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V. **Stories We Know: Empire, Land and Gender in the Book of Ruth**

Sidney K. Berman

Summary

This chapter examines the interplay of issues of empire, religion, land, environment and gender in the narrative of Ruth. These issues tend to intertwine in the abusive context of colonialism. In this chapter, religion is represented by the interpretation of the Torah, which gave the colonialist the notion of moral superiority over the indigenous people. The sense of moral superiority normally escalated to that of racial superiority and resulted in the entitlement to dominate, abuse and massacre the indigenous. In certain areas, the narrative of Ruth is a critique of the imperial attitudes of the Israelites towards the Moabites. I argue that in other areas, the narrative thrusts forward the label “Moab” or “Moabites” in order to present the people and the land of Moab in good light. The sections of the chapter are as follows: An apology for Moab; Torah pronouncements on Moab; Moabite women – the alleged producers of an illegitimate nation; Imperial thoughts against the local woman; The imperialist’s land; Stories we know about Mother Africa; False narratives against Mother Earth, and; Mother Moab, Mother Africa and Mother Earth.

Introduction

This paper examines the interplay of issues of empire, religion, land, environment and gender in the narrative of Ruth. These issues tend to intertwine in the abusive context of colonialism. In this paper, religion is represented by the interpretation of the Torah which gave the colonialist the notion of moral superiority over the indigenous people. The sense of moral superiority normally escalated to that of racial superiority and resulted in the entitlement to dominate, abuse and massacre the indigenous. In certain areas, the narrative of Ruth is a critique of the imperial attitudes of the Israelites towards the Moabites.

I argue that in other areas, nonetheless, the narrative thrusts forward the label “Moab” or “Moabites” in order to present the people and the land of Moab in good light. The sections of the paper are as follows: Theoretical framework – demolishing othering stories; An apology for Moab; The Torah and Moab; Moabite women – the alleged producers of an illegitimate nation; Imperial thoughts against the local woman; The imperialist’s land; Stories we know about Mother Africa; False narratives against Mother Earth, and; Mother Moab, Mother Africa and Mother Earth.

Theoretical Framework – Demolishing Othering Stories

The theoretical framework that runs throughout this paper is a criticism of the colonial and imperialistic mindset that tends to “other” natives by composing false stereotypical stories about them. Othering views and presents a person or community as an anomaly, with the view to perpetually treat them as strangers. It is done by people who perceive themselves to belong in a superior culture and/or race, targeted to people whom they perceive to belong to an inferior culture (Rey 2012:71). Othering dichotomises and mystifies the natives against the colonisers so that the two parties must not consider themselves as equal or as belonging together (Cf. Schulze 2013:17). The framework of othering and composing negative stories is appropriate for this interpretation of the story of Ruth because of the historically unequal relationship between Israel and Moab in which Israel was supposedly superior to Moab. Israelite stories about Moab were negative and imperialistic, but they were not the reality that the Moabites knew about themselves. In this chapter, we see that the negative stories are proved wrong; Ruth the Moabite lives the true positive story of who she is, and serves as a representative of the people of Moab to demonstrate who they are. In the book of Ruth, Ruth the Moabite tells the story she knows.

An Apology for Moab

From the first time that Moab was known to Israel as a people, or at least as an ethnic group, there has largely been negativity. It is significant that when Moses interpreted the law at great length to the Israelites, it was in the land of Moab (Deuteronomy 1:5). One can argue that the Law of Moses, which was to give Israel its identity, was interpreted in Moab with the intention to make conspicuous the contrast between God's expectations and undesirable realities, the epitome of which was apparently Moab. It appears that Moab was presented as a perfect contrast of what the Israelites should become, as far as the Mosaic Law was concerned. Moses' choice of venue thus gives credibility to Israel's entrenched negativity towards Moab. Therefore, an interpretation of the Torah contributed towards Israel's denigrating perception of the Moabites. Gerda De Villiers and Jurie Le Roux argue that by so-doing, Moses made Moab an interpretative space for the Torah (2016). These scholars note that the author of the book of Ruth seeks to radically reverse this interpretation and correct the negative mindset of the Israelites concerning Moabites (*ibid*).

That is why the place Moab matters very much for the plot of the author of Ruth. Whereas the moniker Moab mattered for the wrong reasons in Israelite narratives, this time around, it matters for a good cause. It is as if, for once, the story is being told from a Moabite perspective, or as if Ruth is telling Israelites her own story. It is the kind of story that rightfully honours Moab and reminds Israelites that Moab is good for Israel. It is the story that Ruth and her people in Moab know about themselves. This perspective is not universal. For example, Monica Rey interprets the high frequency of the reference "Ruth the Moabite" as a negative "othering" of Ruth and Moab (2012). Laura Donaldson unfortunately also sees the presentation of Moab in the same way (2008). Nonetheless, I argue that Ruth stood out not because of othering but was different just like her great grandson, David, who would invariably stand out from any crowd (Cf. 1 Samuel 17 where young David displayed reckless bravery when everyone else cowered). Where Ruth's foreignness is invoked, it is so that Moab stands out in a positive way. The only suggestion of negativity for Moab comes where Elimelech and his sons die in Moab (Ruth 1:3 and 5). However, the narrative appears to lay the blame on Elimelech's

lack of trust in God rather than the unsuitability of Moab. From then on, reference to Moab is in the form “Ruth the Moabitess” which is always made in a positive way.

Ruth the Moabitess turns out different. Her mixed marriage with Boaz does not lead to apostasy or a turn away from Yahweh, but leads to a turn towards Yahweh (Ruth 4:14; De Villiers and Le roux 2016: 4). Ruth gives birth to Obed, the father of Jesse who becomes the father of David (Ruth 4:17). King David was responsible for a turning towards God that encouraged many Israelites to find God. Ruth the Moabitess did not even turn the heart of Boaz away from God but Boaz remained steadfastly devout to Yahweh. For a change, we have a whole book dedicated to the praise of a foreigner who is celebrated as an ancestor of the Messiah (Ruth 4:15). Not only is she a foreigner but is a Moabite, of all people. When the family of Elimelech went to escape the famine, the author chose that they escaped to Moab and not any other country (Ruth 1). Furthermore, the author chose that a genealogy appears at the end of the chapter, giving Moab a place of honour in Israelite history and even in the descent of the Israelite Messiah (Ruth 4:17-22; De Villiers and Le roux 2016). The author not only chose Moab for the special setting, but also deliberately chose the temporal setting as “the time of the judges” (Ruth 1:1). This is soon after the nation settles down, and Moab immediately proves to be a refuge. The expression “the Moabitess” is used repeatedly so as to make Moab stand out in this wonderful story. Moses himself died in Moab just before the children of Israel entered Canaan (Deuteronomy 34:5) and he gave a long speech that became a big part of Deuteronomy, which is correctly his interpretation of the Torah. After that, the nation enters Canaan and soon attempts to settle down.

The Torah and Moab

The Torah warns that the threat to the wellness and prosperity of the nation of Israel is not enemy armies but the seduction of the nations that they will find in that land (Exodus 23:33). Nonetheless, concerning Moab, Georg Braulik (1999) effectively argues that the law was not written against Moab (or Ammon). In fact, in the book of Ruth, no

one appears to question Ruth's right to gleaning (Ruth 2) and the right to levirate marriage for both Moabite widows (Ruth 3 and 4; Braulik 1999). Braulik argues that the book of Ruth was written as a lecture to explain Deuteronomy chapters 23 to 25. According to his argument, the chapters were misinterpreted by the Israelites to mean they must refuse allowing Moabites and Ammonites into their assembly and outlaw inter-marriage with them (Braulik 1999:1). Reuven Chaim Klein (2015) articulates a closely-related argument concerning Deuteronomy 2:28-29, which nullifies the basis on which the Israelites ostracised Moabites. The Moabites were outlawed partly because they supposedly refused to give Moses food. Instead, in Deuteronomy 2:28-29, Moses does defend the Moabites, saying that they gave Israel food when Israel passed through (Klein 2015: 94).¹ Scholars divide the protagonists of this Torah debate as inclusivists and exclusivists. De Villiers and Le Roux (2016) mention a number of inclusivists and exclusivists. The book of Jonah, Isaiah 56:1-8, the book of Judith and the book of Ruth are inclusivist as regards welcoming foreigners into the Israelite community (De Villiers and Le Roux 2016).

The Torah warned that nations will seduce Israel into immorality, heathen practices, intermarriage and a forsaking of Yahweh the Israelite God. This backsliding would bring the nation to its downfall. It would be the punishment of a jealous God who cannot accept competition with any other god (Deuteronomy 5:9). This line of interpretation for the Mosaic Law was embraced by colonialists to achieve racial discrimination, displacement, enslavement and massacre of the indigenous. The laws and crimes of apartheid South Africa are a good example. In particular, colonialists of Dutch origin called Africans "kaffir," which meant "non-believer" or heathen. They presumed themselves to be the God-chosen race that had been commanded to invade and claim for themselves foreign lands. Being a special nation lasted for as long as they stayed faithful to their religion, and as long as they preserved the purity of their Caucasian seed. Similarly, the

¹ Reuven Chaim Klein unravels the remaining few bases that led the Israelites to discriminate against Moabites. This argument cleared the way towards justifying the role of the book of Ruth in presenting a fresh interpretation of the Deuteronomistic law.

Israelites were special to God only as long as they stuck to exclusive Yahweh worship and avoided contaminating the Abrahamic biological seed. As can be deduced, the problem with Israel's backsliding is that it is supposedly not intrinsic to Israelites –it is introduced from other nations. Therefore, for the nation to avoid apostasy, they must not inter-marry or mingle with the nations of Canaan (Deuteronomy 7:3). Joshua 23:7 holds that to marry the remnants of foreigners in their midst will cause the Israelites to “mention” the names of the foreign gods, to “swear by them” and to “bow” to them.

The Torah comments on the threat posed by the surrounding peoples including Moab. Deuteronomy 18:9 and 12 say that when the Israelites have come into the promised land, they shall not learn “the abominations of those nations [...] and because of these abominations, the LORD your God is driving these nations out of your presence.” Nehemiah interprets the Torah to prohibit mixed marriages. According to Nehemiah 13:1 & 3, “On that day, they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and there was found written that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation forever. Then it happened that when they heard the law, they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.” Moreover, the book of Moses says “Neither shall you enter into marriage with them; do not take their daughter for your son, and neither give your daughter to their son” (Deuteronomy 7:3). Nehemiah immediately applied the law to all foreigners so that not only the Ammonites and Moabites were expelled from the congregation, but all non-Israelites. Ezra 9:1-2 says that he heard how even the Levites, the priests, have taken for themselves the daughters of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites, so that the holy seed has been mixed with the people of those lands. He says when he heard this, he rent his clothes in shame, pulled out his hair by its roots and sat down in stupefaction (verse 3).

Moabite Women: The Alleged Producers of an Illegitimate Nation

The negative attitudes of Israelites to Moabites originated from the belief that Moabites were an illegitimate nation produced from incest, drunkenness and intrigue. The nation of Moab allegedly came into existence when two daughters secretly got their father drunk and lay with him so that they could fall pregnant (Genesis 19:30-38). The first child born from such an act was called Moab while the second was called Ben-Ammi – these sons became the ancestors of Moabites and Ammonites. The derision in the story is manifold, for it means that firstly, Moab were bastards. Worse still, the mother was the sole mastermind behind the existence of such an illegitimate nation because the father was not consulted. Secondly, Moab were allegedly products of incest, which means they were considered to be mentally retarded. Thirdly, the fact that they were conceived in drunkenness means they are unlikely to have any kind of self-control. In short, Moabites were supposedly illegitimate, incestuous, immoral and retarded. Incest, immorality and retardation were taboo in the ritual and moral laws of the Torah.

Worse still, that story was damaging to the image of Moabite women. It pointed largely to the supposed moral impurity of Moabite women and less on that of Moabite men. The same way that the imperialist has an attitude to the local woman. Unsurprisingly, in accordance with what Israelites could expect of Moabite women, a negative story crops up in Numbers 25: The people of Israel camped in Shittim, at the border of the promised land just before entering. There, Israelite men committed prostitution with the daughters of Moab. They were seduced to whoredom, but they also went further to make sacrifices to Moabite gods and to bow down to them (verses 1ff). Surprisingly, there is no report of Moabite men committing prostitution with Israelite women, supposedly because Israelite women were too pure to agree (Cf. Donaldson 2008: 162). In particular reference to Moab, Deuteronomy 23:3 says, “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD, even to their tenth generation.” In the preceding verse, it says, “A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their 10th generation shall they not

enter into the congregation of the LORD forever.” These subsequent verses obviously mean that any person of Moabite origin is a bastard.

Imperialist thoughts against the Local Woman

An imperialist gender prejudice is evident in the story of the alleged prostitution of Moabite women and Israelite men (Numbers 25). As far as whoredom is concerned, on the one hand, it is common that the imperialist or colonist's women are presented as pure and innocent and having no interest in seducing the foreign man (Green 2018:703). Any sexual contact between the imperialist's women and the local strangers is likely to be interpreted as rape (Cf. the story of Dinah and Shechem the Hivite in Genesis 34). On the other hand, the local woman is presented as less pure because she is commonly cited in a consensual sexual exchange with the colonial men (Woan 2008). We observe that the daughters of Moab were supposedly not molested but consented to sexual contact with Israelite men.

Worse still, the Israelite men were condemned for polluting themselves rather than for seducing or taking advantage of the Moabite women. The question is why we should believe that Moab men would allow their women to freely mingle with Israelite men whereas Israelite men would not allow their women to freely mingle with Moabite men. It is a sign of entrenched prejudice on the side of the author that he probably did not notice his own inconsistency. If there are immoral Israelite men that can be seduced by Moabite women, then there must be immoral Moabite men who can be seduced by Israelite women. If there are immoral Moabite women who can give themselves over to immoral Israelite men; then there are immoral Israelite women who can give themselves over to Moabite men. The reader must expose the common colonial belief that the local girl is immoral whereas the colonist's women are morally pure.

The imperialist refuses to marry the native girl, viewing her as racially inferior to him (Woan 2008). Nonetheless, the imperialist often likes to sexually entertain himself with the local girl. Her sexuality was regarded as “naturally excessive and extreme against a white female

norm” (Woan 2008:280). Indeed, the local girls are viewed as prostitutes, albeit desirable ones. Rayna Green notes that the white man uses the supposedly hyper-sexual native girl while preserving the “good” white women so that they can stay pure (Green, 2018:703). When he is done playing around with native girls, there’s a nice girl from among his people whom he will marry (Cf. Woan 2008:281).

The Imperialist’s Land

Like the imperialist’s women, the imperialist’s land must supposedly be left to the imperialist’s people. But the indigenous person’s daughter and land are expected to be accessible to the imperialist. Therefore, the African immigrant is not wanted in the imperialist’s land because s/he is known to only consume and not contribute anything to the land of the imperialist (Honig 1993:54); yet when the imperialist goes to a foreign land, he is allegedly doing it a favour. Brexit, vis., the exit of Britain from the European Union, the election of Donald Trump to the US presidency and recent victories of nationalist supremacist political parties in most of Europe all betray a protest against the mixing of nations within their own land (Detrow 2016). One of the major causes of Brexit was a protest against the so-called influx of immigrants. The US election was a referendum on immigrants, closing borders and the mixing of nations. Obviously the majority of voters in the US, Britain and European countries that chose nationalist parties do not want the mixing of nations. These are double standards because by colonialism, they have proved that they do not mind mixing themselves with Africans on African soil. Even currently, white supremacists still come to Africa as tourists, entrepreneurs and missionaries, occupying the land and mingling with Africans (Signe 2019). The imperialist says that he does it for a good cause; he supposedly exploits the land in the name of science, industrialisation and development, whereas the local supposedly exploits nature ignorantly and destructively (White 1967). Nonetheless, it is almost always the other way round.

Stories We Know

Nations do not perceive themselves primarily in derisive terms, even if they acknowledge certain weaknesses in their make-up. The positive story about Ruth the Moabite most probably mirrors the story of Moabites about themselves. They know their true story – a story that they can identify with. It is even better that such a positive story is set for the most part outside of Moab. Even better still, it is set inside of Israel, of all places, which lends it sincerity. When in a foreign setting, countries tend to identify with a sincere and positive image of themselves. As regards sincerity, a good example is when, inside closed doors in the Oval Office, US president Donald Trump labeled El Salvador, Haiti and African countries as ‘shithole countries’ (Watkins and Phillip 2018). He was angrily contending against those that were pleading for leniency for immigrants, and he gave a sincerely Donald Trump perspective. His narrative was widely criticised, and no one from the referenced countries volunteered to publicly defend him. As sincere as he was, his perspective was wholesomely rejected. “Shithole” is not the identity of any country or continent, let alone Mother Africa. If Donald Trump had been positive or empathetic towards these countries to his fellow Americans, the authenticity that is communicated by such a setting would have led the countries in reference to identify with his story. That is, Salvadorians, Haitians and Africans would have embraced his perspective. The fact that the story of Ruth is told in Israel to appeal to a traditionally hostile Israelite audience significantly lends it sincerity.

Soon after entering the land, indeed intermarriage and apostasy start to happen. In the book preceding the book of Ruth, which presents the setting for the events of Ruth, individual judges are introduced by God because of the taking and giving of daughters in marriage, and the sons and daughters of Israel started to follow other gods. The history of Israel in Palestine sometimes says that it is because of mixed marriage that Israel backslid many times, became immoral and idolatrous, and were exorcised out of the land by God. The last instance of apostasy before captivity (1 Kings 11:1-8) is also referred to by Nehemiah (13:26): It happened that when Solomon became old, his wives turned his heart away from God to other gods. This invoked the

anger of YHWH, the nation splits - and Israel's history steers towards the downfall of the Northern Kingdom and then of Judah.

The real stories that we know and embrace do not say that we are shitholes. Even if we had no praise for our countries, we know how our poverty was started and perpetuated by imperialists – and how our economic gains and political stability were reversed by supposed super-power countries. Vitchek (2013) interviewed Mwandiro Mhanga, head of the Social Democratic Party in Kenya who lamented that “what the United States and other Western countries are doing all over this continent and all over the world is a much greater terrorism and it triggers terrible consequences”. Conflicts on African soil driven by Western interests have scattered millions of desperate Africans all over Africa, Europe, the US and other continents (*ibid.*). There are widespread narratives that neo-colonialism often tries to push under the carpet. True narratives of the scramble for Africa, human trafficking, genocides, exploitative/destructive industrialisation, stealing of minerals and valuable resources, colonialism, political and military interference, attempted regime changes, economic sanctions and many other atrocities committed by western imperialists are the major causes of African migration to western countries (Cf. Gregoire 2017; Jones 2015). The US president omitted to note that the USA plays a major role in causing African and other countries to become so-called “shithole countries.”

In criticism of Trump's perspective, Robert Fantina (2018:2) denounces a foreign policy that habitually meddles with the economic and political affairs of a weaker country, accuses it of human rights abuses, punishes the country with economic sanctions, causes riots and political turmoil, and then engages in repeated military interventions that paralyze the country further.² Joshua Berman (2017) outlines the USA's military provocation and intervention as follows:

First, get the CIA to fund, arm and train some local insurgents (if needed, bring some from abroad); next, embed US special forces with these local insurgents and provide them with FACs (forward air controllers, frontline

² Fantina was discussing the book “How the US Creates ‘Sh*thole’ Countries” edited by former member of House of Representatives, Cynthia McKinney.

soldiers [...]); deploy enough aircraft in and around the combat zone to support combat operations day and night [...] provide the friendly insurgents with an overwhelming advantage

The economic, military and political consequences of this meddling, has often led to mass migrations by local populations, to which Trump responded by calling the countries “shithole countries.” Instead of accepting a derisive “shithole” story about herself, Mother Africa is justified to point to this larger story.

The author of the story of Ruth the Moabite tells the story apologetically from the standpoint of Moabites. Demonstrating genuine love and affection for a fellow human being, at the beginning the Moabites are not only represented by Ruth but by all the Moabites in the story. For example, Naomi is moved to bless Orpah and Ruth on the basis of their kindness, saying, “... the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me” (Ruth 1:8). Moreover, Orpah also loved her mother-in-law that she too demanded to go back to Bethlehem with her; along with Ruth, she wailed with a loud voice on two occasions when they parted (1:9, 10 and 14). Moabites are kind people. That is the story they know and confirm by action, despite denigrating stories from elsewhere.

Back in Bethlehem, the Moabites now have a representative who will tell and live their story as they know it. For example, Boaz confesses that “all the people of my city know that you are a virtuous woman” (Ruth 3:11). Ruth will also live an industrious life that proves that Moabites are not sluggards, even though she works not to prove a point but to feed her mother-in-law, Naomi. In Ruth 2:7 & 17, Ruth worked at gleaning from morning until evening, amassing much harvest in the process. This is the story of industriousness that the Moabites know about themselves. Ruth’s sacrificial love for Naomi evokes Jesus’ new commandment to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). Ruth clung to Naomi (Ruth 1:14). Indeed, Naomi’s speeches to her daughters and to the women of Judah (Ruth 1:13 and 20) proved that she was attacked by relentless depression, and Ruth witnessed it every day (Ramaribana 2012:49). To prove that she was always thinking about Naomi, Ruth saved some food for her mother-in-law when she ate at Boaz’s farm (2:18).

Of all the positive stories that Ruth could tell, the biggest is her obedience to God's commands, firstly as regards her love for God and secondly her love for her neighbour. Ruth even calls Yahweh by name as she takes an oath to never part with Naomi, meaning that this Moabitess knows about the God of Israel (Ruth 1:17). One of the negative stories that had been told about Moabites was that they were not interested in the God of their great uncle, Abraham. Abraham was the uncle of Lot, the ancestor of the Moabites (Genesis 14:12; Genesis 19). Instead, Ruth displays even greater love for Yahweh and Yahweh's people than the Israelites themselves seem to. She says, "Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God [...] may Yahweh severely deal with me if anything but death makes us part" (Ruth 1:16 and 17). Madipoane (ngwan'a mphahlele) Masenya comments that the words are so strong that they "sound like those addressed by a wife-to-be to a husband-to-be" (2013:2). This is commitment to being part of Naomi's people, especially since they are God's people. It is also commitment to serve God whole heartedly. It is an embodiment of the command, "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength" (Luke 10:27). This is the story that Ruth tells on behalf of the Moabites; – the story that her people know about themselves.

False Narratives against Mother Earth

Oppressive neo-colonialists do not only tell false stories against Mother Africa, but they also do it against Mother Earth. They say Mother Earth naturally wears off, and human beings are not to blame for global warming, increasing droughts, heat waves and cyclones, climate change and the tearing of the ozone layer, and even deny that global warming is happening (GW False 2019; Lober 2018). When Donald Trump and the Republican Party assumed the presidency and control of government, they resumed coal mining and high carbon emissions that had been reversed by their predecessors. That change was due to an imperialist anthropocentric school of thought which holds that human activity does not cause global warming and climate

change. The Republican Party, Conservative Christians and White Supremacists who are either Donald Trump's advisors or his sources of information, belong in this school of thought. Therefore, Sarojini Nadar (2014) advocates for an overall suspicion of master narratives of knowledge, particularly coming from oppressive patriarchal perspectives. These master narratives omit the cries of women, the earth and the colonised. Gale A. Yee (2012) notes "the muteness and invisibility of the women raped in Judges [chapter 21] and those in our times." She gives the 2006 example of 27,000 reported cases of rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the majority of whom remained silenced. Instead of silencing Mother Earth and expecting her to accept the false story that she naturally tends towards barrenness, we must allow her to tell her own story about how she became dilapidated. We must believe Mother Earth's grievance and tell the story that indeed humankind has over-exploited her.

Musa W. Dube (2015:233) explains the root of humanity's destruction of the earth as follows:

Human beings apportioned to themselves the right to exploit and dominate the Earth and other members of the Earth Community. This posture is defined as a framework of viewing the Earth from dualistic, hierarchical and anthropocentric perspectives, which regard the Earth and all other non-human members of the Earth as lower than human beings and available for endless exploitative use.

Thomas King (2016) gives an example of earth destruction by so-called development projects. The project would "devastate some piece of your heritage in the natural or built environment – your neighbourhood, or the landscape you love, the family farm, the hill where your tribal elders seek visions, the stream where everybody in your valley goes to fish" (King 2016). Another example is cited by Vitcek (2013) where Chomsky blames Europe for "dumping toxic waste into the ocean off the coast of Somalia, killing off the fishing grounds and then complaining that the people turned to piracy."

In view of crimes against the environment, many have advocated for "green criminology," a "fifth international crime law" that deals with "ecocide crime" (Cf. Higgins 2012 and White 2017). Robert White suggests that criteria be set for criminalising environmental crimes

like “pollution of air, water and land; illegal trade in endangered species and abuse of animals; deforestation; issues relating to genetically modified organisms (GMO); corporate colonisation of nature; toxic and e-waste dumping; and so on” (2017). This law would correct the accusatory stories against Mother Earth and force humankind to stop and reverse the destruction of the planet.

Mother Earth’s story is that, in the words of the GEF’s chairperson, Naoko Ishii, greenhouse gas emissions went up after 3 years of stagnation, deforestation has increased again, and biodiversity has dropped by 60% since 1970 (Naoko 2018:1). Dube (2015:233) testifies that even during her few decades of inhabiting the earth, “the climate used to be more predictable and friendly when she was younger than it is of late.” David Rhoads lists the various environmental atrocities which one can only wish were abating by now: the deterioration of the ozone layer, global warming, toxic waste disposal, deforestation, desertification, loss of biodiversity, etc. (cf. Rhoads 1992:1). These symptoms are Mother Earth’s appeal to mankind to engage in practices and projects of environmental conservation and recovery.

As those that have over-exploited Mother Earth, we must not be surprised when she shows signs of pain. These signs of pain are her narrative which comes in response to our exploitation of her. We must own up to the truth and echo the words of the Adelaide Declaration, namely, “We confess that we have sinned against Earth, defiled the land, polluted the seas and the atmosphere, violated the forests and devalued God’s creation” (Habel 2013). The story must be listened to and retold by those that respect the truth. Furthermore, the act of owning up must be followed up with organised efforts to repair the damage and restore Mother Earth to her former state of productivity and habitability. On this, the Adelaide declaration pledges as follows:

As members of the Earth community, we commit ourselves to joining with the Earth community in its struggle for justice, by listening to the cries of the whole Earth community, and working with the Earth community to repair the damage done to God’s Earth. We also commit ourselves to working with the whole Earth community to nurture all life, both sentient and non-sentient, and to developing ways of living that sustain all life.

In view of Genesis 19:30-38 and other denigrating stories about everything Moabite, possibilities are that if the story were told from an overall Israelite perspective, reference to the great grandfather of David's descent may not have been made; a comment might have been made to the effect that Ruth's advances on Boaz were lustful and; Boaz would not have been made to admit that the whole village knows Ruth to be a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:11). Mother Africa, women and the girl child have a story to tell about their exploitation as well as a positive story about their make-up. They should be allowed to tell their story, and that story must be respected by all.

Mother Moab, Mother Africa and Mother Earth

Moab became a mother to the starving family of Elimelech, just as she was already home to the nation of Moab. To Elimelech and Naomi, Moab was a place where to escape the famine of Bethlehem. The narrative does not state what caused the deaths of the male members of Elimelech's family, but apparently, it was something other than famine in the land. Moreover, there is no indication that Moabites were suffering or dying from what killed Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. The Moabites were doing well. What caused Naomi to return to Bethlehem was the fact that her economic supporters had passed away. As for Ruth the Moabite, her insistence to leave her country was not so as to escape famine or disease but was for the love of her mother-in-law. Moab appears to have consistently been a good mother to her people. Any symptoms of negativity towards Moab in the narrative of Ruth are the ones that the author is seeking to oppose and reverse. To the credit of Elimelech's family, it is worth noting that they had no imperialist biases against Moab. The biggest sign of this is that their sons married Moabite women, and the parents actually loved these daughters-in-law. This is in stark contrast to the mindset exposed in the section above, namely, "Imperialist thoughts against the Local Woman."

Thus, Moab was a mother to foreigners, destitutes, orphans and widows in fulfilment of God's commandments. Indeed, God had commanded Israel in Leviticus 19:34, "The stranger who resides with you

shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt.” Deuteronomy 10:18 refers to God’s love for the disadvantaged of society and says, “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing.” Being prosperous themselves, the Moabites gave Elimelech the chance to change his fortunes and redeem his family. After he died, they gave his widow and orphans a chance, too. In observing God’s law that way, the Moabites become more Israelite than Israelites themselves. Masenya (ngwan’a mphahlele) urges that Judah has more to learn from the so-called heathens of Moab (2013:3). They do not harbor negative stories against Israel but offer them hospitality and lend them a helping hand. The man of faith, Abraham, failed to offer the same compassion and equality to Hagar and other females by rather making them his slaves (Genesis 24:35). He even allowed Sarah to abuse and chase away Hagar (Genesis 21:10). This was despite the fact that wherever he travelled as he escaped famine, he was treated generously and compassionately by the hosts (Genesis 12:10ff; Genesis 20:1ff). Israel herself, in viewing non-Israelites as unclean and inferior, and looking down on aliens, betray blatant disobedience to God’s commands (Acts 10-11). In this regard, Israel becomes the coloniser.

Mother Africa, prior to colonisation, provided life and opportunity for livelihood to her inhabitants who included forests, ploughing fields, water sources, precious stones and soils, animals, human beings, vegetation and others. All these suffered exploitation and abuse at the hands of colonialists who viewed them as negatively primitive. Science, masculinity and ferocity were exalted and made to stand in opposition to nature, femininity and tranquility. Colonialism quickly sabotaged African peoples’ cultures and religions that existed in harmony and cooperation with nature. Industrialisation led to deforestation, disappearance and deformation of many natural features, global warming, pollution of water sources, soils and the general environment and the trafficking and murder of human beings. Worse still, the proceeds of the exploitation of resources in Mother Africa were not utilised for the benefit of Africa and her natural inhabitants but were syphoned off to Western colonial countries.

Similarly, Mother Earth was originally able to host and benefit many members of her community that include human beings, land animals, water creatures and water sources, vegetation, land features, birds of the air and others (cf. Dube 2015:230). Global warming, desertification and growingly uninhabitable conditions of the earth are a result of anthropocentrism, which created a setting where members of the earth community cannot cherish and live harmoniously with each other. Postcolonial anthropocentrism held that humankind must prosper at all costs, especially through the exploitation of natural resources and industrialisation.

Conclusion

In contrast to a predominantly hostile environment against the people of Moab, the narrative of Ruth, told mostly from an Israelite setting, makes an apology for Moab. The author combats a Torah-induced mindset that perceived Moab as inferior, useless and even harmful to Israel. On the one hand, the Torah had warned that inter-marrying or mingling with Moabites would lead Israel to pagan religious practices, immorality and a forsaking of Yahweh. On the other hand, inter-marriage with Ruth did not lead Boaz to apostasy or immorality. Ruth the Moabite did not present the traditional image of an incestuous and immoral bastard but of a virtuous woman – a woman fit to be counted among the great grandmothers of the Jewish Messiah. The apologetic perspective of the book of Ruth is an appeal to the imperialist minded Israelite to discard negative and false narratives in exchange for positive and true ones. A similar appeal is fitting on behalf of Mother Earth, Mother Africa and the local girl against stories that were manufactured by imperialism – stories that we do not know. Such stories said that Mother Earth naturally self-destructs, Mother Africa is a dark (shithole?) continent, and the indigenous African daughter is immoral whereas the coloniser's daughter is pure. Instead, the real true stories that we know are human-induced climate change, the colonialist's destruction of natural habitats in Africa and the two-thirds world, human trafficking, massacres, political med-

dling in African governments and the pollution of nature-loving cultures and religions. If the author of the book of Ruth could boldly confront oppressive interpretations of the Torah, we too must do the same against imperialist mindsets.

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