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The Dignity of Creation: Turning the Gaze to an African Women's Eco-Theology

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Abstract

In cognizance of the effect of the influence of a dualistic view, that has influenced a simultaneous oppression of both nature and women, this research article suggests a turning of the gaze to an African women eco-theology. It constructs a methodology from the theological reflections of a social Trinitarian understanding of God, as seen in Jürgen Moltmann's works, and incorporates animism to it as a way of reconciling all creation in unity with God. It appraises a recognition of the hierarchical nature of dualism in western thought forms, which contributes to an intertwined oppression of nature. It critiques a transcendental apathetic God, in response to ecological crisis; and affirms the African religious view of animism as a way of retrieving nature, to an active voice. In view of this, it offers a shift from dualist view of creation to an interconnected sacredness in order to accord dignity to the creation. The significance of the article will be to shift the attitudes of African Christians, from a dualistic worldview, towards creation.

Key words: Animism, Ecology, Eco-theology, Eco-feminism, dualism, Creation, The One and the Many, Trinity

Introduction

The Dignity of Creation is emerging as a critical concept that relates to the inherent worth and value of all living things, especially with the ecological crisis around the world. In Africa, the destruction of creation is being attributed from a theological perspective to an erosion of the African religious view of the interconnectedness and interdependence of creation as all infused to the divine as sacred. The missionary theology which Africa inherited is characterized by a dualistic view of creation which depicts creation as inferior to human beings. This same dualistic view has shaped the way creation and women are viewed in a hierarchal manner as subordinate to men. Plato, one of the most influential Greek thinkers who were very instrumental in shaping this dualistic thought aiding to its transmission in Christian theology through the church fathers held that; the world of forms is divine and masculine while the world universalities constituting of matter is inferior and feminine. Based on this world view, natural creation and women have been denied the dignity that they inherently deserve.

Ecological crisis and climate change are among the list of the top agenda in global conversations currently with every attempt by countries around the world to come up with lasting solutions. The world is trying to come to terms with the effects of ecological crisis that is manifested by climate change and global warming. Countries around the world are in a desperate search for possible solutions to droughts, hunger, and massive death of domestic and wild animals, extinction of aquatic lives and other organisms that have inhabited the earth. This ecological crisis is evident in the phenomena which include but not limited to, climate change, mass species extinction, ocean acidification, the rise in wildfires and super storms, glacial melt, pollution and many others (Carfore, 2021).

The UN Climate Change Conference held in Egypt (COP27), in Dubai (COP28) brought together many leaders, registered as participants, party delegates, observers and media representatives. During these conferences, the world was immersed on all facets of climate change, the science, the solutions, the political will to act, and clear indications of action (UNEP, 2021). African countries also held their summit here in Kenya in the month of November 2023 as they sought for an amicable solution to the effect of climate change. The United Nations Environment Assembly also held a week long assembly in Nairobi Kenya in the month of February and March 2024 (UNEP 2024).

Kenya for example, as one of the African countries has not been spared from the pangs of ecological crisis as is evidenced by climate changes that are coming with vengeance to humanity. The warning by the Professor Wangari Maathai that "Nature is very generous but very unforgiving" as she conscientized the masses on the consequences and urgent need to preserve and conserve the environment, are incarnating and immortalizing. True to the words of Professor Maathai, Kenya has been facing one of the worst drought and mass hunger in history. This has been associated with the effects of destruction of environmental resources and the global phenomenon of climate change attributed to human activities. While the effects of the pervasive nature of human activities have a universal effect on creation, women, the marginalized and the ecology in Africa experience these effects with equal measure.

A theological reflection on this state of affairs shows a clear indication of the ignorance by African Christians in understanding the principle of stewardship of creation which recurs as a divine instruction throughout the Biblical texts. From Genesis 1:26-31, the Bible records the creation of human beings both male and female, and the instruction to rule over the earth and all that was created in it. The instruction, to subdue the earth, has often been misunderstood to imply subordination. This is in spite of the Psalmist clarifying in Psalms 24:1-2, 50:7-12, 89:11 that all that is on earth belongs to God the creator and that human beings are stewards or custodians of creation.

Despite the explicit Biblical evidence that humanity has been mandated to take care of creation, the situation in Kenya today is remote from this understanding. It is characterized by pervasion, massive destruction and degradation of creation. In an attempt to interrogate the phenomenon, we discover two-fold realities which are juxtaposed and even intertwined. The first reality is the fact that Christianity which is the largest religion in the country has at its very nature a dualism from Greek philosophical influence. The dualism informs largely how majority of Africans relate with creation. The effect of this dualism promotes a worldview where human beings view themselves as superior to any other creation. The second discovery from an African women theological consciousness is a realization of the intertwined subjugation of women and other marginalized groups with the natural creation. This is informed by the hierarchical understanding of creation that also stems its origin from Greek's epistemological view of the universe. An African women eco-theology framework argues that this reality is also informed by the Greek philosophy which is found within the historical transmission of Christianity to Africa.

Ruether (1992) acknowledging this dualism observes that western religion and philosophical thought which is what Africa inherited from missionary theology is an infusion of Hebrew, Greek and Christian themes which have at its core an ontological dualism of spirit and matter, mind and body with a good/evil dichotomy. The dualism she observes is also identified with gender and class hierarchy. The men in the ruling class are seen to be closer to mind and reason, while women and lower-class people are closer to the bodily. The latter are categorized as 'carnal' both in the sense irrational, prone to sensual impulses, and prone to evil. Ruether (1992) argues that this dualism developed from the thoughts of Greek philosophers especially Plato and Aristotle and Christianity in its historical development took over (Ruether 1992, p. 6). Mwaniki (2018) confirms this view by observing that the Christianity that Africans inherited was informed by a notion of dichotomy where women were viewed as inferior and evil to men (Mwaniki 2018, p. 1).

Having inherited this worldview, the picture that is depicted by the current state of creation in Africa is evidence of a dualistic view where human beings view themselves as superior to all others while the ecology is subject and subordinate to humanity. This has led to a degradation and ruin which reflects ignorance by Africans on the inherent value of creation and how to relate with inanimate part of the created universe. On the same breath, it is observed that the

dualistic view similarly contributes to subjugate women and all others who are marginalized by different facets of power (Norgaard, 1999, p.202).

This article proposes a theological response to this problem and the researchers make their entry to the conversation as African Theologians who are concerned with the ecological crisis in Africa, the subordination of women and all humans in the margins with equal measure. We observe that in order to address the perversion and destruction of creation, subordination of women and those in disadvantaged positions, there is a need to analyse the African's perception of creation together in relation to humanity or what Mbiti (1969) calls the African's religious philosophy (Mbiti, 1969, p 1). This article argues that this can only be done by clearly showing the entire trajectory on how the Greek philosophy of dualism was transmitted to Africa through missionary theology and how it has continued to shape African thoughts in relation to the ecology and human relationships with one another. Through understanding this historical development, the researchers are able to understand how it has led to exploitation, degradation of creation and subordination of some human beings to others.

1.1. Greek Dualism

1.1.1: Introduction

In this part, the researchers seek to understand how dualism as a philosophical ideology of understanding the cosmos was transmitted throughout history especially through Christianity to the current reality and how this philosophy has shaped the African Christians' view of nature, inanimate things, women and the marginalized as subordinate to the elite "male" or the "masculine."

Plato's Epistemology

Greek philosophy is a system of thought that emerged in ancient Greece and was developed by thinkers such as Thales, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. The most famous philosophers in antiquity who shaped the western thought include Plato who the researchers will use as major reference. Before looking at the influence of this Platonic thought on western philosophy and subsequent Christian religion, the article will examine whether Plato had any earlier influence from Greek mythology considering that he was of Greek decent.

It is argued that modern society has its earliest roots in Greek myths. In the Greek myth of creation, *Gaia* (earth) gave birth to *Uranus* (Sky) on her own. Their lovemaking produced every other part of creation including human beings. Like all societies in antiquity, there are no written records of these myths before the invention of the printing machine (Abedilghani, 2015, p. 4). However, Abedilghani argues that Plato's writings have indications of his knowledge of the myths. He states that Greek mythology inspired almost every person who came in contact with it. Pre-platonic philosophers had dismissed the belief in myths as worthless but claimed that they saw them as of benefit only by finding the hidden meaning behind their interpretation (Abedilghani, 2015, pp. 2-39). Plato however, retook myths which were still a living power in his time citing them as unholy and full of errors. He claimed that they ought to be taught as dialectical truths. The allegorical interpretations of myths he argued were a "rustic" kind of wisdom; not antitheses of reason but rather functioning as instruments of the *logos*. Plato viewed myths as a mystery to be revealed but not containing the higher knowledge because reason is supreme and myth subservient to it (Menzel, 2019, p. 8). The article argues that the myth of creation in the Greek world could have shaped the categories of Plato's thinking by the fact that he responded to them even if in the negative.

Plato attempted to explain epistemological concepts of the universe (Pate, 2011, p. 30). In his famous work, *the dialogue* which is found in *The Republic*, Plato gives the allegory of the cave as an illustration of the existence of two parallel worlds; the world of ideas/forms and the world of universalities. As translated by (Eyer, 2016, pp. 1-10) Plato creates a picture of prisoners who have been chained up in a cave for all their lives. The prisoners know nothing but what they are able to see using their sensual eyes as projected on a screen before them and illuminated by a fire behind them. On the screen are shadows of the real universalities that the prisoners have not ever seen. In their illusion, the prisoners think that these images are the real essences of the things. According to Plato, if these prisoners were to be let loose, they would visualize the real things which exist perfectly in the world of forms. This allegory was to illustrate that, what we see in the material world of universalities are just shadows of the immaterial world (Eyer, 2016, p.1). In Plato's world, the forms/ideas are the perfect good while the material things in the physical universe are just mere shadows of the real world.

Marvin Pate in his book, *From Plato to Jesus: What does Philosophy have to do with Theology?* (2011) has given an explicit summary of Plato's epistemological view. He labels Plato's view as dualistic. It is based on distinct categories

between the invisible world of forms/idea with that of visible world of shadows or copies. In the philosophical understanding of the "*One-and-the-Many*", Plato's philosophy holds that the *One* is above the *Many*. The forms are the eternal or universals from which the copies are made. This is to mean that the form, which is the essence of a thing, is behind the particulars, which is visible. He understood the forms to exist separate from their shadows or copies. The forms in Plato's view are immaterial and eternal realities that exist in the mind of God which Plato terms as the Demiurge. Human beings know about the forms because they have a soul that pre-existed before the physical body and from this prior existence, they are acquainted with the forms through recollection of memory. From this the recollection, human beings can reason, transcend to the ability of fathoming the essence of things, and that in human beings' quest for the good, e.g., good, justice, love etc., they are able to gaze upon the idea of the good in a beautiful thought that leads them to the essence of the good (Pate, 2011, pp.25-26).

1.2. Greek Dualism and Christian Theology

Pate (2011), finds philosophy as having been an accompaniment of theology historically. Platonic philosophy has been seen as the most influential to western thoughts and Christian Theology. The most influential neo-platonic philosopher who made a link between Philosophy and theology is Plotinus (AD-204-270). Pate (2011) credits him as facilitating the natural bridge between Platonic philosophies with the mystic of God. Plotinus placed great importance to the eternal/immaterial God who is above the *many*; shadows/copies. He affirmed Plato's theory of epistemological and anthropological dualism. He advanced Plato's idea to that of the creation system and the mystical union with God as the means of salvation of the body from the soul. In his travels in several cities of his contemporary, from Alexandria in Egypt until his permanent settlement at Rome, he came into contact with diverse religious trends which were thriving without philosophical challenges (Pate, 2011, pp. 11).

When in Rome, he systematically combined religion with reason. Plotinus argued that the material world/the *many*, is not the reality, but the *One*, invisible and eternal God is the true reality. Concerning the relationship between the material world and the invisible God, Plotinus introduced the idea of a hierarchical relationship where the visible emanates from God as gradations which only reflect God but are not God. Just as light comes from the sun reflecting the sun but the light is never the sun. Plotinus introduced the idea that the first emanation from the *One* is *Nous* which is the mind, universal intelligence, followed by the soul which is the origin of the human soul and in opposition with the world of matter and this justified the Platonic thought of the pre-existence of the soul (Pate, 2011, p. 29).

In answering the question of evil, Plotinus argued that evil in human beings is as a result of the soul coming into fusion with the body. He argued that the human soul is always struggling to leave the body with the rational desire to reunite with the world's soul/mind and ultimately God. These struggles end when the soul leaves the body at death and ascends back to the *One*/God in a reunion through development of morals and intellectual values. It is Plotinus according to (Pate 2011), who combined reason with religion. This neo-platonic view greatly influenced Christian frontiers like St Augustine (Pate, 2011, p. 29) as we will see.

Plotinus was the last philosopher outside religion and had the greatest influence on Christianity through pagan worshippers. The influence of Plotinus in Christianity was transmitted by Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenic Jewish reader from Egypt. Louth (2009) argues that Philo saw what had been the forms in Plato's epistemology as the mind, the *logos*. God being the architect used the *logos* in *Genesis 1:0*. God being the architect which was in Plato's theory a demiurge, created with the *logos* in *Genesis 1:1*. At the same time, the existing Rabbi's tradition of knowledge; *Sophia*/wisdom or *Rahma* in Hebrew was incorporated within this formulation. In this tradition, the wisdom is the Torah which is the blue print of God as the architect. For Christians, John 1:1, "In the beginning was the word/*logos* and the word/*logos* was with God and the word/*logos* was God", is the culmination of the entire transmission of Plato's dualism to Christianity as we know it today (Louth, 2009, p. 84).

1.3 Greek Dualism in the African Christian Thought Today

As noted earlier in the background, Ruether (1992) acknowledges the infusion of this dualism observing that western religion and philosophical thought which is what Africa inherited from missionary theology as infused from Hebrew, Greek and Christian themes which have at its core an ontological dualism of spirit and matter, mind and body with a good/evil dichotomy.

St. Augustine is credited to be the most influential Church father who constructed theology proper from the Platonic thought which ended up to be embraced by Protestantism over the reformation history. Augustine's Platonic

thought shaped his theology as he modified some concepts to reconcile theology with Plato's epistemology. Augustine believed that the *One* was above or preceded the *many*. The *One* is God, the absolute being, eternal truth and the *Many* corresponded to God's creation. Augustine however had a distinctive thought from Plato. He believed that God created all things from nothing; which is creation *ex nihilo*. He diverted from Plato's thought of a Demiurge who was like an architect but he argued that creation was God's act and that God's creation was a bringing into existence things that did not exist. His view did not see matter as evil but as inferior. Augustine's ontology also had a dual understanding that in creation *ex nihilo*, God is both immanent and transcendent. God directly brought the world into existence in God's immanence but God did this out of free will which is God's transcendence. Pate categorizes this view as that of the One-and-the many. It is simplified that..., "God's transcendence (*the One*) is behind God's immanence in creation (*the many*). To God's transcendence belongs the One (universal, absolute)" (Pate, 2011, pp. 37-38).

This dualism has found its expression in many Protestants African Christian hymn books and liturgies. The Most common hymn book that is used by most *Agikuyu* Mainline Protestant churches is; *Nyimbo Cia Kuinirira Ngai*. The book contains songs that are sung during services and most other ceremonies in the day-to-day lives of the *Agikuyu* Christians. One such song that explicitly shows dualism is the song which is often sung during funerals; whose lyrics are"

Wihoke Mwathani rugendo-ini. Tiganana na mwiri uthii rugendo, Na mwiri ugathikwo utuikie tiri, Niguo tugakinya gwa lthe witu. (Gikuyu Hymn Book, 2003. P. 103)

The song loosely translates as:

The body will be buried and decompose, leave the body to take its own path, our souls are on a sojourner to our father. This alludes to the dualistic view of the human person where the body is viewed as unworthy even at death with soil (*Tiri*) while the soul is viewed as being on a spiritual journey to God apart from the physical universe.

The hymn, *Thi ino ti yakwa* (This world is not my Home) hymn number 322, has a dualistic ontological message where Christians denounce ownership of the earth as just people on a journey to heaven and discourages them to desire any material wealth or any happiness that is derived from earthly pleasure but rather, to focus on their heavenly home where they will live happily forever after (*Gikuyu* Hymn book, 2003, p. 137).

The P.C.E.A *Gikuyu* liturgy and prayer book contains similar pronouncements especially during funeral prayers. Where the body is left to go back to soil (*Tiri*) as the soul proceeds to eternal life apart from the body (P.C.E.A, 1984, p. 178). This dualism is also found in many songs from Gospel artists in Africa. The famous song *Sipati Picha* by Neema Mwaipopo from Tanzania envisions a life away from this world where there will be a new life and where Christians aspire to go. (Mwaipopo, 2015, Youtube.com). Another such dualistic expression is in the song of evangelist Anastacia Karanja "*Kimuonei Uria Watumire ndimikane Thii*" (See the One who made me denounce the world). This song envisions the eschaton where Christians will be reunited by their God away from the earth but in heavenly glory (Karanja, 2020). The above examples demonstrate how African Christians have come to understand the relationship between God, themselves and the created universe. The theology in these expressions has great emphasis on a life out of the world in a yet to be world where they will dwell with God after conquering the state and environment that they are in here on earth.

2.0. The African Religious Worldview

In order to bring things into perspective, the article proceeds to show that dualism did not exist in The African religious worldview before introduction of Western Christianity. The article uses the *Agikuyu* community as a prototype to this effect and proceeds to argue that although the *Agikuyu* community has a supreme God who they give reverence to, they have the divine presence of God as part of their everyday life and therefore the dualism that is inherited from the Greek philosophy is foreign to them.

2.1. The *Agikuyu* view of the Cosmos

In this section the article will bring to light the African worldview of the cosmos. It is important to admit from the beginning that Africa is not a homogenous reality. Orobator (2018) observes the misconception of this homogenous view. He states that "Africa is not a simple reality, but a complex one" (Orobator, 2018, p. 6). This prompts the researchers to use a prototype of the *Agikuyu* community in illuminating the understanding of the African worldview of the cosmos. As the researchers have already established, classical western philosophy has the idea that God is an absolute, pure spirit devoid of matter and elevated beyond the universe. This view contradicts the African worldview. African religious philosophy does not exist in this dualism of spirit and matter where the spirit is good, and matter is evil or detached from God. Generally, the African worldview of creation is that, everything that is has both spirit and matter, and that spirit and matter are good.

Thus, God as an existential reality consists of spirit and matter (Uchena, 2022, p.1). African's do not struggle in determining the nature of this existence because in their worldview, what is important is the close relationship between the divine and creation. The essence/*Ousia* of God is not an African Philosophical question.

According to Githuku (2018), the depletion and destruction of the ecology in Kenya is attributed to a deceptive systematic publicizing of western culture as 'superior' to the "uncivilized" African culture. He argues that before the invasion of Africa by colonizers, everything lived in harmony with everything else. In this affinity, religion permeated all sectors of life in such a fusion that it was not possible to isolate one from the other. The relationship of the *Agikuyu* people with the ecosystem was guided by their sacred beliefs as of an integrated oneness similar to a single organism where all was part of it. From their creation story, the divine, *Ngai* lived on top of Mount Kenya and watched over the *Agikuyu* land from an elevated position. Like the Biblical account where the snake could speak to humans, the animals in *Mukurwe-ini*, which is the *Agikuyu* Eden could also communicate and were used as with divine messages to the first parents. The *Agikuyu* spirituality is that of a kinship between humans and animals both wild and domestic. This is especially evidence in the fact that the *Agikuyu* people named people after animals. Names such as: *Mbogo*, *Wang'ombe*, *Wanguku*, *Njogu*, *Wangari*, are all names of animals both domestic as well as wild animals (Githuku, 2018, p 6). Wangari Maathai in her book, *The Unbowed*, observes that some wild animals were believed to possess the spirits of dead relatives and they would act as mediums to communicate to the living (Maathai 2006, p. 37).

Kinship and harmony existed between the animals and human beings. For example, the *Agikuyu* did not kill animals, especially the wild one for leisure but only in the face of dire starvation. Githuku (2018) accuses the whites for introducing game hunting for leisure to a community where this was unheard of. Like the Biblical Jewish communities, sacrifices were made to *Ngai* with a selection of only those animals that were considered worthy of such important rituals. Killing wild animals was considered ceremonially unclean (Githuku, 2018, p. 9). The *Agikuyu* community was grouped in clans and each clan identified with animal totems. These animals were not to be eaten. The economic structure of the *Agikuyu* included grazing and on many occasions, the domestic animals would graze together with wild animals in the watch of herders (Githuku, 2018, pp. 9-10).

Concerning the conservation of forests, clearing was done for establishing homesteads and farming. Forests were highly regarded as hiding places for warriors, as sources of medicinal herbs and sources of non-wood essentials. Even when clearing was done, it was with great consciousness and the trees were cut selectively. Trees were believed to possess spirits that could intervene in human affairs. Some trees like the *Mugumo*, (fig tree) were considered sacred. It was prohibited to cut or collect firewood from the fig tree.

The *Agikuyu* land was surrounded by the four mountains namely, *Kirinyaga*, *Nyandarua*, *Kirima kia-Njahi* and *Kirimbiruiru*. These mountains were considered religious monuments with the peak of *Kirinyaga* (Mt Kenya) as the holiest dwelling place of *Ngai*. It is believed that before the coming of the whites, the peak of the mountain had never been trampled. The *Agikuyu* land was adorned with numerous rivers flowing from the mountains which were sources of clean water to cater for the needs of the community. The forests were under the collective stewardship of the community. The *Agikuyu* had indigenous knowledge of preventing soil degradation where they practiced intercropping which acted as a source of top cover to prevent soil erosion (Githuku, 2018, p. 13).

Kenyatta (1965) and Hinga (2017) agree that the *Agikuyu* respected the environment and animals as the sources of their livelihood. Hinga (2017) goes further to claim that in the creation theology of the *Agikuyu*, nature belonged to the creator; *Ngai*. *Ngai* is the ultimate owner and dispenser of life. *Ngai* in Kikuyu language implies one who divides to all that which is needed generously including their fair share of the universe to use in order to meet their immediate needs. Human beings in the *Agikuyu* cosmology believed that *Ngai* alone had absolute rights over the environment. In land ownership, the *Agikuyu* believed that human beings had only usufructuary rights. These are legal rights with economic benefits but not amounting to ownership for it all belonged to *Ngai* who dispensed it for beneficial use.

From the above theological understanding, The *Agikuyu* among other African communities perceived the environment both as a gift to be enjoyed through divine favour and as a responsibility to take care of it since, "ultimately it belonged to the creator" (Hinga, 2017, p. 186). Kenyatta (1965), Maathai (2006), and Githuku (2008), are all in agreement on the theological view of the *Agikuyu* in regard to the interconnectedness of the divine, the environment, animals and humanity. Githuku (2008) and Maathai (2006) see it as a kinship and affinity of all in the divinity. Kenyatta sees it as a responsibility, while Hinga sees it as an ontological understanding of the harmony.

3.0. Eco-Feminist Theology

3.1 A Conceptual Analysis as an Attempted Solution

There have been many theological attempts to respond to ecological crisis in Africa. Each of their proponents approaches the issue from their theological convictions, time and context. There are those who think that Africa should go back to its original African traditional religions. Others feel that legal action should be taken against those who destroy creation. Others still argue for a reactionist approach where protests are viewed as a civic duty against those in power aiding to this devastation. Close to the problem of dualism is the theory of Eco-feminism as an attempted solution.

The term "eco-feminism" was first coined by the French feminist writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)* (D'Eaubonne, 1974, p. 180). Feminists who want to engage in ecological discourses have borrowed from her framework in their specific specialization. Val Plumwood is one of them. Val Plumwood was an Australian eco-feminist philosopher who developed a theology that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and the need for a more sustainable and equitable relationship with the natural world (Plumwood, 2002, p. 38). Plumwood eco-feminist theology posits that the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world are intertwined and rooted in a patriarchal worldview that prioritizes domination and control over relationships of care and stewardship (Plumwood 1993).

Plumwood critique of anthropocentrism is central to her eco-feminist theology. She defines it as "the idea that humans are separate from and superior to the natural world" (Plumwood, 2002). She argues that this worldview has led to a disregard for the needs and interests of non-human creation, resulting in widespread environmental destruction and species extinction. She contends that a more sustainable and just approach to life requires a shift away from anthropocentrism towards an eco-centric perspective, which recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings (Plumwood, 1995, pp. 3-20).

In addition to critiquing anthropocentrism, Plumwood (1995) emphasizes on the importance of recognizing the agency and subjectivity of non-human beings. She argues that non-human things are not simply passive objects to be used and exploited by humans, but rather, they are active agents in their own right with their own interests and needs. This according to her necessitates a reorientation of human relationships with the natural world, from one of domination and control to one of care and stewardship (Plumwood, 2006. pp 465-485).

Carfore (2021) uses Val Plumwood to construct a theological framework in the face of ecological crisis. Like Plumwood (1995), she argues that, the ecological crisis is tied to the ideologies implicit in western thinking. She constructs a methodology which she calls "*Val Plumwood's robust ecofeminist philosophy*" and uses it to reveal how harmful dualisms is understood in all forms of oppression. Her first compelling theological approach is to critique transcendental monotheism for extracting life, God, and agency from the natural world (*One-over-the-many*). Her opinion is that presenting God as existing over and above the earth, and this God is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, is a hierarchy that justifies the problematic lagged divine response to our urgent ecological crisis. Her eco-feminist methodology has three steps; first, it affirms intersectionality. It considers racial injustice and systemic racism as intertwined with the ecological crisis. She argues that issues of ecological crisis cannot be addressed without also addressing racial injustice. Secondly, she critiques a transcendental monotheistic God arguing that it reinforces an irresponsible and apathetic God in response to our multi-faceted ecological crisis. Finally, she affirms Plumwood's (1995) "philosophical animism" as a way to retrieve nature in the active voice. By retrieving nature in the active voice, this retrieving she says is a sense of groundedness in place through relationships with non-humans. Her "philosophical animism" affirms agency in the natural world without culturally appropriating Indigenous cultures. Her justification for this methodology is that; "It is a way for Westerners to enter into dialogical relationship with the natural world. It is both political—affirming the rights of Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour—and it is personal—engaging in a practice of the wild" (Carfore, 2021, pp. 1).

3.2. A Critique of Eco-Feminism approach in Africa

An Eco-feminist theology especially as presented by Carfore from a glance is very appealing to those who are conscious of the intersection of axes of power especially of women with the ecology, who find the hierarchical understanding of God as alien and unrelatable, and those to whom nature is alive in their spiritual experiences. However, a closer look at the methodology with an African lens appears to be presenting challenges that are not in the technical formulation of the methodology, but rather, they are contextual challenges.

Feminist theories are first as diverse as their intended outcome and therefore cannot be simplified into a single understanding. Their theoretical frameworks come with contextual baggage as they attempt to deal with contextual issues.

A summary of some approaches is published by (Jones and Budig, 2008) in the *Encyclopedia of Social Problems*. Generally, they all analyse women's experiences of gender subordination as the roots of women's oppression, how gender inequality is perpetuated, and offer differing remedies for gender inequality. Liberal feminism argues that women's unequal access to legal, social, political and economic institutions causes women's oppression. Radical feminism claims women's oppression originates in sexuality. Marxist and Socialist feminists root gender inequality in capitalism. Psychoanalytic feminism applies Freudian theories to gender inequality. It seeks to correct the male bias in psychoanalytic theory, producing theories that explore women's experiences with their emotions, bodies and sexuality. Women of color criticize feminist theories for ignoring coexisting forms of oppression. This perspective includes Black, Chicana, multicultural, and third world feminisms. Postcolonial feminism elaborates on intersectionality by emphasizing Western colonization. Postmodern feminists avoid predominant causes or solutions of gender inequality and focus on plurality and difference. They challenge inevitable and fixed characteristics of gender, including heteronormativity (assumption that heterosexuality is "natural"), and the undifferentiated category of "woman" (Jones, 2008, pp.1-3).

Ruether (1996), in observing the different feminist divergences clarifies that they emerge in response to specific challenges of women in the society within different axes of power dynamics in which they find themselves. She therefore states that in Africa, "there is no such thing as eco-feminism. What we have is a contextualizing of the framework with an ideology of how women and nature have been both exploited both by their own societies as well as by colonizing powers, how women act as mediators of nature's benefits for the families and as caretakers of nature" (Ruether, 1996, p. 2).

Maseno (2021, p. 2) notes that feminist approaches were first applied by African women theologians in the late 1980s. She cites Parratt, (1995, pg. 51) who claims that Mercy Oduyoye's book *Hearing and Knowing* is the first comprehensive treatment of feminism written by an African woman (Parratt, 1995 Pg. 51). It has been observed however that feminist theology was limiting as a category to African Women's agency on the theological issues that were contextual to the continent. As distinct characteristics, the Theologies of African women encompass diverse topics like community, spirituality, ecology, and ecclesiology, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of women's roles and identities across diverse cultural and religious contexts (Maseno, 2021, Pg.1). These theologies are shaped by historical and cultural contexts, addressing colonialism, gender roles, and social responsibility, elevating religious discourse above feminist criticism. And thirdly, African women's theologies emphasize community, challenging hierarchical structures, emphasizing reciprocity and mutual respect in family and community ties, crucial in African societies (Maseno, 2021, p. 1). These three unique characteristics of African Women theologies in relation to a theological response on ecology is in the writers' opinion not to challenge the frameworks, but to give more contextual input inclining towards African women eco-theology rather than African eco-feminist theology.

While applauding eco-feminist theology for its much strength, the researchers make the African women Eco-theology argument with such pertinent questions such as: *What can we do about dualism from an African Christian position? Can we use our African categories to construct a theology that deconstructs such dualism? How do we dismantle such a theologically rooted ideology to restore the dignity of nature using An African women lens?*" the researchers propose that to deal with dualism in Africa and especially in Kenya, the approach can only be a theology that resonates with the African religious philosophy on a sacred interconnectedness of the divine with all creation. The researchers therefore proceed to a social or communal Trinitarian understanding of God in relation to humanity. The article also broadly embrace the African concept of animism not as Val Plumwood (1995) would have it outside a cultural matrix, but we do it within the African cultures religious understanding of what creation is in relation with the God. The researchers' are cognizant of possible danger of pantheism in the process but do not intent it at all.

4.0. Social-Communal Trinitarian view of God in relation to Human Beings

As noted above, Eco-feminist theory has been popular in the past few decades. It has been used to formulate theological frameworks like the eco-feminist theology in response to ecological crisis. It is applauded for its approach to the intertwined oppression of women and nature and also that its theoretical framework has its adumbration from a western thought. The researchers also note that feminism as an ideology to liberate women and all marginalized people has resurfaced in different contexts each addressing the contextual challenges therein.

While the article acknowledges the great progress made by Eco-feminist theologians, there is also a realization of a very contextual theological problem that has been brought by dualism to African Christians. This creates disconnect between the African religious philosophy that shapes the worldview of the African people in regard to the cosmos where everything is embodied with the divine. The article also notes a hierarchical structure where women and nature are put at

the lowest level of the pyramid. Dualism and hierarchy are foreign to the African religious thought as shown earlier in reference to the *Agikuyu* community. The article argues from an African women eco-theology lens that because the African people have a holistic religious oriented worldview, when dualism starts to psychologically reshape this worldview, it results in a disorientation that has detrimental consequences in the way African relate with creation. In a world where there was belief in an affinity, those who are privileged in the dualist hierarchy engage in behaviours of silencing nature and objectifying it to nothing else but exploitation. This is very common in most African communities today where those in positions of power have put creation, women and all other disadvantaged people to a position of subordination.

As shown in the background research, the destruction of creation on earth and especially in Africa has left untold and unfathomable suffering of humanity, animals, trees and every other part of creation. The observation is that the suffering experienced by the devastation of God's creation has a universal face shared by all that exist on the face of the earth. This observation begs the ever-present theological question: Where is God in the face of suffering? How can African Christians understand the instruction of stewardship of creation using African categories in the face of dualism? Finally: How can we overwrite the dualistic and hierarchical view of the universe to a view of a God, who is immanent in the affairs of the earth, who is all encompassing, holistically interconnected with all creation and all humanity (male and female)?

4.1 Social Trinitarian Model and Humanity

All along, the researchers have been struggling with a theological challenge which is informed by a philosophical understanding of God, the universe and how we relate with all. In cognizance of that, the article argues that our solution is both theological and Philosophical and without much struggle, the article delves to the social or communal Trinitarian perspective of the Triune God as constructed by Jurgen Moltmann (1993). From the onset, the researchers agree with many theologians historically that the doctrine of the trinity is one of the hardest Christian mysteries to explain. No wonder Pate, (2011), reminds his readers of the old adage, "If you try to explain the Trinity, you lose your mind, but if you explain it away, you lose your soul" (Pate, 2011, pp. 197).

Without being timid of admitting a lack of desire to explain the difficulty in the doctrine, the article delves straight to the Social Trinitarian understanding of God. Jurgen Moltmann (1993) is considered as one who diverted from the traditional perspective of the Trinity. While writing after being imprisoned by the British government, he reflects on the nature of God in a context of suffering as a prisoner. His reflection led to his famous publications, *The Theology of Hope* and *The crucified God and the Church in the power of the Spirit* (Pate, 2011, pp. 197). Moltmann's (1993) argument is that theology begins with the suffering of the Godhead. The idea behind this stance is that it originates from his reflection of the state of the Godhead at the Cross. He argues that in the experience, not only did Christ suffer at the cross, but God the father and the Spirit in union with Jesus also suffered. Moltmann (1993) goes beyond the modern metaphysics of transcendental subjectivity but fronts a human face of the suffering of the Trinity. This view is drawn from the Cappadocian concept of *perichoresis*. The "members" of the Trinity according to Moltmann (1993) do fellowship in suffering. This suffering is also the bond that unites the Trinity to humanity.

Several contemporary theologians have embraced the Social Trinitarian understanding of God as with unity in the human condition. Among them is Grenz, (2000) in his book, *Theology for the community of God*. His argument is that the Trinity is not an abstract theological concept but rather, a dynamic and living reality that shapes the way Christians understand God, themselves and others. From this model, the Christian community is not just a collection of individuals but a community of believers who are united by their shared participation in the life of God, not in an anticipated future but a present and ongoing reality in their present cultural matrix. Further, the church is not an institution but a living organism that embodies the presence of God in the world. This concept is also embraced by Nengeon (2013), in relation to the image of God. The Social Trinity deconstructs the traditional western understanding of the Image of God as an inherent quality in an individual being or particular element in "man". The traditional view reflects domination, one-sided and is distorted. What these theologians are alluding to is that the likeness to God means God's relationship first of all, and only then, and as a consequence of that, human beings have a relationship with God. This view gives a counterbalance to the individualistic characteristics of the classical theistic understanding of God as well as individualistic image of God in human beings. The entire human community from this perspective is viewed as that which mirrors God on earth (Nengeon, 2013, pp. 2-3). To this effect, the Image of God in Genesis 1:27, is understood not as being borne in every individual soul, but rather, it is men and women who are the Image of God.

The articles' argument finds the social Trinitarian understanding of God as resonating well with the African concept of the human communities, especially in the case of relating with one another. An example is the Ubuntu philosophy that

shows the interdependency of all humanity and expressed as "I am because you are and because you are, therefore I am." It very clearly dismantles the hierarchy among human beings including the subordination of one gender to the other or those in the periphery.

4.2. Infusion of Animism to the Social Trinity

The article has already established that the Social Trinitarian model is a reconciliation of God with the totality of humanity. From here it goes further to see how the rest of creation can be infused to the social Trinitarian as a means of reconciling all creation to God and this is by retrieving nature's active voice as understood by the African people using the concept of animism. As presented in the *Agikuyu* community above, the African thought is that all creation including animals, plants and all inanimate departments that are found on earth have a shared affinity. The researchers believe that inherently, human nature is beyond creating things to make their lives easier but also the ability to re-construct how they respond to situations that keep emerging and demanding in their consciousness. Such re-construction is not only in advancement of technology but also in the way we interpret and reinterpret our beliefs. Realizing the un-static nature of religious beliefs the article moves to what we term as the infusion of animism in the Social Trinity. This infusion the article argues will complete what it has been terming as, 'An African women Eco-theology'. The article reconstructs a theology which affirms both our Christian place in communion with God and others, and our long held believe that what God has put in our custody in Africa is part of the divine providence in a sacred design.

The article starts by demythologizing animism by agreeing with Orobator (2018), that animism has been and still is a "...pejorative and derogatory label". It has been used by scholars in different fields of social studies as ...signifying and codifying...the religion of the other which is in this case African religion. The undertone in animism is primitive and irrational. We hold a similar opinion with Orobator (2018) that such a perception is simplistic and reductionist to a very complex and perplexing reality especially because it is from those who have not been participants of the African Religious experience (Orobator, 2018, p. 16).

Orobator (2018) defines animism as a "...religious imagination, practice, and consciousness...of adherence of most world religions and especially in African Traditional Religions. The pivot point of understanding animism as understood in Africa is that it is a "...deep belief in the livingness of creation). This is loosely translated to mean that nothing is lifeless in the natural surroundings; and that...there is an inner invisible power in anything at any given moment. In affirmation to the words of Pope Francis, Orobator (2018) quotes him stating "Each creature, water, mountain: everything is, as it were, a caress of God" (Orobator, 2018, p. 16). The article clarifies that, this is to be understood clearly in contrast to pantheism. Animism is not the belief that things on the universe are God, but that things on the universe possess the touch of a sacred God and therefore suggests that this caress of God be understood in the Biblical context of Genesis 1:1, where the Spirit, the wind, the breath was hovering over the waters on the eve of creation or in what would be Genesis 1:1 just at the beginning of creation.

From this position, the article progresses to state that, a Social Trinitarian view of God as explained above is completed when animism is infused back to the mystic union with God and humanity in a complete loving relationship where God is reconciled to creation in the African worldview. This is the perfect perichoresis were there exists an inseparable ultimate reconciliation (Gathogo 2015). The researchers admit that while it is not entirely difficult to have humanity view themselves in a loving fellowship with the Godhead, it will take human beings to denounce their privileged position of superiority and admit that nature and all else that is not human share equal importance in union with God. It is then and only then, that human beings will be able to accord creation the dignity that it deserves.

5.0. Conclusion

The article has successfully reflected on how dualism has eroded the mind of the African people and has attributed the devastation and degradation of creation to it. This is due to the way it was traditionally transmitted through Christianity to Africa, specifically as an inheritance from Greek philosophy. It has used the *Agikuyu* community to show that dualism is a foreign concept to the African people and its presence has greatly influenced how African Christians relate to one another and all other creation. In the last part, the research article has come up with a theological solution; and reconstructs a theology that resonates with the African world view of the cosmos. In doing so, it has utilised African women theologies to find rest in the Social Trinity because of its ability to resonate with the African religious philosophy where there is no dualism or hierarchy as understood in Greek philosophy. The article has further argued that despite the complexity of explaining the Trinity, the Social Trinitarian approach presents God who is actively present in human experiences and predicaments,

and especially when there is great devastation caused by ecological crisis. It has also argued that the African concept of animism helps the African Christians to value all other forms of creation as a deliberate act of God's creation. Finally, the article has shown that dualism is deconstructed by affirming a sacred affinity between human beings and all creation in an interconnectedness oneness with God in viewing all as containing the sacred touch of God and therefore, as all inherently dignified. In conclusion, the article states that for the dignity of creation in Kenya, and the rest of the world, to be realized, our theology should be based on the conviction that the *One-is-with-the-many*.

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