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Follow the Raven and the Dove: Survival and Regeneration in Genesis 6-9 and In the Cameroonian Postcolony

Seguir al cuervo y a la paloma: Supervivencia y Regeneración en Génesis 6-9 y en la Postcolonia Camerunesa

Seguir o corvo e a pomba: Sobrevivência e Regeneração em Gênesis 6-9 E Na Pós-Colônia Camaronesa

Abstract
The African/Cameroonian postcolony has partially exited the legal, narrative, and psychosocial fabric of colonial deluge. Reading the independent nation state as the "ark" of survival, the paper argues for a covenantal reading of the primacy of non-human agents (the raven and the dove) in trailblazing postdiluvian life (Genesis 8), which stands in tension and contrast with the covenantal text of Genesis 9 that establishes the dominance of humans over non-humans. This paper proposes an a negritudian reading of the flood story and its after story to illumine the dialectical relation between the divine, the human, and non-human creatures in shaping postdiluvian life.

Keywords: Deluge; Postcolony; Cameroon; Raven; Dove; Negritude;, Noah.

Resumen
La post colonia africana/camerunesa ha salido parcialmente del entramado legal, narrativo y psicosocial del diluvio colonial. Leyendo el estado-nación independiente como el "arca" de la supervivencia, el artículo defiende una lectura de la alianza sobre priorizando los agentes no humanos (el cuervo y la paloma) en el trazado de la vida posdiluviana (Génesis 8), lo cual está en tensión y contraste con el texto de alianza de Génesis 9 que establece el dominio de los humanos sobre los no humanos. Este artículo propone una lectura negritudiana del relato del diluvio y su continuación para iluminar la relación dialéctica entre lo divino, lo humano y las criaturas no humanas en la configuración de la vida posdiluviana.

Palabras clave: Diluvio; Post colonia; Camerún; Cuervo; Paloma; Negritud, Noé.

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Resumo

A pós-colônia africana/camaronesa saiu parcialmente do tecido legal, narrativo e psicossocial do dilúvio colonial. Lendo o estado-nação independente como a "arca" da sobrevivência, o artigo defende uma leitura da aliança sobre a primazia dos agentes não humanos (o corvo e a pomba) na abertura de caminho para a vida pós-diluviana (Gênesis 8), o que está em tensão e contraste com o texto da aliança de Gênesis 9 que estabelece o domínio dos humanos sobre os não humanos. Este artigo propõe uma leitura negritudiana da história do dilúvio e sua sequência para iluminar a relação dialética entre o divino, o humano e as criaturas não humanas na formação da vida pós-diluviana.

Palavras-chave: Dilúvio; Pós-colônia; Camarões; Corvo; Pomba; Negritude; Noé.

1. Introduction

"The moral world of Genesis 1-11," writes Ronald Hendel, "is expressed primarily through action and dialogue rather than rules, with the exception of God's moral prescriptions" that are in fact "embedded in a particular social world" (Hendel, 2024, p. 36). Readers of Genesis, the book of beginnings, immediately confront chaos at every turn – chaos that is moral, ecological, and political. The early pages of Genesis depict a process of creation that interacts with "complete chaos"[2] (Gen 1,2), a phrase that the exilic prophet, Jeremiah, understands and associates with political disaster occasioned by imperial forces (Jer 4,23). As "the wind from God swept over the face of the waters" (Gen 1,2), the work of creation begins to unfold. God either directly calls life into existence (e.g., Gen 1,3.6) or catalyzes creation to reproduce or become generative (e.g., Gen 1,11-12.20.24). This creative work leading up to the Sabbath (Gen 2,2-3) stands as an ecological and socio-ritual buffer against the primordial chaos. In the garden of Eden, the quest for centralized and exclusive knowledge (associated with trees in the middle of the garden) eventually brings humankind into conflict with the divine author of the Garden and one of the animals, the serpent. The garden is protected by sword-wielding divine beings (Gen 3,24), but the violence continues to fragment families, particularly around their relationship with ritualized plants and animals (Gen 4). In response, social genealogy functions as a buffer (Gen 5). Genesis 6 then raises the stakes and introduces readers to a global deluge occasioned by human thought patterns geared toward evil, global corruption, violence, and a regretful deity determined to wipe out the earth (Gen 6,5. 7. 11). In anticipation of the deluge, Noah receives a divine tip about the impending destruction (Gen 6,13) and a divine command: "Make yourself an ark" (Gen 6,14). As the narrative unfolds, the "family ark" also func-

[2] All biblical citations in this essay are from the NRSVUE unless otherwise stated.

tions as a "global ark." In a life-preserving covenantal act, Noah is instructed to bring his family as well as land and air creatures into the ark (Gen 6,18-20), including ritually clean and unclean creatures (Gen 7,2-3). Noah implements an economic system to sustain the ark (Gen 6,22). Just as God "brings" (bôʾ) a flood of water to destroy all life (Gen 6,17), so too Noah will "come into" (bôʾ) the ark with his family and "bring" (bôʾ) non-human creatures to preserve their lives (Gen 6,18.19.20).

The sheer magnitude of the flood in Genesis 7 compels questions about survival and postdiluvian life: How is life in the ark shielded from the deluge around? Is the world outside the ark livable? If covenantal work ensured entry into the ark (and survival of the colonial deluge), what social, ecological, and political concept frames and shapes exit from the ark and reengagement with the post-flood world/creation? Will the pre-flood conditions persist, or will they change in the post-diluvian world? Does the flood structurally and fundamentally change life? Or, as Habel (2011, p. 103) puts it, "is the flood a failure and, if so, how will God come to terms with the consequences?" The microcosmic ark—the exilic artifact that endures and survives colonial/imperial deluge—now functions as the defining structure of all postdiluvian life forms, the only space out of which postdiluvian life presumably emerges. Such assumptions, however, are deluged and require postcolonial analyses; they represent a problematic tethering of postdiluvian identity, survival, and flourishing to a single hero and his ark. Thankfully, the narrative does not allow for such easy analyses. Instead, the narrative attends to the realities of a deluged world, and the problematic assumptions that postexilic thought patterns (epistemologies) and identities are to be sourced to the ideological and material infrastructure (ark) of hierarchical and uneven representation. For postexilic Israel, the narrative invites an ideological shift away from, or out of, the ark and into a world where blessing and flourishing are possible. This shift comes into focus on the back-end of the deluge, when Noah and all the creatures inside the ark must exit that temporary artifact and reengage a world beyond the ark's knowledge base, mechanics of life, and structure. For that shift to occur, the community inside the ark will need the birds (the raven and the dove); better yet, the community will follow the birds as they interact with creation and life unfolding outside of the ark. This suggests that Noah's repeated acts of sending the birds out of the ark is not simply reflective of the ark community waiting for conditions to improve outside; instead, the bird-sending episode signifies the necessity of human and non-human relationality for the sake of flourishing after the deluge. The raven and the dove become trailblazers in that work.

2. Whose Post/Colony? The Making of Cameroon as a Colonial and Postcolonial Ark

Musa Dube's quip that "Africa, surrounded by numerous suitors did not have the choice to choose a suitor or to refuse one" (Dube, 2012, p.3) continues to hold true as a diagnosis of the African postcolony. Historically, a fair number of colonial suitors constructed and reconstructed the empire-preserving colonial ark that became postcolonial Cameroon. To the British empire, it is called Cameroon. To the French, it is Cameroun. To the Germans, it is Kamerun. This all happened in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But to the Portuguese explorers of the 15th century, it is called Rio dos Camarões, the River of Prawns. The Portuguese name signaled the geopolitical and economic exploits of colonial adventure and nomenclature – the river where they caught prawns. The emblem on the national flag of the independent country is not a prawn; it is a lion, an animal that, for the citizens of Cameroon, represents resilience and strength. The country is also nicknamed "Africa in miniature" because, within its borders (which have changed many times over), it contains every African climate zone.

The postcolonial nation-state is both an artifact of colonial deluge and an ark of colonial survival. Cameroon's formation inside (1884-1961) and out of (1961 and onward) official colonial deluge was both malleable and aspirational. German aspirations included a grand vision of *Mittelafrika*, a colony extending from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, linking German Kamerun to German East Africa. As colonial patronage evolved and colonial regimes determined and negotiated what to bring into the colonial arks, France agreed to exercise power over Morocco while Germany took a sizable portion of French-controlled Congo, creating Neukamerun. After World War-I, France reclaimed Neu-Kamerun and reasserted plans to align Cameroun with Equatorial Africa, in opposition to Germany's goal of a new African empire (Joseph, 1975, p. 67). Babou (2010, p. 43) calls this colonial deluge "the internationalization of the colonial problem," namely, "the founding of the League of Nations after the First World War, the creation of the mandate system, and the introduction of the language of trusteeship in the language of international politics." In fact,

> "the establishment of the international community as legal custodian of the Ottoman and German colonies, in the Middle East and Africa, respectively, created a juridical precedent that undermined the rights of conquest, which, since the Berlin conference in 1885, had served as legal framework for colonial rule".

Placed under French and British rule as part of the League of Nations trusteeship program, Cameroon's identity and governing structure changed, again. The creation of the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961 brought together the majority French-speaking "La République" and the minority English-speaking "Southern Cameroons"—two territories with different colonial legacies.

Jean Comaroff and John Comarrof have argued that "*the* postcolonial nation-state… is not, for all the tendency to speak of it in the singular, a definite article. It refers to a labile historical *formation*, a polythetic class of polities-in-motion" (Comarrof and Comarrof, 2001, p. 631. Emphasis original). These polities address the intersections of natural disasters (wildfires), political anxieties, the role of flora and fauna in national identity-formation, the importation and naturalization of foreign plants, etc. Although Comarrof and Comarrof focus their analyses on South Africa, their insights are applicable to other postcolonial nation-states.

At the time of independence, this two-decked ark held just under 5 million people. Today, in 2025, the ark (the river of prawns) holds just over 30 million people and counting, with thousands of plant species and hundreds of animal species spread across its multiple protected rainforests. Cameroon has had its share of natural disasters, most notably the August 1986 Lake Nyos disaster that killed over 1700 people (Kling, 1987). Of the top 10 largest wetlands in the world, three are in Africa: The Congo Basin (4th), Lake Chad basin (8th) and River Nile basin (9th). Two of these (Congo and Chad) directly impact Cameroon. Since the adoption of the Ramsar convention on Wetlands (1971), several countries have adopted the goals of preserving wetlands, including the implementation of environmental flow assessments (EFA) – how much of a river's original flow regime should continue down into its flood basin to provide valued ecosystem service (Keddy et al., 2009, p. 39). Sunday Kometa and Jude Kimengsi have drawn on the historic work and legacy of the Ramsar Convention (ratified in Cameroon in 2006) to advocate collaboration between urban development planners and environmental conservation experts, particularly in the Ndop wetlands (Kometa and Kimengsi, 2018).

Emerging from the colonial deck are multiple genealogies, subjectivities, and identities. First, there is a "national" consciousness that is produced and circulated around cultural and artistic nationalism (represented by the image of the lion on the national flag) and guarded by using the military and the gendarmerie to ensure the "safety" of the nation and its people. Second, around language that is both official (English and French) and unofficial (tribal languages in the country and pidgin English). Third, ethnic consciousness, that mobilizes kinship identities. Fourth, religious consciousness that navigates the two major religions of the book (Christianity and Islam) and the many indigenous religions spread across the country. And finally, gendered consciousness that is reflected not only in the male-gendered reference to the "fatherland" but also in the disproportionate suffering of women and girls in the wars that have ravaged Cameroon (Ngwa, 2015, p. 865-867). In other words, the Cameroonian postcolony is best understood in relation to its human and non-human subjects.

3. The Bird-Sending Episode: Prospecting the Postcolony in Genesis 8

The bird-sending episode in Genesis (8,6-12) was a familiar feature of postdiluvian epistemology in ancient Mesopotamian flood stories (Marcus, 2002, p. 71–80). Exegesis and hermeneutics about the birds unfold around source-critical analyses, as well as around the birds' identities, subjectivities, and functions in prospecting the postdiluvian world. As Moberly (2000, p. 345–46) has shown, these questions address (1) the raven's mission; (2) whether the raven returned to the ark; and (3) the survival of the raven outside the ark. Moberly's (2000, p. 346) analyses highlight how Jewish and Christian interpreters focused on "intrinsic characteristics of ravens and doves (most obviously color and sound), always to the detriment of the raven."

From ancient rabbinic midrash to modern poetic articulations about survival and flourishing, the raven's identity, nature, and role are crucial and instructive. From Louis Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews* to Adam Kennedy's *Birds of the Serengeti*, the raven features as the non-human subject whose experiences and anxieties about survival in and around Noah's Ark, or in and around an untamed natural world, offer invaluable insights to humans. The raven's wisdom (sound) and capacity to survive have informed symbolic analyses of the ancient narrative of Gilgamesh. Along with its wisdom, the raven's color has informed analyses of modern Western missionary movements, as evident in Anna Brigitta Rooth's *The Raven and the Carcass*. Even exegetical biblical commentaries, such as Gordon Wenham's *Genesis*, have not refrained from imaginative and moralizing proclamations about the raven's color, in contrast to the dove, and the raven's role in the flood story. Animal colorism goes back to the ancient world. One example is Enoch's *Animal Apocalypse* (1 Enoch 85–89)—an allegory of "world" history during the Hellenistic period. According to Olson (2013, p. 128), the color symbolism (white = good, black = bad) of the *Animal Apocalypse* made the ravens "an attractive symbol for the current regime, the Seleucids, regarded by the author as the worst of the worst among Israel's Hellenistic victimizers." Even though *Animal Apocalypse* does not state the color of the raven, Olson (p. 129) believes that was not necessary: "There was no need to add the actual epithet "black," as with other animals (bulls in 85,3; 89,9; boars in 89,12), since the ברע comes in only one color." The singularizing-colored perception attached to the raven stands in contrast to the overall goal of *Animal Apocalypse*: that God's purpose in human history "is not to glorify the nation of Israel but to abolish all nationalities entirely and return all of humanity to a single, Adamic state under the auspices of the true Jacob/Israel when he appears. All species become white cattle" (Olson, p. 242). In deluged hermeneutics, all colors fade into white.

Varner (2007, p. 94) argues that a raven is "a 'talking' bird," that "is closely linked to prophecy and wisdom. It is also, on the other hand, associated

with war, destruction and death." Pütová (2017, p. 201) puts it this way: "Stories about the raven are… the embodiment of fundamental paradoxes of human life. With some exaggeration it can even be noted that meeting the Raven is like a look in the mirror." One notes that Roberts's *He Sent Forth a Raven* (1935) is widely understood to have been concerned with the global catastrophe of WW-I, a war that had direct implications on the construction of the colonial and postcolonial ark that is Cameroon. The publication of Roberts's work coincides with the early stages of the Negritude movement, both on the continent of Africa and in the Caribbean. It is unclear whether Roberts was influenced by the movement's theories. Rovit (1959, p. 42) argues that the raven was sent "to make a first settlement in the wilderness beyond the ark." That "hardy trail blazer" of a character makes the way for the dove of peace to follow. So, the void over which the raven flies "to and fro is not just 'post-World War I society,' but the total disaster of modern life, wrenched out of its ordered ways."

In light of these analyses, it is worth asking: If the birds represent the possibilities of life in a postdiluvian world, might the raven—the first creature sent out during the deluge and the creature that did not return to life inside the ark—represent not just postdiluvian but also the deployment of antediluvian life patterns as critical epistemological and interpretive insights for deconstructing the deluge and its ideological presupposition that life is the singular gift of a rampaging deity and his sole hero, Noah? Noah depends not only on divine memory to exit the ark, but especially on the raven's ravenous work. The purpose of the bird-sending episode is not simply to portray a community huddled inside the ark waiting for conditions to become livable outside. Instead, the episode is theorizing the imperative of a postdiluvian world that is no longer subjected to the whims of single-hero BIG men who control everything. Noah, his family, and the creatures must exit not only the architectural embodiment of the ark when it comes to "rest" atop the mountains (Gen 8,4); they must also abandon the lifestyle of floating over a devastated ecosystem that sustains their existence. They must reenter the world of multiplicity, abandon the ark of exclusivity. Repeatedly, God commands Noah to "go out of" (yāṣāʾ) the ark (Gen 8,16) and to "bring out" (yāṣāʾ) of the ark (Gen 8,17) every living thing. Noah and his family go out (yāṣāʾ) and so do all creatures inside the ark (Gen 8,19). For that transition, the humans and non-humans need the birds. Noah led the way into the ark; the birds lead the way out of the ark.

The birds' movements are the first acts of repositioning from inside the ark. Outside of the ark, where the birds are sent, revitalization is already ongoing. A major flaw in the interpretation of the birds has been (1) to delink their movements from ongoing revitalizing movements outside the ark (Gen 8,1-5) and (2) the unspoken or unexamined assumption that all postdiluvian life can only be sourced from the ark. God's remembering of Noah and the community inside the ark is readable as a catalyst for negritudian repositioning that begins

not with the ark or with concerns of a privileged group inside, but with creation outside the ark. This is evident in the vibrant revitalization beyond the ark in Gen 8,1-5. Crucially, although the raven does not return to the ark, the dove's ultimate achievement is connected to the evening (Gen 8,11), "the time of the raven" (ʿēt ʿereb. My translation). Through their movements, the birds liaise with the qualitative repositioning taking place outside the ark. Colonized subjects do not have a ready-made world waiting for them in the post colony. Instead, through ravenous work, through decolonial work, they create such a world after exiting the ideological and structural makeup of the ark of deluge.

David Carr has argued that within the grand narrative structure of the flood story—with its emphasis on "Noah, his family and a life-destroying flood that they survive"—there are clues within the text (6,5–9,17) to indicate that "this is a composition constructed out of textual elements that pre-existed their current context." A source-critical approach shows that the flood narrative is "a carefully constructed, yet *conflated* whole" (Carr, 2021, p. 232, 233. Emphasis original). Given this insight, might the birds' movement, especially that of the raven, signal a form of narrative deconflation—decolonial work—that recognizes the variety of knowledge systems at work in the story but does not seek to simply return them to their preexisting contexts, and rather mobilizes such knowledge systems for an equitable postdiluvian world?

In his commentary on Genesis, Martin Luther argued, contra Jerome, that the raven did return "but did not permit itself to be caught and put back into the Ark as did the dove." Having been sent to find out if animals could again walk the earth, the raven "did not perform its task well" in contrast with the dove that "proved itself a reliable messenger" (Luther, 1958, p. 153). Like Luther, Calvin also argued that the raven returned to the Ark; it sought "to be readmitted." For Calvin, Noah sent the raven because he knew the raven wouldn't return if it found carcasses. Interestingly, for Calvin, the dove did not return because "it enjoyed the fresh air, as if it had been set free" (Calvin, 2001, p. 82). It is quite curious that Calvin understood the dove's no return as a signifier of its desire for freedom, but the raven's continuous flight was its gullible character, susceptible to the allure of carcasses.

The raven is said to have gone "to and fro until the waters were dried up" (Gen 8,7). The raven's long flight—its generative and resilient ability to move and reposition outside the ark—is not pegged to a moment after the flood waters receded, but to a process that led to the de-instrumentalization of the water as a weapon of destruction. Although both birds are sent from the ark, and both birds participate in forms of return (šûb), only the raven's forward journey is described: it went and went (yāṣāʾ). Only the raven has knowledge about movement (yāṣāʾ) beyond Noah-like rest inside the ark—that is, beyond conditions that have confined rest inside the ark. The raven is not seeking favor. That is, ravenous work is not solely or even primarily about finding (māṣāʾ) rest

but about ongoing (yāṣāʾ) dialectal engagement (yāṣāʾ… šûb) with knowledge systems and methodologies of repositioning that predate entry into the ark and postdate exit from it.

The dove's first search for rest outside the ark fails. During its second trip, the dove apparently connects with the ravenous work of restoration; its second return to the ark is pegged to the "time of the raven" (Gen 8,11), the beginning of rhythmic creative time (cf. Gen 1,5). The dove is abandoning the search for privilege (favor) and aligning with ravenous work of creative repositioning. The birds' returning movements are literarily and conceptually connected to the movements in the earth outside the ark (cf. šûb in Gen 8,3. 7. 9). God's breath (rûaḥ) is already blowing (ʿbr) over the waters. The consonantal variation between the wind of God blowing (ʿbr) and the word for "raven" (ʿrb) is worth noting. That variation suggests that the raven's identity and activity are consonantally connected to the work of divine breath infusing decolonial life into postdiluvian creation.

The waters' movement in 8,3a is syntactically like the raven's movement in Gen 8,6. In Gen 8,3a we read that wayyāšūbû hammayîm meʿal hāʾareṣ hālôk wāšôb. The NRSVUE renders it "the waters gradually receded from the earth." The text could be rendered, "the waters receded from the earth, going and returning." Thus, the raven's "going and returning"—fluttering its wings to align with the blowing divine wind—connects with the decolonizing waters, the "returning" waters outside the ark. The raven's movements are part of the larger narrative work of enhancing a postdiluvian world that is no longer subjected to the infrastructure of deluge; this is the work of remembrance, of redesign, of repositioning. This is the work and the path that the raven begins to chart. It is also the work that the dove, Noah, and all of creation eventually follow when they exit the ark.

Altmann (2019, p. 91) translates ʿrb as "Black Bird(s)"—an "umbrella" term for birds, including crows, rooks, and ravens. The raven is among a list of creatures in Leviticus 11, which Whitekettel (2005, p. 510) describes as containing "the most extensive and comprehensive zoological classification system found in the Israelite textual record." Developments in taxonomy occur when "a cultural system undergoes social structural change" or when a cultural system encounters something outside of its existing system, or when there is internal reexamination of existing information (Whitekettle, 2005, p. 526–27). In the emerging postdiluvian world, the dove's second excursion—when it successfully returns with a leaf—is linguistically associated with evening, "the time of the raven" (Gen 8,11). Both birds are trailblazing the transition from deluged existence to postdiluvian life. Within ancient Israelite thought, then, the lexeme "raven" was polysemous. Ravenous work is polysemic work. Thus, when Lev 11,15 speaks of "every raven of any kind," one is perhaps allowed to consider the variety to extend beyond identity to include praxis. Certainly, the raven in

Gen 8 is a particular kind of raven. And the dove's association with the that raven offers dynamic interpretive options for generative transformation of the colony to a postcolony.

4. Colonial/Postcolonial Traumas and their Covenants

The postexilic text of Genesis 8–9 can be read as a work of postcolonial memory, a poetics of negritudian repositioning that connects the divine, the human, and the non-human (Niang 2019). Divine memory (Gen 8:1) functions as a catalyst for the human and non-human creatures' exit from the ark. The memory also catalyzes the work of the earth's repositioning beyond the conditions of deluge (Gen 8,1-5; 13-14) and beyond the ark (Gen 8,6-12;15-19). The narrative in Gen 8,1-19 functions under the rubrics of the pre-flood covenant that preserved some life (life inside the ark) and destroyed other forms of life. For its part, Gen 8,20– 9,17 transitions creation to the post-flood world, guided by divine covenants with Noah and all of creation (9,9.10.11).

4.1 *Movements Toward Freedom*

The narrative in 8,1-19 describes non-human and human movements. In 8,1-5, the focus is largely on the movement of terrestrial creatures: as the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven are closed (8,2), the wind blew (8,1), the waters subsided (8,1), receded (8,3), and abated (8,5), and the ark came to rest (8,4) on a mountain. In 8,6-12, the focus is on the movement of celestial creatures, the raven and the dove. While the raven went "to and fro" until the waters dried up (8,7), the dove was sent to see if the waters had subsided (8,8; 11). The dove returned (8,9), came back a second time (8,11), and finally did not return (8,12). In 8,13-19, the focus is largely on the movement of humans and animals exiting the ark. The face of the ground (*adamah*) is dry (8,13). Just as the raven went forth (8, 7), so now Noah's family and the rest of creation inside the ark must exit (8,16.17.18.19).

Elsewhere, the raven is among a list of creatures that reside (šākan) in devastated ecosystems that Isaiah describes (Isa 34,11). The sword of divine judgment is drawn against the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth, and the slaughter of animals is described as a "sacrifice" (Isa 34,6). Some interpretations suppose that the raven did not return to the ark because it found carcasses and stayed to feast on them (Alehegne 2011, p. 444); residence in a place of divine judgment is related to literary and ideological traditions about uncleanness. Yet, as Altmann (2019, 91–92. Emphasis original) puts it, "Which way does the connection develop"? Are the birds unclean "*because* they inhabit, or are believed to inhabit, desolate places, or does the literary tradition select birds recognized as unclean to play this lugubrious role?" Another interpretation is possible, even more likely, from a postcolonial perspective. Isaiah 34,11 describes the raven

living in a post-destruction world: "But the desert owl and the screech owl shall possess it; the great owl and the raven shall live in it." As with 1 Kgs 17, the raven's presence in the place of destruction is not evidence of the raven being unclean; rather, such residence is evidence of ravenous work to overcome the defilement of (colonial) destruction. The birds listed in Isa 34,11 are also listed in Lev 11 and Deut 14. After describing a dystopian world without a kingdom, followed by the presence and activity of animals and birds, the text concludes with a divine promise that these devastated lands shall be the residence (šākan) of the animals (Isa 34,17). The use of residence (šākan) in Isa 34,17 recalls the residence of the ravens in 34,11. In this post-devastation scene, the raven is present. That ravenous residence helps to transition the devastated lands in chapter 34 to restored lands in chapter 35. That restoration includes the eventual return (šûb) of the people (Isa 35,10). The ravenous work of transformative restoration is a recurring task to which Noah and the ark community must commit to upon exiting the ark.

4.2 The Postdiluvian Covenantal Narrative (Gen 8,20–9,17)

In the postdiluvian covenantal narrative in Gen 8,20–9,17, the primacy of the role of the birds as trailblazers of postdiluvian life is overridden by interest in sacrificial customs and, consequently, the superiority of humans over non-humans. Habel identifies three myths in Genesis 8,20–9,19. There is the *Adamah* myth (Gen 8,20-22), the *Tselem* myth (Gen 9,1-7) and the *Erets* myth (Gen 9,8-17). A radical transformation in the divine relation to these two myths, resulting in what Habel calls a "green" and "greening" relation (Habel 2011, 103). As concerns the divine relation with the Erets, Habel argues that the relationship is "re-defined in terms of covenant promises" (Habel, 2011, p.103).

Life unfolds around these three spaces. The first is an eco-ritual space (Gen 8,20-22). Noah builds an altar and offers a burnt offering. The offering's aroma triggers the externalization of otherwise internalized divine speech. God promises never to curse the ground (Adamah) because of humans (Adam). In this movement of words from the internal to the external, the divine heart is connected to, and contrasted with, the human heart (8,21). The fate of the Adamah and of living creatures depends on what happens in divine and human hearts. For now, the Adamah and living creatures avert a curse and destruction because of the aroma rising from the altar; that is, the earth and living creatures are in fact paying for their survival through the sacrifice. The postdiluvian world is still conditioned around necropolitics: sacrificial death (burnt offering) can avert cosmic death. In this turn of events, the focus is no longer on the trailblazing work of the birds but on appeasing the divine and institutionalizing human dominion over animals. The intentions of the human heart remain unchanged, and a different kind of death (sacrifice of animals) has been written into acceptability, as the divine enjoys what Habel calls "the sensuous aroma of this

massive holocaust of burning creatures" (Habel, 2011, p. 105). Human and non-human fate is still tied together, even though YHWH has "liberated *Adamah*, in spite of the addiction of humans to sin" (Habel 105).

The second space is socio-ecological (9,1-7). Despite the deluge and its lingering aftereffects, life will persist and seasons will persist. The dominant terminology for the postdiluvian world is no longer ground (*adamah*) but earth (*Eretz*). And yet, within the socio-ecological construction of 9,1-7, one hears echoes of the Adamah in the language of blood (dam). James Okoye identifies one restriction: lifeblood belongs to God. Writes Okoye (2025, p.140): "that the first command to be given to the post diluvians is a ban on bloodshed suggests that murder was the endemic vice of the antediluvians." Furthermore, in the postdiluvian covenant text (Gen 9,8-17), the bow as a weapon of war, which is present in the Enuma Elish, does no feature in flood accounts. Okoye sees that hanging bow "as a sign of divine graciousness" (2025, p. 142). And yet, the question remains: Will humankind still be expected to dominate as was announced in the original creation story (Gen 1,28)? The answer seems to be yes. Things have intensified and human dominion seems to have been further entrenched, as the animals now live in fear and dread of humans (Gen 9,2; cf. Deut. 11,25). This blood is protected, as God prohibits the shedding of blood (9,4-6). Yet, given the reemergence of ritual sacrifice as a key feature of this post flood community, the fear of humans is perhaps intensified among those animals that are eatable. Habel notes that "Elohim has changed humans from herbivores into carnivores and thereby intensified their dominion over nature" (Habel 2011 p.107).

The third space is the explicit covenantal space (9,8-17). It is important to note the pre-flood rationale (in Gen 6,11-13) about the earth being corrupt and spoiled and filled with violence. The first irony here is that violence in the form of a flood is used to overcome violence on the earth. The authoritarian playbook is that massive use of force is necessary to root out violence. But that has failed. A change in plan is not only necessary but unavoidable. Hence the divine promise not to destroy life again (Gen 9,11). The covenant relationship between God and all flesh means destruction is no longer a viable or reasonable option for the deity. The narrative moves the story from episodic to semantic tropes. God establishes a covenant (9,9.11.17) with human and non-human creation. The bearer of the covenantal sign is the clouds, which hitherto serve as the divine agents of destruction (9,13.14). Henceforth, the clouds carry the emblematic deterrent to cosmic violence. That deterrent (the rainbow) mobilizes and re-inspires divine memory of the covenant to preserve life (9,17).

5. Conclusion

Although the bird-sending episode has cultural grounding in Mesopotamian texts and tradition, including their roles among sailors, Hendel (2024, p. 292) notes that

> "it is not clear why the flood hero needs them—he can simply look down to see if the water has abated. This scene has folkloric dimensions—the successful third try, the seven-day intervals—and adds a sense of drama and the passage of time."

However, if one reads the story beyond an anthropocentric view, the bird-sending episode signifies that the postdiluvian world is not supposed to be simply subjected to the whims of humans who survive the deluge. Instead, non-human creation is critical to how the creation inside and outside of the ark transitions into a postdiluvian world. Sight alone is not enough; simply looking out from the ark is not enough and might even be callous. Instead, engagement with the traumas of the world outside of the ark is critical to the transition from a flooded to a habitable world. And this is where birds become more than folkloric creatures that add drama to the text. Noah must send his hand and receive the dove when it returns; that is, just as Noah sent out the bird, he must send out his hand. The human body mimics the bird's movement. Ultimately, Noah and the rest of creation inside the ark follow the raven and the dove, the birds that have prospected and trailblazed the realities of life, survival, and flourishing in the post colony. For Cameroon, it is evident that the transition from the colonial ark to postcolonial liberation and freedom is still mired in the logics of the ark; that is, dominated by single-hero BIG man thinking that hampers human and hon-human flourishing. New ravenous work is needed.

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