



MAIN ARTICLES

Adam and Adamah: A Feminist Re-examination of Gender and Environment in the Yahwist's Narrative

Adam e Adamah: um reexame feminista do gênero e do ambiente na narrativa do Yahwista

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ABSTRACT: The Christian tradition of patriarchy often traces its roots to the Yahwist creation narrative in Genesis 2:21-25. The study asks a pivotal question: "Does the Yahwist creation narrative teach male primacy?" However, a closer examination of the Hebrew words "Adam" and "Adamah" suggests a more egalitarian relationship between man and woman. This study aims to re-examine the narrative using grammatical analysis and feminist hermeneutics to challenge the traditional interpretation of male headship. While some interpretations have been influenced by eisegesis, a careful analysis suggests that the Yahwist narrative does not explicitly advocate for male primacy. Instead, it presents a non-derogatory view of the feminine gender and emphasizes humanity's responsibility to care for the earth. Hence, the study advocates for a reconsideration of male headship in the Christian traditions.

KEYWORDS: Yahwist Creation Narrative. Exegesis. Eisegesis. *Adam*. *Adamah*.

RESUMO: A tradição cristã do patriarcado geralmente traça suas raízes na narrativa javista da criação em Gênesis 2:21-25. O estudo faz uma pergunta fundamental: "A narrativa javista da criação ensina a primazia masculina?" Entretanto, um exame mais detalhado dos vocábulos hebraicos "Adam" e "Adamah" sugere uma relação mais igualitária entre homem e mulher. Este estudo tem como objetivo reexaminar a narrativa, empregando análise gramatical e hermenêutica feminista, para desafiar a interpretação tradicional da liderança masculina. Embora algumas

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interpretações tenham sido influenciadas pela eisegese, uma análise cuidadosa sugere que a narrativa javista não defende explicitamente a primazia masculina. Em vez disso, ela apresenta uma visão não depreciativa do gênero feminino e enfatiza a responsabilidade da humanidade de cuidar da Terra. Portanto, o estudo defende uma reconsideração da liderança masculina nas tradições cristãs.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Narrativa javista da criação. Exegese. Eisegese. *Adam. Adamah.*

Introduction

The Yahwistic Creation Narrative, attributed to the “J source” in biblical scholarship, is one of the accounts of creation found in the Hebrew Bible, specifically in Genesis 2:4b-25. The interpretation of male headship within Christian tradition has long found foundational support in the Yahwist narrative. Inferences include: man is created first and woman last (2:7,22), suggesting the first is superior and the last subordinate; woman is made for man—to be his “helpmate” or companion to relieve his loneliness (vv. 18-20); woman is formed from man (vv. 21-22), indicating a derived and subordinate status; woman is created from man’s rib (vv. 21-22), showing her dependence on him for life; and the man names the woman (v. 23), signifying his authority and power over her (Murray, 2021; Clark-Soles, 2020; Tooher; Sandra, 2023; Beynon, 2022; Grudem, 2006; Sandra, 2023). Synonymous with the male superiority preconceptions is the patriarchal philosophy which originally referred to the father’s role as the head of a household. However, as time progresses, its meaning has expanded to describe a systemic framework of male dominance and female subordination. It is a system of social stratification and differentiation based on sex, which privileges males with material advantages while imposing significant restrictions on the roles and activities of females. This system is often reinforced through various taboos designed to ensure compliance with prescribed gender roles (Ademiluka, 2018).

The study engaged the tools of lexical-syntactical analysis which studies the meaning of individual words (lexicology) and the way the words are ordered in a text to determine more accurately the authorial intended meaning. Gorman (2001) defines it as the pursuit of understanding words, idioms, grammatical forms, and their connections based on contemporary conventions. Thus lexical-syntactical analysis takes into consideration the dynamism of language such that biblical words would not be used in the context of contemporary connotations. It goes further to identify how a word is used by an author – that is either literally, figuratively or symbolically with the sole objective of arriving at the author’s meaning. The foundational assumption of lexical-syntactical

analysis is that words can carry multiple meanings depending on the context in which they appear, making context a crucial element in the analytical process. In addition, the work also employed feminist hermeneutics, which involves interpreting biblical texts through the lens of women's experiences.

The slogan "feminism is the radical notion that women are people" said to have been attributed to Marie Schear (Claassens, 2024) is effective in drawing attention *feminism commitment to equity, dignity, and justice for all genders*. Carolyn Sharp (2021) offers a concise definition of feminist biblical interpretation in her commentary on *Jeremiah*, which encapsulates the core objectives of feminist hermeneutics which borders on:

- I. Honoring all subjects – Recognizing and valuing the dignity and agency of every individual in biblical narratives and contemporary contexts.
- II. Interrogating relations of power – Critically examining structures and dynamics of power within the text and their implications for readers today.
- III. Reforming community – Seeking transformative changes that promote justice, equity, and inclusion in both faith communities and society.

With this definition in mind, feminist biblical interpreters can be envisioned as curators. Their work has often focused on uncovering and amplifying the silenced voices of women and other marginalized individuals, both within the biblical texts and in their interpretative histories. This involves the diligent task of gathering, honoring, and occasionally reconstructing the overlooked narratives and histories of women, driven by a commitment to inclusivity and equality (Claassens, 2024). Feminist biblical interpreters go beyond uncovering and organizing the hidden stories of women in biblical and historical records. Claassens reveals further that they also play a creative role, generating new insights that have transformed the field using diverse hermeneutical and exegetical methods to offer fresh interpretations of biblical texts featuring women.

1 Patriarchy and Gender in Christian Tradition

The London Feminist Network (2020) refers to patriarchy as a societal structure characterized by historical and ongoing unequal power dynamics between women and men, resulting in systemic disadvantage and oppression of women. This inequality is evident in the under representation of women in key state institutions, decision-making roles, and various sectors of employment and industry. A defining feature of patriarchy is the prevalence of male violence against women.

The Hebrew Bible is, in many respects, a text shaped by male perspectives. It was primarily authored by men, for men, and centers largely on

male experiences. The principal figures within its narratives are overwhelmingly male. According to Ackerman's (2016) analysis, over 90 percent of the approximately 1,400 individuals named in the Hebrew Bible are men. Thus, this passage has been used to reinforce a patriarchal view that elevates male primacy, often portraying women as secondary or derivative (Olatunde, 2022, Giles, 2020, Wittwer, 2019). This perspective has shaped theological doctrines and practices that impact gender dynamics within many Christian communities.

Within contemporary Christendom there exist two poles: Complementarianism and Egalitarianism views. complementarians hold to the biblical view that men and women are created equal in God's image but were given different roles in the family and local church that are complimentary to each other. The term complementarianism is traceable to the council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 1988 (Murray, 2021). The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW, 2021) promotes this view, arguing that these roles should be celebrated rather than minimized. The CBMW rejects the idea of gender as a social construct and affirms that God has designed men and women with specific roles reflected in Scripture. Founded in 1987, the CBMW is composed of Christian leaders who advocate for traditional gender roles and have produced extensive resources to support their position.

Piper and Grudem favor the term "complementarianism" to describe their stance on gender roles, as it suggests both equality and distinct responsibilities for men and women. They reject the labels "traditionalist" and "hierarchical" because they believe these terms imply a rigid adherence to outdated norms or a power-based relationship, respectively (Piper; Grudem, 2016, p. 15-16). Although Piper and Grudem have projected complementarianism as a balanced and fair approach to gender relation, it should be observed that it subtly reinforces traditional gender roles that can be harmful to women. A prominent evangelical pastor and author, MacArthur has advocated for a complementarian view of gender roles in his teachings and writings. MacArthur has stated that he rejects both male chauvinist and feminist viewpoints. He holds a complementarian view of gender roles, believing that the Bible restricts women from preaching to men or holding leadership positions in churches. He cites 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 as biblical support for this belief.

Complementarian perceptions have continued to contribute to the way in which women have been viewed throughout history as they emphatically assert that the first three chapters of Genesis lay the foundation of biblical manhood of leadership and womanhood of subjugation, as such, every other biblical text must be interpreted consistently with the views in these chapters (Ortlund, 2006). By male headship, it presupposes a

partnership of two spiritually equal human beings, man and woman, whereby the man bears the primary responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction (Ortlund, 2006).

Strauch (1999) explains that the complementarian perspective holds that God created men and women as equals who embody unique, gender-specific roles. Scholars coined the term “complementarian” to underscore both the equality of the sexes and their distinctive, complementary qualities. This viewpoint asserts that God made men and women equally in His divine image, granting them full personhood, dignity, and worth. At the same time, it emphasizes that God intentionally created men and women to be different, each fulfilling distinct roles aligned with their gender (Strauch, 1999). A gender role is a culturally and socially defined set of expected behaviors, attitudes, and traits associated with concepts of masculinity and femininity (Payne, 2024).

Reading the Genesis 2 from the complementarian perspectives, the Adam is rendered as “man,” which implicitly assigns maleness to it (see the King James Version and the New International). However, a close examination of the Hebrew and contextual analysis reveals that this assumption is not straightforward. These views are represented by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in her introduction to the commentary on the *Women’s Bible* when she notes that when women protested against their civil and political degradation, they were directed to the Bible for justification. Similarly, when they challenged their unequal position within the church, they were again referred to the Bible for an explanation (1894).

Conversely, egalitarian view interprets Scripture as affirming that men and women are not only created equal but also share equal standing in roles and functions within the family and local church. According to this perspective, genuine equality means providing equal ministry opportunities for both sexes. It maintains that men do not hold any exclusive authority or leadership roles based solely on gender. Instead, a person’s gender neither defines their status or role in life nor restricts their spiritual gifts and opportunities for ministry (Josiah, 2022; Ware; Equality, 2012). This perspective asserts that at creation, neither sex held a greater degree of essence or humanity over the other. In Genesis 1:26-27, both were made in God’s image, without any distinction in their inherent worth. The term translated as “man” is understood to mean “humankind” rather than specifically a male, emphasizing the equality of both sexes. Furthermore, the “image” mentioned in Genesis 1:27 is interpreted as a spiritual likeness, since God is spirit. Another key point supporting this view is the equal role granted to both man and woman in ruling over God’s creation, as shown in Genesis 1:26 with the use of “them” — “Let them rule.” This shared responsibility of exercising dominion was intended for both on equal terms. In Genesis 1:28, both are tasked with procreation, highlighting

that this responsibility is inherently mutual and cannot be fulfilled by either sex alone.

The above positions obviously call for a reexamination of key Hebrew terms—specifically “Adam” (human) and “Adamah” (ground or earth). The Genesis creation narrative presents varying uses of the *Adam* in the Hebrew scripture ranging from a proper name, to a person and to humanity. *Adamah*, though depending on the context, is variously translated as earth, arable ground, soil, territory, world, or underworld. Another word that is used in close synonymous relation is *eret* (land). These words *adamah* and *eret* are rendered as: ground, earth, land all depending on the context of usage. Although the usage of *Adam* and *Adamah* in the Hebrew text is not as clear as the English renderings seem to suggest. For instance, the creation of *Adam* from the *adamah* (earth) and his/her return to it implies a connection, showing that *Adam* is earthy, like the *adamah* (Berry, 2011, p. 30).

Thus, feminists have always had somewhat misconceptions in their relationship with the Bible being viewed as the source of misogyny and hatred towards the womanhood. Some feminists outrightly dismiss the Yahwist (and in fact the whole of Genesis 1-3) creation as legitimating male supremacy and female subjugation. The preference of feminist readers for the creation narrative in Genesis 1:1–2:3 over Genesis 2:4-25 reflects a legitimate concern with the portrayal of gender equality. The argument is simple, while the second account seemingly makes woman a derivative of and secondary to man, Genesis 1:27 presents an image of concurrent male and female creation. Instead of rejecting Genesis 2, feminist readers might find value in reclaiming and reinterpreting it. For example, the portrayal of the man recognizing the woman as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” can affirm mutual recognition and equality, rather than hierarchy.

However, Phyllis Trible is an exception in her interpretation of the Yahwist creation story in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (1978, p. 75-77) as she approaches it differently. She opines that the Yahwist creation is ambiguous and lacks certain clarity leading to false interpretations that have dominated the conventional way of thinking in Western society for centuries. Trible insists that God creates the first human being *ha'adam* from the *Adamah*. She treats *ha'adam* as humanity – a generic term that does not refer particularly to any gender. Trible observes further that the first creature seemed to have disappeared after the creation of the female from the rib of the *ha'adam* and the new two creatures are called '*ishah* (woman) and '*ish*. Her main argument is that *ha'adam* was a sexless creature without any gender.

Trible's work is very relevant to this study as she demonstrates a rereading of the Yahwist creation narrative for an inclusive interpretation. It

thus becomes necessary to ask the following questions: Does the Yahwist creation narrative really depict the claims of male primacy (leadership) and female subjugation (Submission)? Was the Adam fully male when created or an embodiment of both male and female before God separated them? What relationship exists between humanity (*Adam*) and the earth (*Adamah*)?

2 Yahwist Creation Narrative and the Claims of Male Primacy

Early Jewish and Christian interpretations have often emphasized male primacy in Genesis 2:7, influenced by prevailing sociocultural norms. These readings have reinforced the notion that *adam* inherently refers to a man, with the implication that Adam, being created before Eve, serves as her origin. The formation of the woman from Adam's rib has been interpreted as positioning him as her progenitor, thereby assigning him a dominant role in the creation narrative. Additionally, Yahweh grants Adam the authority to name all of creation, including the woman (Piper, 2024; Ortlund, 2006). Obviously, Ortlund's understanding of the Hebrew *ezer* is as a maid, house-help.

It should be observed that the term *ezer* is notoriously challenging to translate. It has been variously interpreted as "helpmeet" (KJV), "sustainer," or even as "a helper against him" (Nicholson; Domoney-Lyttle, 2020). The concept of woman as man's helper has often led to gendered interpretations, suggesting that woman not only holds a secondary position to man but also functions primarily in a supportive role. However, the description of 'ishah as a "helper" (*ezer kenegdo*) suggests a relationship of compatibility rather than subordination, challenging traditional assumptions of male dominance.

Ezer in Genesis 2:20 from where Ortlund draws his inspiration of help as a subordinate is translated variously in English language to include: support, help, help mate, help meet, companion among others. Campbell observes some of the original purpose and power of the Hebrew term translated helpmeet has been lost through the ages. In tandem with the original language, the Oxford English Dictionary defines helpmeet as "even with or equal to." Thus, a helpmeet is someone who is a suitable partner or companion, often implying equality or compatibility. This definition fits into the authorial intended meaning of equality of both genders.

Gender differentiation in the Yahwist creation narrative emerges later when a part of *adam* is used to form a separate being, identified

as '*ishah* (woman). Following this act, *adam* is subsequently referred to as '*ish* (man). This sequence implies that *adam* in its original form was not necessarily male but a generic human, with gender distinctions becoming explicit only after the division into male (*ish*) and female (*ishah*). The narrative does not indicate any hierarchical distinction at the point of creation.

A careful examination of the text – Genesis 2:18 gives more clarification as the Hebrew *ezer* is drawn from two roots that become one overtime (Freedman, 2004). While one root means “strength” or “power”, and the later root meant “help, rescue. etc.” A strong rescuer or ally could be a viable translation. Another word that is used within the text that is relevant to the understanding of *ezer* is *kenegdo*. Traditionally, *kenegdo* has been translated as “fit” or “appropriate;” thus, describing the woman as “fit or appropriate helper.” Freedman (2004) hints that in late rabbinical commentaries *k'enegdo* means “equal” and stated that in his view “there is no basis for translating *k'enegdo* as “fit” or “appropriate,” as has been done by some translators leading to the understanding of the woman as a ‘fit helper’.”

Ezer occurs about twenty-one times in the Old Testament and from its nuances, ‘help’ should be taken in the widest sense because the references include both divine and human help (Schultz, 1980). Dike (2021) observes that the Hebrew noun *ezer* used in this text and throughout the Hebrew scripture does not suggest ‘help’ in the sense of a servant or maid but support, savior, rescuer, protector. It is in this sense that the Psalmist of Psalm 121:1 declares: “From whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord.” Clearly *ezer* here denotes divine support. This does not in any way suggest that God is man’s slave by being man’s help. There are no additional indications in these passages that the instances of *ezer* suggest either God or woman is subordinate to man. Furthermore, Mowczko (2013) clearly observes that in the Hebrew text, the word *adam* does not necessarily refer to a male human being, as *ha-adam* is consistently used to mean humanity (both male and female) before differentiation occurs.

3 Ha Adam: Fully Male or an Embodiment of Male and Female?

The next question that naturally arises is whether the *ha Adam* fully male or an embodiment of male and female. A journey round the text will offer some clarifications. The periscope that best fits the discussion is Genesis 2:21-23.

3.1 The Text (Genesis 2:21-23) in four versions

Hebrew	King James Version	Igbo Version	Hausa Version	Yoruba Version	Author's Translation
2:21 וַיִּפֹּל יְהוָה אֶלֶּהִים חַרְרָמָה עַל־הָאָדָם וַיִּסְגֹּר נִיִּשּׁוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת בָּשָׂר תַּחְתָּנָה: מִצְלָעוֹ	²¹ And the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the fresh instead	²¹ Jehova, bú Chineke, we me ka oké ura dakwasi madu ahu, o we raru ura; O we wep-uta otù nime ogiriga-ya, mechie anu-aru n'onòdu-ya:	²¹ Sai Ubangiji Allah ya sa barci mai nauyi ya kwashe mutumin Lokacin da yake barci Ubangiji Allah ya cire dāya daga cikin haƙarƙarinsa ya cike wurin da nama,	²¹ OLÚWA Ọlórún sì mú orun ijika kùn Ádámù, o sì sùn: ó sì yọ òkan nínú egungun -ìhà rẹ, ó sì fi ẹran di ipò rẹ	^{2:21} And God caused the human to fall into a deep sleep; and while took one portion of its side, and closed up the (the empty part) with flesh;
22:22 וַיִּבְרָא יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶשֶׁר־לָקַח אֶת־הַצֵּלָע מִן־הָאָדָם לַאֲשָׁה וַיַּבְרָאָהּ אֶל־הָאָדָם:	²² And the rich, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.	²² ogiriga ahu, bú nke O weputara n'aru madu ahu, Jehova, bú Chineke, we wue ya dika ulo ka ọ ghọ nwanyi, O me ka ọ biakute madu ahu.	²² haƙarƙarin nan kuwa da Ubangiji Allah ya cire daga mutumin ya yi mace da shi, ya kuwa kawo ta ga mutumin.	²² OLÚWA Ọlórún sì fi egungun - ìhà tí ó mú ní ìhà ọ̀kúnrin na mọ obinrin, ó sì mú ú tọ ọ̀kúnrin na wà	²² And the portion of his side, which the LORD God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and brought her to the man.
2:23 וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם, זֹאת הָפַעַם עָצָם מִעַצְמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי לִזְאֹת: קָרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לִקְחָהּ זֹאת:	²³ And Adam said, This is now bone of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.	²³ Madu ahu we si, Ehe! nka bu nọ ọkpukpu si n'ọkpukpum puta, na anu-aru si n'anu-arum puta: nka ka agākpọ Nwayi, n'ihì na eweputara nka n'aru Nwoke.	²³ Sai mutumin ya ce, “Yanzu dai wannan kashi ne daga kasuwana, nama ne kuwa daga namana, za a kira ta mace, don daga cikin mutum aka ciro ta.”	²³ Adamu sì wípé, Eyiya li egungun nínú egungun mi, àti ẹran -ara nínú ẹran -ara mi: Obinrin li a ó má pè é, nítorí tí a mú ú jáde láti ara ọ̀kúnrin wá.	²³ And the man said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man”

3.2 Analysis of the text (Genesis 2:21-23):

Genesis 2:21 - Hebrew transliteration: way-yap-pél Yah-weh 'é-lō-hîm tar-dê-māh 'al- ha-'adam way-yî-šān; way-yiq-qah, 'a-ḥaṭ miš-ṣal-'ō-tāw, way-yis-gōr bā-šār tah-ten-nāh

English translation (mine) And God caused the human to fall into a deep sleep; and while asleep, he (God) took one portion of its side, and closed up the (the empty part) with flesh.

The Hebrew term *ha'adam* is used about one hundred and thirty-six (136) times in the Hebrew Bible with various translations: "the man"; "Adam"; "the human"; "humanity". The term *adam* as has been noted by Tribble (1978) carries ambiguity. She notes that ambiguity characterizes the meaning of *adam* in Genesis 2–3. On one hand, man is the first being created (2:7). On the other, *adam* serves as a generic term for humankind. Before the distinction of female and male (2:21-23), *adam* is essentially androgynous: a single being encompassing both sexes.

Observe that personal names in Hebrew language do not take the definite article. "Adam" is typically preceded by the definite article, rendering it as "the adam", or "the human", rather than a proper noun. This usage aligns with the interpretation of "adam" as a generic term for humanity. Over time, however, the term seems to transition into a proper noun, although inconsistently (e.g., Genesis 3:17 uses "Adam" as a name, while Genesis 4:1 reverts to "the adam", and 4:25 returns to "Adam"). However, "adam" is used as a proper name not earlier than chapter 4:25 some English versions consistently use *ha'adam* in ways that connotes proper name for the male human. Even the NIV, which consistently translates *ha'adam* as "the man", has as the title of the passage "The Creation of Adam and Eve", implying that *ha'adam* is indeed Adam as a proper name for the man.

The Yoruba Bible translates *ha'adam* as a proper name for Adam while the Igbo and Hausa versions consistently translate *ha'adam* as *madu* (human being) and *mutum* (human being) respectively. The primary goal of translation is to convey the same meaning in the target language as in the source language (Ihuarulam, 2016). In Hebrew, *ha'adam* can mean "the human" or "the man", depending on the context. Translating it as *madu* in Igbo and *mutum* in Hausa aligns with the broader, more inclusive meaning of "human being" rather than a specific individual. This approach ensures that the translation captures the essence of humanity as a whole, which is often the intended meaning in the biblical context.

Ihuarulam (2016) has also noted that the historical context of Bible translation in Africa often involved adapting the text to fit the linguistic and cultural frameworks of the target audience. Early translators aimed at making the Bible as understandable and relevant as possible to local populations. This historical approach supports the choice of translating *ha'adam* in a way that emphasizes humanity in general. Moreover, many African cultures, including Igbo and Hausa, has the concept of humanity deeply rooted in communal identity rather than individualism. By translat-

ing *ha'adam* as *madu* and *mutum*, the translations resonate more with the cultural understanding of human beings as part of a larger community. Thus, the cultural relevance of the translation enhances the accessibility and relatability of the biblical text for Igbo and Hausa speakers (Ezika, 2019).

The consistency in translation is also crucial for maintaining the integrity of the text (Translation, 1991). The Yoruba Bible's choice to use "Adam" as a proper name may reflect a different translational philosophy, focusing on individual identity. However, the Igbo and Hausa translations prioritize a consistent representation of humanity. This consistency helps in the avoidance of confusion and maintenance of a clear unified message throughout the text (Ihwarulam, 2016). Translating *ha'adam* as *madu* and *mutum*, also aligns with theological interpretations that emphasize the collective nature of humanity created in the image of God. This interpretation supports the idea that all humans share a common origin and purpose, which is a central theme in many religious teachings. Thus, a more accurate interpretation of the Yahwist creation narrative aligns with the generic sense of *adam* as humanity (male and female), rather than as a proper name for the male being.

In Genesis 2:21-22, the Hebrew word *tsela* is often translated as *rib* in English Bibles. Fox (2002) notes that this "rib version" has historically supported the subordinate status of women. However, *tsela* in Hebrew Scriptures has broader meanings, such as "side" (of a person or object), "side chamber" (of the temple), and a place name. Outside Genesis 2, *tsela* is never translated as *rib*, suggesting *rib* is not its primary meaning. Gesenius Lexicon includes *rib* but lacks supporting evidence.

The Septuagint translates *tsela* as "pleura" (side of the body). English translations based on the Septuagint often continue the *rib* interpretation, despite "pleura" meaning "side". This indicates a focus on the *rib* concept rather than the literal Greek text. Lexical analysis shows *tsela* generally means a part or side, not specifically a rib. Nigerian translations also render *tsela* as *rib*, reflecting reliance on existing translations.

Adam Clark (1832) emphasizes the symbolic meaning over the specific anatomical part, suggesting the key point is that a part of Adam was used to create Eve. The traditional "Adam's rib" interpretation is a myth; ancient Hebrews likely understood *tsela* as "side". Philo Judaeus (c. 2000 years ago) interpreted *rib* symbolically as "half of the whole", representing equal partnership between man and woman. This translation has significant hermeneutical implications for understanding creation, human relationships, and theological doctrines. Complementarians use the *rib* concept to support women's subordinate status.

Ellicott (1905) argues against *rib*, noting *tsela* is consistently translated as "side" elsewhere. He suggests the woman was created from a correspon-

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Ellicott (1905) argues against *rib*, noting *tsela* is consistently translated as "side" elsewhere. He suggests the woman was created from a corresponding part of man, similar to a side. David Rosenfeld (2022) also supports the idea of *tsela* as a side of *ha'adam*. The implication is that the Hebrew word *tsela*, often translated as *rib* in Genesis 2:21-22, is more accurately understood as "side". This interpretation aligns with its broader usage in Hebrew Scriptures, where it denotes "side" or "side chamber" and is never translated as *rib*. Translating *tsela* as "side" challenges traditional interpretations that have supported gender inequality, emphasizing instead the equal partnership between man and woman. This shift has significant implications for understanding the creation narrative and theological doctrines.

In other parts of the Old Testament, such as Numbers 31:1ff, the Hebrew term *adam* is used interchangeably to refer to both men and women, suggesting a gender-neutral meaning. However, in verse 47, *adam* specifically refers to the female captives taken by the Israelites. This distinction between *adam* and animals highlights the inclusive nature of

the term, which encompasses both male and female humans. While *adam* might sometimes be translated as "man" in English, the original Hebrew term is gender-neutral. This demonstrates that "man" is not synonymous with humanity, as both male and female together constitute humanity, or *adam*. This perception provides a clear and concise explanation of the gender-inclusive nature of the Hebrew term *adam*, using the example from Numbers 31 to illustrate this point. It also highlights the importance of understanding the original Hebrew term rather than relying solely on English translations.

Going by the above analysis, a gender neutral rendering becomes imperative. Thus, Genesis 2:21-23 reads: "Then the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human, and while it slept, God took one of its sides and closed up the place with flesh. And the side that the LORD God had taken from the human (*ha'adam*), God fashioned into a woman and brought her to the human (*ha'adam*). Then the human (*ha'adam*) said, "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man (*'ish*)."

Observe that while the terms '*ish* (man) and '*ishah* (woman) are introduced in verse 23, the use of '*ish* in this context raises questions. The text states that she was taken out of man *ha'adam*, but it is unclear whether this refers to a specific individual (Adam) or humanity in general. Luther's translation of '*ishah* as "mannin" that is "female man" (Keil and Delitzsch, 2005) suggests a potential interpretation, but this may be influenced by the preceding context of the neutral-gendered "*Adam*".

Worthy of note is the complexities posed by this reading as the gendered terms '*ish* ("man") and '*ishah* ("woman") first appear in the context of Eve's creation. However, '*ish* is used only briefly before the narrative resumes referring to "the *adam*", which is paired with the '*ishah*. This makes it challenging to interpret *adam* as strictly categorical. For instance, should Genesis 2:25 be read as referring to "the human and its wife?" This reading seems less consistent with the broader context. However, putting the text in its context, the Yahwist narrator's primary concern in Gen 2:4-25 is the creation story, the relationship between humans and God, and the establishment of human relationships, rather than promoting patriarchal ideologies (Gerstenberger, 2021). It is therefore difficult to discern explicit promotion of patriarchal ideologies or assumptions about women's roles or inferiority.

Additionally, Adam's declaration that '*ishah* was taken from '*ish* further complicate the interpretation. He did not state that '*ish* was taken from the human *ha'adam* or that both were taken *ha'adam* which would support the generalized interpretation of *adam*. Instead, the narrative suggests a progression from a universal "human" to distinct gendered identities, underscoring the complexity of interpreting these terms in their context.

4 The connection between humanity (*Adam*) and the earth (*Adamah*)

In Genesis 2:7, the human being, or *adam*, is formed from the ground, *ha'adam*, highlighting an intrinsic connection between humanity and the earth. Unlike the “dominion” described in Genesis 1:29, here humanity is called to *abad*—to “serve” the earth—a meaning often lost in English translations, which obscures this foundational relationship. For instance, the New Revised Standard Version translates it as “to till,” the New International Version as “to work,” the Common English Bible as “to farm,” and the New Jerusalem Bible as “to cultivate.” Lapsley (2016) points out that reducing *abad* to “till” or “farm” strips away its deeper connotations, as the term relates more to “service.” In this context, *abad* as a transitive verb implies “serving” the Garden of Eden or “working for” it. This rather portrays humans as caretakers or tenant farmers. Other uses of *abad* in agricultural contexts (e.g., Genesis 4:2, 12; Deuteronomy 15:19; 28:39; 2 Samuel 9:10; Zechariah 13:5; Isaiah 19:9; 30:24) also imply a humble, essential labor without any connotation of ownership or dominance over the earth.

Ecologically, the fact that Adam is formed from *adamah* (dust) emphasizes humanity’s connection to the earth. Hence, humanity is not separate from nature, but made from it. This highlights the importance of humanities care over the environment, as they are intrinsically linked to its well-being. Moreover, being created “in the image of God” (*zelem elohim*) could be interpreted as giving humans a special responsibility to care for creation. This stewardship role could involve protecting the environment and using its resources sustainably.

With regards to gender studies, the wordplay between Adam (man) and *adamah* (dust) does not necessarily point towards men being formed first or having a closer connection to the earth than the woman. Rather, this can be interpreted symbolically as a reminder of humanity’s shared human origin in the *adam* – male and female; regardless of gender. Thus, while the passage focuses on Adam, the creation of humanity (male and female) from the dust is mentioned later (Genesis 2:18); a suggestion that both genders share the same origin and divinely-imaged nature.

The biblical portrayal of *adamah* shares some similarities with the African concept of the earth goddess. In both contexts, the earth is feminine in gender. For Africans, particularly among the Igbos, *ala* or *ani* is seen as a nurturing force sustaining all life. Scholars like Udoka, Ojimba, and Ojimba (2021, 54) have explored the multifaceted nature of *ala*, connecting it to the environment, morality, and ancestors. Chukwu, the Supreme Being, is responsible for creation, while *ala* is believed to conserve and maintain

morality in the land (Kanu, 2018, p. 98). A defiled earth, known as *imeruo ala* in Igbo culture, does not directly correspond to the Jewish concept of *adamah*. However, there are instances in the Bible where the land becomes "cursed" due to sin, highlighting God's judgment rather than the earth's direct enforcement held in the Igbo worldview.

Udoekpo (2024), explores the Genesis account of man's creation with a focus on the African communal concept of ubuntu ("I am because you are") and values the African sense of sacredness. Through a critical theological re-evaluation of the Genesis creation narrative (Gen 1:26-28), he inspires contemporary African communities and others to rethink humanity's role in caring for and responsibly engaging with God's creation. In Mbiti's (1999, p. 256), the concept of *ubuntu* implies that an individual becomes aware of their own existence, responsibilities, and rights only through their connection with others. When a person suffers, they do so alongside their community; when they rejoice, it is with their kin, neighbors, and even ancestors. The individual's understanding of self is captured in the phrase: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am". This principle is central to the African view of identity and community.

This interconnection is not limited to humans only as Christophère Ngolele, an African sociocultural anthropologist, asserts that traditionally, an African attains full human identity only through living in harmony with others, including fellow human beings, the ancestors, created nature, and God.

Moreover, from these Jewish and Igbo worldviews *adamah* and *ala*, can be seen as a symbol of equality between man and woman, suggesting that both are equally important and essential for the creation and sustenance of life. The association of *adamah* with the earth, which is often seen as a nurturing and life-giving force, can be interpreted as highlighting the feminine qualities of care, compassion, and creativity. In the same regard, the connection between *adamah* and the divine can be seen as elevating the feminine gender, suggesting that it is inherently sacred and valuable.

5 Summary

The study delves into the interpretation of male headship within Christian tradition, particularly focusing on the Yahwist creation narrative in Genesis 2. Traditionally, this passage has been used to support patriarchal views, elevating male primacy and portraying women as secondary. However, a reexamination of key Hebrew terms like *Adam* (human) and *Adamah* (ground or earth) suggests a more egalitarian relationship between man and woman.

Key findings include:

1. Translation of *ha'adam* and Gender Implications: The Hebrew term *ha'adam* in Genesis 2:21-23, often translated as "man" or as a proper name "Adam," actually refers to humanity in general (male and female) rather than an individual. This is supported by the use of the definite article "ha," indicating a more general reference to humankind. While many English translations interpret *ha'adam* as to mean "man," Nigerian translations (Igbo and Hausa) better align with the broader meaning, rendering it as terms for humanity rather than a male-specific reference.

2. Meaning of *Tsela*:

The Hebrew word *tsela*, traditionally translated as *rib*, is shown to have broader meanings, including "side" or "side chamber," with no evidence supporting its specific reference to a rib in other parts of the Old Testament. Lexical analysis and translations such as the Septuagint suggest that *tsela* likely refers to a part of the side of the human, symbolizing the equality and complementary nature of man and woman rather than focusing on a specific anatomical part.

3. Hermeneutical Implications of *Tsela*:

The traditional interpretation of *tsela* as a rib is a longstanding myth that misrepresents the original Hebrew understanding. A more accurate translation reflects the symbolic meaning of *tsela* as a "side", suggesting that Eve was created as a corresponding equal part of Adam, emphasizing the equality of male and female, which aligns with the notion of both created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

4. Creation of Humanity from *Adamah*:

The relationship between *ha'adam* (humanity) and *adamah* (earth or dust) in Genesis 2:7 emphasizes the shared origin of humanity, male and female, from the earth. This suggests that humanity is intrinsically connected to the environment, highlighting a biblical call for ecological responsibility. Furthermore, this connection challenges any gender hierarchy, underscoring the shared human origin irrespective of gender.

5. Connection to African Concepts of Earth and Gender:

The biblical portrayal of *adamah* resonates with African beliefs, such as the Igbo concept of *ala* or mother earth, symbolizing nurturing and moral conservation. While not directly paralleling the Jewish concept of *adamah* however, the idea of land being defiled echoes biblical themes of sin's impact on creation shares parallels with the African belief in the earth as a nurturing, feminine force, particularly in Igbo culture, where the earth

(*ala* or *ani*) plays a central role in life and morality. This supports the view of gender equality, where both man and woman are essential for the creation and sustenance of life, symbolized by the nurturing qualities of the earth.

Conclusion

The analysis of Genesis 2:21-23 reveals significant insights into the translation and interpretation of key Hebrew terms such as *ha'adam* and *tsela*. A more accurate understanding of *ha'adam* in the context of the Yahwistic narrative points to its inclusive meaning of humanity, rather than referring to a singular male figure. The traditional interpretation of *tsela* as a rib is challenged by linguistic and contextual evidence, which suggests that it symbolizes a side or corresponding part of humanity, reinforcing the equality of man and woman. Moreover, the relationship between humanity and the earth (*adamah*) in the creation narrative underscores the interconnectedness of humans with nature, promoting a sense of ecological stewardship. This interpretation aligns with broader themes of gender equality, seen both in biblical texts and African cultural perspectives, where the earth, like humanity, is considered a sacred and nurturing entity. Thus, the narrative invites a reevaluation of traditional gender roles and promotes a more inclusive and equitable understanding of creation.

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