

**THE EXPERIENCE OF LANDLESSNESS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST
AS EXPRESSED IN THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS**

by

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ABSTRACT

The dissertation examines the experience of the landless in the ancient Near East as expressed in the book of Lamentations. Land theology has focused on land loss but not on the people who lost it. Similarly, the interpretation of Lamentations has focused on human suffering or on God's absence not on land loss neither on the landless.

This study investigates the phenomenon of landlessness in the Near Eastern world (over the span of 6th and 7th centuries BCE) and how people reacted to such experiences. They lamented over the destruction of shrines, homes, towns and land. Land loss is a prominent feature in city laments.

Lamentations relied on these kinds of lament to express the Judeans' land loss experience. The Zion theology which had granted an unconditional blessing of protection and stability to Jerusalem and to its people, completely failed on the Babylonian invasion in 587 BCE. The 'landless genesis' of the nation from the period of the ancestors (Cain and Jacob) remains in the memory of Daughter of Zion and of the deported man as they lament over the loss of Jerusalem.

KEY TERMS

**Landless experience - Land theology – Lamentations - Imperial policies
Ancient Near East – Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel –
Zion theology – City laments – The deported man – Homeless daughter Zion.**

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I declare that THE EXPERIENCE OF LANDLESSNESS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AS EXPRESSED IN THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Date

signature

(Rev A R S Fischer)

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

A locality becomes a place by receiving from people their footprints, names and buildings, and especially their blood and bones. A brick construction, a cave, becomes a home when it is filled with human laughter and tears. Conversely people exist in and through places. As much as a place receives its character from the people who live in it, it in turn inspires individuals and groups with ways of feeling, thinking and doing. Places profoundly affect the way people are human. Where one hails from constitutes much of who one is. The place where one spent one's childhood remains part of one's soul. One's place is an extension of oneself (Krüger 2003:74).

These words, uttered by Krüger (2003:74) in a modern-day context, convey a universal meaning, since for any person the loss of place, of home or native land, is an extraordinarily painful experience. Landlessness, whether caused by war, deportation or environmental destruction, results in social problems of huge dimensions across the globe.

Land loss is also at the heart of the Hebrew Bible. From Adam and Eve, Cain and Jacob, Joseph and the exiles, the biblical narratives shift from land gain to displacement and consequently to land loss. A garden, a town, the land in general is richly filled with meaning and ritual significance. Therefore, being landless is greatly significant in religious thought and in all human activity.

As I read Lamentations from my comfortable and voluntary exile in South Africa, I cannot forget the voice of many displaced people in Brazil who once had a piece of land and thereafter their houses in the ‘favelas’ (slums) bulldozed; they felt helpless to do anything other than gather on the side of the road to read Matthew 5 from a Gideon’s New Testament, or Exodus 3 and Lamentations from a ragged Bible. This was the only consolation they would have. Ancient texts like these kept some of them out of despair and the rage of violence. This dispossession still happens so often in Brazil that it does not make news anymore.

The violence involved in these displacements impacted on my childhood, adolescence and my ministry there. These scenes are ‘tattooed’ on my memory. Their cry still lingers on my ears. It will not go away. I turn to these old texts to try to understand why these people used them in their moments of homelessness and displacement. I have to acknowledge that my historical and social environment, and my memories of the landless people in Fortaleza, Brazil, influenced my choices in what I am and in what I do, for that is where I come from and that is where I belong.

1.2 Motivation

My motivation for undertaking this study is twofold: firstly, the fact that the theme of landlessness has largely been neglected in scholarly research and secondly to assess whether the book of Lamentations can make a contribution to the issue of land loss and thereby inspire today’s readers who have experienced similar loss: especially for those displaced ‘minorities’ who read the biblical text, making the experience of the disadvantaged normative for their understanding the Bible: an example of theology ‘from below’ (Oeming 2006:99).

I wished to include land loss in the broad context of the ancient Near East as the location of the tiny states of Israel and Judah, but then I realized that the available number of sources on the landless theme is very limited and this could have been a serious hindrance as the theme of land loss in Lamentations is also limited. However, I went ahead with the project despite the lack of sources for a meaningful dissertation, hoping that my motivation for reading Lamentations from the landless perspective might not be a vain attempt.

1.3 Statement of the problem

The theme of a promised land and land possession, has dominated discussion due to its centrality in Hebrew thought (Hoffman 1986:8). There is however, an unconscious silence in the experience of the landless. The problem under investigation in this study is based on the motivational issues mentioned above:

- The experience of the landless pervades Lamentations and central narratives of the Hebrew Bible, yet it is an under-researched theme.
- Traditional interpreters of Lamentations do not focus on the loss of land.

Historical critical interpreters focus on the motifs of doom, hope and reversal of fortunes (Westermann 1994:34,47) against the tradition and beliefs in the inviolability of Zion (Chung Lee 2005:198); or they focus on interactions with ancient Near Eastern texts (Dobbs-Alsopp 1993), Psalms, Job or Deutero-Isaiah (O'Connor 2003:147). Brandscheidt and Albrektson show the Deuteronomistic view of the catastrophe (Johnson 1985:59), as divine judgment (cf Ackroyd 1968:46).

Traditional Christian interpreters avoid descriptions of the violently abused woman (Lm 1,2), stressing rather the message of hope expressed by the male (Lm 3) and his messianic role (Linafeldt 2000:4-8); the agonizing experience of personified Daughter Zion is not fully discussed (Chung Lee 2005:195) or emphasized mainly by feminist rhetoric. Gottwald places this theme of hope in a high position (Joyce 1993:307).

In short, the conventional interpretation of Lamentations repeats itself bringing no new insights. A few scholars though, briefly, do pay attention to the theme of land loss: Brueggemann (2002), Berlin (2002) and Gous (1993); still, their focus is not purely on the landless people and their experience. Nevertheless their works will be reflected in the argument of the study.

The following questions form the basis of my research and will be addressed:

Owing to the importance of the landless theme, has the theological discussion on land devoted enough attention to it? Or have the researchers left a gap between land possession and landlessness? Can the book of Lamentations shed light on the issue of the landless experience in the Hebrew Bible?

1.4 Definition of terms

1.4.1 Land

Two terms in the Old Testament refer to land. *'Adāmāh* concerns the existence of humankind, primarily connected with the reddish soil from which humanity is shaped (Menezes 1986:8). *'Adāmāh* is the dwelling place of humanity; it is also the agricultural soil, their means of existence, also the mark of political boundaries that distinguish countries from each other (Preuss 1991:118).

'*Ērěts* refers to the entire earth. It is the mass that should be differentiated from what constitutes the heavens. '*Ērěts* is frequently mentioned in Lamentations. It occurs eight times in chapter 2 (Gous 1993:356). The terms of Zion, or city of Jerusalem or daughter of Judah might also signify the whole land of Judah. Tent, camp, temple, are metaphoric words in the Hebrew Bible to represent the national homeland (Bandstra 1999:543).

Land in Lamentations can also mean place as defined by Brueggemann:

The land is never unclaimed space but always a *place with Yahweh*...it is the space that has historical meanings, where some things have happened that are now remembered and that provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken that have established identity, defined vocation and envisioned destiny. Place is space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made and demands have been issued. It is the land that provides the central assurance to Israel of its historicity (2002:4,5).

1.4.2 Being landless

A landless person is someone who does not own land or never fully belongs to the host land, or who, having had land once, came to lose it: for example, the labourers, the peasants, are landless. In this study, it will also become evident that some strata from Judah (the citizenry, priests and kingship) possibly became landless as result of invasion and deportation.

Being landless is thus understood here, not only as loss of a piece of land, that is possession and commodity, it is more; it is the loss of homeland and all the self-identification and understanding of God-given land and the consciousness of being a God-chosen nation. Thus, land and landless should be understood against the context of Lamentations, as sociological categories rather than geographical.

1.5 Objectives

My objectives for undertaking this study are the following:

- To explore human suffering in Lamentations as rooted in the abuse of land caused by the invaders and resulting in land loss.
- To indicate that Lamentations could make a significant, if not essential, contribution to the theme of the landless in the Hebrew Bible.
- To broaden the traditional interpretation of Lamentations, placing the theme of land loss on centre stage.

1.6 Methodology

I shall implement ‘all available means to read the text on its own terms, to discover its message(s) and to hear the text as clearly as possible’ that is: to read the biblical text as literature. This may also be termed an eclectic approach, put to much use lately (Long 2001:88). In this approach contribution of other methods such as historical criticism may overlap.

Historical criticism does not exclude the use of other disciplines, but in Lamentations it has proved itself limited, for its major task is to recover the historical scenario behind the text, placing a focus on the tragic fate of the holy city and what its people did to bring such calamity upon themselves (Hunter 1999:63). Land loss is one of the causes of human suffering in Lamentations and consequently, to address it is important.

As no method can answer all the possible questions, I will examine the historical context of the biblical text with a contemporary question in mind, that is, what the Bible says about the landless and their experience (Long 2001:85). Subsequently

against this historical background I will explore the role of the personae of Daughter Zion (*bāt-Zion*) and the deported man (*āsîr*, prisoner) as landless people and thereby focus on their experience of land loss, because they give us a glimpse into how the destruction of the land affected human existence, uprooting the lives in its surroundings.

Therefore the background of the text of Lamentations, against the theme of land loss, its theology, its embeddedness in ancient Near Eastern surroundings will be explored in this study, because no religion and no people are islands (Burden 1986:67); on the contrary, the Israelite religion and nation are deeply rooted in the concept of the holy land and its surroundings. This is a literary study against the background of the book's story.

1.7 Chapter Division

This study is structured around an imaginary narrowing line, telescoping landlessness from the broad context of the ancient Near East to focus on the focal point of this study, namely the book of Lamentations. To follow this telescoping process this mini-dissertation is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter One introduces the theme of landlessness as the problem and purpose of this study. The methodology is presented as a literary study against the historical context of the text of Lamentations, with a focus on the landless rhetoric.

Chapter Two discusses landlessness in the ancient Near Eastern world, its causes and effects. It focuses on imperial policies of displacement or deportation of communities. As a result these policies caused territorial losses to the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel. It also considers laments in terms of the landless person's point of view.

Chapter Three summarizes the theology of land in the Hebrew Bible with the focus on the landless experience from the beginnings in Genesis to the end of the kingship and diaspora in the prophetic texts and in the city laments.

Chapter Four focuses on the experience of landlessness in the book of Lamentations, focusing on the landless rhetoric of the Daughter Zion and of the deported man.

Chapter Five is the final chapter, where arguments and findings are summarized and conclusions are drawn.

CHAPTER TWO

LAND LOSS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WORLD

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss land loss in the context of imperial policies of the ancient Near Eastern world and its impact on Israel and Judah. Afterwards I shall examine the city lament genre, to highlight the reaction of ordinary people to these political movements. Zion theology, which influenced the laments of the book of Lamentations, will be discussed briefly.

Ancient Near Eastern policies, during the sixth century, seem to follow a familiar pattern: a new Semitic power has usurped control of Mesopotamia from a previous one. The Syria-Palestine region is included as inheritance of the next emerging empire (Davidson 1978:198).

How did these political and military movements affect the people of the land? Why are historical records of these campaigns silent on the experience of land loss, which was the result of such policies? The experience of these people seems devaluated and ignored, lost in the war-machine, making a re-construction of their circumstances a difficult achievement. My inquiries find answers in the laments over ancient cities.

2.2 Imperial Policies of Neo-Assyrians and Neo-Babylonians

To expand imperial lands and to consolidate the control of the empire over city-states, greed, rather than diplomacy was the order of the day. Alliances and heavy

tributes, often imposed by warfare, resulted in the displacement of indigenous populations and deportation, which by extension caused political and socio-cultural turbulence around the ancient world (Larsen 1979:85).

Thompson points out that depopulation, reoccupation, deportation and resettlement, and consequently land loss for many, were common practices carried out by super powers, such as Assyria, Babylonia, the Hittites and ancient Egypt: they constituted central aspects of their imperial warfare (Larsen 1979:87), Such practices had been maintained since early in the second millennium. Persians carried out the same policies long after the Assyrian collapse (Thompson 1992:340).

Such policies differed from empire to empire but the ultimate purpose was the punishment of resistance and rebellion. Royal inscriptions, administrative and legal texts along with the Hebrew Bible and ancient historians refer to communities of deportees and exiles, providing evidence that people were handed to the invaders and displaced from their homeland, forced to settle wherever it suited their oppressors (Smith 1989:27-30).

The Assyrians annexed land areas to other land areas in order to control trade routes, raw material and human resources (Larsen 1979: 85), which made Nineveh one of the richest cities of the ancient world. Assyria's multiple successes in campaigns of imperialistic expansion under royal warriors such as Ashurnasirpal, Shalmaneser III, Tiglathpileser III, Senacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal extended its domains to such an extent that it could not rule them effectively (Bertman 2003:57).

Neo-Assyrians used to deport entire families and exchange of populations to assure their power over indigenous people. The Neo-Babylonians appeared to have been more selective, removing major incentives to return to the homeland and encouraging settlement in areas they intended to colonize (Smith 1989:30). This resulted also in loss of land. Such punishment and oppression could only be reversed by imperial edict (Bandstra 1999:519).

2.2.1 The Effect on the Northern Kingdom of Israel

Imperial ambition contributed to the final collapse of the northern state of Israel in 722 BCE and the exile of many (Oded 1979:66). Assyrian attacks, dealing decisive blows, occurred in the period between 733 and 722 BCE, dismembering the Northern kingdom. The anti-Assyrian policy of Peka awoke Assyrian wrath. Coastal cities were destroyed and some citizens were deported. Damascus was razed to the ground. The last king of Israel is said to have ruled over a much smaller state than the previous kings (Weinberg 1969:8).

The Samaritans lost their homeland. People from Babylonia and Hamat came to occupy this place. The slaughtering and displacement of indigenous communities plus territorial losses and reduction to Assyrian vassalage caused them to sink into oblivion (Gottwald 1987:346). Survivors who fled to the Southern kingdom offered a reminder of how foreign affairs could turn out as violent and uprooting.

Tiglathpileser III played a decisive and irrevocable role during his kingship of Assyria (744-727 BCE). His policy caused the beginning of a diaspora in Israel, consequently leading to the cessation of the nation's existence (Oded 1970:177).

2.2.2 The Effect on the Southern Kingdom of Judah

The campaign of Sennacherib (705-681 BCE) against Judah and his siege of Jerusalem (c. 704 BCE) caused a huge loss of Judean territory. The land was given as a reward to the faithful kings Padi, Mitinti and Sil-bel. The *Rassam* cylinder from 700 BCE reports deportations of people from Chaldea, of Aramaeans, Mannaens, Hilakku, Philistia and Tyre amongst many others. Judah came close to being annihilated: the price of survival was Assyrian vassalage (Gallagher 1999:97-135).

Subsequently, ten years of struggles between pro-Babylonian and pro-Egyptian parties within Jerusalem took place. Zedekiah wanted to rebel against a mighty power that he and his allies together could not defy. Jerusalem resisted in the hope that Egyptian aid would lift the siege. After some eighteen months, though, the city capitulated and was destroyed.

Nebuchadnezzar's campaign in Judah is said to have destroyed much of Philistia, including Ekron, Asqelon and ancient Assyrian provinces like Lachish, Hazor and Megiddo. As previously, mass deportation followed the invasion (Betlyon 2003:267-8). Prophetic speech against oppressive powers of Egyptians (Ezk 29:6-16; Jr 46:19), the Assyrians (Nah 3:8-19) and the Babylonians (Mi 4:9-10) is well recorded (1Chr 5:26; Hab 2:8,12,17).

2.2.3 The Effect on Ordinary People

Lamentations concentrates on the suffering and disruption due to war as well as the damages in the agricultural sector, requisitions of crops and labour imposed by the colonizers (Lm 4:9; 5:6). There is no consensus as regards the historical

reconstruction of this period, nor as to how much land loss Israel and Judah suffered under foreign rule, nor as regards how these events affected ordinary people.

The book highlights the psychological state of the survivors and the deported elite under the harsh treatment of their captors (Albertz 2003:21, 146,7), who left them templeless and landless (Lm 2:3-7). They thought of themselves as ‘dry bones’ (Ezk 4:14; 18:37) crushed under the weight of their rulers as in the lament of Psalm 137 (Ackroyd 1968:32).

Under Gedaliah’s short leadership (Jr 40) are mentioned an abundant harvest and displaced people returning from Edom and Moab back to their land (Jr 40:10-13, however this is only a brief interval. More people would be forced to leave their land and to take refuge in Egypt, while other peoples would arrive and take possession (Ackroyd, 1968:7).

Many cities and towns were invaded, others were entirely destroyed; some homeless people had to take material from the rubble to construct their huts, others were obliged to live precariously in caves (Brownlee 1970:395).

Although Albright (1963) and Weinberg (1969:84) describe Judah in the period of the Babylonia invasion as suffering ‘complete devastation’ and ‘a complete collapse of the economy’ (cf Thompson 1992:342), Barstad (2003) by contrast argues that there might have been prosperity, even ownership of land and protection from oppressive indigenous rulers.

It is evident that only a fraction of Judah’s citizenry was deported to Babylonia,

where they settled and prospered (Le Roux 1987:132); many others who were left behind were driven away or fled to other nations. Many had no option but to take refuge in Transjordan, Phoenicia, Syria and Egypt. Such displacement was achieved with violence against people and the environment. Whether the land, devastated by ravages of war, did soon recover or not, is still debated, as is the number of deportees.

Despite ideological exaggeration one can surely say that imperial policies displaced hundreds of thousands (Thompson 1992:342), as well as unsettling the population in dispute over control of the land, severely disrupting economic activities owing to the decrease of population caused by slaughter, pestilence, starvation, and the flight of refugees.

Scholarly opinion regarding the fate of the dispossessed communities diverges from rapid recovery to a regaining of prosperity only later during Persian occupation. Nevertheless, any resettlement, a resumption of agricultural life in the colonies, marriages and trade with the Babylonians and prosperity (Barstad 1996:74) should not minimize the catastrophe of 587 BCE for many individuals.

The majority of scholars such as Smith (1989), Thompson (1992), Albertz (1994) and Renkema (1998) speak of imperial expansions as creating a context of domination, tragedies and communal grief, rather than of peace and prosperity. Hence, Israel suffered unprecedented losses and displacement.

To describe the condition of the landless in the ancient Near Eastern context outside of the imperial policies of deportation has its limitations. Little or nothing is said about individuals *per se*. Albertz acknowledges the downfall of the Judean state as the reason why many became homeless and landless:

they had lost not only their homes but also their land and a social status which was usually influential: often they had been torn from their clans or even families and as a rule were deprived of the solidarity provided by kinsfolk. And they had the bitter experience of seeing how quickly they were written off by the majority of the population which had remained behind and of being robbed of their property (1994:373).

The land was not empty as the Chronicler suggests (Barstard 1996:37), but deportation and dispersion is more certain than the extent of the destruction of the land in Judah (Schultz 1989:222). Landlessness in Israel began as early as the Assyrian elimination of the Northern kingdom in 722 BCE and accelerated dramatically during the Persian and Hellenistic periods (Gottwald 1987:420).

Although some Judeans had settled elsewhere, the successive deportations in 597, 586 and 582 BCE, and perhaps others unrecorded, set up the contrast between homeland and diaspora as a permanent feature of Jewish life and consciousness (Blenkinsopp & Lipschits 2002:i).

In short, one can assume that land loss, famine, siege, military defeat, families being torn apart by war and deportation had affected Israel, Judah and many neighbouring nations. The troubles of a landless and templeless Judah, which began in the Assyrian period, were perpetuated throughout history. It marked the loss of everything: the land, the capital, the temple and monarchy (Albertz 2003:11).

Historical records of this period, such as royal correspondence and chronicles, administrative and legal texts favour the conquerors and their achievements (Oded

1979:11); on the other hand, the laments over destroyed cities narrate a ‘version’ of history from the perspective of the conquered. City laments give one a glimpse into the reaction of landless people who experienced in full the fate of their city-states and the instability of this political context (Bertman 2003:173). The ancient Near Eastern people articulated their loss (or pain, or suffering) by lamenting. My discussion turns now to city laments as a witness to the experience of land loss.

2.3 City-laments and Landlessness

When Jerusalem was stricken by the Babylonian invasion in 587 BCE, poets and sages expressed their losses in the same manner in which neighbouring cultures poured out their distress at having their temple and homeland destroyed. I consequently assume that city-laments are, amongst others, the complaints of a homeless and landless person. Usually, a weeping woman or goddess incorporates the whole city and laments the consequences of war and pain inflicted upon the people and its environs (Bertmann 2003:173).

Laments were sung over the destruction of leading cities of Mesopotamia such as Sumer, Ur and Nippur and the curse of Agade which dates from the end of the period Ur III to the Seleucid era, 2200-500 BCE (Thi Pham 1999:14). The Mesopotamian model was not adopted by the biblical writers to the last detail (Block 1988:150) but motifs such as divine abandonment and plundering are frequently shared by the two literatures.

Among other similarities one may mention the account of the disaster from a homeless, templeless, and I would argue, landless female point of view. A few examples will demonstrate the close connection between laments and the landless

experience. In Lamentations, the city-woman Zion whose land and temple were devastated laments her citizenry who are leaving the homeland, marching into deportation:

Without pity the Lord has swallowed up all the dwellings of Jacob. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire... on the tent of the Daughter of Zion... He has laid waste his dwelling like a garden, he has destroyed his place of meeting... Her kings and princes are exiled among the nations. The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity. Young and old lie together in the dust of the streets. (Lm 2:2).

In the Sumerian lament over Ur, Ningal (the moon-god Nanna's wife) tries unsuccessfully to avert the catastrophe by pleading with the gods to intervene on behalf of the town and to avoid its political disintegration. Since Ur would have no role to play in the future government of the region, her temple and deity became redundant and the catastrophic effect on humans is completely ignored (Block 1988:131). Westermann summarizes the 436 lines of this lament as following:

This song expresses the aftermath of the destruction in its full brutality. Survivors are groaning, corpses litter the city's outskirts, dead bodies lie in the gates and on the streets, unburied and exposed. Within the city famine is rampant. Families are decimated, with little ones having been torn from the laps of their mothers and elderly folk having been burned along with their houses... The temple is destroyed, the warehouses are reduced to ashes. Alas for my city! Alas for my house! The people groan! (Westermann 1994:12).

Some poems are quite explicit on the devastating effect of being stripped of one's property, bringing the theme of homelessness and landlessness to the focal point of the poems. It is important to note that these poems clearly suggest that the

destruction is not of shrines only, individuals as much as the whole city have been affected and suffered unspeakable losses (Hunter 1999:67):

They took my house and my city from me
They took the lady of my house
They took my living quarters, my treasure...my possessions,
My furnishings from me...my property of the Eshumesha...
My property of the Erabriri from me... They took my throne,
My seat from me... (Dobbs-Alsopp 1993:80).

These texts are rather significant to my discussion on the landless experience for they reflect the perspective of the victims of war, those who had become homeless and displaced in consequence of the destruction of their homeland. To deal with such loss, they seek a theological explanation, such as that: the gods were angry, and by divine decree, destroyed their shrine and abandoned the town and people.

This is the case of Lamentations, which is also an attempt to piece together a fragmented theology and to offer some kind of explanation to cope with the suffering of a city-woman ravaged by war and plunder (Gous 1993:352-3).

Jerusalem, the religious centre to unify the rival tribes of northern and southern Israel and to consolidate the Davidic rule, was the epitome of Yahweh's blessings and Israel's success (Monson 1999:2,3) but not for long; like other ancient cities from Ur to Sumer, Jerusalem was to mourn her fate and final collapse, despite the ideology of Jerusalem's inviolability that sustained the Judeans until the collapse of the city. I refer now to Zion theology.

2.4 Zion Traditions

Under Davidic rule, Israel increased her territory and took her place of a powerful leadership in ancient Near Eastern politics. The promises of a great nation and of the promised land seemed to be fulfilled in David. When the king wanted to build Yahweh's dwelling, Yahweh instead built David a dynasty, which unconditionally, Yahweh would always protect and defend (Le Roux 1987:107).

Jerusalem, place of Yahweh's throne, symbolized holy ground, a welcoming place for the righteous (Beard 2005:252). Just as kings have a host of officials and subordinates, Yahweh as the king of heaven rules over the world (Ps 89:6-13) and David is his anointed one (Ps 2:7); despite his unrighteous conduct, Yahweh established an unconditional covenant with his house and sustains the present order in Zion (Le Roux 1987:107).

2.4.1 Sacredness and inviolability of Zion

The king of hosts, who fought the forces of chaos (Ps 148:6), gave the city and its citizens order, stability and prosperity in the land. Yahweh himself assures his presence and deliverance to Zion. He would keep his covenant forever and would never forsake Jerusalem nor reject his people (Selman 1999:50).

This argument was demonstrated to be inaccurate, as Lamentations indicates, and Jerusalem's state cult proved itself unable to reverse Zion's fortunes, leaving the believers shattered in their darkest hour (Le Roux 1987:125-7). The book announces that Yahweh has broken his covenant, destroyed his temple and abandoned his people, temple, king and priests. They have had all their blessings not only cancelled, worse: reverted.

Previously, the Zion cult in Jerusalem had expressed a constant concern for justice. Prophets and psalmists consistently criticized royal attempts to pervert justice and the rights of the poor and dispossessed, emphasizing Yahweh's blessing over all those who seek refuge in his house (Ps 72,84,121,122; Is 3:15; 14:32) (Ollenburger 1987:155). Not any longer though: the ones who took refuge in Zion, according to Lamentations, are left homeless, exposed, landless.

Yahweh, the king of hosts, is the very one who architects the collapse of the city-gates (Lm 2:9), walls and power bases (Lm 2:5,8). Yahweh, now the king warrior, aims arrows at city-woman Zion (Lm 2:4). He awoke the force of chaos, brought back the horrors of war. He betrayed his subordinates, their faith and trust (Lm 2:2). He is a terrorist who shed blood in the holy soil of Zion. Lamentations expressed the utter helplessness of adherents to Zion's theology; they sunk into their own tragedies without escape (Le Roux 1987:125).

It is important to note that often the songs of Zion refer to the memory of the patriarch Jacob in association with power and prominence (Is 49:26, 60:16, Ps 132, 76:7): the mighty one of Jacob (Ollenburger 1987:41). In Lamentations these reminiscences of Zion traditions are tragically reverted to a landless rhetoric. Jacob is scattered among the nations (2:2), powerless, fragmented and homeless. The scattering of Jacob in Lamentations will be further discussed.

2.5 Summary

Land loss and deportations in the period of 732-722 as well as 597-587 BCE, were a severe loss for Israel and Judah, threatening their existence as independent states.

Such losses lasted until 1948 with a brief space between the Hasmonean and Herodian period (135 BCE – 70 CE); they resulted from expansionist politics (Albertz 2003:133).

This exercise has resulted in the following conclusions:

- Imperial policies caused the loss of the Northern kingdom and territorial damage to Southern Judah, which is supported by historiography, literary and religious sources.

- Little is said about the experience of individuals and evidence of their landlessness is scarce.

Therefore, reading ancient literature, which contains such laments, is an important tool. In this case, it functions literally as a magnifying glass to trace the experience of land loss amongst common people.

The discussion on Zion theology was necessary to point out the reasons why Lamentations witnesses the misery of a nation which took land for granted and could not cope with its loss. Now, I shall focus on the importance and significance of the land in Israelite religion, after which the process of telescoping the subject will continue narrowing the focus on the text of Lamentations.

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CHAPTER THREE

THEOLOGY OF LAND IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I shall discuss land in the Deuteronomistic history (DH), in the Law, in Prophetic texts and city laments, bearing in mind, firstly, that the context of instability within which the small states of Israel and Judah struggled to hold possession of their land might have influenced their religious thought and institutions.

Secondly, that biblical texts concerning land and land loss should be understood as a testimony of Israel's will to survive, to return from the diaspora and to establish itself on the promised land, despite the demise of nations and the shrinkage of various empires in the political arena of the ancient Near East.

Thirdly, my attempt is to incorporate the landless experience into the traditional land theology. I therefore propose a reading of the patriarchal narratives not focusing on the conventional discussion of a promised land or a promise to the fathers. My emphasis falls rather on the rhetoric of landlessness and diaspora so crucial in these narratives and, yet, often overlooked.

Such is the centrality of land in the Hebrew Bible that it could have been the central notion for organizing the entire canon (Kaiser 1981:302). Kaiser himself ordered the biblical message around the theme of promise (the land promised to the patriarchs). The theology of land in the Hebrew Bible, according to Amaru (1986:66), is based on the covenantal triad of Yahweh, people and land.

It is discussed in the Patriarchal history in terms of the concept of the promised land, while in the *Tôrāh* legislation and in prophetic texts the theme of land loss is linked with hope, repentance and return. Consequently, land permeates most of the Bible.

3.2 The Different Memories of the Land Issue in the Hebrew Bible

As with many other subjects and institutions, land is not a neutral subject. Land issues in the Hebrew Bible are neither theological, nor is it sociologically disinterested, nor a homogeneous, coherent thought (Menezes 1986:26). In the quest for ‘the truth behind the text’ there might have been a ‘hidden agenda’ as Gous has suggested (1992:186). Habel (1995) illustrates the ideological motivations behind the various land ‘theologies’ according to the different interests behind the biblical text.

As an example, Keefe (2001:113) explains, ‘there seems to be a struggle between the deity of the landless exiles who had religious memories such as the tribes of peasants liberated from Egyptian slavery by Yahweh, against the deity of elite city dwellers and land holders’.

Brueggemann has deepened critical awareness of the ‘trajectories’ that shaped the biblical literature and sociology of the ancient Israel (1979:161-85). In short, the characteristic of the Mosaic trajectory is the tendency to be a movement of protest by the dispossessed who hold views of a deity who intrudes into the political arena in defense of the dispossessed. In contrast, the Davidic trajectory expresses theological views of Yahweh in royal terms. He consolidates and secures the present order of affairs (the Davidic rule and its institutions) as discussed previously under Zion tradition.

I shall now discuss land in the Deuteronomistic history (which consists of an extended review of Israel's history from Deuteronomy to Kings), written according to a perspective of Josiah's reform, up to the Babylonian exile. I also discuss land in the Priestly source (the body of biblical literature used in the composition of the Torah) also probably undertaken during the 6th century in Babylonia (Bandstra 1999:520, 534).

3.2.1 Land in the Deuteronomistic History (DH)

The Deuteronomistic theology differed greatly from the Zion theology; the main contrast is that Yahweh's salvation and his gift of the land were conditional. In order to survive in a political unstable environ and possess the land, Israel should be faithful to Yahweh's covenant (Le Roux 1987:129). The Deuteronomistic historians (or editors) intend to provide answers to the collapse of the two kingdoms and to assist the exilic community to survive without losing its identity.

In their view, choosing a faithful life in the present exile, keeping the covenant (*Tôrāh*) with Yahweh, Israel might survive and return to the promised land (Weber 1971:4,5). They emphasized the casual relationship between land possession and *tôrāh* obedience, between sin and punishment (*āwôn* / *hattā't*) and obedience and blessing. The loss of land was the result of kings and people's failure to comply with the covenant (Le Roux 1987:129,130).

3.2.2 Land as a gift from Yahweh (*nāhālāh*)

The idea of land as a gift pervades most of the Pentateuchal sources. Throughout history, land and religion have gone hand in hand; for example, in the world of ancient Israel particular lands were associated with particular gods. For instance,

Assur is both the name of the land (Assyria) and the name of the deity (Weber 1971:2). Divine titles such as *Baal*, *Melek*, *Adon* and *Mare* indicate that people acknowledged the deities as sovereigns and subjected themselves to them as to monarchs (Block 1988:60).

The deities owned the land where the temple was located while the priests exercised control over it. Beyond the temple, the entire country, actually, could be claimed by the deity. It was a feudal type of religion; the deity was the divine overlord and the people his vassals (Block 1988:60). To pay homage is to acknowledge the deity's ownership of the worshipper's land (Habel 1995:100).

The *nāhālāh* concept, in the Hebrew Bible, is shaped in this context of the ancient Near Eastern religions. Eighteen times Deuteronomy refers to the covenant made to the Patriarchs and all but three of these references emphasize that the land is a gift (Kaiser 1981:305) of exceptional fertility described in hyperbolic terms (Gn 15:7-21), as 'a land oozing milk and honey' (Levine 2000:43). Land was not a reward for Israel's righteousness (Dt 9:4): it was a fulfillment of God's promises to the ancestors based on Yahweh's *hesed* (Davies 1989:351).

The land as Yahweh's *nāhālāh*, was emphasized by the DH agenda to assist the exiles in Babylonia to start afresh on the land, with a better understanding and healthier relationship with Yahweh and his gift of land. This concept was used as a motivation for maintaining the purity of the land against idolatry and unethical behaviour. Possession of the land based on an oath is only mentioned thrice in the law code, contrasting with loyalty to Yahweh and obedience to the *Tôrāh* (Van Seters 1992: 229).

On the one hand Yahweh alone is obliged to accomplish all the demands of the covenant he made to Abraham and his inheritance (Dt 1:25; 4:21,22; 11:17), since he is the Land giver; on the other hand, obedience to his suzerainty is a *sine qua non* for ‘owning’ the land. This gift is forever but the possession of the land is conditional (Kaiser 1981:305-6).

3.3 Land in the Holiness Code

The Holiness Code (Lv 17-27), forms part of the Priestly source (P), the last of the great Pentateuchal documents, composed in Babylonia during 587-539 BCE (Frymer-Kensky 2006:360). Covenants with Yahweh are an important feature in this source. The world of the Priestly editor is ordered and history proceeds according to the divine plan. Yahweh’s purpose for the world is focused in Israel, to whom he gives the law and regulations to maintain their identity and calling as holy people (Bird 2001:270).

It is a simple fact that land theology (in the law of the Holiness Code), corresponds very closely to that of the Deuteronomistic Code in emphasizing the land as gift, as discussed above (Lv 20:22-26; 23:10; 25:2,38). There is also the same close association between a claim on the land and defilement of the land (Van Seters 1992:235), that is pollution and purgation (Berlin 2002:19).

The result of murder, sexual abominations and idolatry, is land loss. Israel must keep in mind that for such sins, original inhabitants became landless and consequently, Israel took possession of the land (Frymer-Kensky 2006:343), but in a latter stage this situation is reversed and Israel becomes landless as well described in these verses:

They worshipped their idols, which became a snare for them.
Their own sons and daughters they sacrificed to demons.
They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters...
to the idols of Canaan. So the land was polluted with bloodguilt.
They became defiled by their acts, debauched through their deeds.
The Lord was angry with his people and he abhorred his inheritance.
He handed them over to the nations: their foes ruled them (Ps 106: 36-41).

For those sins, people and the land are affected and must be purified (purged). Men and women, the children and the elderly, all will equally face the horror of exile, and consequently land loss (Klawans 2000:40-41), as Isaiah clearly spells out in 24:1-3:

The Lord is going to lay waste the earth and scatter its inhabitants; it will be the same for priests as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor. The earth will be [...] totally plundered.

Holiness laws regulated many aspects of Israel for the landed period such as worship, harvest, the sabbatical year and jubilees (Weber 1971:2,3).

3.3.1 Land and the Sabbath

Among other obligations of a landed Israel is exclusive loyalty to Yahweh, forsaking idols, and keeping *sabbaths* and *jubilees* (*šăbātt* / *ŷbēll*) of the land. What is the connection between the land and the *sabbath*? In earliest teaching, the *sabbath* is intended for freeing slaves (Ex 21:1-11, Dt 15:12-18), and only later for resting the land (Lv 25) and for cancelling debts (Dt 15:1-11). *Sabbath* is a way of affirming the power and authority of Yahweh the Land giver (Brueggemann 2002:60).

Sabbath is to prevent people (slaves or others) and land being finally owned, managed or traded. The covenant draws lines of dignity, respect and freedom around people and land. They benefit from the *sabbath* that protects them from being bought and sold at will. Therefore, *sabbaths* contain a radical meaning for landed society: they make no sense in a contextless space, but are indispensable to a nation where land and people are bound together in a covenantal relationship with Yahweh (Brueggemann 2002:60).

On the other hand, if *sabbaths* are not observed the land will be void of the covenant. It will become an asset, unethically traded or consequently discarded. Eventually, everything, including one's brothers and sisters, can be bought and sold: like land, they will become a commodity (Brueggemann 2002:61).

Therefore along with the *sabbath* and *jubilees* Israel is to be fair in all relationships. Family, foreigner, widows, poor and orphans are to be protected and fairly treated; they have no land, no power and consequently no dignity. Land is intended for sharing with all the heirs of the covenant, even those who have no means to claim it (Lv 25:35-38).

The Priestly editor uses the word *'ahhūzāh* (possession, ownership) which refers to an inalienable property, and denotes that the heirs retain the right to buy it back (Lv 27:16-25). However, he avoids the term *'ahhūzāh ôlām* (everlasting possession). He wishes his scattered audience to bear in mind that Israel cannot hold absolute claims on the land. Land possession is conditional.

The territorial losses, including that of Samaria, the capital of the Northern kingdom, are a reminder of how precarious Israel's claims on the land were: if *sabbaths* and jubilees are not carefully observed the land will again vomit its inhabitants out (Menezes 1986:24,25). The agenda of the Priestly editor was to help Israel to deal with the uncertainties and losses of the exile (Gous 1989:59).

3.4 Land in the Prophetic Texts

The unethical behaviour of the kingship towards people and regulations regarding land give rise to the prophetic critique. The kings have forgotten the historicity of the covenant and Israel became like the other nations: horses, wives and silver led the way to oppression and land loss. For example, Elisha's confrontation with Jezebel and Ahab, a classic illustration of greedy kings trading family holdings, caused death and impoverishment (Bandstra 1999:288).

3.4.1 Corporative view of king, land and people

The prophetic assessment of the present state of affairs was based in the corporative understanding of being a nation. King, land and people were intrinsically connected. The king's actions could affect people on the ground and people's action could affect the land. These actions could be beneficial (a blessing) or harmful (a curse), influencing history because king, people and land formed a unity, sharing common identity and destiny (Le Roux 1986:134,8).

3.4.2 Land holdings and land loss

After the Aramaean economic depression, under Jeroboam II's rule (787-747 BCE), an upper class of prosperous landowners became stronger, with labourers at the bottom of the strata increasingly poor (Albertz 1994:159). Large states made the old Israelite order unstable, from the crown downwards. Small farmers were unable to cope with the usual burdens of state taxation.

In order to survive, they were forced to enter into loans and became impoverished to the point that they had to sell themselves into permanent or temporary slavery in order to pay their debts. Others preferred to spend their lives as landless day labourers so as to retain their freedom, while landholders were indifferent to their cause (Albartz 1994:159-161).

Landowners, putting estate alongside estate until they were the sole property-owners (Is 5:8), were forcing small farmers out from their ancestral properties (Am 8:4; Mi 2:1,9) and into debt for high interests rates. It caused them to become landless, homeless and sunk into slavery (Am 8:6). The prophetic criticism was not indifferent to such misuse of the land and oppression of the dispossessed (Le Roux 1986:140).

The law of credit is described in the prophets as open robbery and plunder ((Is 3:14; Jr 5:17), while enslavement to repay debt constitutes terror and oppression (Am 3:9). The upper class obstructs justice by intimidation and bribery (Is 5:20, 23; Am 5:10). Princes, priests and prophets who were advocating the inviolability of Zion (Mi 2:6; 3:5,11), are accused of lying and uttering favourable oracles in return for money (Wilson 1980:276).

3.4.3 Home affairs and land loss

Israel's internal affairs turned out to represent a gross contrast between what Yahweh had done for Israel (when they themselves had been poor and dispossessed in Egypt and in the wilderness), and what they committed against their own poor and indigent in their own land (Sanders 1997:47). They oppress and kill the poorest of the poor; the widows, orphans and foreigners (the classic victims of displacement), once protected by the covenant (Brueggemann 1992:20).

They themselves became displaced and homeless, as the result of a system that had lost its roots in the liberating traditions of the covenant. The executive authorities excluded and dispossessed the small landholders from important decisions and burdened them with taxes (Le Roux 1986:140).

The property boom (Am 4:1,2) occurred at the expense of the peasants as one of the causes of land loss as illustrated by Micah (2:1-5):

before getting up, the landlord has already cut a deal, coveted fields and taken away houses. One day, an invading army will occupy the fields, and the ones who have taken them will not be able to keep them. On ‘the assembly of the Lord’, when people will be called to reorder the local economy (that is; to undertake the redistribution of land), there will be no one to ‘cast the lines’ or to secure land or protect the interests of the unfair landlord (Brueggemann 1992:7-14).

He will also be left with nothing, displaced, landless.

3.4.4 Land and foreign affairs

International politics also demand changes. Yahweh alone, not political and military safeguards of power, can grant salvation and possession of land (Is 7:9). Kings are not free to manage the land as in other nations. The land requires obedience: without this neither temple and garrisons, nor political alliances, nor foreign idols can guarantee land possession (Brueggemann 2002:85).

By 734 BCE (the period when Hosea [10:13] preached against political alliances) foreign affairs in Judah have changed radically. Hezekiah’s hope that the Egyptian aid would arrive in time to assist his attempt to shake off the Assyrian vassalage, is

perceived as being opposed to trust in Yahweh; it is apostasy. For political alliances cannot guarantee stability in the land (Is 28:14-19; 30:1-5; 31:1-3): on the contrary, they represent the road to disintegration and land loss (Albartz 1994:168-170).

The prophetic discourse is deeply rooted in the traditions previously discussed. Again the emphasis is that Israel has no inalienable right to the land (Am 2:10; 9:7). The prophets warned of impending judgment (Le Roux 1986:134) and foresee calamitous military defeat and expulsion from the land (Am 7:17; Hs 9:3), exile and land loss as the imminent consequence of forsaking Yahweh and his covenant.

3.4.5 Ezekiel

Ezekiel witnessed all the extreme chaos of this time. He was a Zadokite priest, called to be a prophet among the exiles in Tel Aviv. The trauma of the siege and the losses of the city and temple (Ezk 4:9-5:9) are reflected in his sermons; they are central themes of his prophecies (Le Roux 1986:135). He mentions that the attitude of those who did not suffer deportation, towards those who have been deported, effectively conveyed: 'Get afar from Yahweh, this [land] is ours' (Brownlee 1970:394).

This verse (Ezk 11:15) demonstrates that to be landless is to be without (holy)land, is to be cast out of Yahweh's presence and blessings (Menezes 1986:9). It means much more than a physical boundary: it is a social, psychological, spiritual condition. Ezekiel understands that exile and Yahweh's departure from Zion are direct results of alliances with other nations, desecration of the temple and social crimes (Ezk 16:39-42). He is optimistic, though, that after punishment, the temple and the land will again be purified (Kamionkowski 2001:181-5).

In his blue print for the future, there is going to be a new *genesis*; again a fertile Eden, containing cherubs, date palms and trees. However there are no outcasts such as Adam and Eve, Cain, Abel or wandering Jacobs (Ezk 36:35; 47:7). On the contrary, the tribes of Jacob are not scattered any longer. The temple is placed at the centre of the land where the tribes would congregate and settle when a new redistribution of land will take place (Le Roux 1987:136-87).

Sermons in Jeremiah (31-33) and Deutero Isaiah (40:1; 61:2) aim to comfort those exiles who have been dispersed and disinherited. Yahweh would never again be absent from this land (Havrelock 2007:655). He will plant his people back in the land and cherish them as his garden and choice vineyard. Yahweh will open the way to the returnees. The wilderness will grow into green pastures and the desert into springs of water (Is 49).

Such images however, do not feature in city-laments, Psalms or in Lamentations; on the contrary there are descriptions of scenes of devastation.

3.5 City laments

Psalms (106, 74:3-9, 137:7) and Lamentations (4:14) describe the land invaded, polluted and in ruins; also like a woman's skirt soiled with blood. As a result, the people are driven out of the land. Dispersion and land loss are certainly impending, as rightly put by the city-woman Zion:

Jerusalem has indeed sinned; on account of this
She has become a wanderer. All who honored her despise her,
For they see her nakedness. Indeed! she groans,
and has turned away (Lm 1:8)

Texts of Hosea (10:5-15), Ezekiel (23:78) Jeremiah (4, 46,51), Micah (7:10) and Isaiah (21-24) make use of female imagery of an unfaithful bride or wife, or a raped or menstruating, impure female, to portray the devastation all over the land. And they focus on the theme of pain, losses and desolation also present in the Sumerian laments.

In Land theology, as discussed above, there is no mention of city-laments as outcries of the land loser. Then again, our theology does not go back to the very beginnings of biblical narratives of land loss. Therefore without debating the folkloric nature of figures, such as Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel and the Patriarchs, I will briefly highlight their experience of landlessness, which could offer a starting point for a theology of the land rather than the traditional convention of scholarship which takes Abraham as the starting point for discussions on the theme of land.

3.6 Landless Experience from the Beginnings

Priestly editors portray their ancestors as landless wanderers and somehow cursed and cast out of their homeland. As Adam, Cain and the patriarchs had to endure an unsettled life in foreign lands, the Judeans under the Babylonians would face the same challenges: overcome the threats to their survival as a nation; increase in number and regain Yahweh's land (Menezes 1986:17).

3.6.1 Adam and Eve

Banishment from paradise spells out the loss of the land that gave them roots, security and fulfillment. Landlessness makes Adam and Eve and their descendant Cain rootless, hopeless and godless (Menezes 1986:9). It reminds them that land

possession demands just and fair relationships with God, with family members and with the environment.

Unfair relationships and domestic violence caused pollution of the land (bloodshed) and, as a result, catastrophic changes in the environment (Gn 3:17) and land loss for Adam and to his son, Cain (Gn 4:13,14). These narratives demonstrate that the collapse of family relationships and unethical land management may result in the collapse of religious and social structures.

The parallels of Genesis 2-3 with Israel's story of land loss are obvious: Yahweh created humankind and placed them in the garden as he created and chose Israel outside of Canaan and gave them a wonderful land (Carroll 1997:65). As Yahweh gave Adam and Eve the divine command, partnership and privileges in the garden, he provided Israel with the law and covenant obligations. Obedience is the only guarantee of stability in the land. The violation of the command results in a curse and expulsion from the garden. To Israel it eventuated in the curse of exile and death (Van Seters 1992:127).

3.6.2 Abraham, Sarah and Hagar

Abraham's accounts also imply power struggles in the household. He is promised that he will become a great nation but he is aged and Sarah, barren. He is neither poor nor landless but a rich wanderer, a hero (Gn 14), a peacemaker, who offers Lot the first choice of the best land (Gn 13), and pleads for the non-destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn 19).

He is silent, however on behalf of Hagar and Ishmael, who are cast out from his clan only to die of thirst and malnutrition in a hostile environment. Only a miracle can grant mother and child's future (Gn 21:8-21).

The themes of expulsion (*gārēš*) and inheritance (*yārēš*) are mentioned in this narrative together with the expulsion of the nations and Israel's possession of the land (Gn 15:19). It recognizes that all Ishmaelites are Abraham's offspring (Gn 21:19); however, his future as a strong nation is also threatened in the wilderness (Van Seters 1992; 264,5).

Similarly, Isaac faces death at Moriah, but the blessing of survival is granted and Abraham's progeny is spared. Later on Yahweh commands that Isaac should not go to Egypt despite the rampant famine (Gn 26:2). Such a command is the reminiscence of a time when large migrations after Babylonian invasion challenged the survival of Judeans in Palestine (Albertz 2003:149).

The ancestors' story follows a pattern from sin to being cast off from the land. Yahweh's intervention would grant them survival and continuity based in his election of Abraham as father of Israel when he was a wandering Aramaean (Dt 26:5) in Ur of the Chaldeans, Southern Mesopotamia (Van Seters 1992:265). Abraham's call to Canaan is also the call for the dispersed Israelites throughout the world to return to their homeland; a shrunken community of dispersed exiles can believe they will settle again in the promised land and become a great nation (Albertz 2003:248).

3.6.3 Jacob and Joseph

Jacob the wandering ancestor has kindred in a foreign land. He owns his blessings by tricking father and brother. To escape from Esau's fury, Jacob sought refuge with his relatives in Paddan-Haran, Northwest Mesopotamia (Gn 28:6). Yahweh

reminds Jacob in a dream at Bethel (Gn 28:10-15), that the land on which he was lying, not Northern Syria, was his homeland and reassures him of the same promises made to Abraham (Albertz 2003:262).

Yahweh intends that Jacob should not remain in Mesopotamia. He explicitly commands him to return. Jacob obeys and returns to Palestine (Gn 31:13). He has to fight for his survival on crossing the Jabbok valley (Gn 32:22-30), where he is blessed and his life is saved (Menezes 1986:28).

When he is reunited to Joseph and the threat of extinction (owing to family struggles and famine) is over, Jacob requests Joseph to take his remains back to the promised land (Gn 48:21). This account represents Jacob as a model for return from the Babylonian exile since Hosea (12-14) had already formulated the conception of return on the basis of Jacob's tradition (Albertz 2003:262,3).

In Potiphar's household Joseph is just a Hebrew slave with no right to defend himself and his future is endangered (Gn 39). From prison and slavery Joseph rises to power in order to provide food and land to his progeny (Gn 47:27). The account illustrates both the dangers and the opportunities facing the exiles (Albertz 2003:263).

From being a hated brother without resource and authority, Joseph turned out to be the respected controller of the empire (Gn 41) a paradigm of the land-getter and the land manager (Brueggemann 2002:25), but to return to Palestine is fundamental: the dispersed Israelites are profoundly vulnerable, on the verge of extinction. The biography of their ancestors demonstrated where Israel really belonged and where they would be offered an opportunity to settle again in the land (Albertz 2003: 266).

3.6.4 Exodus

Abraham and his clan are outsiders and sojourners (*gēr*, *gerîm*) during Egyptian bondage and are also in similar conditions under the Babylonians. *Gērîm* refers to the powerless, disenfranchised people in disadvantaged situations, such as slaves, the poor, widows and foreigners. One could become a *gēr* voluntarily or involuntarily; but it is clear that socio-political upheaval due to war, famine and oppression produced *gērîm* (Spina 1983:322-4). For example, due to famine, Isaac became a *gēr* in Gerar (Menezes 1986:14).

Exodus refers to the vulnerability of dispossessed people, exposed to the harsh conditions of the wilderness region of Southern Palestine: from hunger and thirst (Ex 15:22-27; 16; Nm 20:1-13), threats of enemies (Ex 17:8-16), wild beasts (Nm 21:44-9) and the failure to gain a foothold in cultivated land (Nm 13).

Exodus expresses the memories of this group of *gērîm* struggling for liberation and survival. The group under Moses' leadership was dependent on their commander and liberator, Yahweh (Ex 15:17). Moving from disintegration in Egyptian society to integration within the cultivated land was a huge challenge. Each moment the future of the nation was threatened, Moses performed miracles that brought life out of death. Moses himself was not allowed to go into the promised land. (Frymer-Kensky 2006:303).

3.6.5 Concluding the Beginnings

Landlessness is at the heart of the *Tôrāh*. It begins with the crown of creation going into exile from Eden and it ends with Moses gazing at the land he will not possess. He died landless (Dt 34). The *Tôrāh* begins with Adam coming out of the *'adāmāh* and Moses being buried back in *'adāmāh* (Menezes 1986:8). It begins with land, land possession and it ends with exile and land loss.

Similarly, the accounts of Israel's origins are pervaded by the experience of land loss and dispersal. Once established on the land and bringing the fruits of the harvest, Israel must remember its time of landlessness and recite its family history (*credo*):

My father was a wandering Aramaean ('*ārāmī*' '*ōbēd hayah 'ābī*), and they went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us [...] then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm [...] (Dt 26:5-8).

This study highlights confessions, traditions and memories of landlessness that shaped Israel's identity. It also concerns paradigms and correlations. Just as Adam and Eve lost paradise, many Judeans in the 6th century (BCE) lost Jerusalem, a place that possessed immense significance.

They lost the temple of Zion, the place where they brought the firstborn, the first fruits and animals for sacrifice: where they celebrated Passover and festivals, where blessings and prophecies were pronounced. Just as paradise closed behind Adam and Eve, the access to Yahweh's presence is also denied to the Judeans (Carroll 1997:64). Like Cain, separated from the soil, cut off from Yahweh's face, they were cursed, banished, dispersed.

3.7 Summary

My attempt in this chapter was to discuss the conventional theology of land to demonstrate that it starts from the Abraham cycle, leaving out the Adam and Eve and Cain stories which are rich memories of the landless experience right there, in the beginning. Joseph's and Jacob's are worth emphasizing. Jacob is a paradigm of the landless person yearning to return to his/her homeland.

As prophetic texts and city laments do not even feature in the conventional land theology, my goal was to highlight how land loss is strongly emphasized in this literature which could provide an important contribution to the issue of landlessness in the Hebrew Bible.

Loss of land features permanently in Israel's collective unconscious and pervades the biblical literature, bringing reminiscences of the landless experience of their ancestors in Eden, in the Wilderness and in Babylonia. Such memories in Lamentations are now discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXPERIENCE OF LAND LOSS IN THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the historical background, authorship, literary form and purpose of the book of Lamentations. An outline of each chapter will be followed by the exegesis of a few sections that focus on the rhetoric of displacement and land loss as expressed through the metaphoric persons of Daughter Zion in chapters (1 and 2), the deported man (chapter 3) and the scattered leadership (chapter 4).

4.2 Historical Background

The book of Lamentations displays the heartbreak of the Judeans and their response to the tragedies of war. Yahweh who brought them out of slavery, who gave them the promised land, has now abandoned his throne in Zion and handed them over to the Babylonians (O'Connor 2003:84).

The war that lasted from 589 to 586 BCE was the final collapse of an unstable nation. The community witnessed slaughter and pestilence, survivors fled the city, left the land or travelled voluntarily to Egypt (Jr 44). The leadership was deported to Babylonia. The city's life and the glorious temple were destroyed. The poorest people were left in charge of the land to work in the vineyards (Jr 39:10), but also under oppressive conditions (Le Roux 1987:126,7).

4.2.1 Authorship and place of origin

Lamentations is a collective work of art (O'Connor 2003:4). Its place in the canon amongst the so-called *megillōt*, (the scrolls) has not been questioned (Renkema 1998:35). The possibility that Babylonian exiles produced it should not be excluded (Burden 1987:163), for the exilic origin of chapter 5 is widely accepted (Alberty 2003:145).

Dobbs-Alsopp's opinion (2002:4) is that the book is likely to be the product of the community who did remain on the land. Survivors gathered for mourning ceremonies on the site where the temple stood and recited the laments (Lee 2002:30) that became part of their liturgical texts for the 9th of Av, the day of the destruction of the temple (Renkema 1998:35).

4.2.2 Literary forms

Lamentations features similarities to the dirges over destroyed temples of Sumerian towns (Burden 1987:159-60) and collective and individual psalms of laments in which the mourner utters open complaints to Yahweh for he/she is denied a comforter, access to joyful gatherings and to the temple (Lee 2002:15).

Dirges are funeral songs in *qînâh* structure with its 'limping' beat usually introduced by the word 'how' (*'êkâh*) as in chapters 1, 2, and 4 (Burden 1987: 151,160). In chapter 3, for example, the poetry changes from individual lament (vv 1-25) to songs of praise (vv 52-28) concluding with a complaint against the enemy. Chapter 5 is different; it is not an acrostic, it is not in *qinah*-meter and neither contains the dirge-like motif (Salters 1998:102,3). The book mixes different forms and content but follows a concentric pattern throughout (Burden 1987: 158,60).

4.2.3 Purpose of the book

Jerusalem was impregnable (Lm 4:12); peace, prosperity and salvation were granted by Yahweh's presence in the temple. Based on these principles, the national theology did not prepare Judeans for the disaster. Judah did not obey the demands of the covenant and lost the temple and the land, icons of Yahweh's blessings over Judah (Burden 1987:164,5). These contradictory views underlie the text of Lamentations (Gous 1992:184); they questioned the unexpected collapse and the reversal of Zion:

Her adversaries have become the master, her enemies prosper;
For the Lord has afflicted her because of the multitude of her transgressions.
Her children have gone into captivity before the enemy.
And from the daughter of Zion all her splendor has departed (Lm 1:5,6a).

Lamentations attempts to give answers in a Deuteronomistic tone:

Jerusalem has sinned gravely, therefore she has become vile (Lm 1:8).

Albrektson maintains that the book is designed to lead Israel back to faith in a person (Yahweh) rather than in the land or in a place, Zion (quoted in Moore 1990:540). The collapse of Zion was not taken lightly. Lamentations deals with the loss of Jerusalem and its surroundings to foreign rule and how people experienced it (Lipschits 2003:333,42). Their response came in the form of a dirge for the death of Zion.

Lamentations mourns for the destruction of the temple (2:6), the dying citizenry; king, princes, priests (4:20) are other great losses. It is a 'political burial song',

where Zion is the deceased (Burden 1987:160). It is against this background that I examine the landless experience in Lamentations.

4.3 Metaphors

Female imagery (Dobbs- Alsopp 2002:50) and spatial metaphors (Eidevall 2005: 133) have dominated the study of this book. Since a metaphor is a word or an expression used to demonstrate that one concept is like another by pointing to their similar qualities and likeness, metaphors facilitate our conception of the world and our experience through language that is a representation or expression of our reality (Kamionkowski 2003:37).

By metaphors in Lamentations, I intend expressions that function as representations of the reality in which the Judeans found themselves in terms of their losses. Some commentators might see God's absence or human suffering as the dominant themes in Lamentations, which is valid and cannot be denied. My focus however, is on the metaphors that express loss of land.

4.4 Outline of the book of Lamentations

Song 1: The city-woman Zion is the dominant persona in this poem. She laments over her loneliness, destruction over Judah and desecration of the temple (1:1-11). She voices her complaints; Yahweh caused shame and devastation over Zion (1:12-22).

Song 2: The city-woman Zion laments primarily over the land; Israel, Judah and Jacob the ancestor whose name expresses the collectiveness of the nation features in this poem to speak of the scattering of the citizenry (2:1-5). Yahweh violently dismantles Zion causing endless chaos and pain (2:6-22).

Song 3: The deported man laments over his deportation and the horrors of the war (3:1-21). He attempts to keep faith and hope alive (3:21-33), and pleads for justice (3:34-66).

Song 4: Crimes, from bloodshed to cannibalism, dehumanized the city. Zion is unrecognizable (4:1-10). The leadership is guilty of murder, its punishment is dispersal (4:11-16). Survivors lament the atrocities and reversal of their fortunes (4:17-22).

Song 5: The community laments the cruelty of the foreign occupation (5:1-18) and pleads for restoration (5:1-22).

4.5 Exegesis

My focus is on the poems that are structured around metaphors to express the loss of land. Although the word ‘landless’ is not directly mentioned in the poems, the word ‘homeless’ is; connoting not only the loss of someone’s home but the city and homeland as a whole, which brings the theme of land loss to the fore in a very subtle manner.

I discuss now the metaphorical language of dispersal, homelessness or land loss implied in the sections about the homeless daughter Zion (2:4), the wandering Jacob (1:17; 2:2a, 3b), the deported man (3:2, 19a) and scattered leadership (4:14a, 15), respectively.

4.5.1 The homeless daughter Zion (Lm 2:4)

He has bent his bow like an enemy, with his right hand set like a foe;
And he has slain all the pride of our eyes. On the tent of the daughter of Zion,
He has poured out his fury like fire.

Background of the metaphor

In Lamentations the title Daughter Zion serves as a metaphor for the city of Jerusalem. In the ancient world females or patron goddesses were personifications of the towns or countries. Such personifications occur in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea and Nahum where women are symbolically blamed for the fall of the city (Graetz 1999:17).

In Lamentations chapters 1, 2 and 4 the metaphor of Daughter Zion shifts from the widow (1:1), mother (2:11) and abandoned lover, placing her against the city landscape: fortifications (2:2) temple (2:7) gates (2:9) and walls (2:8) (O'Connor 2003:14). The function of this metaphor is that Zion will carry the blame for the fall of Judah.

Interpretation

The destruction of Zion's tent illustrates the loss that spreads from a residence to the countryside. Yahweh is no longer the covenant partner who unconditionally protected Zion. He is now the enemy who systematically destroys her precious children as well as their homes and so, their stability, protection and refuge. Everything that Zion had once symbolized is tragically reverted (Berlin 2002:71). A defenseless woman carries the blame for the destruction of the place where Yahweh made his dwelling (Renkema 1998:218).

Zion has lost her home, the living space so crucial to a woman. As Krüger states, it was the place which received her footprints, blood and bones, the place once filled with laughter, tears and memories. Her home, filled with significance, part of her soul (2003:74). She is now childless and homeless, completely destitute.

4.5.2 The wandering Jacob (Lm 1:17; 2:2a, 3b)

‘The Lord has decreed for Jacob that his neighbours become his foes; Jerusalem has become an unclean thing among them’.

Without pity the Lord has swallowed up all dwellings of Jacob;

In his wrath he has torn down the strongholds of the Daughter of Judah.

He has burnt in Jacob like flaming fire that consumes everything around it.

Background of the metaphor

Lamentations uses the wanderer ancestor Jacob as metaphor to establish that the dispersed Judeans in 587 BCE, as well as Jacob, share the same situation of dispersal and unsettlement. They both are templeless and landless. In Israel’s memory Jacob fulfilled his ambitions but became homeless in order to survive violence and bloodshed as described in Genesis 27: 41:

Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself: the days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.

Without Yahweh’s commitment to the covenant, Jacob like the other ancestors would have perished. The primary concern of Jacob’s rhetoric in the nation’s memory was that unfair relationships and bloodshed had caused the loss of their land, and its people to become wanderers in foreign countries.

The wandering ancestor had been a channel of election, blessings, promise and liberation to Israel. Now all these blessings are reverted. Previously the nation relied on the basic premise of Zion traditions and on Yahweh’s protection, but the collapse of the temple and deportation of leaders left the nation hopeless, yearning for return and restoration (Le Roux 1987:127).

We presume that the exiles, as well as those who remained behind, still believed in Yahweh's protection and intervention. Their personal piety and Jacob's traditions (Gn 28: 20; 3:15, 42) offered them support and comfort (Albertz 2003:24).

Interpretation

This selection of verses referring to Jacob (1:17; 2:2a, 3b) is part of Daughter Zion's laments (Lm 1, 2). Zion (who incorporates the whole nation) recollects past events of her story of landlessness. As the patriarchs were wanderers, Jacob became homeless and now, her children (the citizenry) suffer the same fate. The account of land loss and dispersal includes fragments of the wilderness period as the context of displacement.

The location of these verses seems to follow a movement from the city ruins to the wilderness. The verbs in 2:2 'swell up' and 'brought down to the ground' are to be translated in the present perfect, which indicates that the action of the verb in the past has consequences in the present (Reyburn 1992:47). Yahweh's devastating deeds are rather violent (Thi Pham 1999:121); he has swallowed up, devoured all (*kāl*) dwellings and pastures (*nāvēh*) of Jacob.

Agricultural landscape as well as physical, socio-economic, political and cultic spheres of Zion are all consumed by fire (Labahn 2006:250-56). A pillar of fire in the wilderness once afforded light and protection when Israel had been a wandering tribe. Now, tent and fire have proved to be a deadly combination.

Without mercy, Yahweh destroys Jacob. He is left without land for his flock, or

any means of survival in the wilderness. The God of Jacob destroys his tent. Could the tent metaphor be a fragment of memory from the wilderness period when the tribes of Jacob dwelt in tents? Does it refer to Yahweh's mobility, when he dwelt wherever his people settled? Whatever may be, what remains is that the land is impure (*le nidâh*), exposed ('*erva*) and people are dispersed (*nādăh*).

The quoted verses imply the dilemma of a city-woman coming to terms with the loss of her territory and the deportation of the citizenry (Gous 1993:351). Dying Zion will perish just as many of her children will perish in the wilderness on the way to Egypt and Babylonia, scattered among the nations. They share in the landless heritage of their ancestors.

4.5.3 The deported man (Lm 3:2a; 19a)

He has driven me away; I remember my affliction and
my wandering.

The background of the metaphor

The metaphor of the deported man, as well as his discourse, convey the ideas of homelessness and displacement: like a prisoner ('*ăšîr*) in chains (3:6-7) he is taken to a foreign land. It expresses the heartbreak of those taken into exile; it meant existence in *limbo*: mourning with no comforter, *menāhēm* (Lm 1:2), for he has been expelled from the promised land.

Yahweh is not guiding him to green pastures like the good shepherd in the Davidic psalm (Ps 23) where Yahweh's rod comforts the righteous; on the contrary, he is violently chased to deadly places. The metaphor serves as an accusatory protest

against the inversion of the situation which befall on the Judeans. They were once granted protection and permanence on the land, now they face cruel deportation. The national theology could not furnish an appropriate explanation of their punishment out of proportion.

Interpretation.

This chapter takes the format of an individual lament but it brings in elements of a Wisdom discourse as it emphasizes the inversion of Yahweh's actions (Berlin 2002:86). In an antithesis of the good shepherd, Yahweh continues his destructive intentions as in chapters 1 and 2: he drives the deported man away from his country in a very abusive way; he traps (3:7), strikes him (3:12) and breaks his body (3:4).

There is no dramatic shift of the first person as it occurs in the previous chapters (Lm 1, 2). The focus here falls on the deported rather than on the community. Only in the middle section does the lament shift to the third person; 'we' and 'us' include the poet in the collective of the nation (Johnson 1985:65).

The verb 'to drive' (*nāhāg*) in *qal* (perfect, complete action) is used elsewhere with different meanings referring to abrupt actions such as to deport prisoners of war (Is 20:4) and to drag off human beings as booty. The deported has been held prisoner (3:7), is tortured (3:12) and hungry (Lanahan 1974:45). His body is bruised and broken (Berlin 2002:89) while Yahweh himself casts him out from the land of the living.

The expression 'affliction and wandering' is a repetition of Lamentations 1:7 where a 'female wanderer' is like Cain: banished and punished for her sin. His

deportation is translated as ‘affliction and wandering’ (Renkema 1998:127,380), and homelessness (Lee 2002:172). Either of the two demonstrates the rhetoric of landlessness. It is read in simple terms: poverty, homelessness and deportation.

His homelessness is as a thick wall (*gādar*) of poverty and trouble where his neighbours make him the subject of scorn and where Yahweh is not accessible (Mintz 1982:10). He is in a hostile land, a land of oblivion. He is in *sheol*: he feels as if he is buried alive (Berlin 2002:90). He has forgotten what is well being (*šālôm*), for deportation is bitter like gall as he protests:

To crush underfoot all prisoners in the land, to deny a man his rights before the Most High, to deprive a man of justice; would not the Lord see such things? (Lm 3: 34-6).

His suffering is not a result of Yahweh’s will but man’s wrong doing (Gordis 1967:18-20,23). It is the result of his basic rights being subverted (Dobbs-Alsopp 2002:124).

4.5.4 The scattered leadership (Lm 4:14a, 15)

Now they grope through [wander] the streets like men who are blind
‘Go away! You are unclean’ men cry to them
‘Away! Away! Don’t touch us’
When they flee and wander about, people among the nations say,
‘They can stay here no longer.’

The metaphor explained

Scattered leadership stands for the consequence that came upon the priests guilty of crimes. The metaphor represents the leadership, who like Cain is condemned to exile while the victim Abel represents the people (Berlin 2002:110). Renkema points to a similar 'wanderer motif' found in Cain's narrative (Gn 4:11-15); the consequences of an unfair leadership are dispersal and exile, being cast out of the land, scattered, cut off from Yahweh's presence (1994:540-2). These leaders (princes and priests) are untouchable, impure, cursed, cast outs like Cain (Berlin 2002:110).

Interpretation

The intertextuality of Lamentations 4:14,15 and Cain and Abel's narrative establishes a lexical and scriptural statement that shedding righteous blood by priests and princes led to loss of the temple and of the city: by extension the territory where Yahweh once dwelt.

Cain's banishment from the garden/land was also his escape from death. The situation is reversed; there is no mercy for Abel, but the perpetrator survives. For the people of Judah, there are no blessings such as escape and survival, but murder, and deportation. They experienced the worse of both ancestors: cursed like Cain, deadly stricken like Abel. The people of the dying city, sinking to the ground impersonate Abel, whose execution and collapse conveys the dying of Jerusalem and the land of Judah (Lee 2002:188,9)

Chapter 4 is closely related to chapters 1, 2 and 3 in terms of the central ideas of displacement and losses as previously discussed. The poet does not blame Yahweh alone. People are also to blame; priests, princes and prophets have the blood of the

righteous in their hands, like Cain who took his brother out into the field and murdered him. They have shed blood in the sanctuary; dispersal is certain (Reyburn 1992:122).

4.6 Summary

In this chapter I have focused on the landless experience in Lamentations through the metaphoric personae of Daughter Zion, the wanderer ancestor, the deported man and the scattered leadership. To this I add the following observations:

We may infer that the destruction of the land and all that it involves caused the human suffering described in the poems and not *vice-versa*. It is precisely the collapse of their world and its institutions that caused dispossession.

The inversion of Zion beliefs is evident in the background of the book. Zion, the beloved mother, who had protected her children, who had been a place of blessing and refuge, has now become a wilderness. Such unprecedented distress needed to be expressed in terms of accusations, bitterness and divine unfairness.

The struggle of the deported man for survival and justice is aggravated for he is in a foreign country which does not recognize his basic rights. His hunger is not only physical or spiritual; it is also emotional, since he yearns deeply for the human kindness, dignity and a future that could only be found back in his homeland. Without the land that had constituted the foundation of his basic rights, the story of the deported is one of mutilation and sorrow.

The analysis demonstrates that the ancestors Cain, Abel and Jacob, all driven out of the land, comprise important aspects of the landless rhetoric in this text.

In general, the metaphoric personae of Lamentations are the focus of this reading in order to highlight their experience as landless people.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The intention of this study was to accomplish these two fold objectives:

First, to trace the phenomenon of the land loss experience from the broad context of the ancient Near East down to Lamentations, adding these findings to the traditional discussion on the Land theology of the Hebrew Bible.

As discussed in Chapter One, Land theology has been silent on the theme of landless people and their experience. I attempted to highlight the landless experience as a pervasive theme in the Hebrew Bible.

Second, to indicate that human suffering in Lamentations is deeply rooted in the loss of land. The displacement of the people in Lamentations was caused by Yahweh's act of terror, resulting in landlessness for many. This, I attempted to demonstrate in Chapter Four through the analysis of metaphors such as the homeless woman Zion, the wandering Jacob, the deported man and the scattered priests. The challenge of this study was to unveil this and to broaden the interpretation, making land loss central to the discussion.

This emphasis (on landless experience) is not common in traditional Land theology; neither is it the focus of traditional commentaries of Lamentations. The metaphors of landlessness and displacement are not obvious on a superficial reading but a historical journey through a literature study seemed to be an essential reading strategy for revealing the metaphors and enriching the meaning of the text.

Concentrating on the landless experience of metaphoric persons in Lamentations, this reading granted them due centrality. It was not a simple task, though, for the landless experience in Lamentations is not wrapped up in a chronicle or historical text but in very emotional poetry and it unveils the landless issue in a subtle manner.

It could be argued that such an approach is faulty (that is to search for the historicity of an emotional condition such as landlessness); therefore other ancient texts (laments) were brought in to draw comparisons and conclusions on the experience of land loss. The result of examining the historical context of land loss caused by imperial policies, bringing in the landless point of view as expressed in ancient Sumerian laments (cf. Chapter Two) was a new exercise.

The theology of land was discussed in Chapter Three. Also silent regarding matters of the landless experience, the role of the patriarchs was focused on their landlessness and wanderings, an important highlight of this study. The traditions of the ancestors are situated in the context of exile, when Judeans were rootless and homeless (Gn 17:4).

This study focused on the context of displacement in which people had reminiscences of their origins. Promises of roots (progeny), stability and prosperity given to the ancestor belong now to the Judeans, heirs of Abraham's faith. Those memories of their sojourn represent a source of hope for land possession in the future which enables Judeans to endure their losses and strengthen their faith in Yahweh who never wills his people to be in permanent landlessness (Brueggemann 1972: 401, 2,13).

In summary, the findings and conclusions of this study were unexpected. History is usually written in a way that glorifies the achievements of kings and emperors (Burden 1987:150). Consequently, records of how they achieved their grandeur are more common and are prioritized over the way in which they affected the ordinary citizens and the displaced minorities. How did their policies affect ancient Israel and Judah?

The dominated masses and the landless seem to be powerless people, consenting to their domination. Even worse, they are the faceless and voiceless whose humanity can be traced by archaeological means only. For example, by records of trade or forced labour, by the tunnels they dug up for irrigation, by the bricks they moulded to erect temples, palaces or steles to indicate the boundaries of their conquered territories or to glorify the conquerors.

History on the perspective of the landless does not define them; it lowers them, silences, excludes and ignores them. If they have no face and voice they can be conveniently 'deleted' from history. We do have examples of documentation, such as a list with names of slaves or conquered labourers who were traded to the colonies but this is an exception; usually they are a mere number in a colossal project of an ambitious king, referred to as 'numerous like sheep' (Oded 1979:111-18).

In this study it was necessary to bring into its context, the imperial policies as well as ancient folk literature (such as the lament genre), because laments go beyond history to tell what happened to these people and how they felt when they were displaced from their homeland. Those laments over the ancient cities have inclusive and detailed language. Soldiers, women, children, elders and the environment are all mentioned.

Being poetry, one can question its credibility and how truthful to reality it is. Poetry being a free expression of feelings, it can also be regarded as an artistic, symbolic interpretation of real emotions.

In different ways, literature can reflect the experience, values and ideology of a community. Lamentations in this regard is a powerful tool to access the human condition of the displaced minority of Judah 587 BCE. It says nothing about the conquerors. It shows the other side of the coin; the conquered (Berlin 2002:88). It depicts the points of view of a homeless woman and a deported man.

Monuments around the ancient Near East were erected to celebrate a king's triumph over other nations. Inscriptions on these monuments were usually songs celebrating the victors. Lamentations is an inversion of these monuments; it consists of the cry, feelings and prayers of the conquered, protesting the horrors and futility of war (Burden 1987:150).

Lamentations constitutes an entrance for those individuals outside the center of power, bringing them on to the stage to share their memories and to voice their sorrows. It makes their voices louder, as no power, no army can silence them. It defines them (the *gēbēr*, the *‘ālmānāh*) it calls them by their name (*bāt-Zîôn*). In Lamentations they have body and face, voice and freedom of speech. They can express anger and make accusations.

Yahweh, who caused pain beyond proportion and punished the land beyond repair, has betrayed Zion. Again, Zion theology played a crucial role throughout the book. The unshakable faith in the temple and in Jerusalem did not answer the questions and protests of the people at the collapse of the city.

It can be said that Lamentations is about the death of a city, Zion, which became synonymous with the land. It is about the loss of a land that meant blessing, security and stability, an exile to a land that signified a curse, homelessness, landlessness and above all godlessness. It is about the unpleasant state of being a wandering Jacob, a cursed Cain. From a wandering Aramaean's descendant (Dt 26:5), bringing the first fruits as thanksgiving, the tribes of Jacob have ended up in laments, without land, temple, priests, without harvest: without blessings of a future and stability.

The theology of land did not focus on the experience of the landless and displaced people: it is Lamentations that expresses the memories of the ancestors, right in this situation of displacement, land loss and homesickness. I am convinced that Lamentations is about land loss and displacement as its poems grant central stage to the city woman *Zîon* and the *gěběr* to voice fragments of Israel's beginnings. Lamentations, in the perspective of the loss of land, could be seen as a microcosm of the landless experience in the Hebrew Bible.

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