bear the consequences.”

One of the interviewees stated that conflict resolution required: *“A third party – the arbiter has to trace the root cause of the problem and then invite the parties to the conflict to a round table discussion so that a resolution can be achieved. Notwithstanding, we know that conflicts generate development, and not all conflicts have negative consequences. A man using one shirt never buys a new one until his heart runs into conflict about his sticking to only one shirt when others are using more than one. Then he goes out and makes effort to buy another.”*

A similar view expressed differently goes on: *“Under normal circumstances you cannot come into any place that has natural resources in it without entering into an agreement with the people. Every development venture has social, economic and environmental implications which require that government or Oil Company speak to the people and get their consent before entering into an otherwise sacred or private space. In cases where such acquisition has generated communal conflicts, there usually are social structures for dealing with the same. The elders take up such issues and in so doing help to resolve them.”*

3.5.2 Summary of views of focus groups and interviews

In summarising the views of both the focus groups and interview discussion the following points are noteworthy.

First of all, their understanding of stewardship is that of a collective and not personal responsibility. Gerontocracy bestows this collective responsibility on the most elderly in the community, who exhibits a deep sense of responsibility and are accountable ultimately to God and to the people. Apparently the quality of the decisions on stewardship, land ownership and use by the most elderly in the community is affected by the manifest absence from home by the elites during important kindred meetings. However, both at home and abroad, it is generally required that local norms or state legislations on land

ownership and use has to be implemented in the light of the customs and manners of land owning communities at least.

Secondly, the general feeling of participants is that increased population, company expansion, and “Land Use Decree” are major factors that pressurise the inhabitants on the land. In their opinion arable agricultural land are continually seized by Total for her mining and industrial purposes and without providing an alternative means of livelihood. In order to promote the wellbeing of land “owning” communities and for sustainable development such environment-friendly industries and mechanised agriculture should be embarked upon by all stakeholders. The ecological distortion and environmental pollution and land degradation currently being experienced in Ogba and Ekpeye cannot therefore be blamed on any but the human beings themselves who are the stakeholders. The focus groups and interviews generally pointed at humans as responsible for the things that go wrong for instance when someone drinks and drive.

Finally, on the question of their personal identity participants generally indicated that this has been shaped in infancy at home and at school by parents and teachers, and later by one’s chosen profession. Yet the centrality of land to this identity was strongly emphasised as the basis on which peoples’ identity is generally formed. Hence, the keeping of sacred spaces which contribute to the environmental and ecological integrity of an area should be continued, though poverty sometimes forces the users of such spaces to give it up.

3.6 Conclusion

It can be seen that in several parts of Nigeria recognition is generally given to the institution of gerontocracy as being the pivot around which stewardship, land ownership and land use has all along been based. In consideration of the anecdotes and proverbs from Ogba it reflects an aspect that can at least fit into the philosophical category of a Nigerian perspective. Our understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use can be enhanced once the principles of equity, justice and righteousness are embedded in the quest for sustainable economic investments and social harmony in the Niger Delta, especially among the Ogba and Ekpeye.

In pre-colonial times ethnic communities such as the Ogba and Ekpeye were ruled by gerontocratic structures which always observed a “giraffe principle” in order to foster a just

and equitable society. Traces of this principle still survive among various Nigerian communities, particularly among the Ogba and Ekpeye as the proverbs and anecdotes suggest. Apparently, gerontocratic structures are being eroded by several factors such as dual legal systems and land policy which tend to move stewardship, land ownership and use from the realm of the natural rights to that of civil rights. It is also being eroded at various levels of government which usurp the role of elders and community leaders on issues of land acquisition and “ownership”.

However, gerontocracy seems to be resilient still. For instance, it has been difficult to implement the government’s land decree or any such laws due to the fact that such “unilateral” laws run counter to the underlying societal substructure of a gerontocratic culture. This means that the cooperation of the most senior citizens and elders in the various communities of the Niger Delta has to be sought before certain policies could be implemented, or even introduced. This is an important indicator that traces of gerontocratic influences are still extant in Nigeria.

Be that as it may, in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times the Nigerian perspectives to stewardship, land ownership and use have primarily followed certain principles such as: Firstly, land belongs ultimately to the Deity¹⁰⁰ and has been passed on to the present users through the ancestors. Secondly, the past, present and future generations collectively are stakeholders of any land tenure or use, and their interests have to be protected and even promoted wherever and whenever matters of land ownership and use are carefully and meaningfully considered as well. Thirdly, it is the responsibility of those who own and use land to do so in a sustainable and responsible manner so that the lives and well being of inhabitants of the land for past, present and future generations are not jeopardised¹⁰¹.

A critical look at the responses of both the focus group and interview discussions show a level of uniform opinion, particularly in respect of long standing traditions of gerontocratic stewardship, land ownership and use. Moreover, the “giraffe principle” implies that stakeholders in the oil sector have to ensure that the benefits derivable from the oil resources are beneficial to the occupants of the land from which the oil has been drilled. In

¹⁰⁰ The polytheism extant in most Niger Delta communities is expressed through a multiplicity of ancestral deities, with an underlying reverence for the Supreme God particularly in land ownership and use matters, with Christianity reinforcing the latter. See Y. Turaki 1999:27-28; J. Hattingh 1997:27-28.

¹⁰¹ See the views expressed by a Yoruba chief previously mentioned in M.G.Yakubu (1985:6-8).

both focus groups and personal interviews, suggestions were made which entail a re-investment of the profits of oil in developmental agriculture and local industries. It is also stated that it makes for sustainable development, restored environmental and ecological integrity. Unfortunately, the principle of justice and equity does not usually govern the attitude and activities of business companies such as Total in spite of the fact that it is the principle governing both Ogba and Ekpeye elders' worldview and which facilitated the lease of vast land areas to Total.

In the next chapter a brief interpretive survey of Old Testament views on Genesis 1:26-28 will be given in consonance with a prevailing Nigerian perspective using a post-colonial hermeneutical approach to the interpretation of our *pericope*. Subsequent chapters in this discussion will also be building on a Nigerian perspective which in my opinion can be integrated to the Old Testament standards to provide a theological and ethical basis for a stewardship, land ownership and land use that is responsible and accountable.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARDS A POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH TO GENESIS 1:26-28

4.1 Introduction

In the third chapter we examined what can be described as similar perspectives of stewardship, land ownership and land use in a Nigerian context. We found that Nigerian understandings of land tenure have a dimension that is both domestic and corporate. The former involves a communal management of land through the “gerontocratic” structures of kindred and family heads, which has been impacted by post-colonial land laws and policies tending towards an erosion of gerontocratic values.

There is also a general understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use which transcend the domestic and the corporate, namely the fact that all land belongs to God, and humans are generally tenants of God’s land. Here we encounter an understanding which transcends both the domestic and corporate management of land, to include the Deity’s overarching administration of nature’s goods and services which have been placed in human’s care. This is perhaps an understanding which may not be said to be uniquely Nigerian as it could apply to some other human communities, particularly in Africa¹⁰². The relation of humans to nature as stewards of His earthly creation, apart from underscoring the value of the land for the dead, the living, and the unborn, place humans in a meaningful relationship to the Deity as well (Towner 2001:29).

I also examined “the giraffe principle” in the practice of stewardship in which the interests of all stakeholders are respected and even promoted. We found by this, a certain richness in the African, and specifically Nigerian cultural conception of stewardship which resonates with Christian values and precepts and is also reflected in various African scholarly views. In my opinion this can contribute in a modest way to addressing the Niger Delta ecological and environmental pollution problem, if not alleviating it (Adamo 2001:336). Seen in this

¹⁰² The belief in a Supreme Deity who oversees every aspect of life on earth is deeply ingrained in the African mind; hence Africans are ‘notoriously’ very religious beings. See Mbiti (1969:1). Moreover, in some African cultures God superintending act is performed by a host of lesser beings, and sometimes through nature and created objects. See Moiserale (2001:384-392).

context our function as stewards of the earth, and of land in particular is not one of purely master or servant, but rather recognising that we are co-dependent with nature within the Earth's greater community of life (Preuss 1995:127).

In this present chapter and in subsequent sections I am giving a brief interpretive survey of the interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 followed by a post-colonial approach to the same scripture.

4.2 Brief interpretive survey of the interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28

In attempting to give a brief interpretive survey of the interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 as our *pericope*, I am careful not to delve into a history of interpretation in its discussion at this stage. Moreover, we make no pretension at exhausting all the possible interpretations of our *pericope* by Western scholars, let alone scholars in general. Suffice it to say that a brief survey of Genesis' interpretation, particularly by Western scholars or those of similar orientation, is to highlight salient issues that are crucial to Biblical hermeneutics or interpretation. It gives us such valid insights especially if there are identifiable traces or inadequacies that substantiate the case for a more germane and judicious approach to interpretation.

First of all it should be noted that there are earlier approaches to the interpretation of Genesis, which have become moribund today and are dubbed as "traditional" or "pre-critical" for the obvious reason that it had linked the authorship of Genesis to a historical Moses – a fact which contemporary scholars have found to be untenable (Hamilton 1990:13).

A second approach to the interpretation of Genesis emerged from essentially Western Christian roots. This interpretative approach is about 200 years old. It was initiated by a French physician, Jean Astruc, whose critical study of the Biblical text has produced the academic exercise known as Source Criticism. Astruc's investigation of the Pentateuch showed various layers of authorship and his works were expanded by some German historians, and especially by the Biblical scholar J.G. Eichhorn¹⁰³ (see Hamilton 1990:11-16). There are various views as to how Genesis came together, which will not bother us

¹⁰³ According to Westermann, since 1779 when the enquiry into the nature and origin of Gen.1 began, several views on it has been bequeathed on Biblical scholarship, one of the most significant being J.G. Eichhorn's. See Westermann (1974:81ff).

now. One thing which is generally acknowledged is that Genesis 1-3 in particular came into being gradually and bears the signs of many stages of growth which implies a multi-sided method of exegesis that is equally open and appropriate to its various stages and layers (Westermann 1974:81-5).

Thus, in the last two centuries or so the Scripture has been subjected to all kinds of critical analysis which have been extensively discussed in the present as well the second and fifth chapters.¹⁰⁴

In conducting this survey, it is important to underscore the salient elements which make for inadequacies in the interpretations of our *pericope*. Such inadequacies call for a correction, and this will be done presently using a postcolonial critical approach in the interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28. The inadequacies in previous interpretations are mainly in the areas of dogmatism, dilemma and dualisms as we can see below.

4.2.1 Dogmatism

In the early Church, reading of Genesis 1:26-28 was considered a sufficient indication of the plurality of the Godhead – the so called Trinitarian formula, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Literary critics like J.J. Stamm and W.H. Schmidt¹⁰⁵ have wondered if such an interpretation was not directly influenced by a Greek dualistic mindset, as well as by Greek orthodoxy and dogmatism. They consider the context of the priestly redactor as being probably unsupportive of such a Trinitarian view of Deity. At those early pre-Christian times in the narrator's experience, it was difficult to think of God in multiple forms. Instead, Genesis rather presents the idea of a monotheistic God in contradistinction to the idea of

¹⁰⁴ The Source Critical studies has led to the famous JEDP theory in which Julius Wellhausen postulates the possibility of a *Yahwist*, an *Elohists*, a *Deuterenomist*, and lately a *Priestly* editor who worked at various stages with long standing ancient Near Eastern and ancient Israelite oral and written traditions in ongoing editorial processes. These processes finally culminated in recension of the text which by the fourth or fifth century BCE has become authentic, if not canonical. Most of these redaction processes were carried out just during or immediately on return from the Babylonian exile by historical persons of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The JEDP theory presumes that, in the process of transmission and redaction, lots of Hellenistic and colonial influences has infiltrated the Biblical text. It therefore rejects the erstwhile non-critical orthodox reading of the text, while recommending a more scholarly, critical, and possibly de-colonised reading in order to arrive at the authentic text. For more incisive discussion of Source Critical studies see Driver (1904); Van Seters (1992); H. Gunkel (1901).

¹⁰⁵ While describing the more recent history of research in the literary components of the text, the duo i.e. Stamm and Schmidt have each taken almost a divergent course, the one tracing the main lines of the literature and the other one the main elements of the literature (see Westermann 1984:148).

polytheism so prevalent in neighbouring ancient Near Eastern cultures. Hamilton (1990:132-33) sums up views by critics who object to a purely Trinitarian view of Deity at this stage.

Another aspect of the interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 which has been dogmatic is on *imago Dei* and *similitudo Dei*. Genesis 1:26 states that humans are made in the image and likeness of God. It is not clear how that image and likeness are structured, even with its repetition of image in verse 27. The literature on the *imago Dei*, according to both Westermann (1984:148) and Middleton (2005:15ff), is limitless. Hamilton (1990:137) says the same: “innumerable definitions of what constitutes the *imago Dei* have been suggested.” Similarly on “our likeness” there are very few scholars who distinguish between “*imago*” and “*similitudo*”. Irenaeus was the first to make such a distinction. It is a dogma which has dominated Catholic theology ever since and has influenced subsequent Protestant or Reformed theology¹⁰⁶. Nevertheless, orthodox and reformed theology has tried to overcome the distinction by linking both *imago* and *similitudo Dei* to intellect and freedom of humans in the striving to communicate and relate with God. Besides the dogma which interpretations have given rise to, there is also the dilemma¹⁰⁷ that subsequent interpretations have been problematic, being both enriching yet enervating.

4.2.2. Dilemma

This leads us to a discussion of the second inadequacy which is the dilemma of interpretation elicited by successive attempts to adequately clarify the subject of the Divine self-address on the one hand, and on the other hand the *imago* and *similitudo Dei*, all in Genesis 1:26-28. It must be pointed out however that so far the arguments do not suffer from logical fallacies as to make the points unacceptable, but rather are very enriching

¹⁰⁶ In the 19th century however, some Protestant theologians like F. Delitzsch re-introduced it and by the 20th century E. Osterloh also touched on it (see Westermann 1984:148).

¹⁰⁷ I chose to use the word “dilemma” in a very special and positive sense, not in a derogatory or negative sense as a choice between two undesirable ends. If anything the motley of views on the various theological issues raised in Genesis 1:26-28 such as the *imago Dei*, the “Let us” self-address, the *demuth* and *selem* etc. have all enriched our understanding of that ancient text. Our dilemma consists in the choice between various interpretations that are both desirable and theologically sound, but which choice is necessitated by a postcolonial hermeneutics that yearns for definitions that are consistent with values and norms resonating with the Biblical world on the one hand and African world-views of God, creation, humans and the environment on the other. We therefore take a positive look at the way such a dilemma can be resolved by the new approach by bringing us into a position that leaves us with postcolonial hermeneutics as a choice for ridding biblical hermeneutics of accusations leveled against it as being the source of the global environmental and ecological crisis which face humankind today. See Rajotte (1992:1-18).

arguments which leave the seeker groping for a proper definition. Meanwhile, let us examine the dilemma or problematic nature of erstwhile interpretations of especially the Divine address: “Let us”, and the *imago Dei* below:

4.2.2.1 The subject of divine self-address

There are as many as five different views on the subject of this divine self-address, and five reasons why we consider these views a dilemma, if not problematic.

The first view, which marked Christian Old Testament theology of the 3rd and 4th centuries upwards, was expressed by as eminent a “patriarch” as Augustine of Hippo. He saw the root of a Trinitarian formula in Genesis 1:26-28. As a result of Augustine’s position a Trinitarian interpretation of “let us” in Genesis 1:26 found its way into Church dogma since the 4th century AD. This line of thought has been followed by most Church fathers such as Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, and by contemporary African theologians (Adeyemo 2006:11) who do subscribe to the Augustinian position.

I consider this problematic in view of objections such as Hamilton’s (1990:132). In his opinion the intention and understanding of the author of Genesis 1 could not directly be said to be one of Trinitarian monotheism in view of the immediate ancient Near Eastern context of polytheism to which the author was responding. In other words, the context of the priestly editor does not fit a Trinitarian but a more monotheising view of God in view of the overwhelmingly polytheising world of Persia to which the text of Genesis 1-2 was a fitting response.

A second view considered “let us” as God addressing a heavenly court, not necessarily to get their support but to get them to witness his next major creative act – the creation of *homo sapiens* (Garr 2003:209; Cassuto 1978:55). Protagonists of this view, including Western and Jewish scholars, draw extensively from Old Testament examples: 1 Kings 22:19; Job 1:6f; 2:1f. 38:7 and Isaiah 6:8. God spoke in a tone which invited other heavenly beings to action either as agents or as witnesses. This depicts God’s involvement with humans that is more active, intimate and intense (Garr 2003:4).

Westermann (1984:144-145) has made an early objection to any attempt to understand the plural “let us” in this way. Not only might the priestly editor have been unfamiliar with

the idea of a heavenly court, but also is he noted for identifying with *Yahweh* as the only God, beside whom there could be no other heavenly being.

Middleton (2006:57) finds it difficult to sustain Westermann's objections because "angelic beings are not foreign to the author of Genesis 1". Instead, similar first person plurals are employed in Genesis 3:22 and 11:7, which undoubtedly refer to a heavenly court. There is also an explicit mention of cherubim in Genesis 3:24, and sons of *'ēlōhîm* in Genesis 6:1-4 with the latter signifying angels in the same sense as in Job 38:7. Westermann's objection can be attenuated when and if Psalm 8:5-8 is brought into focus. It could in fact represent an ancient contextual, and conceptual, or symbolic world in which the sapiential text was shaped, one that resembles the priestly context of Genesis 1.

A third view held by some critics is that God uses "let us" so as to clearly distinguish himself from the beings that result from this last creative act. In other words the idea of an immediate resemblance to God was inconceivable to the priestly redactor. This view is questionable on the grounds of what follows the plural "let us", which is to "make man in the image and likeness of God". It has therefore been abandoned long ago.

A fourth view holds that "let us" is pointing to 'God in self-deliberation' using a plural of majesty. Westermann (1984:145) supports the position that it is a plural of self-deliberation similar to what was observed in Isaiah 6:8 where a singular and a plural are used at the same time to refer to God in action. A clearer example of this self-deliberation is seen in Genesis 11:7 as well, even though the idea of heavenly beings which surround God may have been in the background. Hence the conclusion is drawn by Westermann (1974:81) that the "plural of deliberation in a co-hortative is an attested and sufficient explanation".

It is instructive to note that Westermann (1974:104ff) in his earlier writings considered Genesis 1:1-2:4 as marginal to the text of Genesis, and the creation of humans as not the main focus of the text as there is no tension resolved by it as was the case in Genesis 1:2 and 1:3. God was engaged therefore in a self-deliberation in which no one else, neither angels nor humans, were in focus. In my own opinion, Westermann's argument is untenable if the matter is approached from what he describes as the "many sided method of exegesis". It is possible as he later admitted that the idea of a heavenly court may well be behind this Divine self-deliberation (Westermann 1984:145).

A fifth view states that God is speaking to the Spirit who was already there in the opening verses of Genesis 1. This is considered by Hamilton (1990:134) as resonating more with the context of the priestly editor. God is speaking to the Spirit mentioned in Genesis 1:2, who now becomes God's partner in creation. While conceding that the author of Genesis 1 was not schooled in the complexities of Tri-unity, it is theologically difficult to assume that he was too naïve or primitive to communicate the idea of a Deity that is a plurality in unity (Hamilton 1990:135).

The point to note is that Old Testament scholars are not in agreement on the "let us" and many an African scholar is yet to give the matter sufficient thought. In my own opinion God might have spoken in self-deliberation, but not without his heavenly court in mind at this time especially in the light of the praise duties they had to do while witnessing the coming into being of this quintessence of creation – humans (Job 38:7)!

Be that as it may, such a dilemma as we have seen so far provides crevices for a post-colonial critical re-reading and interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 in order to illuminate its meaning for a Nigerian context in which the problems of identity, hybridity and mimesis (discussed in the next section) resulting from erstwhile colonial links to the West is still an ongoing one. Meanwhile, there is another component of Genesis 1:26-28 which, in Western Biblical hermeneutics, is still the subject of debate as to what it means, namely the interpretation of the *imago* and *similitudo Dei*. This will occupy our interest in the following sub-section.

4.2.2.2 The *imago* and *similitudo Dei*

The various interpretations which have also been associated with the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* have been problematic as well. Westermann (1984:149-152) summarises the six views so far on the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* as follows: There are those who see the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* as pointing to a natural and supernatural likeness of humans to God. Others conceive of it as consisting of spiritual qualities or capacities. Still a third view is of an *imago* and *similitudo Dei* that points more to an external resemblance of humans to God. A fourth view insists that the whole person is made in the image of God, and that it is not the intention of the author to split one from the other. Again, a fifth view interprets the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* as embodiments of a human counterpart to God with whom God can be both in communion and conversation. Finally, a sixth view is that humans are the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* in the sense of a physical representation of God on earth.

The various views presented here provide sources of enrichment for understanding the text, but leaves the reader with an indefinite answer as to what exactly is for instance the *imago* and *similitudo Dei*. This is even truer when we critically examine the various reasons adduced by proponents of those views.

First, a distinction made between *imago* and *similitudo Dei* is based on the different names used in Genesis 1:26. Irenaeus was the first to point out that distinction, and since the 4th century the discussion has gone on in both the East and West right into the Middle Ages.

It is generally agreed that the text is not speaking about a distinction between the natural and the supernatural. However, as Westermann (1984:149) has pointed out, this agreement might be true of Protestant and Reformed circles, but can hardly be said to be true of Catholic theology, which differentiates “the person’s natural likeness to God expressed in the Old Testament” from “one’s supernatural likeness to God expressed in the New Testament.” Thus, *imago* and *similitudo Dei* depicted in the Old Testament points to humans in their natural, physical abilities, whereas the same concept of *similitudo* (Gk. *eikón*) in the New Testament depicts humans transformed into supernatural, spiritual beings with Jesus Christ our Lord as the Prototype!¹⁰⁸ Such distinctions do not reflect for instance Paul’s theology (2 Cor.4:4; Col.3:10) in which Jesus of Nazareth – perfect God perfect human – is most pre-eminently the image of God (Merrill 2003:444-45).

Second, there is another view which sees the *imago Dei* as consisting of spiritual qualities or capacities in humans. This is the most common explanation of this concept down through the centuries, namely that the likeness consists in human intellect, will and emotions which correspond to the tri-Unitarian concept of God. On the other hand, there are those who consider the *imago* and *similitudo Dei*, as consisting in the very nature of human beings, in totality, and in both concrete and corporeal terms. P. Bratsiotis and G. Söhngen are Westermann’s examples of propagators of this view¹⁰⁹.

A third and more recent view is held by interpreters who find the image and likeness in human personality, human understanding, human will and its freedom, self-consciousness, intelligence, spiritual being, spiritual superiority, and in the immortality of the soul. Among

¹⁰⁸ Such distinctions preoccupied the theology of the second to the 5th century church in both Asia and North Africa: the so-called *homoioōsis* debate which by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 C.E. was resolved that, in the Person of Christ both the natural and the supernatural are distinct yet contiguous, inter-dependent and in perfect harmony. See Cairns (1995:69).

¹⁰⁹ See Bratsiotis (1952:289-297); and Söhngen (1963).

the scholars whose views are in alliance with this are A. Dillman (1897:3) who insists that *imago Dei* consists of human's spiritual endowments which is expressed through the bodily form though not identical with it. In this respect Dillman's view is as holistic as the views of Theodorus Vriezen and Karl Barth. The latter again tilting their views in favor of a more spiritual characteristic of the *imago Dei*. Others like W. Eichrodt and J. Junker (1949:3) does the same.

A fourth view is that all about the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* is essentially physical, even though there is an underlying inner and spiritual dimension to it. In Brueggemann's (2001:241ff) opinion, this image of God is further affirmed in the prohibition of fixed images by God in the Decalogue in favor of human physical image. He stated that "there is only one way in which God is imaged in the world and only one: humanness". Humans are the only part of creation which discloses to us something about the reality, the beauty, the power and the richness of God. Man not only reflects a divine glory as Kline (1991:28-30), Boice (1986:149-150) and others have argued, but also owns a body shaped with grace, nobility, majesty and perfect beauty with which humans are enabled to fulfill the God-given mandate to "subdue" and "dominate" the earth.

It is the key concept for grasping the Biblical understanding of image of God as referring to a moral being. By this Adam who was created in the image and likeness of God (is) God's own special representative, not simply by designation (command) but by design (nature or constitution) – i.e. as a representative of God (Birch 1991:87). Von Rad, while recognising the image as physical, underlines the essential inseparable nature of both the physical and the spiritual in humans, as the loss of one will mean the 'death' of the other. In both Old and New Testament, physical and spiritual life deriving from faith in God and / or Jesus Christ are co-terminus (Ps.51:11-12; Pr.4:23; Ezk.36:25-28; 37:10; Jn.6:27, 63; 2 Cor. 4:7; Js.2:26).

Fifthly, there are those who consider the *imago Dei* as the special nature of human existence by virtue of which the person can take a stand before God. Thus the essence of the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* consists in the ability of humans to form or enter into relationships with their Maker with a sense of responsibility and accountability for every act of omission or commission encountered in the process of that relationship. As so aptly put

by J.J. Stamm (1959:81-90)¹¹⁰ “a human being is regarded as God’s counterpart, as the ‘You’ who must listen to God, whom God questions and who must answer him.”

A sixth position is the *imago Dei* seen as the person who is a representative of God on earth. Von Rad (1970:144-45) built his argument on that premise and stressed that there is something more than spiritual and intellectual in the image and similitude of God which humans portray, even in the splendor of their bodily forms. Von Rad made good use of analogy from the ancient Near Eastern world in describing man as God’s representative on earth not in a teleological, but in an ontological sense, more to man’s purpose on earth, than to his being (Birch 1991:88). The Babylonian use of images to stand in place of the gods leads this school of thought to the conclusion that earthly rulers do indeed use their images in places where they otherwise could not be physically present. Von Rad is the leading proponent of this view. He has been followed by others such as E. Jacob (1957:583-85) and W.H. Schmidt (1997:19) both of which have confirmed this explanation and given it a new dimension by means of a number of Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts which speak of the king as the image of God. In their studies the “image of God” is seen as derived from a royal ideology of the ancient Near East.

The dilemma or problematic nature of the views can be seen in that they do not pretend to provide all the necessary answers, and that the inability is understandable in view of the richness of the text in question. In order to critically re-read the text, it will have to be addressed subsequently using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics, which is from a more novel¹¹¹ and more judicious non-Western perspective. It will be seen most clearly in our later discussion of impacts of colonial readings and interpretation of the text on the phenomenon of post-colonial identity, hybridity and mimesis in for instance Nigeria (Bhabha 1994:2-6). The postcolonial context calls for a dialogic engagement between the text and context in an inter-textual, and inter-contextual manner with each context bringing its peculiar analytical story into the dialogue. Meanwhile let us consider a third traceable inadequacy of similar interpretations of Genesis 1:26-28, namely, its dualistic interpretive and extrapolative tendencies.

¹¹⁰ Cited in Westermann (1984:150-1).

¹¹¹ This perspective is described as a postcolonial approach because it “posits a struggle which stands in opposition to the poststructuralist European colonial enterprise” and also because we are employing “a mode of dialogue” which is critically poised to examine and then correct the “bastardising” experiences imposed on hitherto subject peoples. See Dube (2006:187f); Punt (2006: 280); Gugelberger (1995:582).

4.2.3 Dualisms

The interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 has been characterised by dualisms. Such dualistic interpretive and interpolative tendencies arise from the attempt to use Greek categories of thought in comprehending the relationship of humans to creation. This dualism has by extension been applied or extrapolated to a dispensation of the West European missionary project, particularly in Africa of the 18th-19th centuries. In creation, Greek dualism categorised humans and nature in a hierarchical order of sentient and insentient beings with the latter inexorably serving the interest of the former, so also it did in the imperial missionary enterprise by categorising Christianity and African culture into a bifurcation which made the latter become subservient to West European forms – liturgy, music, dressing and hermeneutics – that completely derogated and excluded African culture. These unhealthy phenomena though unrelated in space and time shall briefly be elaborated on subsequently in the ways in which they are identical, beginning with the human / nature dichotomy.

4.2.3.1 Human - Nature dichotomy

Under a Western philosophical approach to stewardship, land ownership and use (see Appendix 1) the features of this dichotomy resulted in humans devastating nature in the Roman world in order to build war-ships. I am careful not to overemphasise this point but it was a real problem. Suffice it to say that a humans-versus-nature dichotomy poses a problem which impacts on our understanding of the divine mandate in Genesis 1:26-28. For instance it challenges a hermeneutics of care and nurture, with one of devastation and exploitation. Based on the Western philosophy of dualisms no text has been subjected to a (mis)reading as this one, because of an interpretation which ultimately gives man the capacity to exploit nature for narrow human purposes (Birch 1991:89).

The way and manner of such a (mis)reading need not detain us at this stage. Important however is the fact that in order for humans to effectively exercise “dominion” over nature, such a bifurcation between humans and all other created things on earth and in the seas becomes imperative. Thus the right of Adam, like individual rights today, was one he could justly claim over nature. This (mis)reading may point out that in Genesis 1:26 God creates human beings with a particular formula which summons the Deity into action: “Let us make man”. In other words, it points at the creative distinction observed in the way God created humans *vis-à-vis* the creation of non-sentient beings such as animals, birds, fish and

plants. Thus, such a creative distinction becomes the source of an established superior-subordinate relationship between humans and nature in the opinion of these dualistic interpreters. Consequently and by extension, humans are created not only in the “image and likeness” of God, but are to exercise dominion over nature in general (Wasike 1999:176). As far as humans are concerned they have been made originally as embodiments of a divine nature, though later corrupted by the fall. The divine endowments consisted in the capacity of humans for moral discernment, and their ability to use the intellect and will freely and independently in ways that are inaccessible, if not denied to lower creatures. Indeed, this divine nature has been given for the sole purpose of exercising dominion over the lower creatures.

In my own opinion, such dualism therefore reinforces an alienation of humans from nature and the environment, resulting perhaps in the reckless exploitation and abuse to which nature and the environment has been subjected at the hands of a few humans. This same kind of dualism has also characteristically been extrapolated to the dispensation of the imperial missionary project in Africa in the area of the Christianity - Culture divide.

4.2.3.2 Christianity - Culture divide

The same dualism in Western thought resulted in some way in humans and nature being placed in separate compartments, but even more so in the way in which Christianity was not allowed to intermix with African cultural concepts of God or of life and world view in general. Thus imperial missionary entrepreneurs were evangelising Africa using Western norms and nomenclatures and in an attitude tantamount to a non-recognition of African traditional beliefs and values. The latter resulted in a lack of rootedness in Biblical exegesis as a result of this unsavory bifurcation of African culture and every aspect of the Judeo-Christian interpretations. It meant that a divisive wedge was driven between African culture and faith in God.

Some leading African theologians have made these same observations with an even stronger emphasis, among who are scholars like M.W. Dube, I.J. Mosala, and J. Mbiti. While Dube (1992:121-122; 2006:178f) underscored the danger which colonial Christianity poses to critical hermeneutics, Mosala (1993:20) identified the negligence of cultural values as the bane of the African church in its quest for a socially integrated and functionally correlated Christian life. Africans were therefore not trained to read the Bible with African eyes. The difficulty which this posed to Africa is what J. Mbiti has said,

“We cannot (Christianise) the African heritage without understanding its religious part” (Mbiti 1977:49).

Some African scholars of an older generation like Adrian Hastings (1975), has pointed out that we need to bring postcolonial Biblical hermeneutics to bear on the problems of (mis)reading the Bible in Africa. The same is true of Ikenga-Metuh (1975:144) whose view is that there are two elements that should determine any meaningful hermeneutics in Africa. It includes an appreciation of the socio-political situation in Africa, and the living experience of the Church in Africa today.

The Christian - Culture divide created a dualism and thus a discontinuity between erstwhile colonial readings of Genesis 1:26-28 and African traditional concepts of God. Such bifurcations remind us of the inadequacies characteristic of Greek thought with its impact on Western hermeneutics. It however provides a crevice for a postcolonial critical hermeneutics. Such crevices afford us the unique opportunity of a close reading that is decolonised, de-mythologised and essentially liberating, particularly as it focuses on local, indigenous, ethnic and culturally contingent matters “with the aim of recovering, reasserting and re-inscribing identities, cultures and traditions that colonial Christianity has erased, suppressed, or pronounced idolatrous” (Segovia 2000a; Moore and Segovia 2005:5-6).

There is still a third component of our *pericope* in Genesis 1:26-28 which interpretation is characterised by dualisms presently to be briefly discussed, namely dominion.

4.2.3.3 Dominion

A discussion of this nature has important implications for a Judeo-Christian tradition in its view of dominion by humans over the whole earth. In the second chapter it was pointed out that the text has been accused as responsible for the present ecological crisis globally and in the Niger Delta in particular¹¹². This criticism is also true of Barton’s (1978:38) views alluded to earlier, and is justified to the extent that Western history of interpretation has wrested this Scripture (Gen.1:26-28) and its commission to dominion out of context. The text is seen as not only conferring the “power of attorney” on humans, but also as

¹¹² Lynn White (1967:1203-1207) specifically mentions Europe’s mercantile presence in Nigeria as an example of Western global expansionist agenda couched in the language of industrial development and transfer of technology.

depicting humans as the apex of the Divine creative action, and has served European interests as the *magna carta* of imperial and colonial domination. In this way the text has been accused of being responsible for the world's ecological and environmental problems. As I hinted in the second chapter, this accusation may be said to be unfair and unwarranted, but it is real all the same. Its unfairness and lack of warrant needs to be addressed from the point of view of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics.

In doing so we can count on at least some Western scholars who do not subscribe to the human-above-nature mindset and who have also exonerated the Biblical text from the accusations scientists have leveled against it. In a discussion of the literary ethic of Genesis 1-2, Westermann (1984:3-4) for instance does not accede to the view that Genesis 1:26-28, which narrates the creation of humanity, is to that extent the high point or climax of creation as a whole. Moreover if any climax at all, he does not think that Genesis 1: 26-28 is that very high point because "there is no tension in the story which is resolved by it".

Such a resolution of creative tension features in Vawter's (1997:50-52) description of man's role in an earth that is already fully formed, established and blessed. He argues that humans are not placed in a world filled with capricious deities or made a slave to demonic forces but is indeed the crowning effort of a creative power that expends itself finally in what has become "the image and likeness" of God Himself. Although Vawter is not clear on this point, he does hesitate to associate the essence of the *demuth* (*Gk. eikon*) as present also in the lower creatures. Therefore, humans exercise dominion because of their physical resemblance to Deity in their erect position which is not the case with the lower creatures.

The limitation in Vawter's creationist ethic is that humans are not only creatures, but conscious beings and in this consciousness they can be in constant dialogue with their Creator (Ps. 8: 4-5, 6-9). Being in communion with their Maker who is spiritual would of necessity entail that at least the humans would have been made in an image of Deity that transcends their physical features and which resonates with the Spirit of their Maker. As so aptly depicted in Fretheim (2005:39) "as God breathes God's own breath of life into the nostrils of a human being (Gen.2: 7), something of the divine self comes to reside in the human – and in an ongoing way".

This issue has been dealt with in greater detail in the second chapter and is restated here to highlight the indecisive nature of the discussion as to what constitutes the role of humans in creation. In dealing with interpretations of the Bible as a colonial and colonising tool, it is important to exercise discernment and to re-read the text in a critical and possibly “scientific” manner. Not only does our *pericope* Genesis 1:26-28 call for such a critical re-reading, it also calls for a re-definition of terms in such a way that interpretations stay clear of imperial traditions (Enuwosa 2005:130). Instead a postcolonial hermeneutic can be used to clarify some of these aforementioned interpretative problems.

In actual fact the distinction between *imago* and *similitudo* is not a generally accepted one. Yet the “doctrine” of what essentially constitutes these components of humans has been approached with dogmatism, and remains problematic even today. It is a dogma which has dominated Catholic theology ever since and has influenced subsequent Protestant or Reformed theology. There is also no gainsaying the fact that the *imago Dei* is a subject of an ongoing debate with respect of its essential components. Above all, an interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 in dualistic terms can be seen in the great divide foisted between humans and nature on the one hand, and Christianity and culture on the other hand. It is instructive to note that to rid Scripture study of colonial influences and make room for a scientific engagement with the text there is a need to rid or liberate it from the strangleholds of dogmatism, dilemma and dualisms (Towner 2001:21). This is particularly imperative if such inadequacies are not to be endorsed in a post-colonial context such as Nigeria in which the problems of identity, hybridity and mimesis¹¹³ still loom large (Bhabha 1994:40-52). This three-fold problem underscores the quest for a postcolonial approach to hermeneutics.

Similarly, each of these interpretative inadequacies discussed above provides viable crevices for a postcolonial critical hermeneutics and requires a corrective for addressing the so called colonial mentality.¹¹⁴ An elaboration of such correctives will bring us to

¹¹³ There is no place that the triad of identity, hybridity and mimesis plays itself out as in the Nigerian post-colonial context with its hosting of two “publics” – primordial and civil. “Identity” here has to do with Nigerians belonging first to their “primordial” public and second to the “civil” public which creates the problem of “hybridity” where people are seen differently depending on which role they fulfill and in what context. At the primordial level they are “sons of the soil”, but at the civil level they are seen as engaged in “whiteman’s work” and are not so respected. In order to earn this respect they engage in a process of “miming” the lifestyle of the erstwhile colonial other, and in so doing alienate themselves from their “primordial” roots, thus fuelling the “corruption” that is so endemic to the society.

¹¹⁴ Such a mentality brew like beer in the various colonising institutions established in the periphery or marginal nations using personnel and capital from the metropolis, two of the most significant are

critically examine the context of a post-colonial Nigeria that is struggling with the triad problems of identity, hibridity and mimesis – an examination which subsequently motivates the use of a postcolonial approach in our interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28.

With respect to identity, the case of the Nigerian state *vis-à-vis* multi-national companies like Total is critically but briefly examined. In the first place Nigerian government operates on erstwhile colonial structures of government – the legislature, judiciary, executive, police, civil service and military formations to mention a few. The crisis of identity which this poses need not be underestimated. A simple four-regional structure of governance in 1960 has since the 1970's been expanded into a 36 state structure with a central government whose legal and administrative institutions primarily regulate the activities of multi-national oil companies and other investors in the country. In order to do this effectively Nigeria has “reneged” on its Federal character and assumed a more unitary governmental character and this to the chagrin of constitutional experts¹¹⁵. This is because of the identity crisis which it has created for the nation state as well as for individuals and ethnic groups.

Oil exploration, exploitation and exportation in Nigeria has since the 1980's been central to this evolution of a new unitary identity for Nigeria, but it has also led to the formation of a hybrid culture of consumerism, and the mimetic phenomena of Western style of living and communications. It has lent credence to the notion that oil mineral resources in the hands of weaker nations and greedy multi-national companies can be a curse that gives rise to a lack of development, internal tensions, human rights abuses, and identity conflicts at the national level. Auty (1993:1) first provided the “resource curse” label and systematically demonstrated that not only might resource-rich countries fail to benefit from a favorable endowment, they could actually perform worse than less well endowed countries.

As a result of this crisis of identity experienced in constituent parts of the Nigerian nation, the Niger Delta region has been immersed in a struggle for self-definition, using various exclusion and inclusion mechanisms. The question most analysts are asking is if Nigeria is a Federation or is it a unitary government? The answer is that constitutionally it is a Federation, but administratively it is not. Not only has this identity problem weakened its

language and schools. The use of English as a foreign language in government, church and schools reflects in the domestic life of the marginalised and has been depicted as a “language ...which defines the colonial / post-colonial dichotomy” see Masolo (1997:283-300).

¹¹⁵ View expressed by a Constitutional Lawyer Professor Ben Nwabueze – author of *Nigerian Land Law* (1972) on the post-April 2007 general elections in Nigeria in the Nigerian press showed that “true federalism” is not practiced in Nigeria. See *Thisday* June 5, 2007.

governance capabilities, it has also forged a link with hybrid political culture in which as Homi Bhabha (1994:25) would put it:

(It is) a place of hybridity... where the construction of a political object that is new neither the one nor the other (and which) properly alienates.. political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of (identity). [*braces mine*]

It is a typical example of a hybrid identity miming a neo-colonial political arrangement of a parliamentary democracy which ignores the gerontocratic base of Nigerian culture and religion. The net result of miming hybrid identity is the militancy and restiveness it has generated in several parts of the country but notoriously in the oil bearing region of the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta region provides a sufficient example of what constitute a hybrid identity in which mimesis as a social phenomena forms part of a dynamic culture (Bhabha 1994:43-5). There is no doubt that the ongoing struggle for self-definition and identity among the various Niger Delta communities draws upon historically well established customs and traditions. Some of these customs resonate with religious mores and ethos, social and cultural landscapes, and a repertoire of life and world view which are then engaged in a dialogic struggle of recognition with the post-colonial structures embodied in both government and company agencies. It leaves the colonial mark of a crisis of identity, hybridity and mimesis in an iterative struggle for self-definition and re-definition with apparently a vicious cycle.

Taking the case of hybridity in respect of the Niger Delta itself, there is the problem of hybrid culture in which inhabitants are caught between two opposing worlds – that of the Metropolitan imperial exploiters; and that of the marginal, subjugated resource owners! For instance, it is difficult to distinguish between the lifestyle of the average Nigerian oil worker and their expatriate counterparts, whereas the bulk of the inhabitants live in poverty in the midst of wealth which they are not enjoying. In order to represent their interests to government, to multi-national companies and to corporate agencies, the people of the Niger Delta have employed both traditional and novel strategies of inclusion and exclusion¹¹⁶ with implications for land ownership and use.

¹¹⁶ Such inclusion and exclusion strategies have resulted in various Niger Delta ethnic “declarations” of human and natural rights of host communities, and this have been documented and circulated in press and academic circles apparently to elicit meaningful solidarity with host communities in the quest for “resource control” of land and natural resources within their areas – a right which at present is being contested by the Federal government and multi-national oil companies. Examples are the *Ogoni Bill of Rights (1990)*, the *Kaiama Declarations (1990)*, *The*

The bases for membership of local Niger Delta communities derive from the tension between such competing strategies of inclusion and exclusion, which often turn upon rhetoric of land ownership, kinship identity, ancestral myth, and cosmology. Over time, these strategies are likely to introduce a new cycle of socio-economic inequalities of ownership, distribution and marginalisation among local communities which are vocal and others not so vocal. Such inequality apparently follows along the classic fault lines of kinship, gender, age, class, and group identity.

There is also a third problem of mimesis in the various host communities, for example of a conscious struggle among groups and individuals within Ogba and Ekpeye ethnic nationality to imitate the lifestyle of the expatriate oil workers *pari pasu* with Nigerian culture as a sign of privilege. This struggle to mime the more privileged “other” is built into various strategies of inclusion and exclusion adopted by our local communities in the Niger Delta who by that process are defining themselves and re-defining their interests.

In the Niger Delta, as we can see in the third chapter, the ownership of land at kindred and communal levels condenses a host of social relationships at the helm of which is a gerontocracy. Shorthand references to the various ethnic groups within the area are often based on the territory inhabited by them, as for example Ogba and Ekpeye. Therefore, group identity of local communities is based on kinship in a very critical and crucial way, without which the strategies of inclusion or exclusion from the immediate¹¹⁷ benefits of the wealth from oil can easily be misplaced. Yet this identity is being seriously jeopardised by the struggle for self-redefinition inherent in the Nigerian state itself now carried over into its constituent parts. The exceptional diversity among various Nigerian peoples in respect of modes of social organisation, coupled with the fluidity and mobility of social identities resulting from a centralised and nationalised resource pool, betray a post-structuralist imperialistic post-colonial state.

It warrants not only the recognition of human rights in the resource bearing communities, and the legitimisation of claims from the perspectives of the state, the companies and host

Ogba Charter (1998), *the Egni Ethnic Coalition* (1999), *the Bill of Rights of the Oron People* (1999), *The Urhobo Resolutions*, and *the Ikwerre Rescue Charter* (1999) and *The Akalaka Declarations* (2000). See Obi (2007:62).

¹¹⁷ An immediate benefit includes compensations for cash crops destroyed in land excavation and burrowing by the oil companies, and which is usually a meager payment even though the damage done to the crops and land is of a permanent and irreparable nature. The Federal Government still claims the bulk of royalty payment on such land and minerals derived from it.

communities, but also requires a postcolonial approach to Genesis 1:26-28 in order to critically assess this ongoing process of self-redefinition in Nigeria at state, community and personal levels.

4.3 A postcolonial ¹¹⁸ approach to Genesis 1:26-28

The concept of postcolonialism is a multi-faceted one that is understood differently in various disciplines (Gugelberger 1994:582). Moreover, there are several approaches linked to it – Biblical criticism, Black theology, feminist and liberation theologies all describe themselves as postcolonial (Moore and Segovia 2005:5ff), and are seriously challenged by the plethora of exegesis surrounding the interpretations of Genesis 1:26-28 (Jónsson 1988:1). It is instructive to note the distinction made below between firstly post-colonial as a spatial and political concept, and secondly, postcolonial as a theoretical, literary, critical stance (Spivak 1999:172). It is in the latter sense that the concept of postcolonialism is being understood and applied in this discussion.

4.3.1 Origin, trend, definition and summary of the postcolonial approach

In order to understand the following discussion I am giving a critical discussion of the origin, trend, “definition” and summary of the postcolonial approach relevant to this dissertation, and for our subsequent hermeneutical and interpretative purposes [Moore and Segovia (eds) 2005:43]. Although both spellings – post-colonial and postcolonial – are used interchangeably, it is separated for purposes of analysis so that the former refers to the field or context in which the latter as a critical literary tool is analytically applied [Moore and Segovia (eds) 2005:43]. We have given enough attention to the various ways scholars have dealt with a fragile and nebulous concept, and have taken a stand in respect of providing what I consider my own appropriation or definition of a rather ephemeral concept (Dube 2000:117-118). It is a concept of an ongoing struggle for mastery which has been of interest not only to Biblical scholars, but also to literary theorists (Bhabha 1994:172-73).

¹¹⁸ A definition of this term along with others like colonialism, neocolonialism and postcolonialism and their respective definitions in the context of this dissertation are given in footnote 1 (p.10) above.

4.3.1.1 Origin

By the 1990's when postcolonialism began to emerge as a scholarly perspective for approaching Biblical interpretation, it meant so much though with an inadequately theorised conceptualisation. Yet Biblical hermeneutics made good use of it in the impression it created on the scholarly mind. Opinions are however divided as to the actual origin of postcolonial literary approach. Most underscore the groundbreaking work by Edward Said (1935-2003) as being the catalyst for contemporary scholarly engagement with this approach¹¹⁹. In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (2004:156ff) points at the inexorable link between texts and the culture as well as the political environment, that is the context in which they are shaped, and adds that interpretations are injurious if they do not take this into consideration. Meanwhile, in Asia and Africa the whole concept of "liberation hermeneutics" has been steeped in what might be described as "extra-biblical Postcolonial studies" which implies a fusion of historical Biblical criticism with a postcolonial approach to interpretations (Moore and Segovia 2005:5-6).

In 1996 a volume of a scholarly journal *Semeia*, edited by L. Donaldson, had focused on the theme "Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading". As apt as the title is, it quickly caught the fancy of Biblical scholars and resulted in the launching of a series in 1997 entitled *The Bible and postcolonialism* by Sheffield Academic Press with its first volume, *The Postcolonial Bible*, already underway and scheduled for publication the following year in 1998. According to Berquist (1996:15):

"Postcolonial discourse enables interpreters to expose colonial realities and to direct our gaze upon the imperialising practices involved in the creation of a colony".

In Biblical circles the use of a postcolonial approach dominated various seminal discussions with a primary purpose to interrogating the Biblical text so as to x-ray its contextual hegemonic milieu. However, it was not clear what the specific purview of postcolonial x-ray to Biblical criticism should be. By 1999-2000 all formal consultations on postcolonial studies with respect to its employment in Biblical criticism came to a close. Yet in 2002 the postcolonial approach to Biblical criticism was receiving great attention among individual Biblical scholars. This gave rise to a series of important publications

¹¹⁹ See E. Said 1993 *Culture and Imperialism* New York: Knopf. In this groundbreaking treatise Said wrote that texts, like their authors, are intrinsically connected to their time, space, culture, language, social world and political reality. They cannot be abstracted from these locations without doing violence to their content and meaning. L.E. Perdue 2005 *Reconstructing Old Testament Theology – After the collapse of History*. Minneapolis: Fortress, p.289-291 gives an incisive highlight of Said's role in post-colonial critical discourse.

notable among which was a publication by Sugirtharajah on liberation and postcolonialism (Sugirtharajah 2001:203-75 and 2002:103-23).

Rather than broadening postcolonial contemplation to cover a wider scope of minimal depth, such publications made a better option imperative namely, one which uses postcolonial criticism as a tool for exploring Biblical studies in depth (Moore and Segovia 2005:2-3). According to this latter option it would be better to see the roots of postcolonial exegetical enquiry going deeper and deeper into the Biblical text than to allow an exertion of scholarly energy in making postcolonial hermeneutics relevant to wider scopes of Biblical and theological discourse. This means that postcolonial Biblical criticism was to be more of a contemplative study, not only of the texts themselves but also the interpretation of the texts. This observation is critical to our appreciation of the innovation required in order to make sense of a strategic but grossly misrepresented Biblical text like Genesis 1:26 - 28.

The ripples of this development in Biblical scholarship resonated with what in Nigerian circles was described as “inculturation hermeneutics”¹²⁰, or as “decolonisation hermeneutics”¹²¹ or even as “African cultural hermeneutics”¹²² with the same thematic emphasis on both an academic and popular re-reading of the Biblical texts using a hermeneutics in consonance with African post-colonial perspectives. Hence my appropriation of postcolonial literary criticism can be seen as an attempt at a synthesis of a perspective that combines in-depth study with a wide range of culturally diverse purviews.

4.3.1.2 Trends

As would be expected, the trend of scholarly engagement with postcolonial critical hermeneutics have followed the writings of scholars of Near Eastern, Asian and African origin. They include Edward Said (1993), Homi Bhabha (1994), Georg Gugelberger (1995), Leela Ghandi (1998), R.S. Sugirtharajah (2001), S.D. Moore (2005), F.F. Sergovia

¹²⁰ J.S. Ukpong (1995) underscored the difficulty of academic reading by African scholars most of whom has received Western type hermeneutical training and adds that “African scholars must learn to re-read the Bible using African lenses”.

¹²¹ S.O. Abogunrin (2005) in a series of articles edited by him, stressed the purpose of decolonisation as resonating with a postcolonial Biblical hermeneutics which is related to the life situation in Africa along with a “pulse” for her societal problems.

¹²² Rose N. Uchem (2001) in her doctoral dissertation at the University of Indiana in the United States argued for a postcolonial Biblical hermeneutics that takes African cultural hermeneutics, that is story-telling and proverb citing modes of conversation into consideration. Citations of these authors have been made in appropriate sections of this dissertation.

(2005), Musa W. Dube (2000), and Justin S. Ukpong (2001) to name a few. In all three sides of the continental divide, these Biblical scholars have used postcolonial perspectives in decolonising Biblical texts and traditions previously used to serve colonial ends in the Near East, Asia, Latin America, Nigeria, and Southern Africa.

These scholars have also attempted to provide answers to the thorny question of what postcolonialism is, and in so doing, have in various ways helped to define more appropriately what a postcolonial hermeneutic is all about. Their individual contributions to an ongoing debate will be encountered in the course of our discussion (Segovia 2005:43ff). It is important however that the key issues central to postcolonialism which some of them have dealt with be understood in the light of our subsequent discussions. Evidently, their views add to the clarity of our present definition and application of a postcolonial approach to Biblical hermeneutics.

4.3.1.3 Definitions

A definition of what a postcolonial approach to Biblical hermeneutic means to us is to be seen in the various views represented by the scholars previously mentioned some of whose ideas are pertinent to this discussion.

Mention has already been made of E. Said whose writings stimulated both liberation and postcolonial studies. Borrowing a leaf from that process, Georg Gugelberger (1995:581-84) defined the postcolonial approach as a “slow, painful and highly complex means of fighting one’s way into European made history”. In other words a process of dialogue and necessary correction. The ultimate aim of postcolonial studies is to elevate the voices from the margin so that they could be heard in the centers of power. As such it is a literary and ideological struggle which stands in opposition to the post-structuralist European enterprise, with a mode of dialogue with and correction of the bastardising experiences of hitherto subject people.

While agreeing that postcolonial criticism is a literary struggle, and that it is oppositional in kind, dialogical and corrective in mode, it is redundant to stress its non-European value or origin. Moreover, the corrective aspect of postcolonial dialogue has specific reference to textual hermeneutics as a way of addressing the negative self-image imposed on hitherto subject people. This is of course where Gugelberger’s understanding of literary nature of postcolonial criticism becomes helpful. Yet a literary project which fails to employ an

accurate textual hermeneutics will fall short of its goal of being corrective. His opinion however that the postcolonial method of appropriating the Biblical text is to be done in a hermeneutics that is “dialogical and corrective in mode” has been widely noted (Segovia 2005:27)¹²³.

A definition given by Sugirtharajah (2002:13)¹²⁴ captures the major links in this dialogical process. It is one which is both interrogative and recuperative:

“Postcolonial hermeneutics signifies a reactive resistance discourse of the colonised who critically interrogate dominant knowledge systems in order to recover the past from Western slander and misinformation of the colonial period, and who continue to interrogate neo-colonising tendencies....”

The emphases by Sugirtharajah on inter-systemic dialogue and correction of the adverse effects of imperial epistemology is noteworthy and resonates with what Gugelberger had said earlier. It is an important point which Sugirtharajah notes here with respect to the dialogue between systems or contexts. As Perdue (2005:285) has observed, there is no epistemology undetermined by systemic or contextual values. One of such system determinism is in the area of economic interests. Economic interest of the neo-colonial nations for instance is a major imperial force which subverts the economic and social base of subject peoples and therefore is to be resisted. Similar contextual values which are in dialogue manifest often within the realm of knowledge and epistemology. It can be seen in a people’s art, agriculture, commerce, industry, literature, music, laws, mores and ethos. This dialogue is as true of contexts from which imperial interests emerge and others to which they are exported. According to Sugirtharajah this dialogue necessitates a (post)colonial interrogation.

It has to be pointed out that it is a two-way dialogue between the metropolis and the periphery, so that Sugirtharajah’s one-way process of imperial influence is faulted on that point. Not only do the imperial agencies infiltrate the “colonies” with knowledge and epistemology, but also pilfers the music, art, and industrial acumen of the so called “subject people”. A postcolonial discourse by this token considers this a “multi-dimensional” feature of postcolonialism which is critical for a meaningful postcolonial hermeneutics.

¹²³ We will skip Leela Ghandi for the moment because of the general ambiguity surrounding the definition of postcolonial, especially with respect to Biblical interpretation. In the opinion of Sugirtharajah (2001:245) such ambiguity has nothing to do with individual post-colonial attitude.

¹²⁴ Sugirtharajah (2002:13). See also Perdue (2005:300).

This is the point where Moore and Segovia (1995:51) define what a postcolonial discourse means in an inter-contextual perspective, by first of all underscoring the inequalities endemic to a colonial / neo-colonial relation:

“Ideological reflection on the discourse and practice of imperialism and colonialism from the vantage point of a situation where imperialism and colonialism have come – by and large but by no means altogether so – to a formal end but remain very much at work in practice as neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism.”

This definition no doubt elucidates the neo-imperialistic component of post-colonialism, that is a centre and periphery contexts in which ideological discourses and reflections take place along with trade and industry. Consequently, the implication of Moore and Segovia’s definition of postcolonialism is that it has a lot to do with ideation, and as such inclines more towards a passivity that smacks of arm-chair philosophy. The passivity of any postcolonial discourse underscores its demerit. A critical postcolonial discourse of any merit or worth has to be actively involved in the lives of the marginalised and attempt a re-ordering and re-writing of the script in which their subjugation became possible. This is a crucial point also made in reaction to Moore and Segovia’s ideation that leaves a postcolonial discourse without enough action. The postcolonial approach has to be action oriented for it to be relevant as a tool of post-colonial identity, especially “in pointing out what was missing in previous analysis, to re-write and correct” Punt (2006a:66).

Of course, it is easy to see how ideas formulated in the “centre” are then exported to marginal or colonised areas, but not as easy as that to critically underline the cultural influence which the so called “margins” exert on the metropolis, especially in the areas of policy formulations. There is a hybridity no doubt but one with a two pronged direction as “centre” dialogues with the “margins”. It is crucial in Moore and Segovia’s view that in the centre - margins inter-contextual dialogue, all other discourses and reflections flowing from receptor “margins” have to conform to the prevailing ideology of the “centre” or at least identify with it. This is what hybridity is in a neo-colonial context (Bhabha 1994:2-6). Yet an identification of this neo-colonial mental process requires more than passive reflection. It demands an active postcolonial literary project which detects the mental slavery to which people in the “margins” are subjected in order to stimulate, as Edward Said had stated, a vital process of proactive postcolonial reflections (Said 1993:42).

An inherent feature of postcolonialism in the centre - margins phenomenon has been identified by a leading African scholar, Musa Dube. She points out imperial tendencies like

exploitation, militarism and the production of legitimising texts. Her definition of a postcolonial approach is one which:

“takes into consideration the global experience of imperialism: that is how the 19th to 20th century imperial powers constructed or constructs their subjects and themselves to justify colonialism and imperialism, and how narratives are instrumental to this process” Dube (1992:121).

From her perspective it is important to direct the postcolonial approach to address the ways in which the Bible has been used to justify the colonial enterprise along with its economic, social, political and cultural bifurcations into coloniser - colonised; master - servant; expert - novice; rich - poor; foreign - local etc. Evidently, colonialism had thrived in Africa, trailing the path of Christian missionaries, the latter which provided the hermeneutics of Biblical texts, and in particular interpreted those texts in such ways as to bolster the colonial enterprise (Dube 1992:121-122).

In this way postcolonial critical hermeneutics will be confronting such imperial tendencies as exploitation, militarism and its legitimising texts. Whereas exploitation is an economic process of impoverishment of subject people by the colonists, militarism results in the attempt to sustain the colonial / neo-colonial structure through force and violence, just as texts are propagandist tools of legitimacy (Dube 2006:178f). Besides, she also stresses the way in which exploitation and violence is imposed on the colonised, particularly on women who live under a double dilemma of domestic and alien patriarchal forms. Therefore, the important role which a postcolonial discourse can play in both inter-textual and inter-contextual dialogue, particularly with texts and systems that are ideologically skewed in favor of a lopsided globalisation cannot be overemphasised.

Musa Dube (2006:178ff) further identifies a rather panoramic synergy of a re-emergence of imperialism in a neo-colonial guise of “globalisation”. She identifies with the struggle to conceptualise these imperialistic and camouflaged phenomena of globalisation. Having identified the champions of globalisation as the USA, Japan and Europe, she insists that the onus of decolonised reading of texts emanating from those centers is now laid squarely on the shoulders of scholars in the two-thirds world. In other words the postcolonial approach must treat texts that emanates from these centers of globalisation as “suspect” in order to sustain the intellectual freedom proffered by an authentic postcolonial approach to hermeneutics.

Dube's thesis makes a very interesting reading and exposes her feminist inclinations in a disconcerting manner. While she is right in identifying organised exploitation, militarism and legitimising text as imperialism's "stock-in-trade" which for obvious reasons are directed towards sustaining the purposes of an empire, it is difficult to accede to her view that any of such imperialistic "stock-in-trade" is gender discriminative. Exploitation in periphery nations is as much a man's problem as it is a woman's. Similarly, violence is aimed more at the male than the female gender in most occasions, in which violence is considered an option by the imperial powers. The same is true of legitimising texts which are directed to both sexes through the media, schools, colleges and universities attended by both male and female.

She is, however, right in her observation that the use of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics does not presuppose the termination of all colonising influences in Africa, especially with the new face of imperialism known as globalisation. It behooves a scholar of her standing to exonerate postcolonial critical hermeneutics of all biases based on gender, class, or creed. Her general understanding of postcolonial hermeneutic as a term used in a general way, to analyse the methods and effects of neo-imperialism as a continuing reality in global relations, should transcend her parochialisms with respect to gender.

Two other scholars who have approached the issue of a postcolonial critical hermeneutic as basic to a re-reading of the Bible in Africa are Justin S. Ukpong (2001) and Jeremy Punt (2002). Writing from their respective cultural contexts – the one Nigerian and the other South African – the former for instance, underscored the need of evolving a postcolonial interpretation of not only the Biblical texts in particular, but of religion in general (Perdue 2005:293). This is done by creating an encounter between the Biblical text and Africa's religious context, using a hermeneutics that ignores historical theology and focuses on postcolonial criticism. This is what Ukpong (2001:35) has described as:

"A hermeneutic of appropriation which, in the case of Africa, is concerned to make a specifically African contribution to Biblical interpretation and actualise the creative power of the Bible in African society."

On his part, Punt opines that the relevance of postcolonial criticism in Biblical studies lies in its fluidity and novelty, capable of grappling with the post-colonial realities of identity, hybridity and mimesis. Apparently there is a way in which colonial reading has impacted on the self-identity of "marginal" peoples and invoked on them a curse of oppression and

domination. Such subtle impacts would of necessity evoke requirements such as has been depicted in Segovia (2000:80-81)as:

“It requires value-judgments and ethical considerations, evaluation and critique ... and furthermore has to deal with the relevancy question more directly than many traditional... hermeneutical paradigms and methodologies ever do.”

It is not clear however if Punt (2006a:70-71) has underscored the aspect of the literary project of postcolonialism which has to do with its vulnerability, especially in ethics and value-judgment. In other words, postcolonialism cannot be anything but subjective as an unavoidable feature in any analysis involving texts and contexts. This is due to the identity crisis and “trauma” which the marginalised sometimes face in view of unequal power relations in post-colonial contexts. There is not only a crisis of identity, hybridity and mimesis but also of impoverishment and social anomie which sometimes lead to a construction of identity based on the otherness of the Other (Bhabha 1994:173; cf. Spivak 1999:24-25). These are recognisable postcolonial issues also encountered in Homi Bhabha (1994:2- 13, 175), signifying that hybridity for instance is an “in-between” reality which compels the marginalised to be self-critical, subjective and introspective. Yet such subjectivism, if applied to re-reading the Bible, calls for a hermeneutics that is actively liberating and which extricates “interpretation” from all traces of subjugation and oppression (cf. Sugirtharajah 1991:324).

With the foregoing in mind, it is instructive to note the futility of attempting a standard analysis, not even a monolithic or standard definition of a postcolonial approach. Our attempt to provide one as well as give indications of our employment of its terms as we did in preceding line and in subsequent lines as well, have been motivated by a post-colonial context of imperialism and neo-colonialism in the economic sector of Nigeria as shown. previously in the third chapter. One could be liable to the same criticism which normally characterises most studies making a pretension at being “scientific”, especially the criticism on subjectivism, instability and fluidity.

In the first place, using a postcolonial optic is prone to subjectivism, instability and fluidity, and for that reason my analysis can miss vital interpretive points in the text. I have therefore consciously tried to be objective and descriptive in order to escape this criticism, by not being prescriptive. This point is emphasised once again below in summarising my postcolonial critical optic, and can be read as the obverse of some of the preceding points.

Second, different contexts view a particular text from different perspectives and this necessarily impacts on the interpretive outcome. For this reason Perdue (2005:285) considers any definition of a postcolonial approach as capable of being truncated by the complex nature of contexts in which the postcolonial phenomena plays itself out. In order to stem the tide of any truncation I have related the analysis to a post-colonial context (Nigeria) in which the phenomena of identity, hybridity and mimesis plays itself out as an ongoing process against which a postcolonial critical hermeneutics engages the post-colonial context in an inter-textual and inter-contextual dialogue.

Such an engagement is in resonance with the suggestion that each post-colonial context must identify its challenges and define them in a globalised world (Welford 2004:33; cf. Hattingh 1997:19). Donaldson (1996:10) describes the process as *proliferation* which points to such an ongoing inter-textual and inter-contextual dialogue as being adapted to suit the pace of changing situations and circumstances by employing ethical norms of responsibility and accountability along with hermeneutical indices of transcendence and holism. In this way a postcolonial approach which at present is fluid and adaptable can serve either essentialist, or reconstructive ends that are adapted to the needs of changing times. The feature of adaptability is one of postcolonialism's most suited qualities which make for a resultful postcolonial critical hermeneutics (Perdue 2005:311).

4.3.1.4 Summary

A summary of the distinctives of my postcolonial approach which is considered most suited to a close-reading of our *pericope* in the light of what has been said so far can be given thus:

Firstly, it is representative. This means that the text can be given prominence in a way that is universally valid by using a more culturally inclusive and gender neutral language with Africa and Nigeria in particular as the context of both our inter-textual and inter-contextual dialogue (Bhabha 1994:175-76; Moore and Segovia 2005:67). This representativeness is to make for a holistic approach to creation and nature for instance, in which humans are an integral part of creation, living in partnership with the rest of the created order.

Secondly, it appropriates texts on both a practical and a theoretical level. On a practical level it examines the semantics and syntax of specific morphemes, words and phrases within the sentence structure of a text in an exegetically meaningful way, in order to apply

this to stewardship, land ownership and use. Using an exegesis that is informed by postcolonial hermeneutics, the sense of a text is unveiled and its meaning interpreted in a way that requires an inter-textual or inter-cultural dialogue as the case might be. In trying to establish what the text of the Bible has to say in their original context using semantics and syntactical structures, our goal is to achieve an interpretation that speaks to our audience in today's words (O'Collins and Farrugia 2000:84-85).

Similarly, on a theoretical level it uses certain key propositions based on the context of the theological world of the Bible on the one hand, and the context of interpretation on the other hand such as inter-textual, inter-contextual, transcendence and holisms. With such indices the inadequacies of previous (mis)readings of the text are addressed, and the Nigerian post-colonial experience is employed as inevitably impacting on our hermeneutics in an ongoing manner. In the case of Genesis 1:26-28, these indices can enable us to understand and appreciate the values of and respect for humans and nature, rather than an unhealthy dread of or reckless exploitation of natural resources (Enuwosa 2005:130ff; Ukpong 2004:32ff; Akao 1993:53; Watson 1990:857). Our pericope is sometimes suspected of being the *magna carta* of the imperial - colonial enterprise (White 1967:1207f). A postcolonial approach proposes that the presence of binaries in Nigeria for instance such as Western - non-Western, metropolis - colony, centre - margin depicts the march of Western historicism which is wrongly attributed to Genesis 1:26-28, of which interpretation is liable to correction and to right application (Donaldson 1996:5,15; Huntington 1993:52-56). It thus employs the tools of mimicry and resistance in its analysis to deal with incoherent interpretations.

Thirdly, it re-interprets texts in an objective and descriptive way. This means that it is not therefore prescriptive. In order to be objective, it traces common elements at the cultural, literary and textual levels in order to critically analyse them. Such analysis is capable of eliminating the bifurcation of humans and nature which makes the imposition of alien values and domination possible.

Fourthly, it is a hermeneutics of trust, and not one of suspicion. It imputes no ulterior motives to the Biblical authors, but searches to find out what ideological leanings motivated their rendition of a text. Popular theology in Nigeria easily berates the impact which Western culture has had on the oil economy and morality in Africa. At present the emphasis is on returning "to African moral values in the light of the demoralising effects which Western culture has had on such values" (Abogunrin 2005:7). In order for our

hermeneutics to be part of this ongoing process of mental *cum* cultural “de-programming”¹²⁵ in Nigeria, it has to be done in a trans-cultural manner keeping the post-colonial indices of inter-textuality, inter-contextuality, transcendence and holism in mind (cf. Moore and Segovia 2005:97). This shall be explained subsequently.

Suffice it to say that a critical close-reading using the postcolonial approach presupposes the possibility of an interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 that has validity in culturally diverse contexts (West 2005: 64; Uchem 2001:156). A postcolonial approach in order to do this has to be as objective and descriptive as possible in the quest for meaningful Biblical exegesis (Abogunrin 2005:3). The text has to address the issues at hand in contextually meaningful ways (Akintunde 2005:96). Interpretation has to move from any “ideological” bias to one of “neutrality” – difficult as this is – especially when applied critically to contexts such as Nigeria in particular, and in varying degrees to Africa in general. My critical hermeneutics takes the inter-textual, inter-contextual, transcendental and holistic indices as departure points for the discussion in the following section and a subsequent close-reading in the next chapter, to let the text speak objectively and descriptively and not prescriptively as previous colonial readings tended to do (Megbelayin 2005:51).

4.3.2 Indices for post-colonial critical hermeneutics

It has been the concern of scholars to shift scholarly emphasis from a pre-colonial, colonial and then a post-colonial direction as we have done in our critical analysis of the socio-political foundation of a new Nigeria in the previous chapter (Oyediran 1979a:43). However, the movement from the one to the other does not necessarily entail a unilinear progression, and so the features of a post-colonial context such as hybridity, identity and mimesis always have roots of unequal power relations and construction of otherness that deeply proceed from colonial and neo-colonial structures (Segovia 2005:25). This also impacts on the way the postcolonial critical engagement is carried out. In view of this complexity, I am using four interrelated indices to capture a postcolonial appropriation of the Biblical text in a measurable and determinate style, and these include: inter-textual dialogue, inter-contextual dialogue, transcendence and holism.

¹²⁵ A word used in the late 1980s by young Christian students of the University of Science and Technology, Christian Studies Unit, Institute of Foundation Studies Port Harcourt, Nigeria to emphasise the mental *cum* cultural paradigm shift which occurs when the “new” life replaces the “old” in presumably a “born again” Christian (Jn.3:3-6; Rom.12:1-2; 2 Cor.5:17). See A. Ahiamadu 2001 cover page.

4.3.2.1 Inter-textual dialogue

In applying a postcolonial critical hermeneutics to our pericope in particular and the Old Testament in general, the principle of inter-textual dialogue is my primary concern (Dube 2002:57ff). By its inter-textual and interdisciplinary nature, it questions the problems in the text and in the disciplines as the case may be and deals with such problems in a way that brings the voice of the margin to the core of the discourse (Gugelberger 1995:582). This is true of our application of it in this dissertation, as it is of the way we re-read the Genesis text. A postcolonial exegesis that addresses the issues of stewardship, land ownership and use in a receptor culture such as Ogba and Ekpeye in Nigeria has to take into consideration sociological and scientific aspects of Nigeria's post-colonial world-view (Ukpong 2004:87-88). With respect to the text, it means that it will be engaged in an inter-textual dialogue which revolves around the explicit meaning of the text, as well as on the implicit meanings. This point shall be clearer as we go on.

In a post-colonial critical reading of this nature, implicit meanings can only be unravelled on the authority of comparable texts; otherwise meanings that are implicit are allowed to remain so (Wendland 2004:192). This means Scripture must be interpreted with Scripture in contexts in which implicit meanings should be made explicit (Manus 2005:283). You would recall the evangelical, the Jewish, and the historical-critical views on the *imago Dei* discussed in the second chapter with implications of divine inspiration, inerrancy, complete truthfulness and full authority of the Bible (Mathews 1996:7). We presuppose that a synthesis of such views is needed at this stage from a Nigerian perspective. Otherwise we are confronted with a situation which Von Rad (1996:29) describes as "a secularism that benumbs its original cultic and religious traditions." In attempting a synthesis, however we are cautious of marrying profound cultural values such as stewardship of land and of nature with for instance a global compact which glorifies transnational capital to the detriment of local initiatives (Niang 2005:328-9; Blowfield 2005:515-524).

Therefore, it is our objective to use a postcolonial critical hermeneutics as a tool for exploring Biblical studies in depth (Moore and Segovia 2005:2-3). In the opinion of Moore, Segovia, and Punt such a perspective can be used in a way specifically focusing on existential issues of a local, indigenous, ethnic, cultural and religious nature "with the aim of recovering, reasserting and re-inscribing identities, cultures and traditions that colonial Christianity has erased, suppressed, or pronounced idolatrous" (Segovia 2000a; Moore and Segovia 2005:5-6). As Punt (2003:71-72) has observed, it is to be admitted that a text

can be inherently colonial right at its production point, and so its authority forms part of a postcolonial agenda for biblical studies. Our postcolonial hermeneutics lays emphasis on this authoritativeness of texts, but stresses that its interpretation in a post-colonial context counts if it is intended to address a crisis of identity, hybridity and mimesis in the target culture. Otherwise it remains a dormant text without making any significant impact.

In order to rid the text of such colonial authority, the roots of postcolonial exegetical enquiry have to go deeper and deeper into the Biblical text, rather than engaging in a superficial exertion of scholarly energy in a hermeneutics of conquest and dominion, not intended by the Biblical authors (Dube 2002:54-57). Not only will this attempt address the dogmatism which has its roots in Roman Catholic theology and has infiltrated orthodox and reformed theology, but will also satisfy the quest for a functional, dynamic meaning-based reinterpretation of the text in a post-colonial context (Nida 1984:76).

This is a crucial step in assessing the accusation that Biblical religion demystified nature and so breached the partnership with nature which humans once enjoyed. The accusation goes further to say that in so doing, Biblical religion fostered on nature a wild exploitation, pollution, plunder and piracy at the hands of humans (Wybrow 1991:140-141). A critical inter-textual re-reading of Genesis 1:26-28 becomes imperative in order to restore confidence in the Biblical text itself, and to examine critically its commitment to responsible and accountable land ownership and use in line with the Old Testament. In our *pericope* creation is treated as a unity. As so aptly put by Brueggemann (1982:11-12): “All stand before God in the same way, as the single reality of creature *vis-à-vis* Creator.” Therefore, postcolonial Biblical interpretation is employed as a literary project with a focus that is African, and in our own case also Nigerian in origin. This is oppositional in kind, but is also dialogical and corrective in mode¹²⁶.

The fact that post-colonial Biblical criticism emerged out of the whole concept of “liberation hermeneutics” underscores the importance it attaches to any interpretation of the Biblical text that has been de-colonised or de-mythologised. In the same way, our employment of it is meant to conform to similar tenets of liberation familiar in postcolonial liberation and even feminist hermeneutics. There is no air of finality that any such interpretations impose

¹²⁶ You may recall the distinction made earlier between post-colonial, which is a spatial and political concept, and postcolonial which is a theoretical or literary critical stance. Our focus on Nigeria uses mainly the latter meaning, unless otherwise indicated, in which case context will speak louder than text.

on the Biblical text *per se*. We see all interpretations as part of an ongoing process that influences and is being influenced by ever changing socio-economic circumstances (cf. Fretheim 2005:264).

4.3.2.2 Inter-contextual dialogue

Such an ongoing process paves the way for continued dialogue with not only the text and other disciplines, but also with the context in which the text has been shaped and the context of interpretation (Dube 2002:65). Or as Punt (2002:63)¹²⁷ has observed, such a dialogue considers:

“The socio-political context and one’s stand within it is of primary importance. But at the same time postcolonialism... specifically addresses the silencing of the other through the colonial strategy of posing the colonised as the inverse of the coloniser, requiring simultaneously the notion of emptying the colonised world of meaning.”

Apparently its implications for our postcolonial critical hermeneutics are enormous (Dube 2002:65). Several allusions have been made to the priestly context of Genesis 1:26-28, which contributes to shaping our understanding and appreciation of the text. On the other hand there is a way in which the context of a developing society like Nigeria, with a missionary history that is dating from about the middle of the 19th century, provides a heuristic in-culturative basis for further sounding the interpretation of our *pericope* (Ukpong 2004:76). In this regard the resonance of African traditions with those in Biblical cultures becomes very helpful in expounding meanings of concepts such as *imago Dei* and “dominion”. It makes it possible to highlight the salient message of Genesis from as it were the “margins” (Sugirtharajah 2001:61-62).

With its century-long experience of missionary Christianity, beginning from 1842 - 1960, (Falk 1993: 357) a marginalised Nigeria and indeed Africa is still engrossed with the impact of a colonial hermeneutics that reverberates into a post-colonial era (Adamo 2005:3). It reverberates into all sectors of her national life, particularly in the economic sector where exploitation of natural and human resources is being justified in the name of God, an act described as “terrorism” by Fretheim (2005:40). Consequently, there has emerged a motley of ordinary and scholarly re-reading of texts, both in the church and in the academy with a persistent effort at decolonisation of Biblical interpretation in Africa,

¹²⁷ See also L. Ghandi 1998:15.

which in Nigeria is spearheaded by African Independent Churches along with their counterparts within the academy.¹²⁸

It challenges traditional Western interpretations of the Biblical text and necessitates a re-reading of such texts in the light of a postcolonial critical hermeneutic. In our own case, the same critical hermeneutic is being brought to bear on such crucial theological and ethical concepts such as stewardship, land ownership and land use. This is a humble attempt aimed at resolving the inbuilt tensions which any (mis)reading of such text as Genesis 1:26-28 could create for both church and academy within, for instance, the Niger Delta where corporate ethical and moral responsibility and accountability has been improperly understood, with such a misunderstanding being attributed partly to the aforementioned Biblical texts¹²⁹. A postcolonial critical reading of the Biblical text is essential because it interprets both the *imago Dei* and “dual mandate” in the context of both the Biblical and contemporary world, in an attempt to deal with such lingering areas of tension and conflict as land ownership and use. So to assist people who are striving to live out their Christian faith within the context of the Niger Delta.

4.3.2.3 Transcendence

In order to attenuate the dilemma of the debate on the Divine self-address and the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:26-28, the reality of transcendence in African thought have been emphasised.

Firstly, such transcendence relates to the coming of Christianity to Nigeria – an event which has a history that is dating from about the middle of the 19th century (Falk 2003:78; Nkwoka 2001:326-335). Yet there is a transcendental concept of human’s role in an earth that is already fully formed and which is well established in the pre-Christian era until the present day. Ukpong’s project of reading the Bible with lay people, proves this point

¹²⁸ The Nigerian Association for Biblical Studies (NABIS) has published a whole series on ***Decolonisation of Biblical Interpretation in Africa*** in which various Biblical issues were thrashed out, using a purely African Biblical postcolonial hermeneutics. According to the series editor: “The commonest thing is that the interpretation of the Scripture is influenced by each people’s (Christians, Jews, historians and Orientals) cultural viewpoint...the colonial era was a time of injustice and a time of misinterpretation of the Bible. The Africans were taught to despise everything African at the time of conversion. The reason for decolonising the church and biblical studies have really led to the foundation and spread of African indigenous Churches (in) an attempt to bring Christianity close to the local people, interpreting the Bible (has to be) in the light of African cultures. (We) make (ourselves) relevant to the local people by employing cultural concepts in interpreting the Bible.” See Abogunrin (2005:1, 4, 7).

¹²⁹ White (1994:45ff); see also C. Wybrow 1991:87 and Kelbassa (2001).

(Ukpong 2001:582-594). The readings proved that Africans think of God in transcendental terms, and they attempt to read the Bible in this way, even when confronted by a motley of human problems. For instance a person would place a Bible under his or her pillow while sleeping because the book has got transcendental power of warding off intruding demons, the same way amulets were worn in pre-Christian times. By this they emphasise that humans are not helpless when it comes to dealing with capricious deities or demonic forces (Gottlieb 2003:117). Under such circumstances it is believed that humans are linked to transcendence or to God's power and that this is because humans are the crowning effort of God's creative power. It is a power which expends itself transcendently in what has become "the image and likeness" of God (Ukpong 2001:582-594).

Secondly, humans are not only connected to transcendence, but are capable of engaging consciously in constant dialogue with their Creator (Psa.8: 4-5, 6-9). Being in communion with their Maker who is spiritual, would of necessity entail that at least humans could have been made in an image of Deity that transcends their physical features and which resonates with the Spirit of their Maker (Beisner 1997:178). As so aptly depicted in Fretheim words (2005:39): "As God breathes God's own breath of life into the nostrils of a human being (Gen.2: 7), something of the divine self comes to reside in the human – and in an ongoing way". Such transcendence in my own opinion attenuates the dilemma of the debate in for instance the *imago Dei*.

Third, a careful look at Genesis and at our *pericope* in particular will demonstrate to present day ecologists the belief that the earth has been destined to be ruled by humans, even as a sacred trust. Human's closer identification with the Deity right from creation is what encourages and perhaps justifies this belief. Therefore, humans can perpetuate in a natural or God-given way an order of which they as humans have been given the capacity to learn and improve upon. Such transcendental views do conceive of God as Creator who rules creation using human instrumentalities.

As people strive to live out their Christian faith in the existential context of different cultural milieu, this process has also resulted in the phenomena of the emergence of African Independent Churches (Ejizu 1987:159-160). In the relatively short period of Nigeria's Christian history of a century and half, Christianity has created a pattern of interpretation of "let us" and *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:26-28, resulting in an ongoing dialogue between the Biblical text on the one hand and the traditional world views of different Nigerian groups on the other (Adamo 2005b:2-3). This process has been facilitated by African Independent

Churches with a transcendental view of God, of humans and of nature and has contributed to obliterate inter-contextual tension and conflict between the Biblical texts on the one hand and the traditional world views of different Nigerian groups on the other hand as has been pointed out.

Fourthly, it took Christian missionary zeal of the 18th and 19th centuries to adversely infiltrate traditional world views by nurturing the tendencies which overtook it. It undermined the indigenous Nigeria transcendental world views, regardless of the latter's resonance with Biblical norms and ethos. It has created an urgent need for an inter-textual and inter-contextual dialogue alluded to earlier, in order to bring about an exegetically correct interpretation relevant to Africa's religious life (Ejizu 1987:169). It calls therefore for a reappraisal of the issues with a postcolonial optic in reading the text critically as a way of sustaining an ongoing dialogue.

Conversely, our discussion at this point has to clarify what transcendence is not. Obviously the general understanding that people have of stewardship in Africa transcends parochial interests. Transcendence does not necessarily mean abstraction even though it might entail that. Transcendental thinking is uniquely human and humans are not only found in Africa. Moreover, Africa's perception of reality is not far removed from other perceptions of reality by people in other continents – Asia, America, Europe etc. The difference may be one of degree but not of kind. Thus in identifying “African-ness” with transcendence and “non-African-ness” with parochialism seems logical only to the extent that humans are not in the centre of creation. An understanding of stewardship, which places humans at the centre of the universe, is averse to transcendentalism in Africa and prone to the same dualistic parochialism to which erstwhile colonial readings have often plunged our pericope.

Transcendence can simply be adapted from J.S. Mbiti's (1996a:174ff) dictum “I am because God is, and since God is therefore I am.”¹³⁰ Neither should this be misunderstood to mean that nothing else counts in Africa beside the Deity and humans. The land is the next most valuable asset besides the Deity and humans. The impression one gets when one reads the writings of Mosala (1983), Dube (1992), Onibere (1987), and Ejizu (1987), point humans out as the central figures in creation. True as this is, it has been noted that

¹³⁰ See Mbiti (1996:174-180).

humans are placed not at the centre of the universe nor are they the ones around whom all things revolve. That honour is reserved for the planet earth itself. Therefore, the recognition of a transcendental power over the individual and over his socio-cultural environment in Africa becomes a matter of little or no controversy (Onibere 1987:176). This idea is indeed the way reality is perceived in some of the African communities with which I am familiar.

Be that as it may, Ogba and Ekpeye, besides the Deity, place transcendence on land rather than on humans. “*Ali a bu okenyi*” (the earth is senior) is the peoples’ way of expressing their solidarity with the earth and nature. It imposes a sense of responsibility and accountability in the way humans live their lives so as to conform to norms and ethos which over the years has contributed in the preservation of the land and its resources in a sustainable and regenerative manner. Hence, J.S. Mbiti’s identification of the God traditionally revered and worshiped in Africa with the God revealed in the Bible and who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is significant for an understanding of transcendental thinking as a reality in Africa (Onibere 1987:178).

Summing up on this point, Bolaji Idowu (1969:12) and Onibere (1987:179) have both pointed out that the same transcendence is reflected in the written version of revelation and insights in the Bible, and that it also finds resonance in most human cultures. The Bible accordingly contains God’s divine self-disclosure, but is not limited to it. As Idowu (1969:12) pointed out:

“If we are to be true to the spirit of the Bible and to our faith, we must admit that God’s self-disclosure is, in the first instance, to the whole world and that each human race has grasped something of this primary revelation according to its native capability.”

A postcolonial reading of the Bible’s unique and universal message stands the best chance of filling that, which is implied in indigenous concepts of God.

I will tend to agree with interpretations of both the *imago Dei* and the cultural or dual mandate which are theocentric rather than anthropocentric. As so aptly put, God is portrayed in the text as one who creates through word in supernatural and superlative terms as depicted in Genesis 1:1-2:4a in particular.

“This portrayal of God in the Genesis 1 creation account is important both for a canonical reading of Scripture and as a clue to interpreting the *imago Dei*” (Middleton 2005:85-86).

This means that the human vocation of stewardship can be modelled on the nature and actions of the God portrayed in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, in which case it becomes at least clearer who the *imago Dei* is meant to be, even though what they are in reality, has been a subject of debate (Middleton 2005:85-86)! The nature of God as depicted in the Old Testament text of Genesis alone suffices to show who the *imago Dei* should be in relation to creation in general and nature in particular. Postcolonialism frees our mind into a creativity of speech and action similar to the Deity's (Perdue 2005:327).

It is instructive to note that, unlike what obtains in other religions where revelation is static and not dynamic, Christianity and especially Biblical interpretation is not and cannot be a finished product. There is an ongoing process of interpretation of Biblical texts in both the church and academy, which influence and in turn is influenced by ever changing socio-economic circumstances. As we have seen, the African Independent Churches (AICs) are living embodiments of such an evolutionary process; because of the way these churches read the Bible of, to and for themselves, with a hermeneutics that is reflective of their universe and their general understanding of the world (Mosala 1983:23; Lokel 2006:544). Moreover, theological institutions in Africa and particularly in Nigeria are increasingly conscious of a process of decolonisation that is running parallel with similar developments of approaches described here as postcolonial critical hermeneutics¹³¹. Let us turn now to a holism that is one of the indices of our postcolonial approach.

4.3.2.4 Holism

A holistic view of Genesis raises a question for a postcolonial critical perspective because any attempt at holistic forms of "social explanation" of Biblical narratives often elicits the question of mimicry and resistance (cf. Bhabha 1994:173). Yet this question does not undermine the relevance of postcolonial critical hermeneutics to a theological interpretation of Genesis. The question is this: can Genesis subscribe to a postcolonial close reading from a holistic point of view which means ignoring its redactional history and interpolations? From our theological reflections so far the answer would be "yes". Moreover, in submitting Genesis to a postcolonial hermeneutics we are particularly concerned that Genesis 1-3 should not, for instance be seen as history as commonly understood today. It does describe past events but not exactly the way they are. For

¹³¹ The Nigerian Association of Biblical Scholars have recently [see S. O. Abogunrin (eds) 2005] published a series of interesting and incisive articles on the theme ***Decolonization of Biblical Interpretation in Africa***. Details are contained in the Bibliography of this dissertation.

instance, the earth is not flat but round, and the sun does not rise but shines steadily on a revolving earth (Uchem 2003:156). But neither is Genesis 1-3 a myth, at least not in a historical-philosophical definition of myth, which to the layman would be referring to primeval fables or tales that has no bearing to reality. This layman's understanding usually carries the day in any mention of the word "myth", and obscures its relevance or use in a "technical" sense to postcolonial exegesis of Genesis 1.

Therefore, we subscribe to the view expressed by Hamilton (1990:57, 70-71) that "Genesis is the understanding of God possessed by God's people individual or groups advanced with the passing of time." It is an oral tradition which had been passed on from one generation to another across several millennia until it finally was written down and later canonised. To the extent of its canonicity, at least in Judeo-Christian circles can it be said to subscribe to a postcolonial critical hermeneutic.

Thus Genesis describes creation that is a holistic reality in which all constituent parts fit together and do not warrant the human / nature dichotomy extant in Western philosophy and theology. The sacredness of life endorsed in Genesis 1-11 encapsulated in the creation narratives, are similar to the narrative sources by which African traditions – be it Akan, Bini, Igbo, Yoruba, Ogba or Ekpeye – develop an "eco-theology" of creation that regards its elements as sacred – particularly the people and land (Oduyoye 2001:33-51)¹³². A postcolonial hermeneutics makes for a synthesis of the Biblical and African perspectives to stewardship of nature, land ownership and use. It is a holism which obfuscates such binaries as human - nature; faith - culture bifurcations such as is found in Western hermeneutics (Dube 1992:111-112). It is one in which the humans - nature; Christianity - culture is seen as co-terminus and in constant dialogic partnership which in the former calls for a nurturing care, and in the latter a transforming interrogation (cf. Donaldson 1996:1-11).

Such a postcolonial critical hermeneutics is used to re-read our Biblical text and pericope. I am using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics informed by African¹³³ scholarly and cultural views, which entails a decolonisation of Genesis. Such decolonisation resounds with a postcolonial theory which has been used by for instance Sugirtharajah (1999b) in

¹³²See Perdue (2005:285).

¹³³While Dube employs postcolonial feminist criticism in re-reading texts, Punt uses a postcolonial critical South African non-sexist approach (Dube 1999:299; Punt 2003:63).

identifying the ideology of colonisation inherent in some Biblical texts, and has contested certain interpretive traditions as colonial, or as serving colonial ends.

An attempt at a postcolonial critical re-reading of this Biblical text, Genesis 1:26-28, answers to the accusation made earlier by White (1967), Hall (1990), Barton (1998) and others that Biblical religion is the precursor to the present spate of devastation and destruction of the earth's pristine ecology (White 1967:1203-1207; Hall 1990:187; Barton 1998:41). Such accusations provoked a response even from Catholic Church circles as shown in the article by Ukpong (2004:75-77) in which he said *inter alia*:

“Human beings exercising control over wild nature has often been understood in aggressive terms. However, a careful reading of the text shows that this instruction belongs in the context of human beings as God's image, and is part of humanity's primary assignment at creation which includes procreation (Gen.1:28) and cultivating the land” (Gen.2:15).

A careful look at Genesis in general and at our pericope will show the encouragement to present day ecologists who believe that the earth has been delivered into the hand of humans as a sacred trust because of this close identification with the Deity right from creation. Therefore humans can perpetuate in a natural or God-given way an order of which humans have been given the capacity to learn and improve upon. In the close-reading that follows a postcolonial approach is therefore employed in the way in which exegesis is combined with a critical hermeneutics.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter an attempt has been made to give a brief interpretative survey of various interpretations of our *pericope*, while at the same time motivating the use of a postcolonial critical approach in achieving an exegetically appropriate, clear and accurate interpretation of our pericope, keeping the Nigerian receptor context in view. In motivating a postcolonial critical approach to a humane and responsible interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28, a short survey of its interpretative background has been given, along with the trend and definitions of various Asian and African scholars. In the course of our analysis we identified certain traces of dogmatism, dilemma and dualisms which marked the history of interpretation of this unique text in Western hermeneutics. We did so in order to clarify the rationale for a postcolonial approach.

The motivation for using a postcolonial critical approach is primarily the interpretative inadequacies resulting from the dogmatism, dilemma and dualisms observable in

interpretations mainly by some Western scholars. Such inadequacies crave for a more novel and judicious hermeneutic. There are three ways in which these inadequacies have been remedied.

The first remedy brings to focus both inter-textual and inter-contextual dialogue which presupposes that interpretations should not be done in isolation of the contexts of the text. In other words, the source context and the reader context of both the author as well as of the textual tradition itself should be in constant dialogue with the context of the reader and interpreter. We all bring our own presuppositions to the text in both reading and interpretation and so our own contexts do constantly engage the text and its context in an iterative dialogic process. In this case all claims to neutrality gets faulted admittedly.

A second remedy is to deal with the dilemma of the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* debate of the Divine self-address as well as with the dualisms imposed on its interpretations. We did this by bringing into focus the transcendental proclivity along with a “holistic”¹³⁴ approach to interpretations which resonates with the African world view in which human events and circumstances are understood from a more theocentric rather than an anthropocentric perspective. The intention of the redactor may be discerned through a post-colonial hermeneutics that takes inter-textual, inter-cultural, transcendence and holism into considerations in order to approximate the original meaning of the source text and context as closely as possible, thereby transcending any parochial interests in our attempt to critically engage the Biblical text in an interpretative dialogue.

The implications of this for Old Testament theology and ethics are enormous. With respect to Old Testament ethics it implies that creation is God’s authoritative command or decree, and this is made explicit and demonstrated in his care for the creation (Ps.147:4-5), in his nurturing the earth and feeding the animals (Ps.149:7-9), but also includes his protecting of God’s people and granting them *shalom* (Ps.147:10-14). Similarly, its implications for Old Testament theology underscores the fact that the latter does not conceive of a human image of and likeness to God in which the natural and supernatural components of

¹³⁴ The criticism by literary postcolonialists that “holism” counters the binary features of the post-colonial context can be answered in two ways: 1) Such binaries as metropolis-periphery, centre-margins etc are spatial indicators rather than theoretical emblems; 2) The object of analysis is – in our case – a literary text (Gen.1:26-28), rather than a socio-structural complex. Pertinent to this view is the observation by Sugirtharajah (2001:253) that “The religious landscape is so complex that reading a text through one single religious view may not yield much these days when cultural identities and religions coalesce”. These coalescence of identities and religions is captured by our indice of holism.

humans are separable, but one in which they are inseparable and contiguous. Therefore, it behooves humans as functional representatives of the Deity to assume the same posture which their Maker took in both creating, fructifying and sustaining the earth.

In the next chapter the results of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics will be applied in a close-reading of our *pericope* based on the indices of inter-textuality and inter-contextuality suggested in this chapter. This will be followed by a translation of the text into Ogba, keeping in mind the indices of transcendence and holism also discussed in this chapter. This will be done in harmony with existing theories of translation that is textually, contextually and functionally meaningful both in the source context and to the target audience which in our case is Ogba.

CHAPTER FIVE

POSTCOLONIAL CLOSE-READING OF GENESIS 1:26-28

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a re-reading using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics is to be attempted. In order to facilitate a postcolonial critical close-reading of our *pericope* as a way of achieving an exegesis that is responsive and faithful to the original text – a postcolonial critical hermeneutics have been employed. It is hoped that this in turn both clarify the re-reading and stimulate an application of this interpretation to the Niger Delta as a way of contributing to sustainable relationships and development in host communities. Moreover, facilitating the processes of the restoration of clean air, a green environment, freedom of person and sustainable development means that both human and non-human Earth communities in the region are being stimulated to engage in a dialogue not only with the Biblical text but also with a text that is decolonised, demythologised and liberating.

This process of transformation will also induce a sustainable relationship of humans (physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual) in partnership with nature particularly as land and natural resources are utilised in an optimal (fair, equitable, and sustainable) manner (Ukpong 2004:80-81). In my own opinion, optimal utilisation of land and natural resources calls for an awareness that both are at best a static, and at worst a depleting asset. Therefore, benefits derivable from them should be applied to such developmental ventures that take present and future generations into consideration.

Therefore, in this chapter I am doing firstly a postcolonial close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28; and secondly a translation of Genesis 1:26-28 into Ogba – with commentaries. In doing this we have to keep in view the text and context (syntax / semantics) as well as the four postcolonial indices (inter-textuality, inter-contextuality, transcendence and holism) discussed in the previous chapter.

5.2 Postcolonial close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28

It is my purpose in this section to engage in a close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28. Beginning with verse 26, it will enable us to see what light a semantic / syntactical study of this verse sheds on the idea that humans are created in the image of God. As Middleton (2005:44-5) has indicated, semantic / syntactical analysis of this verse presumes a symbolic world reflected in Genesis 1:1-2:3 in which our *pericope* is located.

A summary of this context is given by the priestly editor who locates the Genesis 1: 26-28 events on the 6th day of God's creative fiat. The opening words of that day began in verse 24: "And God said, 'let the earth bring forth...'" and ends in verse 31 with "And God saw that it was good." Cassuto (1978:53-54) sums up these creation events with a remark that "the sixth day completes the work that was begun on the third day". On the third day the earth was created and on the sixth day the living creatures of the earth were made. Again, on the third day, immediately after the organisation of inanimate nature had been completed, the plants were brought into being, so also on the sixth day when vegetation and animal life had been fully established, humans who bear rule over all created life on earth was formed (Bandstra 1995:59-60).

There are at least three theological reasons for re-reading Genesis 1:26-28 in the light of this creation narrative which provides its immediate context as summarised above.

The first, and perhaps the most significant reason necessitating a close-reading has been alluded to in the previous chapter, namely, the need to foster stability, justice and righteousness among the stakeholders – community, company and government – in the oil-bearing territory of the Niger Delta through an informed and structured set of stakeholder rights and obligations (Hemphill 2004:339-361; Hempel 1962:156). The implication of this is that an understanding of corporate social responsibility and accountability can be an all embracing theme that is also integrated into the theological and moral conviction of all stakeholders in Nigeria's oil sector, including host communities, civil government, and multi-national companies irrespective of their religious allegiances. It is therefore paramount that those important concepts in our *pericope* such as *imago Dei*, the dual mandate, land (or earth), rule and subdue be critically re-read in a way that transcends sectarian or creedal biases whether in African culture, in Christianity, Judaism

or Islam so as to exonerate Biblical religion in particular from the accusation of instigating the present global ecological crisis (Ukpong 2005:32ff).

A corollary to this is the fact that the social existence of Niger Delta communities such as Ogba and Ekpeye, the economic endeavors of multi-national corporations such as Shell and Total, and the fostering of an enabling environment for a sustainable economic empowerment of citizens in oil bearing communities by relevant state authorities such as the Federal Government of Nigeria and its State counterparts, must all be seen to derive from the will of God!¹³⁵

Secondly, as important as a postcolonial close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28 is, it derives from an existing cultural and theological link of African moral religion to the culture and religion of the Bible lands (Letlhare 2001:474-75). In both African and ancient Israel the fertility of the land for instance, is inexorably linked to good and just practice of stewardship by the king (see Ps.72: 3, 6, 7,16ff). This link between righteousness and fertility resounds in Christianity, Judaism, and African culture. It is a typical theme in the royal ideology¹³⁶ of the Psalms. The king, as chief steward or president maintains the *sedeqah* and *mishpat*, and thereby ensures a state of general *shalom* which would include the fertility of the land. In the prophetic corpus such a link is prevalent also and very often alluded to (see Am. 9:11-15; 5:21-24; Hos.14: 6-8). A postcolonial critical hermeneutic can take advantage of this unique textual and contextual affinity to educe the true meaning of stewardship (Punt 2006:79-81).

Thirdly, a close-reading is necessitated by the inadequacies of dogmatism, hermeneutical dilemma and dualisms, surrounding the various interpretations of the Genesis 1:26-28 passage. Such interpretations which have roots in Greek dualistic thought and in 19th century liberalism, confused the role of humans by re-enforcing a humans / nature dichotomy, and created the basis for human pre-eminence in creation which justifies exploitation and ecological insensitivity. A critical examination of such anthropocentric interpretation of creation is needed (Akao 1993:53; von Rad 1971:139-141). It is necessary to re-establish the true meaning of for instance the *imago Dei*, especially in the

¹³⁵ Ferguson, *et al* [(eds) 1988:645-646]; Yeats (1995:797-798); Williams (1995:796-797).

¹³⁶ D. Lawrie, a professor of Theology at the University of the Western Cape, - on the invitation of the Chairperson of Old and New Testament, H.L.Bosman – presented a series of Old Testament Seminar papers in April 2003 to postgraduate students. The one he titled **“Psalm 72, land and ecological history”** in which he made several allusions to the “royal ideology” in Wisdom literature, particularly in Psalm 72, has proved invaluable here.

light of the fact that humans are fallen creatures living in a fallen world. Humans are themselves in need of total redemption from the corruption of human nature by the one who truly became *imago Dei* on their behalf, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and whose example of stewardship was more of a caring, nurturing, responsible and accountable one (Hall 1990:42,122-23).

With these motivating principles in mind, let us proceed now to the postcolonial close-reading aforementioned. In doing so it must be kept in mind that we are not necessarily rejecting previous readings of our pericope that do not carry a postcolonial tag. Instead, we are utilising and scrutinising every insight contributing to the discussion using postcolonial critical “lenses” in doing so. The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* version of Genesis 1:26-28 is given below – verse after verse – along with an English New International Version translation followed by a postcolonial critical close-reading:

Genesis 1:26



And God said, “let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, over all the earth, and over every moving thing that moves on the face of the earth” (NIV).

☆ ▣ ≡ ● ○ ◌ ▣ ◆ -- *wayomer 'elohim* : “And God said”

In the creation account of the Priestly editor as in Genesis 1:1-2:4 creations are depicted as a word (or speech) event and – *wayomer 'elohim* is used to put the word into effect. Here *omer* is an utterance followed by a statement which is a creative word of God (TDOT

2001:328, 331, 336f). As Ringgren (2001:336f) has observed, the word and the deed go together. “The word is the deed; that which is said is that which is done”.

With respect to the divine name *‘elohim* is used once in verse 26, and twice each in verses 27 and 28 – a total of five times. *‘Elohim* speaks, then he creates and then he blesses those he created. Schmidt (1997:115f) observes that *‘elohim* is more of a descriptive term which only acquired the status of a divine name with time. The idea of the only living God is deeply ingrained in the name, *‘elohim* (Dt.5:26; 1 Sam.17:26, 36; Jer.10:10; 23:36). God first spoke the earth into being before creating humans, and so the saying the earth is senior among the Ogba for instance depicts the dependence on humans on land for survival. It is remarkable though that in this opening statement in Genesis 1:26, God is immediately presented as creating by word as well as by fiat. Each of God’s other creative acts is also framed by the recurring fiat pattern, which first appears in Genesis 1:3-4 “And God said. ‘Let there be light’ and there was light.

Middleton (2005:66) identifies a three-fold pattern: God’s fiat or word (“and God said, ‘let there be x” or “and God said ‘let x do y” followed by an execution report (“and it was so”) and an evaluation report (“and God saw that it was good”). In verse 26 the phrase forms a framework of a spectacular work of creation, though similar to the ones used in verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, and 24. The function of these reoccurring phrases is to introduce a Divine creative command which is instantaneously fulfilled in various works of creation (Westermann 1984:84), coupled with the utterance of blessing on the created beings. Here the creation of man is the focus.

As portrayed in verses 26, 27 and 28 *‘elohim* literally mean gods or the Godhead. “And God said” – God here is in the plural form and the words he utters is an address. Both Dillmann (1892:31) and Jónsson (1988:56-7) were right in this remark that the plurality in the name of God marked a Hebraic conception of Deity as “a living personal combination of the fullness of energies and powers.” In both ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Canaanite and Israelite religion the gods are conceived in anthropomorphic terms (Jónsson 1988:56-7). Many of the characteristics such as “great”, “powerful”, “strong”, “beautiful”, “compassionate”, “exalted”, and “righteous” are all human – the only difference being that the gods possess these qualities in purer forms than do the humans (Van der Toorn 1999:361ff). Moreover, the idea of one supreme Deity or Godhead ruling over all is extant in ancient cosmogonies (Van der Toorn 1999:361ff). The concept of the Godhead as a multiplicity of Deity in unity is still extant among many pre-colonial African

communities (Eze 1997:28-29). However, as Jónsson (1988:29) has observed God in unity does speak in Person not through the voices of a heavenly host.

'*Elohim* occurs in the general sense of Deity some 2,570 times in Scripture. As indicating the true God, '*elohim* functions as the subject of all divine activity revealed to humans and as the object of all true reverence and fear from humans. '*Elohim* is usually accompanied by the personal name of *Yahweh* (Gen.2:4-5; Ex.34:23; Ps.68:18). Evidently, the individual occurrences of the term '*elohim* for God are far too numerous to treat here. Suffice it to note that descriptive words attached to the noun '*elohim* really serve as titles and indicate the various ways in which God's people came to know him. '*Elohim* is the name of God that is most commonly used in titles. They are usually attached by means of the construct, the relative clause or by participial phrases rendered as titles. There are titles which pertain to '*Elohim*'s work, his sovereignty, his majesty, and to his salvific purposes (Scott 1980:44-45).¹³⁷ Suffice it to say that Hebrew language has not entirely endorsed the idea of numerical plurality in '*elohim*, and have often demonstrated this by its being joined with a singular attributive e.g. '*elohim rapha*, '*elohim sadik*, '*elohim shallom* to name a few (Cowley 1954: 399/124g.)

There are also examples from Phoenicia that are similar to the employment of the plural '*elohim* in biblical Hebrew, even though the usage in the former cannot be localised to a particular area outside of Phoenicia, nor is the usage attributable to any foreign influence – Akkadian, Egyptian or Aegian (Burnett 2001:28-29). Both KB (2000:50) and BDB (2000:43) translate *elohim* simply as God in singular form, but the former adds that '*el* is God and that *ohim*, its plural form is an apt reference to "living" (KB 1958:51). Thus *elohim* is translated as "living God", and KB adds a completive that in texts in which it is translated in this way – Deuteronomy 5:23; 1 Samuel 17:26; 2 Kings.19:4 – *elohim* is a real singular, but the pluralistic form depicting His livingness is usually felt. It is derived from the root '*el* which means god, or God. In this case it is similar to the Ugaritic term for "god" or the

¹³⁷ Isaiah 45:18 '*Elohim* is God who founded the earth and heavens; Jonah 1:9 '*Elohim* is God of the sea who founded the sea and dry land. With respect to his sovereignty in Isaiah 54:5 '*Elohim* is God of all the earth; 1 Kings.20:28 he is God of the hills; Jeremiah 32:27 '*Elohim* is again described as "God of all flesh, the God of all the Kingdoms of the earth". As sovereign Lord '*Elohim* is Judge (Ps.50:6; 75:7 H8) or God who judges the earth (Ps.58:11 H12), and as God of majesty and dominion we find that '*Elohim* is God of justice (Is.30:18), God of certainty (Is.65:16), and God of eternity (Is.40:28). Yet by far the most occurring titles are those pertaining to '*Elohim* as the Saviour God. Several constructs are included here in which '*Elohim* is linked to individuals whom he has called for example to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see Gen.17:8; 26:24; 28:13; Ex.3:6; esp.Gen.24:12). For more on this see Harris *et al* (1980:43-45).

“chief god” which is *il*, of which plural form is *ilhm* (Scott 1980:41-45). ‘*El* could refer to God as the living mighty one who is full of strength or it could be one who is mightier than all.

In postcolonial terms God’s word is creative, hence the style adopted by the Priestly author. Among the Ogba and Ekpeye, *Chukwu-Abiama* is used as an abstract plural but is depicting a concrete single Deity. Yet it shows in postcolonial terms humans were made by that unique word which was to be reflected in their love of life and for righteousness in order to keep their relationship to God intact. As the Ogba would say “*ishi ka kniknaga enye pua*” literally: the head is never bigger than the one on whose shoulders it stands” Using the inter-contextual indice we see how easy it is to relate to the idea that God speaks like humans do, and that his words order the whole creation and gives life. Each individual creative act begins with *wayomer* as depicted in verses 26 and 28. From a postcolonial perspective the Ogba and Ekpeye would say that *Chukwu abu eny’ikpe* literally: “God is the Judge” to depict not only the livingness of God but also his personal involvement with the affairs of the community on a day to day basis. In the postcolonial context of Nigeria the idea that God is self-existent and eternal is implicit in most of the theological world views encountered during this research.

- *na’aséh* : “Let us make”

From the standpoint of transcendentalism the Divine self address faces no interpretive problems. Yet it calls for an evaluation of all possible interpretive meanings so far adduced on it. Besides ‘*amar* and *hayah*, *aser* “to make, do” is the third most frequent word in the Old Testament; it occurs a total of 2,627 times. It can connote the production of various objects, the performance of a law or decree. With or without the particle *kə*, *aser* can also refer to a pattern as in Exodus 28:8,15 where the tabernacle must be shaped like the heavenly prototype (Vollmer 1997:944-951).

This phrase *na’aséh* is the co-hortative of the verb ‘*aseh* and is used only once here in verse 26 and signifies a process of creating using some pre-existing materials – the soil for instance (McComiskey 1980:127). There are two components of this phrase that comes up for exegetical consideration: the plural “us” and the use of ‘*aseh* instead of *barah* for “make” (KB 1994:153). We shall attempt to examine in a postcolonial critical way, the uses of the plural form “let us” and the Hebrew word used for “make”. Taking the second point first, because it is of a shorter argument, the use of ‘*aséh* instead of *barah* has been explained as reflecting the fact that humans were shaped from an already pre-existing

primary substance – the earth (McComiskey 1980:127). The use of *'aséh* primarily is to emphasise the shaping of an object whereas *barah* emphasises the initiation of an object and the latter is used for the initial act of creation of heaven and earth (McComiskey 1980:127). Again, *barah* is a theological term, the subject of which is invariably God (KB 1994:153). A postcolonial view of “make” would not be far from “to mould” or “to shape” in a form akin to, or at least in consonance with the moulder’s vision.

The “us” in its co-hortative form “let us” is a first person plural pronoun which suggests a Deity in plurality. Consequently, this phrase has been given various interpretations ranging from those who see it as:

a) A plural suggesting the Trinity – Although this position relates to a relational rather than a functional conception of Deity, few African scholars think that the context of Genesis 1 does not necessarily allow such a multiplicity (see Ukpong 2004:76; Akao 1999:411-421). In my own opinion, assuming that Moses’ life and works influenced the priestly editor, the challenge was not to establish a Trinitarian God, but one which subdues all other gods to him alone. This position formed the basis of Westermann’s argument which centered on the belief in one God who is himself uncreated, merciful, and sovereign versus the belief in multiple gods (demons) that are capricious, unpredictable and often immoral (Westermann 1984:26).

b) A plural depicting God together with the heavenly court. Hamilton (1990:133) for instance sees the idea of a heavenly court as a later development in the text. It was used to replace an ancient idea of a pantheon whereby other gods existed side by side with the true God. Now it is not other gods but an angelic heavenly host, “sons of God”, to whom God speaks. Middleton (2005:55) sees the idea of a heavenly court as not foreign to the priestly editor, and so could be his fingerprint on the text. In my own opinion, the context of Genesis 1-11, especially Genesis 6:1-6, and 11: 1-12, lends credence to the idea that a heavenly court with which God deliberates, has been a very strong Hebrew oral tradition now written down (cf. 1 Kgs. 22:19-23; Jer. 23:22).

c) A plural of self-deliberation – The idea here is that God is communing with himself as in a soliloquy, just like an individual who might say to himself: “now we must fetch water out of this cistern”. Examples of such can be found in Genesis 11:7 and in 2 Samuel 24:4 in which “let us” and “us - me” are personal. It is almost similar to an individual engaged in a soliloquy. However, on this occasion the Priestly editor was careful to point out that God

might have been speaking in conference with other heavenly beings (Westermann 1984:26).

d) A plural of majesty – It is as if God summons himself to what needs to be done – the creation of humankind – by the use of the co-hortative “let us make” (Towner 2005:344). The weakness in this view, in my opinion, is that a plural of majesty hardly occurs with verbs in Hebrew as it does with nouns, and the verb here is *'asêh* “to make”.

e) A plural of mobilisation in which God speaks to something he has recently created. In this case the most likely addressee would be the earth itself. In order to make man out of the dust of the ground God speaks to the earth to be part of this creative process. Thus man owes his origin to both God and the ground. W. Caspari (1929:207) peddled this idea in the early 20th century. This view sounds very African, but it is not without its weaknesses. In my own opinion, the “us”, if anything, could not be referring to material things but to something of the same essence and substance with God (Wenham 1987:44).

f) A plural of fullness in which God speaks to the Spirit who has been brooding over the face of the deep to join him in creating human beings in their own image and / or likeness (Wenham 1987:44). Hamilton’s opinion is that the whole idea of plurality within unity should not be dismissed as an idea foreign to the priestly redactor, because hints of such plurality are dropped here and there until it gets a full blown treatment in Galatians 4:4 (Hamilton 1990:134). A more evangelical position is that held by Matthews (1996:26-28), as well as by Hamilton (1990:51-52) and Wenham (1987:44) namely that God is speaking in self-deliberation. In my opinion, the flaw in Hamilton’s suggestion is similar to what he has himself said of the Trinitarian view, namely, that the priestly editor was confronted with a polytheistic culture which only a strict concept of monotheism could effectively respond to.

A motley of such interpretative insights leaves us with a hermeneutical dilemma. A postcolonial critical reading will conclude that Genesis 1:26 is indeed God’s way of alerting the heavenly court of the creation of the quintessence and masterpiece of creation – humans as both male and female respectively (cf. Abogunrin 2005:16; Ukpong 2004:76; Akao 1999:411-421).

On two occasions this term is used for humans. In verse 26 it is used as it appears here, whereas in verse 27 there is *ha* before it – *ha* depicting uniqueness (Lee 2002:135). Thus a creative act which was announced in verse 26 by God before his heavenly court has now been accomplished to their amazement (Westermann 1984:146). In both verses (26, 27) emphasis is on the human made by God (Towner 2005:345). Adam as used here and throughout our pericope therefore refers to generic man as the image of God and the crown of creation, but can also be the personal name of the created being Adam (Coppes 1980:10-11).

In Genesis 1 it is very commonly used of humans and mankind in general (Towner 2005:345; BDB 2000:8-9). It is mused that the verbal form *adamah* “ground, land” with a root close to *adam* points to the earth’s creative agency in the making of humans, and that *edom* “red” is derived from *adam* which symbolises the ruddy color of this unique terrestrial being (KB 1994:14)! Prior to the fall, Adam was a theomorphic being in the sense that he had an untrammelled functional ability and a capacity to relate to or be in a relationship with God in both physical, mental and spiritual ways (cf. Ez.1:26; Mic.1:3; Isa. 63:1ff; Ps 24:9). At that point the difference between *Elohim* and Adam was one of degree, and not of kind (Kline 1991:65). Adam had a *kabod* that was infinitesimal compared to the fiery, intensely radiant light which is the nature of *Yahweh* (Coppes 1980:10-11). In my postcolonial critical re-reading, I have identified with the view that granting such a special place in creation to humans was to foster through them God’s care and nurture to the lower creatures. It was a privilege that was matched with a corresponding responsibility.

✦■○●☒Ω -- *besalmenu* : “in our image”

It is instructive to note the ease with which interpreters try to drive a wedge between humans and nature based on the fact that humans are created in the image of God and other creatures are not, and so the latter are different and inferior. A postcolonial critical re-reading of this text has the potential of addressing the problems of identity and hybridity just by correctly interpreting and applying this verse keeping the indice of holism also in mind. The phrase “in our own image” occurs only once in verse 26 and is also in this same verse reinforced by *kidmutenu* “in our own likeness”. Although it is used twice in verse 27 it is not reinforced by *kidmutenu* “in our own likeness” as it is here. The reasons for this are not obvious, and are subject to speculations. Hamilton (1990:74-75) gives at least six reasons which has been outlined under the discussion of *kidmutenu* “in our own likeness” below.

In the meantime *besalmenu*: 'in our image' is from the root *šelem* which is used 16 times in the Old Testament and twice in the Aramaic sections of Daniel 2-3 (Hartley 1980:767-8). The word basically refers to a representation – like an idol or carved structure – of the Deity, and in most cases was strictly forbidden (Ex. 20:4; 1 Sam.6:5,6,11). It is generally used to signify the image of the gods (Ez. 7:20; Am.5:26). In Ezekiel 16:17 a further emphasis of the gods made in human likeness is given as in Ezekiel 23:14 (Eichrodt 1972:122). It is interesting that the priestly writer avoided the use of the crucial word *selem* as an adequate description of the picture of humans that he has in mind (KB 1994:810). Instead, he uses an expression to define it more closely such as *besalmenu* as both limited and weakened by the addition of *kidmutenu* (Vawter 1997:53-58). Translated from the root *dmh* it signifies "similarity" or "likeness" (BDB 2000:853). Added to *šelem* as an explanatory qualification its only possible purpose is to exclude the idea of humans being actual copies of God, and to limit the concept to one of similarity (Cassuto 1978:58).

It was the prophet Ezekiel's¹³⁸ employment of the term *demuth* that is "something resembling" in Ezekiel 1:28 that perhaps clarifies the intent of the priestly narrator's employment of *šelem*. Nowhere is the term intended to mean a mere copy of God's outward form, but it could in fact indicate some spiritual correspondence between God and man (Eichrodt 1972:123,127). This fact is borne out by the way the priestly writer employs the term *demuth* "image" in Genesis 5:1 in alluding to the creation of humans. As Eichrodt (1972:129) has pointed out the image of God could also be identical with the "gift of psychic powers, or of reason, or of the sense of the eternal, the good and the true, or of intelligence and immortality" with which humans are imbued (Youngblood 1999:30). This fact is borne out by subsequent uses of *šelem* and *demuth* in Scripture in which juxtaposition occurs in Genesis 1:26 and its synonyms in the rest of the canon.¹³⁹

Westermann (1984:146) wonders if the text is not more concerned with concrete representation of God in physical, material form than simply with the corporeal or spiritual aspect. It has to do with representation as a whole, not just with being a representative.

¹³⁸ The prophet, Ezekiel, employs this term *Demuth* in for instance Ezekiel 1:28 to describe the movement of *Cherubim* in close proximity and resemblance to Divine glory. The word itself occurs no less than ten times in this remarkable first chapter of Ezekiel, where the prophet is attempting to put into words his experience of being commissioned by God.

¹³⁹ See Genesis 5: 1; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11: 7; Colossians 3: 10; James 3: 9; I do not make pretensions at an exhaustive treatment of the concept of the "*imago Dei*". For an incisive discussion of this phenomenon see for example Youngblood (1999:23-30).

The writings on the *imago Dei* since the reformation alone have been legion. As Paul Ricoeur (1965:110) has pointed out:

“Each century has the task of elaborating its thought ever anew on the basis of that indestructible symbol which henceforth belongs to the unchanging treasury of Biblical canon.”¹⁴⁰

In the same vein, Jónsson (1988:1) noted the significance of a diligent engagement with this rather enigmatic Biblical concept “the *imago Dei*” in these words:

“It is noteworthy that there is presently no consensus among scholars with respect to how great a role the concept of the divine likeness has played in the Old Testament. There are some who claim that this idea is nothing less than the foundation of Old Testament message.”

Yet it has not been given any precise and satisfactory interpretation. Since this is not a treatise on the *imago Dei*, it is our purpose to point out the trend of scholarly discourses in the last century or so keeping in mind the two divergent modes of interpretation: the relational mode of interpretation initiated by Karl Barth which Westermann also prefers, as against the more dominant functional mode of interpretation preferred by most Catholics as well as other theologians (Ukpong 2004:75-76; Jónsson 1988:223; Bromiley 1987:804).

A holistic postcolonial critical interpretation of the *imago Dei* will be located in the middle, whereby humans are created to be in relationship to the Deity while at the same time created free to choose to function or not to function within the ethical ambits of that relationship (Ukpong 2004:75; Jónsson 1988:223; Bromiley 1987:804).

◆■◆◆○Ω☺ -- *kidmutenu* : “in our likeness”

This is the only occurrence of this phrase in our entire pericope. The six reasons given by Hamilton (1980:74-75) also are informed by a postcolonial critical re-reading and are presented. The word is a derivation from the root *dmh*; it signifies “similarity” or “likeness”. In the *qal* stem the verb is used mostly in reference to humans and by humans either in the form of a direct statement [Ps.144:4; 102:6 (*Heb.*7) Is.1:9] or in the form of a rhetorical question (Ez.31:2, 18). In the *piel* stem, the verb assumes the meaning of “to compare, imagine, think, intend”. *Demuth* also appears in the theophanic sections of Ezekiel (1:5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, 28; 10:1; 10.21, 22).

¹⁴⁰ See Middleton (2005:18).

While not making a pretension at an exhaustive word study, it is instructive to note that the use of a *şelem* and *demuth* in Genesis 1:26 is unique. Nowhere else in the Old Testament do we find the pair in parallel or in connection with each other. Hamilton (1980:74-75) suggests at least six reasons why this became necessary:

First, *şelem* and *demuth* refer to two component parts of humans – image to structural likeness of God, while likeness refers to human’s moral image with which it is supernaturally endowed. The former was never affected by the fall, but the latter was. This is more of Catholic theology, than is the case with for instance the reformers¹⁴¹. It is generally acknowledged that Genesis 1:26ff is not speaking of a distinction between the natural and the supernatural as any such distinctions is not in accord with the Old Testament (Westermann 1984:149).

Second, the more important of the two is *şelem*, but to avoid the implication that a human being is a precise copy of God, albeit in a miniature form, the less specific and more abstract *demuth* was added so as to define and limit the meaning of *şelem*. Hamilton (1980:192) cites P. Humbert (in THAT 451-56) and J. Barr (in BJRL 51:11-126) as proponents of this position. *Demuth* functions as a limit to an overly physical understanding of the *imago*, but as Middleton (2005:47) points out, the term sometimes also refers to concrete representation or copy of something (2 Kgs 16:10; 2 Chr.4:3; Eze.23:15) just like its counterpart *şelem*.

Third, no distinction is to be sought between these two words: *şelem* and *demuth*. They are totally interchangeable. In Genesis 1:26, which is God’s resolution to create, both words are used. But in verse 27, where the actual act of creation takes place, only *şelem* is used, not *demuth*. The two words are so intertwined that nothing is lost in the meaning by the omission of *demuth*. Also, the LXX translates *demuth* in Genesis 5:1 not by the usual *homoiosis* but by *eikon*, the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew *şelem*. L. Schmidt holds to this view¹⁴². A corollary to this point is extensive use of Hebraisms such as repetitions and parallelisms in the Biblical text (Jenni and Westermann 1997:339ff).

¹⁴¹ In Emil Brunner’s words “Luther broke the tradition of thirteen centuries when he rejected the distinction between *imago* and *similitudo*. Luther’s ‘salvation by faith alone’ certainly left its traces in his solution of the *imago Dei* problem”. Cited in Jónsson (1988:13).

¹⁴² See L. Schmidt 1969 “*Homo Imago Dei im Alten und Neuen Testament.*” and Hamilton (1980: 74-75); see also Jónsson (1988:13, 239).

Fourth, it is not *şelem* that is defined and limited by *demuth* but the other way round. Two things are important here: 1) The similarity between *demuth* and the Hebrew word for blood ‘*dam*’, and 2) in Mesopotamian tradition the gods in fact created humans from divine blood. Genesis then represents a conscious rejection of, and polemic against pagan teaching by asserting that *şelem* specifies the divine similarity to which *demuth* refers viz. human’s corporeal appearance and has nothing to do with the blood that flows in their veins. J.M. Miller is a proponent of this view¹⁴³. The weakness of this position is that such a polemic would not have evoked any sense of duality in the Godhead and in the supernatural nature of humans by being ambiguous as it presently is.

Fifth, the word “likeness” rather than diminishing the word “image” actually amplifies it and specifies its meaning. Humans are not just an image but a likeness-image. He is not simply representative, but representational. Humans are the visible, corporeal representative of the invisible, bodiless God. *Demuth* guarantees that humans are an adequate and faithful representative of God on earth. This is a view held by D. Clines.¹⁴⁴

It is not clear what distinction exists between a representative and a representation, or between humans as persons and humans as mankind. Perhaps a representative can be limited in time, whereas a representation can be more permanent. This lack of clarity makes this a porous argument.

It is important to envision the sense in which humans conveys the *Imago Dei*, as depicted in the seeming distinction between *şelem* and *demuth*. It is likely that the priestly writer intended to assign the same meanings to *şelem* and *demuth* but perhaps not as examples of the physical and the spiritual resemblance of humans to God, or reason and freewill on the one hand and ethical perfection on the other. Parallelism is a common Hebraic literary feature and characteristic (Eichrodt 1972:129). These are flip-sides of the same coin as Westermann (1984:156) has observed.

Sixth, there are those who consider the *imago Dei* as the special nature of human existence by virtue of which the person can take a stand before God. Thus the essence of the *imago Dei* consists in the ability of humans to form or enter relationships with their Maker with a sense of responsibility and accountability for every act of omission or commission encountered in the process of that relationship. As so aptly put by J.J. Stamm

¹⁴³ Miller (1972:289-304). Hamilton (1980:74-75). See also Jónsson (1988:13, 239).

¹⁴⁴ Clines (1968:53-103). See also Hamilton 1980 *ibid*.

(1959:81-90)¹⁴⁵ “a human being is regarded as God’s counterpart, as the ‘You’ who must listen to God, whom God questions and who must answer him.”

A postcolonial critical re-reading of Genesis 1:1-2:4 especially from the perspective of these six known views on what constitutes the *imago Dei* would utilize a more holistic indice. We shall later establish that there should be no distinction made with respect to Hebrew parallels: *ṣelem* and *demuth*, similar parallels of which exists in most languages as in English and Ogba. I will not belabour the point. Therefore, a postcolonial critical re-reading would interpret the *imago Dei* as consisting of both physical, mental, moral, and spiritual qualities and capacities in humans (Akao 1999:419). In other words, the likeness consists in human intellect, will and emotions which correspond to the tri-unitarian concept of God. On the other hand, there are in post-colonial contexts those who consider the *imago Dei*, as consisting in the very nature of human beings in totality in both concrete and corporeal terms (Ukpong 2004:87).

Furthermore, a postcolonial critical re-reading supplements the erstwhile analysis by scholars with a more novel understanding of the meaning of the *imago Dei* and the need to relate it to the human estate in a teleological rather than an ontological manner. There are two things which stand out clearly as the pivot of all six views, namely the *imago Dei* is in some way related to human ability to exercise discernment and to communicate with the Deity, be it in the physical or in the spiritual. A second thing is that the *imago Dei* ignores neither the spiritual nor physical components of humans but involves both in an activity in which clean air and green environment is maintained along with a prudent use of resources.

5.2.1 Preposition *bə* and *kə*

Before leaving a discussion of the *imago Dei* it is crucial to address the use of preposition - *bə* and *kə* – in *bəselem* and *kədemuth* as it is in Genesis 1:26. The use of preposition - *bə* attached to *ṣelem* (image), and of *kə* attached to *demuth* (likeness) are translated as “in” and “as” respectively. Underlying the various uses of this preposition is either the idea of being or moving within some definite region, or some sphere of space fastening on something, some connection with something (Cowley 1952:379). *Bə* and *kə* follows a pattern in which a comparison is fixed between image and likeness (Cowley 1952:379).

¹⁴⁵ Cited in Westermann (1984:150-1).

Clines (2001:91) understands the preposition *bə* to connote (or compare with) the essence of that which is represented in the image of God. Thus, in essence what God has said is that “Let us make humans as / in the capacity of / to be our image.” In the same vein, scholars conclude that by virtue of the way “in” and “as” is used in the Priestly text, “God’s identity is invested in this human creature and is represented by two characteristics: a divine image and a divine likeness.” (Garr 2003:3; Clines 2001:123). In that case the *bə* is a *bə essentiae* with the translation better rendered not “after our image” but “as our image” or “in the capacity of our image” (Wildberger 1997:1081).

In this sense Exodus 6:3; 25: 9-10 comes to mind. In Exodus 6:3, God appears as *bə El Shaddai* and in the second passage, Exodus 25:9-10 Moses was told to make it *bə* “according to the pattern” he was shown on the mount. According to the NET Bible (1-2) it is a form, a replica or the spiritual sanctuary that Moses was shown, and that on earth was to function as the heavenly sanctuary does, though circumscribed by limitations of wear and tear! In my own opinion the parallelisms which mark the rendering and use of *bə* and *kə* are some of the stylistic features of the text which significance further reinforces the fact that God is closely associated with humans. In other words human presence represents the divine presence in relational and functional ways (Konkel 1997:969-970).

Therefore we are confronted with a text which serves both as conferment of “glory” on the human estate (cf. Ps. 8:5-8) and as the point of contact between humanity and divinity. In the first role humans share with God a special status as higher, “more sentient” beings and in the second as responsible, royal representative to care for and preserve the rest of creation in a way mutually beneficial to them and to nature. It is at the latter point that the ethical-functional office conferred on humans is counter-balanced by a responsibility and accountability that is both inescapable and indubitable. Human stewardship which is rooted in the concept of the *imago Dei* is not an exercise in self-aggrandisement, but one which necessitates the building of a harmonious relationship first with the Maker and then with all that he has made on air, land, and sea. The disruption of this harmony during the fall has been the bane of human history and was considered such a crucial mishap that God in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord had to come to the rescue of the fallen human estate in order not only to restore the “shattered” image (Heb.2:6-15), but also to renew the likeness in a relationship that is enduring, eternal and incorrigible (Hartley 1980:767-68; Ahiamadu 1992:3).

◆◆ -- *wayiradu* : “let them have dominion (let them rule)”

This is a *waw* consecutive third person common plural of the root *radah* and it refers to the function of humans – male and female (White 1980:833). Its use here is closely associated with *urədu*, also from the root *radah*. The verbal root is found in later Semitic dialects (but not Ugaritic). It occurs in two senses. One is cognate to Akkadian *radū* although the Hebrew root developed the specialised meaning “to tread” and is used in the *qal* stem in this sense only once (Joel 3:13) “Come tread...the winepress...” The second meaning is “to rule” and is used some 22 times in the *Qal* stem,¹⁴⁶ occurring in every section and type of context. Its initial usage appears in Genesis 1:26 “and let them have dominion (or rule) over” (Zobel 1974:330-336). *Radah* does not occur as a synonym in proximity to the more frequent verb *māshal*. Generally, *radah* is limited to human rather than divine dominion (White 1980:833). Besides, it occurs 27 times in the Old Testament with rule or dominion connoting “take, seize” (White 1980:833). Generally, *radah* often occurs with a personal object; it denotes an action performed by a human agent. On the one hand it is humans who are the dominating agents, and on the other hand it is also humans who themselves are being dominated (Zobel 1974:330-336).

For instance, Psalm 110:2 states that *Yahweh* will send (*šlh*) the scepter of the king out of Zion, and this is associated with a command to the king to begin to *radah* in the midst of his foes (possibly all human foes). Some think that *radah* implicitly conveys the idea of royal rule not over creation but over hostile nations and their forces (White 1980:833)! Here the idea is not “rule” in a pagan sense, but rule through service (Assohoto 2006:11). The latter interpretation is perhaps pointing to human struggle to conquer nature for human ends. It is the attempt by humans to employ the power of “rule” and “dominion” literally in the management of human and natural resources that creates room for a domination and subjugation. Thus humans are to exercise “dominion” *radah* over other humans, especially enemies, but more importantly over living creatures (Ashokoto 2006:11). As shown in Ezekiel 34:4 *radah* could be connected with force and harshness (Hamilton 1990: 138). However, such is not the normal nuance of the verb (Wolff 1974:161). The three passages from Leviticus emphasise the point that the master is not

¹⁴⁶ The majority of these deal either with human relationships (Lev.25:43,46,53 – a master over a hired servant; 1 Kgs 5:16,30; 9:23 – an administrator over his employees; 1 Kgs 4:24; Ps.72:8; 110:2 – a king over his subjects; Lev.26:17; Num.24:19; Neh.9:28; Ps.68:27; Is.42:2,6; Ez. 29:15 – the rule of one nation over another; or Ez.34:4 – a shepherd supervision over his flock). See Ryken *et al* [eds (1998:59)].

to rule over his servants with harshness. Solomon's dominion (1 Kgs.4:24) was a peaceful dominion. The reigning king of Psalm 72 is also the champion of the poor and the disadvantaged (Hamilton 1990: 138). What is expected of the king is responsible care over that which he rules. Like the word "image", "exercise dominion" reflects royal language. Humans are created to rule, but this rule is to be compassionate and not exploitative. Even in the Garden of Eden, he who would be lord of all must be servant of all (Hamilton 1990: 138).

Sarna (1989:12-13) gives two reasons such a humane interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 is needed. First, the human race is not inherently sovereign, but enjoys its dominion solely by the grace of God. Second, the model of kingship depicted in the text is Israelite, according to which the monarch does not possess unrestrained power and authority, the limits of his monarchical rule having been carefully defined and circumscribed by divine law, so that kingship is to be exercised with responsibility and is subject to accountability. As previously indicated *rādâ* is limited to human rule rather than divine dominion, and is the same verb used when describing the sun as ruling over the day or the moon as ruling over the night (Gen.1: 16). It is alluded to in Psalms 8 and 136 but with the verb *māshal*. The meaning is clear in both the priestly and Sapiental texts: rule or dominate! This interpretation is significant. Rule or dominion from a postcolonial critical perspective can only be exercised by humans over the living creatures and over the earth as a whole (including the plants) to the extent that humans reflected their true identity (White 1980:833). Otherwise dominion is lost and the right to rule is withdrawn (Cassuto 1978:59).

From a postcolonial critical hermeneutics the two occurrences of this phrase – one each in Genesis 1:26, 28 is for a purpose. Humans are to play the role of and serve as the *imago Dei* among the rest of creation. Humans were to be seen as self-governing beings who need minimum external government. Human rulership was to be exercised only over other living creatures, and not necessarily over human beings. Nor were men given authority to dominate women (or vice versa). Our fellow human beings bear the image of the Creator and thus are not to be dominated but to be served (Assohoto 2006:11). Therefore, "subdue" and "dominion" in Genesis 1:26-28 cannot and need not under a postcolonial critical "lenses" be read to include the licence to exploit nature banefully as is currently the vogue in most parts of the world, and with respect to oil and solid minerals in Africa, particularly in the Niger Delta (Ukpong 2004:83-88).

A postcolonial critical re-reading of Genesis 1:26 would transfer neither the nuance of forceful exploitation and dictatorial expropriation into the use of *rada* in Genesis 1:26, nor of *kabas* in Genesis 1:28 (Krause 2005:360-61). Probably, what is designated here is the building of settlement and the practice of agriculture; “subdue the land” in Genesis 1 is a semantic parallel to “plant and keep the land” in Genesis 2:5,15 (Hamilton 1990:139-40). The priestly redactor is clear on the point that humankind was created to “rule over” fellow creatures. He was to be lord, to trample and to overspread the earth. Humans should uphold and indeed enforce God’s sovereignty as lord of the earthly creation. Hence the image of God would be a sign of God’s presence among His creatures in the being of humans (Sarna 1989:12-13).

◆ -- *bedgath* : “over the fish”

In Genesis verses 1:26 and 28 where “rule over the fish” – a third masculine plural imperfect – was preceded by a simple *waw*, it was an expression of purpose (Wenham 1987:27ff). The rest of this verse *bedgath* *al-haarets* depicts the Divine proposal to bring about a new creation and it is also repeated in *toto* in verse 28 where that proposal has become a reality. We alluded to this in our discussion of the *adam / adamah* combination. A postcolonial critical hermeneutics of necessity do reflect this similarity as can be seen when fish is again considered as creatures blessed, like humans were – to be fruitful and to multiply. Yet it is instructive to note that the masculine *dāg* and the feminine *dāgā* appear in the Old Testament with no apparent difference in meaning (Kalland 1980:182). Fish are referred to as creatures low in intelligence or in control of their destiny (Gen.9:2; 1 Kgs 4:33; Job 12:8; Ecc.9:12; Gen.1:26-28; Ex.7:18, 21) and are included in the human diet as food (Num.11:5, 22; Neh.13:16). According to Kalland (1980:182), in Biblical times they were caught by hooks (Job 41:1-2; Is.19:8), by spears (Job 41:7) and nets (Hab.1:15; Ecc.9:12).

○ -- *hayam* : “of the sea”

The word *yām* is Hebrew word for sea, and it occurs also in Genesis 1:28 where it can also mean west. *Yām* is used over 300 times as reference to sea and over 70 times in reference to “west” or “westward” when the prefix *ha* goes with it (Gilchrist 1980:381): *hayam*. In Biblical Hebrew, the word *yām* (sea) is closely linked to another Hebrew word *təhom* (flood) which is used of the “deep” or “waters of the deep”. In accordance with the ancient Hebrew, it usually indicates the ocean surrounding and underlying the earth. It is

instructive to note that in most ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, the sea or flood is often depicted as opposed to the gods, but this is not the case with the Hebrew cosmogony (Westermann 1997:1410-1414). Here *yām* (sea) is not personified and has no mythical function assigned to it. Instead *yām* or *təhom* is an element of the created world. In both Genesis 1:26,28 *yām* can be used as reference to sea and in reference to “west” or “westward” when the prefix *ha* goes with it (Gilchrist 1980:381).

🕒♦☯◻ⲟⲗⲛ -- ***ubeop* : “and over the birds”**

In the *qal* form 🕒♦☯◻ is used of birds and flying creatures. They are first mentioned in Genesis 1:20,21 “and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens...So God created...every winged bird according to its kind.” God uttered the words that the waters should team with swarms of living creatures and the birds should fly across the firmament and above the earth. Hence creation is both by word and fiat. The domain of the birds is between the heaven and the earth, the latter expression in Hebrew is used of the atmosphere as well (Clements 1974:512-14). In addition, *ubeop* in Genesis (1:20, 26, and 28) is one of five classes of living creatures identified in the priestly tradition. Such identification is based on the domain in which each of the living physical creatures move about.

★🏠🌞❖🌀 --- ***hashāmayim* : “of the air (literally heavens)”**

Shāmayim means “the entire enormous expanse of heaven”. This basic meaning cuts across all Semitic languages where *shāmayim* serves both as a religious and cosmological term (Bartelmus 2001:205-236). It is one of the most frequently used words in the Old Testament. Ancient Hebrew speakers used the word *shāmayim* to depict both the atmosphere and the whole space between earth and heaven. The use of *shāmayim* also appears to be in relation to all “phenomena of and from heaven” including the falling of rain, dew, hail, storm, thunder and lightening. As has been previously mentioned in our close-reading in verse 26 the heavens falls into two broad categories: the physical heavens and the heavens as the abode of God. Heaven and earth together constitute the universe (Gen.1:1), and the creatures that populate the space between them are the various species of birds with the eagle leading them (Austel 1980:935).

🌀🌞🌀👉ⲟⲗⲛ -- ***ubabəhemah* : “and over the beasts”**

This refers to living creatures other than humans, including all the larger animals, all of which are considered inferior to humans and over which rule and dominion is to be exercised in a caring and nurturing environment (BDB 1968:96). The term is used of four-footed animals 137 times and is used to distinguish animals from birds (Gen.6:7), fish, and reptiles (1 Kgs 4:33). They are creatures of the sixth day along with humans (Gen.1:26) and are preserved by the Creator through his provisions (Martens 1980:92-93). These could have mythological implications, which borders on ancient Near Eastern mythologies alluded to in the second chapter.

אָרֶץ וְעַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ -- *ubekol-ha'arets*: “and over all the earth”

This is a reference to the whole earth (or land) as the opposite of heaven, or sky. *Eretz* is sometimes used as synonym for the land, country or territory, and even with a piece of land (BDB 1968:75-76). According to Koehler and Baumgartner (2000:88-89) this word appears approximately 2,400 times in the Old Testament. More specifically THAT 1:229, remarks that ‘*eretz* is the fourth most frequently used noun in the Old Testament, appearing 2,504 times in the Hebrew sections, and 22 times in the Aramaic sections. The first two meanings listed above are by far the most crucial. That is, ‘*eretz* designates either (a) “the earth” in a cosmological sense, or (b) “the land” in the sense of a specific territorial designation, as for example, the land of Israel. In the former meaning we are informed first (Gen.1:9-13) that God created the earth on the third day. All is done here by divine fiat. The earth is not the product of a primordial substance, as is the case in the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* where the earth is formed from part of the cadaver of the fallen and slain Deity *Tiamat*. The earth, like the heavens is a sphere that is completely under the control of divine sovereignty. The earth is the Lord’s (Ps.24:1) and as such is answerable to him (Hamilton 1980:74-5).

The second major use of ‘*eretz* is to designate a particular territory. Here the reference to the land of Palestine is of special significance. This is a land that belongs to the Lord as does the earth at large. It is his heritage (1 Sam.26:19). The land is holy because the God of holiness has given it to his people. There is nothing intrinsically sacrosanct about this land any more than there is about the city of Jerusalem or the temple. If God departs, the sanctity leaves too (Hamilton 1980:75).

The world of the Bible is divided into two sections, Israel and the nations. One is holy, the other is impure. Although God governs everywhere, the area of his sanctity and self-

revelation are limited to the boundaries of the land of Israel. In foreign lands the people were not even capable of worshiping the Lord (Ps.137). This is illustrated in the book of Jonah. While it is said by the prophet himself that the Lord of heaven rules the sea and the dry land (Jon. 1:9), yet he attempts to flee from the presence of God (Jon. 1:3, 10). This can only mean that Jonah attempts to flee from the area of divine revelation. Here he hopes the land of God will not come upon him¹⁴⁷. No wonder then that the prophets' messages to the exiles ring with the call that God will bring them back to this land. It is important that humans who are given the mandate to rule over the beasts and creatures of the earth should have full understanding of what this mandate involves and how they can exercise this mandate in a caring, nurturing, responsible and accountable manner.

𐤎𐤐𐤔𐤕 𐤎𐤐𐤔𐤕𐤕𐤔𐤕𐤕𐤔𐤕 -- *ubekol haremes haromes* : “and over every moving thing that moves”

Haromeshet : “that moves” is from the root *rāmas* or *remeś* which is similar to Semitic *rms* found in Arabic: *ramaša* (literally, pick up with one’s finger tips). The verb *rāmas* occurs 17 times in the Old Testament, while its derivative *remeś* occurs 16 times. The verb describes the locomotion of various creatures that “creep” or “crawl” over the ground, either scuttling on very short legs or wiggling about like a snake, found in both land and sea (Clements 1974:512-514). Its occurrences are mostly in the creation narratives (Gen.1:21, 26, 28, 30; 7:8, 14, 21; 8:12, 19; 9:2) and in the prohibitions against unclean food (Lev.11:44, 46; 20:25) and such catalogues of beasts (Dt.4:18). It appears in two poetic passages (Ps.69:34; 104:20) and one prophetic passage (Ezk.38:20): “All things that creep on the ground” (White 1980:850-51). The priestly account of creation (Gen.1:1-2:4) identifies the creatures described as *remeś* as having been created on the 6th day, together with humankind and other large land animals (Gen.1:24-25) apparently depicting the close affinity between various creatures great and small, significant and insignificant (Clements 1974:514).

A postcolonial critical re-reading of this phrase *remes* which the NRSV translates as ‘creeping things’ while the NIV uses ‘moving things’ is very significant. BDB (2000:942-3) renders it “creeping things” that move lightly or glide about including water animals. The

¹⁴⁷ In the Deuteronomistic history – Genesis to 2 Kings – this idea of boundary deities is so well indicated. Each nation on earth has specific god or deities assigned to it. ‘*Elohim* is Israel’s God, just as *Chemosh* is Ammons, *Dagon* is Philistine, and *Baal* is Syria-Phoenician.. The same is true of other Hebraic names for God such as *Yahweh*, *Yahweh Sebaoth*, and *Adonai*. For an incisive discussion of various national deities, see K. Van der Toorn *et al* [(eds) 1999:910-924].

participle *romes* is ‘that move’ (NIV) or ‘that creep’ (NRSV). KB (2000:895) adds “that move about aimlessly and in indiscernible number” (Gen. 1:26, 28, 30 etc). The noun is masculine and is used to classify living creatures of the smaller category, but not excluding large grazing animals, whales, birds and insects (White 1980:850-851). Generally, the verb form *remes* describes the locomotion of small animals especially reptiles. It appears primarily in the account of creation (Gen.1:21, 26, 28, 30; 7:8, 14, 21; 8:12, 19; 9:2) and in all the prohibitions against unclean foods (Lev.11:44, 46; 20:25) and other such catalogues of beasts (Dt.4:18). It appears in two poetic passages (Ps.69:34; 104:20) and one prophetic passage (Ezk.38:20), “All the creeping things that creep on the ground”. Even the resources hidden underground once they are brought into the surface of the earth comes directly under human control as well – including plants, minerals, flora and fauna.

🏠🏠🏠🏠🏠 -- *al ha'arets* : “upon the earth”

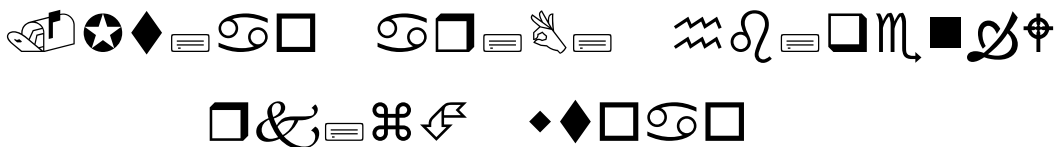
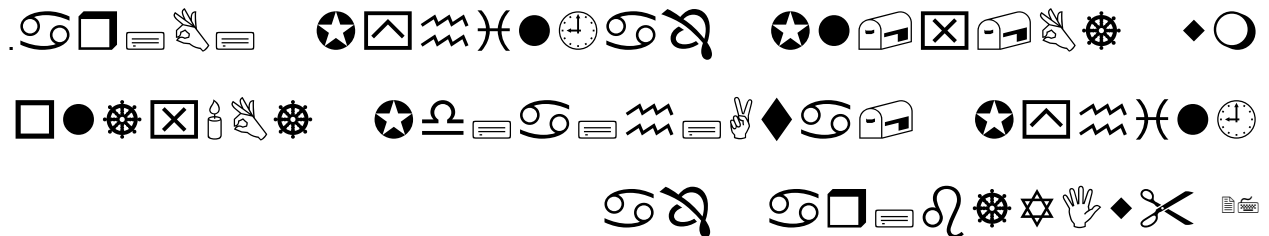
This phrase occurs similarly in Genesis 1:28 as well, including the preposition *al* ‘on’ can be analysed syntactically. BDB (2000:752-3) gives two translations of *al* one substantive: meaning, “upwards, raised up to the height”, and the other a preposition, meaning “upon, and hence on the ground of, on account of, together with, beyond, above, over, by, on, to, against”. KB (2000:703) translates *al* in the same way first as ‘raised up on high’, and second, as ‘higher than, upon, on’. It is noteworthy that movement of living creatures revolves around the surface of the ground and so they come under human dominion. A postcolonial critical hermeneutic would ask the question: what does it mean by the preposition *al* ‘on’, ‘upon’ or as some would say ‘on top of’? The most common meaning of the word *al* is ‘that which is found moving on top or comes up to the height of the ground, top’ including what was previously underground – creeping things like ants, cronies, and creeping plants, seed, minerals etc.

Although *‘eretš* could mean land, ground, soil, or earth, it is often associated with secondary meaning of *‘eretš* as designating a country, forest, field or a particular territory. As a matter of fact, its most comprehensive meaning indicates all of these meanings, which are located in time and space (Schmid 1997:170-79). In the main, *‘eretš* is the receptacle of all rain and dew (Gen. 2:5; 7:4); *‘eretš* indicates the ground on which people and things stand (Ex.8:12f), on which the dust lies, on which creeping things creep (Gen. 1:26; 7:14; 8:19 etc), and on which the slaughtered lie (Lam. 2:21). In other words, *‘eretš* is a direct pointer to any territory and the heavens above it, literally the cosmos hence “heaven and earth” are mentioned together (Gen.1:1; 2:1, 4). Finally, *‘eretš* (the earth) can

be penetrated and descended into (Jnh.2:6). We have already mentioned that God owns all the earth, but the land of Israel in particular – a land which is considered holy because it is God’s heritage (1 Sam.26:19).

In Hebrew cosmology, as Schmid (1997:170-79) pointed out, the earth has life and can open its mouth, can spew people out of it, and can shake culprits out of it (Num.16:30-34; 1 Sam. 14:15). Again Hamilton (1980:75) also pointed out, if God’s presence is withdrawn from a particular land, then that land is doomed to ruin and destruction (cf. Num.16:30-34; 1 Sam. 14:15). The ASV and NRSV reflect the difficulties in deciding which of the English words to use in a close-reading. Sometimes the two are used interchangeably but the context explains which use is meant. In the Biblical narratives in general land, ground, soil, earth, country, forest and field all refer to the same ecosphere (Bandstra 1986:71-72), and it is in this sense understood in a post-colonial context. Suffice it to say that the survival of the inhabitants of any land is tied with the land itself, and whatever affects the land affects its peoples. As we saw while considering African cultural views the earth is a living entity capable of detecting wrongdoers and swallowing them up.

Genesis 1:27



So God created man in his own image. In the image of God created he him, male and female created he them.

☐☐☐☐♦ -- vayebəra : “So he created”

The Hebrew root *bārā* is used in depicting God’s creative activity in Genesis 1:27 and 28 whereas in the earlier Genesis 1:26 another verb *yasar* is used (Lee 2002:135). There is a

redactional process whereby the use of *bārā* seems to be a late addition to the creation narratives, except that the Hebraic tendency to theological exclusivity surrounds its use here as well, and makes its usage in Genesis unique and inexplicably associated with *Yahweh* and no other.

The objects of *bārā* very often vary, and are usually special and extra-ordinarily new as can be seen below:

- 1) Heaven and/or earth – Genesis 1:1; 2:4; Psalms 148:5; Isaiah 65:17.
- 2) People – Genesis 1:27; 5:1ff; 6:7; Deuteronomy 4:32; Isaiah 43:7; 45:12.
- 3) The people of Israel – Isaiah 43:1, 15; Psalms 102:18; Ez.21:30.
- 4) Wonders, novelties – Exodus 34:10; Numbers 16:30; Isaiah 41:20, 45:8, 48:6, 65:17; Jeremiah 31:32.

Be that as it may, the creation motif found in the Old Testament presumably antedates the use of *bārā* in Genesis 1:1-2:4 (Schmidt 1997:253-256), and like in a post-colonial context its use might have been deeply rooted in the oral traditions of the Hebrew redactors. The postcolonial inter-contextuality indice makes the story resonate with what is sometimes discerned in the oral traditions of the African communities encountered during this research.

Yet the absence of the verb *bārā* in the initial portion of the creation of humans in Genesis 1:26, but which the priestly editor uses when the action takes place is suggestive of God as the only subject of creation with or without a heavenly court (Parker 2005:439ff). Apparently, ancient Near Eastern traditions which describe the formation of light and darkness, heavenly and earthly oceans, water and land (Gen.1:4b, 7, 9 LXX) from one pre-existent primordial substance has facilitated the holding of views that Genesis 1:1-2:4 is more or less a later addition to the Biblical creation account (Schmidt 1997:253-56). Moreover, the fact that *bārā* is never used except in connection with Israel's God who creates and no other gods, suggests that this type of creation is without any analogy, and as such is beyond conceptualisation. He could have used "so created" to emphasise the awesome creative power of God in order to keep the monotheistic identity of the post-exilic community intact. It is one thing which binds them together not only to *Yahweh* but also to their past heritage. A similar thing happens in the context of the recipients of the text when they seem use the what the Bible says or does not say, to affirm both personal and group identity.

The limitation of this word to divine activity indicates that the area of meaning delineated by the root falls outside of the sphere of human ability (Westermann 1984:76)¹⁴⁸. Since the word never occurs with the object of the material, and since the primary emphasis of the word is on the newness of the created object, the word lends itself well to the concept of creation *ex-nihilo*, although that concept is not necessarily within the meaning of the word *bārā* itself (McComiskey 1980:127-28). It signifies a word for creation which meant an activity in which only Israel's God is capable of creating, later to be revealed as the One universal God. This fact is borne out by the fact that *bārā* is also used to depict the fact that God created *ex-nihilo*, and no material from which God created is ever mentioned. This is not usually the case when its synonym *yāsar* is used.

Using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics to examine this word *bārā*, it has been used only in the Priestly document and other late literature. The formula in which God speaks creation into being but shapes humans in a rather peculiar manner is further depicted in this verse and merits a postcolonial critical examination. The root *bārā* has the basic meaning "to create", and differs from *yāsar* "to fashion" in that the latter primarily emphasises the shaping of an object while *bārā* emphasises the initiation of an object (McComiskey 1980:127-28) usually by God. Moreover, creation as God's action is a notion found to antedate the use of *bārā* in Genesis 1:1-2:4. For example similar creation motif can be seen in Job 28, 38-41; Psalms 19, 33, 147; Pr. 3:19-20; 8:22-31, but its role in Genesis 1:1-2:4 cannot be overemphasised (Van Leeuwen 1997:728ff).

A postcolonial close-reading which brings the indice of inter-contextuality into play makes it easy to relate with the idea that creation is by Divine fiat as Genesis portrays it. *Chukwukere*, literally: "God created" or *Chineke*, literally: "God who creates" finds no difficulty in being appreciated by native minds being a well grounded belief of the people. In the New Testament it is stated that God would replace the present creation with a new earth and a new heaven (Rev. 21:1-8). This is an eschatological hope which presumably is associated with Genesis 1:26-28. It has probably fueled the ecological devastation and environmental pollution that the planet is presently subjected to by multi-national companies. Moreover, the church is presently caught in the web of this eschatological hope almost to the point of desperation (Ukpong 2004:89-90).

¹⁴⁸ Westermann (1997:42) illustrates the high regard which the Old Testament has for the creation motif in the way it cites various textual examples of God's creative acts. (See Dt.4:32; Ex.4:11; Is.17:7; 45:12; Jer.27:5; Zec.12:1; Ps.8:5ff; 139:13-16; Job 15:7; 20:4; Pr.8:31).

Ogba cosmogony considers the Divine creative agency of the “kite”. God created the heavens and earth and humans, animals, birds, reptiles, insects, plants, flora and fauna in a process that involved sending the “kite” from heaven with substances deposited in the cosmos which formed both the sky and the dry land. As the Ogba would say “*madu ka gbapiya ya odu oshishi*”, literally: humans did not emanate from plants, they were created. Therefore *Chukwuabiana* is a revered Deity, although the name itself signifies a Supreme God who is surrounded by lesser deities like the sun in comparison with the moon and stars. Consequently, and as our empirical research proves every event that happens on earth is considered literally as an “act of God”. Nothing happens without his knowledge and perhaps permission.

✪ ⚡ ⚙ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ ⚡ -- ‘*ēt-ha-adam* : “the humans”

‘*Ēt* is a Hebrew particle often serving to mark a direct object, a particle depicting usually a determined direct object (Clines 1993:439). In Hebrew it functions sometimes as an untranslatable particle, but usually functions as a suffix “with, or together with” (Dt.1:30) used more frequently in the theological context of God’s promises to humans “I am / will be with you”.

Ha-adam: “the human”. As was stated earlier in the first use of this word in verse 26 apparently witnessed the summons of God in a divine self-address in which he announced his intention to create humans in his own image and likeness. Here we see the performance of that intent. So God created humans (NIV). God makes *adam* both male and female. Apparently, both genders are implicit in the collective word, *adam* (Wenham 1987:26). The formula used in announcing the creation of humans have been modified in the accomplishment of the actual creative work with both an ‘*ēt* depicting emphasis and a *ha* depicting uniqueness (Lee 2002:135).

A postcolonial and inter-textual indices brought to bear on this and the interpretation of Psalm 8 informs the reader that the creation of humans depicts a unique place amidst the whole of God’s creative work. Therefore, the idea of rule and dominion which by human nature is extended to animals and moving things has implications to fellow humans only to the extent that they are being served, nurtured and procreated in a responsible manner. The specific creation of humans as male and female underscores the innate social yearning in their being for such a nurture, company and community.

◆■○●☒ⲟ -- *besaləmu*: “in his own image”

In the Biblical text *Selem* is the most frequently used word and it is used to depict humans imaging God their Creator, and the frequency of its occurrence tilts the argument in favor of both *selem* and *demuth* being parallel expressions, signifying essentially the two aspects of the same phenomenon – humans are images of God both physically and spiritually. This emphasis on the image as synonymous with the likeness can be appreciated when we consider the way the *LXX* translates the parallel term *demuth* in Genesis 5:1. Not by the usual *homoiosis* but by *eikon*, the Greek counterpart to the Hebrew *selem*. It is likely that the priestly writer intended to assign the same meanings to *selem* and *demuth* but perhaps not as examples of the physical and the spiritual resemblance of humans to God, or reason and freewill on the one hand and ethical perfection on the other. Parallelism is a common Hebraic literary feature and characteristic (Eichrodt 1972:129). These are flip-sides of the same coin as Westermann (1984:156) has observed. However, in a postcolonial world view *selem* will have more to do with external resemblance whereas *demuth* will have more to do with representation or a holistic correspondence.

Earlier, in verse 26 the emphasis was on both the royal “us” and the majestic “our image and likeness”. This repeated emphasis here about the identity of the humans in relation to God not only depicts that God alone created, but also that he did so exclusively and with the witnesses from the heavenly court praising this unique creative effort (Job 38:7) [Hamilton 1990:138]¹⁴⁹. As has been mentioned in our commentaries on “our image” in Genesis 1:26, the term is not intended to mean a mere copy of God’s outward form, but it could in fact indicate some spiritual correspondence between God and man. Eichrodt (1972:123,127) thinks that this fact is borne out by the way the priestly writer employs the term *demuth* “image” in Genesis 5:1 in alluding to the creation of humans. Westermann (1997:35) emphasises the image of God as establishing a partnership between the human community and the divine council, so that a relationship is forged with God in their being attentive to and responding to the Creator. This understanding which has informed colonial hermeneutics for so long has been adopted into a postcolonial critical world view by the indices of transcendentalism and perhaps inter-contextuality.

¹⁴⁹ Hamilton adds a completive here that the use of the third person singular pronominal suffix is deliberate and that it undercuts the possibility of any understanding of the “our” in Genesis 1:26. He asks, “may this be the writer’s way of saying that when humans were created in the image of ‘*elohim*, he meant God and not a divine council? If the narrator had meant the latter, then we would have expected, “so God created humans in their image.” See Hamilton (1990: 130ff)

The actual performance of what was mooted previously now follows with the actual creation of humans – *beselem* : “in the image of”. A postcolonial re-reading of this phrase will definitely not identify humans so closely with the Deity. As the Ogba would say *madu ka bu Chukwu* literally: “humans are no gods”. It is a Judeo-Christian innovation to equate the creature with the Creator as we see here. From the point of view of postcolonial critical hermeneutics: the idea that humans are offsprings of God, resonates with the postcolonial perspective of holism whereby the Fatherhood of God is interpreted by the closeness with which parents and their children eventually complement each other as the latter grows more and more into the image and likeness of their forebears.

★🏠🌊●🌐🌀 -- ‘*elohim* : “God (literally gods)”

It is not by chance that the Ogba and Ekpeye word for the Deity has the meaning of a multiplicity of gods under a Supreme God, the difference being that *‘elohim* is a plural form of *El* (God) and is used in connection with *be-selem ‘elohim* in this verse to reinforce what was proposed in the previous verse (verse 26) “let us make humans in our own image”. As Wildberger (1997:1080-85) has pointed out, this latter repetition of *be-selem ‘elohim* here makes sense because it is intended to correct the impression that humans are the direct image of God, and to state that humans are direct images of divine beings which is what *‘elohim* (gods) will signify (Schmidt 1997:115ff). A postcolonial critical hermeneutics will resonate with an interpretation which upholds the commentary, in Psalms 8:6 for instance which when read along with this verse will actually be saying: “you made humanity a little lower than *‘elohim* which cannot mean “God” but only divine beings.

Christianity has since the last century been encountering the Ogba and Ekpeye culture in a very transformative way. Thus when Jesus our Lord’s states in the Gospel (Jn. 10:34-35) and cites Psalms 82:6 “I said you are gods”, he would seem to support this postcolonial critical stance which attempts to reckon with a multiplicity of gods in the traditional Ogba world view for instance. Moreover, its emphasis is repeated in all of the five occurrences of *‘elohim* in our pericope. In the meantime, suffice it to be said that, when indicating God *‘elohim* functions as the subject of all divine activity revealed to humans and as the object of all true reverence and fear from men (cf. Schmidt 1997:107ff). When Psalms 8:5-6 is read against the background of Psalms 8:3-4, we see the sense of awe and insignificance to which humans has been surrounded and to which they ought to be responsive. Moreover, in most other occurrences of *‘elohim*, it is often accompanied by the personal name of God, *Yahweh* [Gen.2:4-5; Ex.34:23; Ps.68:19 (H 19)] (Scott 1980:44).

◆◆□□ -- *ōtō* : “him”

Apparently, humans and not animals are the focus in our pericope and like in postcolonial interpretation the pronouns used has to be gender neutral. *Ōtō* is *et* plus third masculine singular suffix, referring to “him” in singular form (*fem.* = *āten*). It is often appended to a verb for emphasis: made him. According to BDB (2000:61,87) *Āttī* may have been the older and more original form of *āt* (thou for female) preserved, probably, dialectically in Judges 17:2; 1 Kings.14:2; 2 Kings 4:16, 23; 8:1; Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 36:13. In Genesis 1:27 *ōtō* may be used as a reference to human beings, but excluding animals (cf. BDB 2000:271). It will be appropriate to say a few words on the use of *‘ish* and *‘ishah* for man and woman in Genesis 2:22, 25 in comparison to *zākār* and *nəqēbā* for male and female in Genesis 1:26-28. In the latter the terms used resonate more to the biological nature of male and female as has been mentioned in the preceding discussion, while in the former a new dimension of social reality is introduced into the relations of males and females, namely the psycho-social reality of mutual relationship and interdependence. With a plural suffix the word becomes - *otām* : “them” used later to indicate that God made them male and female.

In this case the indice of inter-contextuality paints a picture of a pronoun *otām* depicting both male and female, and when read in the light of the preceding *beselem* “in the image of”, it is clear that human beings irrespective of gender differences are made in the image of God. Male and female are like flip sides of the same coin shaped by God, and to deface one is to render the other valueless. An African proverb puts it: “God created the man before he made the woman” similar to the way I make a rough draft and refine it to produce the final piece. This is in resonance with a post-colonial identity of partnership. Later, *Otām* “them” – in Genesis 1:28 – is appended to the verb *bārak* to emphasise the fact that humankind are subjects of God’s blessing! In this case also its use is to stress not on uniqueness but on the commonality of life within the earth’s natural surroundings (Feinberg 1980:84).

Three significant points emerge from an apparent distinction between the biological identity and social identity of humans. First, the plural of Genesis 1:27: “male and female he created them” argues against any concept of patriarchy or androgyny, but instead puts in place a partnership in which the man is simply a “*primus inter pares*” or first among equals. Instead, God first creates humans before he separates them into distinct sexes –

male and female from an original human specimen! Second, both male and female bear the divine image and likeness, and together reflect the divine glory in degrees as well as in kind. Third, sexuality functions in both biological (Gen.1) and psycho-social terms (Gen.2). A postcolonial reading of this words and phrases would see the implementation of the Divine summons now implemented in a creative action.

𐤆𐤊𐤍 - *zākār* : “male”

Here *zākār* is used predicatively to refer to the male gender or “specie” of humans (Schüle 2005:7). As a noun it sometimes can be used in a collective sense for human beings (BDB 2000:271). In Genesis 1:27; (see Gen.17:10, 12) *zākār* is used of “to create” human beings; not only males but both sexes (Clines 2001:258). In its noun form, *zākār* occurs 82 times in the Old Testament and indicates the male sex of both human and animal’s specie (TDOT 2001:83). It is used three times as an adjective, referring to human beings (Num.3:40, 43; Jer.20:15). Instructively, there is a close link between *zākār* male and *zêker* remembrance, memorial of persons or people. *Zākār* also has close affinity to Assyrian *zikaru*, *zikru* males. Both *zākār* and *‘ish* specifically characterises the typical masculine properties such as strength, influence, courage and drive (1 Sam.4:9; 26:15; 1 Kgs.2:2 cf. Jer. 44:15; Jug. 8:21). The idea of mortality is imbued also in *zākār* and *‘ish* when contrasted with *‘el* or *‘elohim*.

Westermann (1997:31-32) points out that there are times when *zākār* is used mainly as a synonym for *‘ish* “male” or for *ben ‘adam* to depict the maleness of humans in contrast to females. When *zākār* is used in this way it is pointing at the gregarious or social nature of humans – men and women. This usage of *‘ish* for instance is reinforced in Genesis 2:18 when *Yahweh* announces the repugnance of male solitude: “it is not good for the man to be alone.” Its most direct counterpart is *nəqēbā*: female (see Gen.7:16).

𐤅𐤊𐤍𐤁 - *unəqēbā* : “and female”

In Hebrew, the usual way to make a noun feminine is to add the letters *ah* to the shorter masculine form (Wenham 1987:25)¹⁵⁰. Like its *zākār* counterpart *nəqēbā* which indicates the specie of female sex, is used for both human beings and animals, and the latter occurs about 22 times in the Old Testament (TDOT 2001:551-52). The nominative is formed from

¹⁵⁰ *Adamah* is the exception to this rule. The word *adamah* is not the feminine form of *adam* but refers to “earth” instead of being the feminine form of *adam*. It rather means earth, depicting inadvertently the bond that is between humankind and the earth.

the Hebrew verb *nqb*, pierce (2 Kgs.18:21), bore (a hole – 2 Kgs.12:9-10), and as a past participle it sometimes refers to a riddled or pierced bag (Hag. 1:6) apparently pointing to a bag with holes through which it leaks. When compared to the Hebrew *Siloam* inscriptions, “And this is the way in which it was cut/pierced through *hnqbh* (ANET 321 KAI 1:189:1). Van Gemeren (1997:1106) therefore opines that *nəqēbā* apparently referred to the sexual organ of the female. Thus, in Genesis 1 sexuality is seen in biological terms whereas in Genesis 2 it is seen in psycho-social terms (Schüle 2005:7). This difference will be discussed presently. In etymology *nəqēbā* as has been pointed out earlier literally means to pierce a hole or to perforate, as a mark of identity, distinction or honor. In the case of human beings, identity by a name replaces identity by a hole in the ear.

Genesis 1:28



“And God blessed them and said, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

☺□◊ -- *wayəbarek* : “And he blessed them”

A postcolonial reading takes the idea of blessing seriously. The general belief is that without this Divine favour all human efforts will amount to nothing. Semantically, this is a

waw consecutive third person common plural form of the root *bārak* “bless”. The root and its derivative occur 415 times in the Old Testament, and about 214 of that in the *Piel* stem which is translated as “to bless” (Oswalt 1980:132). The *Qal* passive participle “blessed” occurs 61 times (Oswalt 1980:132). In this context God blessed humans (Hamilton 1990:51-52). This can mean either the verbal endowment with good things or a collective expression for the good things themselves (cf. Ez.34:26; Mal.3:10). Or it could mean as Cassuto (1978:58-9) has suggested reproduction and procreation at the same time, but with an underlying increase in expressing the divine image and likeness in the process. This is significant because dominion can only be exercised over the living creatures and over the earth as a whole (including the plants) to the extent that humans reflected the divine image and likeness in an ever increasing dimension.

BDB(2000:135,138) links *bārak* to its other synonym “kneel” with the implication of keeping them on their knees or even humbling them. Koeler and Baumgartner (KB 2000:153-155) links *bārak* to a greeting of praise. God, having completed his great creative act of making humans now ushers them into their terrestrial estate with a greeting of blessing or of praise. To put it in Koehler’s and Baumgartner’s own words, God “now declares that (humans) are gifted with fortunate power” of nourishing or replenishing the land; with the implication of caring and nurturing life on earth. From a postcolonial critical hermeneutics these are profound revelations!

□○☉☆◆ -- *wayomer* : “and said”

This is a compound word *waw* and *omer*. The *waw* could mean: and, so, then, when, now, or, but, that and many others (Weber 1980:229). It usually marks the beginning of words, and seems to be the unique way of a Hebrew syllable that begins by a vowel (KB 2000:244). It is an inseparable prefix which is used as introductory particle or as conjunction which can usually be translated as “and”. The Authorised (KJV) Bible often began many sentences with an unexplained “and” as a result of a too literal conformity to the *Masoretic*, whereas the NRSV ignores it completely.

‘*Omer* refers to speech, word, thing, or to something said (Gen.3:1), in the heart (as in a soliloquy – Isaiah 14:13), promised (Neh.9:15), or commanded (1 Chr.21:18). It is the root word from which is derived among others ‘*imra* “utterance” and *ma’amar* “word, command” (BDB 2000:56-7). The commonest usage of the verb ‘*omer* is in direct conversation,

whether the subject is either God (as it is here in our *pericope* and in Genesis 1:3 etc), or the serpent in the garden of Eden (Gen.3:1), or of Adam, terrified, and trying to hide from God (Gen.3:10), or even of Balaam's ass in his attempt to divert the obstinate prophet (Num.22:28). Although the Hebrew language has a well attested and frequently used verb for "command" (*sāwâ*), *'amar* also serves for this meaning. This usage is found in God's command to Joshua (Jos.11:9), Hezekiah's command concerning the offerings after the cleansing of the temple (2 Chro.29:24).

Using the indice of inter-textuality in Genesis 1:26-28, and indeed the creative narratives, we see especially the word *'omar* as repeatedly used of God to introduce revelation. Revelation is latent in the word but becomes manifest as it is passed on from one person to another (Feinberg 1980:55). As Waltke (1980:55) has observed, this presupposes that God's word is a spoken, transmissible, propositional, definite matter.

Besides, God's word is creative. Genesis 1 has the phrase "God said" *'omar* some ten times. Half of this times it is "God said, let there be" and then God proceeded to create. This creative word of God is signalled in Psalm 33:9 "He spoke *'omar* and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast". The parallel word, he commanded *sāwâ* and the situation in Genesis 1 may give the wrong impression that the creative word does what it says (TDOT I, 1978:336) as if the word has a power independent of God. Rather it is God the Creator who does what he wills. This will of God is expressed in words of command and they are effective because he makes them so (Feinberg 1980:55).

☀️🌀● *-lahem (or lahen)*: "therefore" (either from ● and ☀️🌀).

☀️🌀 *hem* is an indirect object depicting the one who is being addressed. In this case the emphasis is on ☀️🌀 *hem* which is close to *hema*. There is no appreciable distinction between *hem* and *hema* except probably in so far as the longer or shorter form was better adapted to the rhythm of particular sentences (BDB 2000:241). In this case it serves to reinforce what God is about to say. KB (2000:236) identifies it as a phrase used indifferently, but more frequently with a *beth* than with a *lamed*.

☀️🏠🌀●🌀 -- '*elohim* : "God (literally gods)"

It is interesting that *'elohim* occurs here together with *zakar* in the same context – God and the humans he has made. Another text in which both also occur is Genesis 17. It is

noteworthy that there is a 5 times repetitious use of the name ‘*elohim* in Genesis 1:26-28, which in my own opinion emphasises the person of God not only as Creator (verse 26), or as the one in whose image and likeness humans were created (verse 27) but more than that as the one who blesses and makes them fruitful (verse 28). Once it was used in verse 26 and twice each in verses 27 and 28 respectively, to stress on the identity and purpose of humans created by one God. The NIV ignores this repetition of the Divine name, but the NRSV takes note of it. My guess is that the emphasis is both on God who speaks to bless, and on God who makes fruitful. It is important that the fruit to be borne by humans do reflect the divine character, and on the basis of that for them to engage in meaningful reproduction of their kind. This is the context in which ‘*elohim* and *zākār* occurs simultaneously in Genesis 17:10,12 and apparently in a collective sense depicting the proximity of God and to all humanity as the latter strives to fulfill the cultural or dual mandate.

𐤀𐤍𐤏𐤍 -- *pəru* : “be fruitful”

“Be fruitful and multiply”, has generally been taken together as reproductive sexuality. But that does not wholly agree with the *imago Dei* referred to earlier, in which humans are to reflect the Divine identity. The point is that humans are to be spiritually conjoined to their Maker in a responsible shepherding or husbanding of creation with justice, righteousness, grace and mercy in order therefore to multiply in their own kind according to the Divine plan. The most original truth about humans is that they were created to be in fellowship with God in whose image they are created in a pro-active way, and with each other in a procreative way (Wenham 1987:29).

This is a verb consecutive perfect second person plural as is implied in the translation. KB (2000:778) refer specifically to the fruit of the vine, or of the fig tree but more importantly to the fruit of the womb, resulting from intercourse between the male and female. In addition, BDB (2000:826) interpret it as fruit of the ground generally, and as fruit that results from labour (Pr. 31:16-31). It could also refer to the product of a wise action (Pr. 8:19) or a wise speech (Pr. 18:21). Its meaning in this context is a kind of fruitfulness that results in a “branching out”.

It also means a fruitful expansion of and from the prototypical nature of a tree as through its branches and leaves. In this sense *pəru* is more than six times juxtaposed with *shōresh*

“root” (2 Kgs 19:30; Isa.14:29; 37:31; Ezk.17:9; Hos.9:16; Am.2:9). Some like Ginsberg¹⁵¹ would object to it meaning a literal fruit, though that is part of it. In actual fact *pəru* can literally mean the “fruit” of a relationship between action and its consequence as there is between a plant and its seed or *vice versa* (Hamilton 1980:734). Similar to the ways trees grow roots below and produce fruits above [Ps.104:13; Pr.8:19; 11:30 (KJV)], humans are to be rooted in God so that they can reproduce and “branch out” his life, character, wisdom, and super-nature¹⁵². Humans are commanded to be fruitful, that is to branch out in and as the image of God so as to reflect in their relationship to him a character that is similar to his original character. On the basis of this also they are to do what follows next in the text, namely, to multiply!

✠ ⲟⲗⲓⲁ ✠ - *urəbu* : “and multiply”

This comes from the root *rābā*, literally to become numerous. It is a West Semitic form of a very common term cognate to Ugaritic *rb* and Akkadian *rabû*. This root initially occurs in Genesis 1:22. “Multiply” is read by all the versions, but in subsequent usages a variety of translations appear. In Genesis 17:17-18 *rābā* is translated as “increase”, or “be many” in 1 Chronicles 23:17; and as “so much” in Genesis 43:34. In the Hiphil stem the standard and the most common meaning, “multiply”, but a variety of other translations are also given, which space does not permit us to list here (White 1980:828).

Suffice it to say that the wide range of meaning shows the latitude of the original Hebrew root. It is a word used mostly in quantitative contexts, but sometimes also in a metaphorical sense like in Job 29:18 “live long”, and 1 Chronicles 7:4: “to have many children”. As so aptly depicted in BDB (2000:913) *rābā* can also mean “influence” such as of a ruler over his people or of a speaker over his / her audience. In comparison with *pəru*, *rābā* specifically is linked to child-bearing in order to extend the human influence throughout the habitable earth (cp. KB 2000:867-8).

✠ ⲟⲩⲟⲙⲓⲗⲓ ✠ -- *umil'u* : “and replenish”

¹⁵¹ See Ginsberg (1963:72-76). See also Hamilton (1980:733-35).

¹⁵² This resonates with the New Testament imagery of the Vine and its branches in John 15 in which disciples of Jesus are commanded to be fruitful in the sense in which a tree reproduces itself through fruit-bearing branches (Jn.15:1-5). Fruit-bearing in this case also means more of a godlike character which Apostle Paul later describes as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control against which there is no law (Gal.5:22-23).

This word literally means to fill or to be full (KB 2000:523), such as when the earth is said to be full of violence or on the other hand to be full of the glory of the Lord (Gen. 6:13; Hab.3:3). In the *Niphal* perfect *nimalu* would literally mean to be filled with people or a house filled with people as smoke fills a kitchen so to speak (BDB 2000:570). Thus, when Jacob foresees a time when Joseph's children would become a multitude of nations *məlo* is used. The NRSV sticks with "fill" in its translation, while the NIV uses the more figurative "replenish".

𐤎𐤏𐤃𐤃 - *wəḵibəshuha* : "and subdue it"

This is a *qal* perfect second person singular of the root *kābash* "subdue". It literally means to subdue or subjugate if possible with force, implying that the one being subdued is hostile to the one who subdues, and would not do the bidding of the latter unless under subjugation (Holladay 1988:151).

The verb *kābash* occurs in the Old Testament fifteen times, and is also cognate with Akkadian *kabāsu* "to tread down" and Arabic *kabasa* "to knead, stamp, and press". In the Old Testament it means "to make to serve". The implication for the use of such a strong verb is that "creation will not do human bidding gladly or easily and that humans must now bring the creation into submission by the sheer use of strength" (Oswalt 1980:430). This part of the cultural mandate was given before the fall of humans in Genesis 3, and the effects of a literal reading of "*kābash*" to mean "forced servitude" has been the fierce and destructive delight with which humans have performed this task, and unless human iniquities are themselves subdued (Mic.7:10) "*kābash*", the intention of the Creator God will be a far-fetched dream!

Read against the background of Genesis 1:26 in which humans are made in the image and likeness of God, *kābash* implies "to subdue" in an effective, but unobtrusive and beneficent manner. It is used of subduing the land of Canaan (Num.32:22), and in the *piel* it is used of subduing peoples (2 Sam.8:11). KB (2000:423) reads *kābash* to mean "tread down", or "press" upon with the intent of overcoming. In BDB (2000:461) *kābash* simply means "bring into bondage" but connotes "beat", "make a path", "massage", or "dominate and make subservient". It is the same way in which the soil crushes a seed that is sown in it in order to cause it to be fruitful and yielding, and as such *kābash* has a positive connotation. It is the same word used of a man who cowers a timid woman into sexual

intercourse! Feminists commentators are very critical of similar application (Antonelli 1997:36).

☀️🏠🌕☩️🌀 -- *hashāmayim* : “of the air (literally heavens)”

The NRSV and NIV translate it as “of the air” as does the AV and ASV. The use of *shāmayim*, the heavens, falls into two broad categories: the physical heavens and the heavens as the abode of God. Heaven and earth together constitute the universe (Gen.1:1). Moreover, the creatures that populate the space between them are the various species of birds with the eagle leading them (Austel 1980:935). In addition to what we have already said in the discussion of heaven in the 26th verse above it is pertinent to note that heaven was created through the spoken word of God in Genesis 1:1, and by virtue of that heaven is removed from the realm of an autonomous sacral entity and placed in the category of God’s creation.

This is strongly a Judeo-Christian understanding of heaven and is based on texts such as Genesis 2:4b; 14:19, 22; Isaiah 42:5; 45:18; Psalm 8:3; 33:6; Proverbs 3:19; 8:27. Although heaven in this tradition is venerated as the dwelling place of *Yahweh* and his hosts, God’s actions from heaven are usually seen as contingent on human considerations. Thus God sends rain and dew to make the earth fruitful so as to enhance human life and ensure sustainable growth and multiplication of human, animal and plant species.

🌀☀️👉🌱🌿🌳☩️ - *ubekol ḥayah* : “and over every living creature”

“Be” is correctly translated as “over” by both the NIV and the NRSV, depicting a super-ordinate ruling position of humans over the rest of creation (Ringgren 1974:373). As can be seen it is a rule over antagonistic forces, particularly of human groups or nations (Ringgren 1974:373). Similarly, the *kol* is interpreted to mean all five classes of living creatures including the fish of the sea (Gen.1:26, 28), the birds of the air (Gen.1:20, 26, 28), cattle (Gen.1:24), wild animals (living in the fields – Gen.1:24-25, 30), and creeping things (Gen.1:24, 30).

With respect to *ḥayah* which is translated as “the living” or “living creatures” it is a word used generally to underscore a fully packed and dynamic reference to the being of a person or thing. Although it is sometimes associated with “be” / “become”; its semantic

range is wider than that of those corresponding English verbs. Hamilton (1980:213-14) however does not equate *ḥayah* with existence or the identification of a thing or person. The translation of *ḥayah* can be problematic as the AV depicts (Barr 1961:58ff). In the latter there are numerous instances of translation of *ḥayah*, in which words such as “is, are, was, were” are in italics, indicating that these are additions by the translators for the sake of smoothness but not in the Hebrew itself. In such cases the Hebrew employs what is known grammatically as a nominal sentence, which is defined as one lacking a verb or *copula*: An example is: “I am the Lord your God!” *Ḥayah* is never used as a verb or *copula*, and this has given rise to speculations that Hebrew thinking moves more in dynamic, rather than static lines (Hamilton 1980:214)¹⁵³.

Ringgren (2001:373) insists that *ḥayah* might have had narrower or original connotation of “being”, but its occasional appearance in poetic parallelism with other verbs does not provide sufficient evidence. He also noted in Genesis that *ḥayah* occurs with introductory idioms or with particles. The same can be said of the occurrence of the word in the Old Testament. It appears that from the very outset *ḥayah* was used to refer to “being” in the sense of “exist, be present” (that is, what has come into being) and of “come into being, or happen (that is, what is coming into being). In the former sense *ḥayah* occurs 146 times, and in the latter sense it does not occur very often as it is always expressed by finite forms, of which Psalms 64:8 is one rare example (Ringgren 2001:373).

5.2.2 A Summary of Postcolonial close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28

Thus in this attempt at a postcolonial close-reading, the notion that humans – God’s image bearers – were initially called to labor creatively, righteously, and wisely is incidental to the Divine construction of human nature as caretakers and not owners of creation. Humans were also to be in loving fellowship with God in subduing the earth and every living creature on it, whether in the sky, in the waters, or on the land (Zobel 2001:330-36). They were to reproduce God’s character in both of their relationship to him, to each other and to nature in general. This is in order to create a meaningful atmosphere in which they can multiply, subdue and “replenish” the earth. What has often been referred to as the cultural or dual mandate can also be called the stewardship vocation: humans are to be stewards of the earth as God’s representative image in both character and life (Beisner 1997:184-

¹⁵³ Instead Hebrew uses *yesh* (positive) and *‘ayin* (negative) to express existence, beside the nominal sentences; see Hamilton (1980:214).

85). The gerontocracy extant in Niger Delta communities is at the head of a host of social relationships emanating from the nature of humans as gregarious beings.

In Genesis 1:26-28 God creates human beings with a particular formula which summons the Deity into action: “Let us make man”. The distinction between the creation of the human being and other beings became quite pronounced. What is very unique is that humans are created not only in the “image and likeness” of God, but are given a creation, cultural or “dual mandate” both to overspread, “subdue” – trample under foot – the earth, and to exercise rule, authority and dominion over nature in general regardless of its inherent life (Wasike 2001:176). Evidently, man in such a pristine origin becomes an embodiment of the divine nature, later to be corrupted by the fall (Livingstone 1999:448-449). Such divine endowments as moral discernment and the use of intellect and will are denied to the lower creatures. Also inherent in Genesis 1:26-28 is a general understanding of *Elohim*'s, commission to human dominion exercised over the earth and over nature, which some have taken out of context.

In the same vein the poetic composer of Psalm 8 declares that humans are made a little lower than $\bigcirc \square \text{wavy} \bullet \text{eye}$ and that *Yahweh* adorned humans with a crown of $\text{wavy} \square \text{eye}$ $\text{eye} \blacklozenge \text{eye} \&$. Interestingly, even a postcolonial critical hermeneutics would subscribe to the meaning of '*elohim*, as it connotes the livingness of God (BDB 2000:42-43; Van der Toorn 1999:352ff). It resolves the dilemma of a multiplicity of opinion by Old Testament scholars as to the meaning of the name of God '*elohim* (cf. Mettinger 1999:920-24)¹⁵⁴. Yet a few points can help us to grasp the postcolonial interpretation and application of the name of God. For purposes of rendering the text into an African language, it is crucial that the text be read with a post-colonial target audience and context in mind, without necessarily contextualising it.

The final point to note is as Maré (2006:935) observes that '*elohim* should be understood as “heavenly beings” (as in Genesis 6:2, 4; Jb.1:6; Ps.97:7). However, in my opinion, the claim by the Psalmist favors the sense of God. In other words '*elohim* is an allusion to the *imago Dei* in humans, or to their exercise of the God-given dominion in creation. Besides,

¹⁵⁴ The same is true of other Hebraic names for God such as *Yahweh*, *Yahweh Sebaoth*, and *Adonai*, the latter being more of an appellation than a name. For an incisive discussion of the names of God see Van der Toorn (1999:910-924).

the poetic employment of the word ● ☺ in Psalm 8:1, 6, 7, and 9, is perhaps to emphasise God's glory revealed in all of creation, and that He has placed all under the rule of humans. The totality of *Yahweh's* majesty is given by Him to humans. This is to be expected in an ancient context in which many of the characteristics ascribed to the gods are basically human characteristics (Van der Toorn 1999:361-363). Thus the full revelation of God's glory in all of the earth includes an investiture of humans with both glory and a position of authority. This point was alluded to in the first chapter, where Boice opines that by this initial creation, humans were "given the hope of an eschatological glorification that would change them into a transformed glory image of a radiant "Glory-Spirit" (Boice 1986:149-150).

Each of the postcolonial critical indices – inter-textuality, inter-contextuality, transcendence and holism – applied in the preceding re-reading along with semantic and syntactic analysis of our pericope attempts not to read into this text, but to go alongside the redactors in their context of interpretation and presentation. Generally, human dominion in Genesis 1:26-28 should never be seen as a self-serving anthropocentric use of power against other creatures, but it should be understood as human dominance which could be undertaken as a vocation in full recognition of its source and significance. Ultimately human dominance lies in *Yahweh's* pre-eminent rule. Humans reign with *Yahweh* as responsible stewards and as accountable users of that with which they have been entrusted.

Evidently, humans possess certain superior endowments such as intellect and will. It is important that this endowment should not be located in a relationship between humans and other creatures which is placed on a scale or hierarchy of being, determined by such gifts. To do so is to end up with the modern mechanistic mindset of humanity-above-nature. Instead, the *imago Dei* endorses the quality that humans possess (which makes us superior to other creatures) as pointing more to a relationship in which we stand *vis-à-vis* our Creator, and to a vocation to which we are called within the creation as responsible stewards and accountable "users" not "abusers" of nature. Once this position is understood, a very different conception of humankind / other kind relationship follows. In the latter case the symbol of stewardship comes vividly into focus.

We have dealt extensively so far with an examination of concepts such as "dominion" and the *imago Dei* as it impacts on the mandate received by humans from God to "husband" the earth. In the translation that follows, this fact is vividly portrayed in the various nuances

in which Ogba and Ekpeye grammar represents our pericope as portrayed in the creation narrative. Once the concept of *imago Dei* is correctly interpreted and grasped in the context of an ongoing Divine - human relationship, then the stewardship role of humans as part of their dominion over the earth comes into a sweet relief.

5.3 Functional equivalence and postcolonial hermeneutics

Our earlier attempt to do a postcolonial close reading of our *pericope*, leaves us now with another viable option of furthering our discussion through a translation of our pericope into Ogba. Some newer theories of translation insist that a good translation should have a clearly stated purpose of translation, a clearly outlined target-text functions and target-audience address in what is commonly referred to as *Skopos* rule (Wendland 2004:53). In our own case, it is to be informed by a functional equivalence approach¹⁵⁵ while using presumably the “fruits” of the foregoing close-reading as well as the cultural perceptions encountered in our empirical research. This is not the place to delve into the intricacies of the *Skopos* theory¹⁵⁶. Suffice it to say that there are three points of convergence between a functional equivalence translation and postcolonial critical hermeneutics which we have to keep in mind as we engage in a translation of the Biblical text (Beckman and Callow 1976:19-45). These points of convergence is true regardless of the purpose or *Skopos* of a translation:

First of all, functional equivalence and postcolonial critical hermeneutics work with the Bible as their exegetical and hermeneutical tool. Secondly, both approaches are aimed more or less at receptor audiences that have presumably gone through one form of colonial experience or another. Thirdly, both approaches are guided by the ethical requirement of fidelity to the original (i.e. Biblical) text in order to be authentic in post-colonial contexts. A point by point discussion of these three points of convergence will follow presently.

¹⁵⁵ The functional equivalence approach has gradually been moving into the background of most nascent translation theories such as the literary-rhetorical approach and the *skopos* theory. The earlier approach emphasized more of a dynamic meaning based translation, just like the literary – rhetorical approach also does but with an added emphasis on discourse and contextual connotations within the text. For its part the *skopos* theory calls for a brief or resumé giving details of the motivation and guidelines of the translation. An Ogba New Testament using the functional approach has been published, and this study envisages an Old Testament translation in which the newer theories will form part of the “brief” so motivated. See Wendland (2004:12, 26-27); see also A . Ahiamadu (2006b: 293ff).

¹⁵⁶ A thorough-going discussion is contained in the book by Wendland (2004:52-87).

5.3.1 The Bible as a common tool

The fact that the Bible is the common working instrument for practitioners in both fields of exegesis and hermeneutics is an obvious but striking one. This can be appreciated when we consider the importance of this tool to Bible Translators and Biblical scholars. The emphasis in both fields of study is on correct exegesis resulting in a critical interpretation as well as in an accurate and clear translation (Mojola 2002:202). First of all, using a functional equivalence approach the Biblical text is to be exegeted in a way which makes its meaning explicit in a postcolonial interpretation which for instance might be implicit in a colonial reading, and *vice versa*. For one thing, explicitness is associated with fidelity as well as with the intelligibility of the translation when it is read in the receptor audience. In this way a translation becomes functionally accurate when it elicits appropriate responses from the receptor audience similar to the effect it had on the original audience (De Blois 1997:21-30). In my opinion the authority of such accuracy derives from that same single source, namely, the Biblical text, and any accuracy is measured by and is dependent on the explicit meanings of it as a source text (cf. Wendland 2004:22). In other words the closer in explicitness to this source text a translation is the more accurate its postcolonial hermeneutics becomes, but accuracy is not all.

Secondly, besides being explicit and accurate, a translation must also exhibit clarity even if this means reversing the translation process by keeping explicit information implicit in the text (Beckman and Callow 1976:45). There is a sense in which the Biblical pattern of language in the source text, merges with the translators' lively use of contemporary idiom and existing literary features or style of the target language (Wendland 2004:73). This idea resonates with both a functional equivalence approach and a postcolonial critical hermeneutics in their common emphasis on de-mystifying the text and making it more eloquent (Moore and Segovia 2005:6-7; Smith 2000:25). This emphasis on clarity is common to all of the translation models – literary, functional, dynamic equivalence, and literary-functional (Wendland 2004:77).

An unclear reading of the Bible resulting from literary translations, in turn results in all kinds of negative attitudes towards for instance women, whereas functional equivalence makes a more inclusive sense by taking the important rhetorical and semantic features of a language into consideration; the same goal which a liberation hermeneutics is out to achieve (Dube 2000:127). As so aptly put by Dube (2002:65):

“Every critical reading of the Biblical text is a search for social justice, and like all searches, know that the process of discovery involves a very dynamic approach. So with a postcolonial reading as with any other reading for that matter; it cannot but be (*clear and*) dynamic in its interpretations of the Biblical text” (italics mine).

Thirdly, naturalness also brings both approaches to the Biblical text as a point of convergence and as criteria for a good translation. A translation has to be grammatical, natural, idiomatic and fluent (Wendland 2004:276). Naturalness is a two pronged issue: it begins with exegesis and ends with hermeneutics (Ahiamadu 2005:85; Mojola 2002:202). There is on the one hand the need for mastery of the receptor language, and of the Scriptures or source text on the other. Ongoing researches in the field of Translation Studies have further refined the concepts, but naturalness is inherent in the idea of functionality – a feature which all the translation models share. A translation fulfils its function or performance for its primary target audience if it makes the target audience understand what was translated and why it was translated that way (Naude 2002:57). This is what some Translation theorists refer to as the *Skopos* rule (Wendland 2004:93).

Fourth, this must be based on “shared background knowledge”, “cultural assumptions” and “literary traditions” from both source and target communities. Moreover, as Naude (2002:47) has observed, the functional equivalence approach under any guise must make a pragmatic sense of the Biblical text, based on proper textual analysis or exegesis. In the present example a postcolonial critical hermeneutics comes very handy. Naude’s idea is similar to contemporary scholarly engagement with a postcolonial approach. For example Edward Said (1935-2003) is credited with founding the postcolonial approach to literary discourse¹⁵⁷. In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Said (2004:156f) points out the inexorable link between texts and the culture as well as the political environment, that is the context, in which they are shaped, and adds that interpretations are injurious if they do not take this into consideration. This point was alluded to earlier, and depicts the nature of both postcolonial hermeneutics and functional equivalence approach in their similar quest for naturalness as the basis for a meaningful hermeneutics.

However, on its part, the functional equivalence approach has been criticised by those who think that its protagonist, Eugene Nida obviously was disconcerted by the more traditional, literal forms of translation (Gentzler 1993:54). This does not mean that Nida’s

¹⁵⁷ In his groundbreaking treatise *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) Said wrote that texts, like their authors, are intrinsically connected to their time, space, culture, language, social world and political reality. They cannot be abstracted from these locations without doing violence to their content and meaning.

theory would completely ignore fidelity to the form of the source text. It meant that a too rigid adherence to form can distort the meaning of a text in the receptor language (Gentzler 1993:54). In that case it does mean that literalness can be ignored in favour of translating the meaning of the text so as to highlight its resonance with the literary forms of the receptor culture, which is also the aim of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics. The idea is one of a reading that is liberating. In this way a postcolonial critical hermeneutics achieves the same goal as a functional equivalence exegesis, with the end result of a translation using a hermeneutic that is decolonised, dynamic, and liberating.

Apparently the aim is to effectively handle the limitations imposed on a second language user by idioms, semantic domains and linguistic forms of an original text with literary or grammatical forms that often differ from the forms of the receptor language or culture (Mojola 2001:1-26). In the case of Ogba and Ekpeye in which, besides the New Testament translation,¹⁵⁸ no portions of the Old Testament have been translated to the best of my knowledge, it calls for a marriage of both a critical exegesis and a meaning-based dynamic rendering of the text in the mother tongue. Most colonial translations are very literal but postcolonial translations do not have to be so if the message of the Scripture is to be understood in post-colonial contexts.

This is therefore an attempt towards a functional equivalent translation which can convey the message of Genesis 1:26-28 to mother-tongue speakers so as to re-read the text in a postcolonial critical hermeneutics in order to translate it in Ogba in a way that is functionally accurate, clear and natural (Smith 2000:25). This will result from an uncompromising attitude of fidelity to the original source text as well as from its intelligibility and acceptability in the receptor context (Ahiamadu 2005:82ff).

5.3.2 Common post-colonial context of readers

Interestingly, both approaches are aimed more or less at receptor or reader audiences that have presumably gone through one form of post-colonial experience or another. Both functional equivalence and postcolonial critical hermeneutics have the singular or similar objective of “reaching the un-reached” with God’s word, the one through a functional

¹⁵⁸ Among the Ogba and Ekpeye communities of Nigeria, there has been an upsurge of mother-tongue Bible reading since the translation of the New Testament by the present author in a partnership of the Holy Spirit and the Ogba Bible Translation and Literacy Team (OBTLT) in 2006. To understand this visit our website on <https://www.ogba-obtlt.org>.

translation, and the other through a postcolonial interpretation of the text. As we have pointed out, most colonial translations are usually missionary translations with their knack for literalness. In a post-colonial context this can be made more eloquent through dynamic or functional equivalence translations (Nida 1986:15).

There are three key elements which drive every translation theory, namely the need for a translation to be accurate, clear and natural (Wendland 2004:7). The history of Bible translation and the evolution of various translation models have revolved around the need to maintain both in the source language text (SLT) and in the receptor language text (RLT) the functional equivalence parameters of accuracy, clarity and naturalness – whether the approach used is a literal, or dynamic; literary-rhetorical, or functional equivalence. This trend in Bible translation has also been underscored in scholarly circles, particularly in the field of translation studies [Gentzler (1993:45ff), Statham (2003:71ff), Nida (1986:61ff)].

The functional equivalence approach has developed as a result of Eugene Nida's break with the more formal approaches to Bible translation and his emphasis on translations that are linguistically dynamic and meaning-based (Gentzler 1993:54). The differences between the functional equivalence approach and the more literal or literary-rhetorical approaches lies in the fact that the former is a dynamic meaning based translation which generally ignores the forms of the original while transferring the meaning of the text into the receptor language in a way that is functionally and linguistically intelligible (Gentzler 1993:54). On the other hand the more literal approaches, while sticking to the meaning of a text in translation, also adhere to a formal correspondence between the source text and receptor text (Wendland 2004:72). Those who find the literary approaches more appropriate in post-colonial translation contexts insist that the use of a functional equivalence approach would be more relevant in contexts in which a more literary translation has been in vogue (De Blois 1997:21-30). Recently, Wendland (2004:36) has added that functional "matches" should be sought as it is crucial to the transfer of meaning in presumably a post-colonial context.

In Ernst Wendland's discussion of the "functions", he insists that not only should it be pragmatic, but also its form and content must fulfil particular communicative goals. In this way, selected linguistic levels and diverse frames of socio-linguistic and situational reference can easily be processed and interpreted by the target audience "based on personal as well as group learning and experience" (Wendland 2004:12-13). This, in my opinion, is another way of saying that both the translation and hermeneutics is to bring the

original text and receptor text as closely to each other as possible in an accurate, clear and natural way.

Or as Nida (1986:14-15) had earlier pointed out “the imperative, emotive, performative, and inter-personal functions are often far more important than the informative one” so that where these are present in the Biblical text, every effort should be made to convey them (Nida 1986:15). The implication of this for an Ogba translation of the Old Testament in general and our *pericope* in particular is that a translation must capture the hermeneutical and exegetical features of the text, particularly a hermeneutic that has a postcolonial bias. The convergence of an exegesis that is functionally equivalent and a hermeneutics that is postcolonial becomes an imperative.

It is important to stress the point first raised by Eugene Nida that all translations should aim at conveying the accurate, clear and natural sense of the original or source text (ST). These ideas were contained in Nida’s book *Theory and Practice of Translation* (1974, 1984) which since then has become the benchmark between a purely literal and a dynamic equivalent translation. Since the 1990s the concept of functional equivalence has undergone some modifications on the one hand by those who like Edwin Gentzler (1993:45) and Nigel Statham (2003:71) intend to make it both meaning based and more functional, and others like Ernst Wendland who has added a literary component to the functional equivalence. The latter has emphasised that literary-functional equivalence best captures the sense in which Nida’s functional theory can meet the original criteria of accuracy, clarity and naturalness in any translation of literature (Wendland 2004:7,74,279). The core concept of both the meaning based and literary approaches are similar: accuracy, clarity and naturalness.

A synthesis of these views can be subsumed under the example provided by the Ogba language in which, having been exposed to the more literal King James and Igbo versions for eight decades have only recently had a New Testament translation based on the functional equivalent approach (Nkwoka 2001:336-345; De Blois 1997:21-20). The Ogba audience can also be said now to be ready for an Old Testament translation (De Blois 1997:21-20). Moreover, this transition from a literal to a functional does remove the limitations which a literal translation imposes on a second language user by idioms, semantic domain and linguistic forms which differ from a first or mother tongue language (Nida 1986:15). It paves the way for post-colonial contexts such as Ogba to have Bible translations that are exegetically functional or dynamic and at the same time

hermeneutically postcolonial. We cannot ignore the ethics of fidelity which is the concern of the literal approaches, and the core value of functional equivalence.

5.3.3 The common ethics of fidelity to Biblical text

It is instructive to note that translations in order to be authentic in post-colonial African contexts for instance, have to be guarded and guided by an ethical standard of fidelity to the Biblical text, a fidelity that is synonymous with loyalty to the source text (Wendland 2004:52,72). Fidelity and loyalty to the source text is necessitated by the literary nature of the exercise of both translation and hermeneutics. A functional equivalence approach is as much a literary exercise as is a postcolonial critical hermeneutic. This view agrees with what practitioners of both fields say of themselves. For instance, Moore and Segovia (2005:30) describe postcolonial Biblical criticism as “a literary enterprise by and large” which deals with “literature written in the historical post-colonial period and from the perspective of the colonised”. This is similar to what Naude (2002:47) and Mojola (2001:1-26) identifies in a functional equivalence approach as involving a literary analysis of “idioms, semantic domains and linguistic forms” of a source (Biblical) literary text with a view to rendering them meaningfully to hitherto subject or post-colonial peoples (Ahiamadu 2005:83). Using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics can facilitate the identification and re-reading of texts which previous colonial readings or renderings have made obscure, in order to restore the primary meaning of the text as intended by the original authors and as understood by the original audience (Nida 1986:15).

In the translation of our pericope below, we have progressively moved from Naude’s (2002:47; 2006:1225-1238) position that a “shared background knowledge” as well as “cultural assumptions”, and “literary traditions” for both the source and target communities should be provided, into one that Wendland (2004:1-2) describes as literary-rhetorical. The literary-rhetorical approach also follows the same technical goal of maintaining an accurate and clear rendering of the content of an original text, using an exegesis informed by a critical hermeneutics but rendered in the target or receptor language in as natural and meaningful a way as possible so as to elicit the same audience response in the receptors as it did on the original audience (Wendland 2004:27). In order to achieve this noble objective, Wendland (2004:35) has suggested that we keep an eye on “accuracy of content representation” and also an “awareness of target audience preference” (Wendland 2004:35). In my opinion, however, the target audience preference has to be subordinated

to the accuracy of content representation in order to meet the criteria of loyalty and fidelity to the source text.

This is our approach in the case of an Ogba translation of Genesis 1:26-28. It is envisaged that this translation does not become overtly literal but rather one that stays as functionally close to the source text as possible. It is attempting to use presumably the fruits of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics in a functional equivalence translation through a faithful exegesis that is loyal to the source text. In this way it can incorporate the results of a postcolonial close-reading combined with faithful textual exegesis, and in so doing transcend the limitation of idiomatic, semantic and linguistic forms while keeping an eye on a translation that is accurate, clear and natural in spite of the different forms existing between the source and target languages (Ahiamadu 2005:83; Mojola 2001:1-26; Nida 1986:47).

With this basic conceptual scheme in mind let us turn our attention to a functional equivalent translation of Genesis 1:26-28 into Ogba, which combines with it a postcolonial critical hermeneutics.

5.4 Functionality and phraseology in Genesis 1:26-28

Our pericope is marked by certain combination of words or phrases that rarely do occur anywhere else in the Old Testament (Bromiley 1987:803). The rarity has contributed to various interpretations of Genesis 1:26-28 with respect to the cultural mandate to “subdue” and “rule” the earth and “replenish” it. Until recently most interpretations have been the result of centuries of a literal reading both in its original Hebrew form and in some, if not all of its translations (Meyers 1988:122). A literal reading of the Old Testament has led generations of Christian leaders to project all kinds of exploitative meanings to for instance the *imago* and *similitudo Dei* mistaken to be the main thrust of the story of Adam and Eve. The marginalisation of women for instance has also been traced to this type of uncritical, literal reading (Uchem 2001:167).

What we attempted to do in the previous section is to apply a postcolonial critical hermeneutics to the close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28. The result of that exercise is now to be applied to an ethnic audience using a functional equivalence approach in a translation

of the said pericope that consistently meets the functional equivalent criteria of accuracy, clarity, and naturalness. In this way the text becomes invaluable and meaningful for an exasperated people struggling with a triad of post-colonial vestiges such as identity, hybridity and mimesis. This have been discussed previously especially in the third chapter.

The thrust of every translation theory as has been mentioned is a triad of accuracy, clarity and naturalness. This has been discussed extensively in the preceding section and is so crucial both to translation and to the hermeneutics preceding it. There are various theoretical issues with respect to maintaining accuracy, clarity, and naturalness which has also been critically assessed (Munday 2001:14-15). The cultivation of a functionally relevant translation imbued with the values of insights derived from a postcolonial critical close-reading of our pericope is now apt. Perhaps, by this process we can achieve a corresponding effect with regard to the overall perspicuity, efficacy and / or impact of the translated text of Genesis 1:26-28 on its pre-determined audience (Wendland 2004:340). This fulfils one of the goals of a functional equivalence translation to undercut a literal translation of the Bible often associated with previous colonial hermeneutics (Mojola 2002:208; Donaldson 1996:3-5).

A survey of the Ogba translation below will reveal such a cultivated text in which Hebrew forms are reflected along with its equivalences in the receptor language of Ogba in the way in which it is accurate, clear and natural in the latter (Nida 1991:7). This literary similarity does not necessarily imply a similarity of form; instead it is more of a similarity of meaning. In other words, the difference in linguistic forms between the Hebrew and Ogba does not alter the similarity of meaning of the text in the receptor language (De Blois 1997:21-30). Moreover, the translation helps to re-tell the creation narrative in a way in which meaning rather than form is the focal point. The same thought in a source text can be expressed in different linguistic forms by different languages. Re-telling the form of the original does not guarantee re-telling its meaning; instead it can indeed lead to a distortion of meaning. Therefore, the form of the original language is incidental to the form of the receptor language in this translation (Naude 2002:50-52). Functional equivalence makes no attempt to re-tell the form of source text unless the natural way of expressing the same thought in the receptor language would use a parallel form.

The understanding of the meaning of the text by the Ogba speakers and readers can be greatly enhanced by an effective combination of a functional equivalence approach with a postcolonial critical hermeneutics that is culturally sensitive to creation, to the ecological

integrity of the Niger Delta, to environmental and to gender harmony (Naude 2002:44-49). The cultural understandings of creation, stewardship, land ownership and use of Ogba and Ekpeye have been discussed in the third chapter. Generally, the discussion was such that the Biblical standards of morality, ethos and norms resonated with what is perceived as morality or norms in an African, albeit Nigerian context (Uchem 2001:148). In my opinion, there is no reason why this resonance of both cultures cannot be highlighted through the use of meaning based translations of the Bible in Africa which derives from a sound textual exegesis presupposed in a postcolonial critical hermeneutics. The result would be translations that are exegetically faithful, while being culturally sensitive. Such is the advantage of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics which adapts itself to its consumer audiences through taking cognisance of inter-textuality and inter-contextuality in both the source language as well as in receptor language. This is what translations have often been credited with, namely, the capability of being both adaptable and transformative¹⁵⁹. The Ogba translation below hopefully combines such rare virtues.

5.5 Translation of Genesis 1:26-28 into Ogba with commentaries

This structure of the following translation uses the functional equivalence approach based on a postcolonial critical close-reading of our periscope. This is in some way helpful in our understanding of a Nigerian perspective to stewardship, land ownership and land use as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

5.5.1 Structure of translation

The text will first be rendered in the Masoretic (Biblical Hebrew) version, followed by a literal (New International Version in English) translation, a functional equivalence translation into Ogba, and finally a back translation from the vernacular into (Nigerian) English. The English back translation will enable the reader to grasp the word for word meaning of the vernacular. A back translation stays as close as possible to linguistic forms of expression in the receptor audience, which in this case is Ogba. As has been observed,



¹⁵⁹ The strategic importance of Bible translation to the ministry of the Christian Church has been underscored in the words of this anonymous author: "Translation it is that opens the window, to let in the light; that breaks the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that puts aside the curtains that we may look into the most holy place; that removes the cover of the well, that we may come by the water, even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the well by which means the flocks of Laban were watered. Indeed, without translation into the common language of the people, the unlearned are but like children at Jacob's well – which was deep without a bucket, or as that Ethiopian eunuch who looked into the scroll with his eyes but understood nothing of it until Philip joined his chariot and made the text very clear to him in the common language" (cf. Wendland 2004:37-38).

social transformation takes place when the text is made to speak in the language of the people directly from the Hebrew, and without the intermediation of a second language (Mojola 2002:202). It is imperative to let the text speak for itself in this way to the target audience.

On the basis of the translation, some comments will be made along exegetical and hermeneutical lines in consonance with our avowed postcolonial intent, so that interpretations deriving from our re-reading of the text can be made more authentic.

earth to create humans and all other things. Hence, law of the land is the supreme law in most of these communities today (Amadi 1982:66). African concepts of God for instance among the *Yoruba* of Nigeria is built around a Supreme Deity *Olodumare* who in alliance with *Orisa-nla* created first the earth out of which humans and other living things were made (Aderibigbe 1999:334).

Besides, in African cosmogony, there is also the “myth” that the earth was created first before humans. This also resonates with Genesis 1-2. Among the Igbo for instance, God creates *Ala* (earth) through which he then creates humans and other living things that move on the earth. This concept is translated into the saying among Ogba that *ali abu okenyi*, literally: the earth is senior. Thus the land out of which humans were created with breath in their nostrils, is an emissary of God. The earth only does what it is told and the end result is what God intended and not what the land intended and so the true creator is God. This point was alluded to in the third chapter.

This leads us to an interpretation of the Latin *imago* and *similitudo Dei*. In both Hebrew and English it is   -- *besalmenu kidmutenu* and “in our own image, in our likeness” respectively. Such parallelism in Hebrew resonates with terms extant among Ogba and Ekpeye.

In Ogba the words are translated as *enyege* and *oyiyi* which speaks more of a replica and resemblance of the gods not in the sense of being divine, but in the sense of being capable of “Divine” representative functions. The emphasis is on the *enyege* “image” which reflects or resembles the original. The *oyiyi* “likeness” speaks more of actual correspondence, but it is the *enyege* “image” that conveys the aspect of representation of the original, in this case of the Deity. A proverb which depicts this unerring resemblance is *agbugbo yiga enye kpushia*: “the calabash (usually) resembles its planter or maker” – the calabash in this case being humans and the planter or maker of course being God! The terms are therefore best seen as flip sides of the same semantic coin.

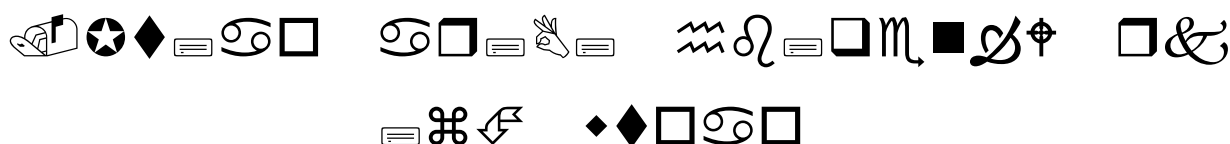
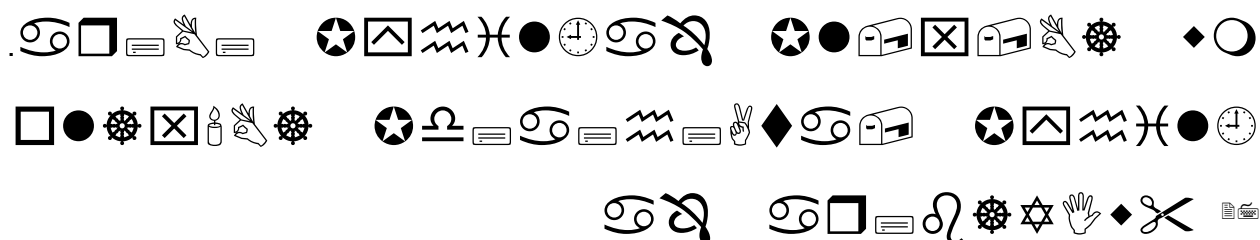
It is interesting that Justin Ukpong (2004:85) posits the view that humans are not the image of God when it comes to priority in the natural order, but are the image of God in a functional sense: created last to cap or crown God’s creative works. The functional as opposed to the relational interpretation of the *imago Dei* was also mooted by Curtis

(1984:46). Hence, as Ukpong (2004:85) points out “humans are created to function like God” in being creative and keeping in partnership with the Creator.

The impact of this on human stewardship over the earth is enacted in the command to have dominion (*rada*) stated here in Genesis 1:26 “where the link between creation in the image of God and the charge to have dominion is made clear”. In other words, a careful reading will prove that the text places the earth under man’s rule, but not in a manner uncritical of perspectives that follow the exploitation of the creation for narrow human purposes (Birch 1991:89).

Genesis 1:27

Masoretic (Biblical Hebrew) translation



Literal (New International Version in English) translation

“So God created man in his own image. In the image of God created he him, male and female created he them.”

Functional equivalence translation into Ogba

“Ódě kà Ó kèpiyà, Chiokike, imodindu nwínye má óyìà yà má ó bù ènyègè gǎ.
Ókno ya nnwùrnè má Ó kèpiyà wó.”

Back translation from the vernacular into (Nigerian) English

“In exactly this He created out, God, persons as (s)he resembled him and as (s)he imaged him. As male and female He created-out them.”

Comments: It is important to envision the sense in which humans conveys the *imago Dei*, as depicted in the distinction between *şelem* and *demuth* -- which in the Ogban version will be “*enyege*” and “*oyiyi*” -- the one depicting intelligence, will and emotions, and the other depicting excellence, beauty and majesty. It is likely that the priestly writer assigned different meanings to *şelem* and *demuth* respectively as perhaps examples of the spiritual and physical resemblance of humans to God, or reason and freewill on the one hand and ethical perfection on the other (cf. Eichrodt 1972:129). It is interesting that the priestly writer avoided the use of the crucial word “*şelem*” as an adequate description of the picture of humans that he has in mind. Instead, he uses an expression to define it more closely such as *besalmenu* as both limited and weakened by the addition of *kidmutenu* translated from the root *dmh* it signifies “similarity” or “likeness”.

Added to *şelem* as an explanatory qualification its only possible purpose is to exclude the idea of humans being actual gods, but rather reflections of God, and to limit the concept to one of similarity (Cassuto 1978:58; Vawter 1997:53-58; Eichrodt 1972:122). It was prophet Ezekiel’s¹⁶⁰ employment of the term *demuth* that is “something resembling” in Ezekiel 1: 28 that further clarifies the intent of the priestly narrator’s employment of *şelem*. Nowhere is the term intended to mean a mere copy of God’s outward form, but it could in fact indicate some spiritual correspondence between God and man.

This fact is borne out by the way the priestly writer employs the term *demuth* “image” in Genesis 5:1 in alluding to the creation of humans (Eichrodt 1972:123,127). As Eichrodt (1972:129) has pointed out the image of God could also be identical with the “gift of psychic powers, or of reason, or of the sense of the eternal, the good and the true, or of intelligence and immortality” with which humans are imbued (Youngblood 1999:30). This fact is borne out by subsequent uses of *şelem* and *demuth* in Scripture in which juxtaposition occurs in Genesis 1:26-28 and its synonyms in the rest of the canon.¹⁶¹

In its postcolonial interpretation, the one who carries the “*enyege*” of another could in fact be mistaken for that one at least as of the same kind, though not to the same degree. Similarly, the one who is shaped in the “*oyiyi*” of another could in fact be adored like the one whose form and shape he takes also in kind but never in degree. It is regrettable to

¹⁶⁰ For the way Prophet Ezekiel employs this term *demuth* in for instance Ezekiel 1:28 see the footnote number 133 above.

¹⁶¹ The “*imago Dei*” human identity is a well articulated one in the Old and New Testament (Gen.5: 1; 9:6; 1 Cor.11: 7; Col.3: 10; Js.3: 9). See also Youngblood (1999:23 – 30).

note that in Ogba, humans are envisaged as being more of the “*enyege*” and “*oyiyi*” of the creatures, rather than of the Creator. This mistaken identity of humans in Ogba depicts a repugnant feature of most primitive religious beliefs, and needs to be addressed using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics of the Bible message (Ahiamadu 2005:85).

Nevertheless, an Ogba proverb says: *Oherinie wo nnwa ohnurnu ma didia wo herinia ma nnea*, literally: “If a child is not accepted because it looks like its father, it is accepted because it looks like its mother”. The belief in the close affinity or relationship between the pro-creator and the pro-creation is deeply imbedded in the traditional beliefs of the people. In other words, the identity of the parent as that of the Creator is firmly stamped on their offspring as that of the creation. The message that God by making humans in His own image and likeness stamped His identity permanently on them resonates with the Ogba worldview, now elevated by a Judeo-Christian creation narrative. Humans therefore share in the Divine regency and have correctly been described as vice-regents of God.

In Westermann’s (1984:148-149) view, “no distinction between the natural and the supernatural” is being underscored by the words “image” and “likeness”. However, in the Ogban understanding, some difference does exist: “*oyiyi*” will refer more to external correspondences between God and man, namely physical gaits and physical abilities, whereas “*enyege*” will have more to do with spiritual features such as moral and mental influence and capabilities. In both ways humans are capable of exercising power over the lower creatures but they do this either as partners with the creatures, or as God’s vice-regents on earth. It is again a bi-focal or dual responsibility. Human exercise of authority over the lower and insentient creatures is either in partnership with nature, or as representatives of God, but never independently. Viewed from both angles it is on humans that the onus of proof lies with respect to a sense of responsibility and accountability in such exercise of rule. Humans are not to see themselves as absolute monarchs on earth, but as trustees or stewards acting on behalf of a sovereign God who is also the supreme Creator (Birch 1991:89).

This image of God is further affirmed in the prohibition of fixed images by God in the Decalogue in favor of human image. Such a prohibition is not intended to drive a wedge between humans and the rest of nature, because of an ongoing human–nature partnership on the one hand, and God - human relationship on the other. Instead, it is intended to foster a position of human priority to which is attached a responsible care for nature in ways in which the *imago Dei* deeply embedded in the human psyche is reflected.

Generally, humans are the only part of creation which discloses to us something about the reality, the beauty, the power, and the richness of God. There is only one way in which God is imaged in the world and only one: humanness.

Genesis 1: 28
Masoretic (Biblical Hebrew) translation



Literal (New International Version in English) translation

“And God blessed them and said, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Functional equivalence translation into Ogba

“Hné o mè pò, Chiokike, bù ílée wó góní ùwòmá, lé wó kwúní wá, Chiokike, ó mí wò nnè híapìyá wò ùhíamádù bà júpìyá ósá ùwà, gbáchnìkámáa wò. Óchìkòbá wò áznù má ò hnà wò ùhìà yá òzhnìmìnì, yà nnùnù má ó hnà wò àwhé yá élú-ígwé, yà ánúmanù má ò hnà wò ùhìà dì ígábáchnì y’élú-àlì.”

Back translation from the vernacular into (Nigerian) English

“Then he God invoked blessing on them that they (should) yield fruit, and multiply into many persons as to fill all earth, to walk round and over it. As to oversee the fish as many as are in seas, and birds as many as are in sky, and beasts as many as are moving on the earth.”

Comments: By this Divine utterance of blessing in Genesis 1: 28 God is said to mean, procreation in general. However, a postcolonial critical re-reading of this text suggests a duality of meaning as well. Mankind is to reproduce God’s character by virtue of his being the image “*enyege*” of God as well as procreate himself in socialising with the opposite

sex, by virtue of which they are made male and female “*okno ya nnwurne*” (cf. Sarna 1989:13). Furthermore, man is to be in relationship with God in living out the divine blessings in order to rule and control nature and other created things in a partnership that is both responsible and accountable. As God’s conversation partners both in reproducing God’s character and in procreating themselves, humans are elevated to a realm in which they share in God’s sovereignty but live responsibly before Him (Preus 1995:114-140). The importance of human reproduction of the divine character and procreation of physical offspring, in fulfilling the dual mandate, which God has commanded, as part of a creation ordinance and blessing, cannot therefore be over-emphasised (Clements 1992:13; Birch 2001:303ff).

Of course the blessings are bestowed on them at the time of creation, and seem to be primarily one of increasingly imaging the Deity and of fertility at the same time. In other words, there is an underlying increase in expressing the divine character that runs *in tandem* with procreative functions. The latter once again is important because dominion can only be exercised over the living creatures and over nature generally to the extent that humans occupy the earth physically in a manner that truly reflected the divine image and likeness (Cassuto 1978:58-59).

At best, dominion could be equated with a meaning such as the building of settlement and the practice of agriculture. This is borne out by the fact that “subdue the land” in Genesis 1 is a semantic parallel to “plant and keep the land” in Genesis 2: 5, 15. (Hamilton 1990:139-140). The text not only confers the “power of attorney” on humans, but also does so with the implication for responsibility and accountability as the experience of Israel has shown. Having been granted the land of Canaan as a gift from *Yahweh*, it was Israel’s responsibility to utilise its resources in a humane, sustainable, and accountable manner, like good and faithful stewards would.

This responsibility further underscores the distinctiveness of humans over the rest of creation. In contrast, the fish for instance are blessed with physical fertility, but not in the same way in which humans received a two-fold blessing comprising both spiritual elevation and physical fecundity. In those two blessings is depicted the roles assigned to humans, namely to reproduce God’s character as well as procreate their kind through child birth on the one hand, and on the other hand to exercise dominion and subdue the earth not in the sense of absolute use but absolute care and preservation (Hamilton 1990:139). There is a sense of respect for nature, which pervades our text and is underscored by the

fact that like the Ogba proverb puts it: *nnwa ayie didi a yi nne o bo yi po enye?* “a child not like his father or not like his mother will be like who?” Humans are to tend the earth in the same way God tends, but never destroying it (cf. Gen.1: 28). Otherwise, a misplaced emphasis on human dominion over the natural world and encouragement of the human race to exploit its resources for its own selfish ends would result in humans losing their dominion, while at the same time ruining their own estate (Brueggemann 2002:1-2).

It is therefore evident that the creation account is explicit on the point that humans were to be responsible for the care and preservation of the terrestrial world (Gen.1: 28; 2:15, 20). It is a dual responsibility disguised in a language of “subjugation” of the created order. However, this responsibility or mandate was to be implemented through active moral reproduction, intelligent procreation and responsible conservation. This seems to be the most objective and critical interpretation even when texts like Genesis 9:1 is brought into the picture: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth”!

We can presume as part of a concluding remark that prior to the fall, man was a theomorphic being in the sense that he had an untrammelled ability and capacity to relate to and with God in both physical, mental and spiritual ways (cf. Ez.1:26; Mic.1:3; Is. 63:1ff; Ps 24:9). At that point the difference between Elohim and Adama was one of degree not of kind. The *kabod* which humans embodied then was infinitesimal compared to the fiery, intensely radiant light, which is the nature of *Yahweh*. Yet they were to be lord of, to cover and to overspread the earth. Humans should uphold and indeed enforce God’s sovereignty as lord of the earthly creation. The ultimate meaning of the *imago Dei* is for humans to serve as a visible sign of God’s presence in a relationship among His creatures and in which they mirror God in the way they share in partnership with nature!

5.6 Conclusion

A clarification of the syntactical and semantic link between the *imago Dei* and dominion or rule in Genesis 1:26 has been attempted so as to show that, contrary to popular colonial interpretations, the text places the earth under man’s rule, but not in a manner uncritical of perspectives that follows the exploitation of the creation for narrow human purposes (Birch 1991:89).

The present global ecological crisis and particularly issues of stewardship, land ownership and use in Nigeria in general and the Niger Delta in particular motivates a close re-reading

of Genesis 1:26-28, in order to provide a fresh understanding of what stewardship entails in consonance with a responsible land ownership and land use. Land is generally understood – whether of Canaan or of the nations – to be a gift from *Yahweh*. However, it is Israel's responsibility and that of the nations to utilize its resources in a humane, sustainable, and accountable manner, like good and faithful stewards would (Brueggemann 2002:90-91).

The need to enhance clean air, green environment, freedom of persons and a sustainable development particularly in the Niger Delta calls for a critical hermeneutics capable of fostering this understanding (Hamilton 1990:13). Moreover, we have attempted to use such a critical hermeneutics to reduce our pericope into the heart language of Ogba. This is to further educe its relevance in providing Ogba in particular, with an authentic perspective to stewardship, land ownership and use which resonates with Biblical standards. Above all, only in so doing can the land tenure practices in Nigeria be transformed to resonate with a responsible and accountable land ownership and use according to general Old Testament theology.

In the next chapter we shall attempt to bring all these discussions so far – in chapter four and five, as well as other issues raised in the second and third chapter – to bear on a re-definition of stewardship.

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS A RE-DEFINITION OF STEWARDSHIP

6.1 Introduction

As part of the discussion in the first chapter, I outlined the need for a theological-ethical response to land ownership and use in order to address the ongoing ecological destruction in the Niger Delta (Evuleocha 2005:328ff; Ahiamadu 2003:7-11). Such a theological-ethical response was demonstrated in the various scholarly views which were critically examined in the second chapter. I am often engaging with such views in areas where they are explicit or overt in addressing the need for a stewardship of land that is responsible and accountable (Vallet 2001:1-3). Moreover, I have critically examined ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament concepts of stewardship, land ownership and use, and did the same with the African views. I did this, keeping in mind the responsibility to transcend existing scholarship by underscoring those trends of scholarly discussion which demand the use of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics. With this I was able to attempt a postcolonial critical close-reading of a basic Old Testament creation narrative which speaks of stewardship such as Genesis 1:26-28, using this as the departure text in such a way as to demonstrate not only my accountability to those likely to be impacted by the close-reading, but also my responsibility to make my study multi-dimensional (Patte 1995:20).

Making my study multi-dimensional is incidental to a postcolonial critical close-reading and a functional equivalence translation in which Genesis 1:26-28 is exegeted and rendered into the Ogbá language with a back translation that speaks back to the English reader what has been translated into Ogbá. Its multidimensional component also embraced the empirical research carried out among the Ogbá and Ekpeye during which the underlying world view of gerontocracy and the 'giraffe principle' governing the practice of stewardship with respect to land ownership and use, was uncovered. It is indeed imperative for the existing perceptions of stewardship, particularly in respect of land ownership and use in Nigeria's political, economic, social and cultural life, to provide us with verifiable indices for attempting a re-definition of stewardship. Again, such a multi-dimensional study gives us a new appreciation of our ethical responsibility in ensuring that the Biblical text is read

critically in line with our preferred postcolonial hermeneutical approach, but also with a sense of accountability towards those who ultimately would be impacted by the outcome of such a critical close-reading. This relationship between ethical accountability and critical responsibility has been underscored by Patte (1995:8) in the fact that “we need to envision critical exegetical practices from a radically different perspective” in which “an ethically responsible practice of critical exegesis must be multi-dimensional” in order to be legitimate (Patte 1995:9). Our responsibility to maintain a multi-dimensional profile has led us into a postcolonial critical reading of Genesis 1:26-28 and the use of a functional equivalence translation of the Biblical text into Ogba language, along with a back-translation into English in order to discharge this onerous duty of being accountable to the people for whom the translation is made.

In this sixth chapter my main goal therefore is to re-define stewardship based on the existing perceptions people have of what exactly constitutes a responsible and accountable land ownership and use, especially in respect of oil exploration, exploitation and exportation on the one hand. On the other hand, such a re-definition is to derive its substance from the facts which emerge from the postcolonial close-reading and functional equivalence translation of Genesis 1:26-28 mediated by the various scholarly views on the concepts of *imago Dei*, “be fruitful and multiply, subdue the earth and exercise dominion over the animals” that is extant in such scholarly views. As a corollary to such a multi-dimensional study yielding a re-definition, I envisage the value of using both the existing perceptions and the emerging facts to critically underscore my responsibility in making my methodology verifiable and scientific, while not ignoring the need to transcend existing views and to launch my study on a new pedestal of an Old Testament science that is transformative and contextually applicable. Finally, it is imperative in doing this to employ our close-reading and functional equivalence translation in a critical assessment of the impediments to a responsible and accountable stewardship of land in the political, economic, social and cultural conglomerate known as Nigeria and suggest how such impediments can be removed. What are the criteria for a re-definition and can such re-definition justify the use of such criteria?

6.2 Criteria for a re-definition

The answer to these questions leads me to a consideration of some of the crucial criteria for a re-definition of stewardship, particularly the criteria of responsibility and

accountability. Both criteria entail a condition necessary for me to be accountable to the primary target audience to whom this study relates, namely Ogba and Ekpeye, but also responsible for the steps taken that leads to the re-definition of stewardship that resonates with existing perceptions derived from both culture and academy, that is to say, my empirical research and the various scholarly views. Such an engagement is aptly summarised in the words of Gerald West¹⁶²:

“Because the Bible matters to current contexts, socially engaged Biblical scholars owe it to their contexts of accountability to bring their concerns to the Biblical text. Because socially engaged scholars are Biblical scholars, their responsibility to their discipline requires that they diligently work with the resources it offers” (West 2007:11).

Thus the socially engaged Biblical scholar performs the kind of a double-edged function discussed here, which in my own case connotes two parallel facts. It underscores the relative uniformity observable in the perceptions of stewardship rights and obligations among the people encountered during my empirical research, which runs parallel to a conceptual diversity in existing scholarly perceptions of stewardship as well. While underscoring the fact that we all bring our own presuppositions to the reading of the Biblical text, I consider myself responsible in ensuring that this study is descriptive and not prescriptive, particularly in the kind of postcolonial critical exegesis adopted. I also consider myself accountable to the Nigerian context in which I was raised and from which the empirical data contributing to a re-definition of stewardship has been derived. Moreover, my accountability is further transcended by the impact which this study is likely to make on their general understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use, especially if it calls their previous perceptions into question. Using therefore those two criteria – accountability in making this study relevant to my primary target audience; and responsibility for a multi-dimensional study in adopting a postcolonial critical exegesis which uses a functional equivalence translation to make the study relevant to the Nigerian context, I shall venture with all humility to a re-definition that does justice to both the culture and academy. In doing so I begin with the following assumptions:

Firstly, my exegesis of Genesis 1:26-28 cannot be separated from my postcolonial Nigerian background, even though my interpretation seeks to critique such a background by using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics in a close-reading of the text and by

¹⁶² His concept of accountability and responsibility might seem rudimentary at this stage of articulation, but they do represent widely held views in the academia at the moment. See West (2007:1-11).

translating the same, using a functional equivalence approach which is accurate, clear and natural.

Secondly, the post-colonial experience of participants in both the focus groups and interviews held during our empirical research will undoubtedly contribute in shaping the existing perceptions of stewardship, land ownership and use.

Thirdly, the facts which emerge from the various scholarly views of both Old Testament in general and Genesis 1:26-28 in particular does not give us all the needed interpretive insights and must of necessity be supplemented by my own contributions through a proper exegesis using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics in order to provide a redefinition of stewardship.

With these assumptions at the back of my mind, let me explain how accountable this study ought to be with respect to the primary target audience on the one hand, and how responsible we can be seen to have been in our use of a postcolonial critical exegesis along with its functional equivalence translation that followed in its trail.

6.2.1 The criterium of accountability

Interestingly, Patte (1995:65) raised the issue as to how to reconcile our methodological options with a sense of ethical accountability towards our primary audience. One way in which this has been done in this study is through a critical use of a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary approach in the critical exegesis of Genesis 1:26-28 (Patte 1995:65). Whether or not every use of a multi-dimensional approach needs necessarily to be androcritical as Patte urges is a matter for debate (Patte 1995:66). Instead, David Fisher (1986:137-46) encourages exegetes to adopt a gender neutral stance in fulfilling our calling as accomplished exegetes through our being able to master the text, on the basis of which our authority as teachers consist. A postcolonial critical hermeneutics is essentially liberative and dialogical as much as it is inter-textual and inter-contextual.

In my opinion, Patte's androcritical multi-dimensional exegesis as well as Burnett's post-structuralist exegesis does not and need not pose a threat to a postcolonial critical exegesis even with the minor differences which do exist between them. On the one hand, Patte and Burnett differ in that the latter emphasises the "un-decidability" of the text, while the former emphasises the "multi-decidability" of the text. My own difference with Patte is

in the fact that I am explicitly multi-dimensional in the structure of my study and implicitly postcolonial in my approach to critical exegesis, particularly with a priestly text such as Genesis 1:26-28. Interestingly, it is the multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary angle that makes the present study accountable at the level of empirical evidences as well as of hermeneutical appropriation of the Biblical text.

After all, the purpose of a multi-dimensional practice of pedagogy and exegesis is accountability to those impacted by our work (Patte 1995:49). On the level of empirical evidences this study is accountable for the various views gleaned through the focus group discussions and interviews, whereas on the level of hermeneutical appropriation of the Biblical text, the study benefits from insights gained from African culture of communal solidarity and good neighborliness which in many ways resonate with the Biblical imperatives of Israel.

It is an exegetical responsibility to elucidate the Biblical text using a postcolonial hermeneutics and to translate same in a functional equivalence manner. It is also an accountability that warrants the use of pedagogy in bringing together the various perceptions of stewardship, land ownership and use within our empirical research context. Moreover, this has to be done in such a way that helps us understand for instance the “giraffe principle” better as the underlying value of the people’s self-understanding of what in reality should be considered a stewardship that resonates with the people’s cultural values. I now critically examine our accountability in an empirical research context.

6.2.1.1. Accountability towards the government

It is a common ancient Near Eastern belief that royal figures were “sons” adopted by the gods to function as vice-regents and intermediaries between the deity and society. Egyptian society recognised Pharaoh as divine, who was *Horus* in life and *Osiris* in death. Thus some Egyptian royal *Stelae* describe the king as the image of God. Rulers were responsible for the equilibrium between nature and society which were dependent upon the administration of the king’s rule. In a similar way, ancient Israelite sages used royal imagery to describe the king as the appointed “son” of *Yahweh* who ruled in his name (2 Sam.7:13-16; Ps.2, 72, 89).

In my critical examination of scholarly views especially with respect to the ancient Near East and the Old Testament I discovered the great attachment which ancient people had

towards the land and its human, animal and natural resources with the monarch serving as the chief custodian of land. The importance of ascribing land ownership to the “king” as steward was in recognition of their pre-eminent role as the image of God who ultimately owns and disposes all land. In the Old Testament it is a basic structure of society that all land ownership and use revolves around the *paterfamilias* who as head of the *bet ab* serves as the custodian or steward of land belonging to the land owning unit. In that case the actual rule and dominion would be exercised by those who conform as closely as possible to the Divine standard of justice and righteousness (Brueggemann 2002:88). Such a mutual obligation to accountability is exhibited in the case of Ahab the king and Naboth the citizen (1 Kgs.21:1ff) both held accountable for the way the family patrimony is to be disposed, the one wrong and the other right, leading to alienation from the inheritance by both (Brueggemann 2002:88).

Genesis 1:26-28 is clear on the point that those to whom we are accountable should by all means exercise stewardship in a humane, responsible and sustainable manner such that the purpose of the *imago Dei* is not only achieved but also promoted. Thus our interpretation of the *imago Dei* as well as of “rule” and “dominion” necessarily leaves us in a state of mutual accountability in which the Nigerian polity is accountable to the governors and the governors to the Nigerian polity. Moreover, it is almost as if I am engaged in the kind of advocacy interpretation which Patte (1995:69) mentions as the link between critical exegesis and hermeneutics because of the common context of post-colonial experience. Consequently, the translation of Genesis 1:26-28 provides an interpretation of stewardship, land ownership and use which is to be understood not only in the light of the Nigerian context, but also in the light of the meaning which originally belonged to the context of the Priestly redactor in an attempt, perhaps to respond to a multi-religious and polytheistic culture of the post-exilic era of the Persian empire.

As critical exegetes and pedagogists that is accountable to the government, it is important to underscore how a post-colonial erosion of gerontocratic land tenure system in Nigeria, and particularly in the Niger Delta impacts negatively on stewardship, land ownership and use. Politically, the Nigerian context denies the validity of the State as an instrument of maintaining justice and righteousness in the areas of land ownership and use with the “Land Use Decree” which was put in place in 1978. It has by that singular act undermined the principle of equal rights of all Nigerian citizens, while encouraging the marginalisation of land owners in the oil bearing Niger Delta. It presents a distorted picture of the *imago*

Dei as a representation of God in the government, and has instead depicted the rule of the king as “cruel, barbaric and oppressive” as events in the Niger Delta is today proving.

Ordinarily, every Nigerian is born with an inalienable right to land belonging to his ancestors or kindred (Yakubu 1985:263). As part of a post-colonial legacy this decree undermines a special or natural right and moves it into a civil right sector with the implication that a primary right to property is being made secondary and subject to civil legislation with obvious human rights implications (Blum 1998:77). If anything, unilateral laws especially in respect of land in post-colonial Nigeria, have often been used to a great advantage by corporate bodies and multi-national companies to the detriment of the elders and chiefs who are thereby marginalised by the state on such crucial and strategic issues as stewardship, land ownership and use.

Our accountability to government in its unilateral control of all laws relating to land ownership and use has been enhanced by the singular fact that not only the government, but also the elders and chiefs are custodians of land in their respective territories and domain, although in practice the “Land Use Decree” of 1978 has tended to incapacitate the gerontocrats from the exercise of their rights. In principle land ownership and use has by this decree been moved from the natural to the civil rights domain, and stewardship is now a matter of civil instead of the usual communal gerontocracy. Generally, the consensus of opinion is that government should enact laws that are in consonance with the traditions and customs of land owners and users.

It has generated a crisis over resource control claims in the Niger Delta which has created a “restive” civil society in which oil bearing communities are engaging the Federal police and army in an itinerant struggle for economic and social liberty – a struggle which is tagged as “militancy” in those parts of Nigeria. The situation betrays the Federal government’s lack of accountability in governance and has weakened the pre-existing communal authority, while eroding the principle of equity and justice usually associated with gerontocracies (Obi 2006:65).

It is therefore with a sense of accountability that we can bemoan the disintegration of the gerontocratic structure of the Nigerian nation with the scraping of the “house of chiefs” in both Federal and State parliamentary levels. What are the implications of the absence of gerontocrats in the day-to-day governance of Nigeria? The post-colonial Presidential constitution of 1979 which marked the beginning of the second Republic in Nigeria

scrapped the house of “chiefs / elders” in the Federal and State Parliaments, and replaced them with a Western type “Senate” whose composition is similar to the house of representatives – consisting mainly of educated and young elites (Ahiamadu 1982:67; Oyediran 1979:43). The implication is that the elders have no formal forum in which to deliberate on sensitive issues such as stewardship of land as it is being practiced in post-colonial Nigeria.

It paved the way for the erosion of gerontocracy along with the principles of justice and equity which it represented. The result is one in which an inalienable right to stewardship, land ownership, and land use by the senior members of the community have gradually being transformed into a civil right exercised more or less at the discretion of governors, their appointees who are mostly “civil” servants not rooted in the customs and norms of the local cultures.

6.2.1.2 Accountability towards industry¹⁶³

Evidences from the ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament cosmogonies are equally unsupportive of any abuse of human rights. From the point of view of ancient Near Eastern mythologies the gods went to war in order to redress such injustices and inequities. It meant that one of them, *Tiamat*, might get slain so that out of its remains a new creation can be put in place for the purpose of serving in the menial jobs which the gods considered below their dignity. Old Testament cosmogony presents a priestly narrative in which the words “rule and dominion” certainly yearns for a more humane interpretation in Genesis 1:26-28 (Sarna 1989:12-13). This brings two important points to mind with respect to the creation of humans and animals. Firstly, the human race is not inherently sovereign,

¹⁶³ The Oil Industry in Nigeria apparently has attracted many multi-national oil companies into its operation like Shell Petroleum Development Company Ltd (1937); Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited (1955); Chevron Nigeria Limited (1961); Texaco Overseas Nig. Petroleum Co. Unltd (1961); Elf (now Total) Petroleum Nigeria Limited (1962); Philip (1964); Pan Ocean Oil Corporation (1972) Bought Over Ashland Oil Nigeria Limited (1973); Agip Energy & Natural Resources (1979); Statoil / BP Alliance (1992); Esso Exploration & Production Nig. Ltd. (1992); Texaco Outer Shelf Nigeria Limited (1992); Shell Nig. Exploration & Production Co. (1992); Total (Nig.) Exploration & Production Co. Ltd. (1992); Amoco Corporation (1992); Chevron Exploration & Production Co. (1992); Conoco (1992); and Abacan (1992) and more including Chinese firms that have come in the wake of a new democratic dispensation since 1999. It is impossible to cover all of them. Therefore occasional references would be made to one of the major operators, namely Total, whose operations in Ogba and Ekpeye land in the last 45 years has positively, perhaps more negatively impacted on the general understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use within these and neighbouring ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta. For details see Evuleocha (2005:329).

but enjoys its dominion solely by the grace of God. Secondly, the priestly narrative reflects a royal ideology and the model of kingship depicted in the text is Israelite. According to ancient Near Eastern customs reflected even in the Old Testament, the monarch does not possess unrestrained power and authority. The limits of his monarchical rule has been carefully defined and circumscribed by divine law, so that kingship is to be exercised with responsibility and is subject to accountability.

Based on this premise, the words “subdue” and “dominion” in Genesis 1:28 cannot and need not in my opinion include the licence to exploit nature banefully as is currently in vogue in most parts of the world, and with respect to the exploration for, and the exploitation and exportation of crude oil and solid minerals in Africa, particularly in the Niger Delta (Ukpong 2004:83-88). Apparently, there is the Hebrew love for life and the sacredness of all life which assumed a linkage between human righteousness and the welfare of the earth. In the Agrarian economy of ancient Israel, this was best expressed in the care for its livestock: “A righteous human cares for the needs of his or her animal” (Pr. 12:10a; 27:23; Dt. 25:4). Moreover, the sin motif is not lacking in this orthodox presentation of Biblical truth. As so aptly depicted by Mathews (1996b:175):

“Sin impacts on the prosperity of the earth and its inhabitants. Genesis shows how human sin elicits God’s curse upon the land (Gen.3:17), and the latter wickedness of human society results in the destruction of the whole earth by flood, specifically these three zoological groups that have been placed under human care (Gen.7:21-23). Human life then bears this responsibility under God and is held accountable for the world God has created for humanity to govern, for “the earth he has given to humans” (Ps.115:16b).

As my empirical research has demonstrated, the *modus operandi* of multi-national oil companies such as Total in Ogba and Ekpeye leaves an accountability issue unaddressed. I have used empirical research to depict this and have kept to the ethical demand for accountability towards the company operating in Ogba and Ekpeye, namely Total, in the way we interpret and apply the results of our empirical research. For instance, several participants in the focus groups pointed at the decreasing land share by individual families as due to the *latifundia* being practiced by Total, including demographic pressure of migrant oil workers in the area. The more senior sections of both the male and female focus groups were very vehement on this point with the community leaders lamenting what they felt were like a “death sentence” imposed on their families by Total and other multi-national companies who have placed “profit above people” in their operations in the area. Not only have they polluted the environment – land, air and sea but also have tampered with the ecological integrity of the area and negatively impacted on biodiversity.

Our accountability to Total results from my empirical research of which participants does not paint the company's industrial operations in too rosy a picture, and even more by giving a voice to the marginalised sections of the community who undoubtedly are disappointed that Total's sense of corporate accountability to the inhabitants of the oil bearing communities, as well as to the government also leaves much to be desired.

Several multi-national companies including Shell and Total are at present confronting a huge wave of "kidnappings" of their expatriate staff who are contributing to the deprivations and impoverishments of a "peaceful and unsuspecting inhabitants"¹⁶⁴. In being accountable to Total – one of the major stakeholders in the business of oil exploration, exploitation, and exportation – I have pointed out that land used in an unaccountable manner by Total even at the bequest of the Federal Government of Nigeria, as has been underscored both in the empirical research, the views from the ancient Near East and in the Old Testament concept of *şedeqah*, not only erodes the ecological structure of the area, but also undermines the fruitfulness of the land along with its economic and material implications.

As has been pointed out in the second chapter, it leaves the people completely rootless and vulnerable in their quest for meaningful and sustainable living conditions because of an unaccountable deployment of natural resources derived from their area. The fear is that future generations might have no access to the natural resources obtainable in the area. These of course are the natural resources which otherwise could have promoted a rewarding and sustainable living.

Evidently, the multi-national companies in Nigeria display very remarkable interest in "profits" rather than in the "peoples" inhabiting their host communities. Moreover, their self-centred operations stifle the social and economic developments of these same communities. It shows also that some of them go to the extreme of violating the human and cultural rights of vocal groups, to the point of instigating security forces into the elimination of militants and activists (Manby 1999:294)¹⁶⁵.

¹⁶⁴ See the newspaper report of National Political Reform Conference held in Abuja, Nigeria in March - June 2005 and to which eligible elites and opinion leaders from all over Nigeria were participants, *Thisday*, June 9 and 14, 2005.

¹⁶⁵ The incidence of civil unrest and environmental activism during which the Ogoni lost 14 prominent sons, 9 of them hanged on the orders of a military dictator, Sani Abacha in November 1995 is still fresh in the memory of environmental activists. It is also common knowledge that it was

Since the 1950s, but more precisely from the 1970s onward, the oil extractive business endeavours of multi-national companies like Shell, Total, Agip, and Chevron¹⁶⁶ (to mention a few), has been quite remarkable in making a globally significant economic and social impact. Nigeria today is the world's fifth largest producer and exporter of hydrocarbon. She also provides the largest oil market to the United States and other Western industrialised nations. She provides nearly forty-five percent of her "light sweet" oil as sales which supply America's total energy needs (Hattingh 1997:13).

Paradoxically, there are no less than 10 million out of her over 140 million population, inhabiting the oil bearing region of the Niger Delta who are being progressively impoverished as a result of multi-national company operations in the area. Even with the recent adoption of a democratically elected government committed to the promotion of human rights, the situation seems not to have improved (Evuleocha 2005:338; Manby 1999:282). Since then there has been militant reactions from the Niger Delta inhabitants – particularly the unemployed youths and women groups protesting the worsening human, social and economic rights violations in the area¹⁶⁷.

The environmental standards that oil companies such as Shell, Total and Chevron to mention a few, adhere to in Europe and North America is clearly never applied to Nigeria, and has been a cause for alarm among the inhabitants of the Niger Delta. What Nigerians have to put up with, would clearly not be tolerated in Europe or in North America. What is at issue here is that environmental standards recommended in the Rio Declaration 1992 (Principle 11) is not applied by the MOCs in Nigeria as in Europe and North America. As

masterminded by a multi-national company, Shell, solely in order to maintain her grips on the Niger Delta – the treasure base of Nigeria. See Hattingh (1997:33-39); see also Ahiamadu (2003:9-10).

¹⁶⁶ These are all multi-national companies originating from West Europe – Shell is a British/Dutch company, Total is a French company, Agip is an Italian firm, while Chevron is from the United States – by extension of the same West European family. In the Code of Conduct governing the operations of Totalfinaelf for instance, it is stated that Totalfinaelf **strives** to uphold the principle of the UDHR, the key conventions of the ILO, the OECD guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the principles of the United Nations Charter on non interference in the internal affairs of host countries. See Total Code of Conduct 2005 Courbovole, France Corporate Communications website www.total.com p.6. The notion of "**striving**" which is very prominent in Total's and Shell's Code of conduct apparently ignores the fact that the problems which host communities face, have been created as a result of their industrial and mechanical operations, and cannot therefore be attributable to circumstances beyond Company control which is what the notion "strives" seem to suggest. Instead, it is a situation that demands a decisive action on the part of multi-national companies to halt what has constituted a serious health hazard in the areas of their operations.

¹⁶⁷ Evuleocha, S.U. (2005:328 -340).

Hattingh (1997:34) has so aptly described it, “what is like is not treated alike”.¹⁶⁸ The same is true of the problem of gas flaring which is a major source of all the pollution as we shall see later. Looking at their double standards, the MOCs are treating people differently in different parts of the world. Their environmental impact on people in Europe and North America is managed with more circumspection than it is done in the Niger Delta where the people of the Niger Delta, that is Africans are involved. The cynicism with which MOCs treat their host communities speaks for itself (Hattingh 1997:34). The people’s bond with the environment, the land and the landscape is inadvertently shattered and so is human dignity. But why should this bond be shattered or lost? The answer is obvious. The dignity of the land has been compromised through an interplay of economic and social factors through which government have legitimised perpetual land sale which in pre-colonial times was considered a criminal offence.

6.2.1.3 Accountability towards the community (Niger Delta – Ogba and Ekpeye)

The use of land, both for residential and agricultural purposes, is usually inextricably bound with the traditional religion of the people who recognise God and their ancestors as joint owners and users of the land (Ahiamadu 2005:57-58). The result is that an offering has to be made at the end of each year to acknowledge the fact that the living use the land as custodians of past, present and future generations, and that it is a heritage belonging to God and handed over from the ancestors (Yakubu 1985:74-75).

This view is similar to the Old Testament (OT) concept of land as belonging to *Yahweh*, and humans as stewards of the land are merely temporary sojourners. Any change in this basic substructure affects the life of the entire community (McKeown 2003:488), and as such the land holding systems in existence should be taken into account by modern government and economic systems of land management.

The similarity between ancient Israel and other cultures with respect to land tenure systems has been underscored (Boecker 1976:17). In several ways the similarities are even truer of local African land holding practices (Dibeela 2001:394). For instance, it recognises the Deity as primary owner of all land, and the kinship group as the main custodians of land on behalf of past, present and future generations (Ayandele 1966:69;

¹⁶⁸ See Hattingh (1997:33-39) in an insightful ethical and philosophical analysis of the social and economic implications of the environmental degradation perpetrated by MOCs among the Ogonis in particular and the Niger Delta in general.

Yakubu 1985:6-8). Another similarity lies in the observance of land laws intended to preserve the land so as to make it fruitful (Dibeela 2001:395).

In most parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East there is the tendency towards a system of land ownership and use in which three basic ideas emerge.

The first of these is that society, or segments of it, is the basic controlling group in relation to land. Rights to land are dependent not on individual merits but on social criteria such as ethnic group membership and the fulfilment of social obligations like marriage and maintaining a family. The latter is important as it involves women in the inheritance process (Nwabueze 1972:170-71). Secondly, land held communally cannot be sold or given away by individuals – especially to those outside the kinship unit or group (Ayandele 1966:69). Thirdly, a non-monetary periodic redistribution occurs through the changes in membership due to births, deaths or other factors, such as adoption or temporary residency (Dybdahl 1981:36).

In Nigeria oil minerals exploration, exploitation and exportation are placed squarely at the disposal of unscrupulous multi-national companies. Yet by logic of history the expectation of host communities is that multi-national companies will bring social and economic development closer to the grass roots in line with the “giraffe principle”. Quite to the contrary, Frynas (2005:581-598) has shown that the actual and potential contribution of multi-national companies to development faces both structural and moral *cum* ethical constraints depending on whose perspective is taken. From the perspective of multi-national companies (Total, for example) the benefit of social projects embarked upon help to bridge the social gap between the three major stakeholders¹⁶⁹ – government, company and community – while presenting a socially responsible front. On the other hand, the perspective of the host communities often sees a crucial flaw in the attempt by multi-national companies to use social initiatives as a competitive weapon because it fosters development priorities designed in partnership with specific government officials without necessarily being of value to those for whose benefits the Corporate Social Responsibility

¹⁶⁹ There are other stakeholders not directly mentioned but which are subsumed in the three major ones which include: shareholders and other investors; consumers; political parties; human employees of multinational oil companies; the animal kingdom and nature itself all of which sustain the industry. We have chosen to depict all of these in three main grouping – community, company and state – for the sake of brevity and clarity. See Ballard et al (2003:289).

initiatives were ostensibly undertaken.¹⁷⁰ Accountability from a Corporate perspective here suffers an abuse (Manby 1999:288).

The community protests which this has generated in the recent past often has led to a halt of oil operations and called for redress. Apparently, multi-national companies use Corporate Social Responsibility initiative to put together some so called development projects in such areas as a way of buying local communities' agreement to allowing the firm to continue its commercial operations. This leads to the point raised in Frynas (2005:584-85) and Manby (1999:288) papers. These have pointed at the Nigerian experience as seemingly supporting the notion that multi-national companies do not often want to assume responsibility, and are by virtue of that unaccountable for the damages that their operations impose on the economy of their host communities. This is true to the extent that the negative impact of oil and gas investments creates in the ecology and environment of Nigeria by far outweighs the social and economic benefits derived from oil by the host communities (Evuleocha 2003:331-32). This is not to mention the decline that is suffered by the non-oil-producing sectors of the economy (Ballard *et al* 2003:295).

There was a time in the Niger Delta when land sale was considered a criminal act. Due to political and economic structures of both the State and multi-national oil companies respectively, an undue pressure has weakened the indigenous values, made resistance difficult, and rather legitimised perpetual land sale. In both Divine and natural law such pressures are selfish and ill-motivated. Western multi-national oil companies have always gratified their desire to obtain freehold right to land occupied by their predecessors without regard for the contractual obligations entered into by their forebears. They have also – in the wake of the oil boom in Nigeria – ventured into native lands that provided habitat for both humans and other living creatures. Native lands were a very dependable resource for the cultivation of agricultural goods and services. The current practice is to negotiate for land acquisition in the Niger Delta from far-away, Abuja – the federal capital, and armed with such so called “Certificates of occupancy” corporate bodies and multi-national oil companies inadvertently descend on the people's land so leased by government officials, without the knowledge and consent of these immediate land owners. This has been the worst form of injustice and disregard for human rights, as the practice of granting of oil mining leases (OML) has proved (Ballard *et al* 2003:299).

¹⁷⁰ See Frynas (2005:581-598).

The recent Ogoni uprising provides a vivid scenario of a land owning people who were never consulted and never rewarded for the acquisition of their land by both government and multi-national oil companies (Newell 2005:544). Therefore, restoring human dignity in the Niger Delta and indeed in other parts of Africa through restoring the people's bond with the environment is possible only by restoring the dignity of the land (Hattingh 1997:28; Brueggemann 1977:86).

During my empirical research in Ogba and Ekpeye areas I encountered similar indictments also being extended to various communities in the Niger Delta which are ruled by elders and chiefs who make decisions without consulting with the more educated "elites". This point featured in my empirical research and was identified as one of the reason why valuable land assets have been passed into company hands without following the due processes of law such as the writing of deeds of transfer of land ownership.

I have discovered that the "giraffe principle" in its win-win, compensatory use and good neighbourly applications seem to underlie the existing perceptions of stewardship, land ownership and use among for instance the Ogba and Ekpeye. We are accountable to the community in the way a re-definition of stewardship portrays these aspects of African cultural and religious ethos which in line with the *ma'at* of ancient Egyptian and the *sedeqah* of ancient Israelite societies resonates with the general requirement of justice and righteousness in line with the inherent quality of humans as the *imago Dei*.

6.2.2 The criteria of responsibility

The fact that Genesis 1:1-2:4 and particularly Genesis 1:26-28 is a priestly narrative with a creation motif possibly emanating from the exilic period may be portraying a post-colonial context of some sort. Here creation is treated as a unity, though distinctions are made between human and non-human creatures with an interrelation which has a tripartite component (Brueggemann 2002:11-12). Firstly, creation is treated together without distinctions or differentiations: "All stand before God in the same way, as the single reality of creature *vis-à-vis* Creator" (Gen.9:6-8). Secondly, human creation is treated as superior and non-human as subordinate (Gen.1:25-30; 2:15). In this way human creatures are designated to order, rule and care for the other creatures; creatures are to obey and to be responsive to human creatures. Thirdly, human issues predominate the text to the total exclusion of the rest of creation. In our postcolonial critical hermeneutics this phenomenon is captured by the concept of humans in partnership with God and with creation or nature.

6.2.2.1 Responsibility as humans in partnership with nature

In fact the *pericope* has inter-textual and inter-contextual links such as Psalm 8 and the cosmogonies of ancient Near East respectively which affirm that humans in partnership with nature transcends any previous uncritical reading which portrays a humans-above-nature mindset. It does indeed depict Genesis 1:26-28 as having an old ancient Near Eastern history at the back of it. Apparently, this also has been brought into an inter-contextual dialogue with the contemporary Nigerian problem of stewardship, land ownership and use.

In doing this we have highlighted a text in which is contained God's decisive dealing with his creation (Brueggemann 1995:16), and one in which creation is embodied as a creaturely unity (Genesis 1:31; 8:22) in both theological and ethical ways. Moreover, as we have pointed out in the second chapter, creation theologians such as David Clines (*The Theme of Pentateuch*, 1978, p.61-79), Claus Westermann (*The Promise of the Fathers*, 1964, p.47-58), Gerhard von Rad (*Genesis*, 1972, p.152f), and Joseph Blenkinsopp (*The Pentateuch*, 1971, p.46ff) have each underscored the tension imbedded in creation in the "troubled relation of creator / creation and God's enduring resolve to have creation on its terms". Others like Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics* III / 2, 1960, p.28-36) have depicted a relational understanding both of the *imago Dei* and of a partnership of humans with God and with one another in the care and nurture of creation – a partnership which is captured by our postcolonial indices of transcendence and holism (cf. Brueggemann 2002:28-36).

At present stewardship has been grossly misunderstood with respect to creation resulting from a humans-above-nature rather than a humans-in-partnership-with-nature mindset. This have had an unsavoury consequence for the oil bearing communities of the Niger Delta, but has also created an environment hazardous to human health and survival. It is interesting to note that only to the extent that multi-national companies are held responsible for the negative or positive impact that their industrial and mechanical operations are having on their host communities by those who truly seek to be the true *imago Dei*, can such multi-national companies consider themselves accountable for the impacts – positive or negative, which they create in host communities (cf. Geisler 1989:309). The experience of Nigeria shows that such a sense of responsibility level is lacking both in the implementation of environmental laws, and in the respect of ecological

integrity of host communities (Evuleocha 2003:331). Without any external monitoring agencies it is easy for multi-national companies to pass the buck, filter away their profits and leave the inhabitants of the areas impoverished (Blowfield 2005:518-519).

It is in a similar way that a postcolonial critical exegesis theologically affirms the creation or cultural mandate in our pericope as not necessarily implying a human rule over creation in an absolute sense, but rule exercised in a rational, humane and accountable manner. Human destiny is to face the world and to live with other creatures some of which are dangerous, but all of which are to be ruled and cared for. The destiny of the human creation is to live in God's world, with God's other creatures on God's terms (Brueggemann 2002:40).

6.2.2.2 Responsibility as users of a critical hermeneutics

In the use of a critical postcolonial hermeneutics the following deductions emerge. Genesis 1:1-2:4 has a Priestly hand behind it. It is a late document but has sources in deep antiquity. In other words the text utilises older materials from perhaps both Mesopotamian and Egyptian cosmologies and creation stories. It could be a sixth century writing addressed to the exiles and served as a refutation of Babylonian theological claims (Brueggemann 2002:24-25). It is a product of an intense desire to find the ground of faith in this God, in view of the contradictions imposed on the exiles by the Babylonian experience which meant a denial of the rule of this God. As Brueggemann so aptly puts it: "Its liturgy cuts underneath the Babylonian experience and grounds the rule of the God of Israel in a more fundamental claim, that of creation" (Brueggemann 2002:25).

A primary responsibility on the part of Biblical scholars is to demonstrate the imperative, if not mandatory nature of a critical hermeneutics that helps us re-define stewardship in a way which resonates with the restorative motif of the Priestly editor. In the present circumstance, the use of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics and a translation of the Biblical text into Ogbá using a functional equivalence translation converge in some way with that resonance as the three points indicated earlier. Beside the Bible being the common tool of both approaches, the context of the receptor-audience in both approaches are post-colonial, and both approaches are governed by the common ethic of fidelity to the Biblical tradition. These points are elaborated in the fifth chapter and need no repetition. Suffice it to say that the facts which emerge out of our back translation of the Ogbá version

of Genesis 1:26-28, indicate that the discharge of this hermeneutical duty has to underscore this common multi-dimensional and post-colonial framework (Boice 1986:155).

We have used a postcolonial critical hermeneutics to point out that, while Genesis does not necessarily presume to be a scientific description of reality, it is a theological affirmation of creation which resonates both with ancient Near Eastern creation stories as well as creation stories extant in various Nigerian communities of today. A close-reading of the same *pericope* has further buttressed the fact that the cultural or creation mandate is primarily intended to facilitate a human imaging of God in both character and life issuing in reproductive cycles of birth and rebirth. A postcolonial critique of Genesis 1:28 provides the much needed critical examination of anthropocentric interpretation of creation (Akao 1993:53; Von Rad 1971:139-141). It has helped us to re-affirm the meaning of for instance the *imago Dei*, especially in the light of the fact that humans are fallen creatures living in a fallen world. Humans are themselves in need of total redemption from the corruption of human nature by the one who truly became *imago Dei* on their behalf, Jesus Christ the Son of God, and whose example of stewardship is more of a caring, nurturing, responsible and accountable one (Hall 1990:42,122-23).

Hitherto, we have pointed out that humans are generally responsible to God who gave dominion initially to them, and secondly human responsibility is towards other people – in the actions which bring us into a relationship with them (cf. Gen. 3:9, 11, 13; 9:6). Thirdly, human responsibility is towards nature and this particularly goes with a moral implication to our treatment of nature – whether we cultivate and advance it or whether we use and destroy it. Fourthly, we have a responsibility towards ourselves, in the sense that we stand with the rest of the created order in a unique position of being made, as the Psalmist puts it “a little lower than the angels” (Ps.8:5) (Boice 1986:155).

6.2.2.3 Responsibility in subverting uncritical readings

Henceforth, our responsibility lies in our ability to critically exegete our *pericope* in a multi-dimensional way which subverts previous uncritical readings because of the “devastating effects” which uncritical interpretations have had in imposing different forms of alienation on the people in the land and environment (Patte 1995:75). We saw in the fourth chapter the psychological effects of a neo-colonial social and economic order which foster the problems of identity, hybridity and mimesis on the inhabitants of the Niger Delta, and the demographic impact which Total’s practice of *latifundia* has on the general Niger Delta

environment. It behooves the government, company and community to assume certain roles in line with the need to maintain the ecological integrity and environmental cleanliness as well as sustainable development of the Niger Delta. It is therefore necessary to illustrate how various stakeholders – government, company and community, can be impacted by our use of a critical exegesis in our appropriation of the Biblical text.

In applying this to the Nigerian context it quickly challenges the crisis of identity experienced in constituent parts of the Nigerian nation. Nigeria is a secular nation with as many Christians as there are Muslims and African traditional religion with one common belief in creation and leadership of God through the gerontocrats. Yet as we have seen, the elders have been excluded from corporate governance with the abrogation of the “House of Chiefs” from both federal and state parliaments. The question most analysts are asking is if Nigeria is a Federation or is it a unitary government? The answer is that constitutionally it is a Federation, but administratively it is not. Not only has this identity problem weakened its governance capabilities, it has eroded the veritable institution of gerontocracy and the “giraffe principle” which attended it, and so generated youth militancy and restiveness. It begs the question of government’s civil responsibility once more, but particularly in respect of what in management circles is described as “corporate governance”. A redefinition of stewardship challenges all of the political, economic, social and cultural discrepancies bedevilling the Nigerian nation.

Similarly, a multi-dimensional hermeneutics resulting from a combination of post-colonial critical close-reading, a functional equivalence translation and a fitting back translation also calls into question the present practice of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by multi-national companies particularly Total. In order to determine the level of best practice by multi-national oil companies, the concept of corporate social responsibility is employed as a barometer for assessing, at least in the Niger Delta, the investment in economic development and ecological integrity of oil bearing communities by multi-national companies *vis-à-vis* their industrial operations and business motives. The concept is also employed as a measure of the level of compliance with international conventions and national environmental laws of their host nations. It must take into consideration what some¹⁷¹ have described as “the best practice level” – that is a distinctive, innovative and effective implementation of strategic social and economic programmes with a significant

¹⁷¹ For a seminal discussion of this phenomenon, See Newell (2005:541-557).

and measurable impact on the people whom they are designed to serve (Welford 2004:33-35).

A redefinition of stewardship from a Nigerian perspective may not therefore shy away from invoking among other things the call on multi-national oil companies to ensure the placement of human dignity above annual investment turn-over. From an Old Testament perspective it would be like reproducing in themselves the character of God as *imago Dei*, whereas from an African cultural perspective it would entail employing the “giraffe principles” of win-win, good neighbourliness and compensatory use of natural resources. Some external features of this would include among other things the preservation of clean air, projection of a green environment, protection of human rights, supplies of health and environmental safety facilities, commitment to local community protection and engagement, policies on a fair and equitable share by all stakeholders in company assets and liabilities including procedures for the resolution of complaints¹⁷² within the company’s own operations.

Other internal features would be staff development, in-house education, vocational training, non-discrimination in the workplace, and equal opportunity statements and implementation of fair wage structures. McWilliams and Siegel (2001:117) insisted that transnational capital has to be deployed in host communities in a way that “goes beyond the interest of the firm in implementing public and corporate infrastructures which meet the requirements of local, national and international law.”¹⁷³ This to my mind resonates with the *imago Dei* identity of humans who not only reflect the Divine character in their day to day business practice, but also are increasingly imaging the Creator in the care and nurture of His creation by means of both the external and internal features which corporate social responsibility calls for and which agrees with both the Old Testament theological and ethical views, as well as with the African cultural views.

The commitment of multi-national companies to their host communities must be such as reflects the *imago Dei*, and this have to be evaluated from a “best practice” level that implies an implementation of distinctive, innovative and effective social and economic

¹⁷² Welford (2004:32-35)

¹⁷³ McWilliams and Siegel (2001:117-127).

programmes in host communities in order to make a strategic, significant and measurable impact on the people whom they are designed to serve¹⁷⁴.

6.2.2.4 Responsibility in view of human rights and human dignity

The re-definition of stewardship implies a responsibility to highlight the requirements for human rights and human dignity inherent in the concept of the *imago Dei*. This is true especially when the ongoing struggle for self-definition and identity within various Niger Delta ethnic communities is considered. This I alluded to in the third and fourth chapters. It is an itinerant struggle for resource control which of course draws upon historically well established customs and traditions such as was shown in the anecdotes and proverbs. Some of these customs resonate with religious mores and ethos, social and cultural landscapes, and a repertoire of life and world view which are then engaged in a dialogic struggle of recognition with the post-colonial structures embodied in both government and company agencies. It leaves the post-colonial mark of a crisis of identity, hybridity and mimesis especially when the human rights and dignity of the people are not respected neither by the companies nor by the government, or when they do it as a lip service only.

The basis for membership of local Niger Delta communities derive from the tension between such customs and religious mores and ethos competing with business strategies of inclusion and exclusion adopted by companies and government, which often turn upon rhetoric of land ownership, kinship identity, ancestral myth, and cosmology. Over time, these strategies have introduced new cycles of socio-economic inequalities of ownership, distribution and marginalisation among local communities which are vocal and others not so vocal. Such inequality apparently follows along the classic fault lines of kinship, gender, age, class, and group identity.

In the Niger Delta the ownership of land at kindred and communal levels condenses a host of social relationships at the helm of which is a gerontocracy. Shorthand references to the various ethnic groups within the area are often based on the territory inhabited by them, as for example Ogba and Ekpeye. Therefore, group identity of local communities is based on kinship in a very critical and crucial way, without which the strategies of inclusion or

¹⁷⁴ Manby (1999:292). The two case studies cited by Manby – Shell and Chevron – point to the double standards employed by oil companies to secure their profit at the expense of the people.

exclusion from the “immediate”¹⁷⁵ benefits of the wealth from oil can easily be misplaced. Yet this identity is being seriously jeopardised by human rights violations¹⁷⁶ and the identity crisis inherent in the Nigerian state itself now carried over into its constituent parts. The exceptional diversity among various Nigerian peoples in respect of modes of social organisation, coupled with the fluidity and mobility of social identities resulting from a centralised and nationalised resource pool, betray a poststructuralist imperialistic post-colonial state. It has not only undermined the peoples’ dignity but also their sense of responsibility as stewards of God’s land which they have inherited from their ancestors.

As a Nigerian who has grown up mostly in a post-colonial environment, the reading of Genesis 1:26-28 have often filled me with awe in respect of what it means to be human, or to put it more succinctly: what it means to “subdue the earth” and exercise dominion over it. In using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics to critique our *pericope* Genesis 1:26-28 in particular, I am conceding the point that a postcolonial literary-critical methodology is necessarily a dialogical and corrective tool for a meaningful exegesis, and that by means of it our text can be rid of colonial connotations. Although it is impossible to rid the interpretation of any text of every presupposition, it is nevertheless important to allow the source text and context to dialogue with the receptor text and context in a way in which a recovery of human dignity or of humans in partnership with both the Creator and creation is facilitated.

Furthermore, man is to be in relationship with God in living out the divine blessings in order to rule and control nature and other created things in a partnership that is both responsible and accountable. As God’s conversation partners both in reproducing God’s character and in procreating themselves, humans are elevated to a realm in which they share in God’s sovereignty but live responsibly before Him (Preuss 1995:114-140). The importance of human reproduction of the divine character and procreation of physical offspring, in fulfilling the dual mandate which God has commanded as part of creation ordinance and

¹⁷⁵ An immediate benefit includes compensations for cash crops destroyed in land excavation and burrowing by the oil companies, and which is usually a meager payment even though the damage done to the crops and land is of a permanent and irreparable nature. The Federal Government still claims the bulk of royalty payment on such land and minerals derived from it and are not accountable to the people in doing so.

¹⁷⁶ This is being written at a time when a combined force of the Nigerian Army, Navy, Airforce, and Police are combing the streets of the oil city of Port Harcourt shooting and killing “dissidents” and “militants” who are demanding a better deal by both the Federal Government and the multi-national oil companies for the resource owners and are bent on interrupting the entire Oil industry in the Niger Delta until justice is done. Several Nigerian newspapers and the BBC News of 2 – 29 July 2007 are replete with reports of this nature. Visit <http://www.Nigeriaworld.com> or <http://www.thisdayonline.com> for details.

blessing, cannot therefore be separated from a re-definition of stewardship (Clements 1992:13; Birch 2001:303ff).

This fact became even clearer with the use of a functional equivalence method to translate the re-read text into Ogba language, as an example of a context in which previous uncritical readings have had a devastating effect on the environment and ecology. Take for example the Divine blessing imbedded in Genesis 1:26-28 𐄂 wayəbarek (“and blessed them”). By this Divine utterance of blessing in Genesis 1:28 God is said to mean, procreation in general. We therefore intimated that a functional equivalence translation of this text suggests a duality of meaning as well. Man is to reproduce God’s character by virtue of his being the *enyege* “image” of God as well as procreate himself in socialising with the opposite sex, by virtue of which they are made male and female “*okno ya nnwurne*” (cf. Sarna 1989:13).

Of course these blessings are bestowed on them at the time of creation, and seem to be primarily one of increasingly imaging the Deity and of fertility at the same time. In other words, there is an underlying increase in expressing the divine character that runs *in tandem* with procreative functions. The latter once again is important because dominion can only be exercised over the living creatures and over nature generally to the extent that humans occupy the earth physically in a manner that truly reflected the divine image and likeness (Cassuto 1978:58-59).

A back-translation of the Ogba version of Genesis 1:26-28 again into English opened up the text once more to a hermeneutics which is transcendental and holistic by effectively using the mother tongue to educe a meaning of the text which reveals its syntactical and semantic components in very helpful ways. Otherwise, such a thorough understanding of the text would be submerged in second language euphemisms and usages. The back-translation also educes the underlying increase or fruitfulness imbedded in the text in a dualism in which humans express the divine character without ignoring their social and reproductive functions – a dualism which promotes the fulfilment of the cultural and creation mandate in meaningful ways.

All of these have so aptly summarised the heart and essence of our postcolonial close-reading, functional equivalent translation and back-translation of our pericope. In so doing our hermeneutics has transcended previous interpretations of Genesis 1:26-28 and can be

said to be our humble way of contributing to the recovery of the full meaning of the text and its further elucidation.

It warrants not only a recovery of the “giraffe principle” of win-win, good neighborliness and compensatory use of natural resources, but also justifies the dualistic components of our postcolonial close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28 which recognises the dignity and worth of the human persons as image of God, while at the same time calling for a reproduction of the divine nature as well as of human offspring within the resource bearing communities. Neither the stakeholders nor their surrogates are exempted from this primary responsibility to God, to one another and to creation in general.

6.3 Re-definition of stewardship

We can now pull the various strands of interpretation together in our attempt to produce a redefinition of stewardship in consonance with existing perceptions from both the Nigerian context as well as from the purview of our pericope. In the same vein, our redefinition of stewardship can draw from all the insights so far gleaned from various theological, ethical and cultural contexts in which practices of humans in their self-understanding of what it means to be responsible for someone’s else’s property including land has been discussed.

6.3.1 Background to re-definition

From the Nigerian context for instance the “giraffe principle” of win-win, good neighbourliness and of compensatory use of communal resources stand out in bold relief and in a way crucial to any re-definition of stewardship. I will say more on this presently.

Meanwhile, a background to a redefinition of stewardship which captures the cultural and theological elements or perceptions and their implications for land ownership and use is therefore not only desirable but also timely. Having said that, a re-definition of stewardship presupposes various philosophical and religious attitudes towards the earth envisaged in Genesis 1:26-28 and related texts read in an inter-textual manner (Vawter 1997:58). Such attitudes provide a background in which to situate our redefinition of stewardship which at present is being attempted. This same background is summarised in three ways: postcolonial literary background; Old Testament theological and ethical perspective; and African cultural principles.

6.3.1.1 Postcolonial hermeneutical background

A postcolonial hermeneutical background preceded a re-definition of stewardship. In other words, the postcolonial critical exegesis of our pericope involving a close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28, a functional translation of the same and a further back translation underscores a multi-dimensional critical exegesis of a text which enhances our redefinition of stewardship in two critical ways. Firstly, that the creation or cultural mandate is dualistic and not simplistic, in the sense that it speaks of the *imago Dei* as depicting the importance of godly character on the part of humans and of the value placed on progressively reproducing themselves through their own offspring. Secondly, that human beings are created to be in partnership with God and with creation in the onerous task of “keeping” and nurturing creation. It is a sort of relationship that enables humans to live together with the animals and other creatures in an environment that blooms with greenery, with clean air and in which human, animal and natural life flourish freely and in an unimpeded atmosphere.

In this way, stewardship is described as a human calling in which God and humans are in a relationship and through which God’s presence is extended to “wherever humans are found” (Hall 1990:25). It is deeply imbued with the *imago Dei* whereby humans are representations of the Deity with respect to the management, ownership and use of the natural resources, particularly land (Hall 2004:31-32). Stewards know that the land and natural resources are properties which belong to another and that in the final analysis they must report on their use or misuse of what they have been given to the one associated with its ownership. Old Testament theology and ethics depicts a God whose intention is that humans should live as God’s steward of the physical creation within a creaturely sphere (Elwell 1992:1054).

Therefore, humans as custodians or stewards are not, after all, the owners or master of land (Hall 1990:33-34). They are stewards in the sense portrayed in Isaiah 22 in which the steward, Shebna is charged to cultivate a responsible and accountable attitude towards the One whose property he manages or oversees. Our re-definition depicts this accountability as being to God and to the custodians or stewards of land.

6.3.1.2 Old Testament theological and ethical perspective

In the Old Testament, stewardship is generally considered to be one of individual, communal, and even collective responsibility (Hempel 1962:153-161), although the exilic experience of Israel impacted on their perception of God's *modus vivendi* for the Israelite which seemed to have changed from what it was at the time of Moses (Exo. 20:5c). In the Mosaic dispensation children were held responsible for the misdeeds of their parents, but in the post-exilic times of Ezekiel (Eze.18:4) each Israelite was to suffer for his or her own sins. Nevertheless, the boundaries between individual and collective responsibility seemed to be blurred in the post-exilic community. Understandably Hempel (1962:153) makes this an editorial rather than a dispensational issue. The *Yahwist* identified responsibility as collective both in rewards and retribution, whereas the Deuteronomist stylised the whole of history from the exodus to the exile as a history of human frailties or sin, and therefore subject to *Yahweh's* intervention in mercy, but also in justice.

The Old Testament is very clear on the fact that stewardship entails lots of decision making for which accountability is demanded. This is a positive dimension that becomes vivid in texts such as Daniel 1:11,16, where a steward is quite at liberty to make immediate decisions. Or even in the passage alluded to earlier, Isaiah 22:15-21, in which Shebna occupies an exalted office within the royal palace, and as the steward he is neither ultimately authoritative nor irreplaceable, even though in the ordinary scheme of things he might seem to be important. Stewards may be superior servants of God, but a servant nevertheless (Hall 1990:33). Isaiah the prophet had to be sent to rebuke a steward who lost sight of this vulnerability (Is.39:3ff).

The idea that a human is a steward of God in his or her relation to the world and his or her own life is inherent to the creation story in Genesis 1 – 2. Here humans are appointed “steward” or lord (in a relative sense) of all things, except themselves (Elwell 1992:1054). There are about 26 direct references to steward and stewardship in the Bible – both Old and New Testaments (Hall 2004:25)¹⁷⁷. All the uses of the term in Scripture are uniformly literal or technical, that is, it describes an actual office or vocation in society (Hall 2004:31-32). Suffice it to say that alongside the teachings of Scripture about the proper attitude to property (land) is a parallel assertion that all human possessions are humans not in an

¹⁷⁷ See footnote in sub-section 1.5.10 p. 42.

absolute sense, but as a trust from God. As the Psalmist puts it “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it” (Ps.24:1).

A steward ordinarily is someone called to exercise responsible care over possessions entrusted to him (Watson 1990:857). From the point of view of the *imago Dei* and our pericope, stewardship would entail exercising rule and dominion over the fish, birds, animals, and over the land as well (Gen.1-2). In that sense, God is the one who has entrusted humans with the onerous responsibility of stewardship over the physical and moving creatures on the surface of the earth (Watson 1990:857), and this responsibility has to be exercised with a sense of accountability first to God who assigned humans this special role, and then to fellow humans for the way each exercises this responsibility (Ryken *et al* 1998:814). Human exercise of authority over the creatures and on land is co-terminus with a responsible and accountable discharge of this stewardship duty (Bromiley 1988:803-805). Indeed, accountability and responsibility are both built into the metaphor of stewardship (White 1990:189,235) as two mutually informative roles. Its responsibility entails a “power of attorney” which goes with the office of the “*aser ‘al bayit*” (chief of the house) as stewards are called, so long as he or she exercises this authority in realisation of the Creator’s purposes and will (Watson 1990:857).

Generally, Old Testament ethics is therefore not bereft of historical antecedents, but stresses a continuity in which Israelites were to “do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic.6:8) (see Hall 1990:187; Birch 1991:298). This had both a public and private connotation. A re-definition of stewardship in accordance with an Old Testament hermeneutics is shaped by the overall requirement of justice and righteousness in all matters pertaining to land ownership and use. Such an Old Testament view also resonates with the “giraffe principle” enunciated in the case of the peoples of the Niger Delta and with the *şedeqah* and *ma’at* principle of ancient Near Eastern communities.

6.3.1.3 African cultural principles

The “giraffe principle” is deeply embedded in the gerontocratic culture of Africa, albeit Nigeria to be specific. Generally, a redefinition of stewardship is to ensure what can be described as “right behaviour” towards God and one’s neighbour which is what this principle is all about (Janzen 1994:40-46; Ehusani 1991:63). It is a demonstration of loyalty to God on the one hand, and a requirement for each stakeholder – government, company and community, to maintain a balance between land ownership and use on the one hand,

and the preservation of clean air, green environment, clean water resources, freedom of persons and a sustainable use of depleting oil and natural resources. This requires a non-mechanistic mindset, but one couched in the reproduction of the *imago Dei* in its Divine qualities of care and nurture, as well as with a practical engagement with the perpetuation of the race.

Moreover it can be associated with the innate desire in Africans and indeed in humans to be blessed. This desire to be blessed is found in all cultures ancient, modern, and post-modern. For instance Genesis 1:1-3:24 invokes both the blessing of the Deity on every fulfilment of the dual or cultural mandate that takes cognisance of a human exercise of rule and dominion under the overarching rule of God. It also takes into cognisance that there is a curse which presumably would be incurred with every deliberate distortion of the Divine intention through an abusive and exploitative use of God's heritage in creation. To refer back to the Old Testament prophetic oracles, there is the "covenant" breaking tendency of Israel which inevitably have adverse effects on its individual members. Hence to take the word "subdue" literally and to apply it to Africa as meaning to devastate, exploit, pillage and plunder is to live a life of disservice and misery, whereas to do the opposite is to live in fulfilment and comfort. That the Biblical text speaks the language of African cultural principles is therefore true.

A redefinition which takes advantage of this Old Testament ethic as well as of the African cultural ethic of a life for an individual lived as a life of service to the community¹⁷⁸ can be foisted on our Nigerian context. In this way, the phrase "subdue the earth" in Genesis 1:26, 28 have been translated into Ogba as meaning more of "tend the earth" rather than devastate and exploit it. It is only as humans tend the earth and care for all its components that a more enhanced and fulfilling communal life results. Thus the social ills in any human society when placed in the context of the dual mandate in Genesis.1:26-28¹⁷⁹, can be addressed by appealing to individuals to live out the principles of win-win,

¹⁷⁸ African and Biblical religions frown upon injustice and abuse of human rights. In these world views some measure of consciousness is ascribed to the physical earth and specifically to the farm land on which crops and trees grow. In both cultures land is often invoked as a witness to oaths taken, and is even summoned to witness a misdeed. There is in the Niger Delta for instance, a deep-seated value which impacts on stewardship, land ownership and use. It is the link between kingship and righteousness on the one hand, and the fertility of the land on the other. There exists a very strong theological link between the two in both the indigenous African and Biblical world view (cf. Job 31:1-3; Isa.1.2; Mic.6: 2; Dt. 30: 19; Job 16:18; 20:27b).

¹⁷⁹ Perhaps Israel's subjugation of the land of Canaan could be said to be a very poor reflection of this mandate as it was carried out not before but after the fall. We know that the effects of sin have

compensatory use, and good neighbourliness inherent in the “giraffe principle” which literally resonates with the Old Testament concepts of justice, righteousness and walking humbly with God (Mic.6:8). Only a stewardship exercised in line with Divine and humane principles in the ownership and use of land particularly in the Niger Delta can bring about individual lives within human societies that impact positively and sustainably on what goes on within the society (Janzen 1994:40-46).

As was previously indicated, our exegetical and pedagogical accountability in Africa is towards the government, company and community. This implies bringing together the various perceptions of stewardship, land ownership and use among the people which help us understand why the “giraffe principle” is so crucial in any redefinition of stewardship that will resonate with the people’s religion and culture. In the case of the Niger Delta the gerontocracy led in the way of being responsible and accountable, whereas in the Old Testament and the ancient Near East it is *Yahweh* and the monarchs respectively who lead the people in righteousness and justice.

What then is stewardship, considering the background perspectives so far examined – the postcolonial critical hermeneutics, the theology and ethics of the Old Testament, and the “giraffe principle” which resonates with African cultural principle of gerontocracy? Does a postcolonial hermeneutic of Genesis 1:26-28 have any implications for such a re-defined role of stewardship of land? How can such roles of stewardship be streamlined in the light of the foregoing?

Evidently, a straight-jacket re-definition of stewardship will not do, except that it is couched in the theological and ethical garb of the “giraffe principle” of win-win, good neighbourliness, and compensatory use of land and natural resources on the one hand. Its dual nature of embodying the creation mandate and its call on all humans as the image of God to reproduce the divine character in land use and ownership while at the same time procreating humankind to safely inhabit the terrestrial environment must be underscored.

meant not only death for man but also a tortured creation that languishes under futility helplessly (Gen.3:17-19; Rom.8:18-25).

6.3.2 Summary re-definition of stewardship

On the basis of these three interacting components derived from a postcolonial critical hermeneutics, a close-reading of an Old Testament pericope, and from African cultural principles – my re-definition of stewardship is in the following words:

“Stewardship is a relationship with God, fellow humans and nature which issues in the reproduction of Divine character and in a responsible procreation with a view to manage, own and use land and natural resources in a win-win, good neighbourly, compensatory and accountable situation of which the benefit of God and the interest of the people themselves are seen to be preserved, promoted and protected. It demands an equitable, just and righteous use of land, the material creation, gifts, objects, time, money and all the powers of the mind and body, which God has entrusted to us consciously realising that it is a call to be both accountable and responsible in all matters including land ownership and use.”

The implication of a re-definition such as the one given above, is that the rulers of all God’s people are stewards, responsible to the master – that is to *Yahweh* in all matters of land ownership and use. In this regard, a Biblical passage from Isaiah 22:15-22 depicts the inherent qualities of a good steward of land: attributes such as humbleness of spirit; lack of pretension and ostentation; and parental behaviour toward those who inhabit and use land for agriculture and other purposes; and for whose welfare the steward has responsibility. The steward is not synonymous with ownership, mastery, ultimacy of authority, and sovereignty because theologically we recognise that these qualities are attributable to God alone. There is a law of stewardship of land, which many know to be true enough. It insists that human beings must be faithful trustees of the land and natural resources found therein. The Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5 is a vivid illustration of this law. However, it is one thing to know this and another to do it. The message of stewardship can be drummed in when we realise that, as stewards, we are prevented from imagining ourselves owners, and avoiding over-exploitation, irresponsibility, neglect and apathy.

6.4 Stewardship re-defined in the light of a postcolonial close-reading and a functional equivalence translation

In the first place, using a postcolonial optic is prone to subjectivism, instability and fluidity, and for that reason my analysis has been limited to the resolution of an identity and hybridity crisis endemic to a post-colonial society (Bhabha 1994:2, 13). In doing so, I have consciously tried to be objective and descriptive in order to escape this criticism, by not

being prescriptive. Such an engagement is in resonance with the suggestion that each post-colonial context must identify its challenges and define them in a globalised world (Welford 2004:33; Hattingh 1998:69).

Apparently, the relationship between context and text in the way interpretations are carried out has been underscored especially in respect of mutual impact which each can have on the other. As was pointed out previously Perdue (2005:285) any use of a postcolonial approach is capable of being truncated by the varying contextual complexities which compound the interplay between context and text in a post-colonial situation. This is especially true with respect to the post-colonial phenomena of identity, hybridity and mimesis which often interplays with an ongoing process of even a supposedly neutral hermeneutical engagement which extols an inter-textual and inter-contextual dialogue. Yet a sound exegetical analysis coupled with a postcolonial critical hermeneutics can be part of an ongoing process of what we previously described as mental *cum* cultural “de-programming”¹⁸⁰ in Nigeria, leading to identity formation, cultural and social integration within an atmosphere of inter-contextuality, transcendence and holism (cf. Moore and Segovia 2005:97).

In this way a postcolonial approach which at present is fluid and adaptable can serve either an essentialist, or reconstructive ends that are adapted to the needs of changing contexts in order to bring about social transformation. The feature of adaptability is one of postcolonialism’s most suited qualities which make for a result oriented postcolonial critical hermeneutics (Perdue 2005:311). This process of adaptability is described by Donaldson (1996:10) as *proliferation*, in the sense that a definition adapted to one context may still evoke a re-definition in another context.

In the case of Genesis 1:26-28, the postcolonial indices of inter-textual and inter-contextual dialogue for example enables us to understand and appreciate the values which the text places on both humans as *imago Dei* and on nature as the realm of their beneficent rule, rather than one of an unhealthy dread or of reckless exploitation (Enuwosa 2005:130ff; Ukpong 2005:32ff; Akao 1993:53; Watson 1990:857). Such an analysis is capable of eliminating the bifurcation of humans and nature which makes the imposition of alien values and domination possible. Popular theology in Nigeria easily berates the

¹⁸⁰ Mental “de-programming” is a process of unlearning what was previously or wrongly learned and the process carries with it the notion of right replacing wrong, and new replacing old. By its own logic the process also entails a mental “re-programming”.

impact which Western culture has had on the oil economy and morality in Africa. At present the emphasis is on returning “to African moral values in the light of the demoralising effects which Western culture has had on such values” (Abogunrin 2005:7).

A post-colonial exegesis that addresses the issues of stewardship, land ownership and use in a receptor culture such as Ogba and Ekpeye in Nigeria has to take into consideration sociological and scientific aspects of Nigeria’s post-colonial world-view (Ukpong 2004:87-88). With respect to the text, it means that inter-textual dialogue will revolve around the explicit meaning of the text, as it will the implicit meanings. Interestingly, a functional equivalence translation of Genesis 1:26-28 into Ogba highlights this postcolonial liberative worldview.

This is a crucial step in assessing the accusation that Biblical religion demystified nature and so breached the partnership with nature which humans once enjoyed. The accusation goes further to say that in so doing, Biblical religion fostered on nature a wild exploitation, pollution, plunder and piracy at the hands of humans (Wybrow 1991:140-141). Notably, a postcolonial critical close-reading does not seem to buttress that point, but instead provides us with an exegetical meaning which when translated into Ogba, meant that humans and the rest of creation, especially the land, are in a relationship fostered directly from God and terminating on land. Such a critical postcolonial inter-contextual re-reading of Genesis 1:26-28 becomes imperative in order to restore confidence in the Biblical text itself, and to examine critically its commitment to responsible and accountable land ownership and use in accordance with the strictures of the Old Testament.

The advantage of this re-definition is therefore enormous in that it clarifies the role of humans which are created in the image of God as those who were first of all to reproduce the Divine character of love, wisdom and power in their relations with the rest of the created other, and on the basis of that to procreate their “kind”. This is described as a dual or cultural mandate through which the whole earth is brought under the rule and dominion of humans. It challenges traditional Western interpretations of the Biblical text and necessitates a human rule of nature which is moderated by a reproduction of the Divine character.

A careful look at our re-definition of stewardship will demonstrate to present day ecologists the belief that the earth has been destined to be ruled by humans, even as a sacred trust. Human’s closer identification with Deity right from creation is what encourages and

perhaps justifies this belief. Therefore, humans can perpetuate in a natural or God-given way, an order of which they as humans have been given the capacity to learn and improve upon. Such transcendental views do conceive of God as Creator who rules creation using human instrumentalities (Hamilton 1990:57, 70-71). The status of the people tower above the land, yet their dependence on the land for survival, sustenance and satisfaction is an ongoing one. It is such a dependence that imposes a sense of responsibility and accountability in the way humans live their lives so as to conform to norms and ethos which over the years has contributed in the preservation of the land and its resources in a sustainable and regenerative manner.

Finally, this redefinition of stewardship has also synthesised the African and Biblical perspectives to stewardship of nature, land ownership and use. Using the indices such as inter-textual and inter-contextual dialogue, as well as of transcendence and holism such binaries as human - nature, faith - culture bifurcations such as is found in colonial - neo-colonial hermeneutics have been avoided (Dube 1992:111-112). Instead, we now have a re-definition of stewardship in which humans and nature on the one hand and Christianity and culture on the other are seen as co-terminus and in constant dialogue. In the former it calls for a reproduction of God's mind in humans and in the latter in a procreative effort that makes for demographic, ecological and environmental transformation (Donaldson 1996:1-11).

6.5 Stewardship re-defined in the context of Old Testament theology and ethics

Our re-definition of stewardship is presumably rooted in Old Testament theology and ethics in ways which scholarly views, postcolonial close-reading, functional equivalence translation and a word-perfect back translation do account for. Its multi-dimensional nature however requires a progressive and proactive hermeneutics culminating in what Patte (1995:17) have described as "morality of knowledge", or as Johnson (2007:6) puts it – a pilgrim's "ongoing negotiations" in meeting interpretive needs. It is as if our view of Old Testament theology from the perspective of a literary-critical analysis cannot be static but should from time to time arrive at new configurations. Meanwhile, our present use of a postcolonial critical hermeneutics helps me – coming from a post-colonial Nigerian background – to elucidate the text as I have done in the fourth and fifth chapter. Again, this is not done in a purposeless style but with a conscious understanding that a return to and

recovery of creation theology steeped in a profound soteriology can prove invaluable in the ongoing quest for a responsible and accountable land ownership and use not only in Nigeria but also in other parts of Africa (Brueggemann 2002:xxiii).

In order to contribute to the sustenance of such a creational theology we have gratefully utilised insights from Jewish, historical-critical, and evangelical trends of interpretation. We have dealt extensively with an aspect of the historical-critical tradition in the preceding section on stewardship and the *imago Dei*, and have also considered the views of Jewish scholarly counterparts with respect to creation and land ownership, as well as with the evangelical scholarly views. A summary of all three would focus on their points of convergence and how it fits into the ongoing need for a re-definition of stewardship that impacts on both theology and theopraxis.

Firstly, they are all agreed that humans are conferred with special privileges including stewardship rights over nature in ways specifically depicted in dual or cultural mandate, keeping the Divine character and human procreation in mind (Cassuto 1978:8-9). It all boils down to humans being the symbols of God's presence on earth – a point to which ancient Near Eastern traditions and Old Testament views generally converge and which brings humans into a partnership with both God and nature in an ongoing way described by Fretheim (2005:13) as creation *continua*. The semantic and syntactic analysis which engaged our effort in the fourth and fifth chapter particularly its translation into Ogba did confirm that the Biblical text confers an extra-ordinary office on humans as stewards of God's creation (Sarna 1989:10-13). In Genesis 1:26-28 there is a strongly expressed resolve which portrayed the divine intent and purpose for *homo sapiens* who as embodiments of his character and form can reflect the same mysterious duality which the Psalmist had cause to comment on in Psalm 8:4-7 depicting the awesome power at the command of humans and their utter insignificance compared to God with these words:

“When I consider your heavens, the moon and stars, the works of your own hands, what is human that you are mindful of them, or the children of humans that you care for them? You have made them the rulers over the works of your own hands and have crowned them with loving-kindness and with honor, and you have put all things under their feet – the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and the beasts of the field”.

Consequently, various scholars have linked human stewardship, land ownership and use to these same verses and some scientists have traced our present global ecological crisis to the interpretations which scholars have given to these same verses (Birch 1991:89; Vallet 2001:28). It is its regal vocabulary implying both nurture and care that has caught

many an imagination. In the context of the ancient Near East, such cosmogonies served to elevate the king above the ordinary run of humans, even though they did not exonerate him from *ṣedeqah* or English righteousness – the maintenance of an order in the realm in which no human or animals are oppressed. It is more of a democratisation of a royal prerogative by the Bible narrative than an exclusive preserve of the rulers, as in both Egypt and Mesopotamia the observance of *ma'at* was a priority for all those who bear the image of God, especially the king.

The conviction of Jewish, historical-critical and evangelical scholars is that many of the problems are caused by a misunderstanding of the original intentions of Genesis (Wenham 1987: xlv-xlvi). Only when the editors' major points are grasped can many of the clashes between his and our world views be eliminated (Wenham 1987: xlv-xlvi). Words are not univocal like scientific symbols, but they have a variety of meanings. The context makes clear which meaning is intended. The primary meaning of man in Genesis is "human being" or "human race", and a hearer or reader generally understands this term in this way, unless the reference is clearly demanding a sense of "adult male" in the context in which it is used (Wenham 1987: lii).

In using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics to exegete the text I have gone one step further in fulfilling one of the requirements of Biblical interpretation (Goldsworthy 2000:526). I have exegeted the text in the light of both its context and the context of its receptor audiences. In other words, the close-reading and functional translation of Genesis 1:26-28 have not only defined the *imago Dei* in terms specific to the context of human rights and human dignity, but have also pointed at the functional duality of the cultural or creation mandate as depicting not only the procreation of human offspring as most orthodox interpretations have always read the text, but more than that as calling primarily for a fruitfulness in the reproduction of the caring and nurturing character of God as well. Without the latter the former function cannot be properly fulfilled (Turaki 1999:304).

Be that as it may, the Biblical symbolism of human's imaging capacity of the divine (Wenham 1987:32-33) does recognise a mediatory function by humans between God and the rest of creation. This idea has been recaptured in our re-definition of stewardship as well.

Furthermore, by this re-definition of stewardship the overriding objective of freeing creation, nature and humanity from the margins to which Israel's overwhelming theme of

salvation history has cast it seemed achievable. These themes which Lohfink (1974) once took up in an extensive discussion, but which came into the limelight of academic interest, points out the need to separate creation from human nature and history so as to stimulate the academy's interest in creation theology – an area in which Israelite theology seemed least interested. These writers apparently justified Fretheim's (2005) thesis that the sublimation of creation to salvation history is unwarranted, and along with Von Rad (1996:36-59) emphasised albeit on a sceptical note, the need to recover creation, nature and humans from such an obscurantist theology. This has been the overriding motivation of our re-definition of stewardship in which humans and creation are placed in a warm embrace, rather than in a hostile antagonism. Nevertheless, as has been pointed out Old Testament discourse on creation has to undergo a paradigm shift from chaos to creation, and progressively to the new creation.

Given the realities of sin and evil in the world, such continuing creational activity will not proceed without the kind of opposition depicted between Genesis 3 and Revelation 20. In other words, the sordid events which transpired between Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22 give us some caution in realising that creation and salvation are capable of exposing the Divine realm to vulnerability, and as a result humans are constantly being brought to share power, wisdom and love with God (Fretheim 1994:343) for purposes of stewarding and husbanding the earth. In other words God has always been in dialogue with creation in a process which resonates with what has earlier on been described as *creation continua* (Fretheim 2005:9).

In all of this there is no direct discourse of an Old Testament theology of stewardship of nature, land and creation that this present author encountered, even though James Barr (1993:33) succeeded in making stewardship an important part of human's responsibility in creation. The advantage of Barr's works is that he obviously points natural theology to its roots in Biblical theology, and thus removed the earlier objections that have been raised against naturalistic theology. One can observe the direction in which Barr's work moved in making natural theology acceptable in the field of Old Testament scholarship, even though its relevance to the practice of stewardship by humans in respect of nature has been minimised.

In my view, the theme of creation is presently an overarching one. A dissertation of this nature cannot but build on the seemingly solid foundation laid in Biblical and Theological studies, nor does it ignore the well beaten paths of scholarly insights into the issues at

stake on stewardship, land ownership and use, though not in a direct and non-polemical manner. Nevertheless, in both ways the route open to us requires a measure of an eclectic putting together of divergent views from for instance Barr's natural theology rooted in proper Biblical exegesis to Brueggemann's theological and ethical notions in creation. Such a diversity of reflections has enriched our discussion to the extent that it shapes human responsibility for the present ecological crisis rocking our planet. It is in bringing together polarised opinions to a point of convergence that a new synthesis is achieved, which would prove useful in furthering and enhancing the ongoing debate on human stewardship of creation along with the responsibility and accountability that goes with it.

This is particularly true when a theology of stewardship must deal with an efficient and sustainable use of natural resources which are a depleting asset in a way that maintains a healthy ecology, clean air, a green environment, and freedom of persons. Such a synthesis acknowledges not only the diversity of contexts but also the interdisciplinary nature of the subject (Brueggemann 2002: xiii). The awakening of interest in creation, nature, land use and stewardship has cut across various disciplines with special focus on eco-justice and eco-theology or eco-praxis. Yet they have enriched our discussion in a way which re-invigorates the Old Testament text (Fretheim 2005:270, 273).

6.6 Stewardship re-defined in the light of African cultural principles

The last but not the least in our consideration is the gerontocratic culture extant in parts of Africa and particularly Nigeria which has informed the present re-definition of stewardship. A tripartite principle which underscores the importance of this "giraffe principle" is win-win, compensatory use and good neighborliness. It illustrates how the issues of best practice, corporate governance and corporate social responsibility should be related to the *imago Dei*, the cultural or creation mandate and specifically to human exercise of rule and dominion over the animals in particular.

These principles of equity, justice and righteousness are embedded in a gerontocracy that has at the back of it a sense of an orderly rule by the elders. It has transcended the limits of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, and has impacted on stewardship, land ownership and use in cultural, economic, legal and political ways. Another name for gerontocracy is "rule of and respect for the most elderly" and it has the "giraffe principle" of equity and justice underlying it (Ehusani 1992:91; Amadiume 1987:22; Amadi 1982:94). By means of proverbs and anecdotes, we have been able to penetrate the world of a post-

colonial culture in order to share with them their experiences of a more democratic standard of economic and social empowerment rooted in the religion, ethos and mores of the society (Sofola 1973:50).

Our re-definition of stewardship presumes a concept of creation *ex nihilo* which does not resonate with the cosmogonies of the Yoruba, Igbo or Ogba for that matter. It is a redefinition of stewardship according to the Old Testament scriptures, and not according to African culture. On the part of cosmogony our redefinition is in consonance more with the Hebrew Scriptures, whereas on the part of stewardship it is both at par with the standards of righteousness and justice demanded in the Old Testament as well on the principles of win-win, compensatory use and good neighborliness demanded by African customs and tradition.

The belief that *Chukwuabiana* created and owns the land has been captured in our redefinition of stewardship and it is a well established one among the various Nigerian communities (Ehusani 1991:89). Similarly, the fear that the Deity might punish anyone who ignores the “giraffe principle” is embedded in their consciousness and governs their general outlook in life. The effect of a post-colonial governance of Nigeria has been heavy on this, as it has completely dulled the people’s sense of right and wrong by introducing a dualised society of “civil” and “primordial” public (Ekeh 1974:27). Yet the “giraffe principle” is presumably one around which the cosmic order revolves and can facilitate an equitable use of land, of nature and all its abundant resources (Amadiume 1987:22). In the “giraffe principle” is contained the role of humans to use natural resources discretely and responsibly with a view to prudent management and a systematic preservation of such resources for the present and future generation. The gerontocratic values demand that trees, games, crops, and fishery resources etc. all require a prudent and judicious use in order to avoid the disappearance of species.¹⁸¹ The intense deforestation and desertification going on around the Niger Delta and Nigeria generally helps us to see how post-colonialism has impacted on the erosion of these values.

Yet it is one thing to be afraid of violating a Divine requirement, it is another thing to actually realise it when one does violate it. It is important to see in this anecdote the

¹⁸¹ The impact of this on the ecological balance of the Niger Delta has been a matter for conjecture, with alterations in volume of annual rainfall, the impact on the agricultural mainstay of the region is better imagined than described. Moreover the industrial discharge of chemical wastes on the waters and streams makes life very difficult for ordinary folks in the area as well. Cf. Hattingh (1997: 37).

underlying philosophical world in which people's thinking has been shaped, especially when it comes to stewardship and use of land. It is easy to appreciate the predicaments of the host communities who on the basis of the "giraffe principle" had given out their land in the hope of sharing the benefits accruing from it, but disappointed by the fact that the business ethics of multinational companies do not necessarily entail any humanitarian considerations, but rather is influenced principally by the maximization of profit even at the expense of the people. The principles of win-win, compensatory utilisation of land, and of good neighbourliness can now be confronted by a more globalized principle of win-loose and so the benefits accruing from the land is pilfered and not applied to the inhabitants of the land in a sustainable way.

Apparently, the discovery of oil within the living and agricultural space of the various Niger Delta ethnic nationalities has attracted a host of multinational oil companies to the area – each with the profit motive as the underlying *modus vivendi*. It is similar to a ravaging beast which can make or mar people's lives depending on whether it is killed and fairly shared, killed and inequitably shared as the present situation in Nigeria shows, or whether it is allowed to roam. The 3Es – exploration, exploitation and exportation have all ignored basic ethics encountered in our study of the ancient Near East, the Old Testament ethic of righteousness, and the "giraffe" which informed the cultural mores and ethos of the Ogba and Ekpeye for example, and in so doing have violated not only the human rights of land owners and users, but also interfered with their devotion to God inadvertently. It is still incumbent on Total and the Federal Government to reverse the adverse effects of the 3Es by bringing their *modus operandi* in line with international standards and conventions. Therefore the present practice whereby government collects all the royalties from oil and leaves only the crumbs for the producing communities is a denial of human rights and human dignity, and should be rectified.

The "giraffe principle" of win-win, of compensatory use of land, and of good neighborliness should be seen as strongly applicable to my re-definition of stewardship. Such are the principles which can bring about social and economic transformation in the Niger Delta if and when they are put into practice. This re-definition is capable of bringing the relief of equity, fairness, justice and righteousness on government, company and communities in their respective as well as collective endeavor to become co-sharers of the benefits deriving from the oil exploration, exploitation and exportation. It is important that all stakeholders participate in the shares of the benefits accruing from the land which the Ekpeye and Ogba custodians gave out (but never sold) to the multi-national companies.

The people as custodians, apparently had understood the lease of land to oil companies as necessitating the activation of the “giraffe principle”, but have instead been confronted by the individualistic investment priorities of the multi-national companies. The onus of proof of a responsible and accountable stewardship is therefore on the multi-national companies which obtained the land to be able to see the world view of the original owners as entailing their sharing in all the benefits accruing there-from along with all other stakeholders as this is a fortune emerging from their (the communities’) land. The ways in which this can be done have been enunciated all along in our discussion of the principles of “*ma’at*”, of “*ṣedeqah*”, and of “giraffe” as very similar notions. (O’Neill 2007:111-113).

6.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, it suffices me to say that the perceptions of the Nigerian peoples based on their religion, ethos and values have enhanced this present understanding of what stewardship could be when it comes to land ownership and use in an industrial context. Such a perspective has been brought into an inter-contextual dialogue with insights both from the ancient Near Eastern norms, and Old Testament theology and ethics. The facts which emerge from such a critical engagement of one context with another, using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics and a functional equivalence translation of the pericope goes a long way to corroborate the existing perceptions of stewardship, land ownership and use in ways which apparently shapes the foregoing redefinition. It of course also raises some questions which is to be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION ON STEWARDSHIP

We have used the key concept of stewardship to critically re-read Genesis 1:26-28 using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics, and have also interpreted the Biblical text in terms of its implication for land ownership and use in the Niger Delta based on the “giraffe” principle. In a context such as the Niger Delta, providing a theology of land that resonates with the cultural mandate seen from African cultural perspectives is considered a sufficient and innovative ground for addressing the lingering problems of *latifundia*, land degradation, environmental pollution and ecological distortion. It is remarkable to note that this innovative use of the concept of “stewardship” have contributed to an exegesis that provides a hermeneutics and interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 in an obviously postcolonial and critical way, even though the word “stewardship”¹⁸² itself is not part of this text (Hall 2004:38).

In the second chapter in which various scholarly views were arraigned on the subject, it becomes clear that humans are generally called into a role of stewardship not only in respect of nature and created things, but also in their response to the Creator whose standards of morals and ethics is imbued in the whole identity of humans as the *imago Dei*. Apparently humans should not only be in relationship with their Creator and his creation, but also with one another as good neighbours in sharing with and caring for one another. This is depicted as responsible and accountable in the way they dispense of this role. In both the Nigerian perspective which we dealt with in the third chapter, and the indices employed in the fourth chapter as criteria for a postcolonial critical hermeneutic, attempts have been made to bring the message of Genesis to bear on the Niger Delta context as a humane, godly and indeed responsible response from the perspective of the creation, cultural or dual mandate. Simply put, humans are to be in partnership with nature in an ongoing creational process – reproducing the divine character on the one hand and on the other engaging in a responsible procreation. As can be seen therefore in the re-definition which followed in the sixth chapter, there is a critical need for stewardship to be

¹⁸² In this way Hall (1980) has been very helpful in our appropriation of the term for a critical examination of land ownership and use situated in the cultural mandate.

exercised in a win-win, compensatory use and good neighbourly atmosphere in order to eliminate an ongoing process of exploitation and pollution in the Niger Delta.

Moreover, this has to be done keeping in mind that there is no theological or ethical links between exploitation and expropriation, and the *imago Dei* in particular or with the concept of *kabash* (“subdue”) and *radah* (“have dominion”), all of which are with reference to Genesis 1:26-28 (Conradie 2006:308). Although the word stewardship used previously does not appear in the above text, it nevertheless contains the hermeneutical device with which we interpreted the meaning of *kabash* and *radah* in the fifth chapter as meaning more of a nurturing and protective use of what belongs to another – a meaning which have often been referred to as “sustainability” (Hattingh 2001:14-15).

7.1 Answering the problem

Hence, I began this dissertation by stating a problem confronting the people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria – a problem on air, land and sea simply known as environmental pollution, ecological distortion, *latifundia* and land degradation. The question to ask is the extent to which our study has answered this problem. First of all, we have identified all of these as real problems with various social and economic, even moral implications. Secondly, we have in the course of identifying the problem, inadvertently referred to various scholarly views and empirical evidences pointing in the direction of a lasting solution to these problems – barring human greed and avarice (Akao 1993:53). The problem on the one hand has been identified with an ongoing destruction of nature and pollution of a peoples’ environment resulting in the ecological distortions and land degradation with the chief perpetrators being various multi-national oil companies of which our focus was on Total (Evuleocha 2005:328ff; Ahiamadu 2003:7-11). The problem is further exacerbated by Federal Government of Nigeria’s ill preparedness to address the issues raised by oil mining activities of multi-national oil companies such as desertification, gas flaring, human and animal extinction, ecological damages, and general environmental pollution.

Although the government claims that it has a legal duty to promote and protect the human and other rights of her citizens, experience has shown a consistent abuse of the same by corporate agencies and government security forces. Neither has Total for example modified her operations to cater for the human and material needs of their host

communities, but instead have failed to address the negative effects suffered by their host communities (HCs) as a result of their operations. What moral obligations bind multinational oil companies to host communities when the Federal Government of Nigeria shirks the legal obligation to protect her citizens against human rights violations, perhaps due to weak governance or corruption? This study has sought to provide answers to this question by looking at various scholarly views on and interpretations of the creation mandate in Genesis 1:26-28 as well as by gleaning evidences of such obligations among Ogba and Ekpeye cultures through my empirical research. It is a multi-dimensional study dealing with a multi-faceted problem that calls for a multi-disciplinary solution.

In this concluding chapter it is my intention to evaluate the extent to which our hypothesis in the first chapter has been corroborated or disconfirmed. Our engagement with the analysis of the problem had one overarching theme in mind, namely, there is nothing in the Biblical text that authorises a baneful exploitation of nature for narrow human purposes (Birch 1991:82). Our hypothesis that a human-above-nature mindset is foreign both to Scripture and to African culture propelled both the literature study and my empirical research. The result of my investigation is similar to what most Biblical scholars have said with vigour, namely that a renewed interest in creation theology requires that humans recognise their role in the creation as being one of a partnership both with the Deity and with nature, more than anything else (Fretheim 2005:34; Ukpong 2004:72f). The concept of human-in-partnership with nature “breathes” in both the Biblical text, in ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies, as well as in the “giraffe principle” extant in Nigerian culture. Our contribution lies in using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics and a functional equivalence translation in interpreting the pericope, thereby ridding it of parochial and ecclesiastical trappings.

As we engaged with this analysis in the intervening chapters, a common thread on stewardship, land ownership and use that runs through the ancient Near Eastern, Old Testament, and African cultural views with special reference to Nigeria is accountable procreation of human species and a responsible reproduction of God’s character by those who are made in his image and likeness, and this without distinction based on race, climate or habitat. These points became clearer as we pointed out the inconclusiveness of various interpretations of the *imago Dei* which necessitated our employment of a more novel postcolonial critical hermeneutics. I used it both to exegete Genesis 1:26-28 with its overarching anthropology, but more than that I also used a functional equivalence approach in translating the same into Ogba, which further highlighted the richness of the

text. The evidences from our empirical research also underscores the general understanding of human stewardship as implying an accountable and responsible care and nurture of the land and creation in a way which promotes the wellbeing and interest of past, present and future generations which is endemic to land tenure systems extant in Nigeria.

In what follows I will evaluate the hypothesis to see its relationship to the various evidences adduced from both scholarly and cultural circles – keeping the text itself in mind.

7.2 Evaluation of hypothesis

Evidently, various views of stewardship, land ownership and use have tended to be anthropocentric without necessarily ignoring theocentricism (Watson 1990:857). One almost comes to the conclusion that God and humans are in a league in which all other creatures on earth are to be subjected to exploitation, expropriation and if need be extermination in order to promote human civilisation and prosperity (Ukpong 2005:32ff). It is often the case that those who hold such views are uncritical in their readings. In other words, they have failed to take the context of time and place into consideration. This inevitably results in a mis-reading and consequently in a mistreatment of nature as of an enemy, as something outside of man's orbit, something to be conquered, exploited, and mastered (Barton 1998:41-42). Not only have this study engaged in a postcolonial critical re-reading using indices of inter-textuality, inter-contextuality, holism and transcendentalism, all of which underline a humans-in-partnership-with-nature mindset, but have in so doing justified the exegetical significance of the pericope (Gen.1:26-28). This point has necessitated an Ogba translation of the same pericope so that everyone can see what the text may be saying to an audience such as ours, perhaps in ways it previously did not (Enuwosa 2005:130ff).

Apparently, it is important that we correct some wrongly held notions such as of human superiority over creation, and instead emphasize as I have done in a close-reading the way the text speaks of principles of justice and righteousness. The Priestly editor might have been conscious of this when he gave his creation narrative in such a unique way different from the prevailing narratives of the ancient Near Eastern cultures in which the gods often were vulnerable, precarious and even immoral (Fretheim 2005:12-14). The

uniqueness of *Yahweh* to the Priestly editor, lies in the fact that he created all things and is himself uncreated, righteous, just and merciful towards all that he has made (Brueggemann 2002:xliv-xxli).

On the basis of the foregoing we can then draw conclusions while at the same time showing the areas in which further research might be envisaged. While doing that, it is important to begin with a critical evaluation of the commonalities which confirm a humans-in-partnership with nature relationship instead of a humans-below-nature mindset sometimes encountered in some African cultures, or a humans-above-nature mindset which is the bane of humanism in Western circles. Such commonalities are described as the principles of good stewardship, land ownership and use extant in the Nigerian context, but which resonates with both the ancient Near Eastern and Old Testament customs and manners as well (Matthews 1988:1).

7.2.1 Underlying principles of best practice of stewardship, land ownership and use

Our re-definition of stewardship in the previous chapter captured what can be described as the best practice level of stewardship, land ownership and use and it stressed the gerontocratic principle of win-win, good neighborliness and compensatory use. This principle otherwise tied to the “giraffe” anecdote in the third chapter is simply a reflection of a practice which resonates with practically every civilised community, including ancient civilisations such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, not forgetting to mention the Biblical world of ancient Israel (Fretheim 2005:50-52 Brueggemann 2002:14; Garr 1996:136; Ehusani 1991:56).

In the second chapter we critically evaluated the views on stewardship, land ownership and use that is widely held among various scholars of both Western, Jewish and African extraction. A typical example is anthropology from a Jewish perspective: humans are like other creatures in terms of corporeality, but not like them in terms of thinking faculty and conscience (Cassuto 1978:56). A postcolonial critical approach in the fourth chapter narrowed the discussion of scholarly views to this same consideration of Genesis 1:26-28 and their implications for the creation mandate, particularly such subject as the Divine address, *the imago Dei*, “subdue” the earth and “rule” over the animals.

With respect to the subject of the Divine address, the view that God spoke in self-deliberation but with the heavenly court in mind became more pronounced. Moreover,

humans are made as representations of the Divine personality and as consummate beings according to the Divine purpose (Von Rad 1971:144-145). It entailed a reaching out toward the other in all of life's circumstances and being graciously there on behalf of that other. That is the role expected of humans who are the image of God in both functional and relational ways (Fretheim 2005:26-27). Or as Ukpong (2004:86) puts it, humans supposedly function like God as bearers of his image.

In all of this it becomes clear that both the *imago Dei* and the sphere of human rule over the 'eretz, far from being an unsettled one, is clearly interpreted inter-textually as the reproduction of the Divine character in functional ways and exercising dominion exclusively on a relational basis alone (Livingstone 1999:448-49). There are other scholars who have attempted to grapple with a definition of what humans consist of, not from this Biblical or theological perspective, but from a purely philosophical perspective that are marginal to our study but equally substantial (White 1967:1205)¹⁸³. A more theological reflection on this subject was done by Fretheim (2005:30) whose opinion is that no post-modern reading of Genesis creation narrative can reduce the weight of previous theological and ethical readings and the impact it has had on the environment and especially women. However, he seemed to have overcome all such scepticism when he unwittingly admits that:

“We must go beyond the text and draw on insights from other Biblical texts and from post Biblical learning and experiences in and through which God has been at work.” (Fretheim 2005:30).

In our postcolonial critical close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28 we inadvertently waded into the use of such extra-biblical insights using four critical indices in approaching the text, namely inter-textuality by comparing the text with similar texts from other parts of the Biblical canon, inter-contextuality by contextualising our reading to ancient Israelite and even Near Eastern culture while also contextualising the interpretation derived from it in

¹⁸³ Such philosophical reflection or what is commonly known as Gnosticism has been characteristic of scholarship in the Graeco-Roman tradition of dualistic thinking (Wybrow 1991:53). Thus the separation of humans into spirit and matter with the denigration of the latter as prone to evil is a philosophical conception derived from a broader contextual milieu (Wybrow 1991:47). It inevitably creates room for subsequent philosophical placement of humans beings, capable of spiritual sensibilities as, above natural creation – animals, birds, trees and the land which are mere material matter (Kelbassa 2001:79). This humans-above-nature mindset which is deeply rooted in an ancient Graeco-Roman culture typified in Hellenism and its projection of a superb human culture has been briefly debunked in our argument so far. Such attitude to nature also raises the question of what can be considered a proper human attitude to creation in general, especially when the issue of stewardship, land ownership and use is under consideration (Hall 1990:56-57), questions now answered in this humble treatise. (Some of the debunked views are in Appendix 1 below.)

the light of my own post-colonial experience as a Nigerian. When it comes to subduing the earth and ruling over the animals, one is under the impression that a too literal focus on the human being as created in the image of God, with the accompanying command to have dominion (Gen.1:26-28) have seldom been related theologically to other texts in these chapters (Gen.2:4b-24 for instance) that speak more fully of the status and responsibility of the creatures (Fretheim 2005:33).

In my survey of scholarly views on stewardship, land ownership and use as practiced in the ancient Near Eastern, Old Testament, and African culture I observed some underlying principles which suggest that inter-textuality and inter-contextuality are basic ingredients for exegeting the Genesis pericope. Other indices used in the postcolonial close-reading also included holism and transcendentalism – two of which point in the direction of more or less multi-dimensional engagement with the text. In this way our initial hypothesis in favour of a relationship and perhaps functional interpretation of the *imago Dei* has already been corroborated (Fretheim 2005:49; Ukpong 2004:72-86). This is even truer when the scholarly views from the ancient Near Eastern cultures are brought into focus.

7.2.1.1 Ancient Near East

Surrounding a holistic overview of the underlying principles of ancient Near Eastern concepts of stewardship, land ownership and use for instance, is the notion of a prosperous land which so much depends on how the king and the subjects comply with the norms and ethics of land tenure. There are several tradition-historical antecedents to the primeval saga, some of which included the *Enuma Elish*, the *Gilgamesh Epic*, and the *Memphis Creation* documents. There are also the Sumerian king list and the *Atrahasis Epic* – in the latter of which various narrative elements are set together in something of the same series of Old Testament primeval saga – all of which reflect ancient creation motifs (Coats 1983:16-46).

The point is that when one reads for instance Prophet Isaiah's concept of creation, one sees *Yahweh* subduing chaotic forces of the deep in order to establish the cosmos. Such concepts cannot but cause one to see a prevailing notion of creation out of chaos resulting from God's righteous and upright rule. Such righteous rule is the underlying principle which is also embodied in the Egyptian concept of the *ma'at*. In ancient Near Eastern cosmologies righteousness and justice (*ma'at*) belongs to the domain of the royalty. They are responsible for its enforcement within the realm as divine representatives of God, so

that the righteous rule of a king is a reflection of the righteous rule of Deity, and if this chain of right-doing is broken, the situation on the land becomes chaotic and difficult to steward or manage. Therefore good stewards need to be admonished, instructed, and corrected like ancient monarchs in order to avoid the humiliation of abnegation from the land resulting from a breach of relationship (Coats 1983:59).

The Old Testament having been shaped in ancient Near Eastern cultures invariably contain similar underlying principles of good stewardship, land ownership and use based on justice and righteousness – the whole principle of *ṣedeqah*.

7.2.1.2 The Old Testament

It is interesting to see how this overarching theme runs through and governs a general Old Testament conception of stewardship, land ownership and use. Stewardship is a calling to newness in partnership both with the Deity and with land in particular (Brueggemann 2002:20). Nature and land are conceived of as communal gift from the Deity (Wright 1983:57). It is Gottwald (1975:46-47) who makes the point that stewardship of land in line with the Old Testament views is intertwined with the notion of monotheism. Faithful people must resist the temptation of complacency in the land and stick with the buoyancy of the covenant by saying “yes” to *Yahweh* and “no” to the gods. Those who do so will not be uprooted from the land but would dwell safely in it even to son’s sons (Brueggemann 1977:58-59). In an attempt to avoid the precarious thrust of landlessness, Israel’s need to address this looming danger to her practice of true religion, received immense prophetic attention.

It is therefore a prominent Old Testament view that brings *Yahweh* once again into focus as the one whose land Israel inhabits and desires to inhabit to son’s sons. In Brueggemann’s (1977:56) opinion, *Yahweh*’s role as benefactor must come to mind before Israel’s new identity can be sustained, because occupying the land effectively rests on the exercise of stewardship that is compliant with the *ṣedeqah* principle or laid down laws. This is depicted in our close reading of Genesis 1:26-28, where the reproduction of the Divine character by humans as being the *imago Dei* is closely linked to a procreation of human species who subdues the earth and rules over the animals and other moving beings effectively.

In other words, it is only by obedience to divine laws – especially the Decalogue – that *Yahweh's* action towards Israel and His incredible willingness and capacity to transform Israel's history from slavery in the wilderness into security in a land which belongs to them, can be facilitated (Brueggemann 1997:89). Hence the burden of the Deuteronomist is to sensitise the nation to the singular fact that Israel could not single-handedly grapple with the realities of a re-defined post-Egyptian identity without relying on *Yahweh* and obeying His precepts. Israel would live a life rooted in “precepts freely spoken and gifts freely given” in order not to be caught in apathy under coercion that is devoid of passion and victory (Brueggemann 1997:89).

The onus of proof that Israel is capable of living sustainably using the abundant resources *Yahweh* has availed her with in the land, is upon Israel herself. The word from the Preachers at Jordan is: “take heed”; “beware”; “take heed lest your heart be deceived” (Dt.11: 16; 6:12; 8:11-17). Ceasing to be Israel in the land is one of the gravest dangers which confronts the people and which will be the inevitable outcome of short-lived memories. As Brueggemann (1977:57) aptly puts it: “the way to sustain gifted existence is to stay singularly and exclusively on God, who is the gift-giver”.

It is my considered opinion that such a Judeo-Christian *cum* Old Testament ethic can be described as down to earth because there is nothing one can do in, on or with the land that is outside of the sphere of God's moral scrutiny – a point to which Brueggemann returns again and again. In that respect our postcolonial critical hermeneutic of the Genesis account of the creation mandate (Gen. 1:26-28) stands in good stead of being applied efficiently in not only understanding but also addressing the devastation and decimation of both human and natural resources in the Niger Delta. An appropriate culture of land ownership and use, which can be economically more sustainable, ecologically more “orthodox”, and environmentally more sensitive, is the only way to reflect a similar monotheistic culture which governed Israel's economic, legal and social evolution. Suffice it to say that most cultures encountered by this study have a vigorous sense of a Divine ownership of land as a special gift entrusted to humans to be used accountably and responsibly¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸⁴ There is an incisive discussion of security of land tenure, local communities and resource control in other cultures around the world found in Hoadley *et al* (2002:23ff); and in Ballard *et al* (2003:299-300).

This view has been explored extensively by various Old Testament scholars who apparently are well acquainted with the basic books of the Old Testament – the *Torah*. Our pericope has reflected stewardship in ancient Israel. Stewardship in this context can be understood as custody and effective management of all land granted to Israelites in the land of Canaan (Olson 1995:102). The views of scholars, which have been the theme since the second chapter is on a stewardship which generally revolve around the *imago Dei* to which a theology of land¹⁸⁵ in the *Torah* is applicable. A quick survey of the *Torah* will make this point even more vivid.

For instance, in Genesis 12 the patriarch Abraham is told to depart from among his kiths and kin into a land which *Yahweh* was to show him, and in that land he was to grow into a great nation, he was to be blessed and to be made a blessing to all nations of the earth through his promised seed. Van Seters (1992:72) reads this “promise of land” theme not as exclusive to Israel but also embracing the nations (Van Seters 1992:16)¹⁸⁶.

Similarly, in Exodus we find groups of native pilgrims who, having been rescued from a long and arduous slavery, were now to go and take possession of the land of promise. Prior to taking that step, the “promise” theme is further highlighted by God through the giving of the law by Moses through the construction of a “Cultic” tabernacle, the inauguration of a kindred priesthood, and the sealing of a covenant of promise with blood. On their part the people respond overwhelmingly in favour of Moses and of the law. Fretheim (2005:48-49) considers this an act of a gracious God who not only shares his creative energy with humans, but also desires to maintain a relationship with them. The whole Sinaitic episode (Ex.19-24) was geared towards Israel’s faithful compliance with the tenets of the Covenant code and an assurance of *Yahweh*’s guarantee of a covenantal relationship with them in the land of Canaan to which they – the Israelites – would return.

In Leviticus the emphasis once again is on the fulfilment of promises made to the fathers, provided the “cultic” requirements for a decent and fruitful life is met in the Promised Land.

¹⁸⁵ ‘The clearest expression of Old Testament theology of land is Lev.25:23: “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants”. Such a statement underscores not only *Yahweh*’s ownership of the land, but his grace in giving land as a gift. The land is given to Israel, but it remains under God’s ownership (Wright 1983:57). Interestingly, there is no direct mention of this in Numbers, but its application to the wandering pilgrims is made explicit in *Yahweh*’s promise to give the land to the younger generation while denying access to the older generation (Num.14:30-31); see Ahiamadu (2005:7).

¹⁸⁶ This is true of Biblical passages which speak of *Yahweh*’s foreknowledge of national and geographical boundaries. See Deut.32:8; Acts 17:26-27.

In Leviticus (Lev. 25) and as part of the promise theme, the Jubilee institution was enacted. This of all the laws designed to protect the individual inalienability of land was specifically meant to show that ultimate ownership of land was *Yahweh's*. Coats (1983:48ff) perceives such “cultic” prescriptions as being greatly influenced by the royal court. Others see it as a post-exilic priestly form of the Pentateuch deriving from the same setting (see Westermann 1986:128). There had to be the supporting procedures of redemption and Jubilee in Leviticus 25 in order to foster safe possession of land at the individual and kinship levels¹⁸⁷.

In Numbers the demand of the daughters of Zelophehad receives immediate Divine sanction (Num.27:1-11; 36:1-12) because of the importance of land to the survival of *Yahweh's* covenant people who are to serve Him as a worshipping community in the land of Canaan. Important safeguards were provided to guarantee women's rights to land ownership and use whenever the circumstances allowed it as in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. Olson (1996:162-63) and Westbrook (1991:147) underscore the aetiology of this narrative while commenting on its historical plausibility.

Finally, in Deuteronomy the integrity of boundary markers (Dt.19: 14) – a violation of which attracted a severe curse (Dt.27:17), and against which both prophets and sages spoke vehemently (Ho.5:10; Jb.24:2f; Pr.23:10) were to be maintained. Fretheim (2005:40) and Watson (1990:857) both show how a violation of this rule could be tantamount to an “act of terrorism”. Hence, these Deuteronomic laws, repetitious as they were to the Israelites, had to be re-enacted each sabbatical year through reading and re-reading of the *Torah* to warn them against acts inimical to the covenant. Again, such re-readings emphasised the safeguards which facilitated the ownership and use of land by all, including widows, the fatherless, and proselytes or strangers. For instance, the taking of interests on loans given to fellow Israelites was forbidden (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36f; Dt. 23:19ff).

This applied not only when an economy was cash based, but also when it was barter based. It was and still is a true mark of good neighbourliness (Ajah 2006:140). Two ways in which this was practically applied to the socio-economic life of Israel were: firstly where there was control over the use of pledges taken as security for loans (Ex.22:26ff). In this respect one's millstone could not be so pledged (Dt.24:6) nor could one's privacy be invaded in the attempt to secure a pledge. Secondly, not even the king was allowed to

¹⁸⁷ This point has also been discussed elsewhere, see Ahiamadu (2005:51).

amass wealth or engage in excessive economic, financial, military or social self-aggrandisement (Dt.17:16f). It is therefore clear how Old Testament theology and ethics point in the same direction or principle which must undergird every concept of stewardship, land ownership and use – the principle of justice and righteousness!

7.2.1.3 African culture in contemporary Nigeria

The same underlying values of justice and righteousness govern the self-understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use in parts of Africa, although several mitigating factors hinder its full expression. Yet the same overarching theme is found in all of the cultures encountered in this study – the Akan of Ghana, the Bini, Ebira, Igbo, Ogbá, or the Yoruba of Nigeria – namely, the fertility of the land and the longevity of its inhabitants are closely associated with the practice of righteousness and justice, described as the “giraffe principle” of win-win, good neighbourliness and compensatory use of natural resources including land. Among these various ethnic groups, the elders or gerontocrats played a dominant role in setting the maintenance of a social and economic order in which such principles of equity, fair-play, justice, and mutual care played themselves out in the land (Ehusani 1991:56). The gerontocrats also served as custodians and interpreters of prevailing norms and customs of the people similar to the *pater familias* in ancient Israel as was stated in chapter three.

Conversely, the habit of devastation of and alienation from the land which industrial operations of oil companies introduced in Ogbá and Ekpeye is still foreign to indigenous minds. It disregards the creation or cultural mandate of responsible reproduction of the Divine character which is at the core of a re-definition of stewardship. It also inhibits an accountable utilisation of nature’s resources as the process of human procreation goes on. Moreover, it results in a violation of creation with a negative impact on the institution of gerontocracy and the “giraffe principle”, while undermining social harmony and the dignity of land. Finally, it calls into question the concept of humans as being the image of God when multinational business moguls do not reflect God’s caring and nurturing character, or do so in very exclusive and discriminatory manner.

In answer to such questions we attempted both a post-colonial critical interpretation of the pericope as well as a functional equivalence translation of it so as to demonstrate the ways in which the *imago Dei* provides a fulcrum around which stewardship in a responsible and accountable manner revolves. Hence, I pointed out that a right relationship with God by

human stewards is inevitable in yielding to a harmonious relationship with the rest of creation. It is on that note that the gulf between creation and redemption is spanned (Fretheim 2005:18).

A postcolonial critical hermeneutics now reads Genesis 1:26-28 in thoroughly theocentric terms and depicts the *imago Dei* in both vertical (relational) and horizontal (functional) terms so as to sustain a humane and nurturing environment in ways resonating with the heart and essence of human nature and vocation (Towner 2005:349). In this way, humans can maintain a balance between a pilgrim mindset which befits true stewards, and which ascribes the ownership of all things to the Deity, and a mindset couched in the theological and ethical requirement of justice and righteousness to which all stakeholders must subscribe (Brueggemann 1977:3,108). The placement of natural resources at the disposal of humans seem to have been undertaken by the Creator in order to foster accountable and responsible nurture and care of creation for the benefit of all stakeholders – community, company and government; but it does not end there. Nature as well as creation needs to be cared for by those sentient beings that rule over them and dominate them (Wilde 2000:39-45).

There are ways in which transcendence informs the ancient Near Eastern concept of *ma'at* relationally and functionally. It is at that point of transcendence that *ma'at* converges with the *sedeqah* principle of the Old Testament as well as with the “giraffe principle” of win-win, compensatory use, and good neighbourliness which lies at the root of every gerontocratic culture. At the point of transcendence similar principles of justice and righteousness as a general belief can be traced to different cultures, land and clime. As a principle it is tied to a profitable conservation and sustainable use of land and its usufruct which is necessary for the survival and improvement of human society, but at the level of practice we know that land is a static gift from God and a depleting asset which yields benefits extending from generation to generation only if owners and users conform to this universal principle of *ma'at*, *şedeqah*, or “giraffe” (Ottoson 1974:389).

It is these underlying principles of *ma'at*, *şedeqah*, and “giraffe” which make stewardship such a part of what Fretheim (2005:83) has described as continuing creation. In the light of the foregoing the following evidences have been adduced to justify or prove our initial hypothesis that a humans-above-nature mindset is in dissonance with both the Biblical text and cultural practices in the ancient Near East and in contemporary Africa. Instead a

humans-in-partnership-with-nature is more prone to a responsible and accountable stewardship, land ownership and use.

These contributions inevitably lead us to conclusions drawn from the methodological resources used so far.

7.3 Contributions which justify the methodology

The methodology which has enhanced the contribution of this research to Old Testament studies are of course verifiable ones, namely, literature study, a critical exegesis using a postcolonial critical hermeneutic, and empirical research using focus groups and personal interviews. The evidences which justify the steps taken to arrive at this concluding chapter are too numerous to mention. Not only have I engaged various Old Testament scholars in a dialogue as part of a literature study, but have also devised a specific strand of postcolonial hermeneutics adapted to Old Testament studies. As far as is known to me, there has never been a study of this kind in the field of Old Testament Biblical studies. With these same methodological resources, we are also able to adopt a strategy of Bible translation which is functionally dynamic and culturally sensitive to the receptor audience in a way that is accurate, clear, and natural.

Similarly, in an empirical research which not only took me to Nigeria on two separate occasions, but also to Sweden for a participant observation of a human rights culture as depicted in that Nordic context, this study has been able to uncover the relevance of a sound exegetical and theological interpretation of the pericope from the point of view of the indigenized, marginalised and the neo-colonised (Smith 1999:22-28). It is thus able to critically assess the Old Testament perspective as well as the people's self-understanding of stewardship, land ownership and use involving all the stakeholders – community, company and government – especially in the oil industry in the Niger Delta. These points are further elaborated below in critical hermeneutics, human rights and the “giraffe principle”.

7.3.1 Genesis 1:26-28 in critical hermeneutics

In the first place the humans-above-nature mindset is not based on any interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 that we have known so far. Neither Fretheim's (2005:33f) creation

continua which is based on humans in relationship with God and with nature on the one hand, nor Ukpong's (2004:83f) humanity as embedded in creation warrants such a mindset. Instead, a humans-above-nature mindset unwittingly steers a desire to denigrate the land and creation, and to glorify profit in an on-going process of exploitation and expropriation of native oil wealth by multi-national oil companies in the Niger Delta [(Evuleocha (2005:328); Ballard *et al* (2003:296)].

It certainly is difficult to link this ongoing process of exploitation and pollution to a theological or ethical interpretation of the *imago Dei* in particular or with the concept of *kabash* ("subdue") and *radah* ("have dominion") with reference to Genesis 1:26-28. Seen from the perspective of stewardship the above text nevertheless contains the hermeneutical device for interpreting the meaning of *kabash* and *radah*. Therefore, a theology of stewardship suggests that human beings are responsible and accountable for the whole of the earth together, without excluding resource or land owners (Hall 2004:56).

Neither are humans to fulfill this mandate in isolation, but are to do so in a relationship with God, with one another and also with creation in a process that Fretheim (2005:19-22) describes as creation *continua*. This is to be done by all humans in partnership with the Creator and also in partnership with creation or nature itself. It is a responsibility that must be expressed in overarching just and humane cultural, religious and social super-structural forms such as prevailed in the Egyptian *ma'at*; the Old Testament *ṣedeqah*; and the contemporary African "giraffe principle" of win-win, good neighbourliness, and compensatory use. Moreover, it is a responsibility that goes with an inescapable accountability and calls for the same care and nurture of the human environment and ecology that the Creator originally intended and is worked out in functional and relational processes (Fretheim 2005:19-22; Ukpong 2004:83ff). In relational terms humans definitely are as vulnerable as all nature itself and are dependent on land and nature for ongoing survival, even though in functional terms they are honourably to serve as care givers (Conradie 2006:308).

We can also relate our interpretation of Genesis 1:26-28 to human rights.

7.3.2 Genesis 1:26-28 and human rights

The concept of human rights antedated the Universal Declaration of Human Rights UDHR of 1948, and in principle is derived from the cumulative human rights culture of several

millennia (Runzo 2003:11-23). Hence the UDHR received a global support during its enactment, but for some minor exceptions.¹⁸⁸ Paradoxically, a global awareness of the rights of individual persons and the conferment of independence status on many parts of colonial Africa since Liberia's nationhood in 1948 has not altered the violation of human rights in the South¹⁸⁹ by countries of the North. Thus practice is divorced from theory when as in the case of the UDHR various interpretations of the *imago Dei* have tended towards a lopsided definition of humans as being those of a particular class or creed, not to mention race.

With particular reference to Nigeria, the 1963 and 1999 constitutions following in the trail of the UDHR entrenched the rights of every Nigerian to life, to person, to movement, to association, religion, conscience, held opinion, and equality before the law. Consequently, it suffers the same divergence between principles and practice which its "progenitor" experiences. Beside, there is an inherent weakness in successive Nigerian constitutions which illustrates this divergence, namely, the absence of commensurate responsibilities and accountability before the law in the enjoyment of personal and corporate rights (Ekeh 1974:90; Ahiamadu 1982:59).

Nowhere is this disjunction between rights and responsibilities or accountabilities evident as in the areas of oil exploitation and the whole issue of environmental pollution as a result of gas flares¹⁹⁰. Thus a link is forged between stewardship and human rights when issues

¹⁸⁸ The UDHR has until today not been universally endorsed as most Muslim led governments around the world – the Middle East and some Asian countries have not subscribed to its ethos, seeing it as a Western imperialistic device. [Runzo and Sharma (eds) 2003:23ff].

¹⁸⁹ "South" is used here as referring to the Southern Hemisphere where most of the developing economies of the world are located. "North" or "Northern" refer to the more industrialized nations of Europe and North America. See Jenkins (2005:527).

¹⁹⁰ A broad view of the issues at stake is reproduced in Magazine published in Cape Town, South Africa which appeared in May 2005 and reproduced here in to to: "It is said that if you fly over parts of Nigeria at night, you think it is day because of the flaring of natural gas. The same is also true of Angola, which burns 85.0% of its oil-linked natural gas. We have seen in the case of Nigeria that instead of the federal or state governments bringing Shell, Total and Agip to book, they are the ones that need to be brought to book by either the African Union or United Nations for tolerating this wanton waste of finite natural resources. These multi-national oil companies and others too numerous to mention have carried out this destructive practice for more than five decades since oil was discovered in the Niger Delta. It is our considered opinion that the multi-national oil companies ought to be forced to pay adequate compensations, stop the gas flares and clean up the environment for the restoration of the dignity both of the land and of the people. One wonders where they obtained permission to burn Nigeria's natural resources, and what manner of post-colonial governments exist on a continent which has allowed a substance that can do so much for the economies of "developing" African countries to go up in flames and without respect for the environmental damage done to the land inhabited by the people of the Niger Delta who are the most affected by these reckless gas flares. While several North African producers of crude oil have

such as this are presented. Rulers as we have seen are also stewards, and decisions to exploit land and natural resources with or without the consent of the governed, as has been the case in Nigeria's land decree leads inevitably to misconceptions of rights. Apparently, the key feature of secularism is its ability to safeguard ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism within the polity (Taylor 1994:62).

In a country where Muslim fundamentalism sometimes erupt into violent uprisings against adherents of other faiths, the secular protection of pluralism against, religious egoism and other dangers may be crucial to a just society (Runzo 2003:23). The secular must not be held captive to the values proclaimed by any one religion. Instead the secular and sacred must be governed by values which all religions have in common, such as personal and group accountability to Deity and mutual responsibility to one another. In my opinion,

distinguished themselves by seizing global market opportunities to earn revenue from the export of natural gas. Most of Nigeria's gas associated with oil has gone up in smoke, with serious economic sustainability consequences. Petroleum experts have pointed out the environmental advantage which natural gas has over crude petroleum in that with the correct processing, it can provide the kind of "green" low sulphur transport fuel that the world desperately needs. Natural gas is not only a major source of energy, but also a chemical feed stock.

It is true in the case of Nigeria that a liquefied natural gas project (LNGP) has been mounted in Bonny in Rivers State for extracting the natural gas associated with crude oil, but this has been done less than a decade ago and solely due to the peaking of crude oil production and reserves in both Nigeria and in some big producing regions – like the Middle East, Texas (USA) and Russia. The LNG project in Nigeria has been there for nearly a decade now but there has never been any shut down of any of the gas flaring point in the Niger Delta which suggests that the LNG is serving a purpose other than the extraction of natural gas, perhaps extracting only an insignificant percentage. That is not good enough.

The oil majors – Shell, Total, Chevron, Agip and others which are all Western European and North American firms – have known all along that the oil does not belong to them, but to the people of the Niger Delta, albeit Nigeria. The flaring of natural gas and all its negative effects on both the people and their environment has already been discussed. The social, economic, and moral implications can only be better imagined than described. Suffice it to be said that it is situations like this that justice cries out for a world court at which the transgressors can be tried, convicted and heavily fined. They owe the people of these regions big reparations and they should be made to cough up such damages done to the environment of the Niger Delta, Nigeria and Angola, because that seems to be the only language that desecrators of this sort understand.

From this MOC's reports we gather that Africa's natural gas reserves reached 450 trillion cubic meters in 2005, but what they have to calculate is how many trillion cubic meters they have already destroyed and what have been done in terms of air pollution and ill health to both the neighbouring communities and their environment. Given the knowledge base of the value of natural gas and the logistics that can be applied to get it where it needs to go, there is in my opinion no longer any excuse at all for its continued destruction. There is no other way land can be disowned and abused than the way the multi-national oil companies are doing it". (Creamer's 2005, 41:6; see also **NECCSA** 2005:1).

without such a sound moral and ethical base, it is difficult to incorporate a social ethic or morality that is both responsible and accountable. It becomes even more difficult to strike a balance between religious inclusivism and secular rationalism.

7.3.3 Genesis 1:26-28 and the “giraffe principle”

My empirical research resulted in the identification of the principle of win-win, good neighbourliness, and compensatory use of resources similar to the *şedeqah* principle which a postcolonial close-reading and functional equivalence translation of Genesis 1:26-28 has proved. In other words, a postcolonial critical close-reading of Genesis 1:26-28 as well as a functional equivalent translation into Ogba have all been in an attempt to critically eliminate the bifurcation between Scripture and Culture which erstwhile colonial readings and interpretations have placed. In this way our presupposition is justifiable to the extent that an inter-textual and inter-contextual close-reading have corroborated the possibility of discouraging the kind of human autonomy and exploitative ownership and use of natural resources which has resulted in the present ecological disaster facing the Niger Delta today. We have used a postcolonial critical hermeneutics to emphasise these points in our close-reading, and subsequently have re-defined stewardship in a more inclusive way than is usually allowed by ecclesiastical trappings.

This to my mind is a holistic approach to the subject which opens a new horizon of scholarly interaction with a concept which according to Hall (1990; 2004) has come of age. Yet one cannot completely ignore the various infrastructures put in place for the bolstering of the human race vis-à-vis nature with the tendency to lean on a human-above-nature mindset, instead of a humans-in-partnership-with-nature mindset, the latter of which my methodology has justified.

Be that as it may, we must strive even more for a transcendentalism which is needed to elevate the native mind from a “servile” detachment from any but a subsistence use of the nation’s abundant natural resources which simply amounts to a humans-below-nature mindset (cf. Hughes 1998:158). My study have proffered a middle course of a relational theology of land and nature in which humans are not only engaged in a tripartite link with their Maker and nature on the one hand, but are also expected to respond to their Maker and to nature in an accountable and responsible manner on the other.

The tendency for indigenous traditions and values to take the downward spiral of a humans-below-nature mindset suggests that the “giraffe principle” of win-win, good neighbourliness and compensatory use is per se insufficient to bolster the kind of corporate governance, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic co-existence needed for Nigeria’s continued co-existence in a “global” world. Yet the “giraffe principle” is a pointer that justice and righteousness is deeply imbedded in the people’s culture. It also depicts the undeniable fact that “what is alike must be treated alike” (Hattingh 1997:34). The standards of environmental and ecological sensitivity maintained in Europe and North America must be applied by multi-national companies in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and especially in the Niger Delta in order for a good stewardship of the natural resources with which the country has been endowed to emerge.

A corollary to this point is what professionals including legal practitioners and quantity surveyors¹⁹¹ have identified as the current abuse that land in particular and nature in general are facing in the hands of unscrupulous and ill informed corporate entities. Nigeria has not embraced the habitat agenda like Kenya and South Africa. This is not because they do not know what it stands for, but due to the multi-faceted nature of the country’s problems – multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural – which also impacts on people’s perception of reality.

Nigeria is the only country in Africa where multi-national oil companies wake up in the morning and carry out massive land excavation – felling down trees, closing water channels and nothing happens. According to the professionals land ownership and use in Nigeria is generally not based on equity and justice. The point of this study is to proffer corrective and dialogical ways in which such concerns are not only addressed, but are seen to have been addressed.

Having said that, the implications for Africa as a whole are enormous. The strictures of a re-definition of stewardship must embrace the human solidarity prevalent in Africa. It means that those who exploit and expropriate Africa’s, albeit Nigeria’s resources purely for profit without caring for the people who own those resources need to be stopped. Neither a critical reading of Genesis 1:26-28 nor a clear acquaintance with the African cultural principle of the “giraffe” permits such an abuse of creation. People however need to be

¹⁹¹ Sir Levi Oguike claims to be speaking for the Nigerian Institute of Quantity Surveyors (NIQS) and is the immediate past chairman of House of Representatives committee on Habitat. See *Vanguard Newspapers*, May 31, 2005. Lagos – Nigeria.

taught to be more responsible and accountable in the use and management of that which nature has entrusted to humans (Ukpong 2004:76).

In other words, in its re-defined status, stewardship, land ownership and use can only tolerate the ongoing processes of globalisation to the extent that stakeholders such as Ogba and Ekpeye community, Total multi-national company and the Federal and State government in Nigeria share equitably and rationally in the gains from the land and natural resources that are being exploited (Evuleocha 2005:334).

Apparently the foregoing recapitulations have necessitated the formulation of our hypothesis and the choice of this methodology. Moreover, it challenges us to take a fresh look at stewardship and understand its resonance not only with the ancient Near Eastern, but also with the Old Testament, the Judeo-Christian and African cultures. It challenges us to think more clearly about the ownership of land and natural resources which belongs to God and the ways in which our use of them can be streamlined by humane considerations (Ukpong 2004:72-74).

There is presently a global outrage against the environmental pollution going on in parts of Nigeria, and the quest for the preservation of clean air, green environment, freedom of persons and sustainable development seem to be an elusive one from the point of view of human rights and human dignity (Benhabib 1997:54; White 1967:1206). It does seem that such a quest shall not be stopped. Moreover this ongoing quest results in that this study will never have the last word on the matter. Perhaps what I have done is to open a field of enquiry and a horizon of thought which may serve as a heuristic resource for those who would like to delve into the intricacies of environmental theology or what in some circles has been described as ecotheology (Conradie 2006:309).

In conclusion, it is true that a synthesis of the numerous multi-disciplinary concepts with which this study has been engaged with, may not be satisfactory from the point of view of a single discipline, yet its theological and ethical leanings cannot be disguised. It is a multi-dimensional study giving authenticity to the African voice on the subject of stewardship, the first of course to do so using a postcolonial critical hermeneutics. Perhaps my early graduate studies in political science¹⁹² has stood me in good stead in being able to

¹⁹² I obtained a Bachelors degree in Political Science in 1979 and in 1982 graduated with a Master of Science degree – both from Nigeria’s “premier” University of Ibadan. Between 1982 and 2002 I have been involved in full-time Christian ministry, until I landed in Stellenbosch University in 2003.

synergize Old Testament theological reflections on the creation mandate with an ethnographic analysis of the gerontocratic context of West Africa and indeed Nigeria in respect of the conventional practices of stewardship in pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial times, using the underlying principle of justice and righteousness (Mosala 1986:15-30). Bringing in a postcolonial critical hermeneutics introduces another innovative dimension to a re-reading of the ancient text in a way in which it is meaningful to the context of the Niger Delta in which a conceptual incoherence had until now surrounded stewardship, land ownership and land use. This study warrants and gives an authentic African voice to the crucial concept of stewardship in relation to land ownership and use in a way in which it impacts on creation theology, human rights and corporate social responsibility. It demands as we have done, that the Genesis text be exegeted and re-read in a postcolonial critical way in order to bring the text into a meaningful and proactive dialogue with the environmental situations in the Niger Delta.

In doing so it transcends all previous interpretations and again gives conciseness and clarity to Genesis' concept of *imago Dei* and human "dominion" of '*eretš* or the earth – concepts which are pivotal to stewardship. It used both a postcolonial critical approach and a functional equivalence translation to highlight the ethical worth of the creation, cultural, or dual mandate in an interpretation which brings together both an inter-textual and inter-contextual hermeneutics (Conradie 2006:308). In doing this, I am not unmindful that it is possible to lose sight of the fact that "the social background of Biblical literature is often far removed from contemporary life and therefore unable to provide concrete models for contemporary social concerns". Yet as it was said: "the power of the text however lies in its modeling of social transformation" (Ahiamadu 2006:303; Dozeman 1998:222; Getui 1995:7).

7.4 Suggestions for further research

This raises lots of questions which further research can address. First of all it raises the question of what then should be the right approach to stewardship, land ownership and use of natural resources by all stakeholders in the Niger Delta's oil industry, including the

In those inter-study years (1982-2002) I went through several short courses and workshops on Biblical studies, Christian Ministry, Evangelism, Bible Translation, Local Language Literacy Development, and Socio-linguistic studies – all of which have enriched the quality of this research. My gratitude and that of my wife Julia, goes to our numerous friends and mentors too numerous to mention, notable of whom is Rev. Sam M. Allison, Co-ordinator of Christian Studies Programme of the Rivers State College of Education, Port Harcourt who exposed me to the rudiments of Biblical Hebrew.

community, company and government? Is the corporate social responsibility of those who are engaged in the processes of exploration, exploitation and exportation of mineral resources particularly in the Niger Delta any different from what it is elsewhere? To what extent are these stakeholders – community, company and government – aware that Genesis 1:26-28, like many similar texts, exists and that it is speaking directly of them as so called owners and users of land and the natural resources in the Niger Delta, and therefore can be used to address the problem which ignorance or misunderstanding of this basic text have created?

On the part of the community, given the necessary funding, more of the Biblical text can be translated, so that it can be read to enlighten land owners and users on the role they are expected to play in order to fulfill their stewardship and exercise the cultural mandate as the *imago Dei*. I am thankful to Almighty God that a translation of the entire New Testament is now available in Ogba. There is a need for a group reading of the Biblical text with focus group participants and in Christian congregations not only to see what impact an uncritical reading of the text can have on social transformation, but also to assess the extent to which readers dialogue and interact with the text that is placed before them (Ahiamadu 2005:105; Ukpong 2001: 582ff; Dube 1992:113-114). Such reading can then progress and be made more critical through a systematic Biblical training in exegesis and dogmatics. It could yield the unexpected result of a more de-colonised, demythologised, and even liberating reading as it dialogues with such salient issues confronting human societies today such as identity, hybridity, mimesis, feminism, and ethno-centricism. As people learn new ways of interpretation it will lead to social and spiritual transformation. Having said that, there are areas of further research which this study inadvertently opens up.

Firstly, it opens up lots of research into what human rights consists of in the context of a gerontocratic culture and how much of the ethic and mores of gerontocracy is still extant today. Such a research sounds ethnographic, but it can also be approached from a theological perspective. Stewardship, land ownership and use challenge us to avoid an exploitative attitude in our use of land and natural resources, but instead to serve responsibly and act like people committed to creation and salvation like elders do.

Secondly, it also calls for further research into the impact which the previous colonial readings and interpretation of the Biblical text have had on the modernisation of land tenure laws, and the commercialisation of land. A qualitative research done in this area reveals a gap between traditional values and the impact which government and company

acquisition of land have had on the areas of Ogba and Ekpeye. The question is why has so many decades of national self-government and of oil company presence in the area impacted negatively on the economic and social conditions of host communities in areas where oil is drilled? Is the situation any different in the neighbouring communities without oil? A quantitative and comparative study will open up ways in which to be able to understand the source of the negative impact – theological, cultural, moral or spiritual with a view to addressing the problem.

Thirdly, it calls for further research into the ways in which humans must relate to the environment in a more sustainable and proactive manner. It calls for further research into the dynamics of a more inclusive and humane society from the point of view of Old and New Testament in a way in which the Biblical text is brought continually into dialogue with issues such as *latifundia*, environmental pollution, human impoverishment and abuse of human rights. This means that a multi-dimensional study which takes cognisance of a post-colonial context of new nations of Africa in particular can further contribute to the quest for liberation and restoration of human rights and human dignity which in turn can only be derived from a dignity of land.

Finally, we have used a qualitative method of analysis in the present study. Perhaps this can serve as a basis for follow-up study which alternatively uses a quantitative analytical method in critically assessing the prevailing conceptions of stewardship *vis-à-vis* interpretations of Genesis extant in most of those communities. This will enable the researcher to see in which direction the general understanding is moving – towards the Bible or towards a culture of destructive exploitation of natural resources? Perhaps this is too simple a dichotomy, but it does convey the sense of urgency that is needed to tackle the issues raised in this research!

Land in Africa is generally conceived as belonging to God. Such theocentric views of land can be analysed in a multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary study which brings together insights from a theological, sociological, anthropological or even linguistic perspective. Its aim might be to compare how different religions, cultures, human or language groups perceive the stewardship role bestowed on humans in relation to the Deity and to creation.

In suggesting these research options, it should be noted that stewardship connotes the activation of the spiritual and physical components of the *imago Dei* for an accountable and responsible exercise of “rule” not only over land and natural resources but also over human relationship to God our Maker (Alanis 2005:449). Humans are involved in a

spiritual struggle of a 21st century post-modern civilisation – a struggle in which the quest for a future that is neither pretentious nor steeped in an unfounded lordship of the universe should be the overriding theme. A humans-above-nature mindset will by its own internal logic lead to dread oblivion and self-annihilation unless the reckless exploitation of natural resources and an obsessive culture of consumerism is halted (Mosala 1986:18). This is the point in which an authentic African voice needs to be heard, namely that only a humans-in-partnership-with-God-and-with-nature can provide the enabling environment in which the cultural, creation or dual mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 can be fulfilled by humans. The quest must be on how to rescue creation from the hands of a few greedy and violent entrepreneurs, and to make natural resources available both to land “owners” and users as those who tap into it do so in an accountable, responsible and sustainable way.

APPENDICES TO DISSERTATION

List of Appendices

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Appendix 1: Western philosophical views

WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS ON STEWARDSHIP, LAND OWNERSHIP AND USE

There has been so much written on this subject that it will be difficult to review all but the major and significant ones. In order to obtain an objective assessment of Western philosophical thrust with respect to stewardship, land ownership and use, a critical examination of the notion of humans as the apex and core of creation, the humans - nature dichotomy, the “Western roots of our present ecological crisis” is to be attempted.

Concepts of humans as the apex and core of creation

An important value held in ancient Western philosophy is the human ability to modify each human habitation to reflect the human artefact (White 1994:1204). The world known to the ancient Romans for instance, was characterised by “terracing or irrigation, overgrazing, the cutting of forests – to build ships to fight the Carthaginians or by Crusaders to solve the logistic problems of their expeditions” (Kelbassa 2001: 76-90).

Ancient era of Socrates and Aristotle

When we examine ancient Greek philosophy we find in Socrates for instance that the land and the natural habitation did not receive his due attention, but he spoke about nature in general (Kelbassa 2001:76). Instead Socrates paid a lot of attention to issues bordering on economic, social, moral and political philosophy, but not so much has been done on matters of land tenure; ownership and use except as part of the natural environment discourse (Attfield and Belsey, 1994:1). It is presumably true that the origin of the “humanity above nature” mindset so prevalent in Western philosophy can be traced to the writings of Socrates and Aristotle as this idea has also been shown to be a latter development of ancient Greek communities. Generally, the Greek world view portrayed

humanity in superlative terms as the apex and core of creation in their relationship to the rest of nature and the universe (Kelbassa 2001:79).

For instance, the old Greek gods were essentially nature deities, such as *Poseidon*, god of the sea, and *Zeus*, god of lightning, and some trees were considered as sacred. The Greek high esteem for humans was remarkable, in contrast to the scant attention they paid to nature except for its value for humans (Ferkiss 1993:5). Similarly, the environments for the Greek are objects of thought and rational analysis only to the extent that it impacted on the human condition. Of special interest was the worship of nature which gradually became mere ritual. With time it was supposedly replaced with philosophical reflections (Hughes 1998:158).

Aristotle's philosophy followed that of Socrates very closely in its anthropocentric attitude towards non-human creatures, even though traditional Greek religion was not so emphatic on the concept of a stewardship or mastery over nature by humans, not even one that sought to rule the world for personal advantages (Passmore 1974:13). Aristotle thought that "matter was associated with the feminine and was passive, while ideas were masculine and active; bolstering the basic attitude that man should rule over nature" (Ferkiss 1993:6). He advanced the notion of the "ladder of nature". This later became known as the "Great Chain of Being". In it he stated that everything has its own place and purpose. In line with this thinking, humankind occupies a special median place within the chain, which ranges from Deity above, to humans, then to animals and plants and finally to matter below. Such an attitude invariably fuels the subsequent human understanding of nature as principally subservient to human need.

This subservience is further portrayed in Aristotle's anthropocentrism, as in his thinking he maintained that the "irrational exists for the sake of the rational beings."¹⁹³ For Aristotle, therefore, nature is hierarchically arranged and plants have the purpose of serving animals and animals have the purpose of serving human beings. He placed the non-human at the bottom of a great chain of beings.

Although one might argue that this model does not allow a complete rift between the celestial and the terrestrial orders, and thus may help us to reconstruct an ecologically

¹⁹³ Reeve 1998:14

sound philosophy of stewardship and of nature, one must reckon with the significant position humans occupy in Aristotle's hierarchy of being. Some writers have considered Aristotle's philosophy as a veritable source of Western philosophy which motivates a responsible stewardship of the earth's ecological resources. It is not difficult to see the influence which Aristotle exerted on the Stoics who believed that whatever exists was made for rational beings like humans (Passmore 1974:15). A broad Aristotelian philosophy of well-being has provided Western scholars with basic premises for theological and ethical reflections with implications for humans and nature (O'Neill 1994:87).

One can see a reflection of Socrates and Aristotle in broadly Hellenistic culture. The Greeks and Romans have largely been under Hellenistic influences. For instance, the Romans regarded nature as one of their conquered provinces, for profit and economic benefit (Hughes 1998:158). Although their religion was originally animistic, the basic concern of the Romans was to find some way to make use of nature (Ferkiss 1993:8). Subsequently they destroyed much of the natural environment. "Deforestation took place on a major scale, first in Italy, then in the outer provinces. Wildlife, especially exotic animals, were killed, in part to fuel the famous Roman circuses" (Ferkiss 1993:9).

Among the Romans the belief that humanity has a special, almost divine, status in the order of things is clearly spelt out. As J.J. Clarke rightly pointed out:

"[T]he spirit of human superiority and domination of nature clearly emerged (among the Romans) with the crumbling of the old Medieval Catholic order, the growth of capitalism and the opening up of the globe to European exploration and conquest (1993:75)".

Such a world view of necessity is a product of the doctrine of Aristotle's "Great Chain of Being",¹⁹⁴ which later informs Plato, and the Neo-Platonist concepts of hierarchy of being.

Medieval to post-reformation era

In the period from the 12th to the 18th century the influence of the Enlightenment writers can be felt as even the Scholastics used this doctrine to describe superior and inferior creatures in the world. Others used it to justify social inequality and indifference to suffering,¹⁹⁵ a point so aptly picked up by Karl Marx who apparently used it to debunk capitalism and social inequalities. The Enlightenment thinkers considered themselves as

¹⁹⁴ Aristotle's "Great Chain of Being" has influenced Western philosophy and Metaphysics in very profound but disconcerting ways especially in distancing nature from humans.

¹⁹⁵ An incisive discussion of this phenomenon has been given in Marshall (1995:218-20).

those living in an “Age of Reason”. They subjected everything to the test of reason. Various thinkers therefore advanced the notion of “human progress” which later became known as the “perfectibility of man”.¹⁹⁶ The doctrine of original sin was rejected and human beings were regarded as naturally good though they can be corrupted by society. Education and Enlightenment were expected to promote virtue and thereby eradicate vice. Apparently:

“[T]he intellectual roots of the Enlightenment were in the science of Galileo and Copernicus, the empiricism of Bacon, the rationalism of Descartes ... and the sensationalism of Locke (Marshall, 1995:216)”.

A consideration of the impact of enlightenment on the modern era can be seen in the works of philosophers of the post-enlightenment or so-called modern era: Francis Bacon (1561-1626), René Descartes (1596-1650), John Locke (1632-1704), and Karl Marx’s (1818 – 1883).

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) emphasised the high place of humanity *vis-à-vis* nature and he gave an ideological justification for this new philosophy at the beginning of the 17th century. He proclaims that the new empirical methods of investigation could help humans to have a true understanding of the workings of nature, and thereby to transform it in accordance with their whims and caprices. He was in favor of the control of nature in the interest of and benefit to humans.

In the same vein, René Descartes (1596-1650) proposed a method for investigating nature. He suggested a practical philosophy that aimed at transforming nature through science-based technology. His belief that God created all things for humans led Descartes to adopt the ingredient of Stoicism in Christianity that man can control nature because of his rationality (Passmore, 1974:21). He identifies everything but the human mind as a mere machine, which men can manipulate. For him all material beings are mindless. Descartes’ dualism stresses that mind and body are self contained and independent. Nature was considered as a machine by followers of Descartes, with some of them objecting to such a reductionism of nature.

One of Descartes’ followers who had a different view was Ray (Attfeld 1994:32). Even though such circumstances are controllable by them (Marshall 1995:214) Ray rejected the view that everything was made for humans. According to him, nature was not to be seen as a dead object which needs to be subdued and mastered by human

¹⁹⁶ As in the title of John Passmore’s book: Passmore 1970 *The Perfectibility of Man*.

beings through science and technology. However, Ray's views were overtaken by the events of the rise of modern science in which nature is heralded as intelligible. Science insists on a nature that is governed by natural laws and one capable of being understood by human beings without appealing to supernatural forces. "This is the attitude to nature which has dominated Western science: understanding through laws, transformation through technology" (Passmore 1995:134).

The principal thinkers of the Enlightenment known as the *philosophes* in France apparently carried the mindset of humans above nature further in their belief that humans by virtue of their inherent rational ability are potentially a product of natural circumstances. Both French and British philosophers were primarily concerned with human understanding and mastery of his environment. Rather than looking up to nature's benevolence, the philosophers thought that the best place to look was inwardly at the human mind and from thence looked at nature. By placing priority on the human mind, they bracketed it from the world and deepened the gulf between the subject and the object, the observer and the observed, humanity and nature thereby fostering a humans - nature dichotomy (Marshall, 1995:217).

In the next sub-section we highlight briefly Locke's theory of rights and the Marxian determinism.

A humans - nature dichotomy

In the view of John Locke (1632-1704) humans have certain basic rights in a "state of nature" that does not have government and civil society. For Locke these rights involve a right to life, liberty and property. In particular, Locke argues that if a human mixes his labor with a natural object, the product is his. Locke locates no value in uncultivated land before it is improved. He regarded un-harnessed and un-cultivated land including wetlands as synonymous with waste. As Hargrove (1998:181) convincingly noted, an amoral or anti-social attitude has resulted from Locke's property theory. His theory "provides the foundation for the land owner's claim that society has little or no role in the management of his land, that nobody has the right to tell him what to do with his property" (Hargrove 1998:179).

Apparently, this conception of management borders on a sense of stewardship which can be said to be responsible but definitely not accountable, especially with its high placement

of humanity *vis-à-vis* other nature and creation. This fact becomes even clearer when one examines the “dialectics” in Marxian thought.

Another area in which human attitude to nature has been influenced by so called “Western culture” is in the area of human rights, and the dichotomy which it fosters between humans and nature. It is remarkable to note that some rights theorists did not accept the view that uncultivated land has value, whereas, for instance, John Locke (1632-1704) argued that humans and nature are exclusive, he promoted an anthropocentric attitude towards nature.

Not only are we immediately confronted with the Lockean position of the exclusivity of private property which contrasts with the Marxian position of inclusive and non-personal property, but also we have to contend with a philosophical emphasis on the fusion of Western science combined with a technological prowess. According to Locke, human effort mixed with natural resources produces something of benefit, and confers exclusive patent right on the producer. Such a philosophical conception of ownership also impacted on extant views of stewardship narrowing the latter to a more aristocratic than an egalitarian vocation.

Karl Marx’s (1818 - 1883) supports the unity of humanity and creation in his early works, in which he argued that mankind has developed from nature and are in mutual interaction with nature. But man is alienated from his own nature and from external nature in capitalist society. Capitalism regards “nature” as an “other” to be exploited. He thought that this alienation of humans from both themselves and the natural world would be resolved in the forthcoming “classless” society through the “dialectic” process of labor and the proletariat:

“Communism as completed naturalism is humanism and as completed humanism is naturalism. It is the genuine solution of the antagonism between humans and nature and between humans themselves”. (*My paraphrase* - see D McClellan 1971:148).

Thus, the problems of stewardship would then be solved once the land and other means of production are squarely placed in the hands of the “masses” each in a responsible and accountable relationship with the other, and more so with capitalism now replaced with an environmentally un-alienated social order. In this connection, it has been observed that Marx’s thought is not homocentric or humanly chauvinistic, because Marx conceived of nature as man’s body. Nature is not an “other”. Marx understood nature as capable of

being resurrected, and like the resurrection of humans, nature can be a fully natural, social, embodied, and sentient being (Lee 1980:12).

An observation on Marx's early thought which is undoubtedly inherited from Hegel, is that it cannot be incorporated into a defensible terrestrial and ecological human rights theory. We recognise that some passages of Marx's early works reflect ecological concerns. In referring to nature as man's spiritual inorganic nature, Marx stated that "the land, plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc. theoretically form part of human consciousness, partly as objects of science and partly as objects of art" (O'Neill 1994:27). Indeed, Marx also believed that objects have their own inherent aesthetic standards or beauty. As L. Wilde (2000:39-40) has argued, Marx had a respectful attitude towards animals and nonhuman nature in general. Although Marx showed the difference between humans and animals, he did not treat animals as inferior or deficient beings.

Marx maintained that human beings begin to understand how they differ from other animals when they begin to produce their means of subsistence, although he acknowledged that the germ of making a tool can be found in some of them. Marx pointed out that beside land, humans have consciously created the means of production whereas lower creatures only produce what they immediately need for themselves or their young. Such lower creatures, unlike humans, live under the domination of immediate physical need (Wilde 2000:45). For Marx, therefore, it is a conscious life activity which distinguishes humans immediately from animal life and confers the responsibility of care and concern for the latter on the former (Wilde 2000:42).

In spite of the positive points mentioned above, Marx considered nature as an instrument of human's self-creation (McClellan 1971:139). According to Marx, man's growing utilisation of land and mastery over nature can help him to move beyond the deification of nature and the traditional way of life. He states that the "great civilising influence of capital" lay in its rejection of the "deification of nature".¹⁹⁷ He advised human beings to conquer nature in accordance with their needs. He viewed technology as the human mode of dealing with nature. Although he showed how machines would come to dominate human beings instead of serving their ends, he paid little attention to the effects of technology on nature and non-human beings (Lee 1989:184). Indeed, in his "the *German Ideology*" Marx

¹⁹⁷ Passmore (1974:24) quotes Marx's *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, in which he stated "nature becomes for the first time simply an object for mankind, purely a matter of utility".

pointed out that animals could be prevented from fulfilling their roles unless a responsible stewardship is exercised over them!

The concept of ecological crisis

Lynn White Jr. is a modern critic of Western mechanistic world-view who identifies the concept of a global ecological crisis more with Western theology than philosophy. His writings sparked off lots of discussion some of which has enriched the theology of creation.

According to White (1967:1203-1207) the Judeo-Christian traditions has built a dangerous doctrine of human superiority over nature in the way it has interpreted Genesis 1:26-28 to mean “rule”, “exploit”, “bring under control” (White1994:45-57). In Genesis 1:26-28 and Psalm 8 it is certainly stated that human beings are creatures of God, are made in God’s image, and are therefore next to God in the order of priority and utility.

White suggested that such a dominion hermeneutics has consigned the natural world to the realm in which it serves only a human purpose. He is careful however, to argue that Biblical texts were interpreted in different ways by Western scholars. The result of such a multiplicity of interpretations was Christianity in the Latin West which fostered an attitude of human arrogance toward nature. He adds, science and technology were shaped by Christian attitudes toward man’s relation to nature (White, 1994:49).

The essence of White’s (1994:45-57) observation is that scientific and technological innovations has been made in neighbouring cultures such as China and Egypt, yet it is the Western philosophical mind that has successfully integrated all the sciences and technology of the past, even borrowing from great Islamic scientists of the Middle Ages. This is as a result of the profound influence which medieval mind and medieval culture in general exercised on the Western Christian hermeneutic (White 1994:1206). Paradoxically, the technological and scientific progress which resulted from this integration facilitated the processes of massive scientific and industrial production, but at the same time it robbed the agricultural sector of valuable land, human and material resources.¹⁹⁸ A system of egalitarian land distribution was gradually caving in to a more aristocratic and

⁶ On the eve of the industrial revolution in the late 16th century, the fight for stewardship of land was mainly among the Bishops, the Kings and the Knights along with their vassals. The peasantry were drawn into an invertebrate conflict which meant they had to loose their land or mortgage it in order to survive. Hitherto egalitarian communities were reduced to Serfdoms as the battle for rights became the battle of the mighty (see Cairns 1995:226).

speculative land holding which robbed the masses of valuable land assets. Stewardship was now to be understood not as the common exercise of all humans but as the exclusive engagement of the aristocracy and clergy¹⁹⁹.

Obviously, White's view attracted the attention of various British and French writers.

Several critics have stated that White's interpretation of the roots of our present ecological crisis is completely implausible. They have stressed that Western Christianity has not been exclusively negative to the land and natural environment. Ardent critics of White such as Clarence J Glacken (1967), Attfield (1994, 2001), Robert J Moore (1990) and Peter Harrison (1999) have tried to show that in certain respects Western Christianity has had positive impacts on land development and on the environment. According to Attfield, despite ugly episodes and depressing periods in medieval history, Western Christianity "encapsulates beliefs supportive" of a responsible land ownership and use by teaching people to be environmentally sensitive both in their attitudes and policies. (Attfield 2001:109).

Finally, Wybrow (1991:33) argues that even though Western philosophical reflections could be said to have de-divinised nature in ways parallel to the Judeo-Christian ethic, it could not therefore be said to be insensitive to the yearnings and aspirations of creation in general and humans in particular. Be that as it may, the argument as to the veracity of White's (1994:1205) assertion still goes on. There seem to be elements of truth in his accusation of Western Christian hermeneutics as inspiring the heartless exploitation of nature by a small section of the global human community. It is for this reason that over and above all the methods of interpretation so far used in Western scholarly circles – the historical-critical, the literary-critical, canon-criticism, and lately socio-rhetorical approaches, we have employed a postcolonial critical hermeneutics in a close-reading of the same texts. Although White (1967, 1994) is right in associating Western self-understanding of stewardship, ownership and use with respect to natural resources with Western hermeneutics, it is important to note the difference between what the original intentions of the authors of Genesis were, and what use people have made of this text today.

¹⁹⁹ An incisive discussion of what this meant for feudalism in Western Europe during the medieval period has been given by Cairns (1995:319-346). It created a society of lords, knights, vassals and serfs!

This becomes clearer when we look at existing scholarly views from a context which had little or no access to Biblical hermeneutics at the same time that the Western philosophers did.

Appendix 2: Sample of basic questions posed to focus group and interview participants

Stakeholder interviews in Nigeria

Dear participant,

This is an interview intended to measure corporate social responsibility of government and of company with respect to stewardship, land ownership and use in the Niger Delta, in order to critically assess corporate behavior towards the perennial problems of land degradation, ecological distortion and environmental pollution to proffer solutions within the context of the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole.

I would like you to answer these questions not only as an individual, but also as a responsible member of your organisation or government. Although your views may not be quoted as representing the official position of your organisation on the issues raised, it will be seen as an insider's view reflecting your years of experience in your particular field of work. It will also assist me in determining the direction of this study and, perhaps guide me in making appropriate recommendations to Niger Delta community, state governments, and of course the oil company.

I will begin by asking you to say your name, what you do and where you come from as shown in the form below:

Name:.....

Home Address:.....

.....

Your department:.....

Your status/position.....

Phone number:.....

House phone number.....

Religious Affiliation.....

Comments:.....

.....

.....

.....

Question 1

What would you consider the benefits derivable from:

- a) Land acquired for the oil company or private use;
- b) Land acquired for government or public use.

Question 2

How much say do you have for instance when your company or government agency approaches native families or local communities for the acquisition and use of a piece of land?

Question 3

What else can you tell us about your responsibility to use and maintain land, and do you think that private (i.e. oil) companies and/or public (government) acquisition and use of land impacts on your responsibility?

Question 4

What factor(s) or agencies do you consider as helpful or as hindering to individual ownership and use of land, and which of such factor(s) or agencies do you consider being in alignment with your own conception of a responsible and accountable ownership of land?

Question 5

Where do laws relating to land use emanate from in your local government area or company's catchments area, and are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the situation of land use and ownership as it is practiced today in your company or local government?

Question 6

Which of the following factors would you consider responsible for increasing value of land²⁰⁰ in your local government or company catchments area:

- a. Population growth;
- b. Oil company operations;

²⁰⁰ Among the Niger Delta peoples, and the Ogba in particular, land is owned at the kindred / family level, but used by nuclear families whose male heads meet annually to determine the portion of land to be shared and distributed among the households for the year's subsistence farming. The focus groups in these categories were conducted separately and in various locations, all within the community and during the day.

- c. Government policy;
- d. Private estate development and housing.

Question 7

If you were in a position of responsibility as family head, head of government, company manager, or commercial farmer owning and using land in this area, what use of land would you consider better / more appropriate than what is presently obtainable?

Question 8

In the event of a natural disaster like seasonal flood, famine, war, and perhaps sudden and violent accidents, to whom would you attribute the cause and who would you or the people blame as responsible for such occurrences?

Question 9

How is your personal and corporate (group) identity formed – through land ownership, family affiliation, educational achievement, or social connexion?

Question 10

In places which fall into a community's sacred or private space, what is your company's and local government's attitude when natural resources are to be mined in such no-go areas? Is there an overriding policy that helps you deal with ensuing conflicts between land desired for acquisition and the peoples' desire to retain their sacred and private space? Give examples.

Thank you for responding so well and so openly.

Appendix 3: Asserted views, common views and group views

Each focus group was conducted according to sex and age categories (Schutte 2000:9-10). The older category was in the range of between 45–65 years. The middle-aged adults, most of whom were self-employed and in micro business, were of the ages 35-45 years, while the youngest group, most of whom were students in higher institutions or young graduates, were of the ages 16-35 years. The participants displayed considerable leadership qualities such as punctuality, dexterity in dealing with issues under discussion, and astuteness in disseminating information. Of course, they would each be regarded as

“responsible” from the point of view of the community because of their ability to maintain families of their own either as husbands or as wives. Marriage is one criterion for land ownership and use in the community, and each nuclear or extended family is involved in one stewardship role or another with respect to the stewardship of land bequeathed on the “present” generation by the ancestors.

Furthermore, each of the six focus group interviews in the community had to be conducted in separate sessions, and in agreeable times and location. Each participant apparently focused on their self-understanding of issues raised on what constitutes good stewardship, responsible land ownership and accountable land use for all stakeholders – community, company and government. Three highlights of the focus group sessions need to be stated.

First, a total of ten questions (see above) were addressed to each focus group. The questions were essentially the same, except where further explanation was needed from a participant, which aim was to further elucidate a particular viewpoint.

Second, each focus group was conducted in the same way as the others; first an introduction of persons and of the purpose of the interview, and questions posed each one at a time to which participants took turns in answering. Their answers were, with their permission, recorded via a tape recorder.

Third, each focus group session proceeded very smoothly as the discussions were adapted to each group’s special features such as age and experience - this being a community in which social strata is based on age. The eldest were seen as more experienced, the middle-aged were seen as the more productive, and the youths were seen as the more adventurous.

The question of who created or ultimately owns the land did not arise, because generally people believe that the land belongs to God and what belongs to the people is its usufruct. However, the question was on the advantage of giving land to either government or the oil company and which of this “acquisition” is more beneficial? Participants recognised quite importantly that God literally has entrusted every piece of land to someone or some kindred. They identified with land as belonging to them and to those whom the community has made a lease of land for economic or development reasons. However, they were of the opinion that land so leased should be used in mutually beneficial ways by the acquisitions.

The younger men and the middle-aged women: These expressed views on a responsible and accountable use of land that has grave implications. One of them mentioned that the way land is being acquired and used in the community by government, company agents and private individuals leave much to be desired. On accountability the participants generally saw the men as custodians and as such are accountable to past, present and future generations for the way and manner of distributing the land for agricultural, domestic, and other uses within the community. There is a deep sense of collective rather than individual responsibility for land or property ownership. The obvious reason for this is that property or land is never customarily owned at any level beside the kin-group, and most kin-groups occupy literally the same community. Therefore it is sometimes difficult on the part of government and the oil company to pay compensations to any individual, because of conflicting claims from kin-group members which make it easy for government or the company to evade the payment of compensation.

Younger female participants: Moreover, the younger female participants had a high opinion about their own personal capability to own land and embark on sustainable investments and projects which might provide employment opportunities to some skilled youths either as individuals or as part of the land-owners' deal. In their own opinion women could be more responsible and accountable in their use of land, if given the same economic and social empowerment which at present is directed almost exclusively to their male counterparts by both government and multi-national companies. Most of the women were convinced that even if they acquired their own land, they might only do so as partners with their male counterparts, their husbands and/or male offspring and that female heir are completely ruled out of the inheritance picture.

Appendix 4: Names of participants and dates of focus group and interview discussions

1. Focus groups

1.1	Category A: 45 – 65 years and above		
1.1.1	Focus Group 2	Elders and Women Leaders	13 August 2005
1	Esther Ego Elenwa	Ohali / Akpaa kindred	
2	Janet Osinger	Obeyi “	
3	Fanny Abraham:	Imeagi / Umuiwea - Ediwuru	
4	Juana Nne Ikoro	Umuodua / Obeyi kindred	
5	Rose Okwu	Ohali / Umuonwubi – Ediwuru	

6	Abigail Sunday	Uloihuru / Akpaa	
7	Comfort Eziada Ikoro	Uloihuru / Obeyi	
8	Ebere Odajiri Nwokomah	Ohali / Obeyi	

1.1.2	Focus Group 1	Elders and Chiefs	20 August 2005
1	Samson Solomon	Ediwuru kindred	
2	Israel N. Obulor	Agwolo “	
3	Obie Blessing	Okporomini	
4	Isobo Mbonu	Umuezeali	
5	Richard Owerre	Umuajie – Ediwuru	
6	Council Edwin	Abururu – Ediwuru	
7	Alexander O. Odeyi	Agwolo	

1.2	Category B: 35 – 45 years and thereabout		
1.2.1	Focus Group 4	Middle-aged women	15 August 2005
1	Eunice Okpara	Ishikoloko / Umuakoku – Ediwuru	
2	Janet Nso Obulor	Umuedi / Agwolo	
3	Magdalene Dike	Obeyi / Akpaa	
4	Okwudiri Ukomadu	Akpaa / Obeyi	
5	Mary Nwagboso	Umungnu / Ulihuru – Ediwuru	

1.2.2	Focus Group 3	Middle-aged men	19 August 2005
1	Emeka Ake	Akpaa kindred	
2	Ambrose Ile	Imeagni – Eligbo	
3	Victor Ogunwa	Umuonwubi – Ediwuru	
4	Anosienya Ukwuru	Akpaa	

1.3	Category C: 16 – 35 years and thereabout		
1.3.1	Focus Group 5	Young Adults Ladies	10 August 2005
1	Chinatu Chilekwe	Akpaa	
2	Eunice Odua	Umuodua / Akpaa	
3	Patience Orukwo	Uriem – Obagni	
4	Victoria Samuel	Umuajie – Ediwuru	

1.3.2	Focus Group 6	Young Adult Gentlemen	17 August 2005
1	Amala Dede	Azaga – Ishikoloko	
2	Kenneth Wilfred Ezeanu	Umuajie – Ediwuru	
3	Georgewill UcheChukwu Ojum	Umuajie – Ediwuru	
4	Simon Chukwugozie Abraham	Umuajie – Ediwuru	
5	NwaChukwu Ile	Umuajie – Ediwuru	
6	Wisdom Echendu	Akpaa	

2. Interviews

- A. Mr. Okoro Okara interviewed on 19 January 2006
- B. Mr. Ajukwurna Wokomah interviewed on 25 January 2006.

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