

People and Land in the Holiness Code: Who is YHWH's Favourite?^{1*}

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ABSTRACT

The article is interested in how land (אֶרֶץ) is personified in the Holiness Code. It starts by describing the different "countries" portrayed in the Holiness Code and then discusses all the instances where land functions as the subject of a verb (Lev 18:25, 27, 28; 19:29; 20:22; 25:2, 19; 26:4, 20, 34, 38, 43). The land at times seems to be close to being a human character by "becoming defiled," "vomiting," "acting like a prostitute," "observing the Sabbath," "giving" and "enjoying." These verbs are all usually associated with human actions. In the light of these texts the article then attempts to describe the relationship between land, YHWH and the addressees. It becomes clear that there is a closer relationship between YHWH and the land than between YHWH and the addressees. The article then attempts to engage with Habel's ecojustice principles showing that the ancient authors of the Holiness Code might have been familiar with some of them.²

KEYWORDS: Holiness Code, land, ecojustice principles, ecological hermeneutics, connectedness of life.

A INTRODUCTION

The following description of land (אֶרֶץ) in the Holiness Code draws on the six ecojustice principles, or some of them at least, of Norman Habel and his Earth

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¹ This article was first read as a paper at a conference, namely "Ecological Interpretations of Biblical Texts: Issues and Outcomes." It took place at the Kruger National Park in September 2014.

² In terms of method I do not consciously follow Habel's three principles of suspicion, identification and retrieval, although I think that they are present in my reading. See a recent discussion of these principles in Norman C. Habel, *The Birth, the Curse and the Greening of Earth: And Ecological Reading of Genesis 1-11* (EBC 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 8-14. It is clear that these principles bear similarities with feminist hermeneutics.

Bible Project.³ With regard to the Priestly creation narrative Norman Habel says:

the primary subject of the primordial setting and subsequent days of creation was not the entire cosmos, nor humanity, but *erets*, Earth.⁴

Habel prefers to write "earth" with a capital "E" in order to be consistent with their principles (which I will mention in a moment). Using the term Earth says something of the fact that Earth is regarded as a fully fledged or primary subject.⁵ I will try to show that in the Holiness Code עֲרֶץ is perhaps not the primary subject but at least a crucial one, second apparently only to YHWH. Syntactically עֲרֶץ is clearly the subject of quite a few verbs. The six ecojustice principles, which seem to have remained constant over nearly a decade, are useful in describing different aspects of the role of עֲרֶץ as a subject.⁶ They consist of principles such as (1) "intrinsic worth," (2) "interconnectedness," and the fact that the Earth has (3) "voice" and (4) "purpose"; then there is (5) "mutual custodianship" and the principle of (6) "resistance." I will try to show that some of these principles can be identified in the Holiness Code.⁷ Especially the principles of intrinsic worth, interconnectedness and resistance are very clear and, although עֲרֶץ has no voice (or not one I can hear in the Holiness Code, in any case), it is at least a crucial actor that does things, very important things, especially for the humans who inhabit it. But let us turn to the Holiness Code, which from a historical-critical perspective belongs to another later layer than the Priestly text of which Genesis 1 is part.

³ The Earth Bible Team, "Guiding Ecojustice Principles," in *Readings from the Perspective of Earth* (ed. Norman C. Habel; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 38-53.

⁴ Norman C. Habel, "Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis 1," in *The Earth Story in Genesis* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 35.

⁵ This way of writing still seems to cause some difference of opinion amongst other members of the Earth Bible Team. See the Editorial Preface by Habel and Wurst in Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst, ed., *The Earth Story in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 9-10. It is also noteworthy to point out that Habel often simply transcribes the Hebrew word and thus refers to *Erets*. The word is still capitalised. See Habel, *The Birth*, especially his motivation on p. ix.

⁶ Norman C. Habel, "Introducing Ecological Hermeneutics," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics* (ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter Trudinger; Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 2.

⁷ For criticism of these principles see Gene M. Tucker, "Ecological Approaches: The Bible and the Land," in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen* (ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent H. Richards; SBLRBS 56; Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 349-367. Tucker's strongest critique of these principles is reserved for the principles of "voice" and "resistance." See Tucker, "Ecological Approaches," 359.

In terms of a basic historical-critical point of reference, my understanding of Lev 17-26 is that it is an addition to the Priestly text made by a later generation of priests. Leviticus 1-16 is usually regarded as part of P.⁸ The authors of Lev 17-26 were well acquainted with P, but they went much further than their priestly predecessors. Where Lev 1-16 is mostly focused on the cult and the rituals associated with maintaining the cult, Lev 17-26 broadens its horizons to include, amongst other things, what we might call "ethical perspectives."⁹ In this regard I follow important scholars such as Milgrom, Knohl, Otto, Nihan and now also Hieke.¹⁰ In terms of dating these texts, however, I do not follow Milgrom and Knohl, who date much of P and Lev 17-26 to the pre-exilic era. I rather follow European scholars such as Otto, Nihan and Hieke, who regard both P and Lev 17-26 as post-exilic texts. To be more specific, I would agree with Otto and Nihan that the creation of Lev 17-26 occurred some time towards the end of the fifth century and could be closely related to the creation of the Pentateuch.¹¹ Most of the scholars mentioned above would agree that there is something often called H, which is usually broader than just Lev 17-26. In the book of Leviticus, 11:43-45 and 16:29-34a are usually also regarded as part of H.¹²

⁸ The differences between P^G and P^S are not relevant for my discussion, since both preceded Lev 17-26. For an overview of the debate see Erich Zenger and Christian Frevel "Das priester(schrift)liche Werk (P)," in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (8th ed.; ed. Christian Frevel; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008), 193-203. In this regard I follow Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, (FAT II/25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 619, who is rather reluctant to distinguish between P^G and P^S.

⁹ See the discussion in Esias E. Meyer, "From Cult to Community: The Two Halves of Leviticus," *VEccl* 34/2 (2013): 2-3.

¹⁰ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000; repr. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1349-1352; Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 8-45; Eckart Otto, "Innerbiblische Exegese im Heiligkeitsgesetz Levitikus 17-26," in *Levitikus als Buch* (ed. Heinz-Josef Fabry and Hans-Winfried Jüngling; BBB 119; Bonn: Philo, 1999), 125-137; Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 401-535; Thomas Hieke, *Levitikus 1-15* (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 66-69; Thomas Hieke, *Levitikus 16-27*, (HTKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 612-613.

¹¹ Eckart Otto, "The Holiness Code in Diachrony and Synchrony in the Legal Hermeneutics of the Pentateuch," in *The Strata of the Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions* (ed. Sarah Shectman and Joel S. Baden; ATANT 95; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009), 149; Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 546-548.

¹² When I refer to H, I thus mean something broader than just Lev 17-26. The latter is often called the Holiness Code, but that is a bit of a misnomer since few scholars still regard it today as an independent code which had a life of its own before it was joined to P. When I refer to the Holiness Code I mean Lev 17-26.

In the rest of the article I will first provide an overview of the usage of the term אֶרֶץ in Leviticus in general (where it occurs 82 times)¹³ and chs. 17-26 in particular. I will then provide an overview of texts where the land comes close to being personalised. Lastly I will draw from my earlier work and attempt to describe the relationship between YHWH, אֶרֶץ and the addressees.¹⁴ What follows is mostly a synchronic reading of the text.

B LAND AS A "COUNTRY" IN LEVITICUS

Of the 82 occurrences of אֶרֶץ in Lev, 67 are in chs. 17-26. This already shows that the land was much higher on the agenda of the authors of Lev 17-26 than of their Priestly predecessors (Lev 1-16). Chapters 25 and 26 combined have 43 occurrences between the two of them, which is more than half of those in the whole book. I will mostly use the Hebrew term אֶרֶץ. Translating the term is difficult. Is it land, country, or *Earth* as Habel would have it?¹⁵ At times it has clearly different meanings. It might actually be Earth in the Priestly creation narrative, but in Leviticus it seems to be referring more to Canaan or Egypt, which would mean it is more like something we might call a country. Before we look at the examples of Canaan and Egypt, let's first consider examples of the more general usage of אֶרֶץ.

There are some examples where one could simply translate it with "land" or even "ground." This is especially true of examples from ch. 11, where we find reference to animals. Examples include "land animals" (v. 2)¹⁶ opposed to flying and swimming animals. Or animals who leap (v. 21), or swarm (vv. 29, 41, 42, 44) on the ground or earth. In Lev. 16:22 one finds the expression "barren region" or אֶרֶץ גְּזֵרָה. The three references¹⁷ to the עַם הָאֶרֶץ ("people of the land") are obviously something else as well. Yet, and this is important, in H אֶרֶץ usually refers to the land to which the addressees are going, i.e. Canaan, especially as part of expressions such as "when you come to the land" (Lev 19:23; 23:10 and 25:2), or the "land of milk and honey" (Lev 20:24), or most of the examples where land is the subject of a verb. Let us take a closer look at Canaan, Egypt and another country implicitly referred to, before moving to cases where אֶרֶץ is the subject of a verb.

¹³ Leviticus 4:27; 11:2, 21, 29, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46; 14:34(x2); 16:22; 18:3(x2), 25(x2), 27(x2), 28; 19:9, 23, 29(x2), 33, 34, 36; 20:2, 4, 22, 24; 22:24, 33; 23:10, 22, 39, 43; 25:2(x2), 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 18, 19, 23(x2), 24(x2), 31, 38(x2), 42, 45, 55; 26:1, 4, 5, 6(x3), 13, 19, 20 (x2), 32, 33, 34(x3), 36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45; 27:24, 30(x2).

¹⁴ Esias E. Meyer, *The Jubilee in Leviticus 25: A Theological Ethical Interpretation from a South African Perspective* (Exuz 11; Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004).

¹⁵ Habel, "Geophany," 35-36.

¹⁶ Literally it can be translated with "from all animals who are on the land" (מִכָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאֶרֶץ).

¹⁷ Leviticus 4:27; 20:2, 4.

אֶרֶץ can refer to at least three different "countries." The first example of אֶרֶץ as referring to a country is אֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם or Egypt.¹⁸ In terms of Leviticus as a book, Egypt occurs only in H. It is usually associated with being a bad place in terms of where it fits into the broader Pentateuch narrative. Leviticus is part of the Sinai pericope¹⁹ and Israel thus finds itself between Egypt and the promised land. Egypt is always linked to YHWH presenting himself as the liberator from Egypt. Of the 11 examples of אֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם, it is actually preceded by the proposition מִן on nine²⁰ occasions, always expressing movement away from.²¹ The first example says it well:

Leviticus 11:45:

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה הַמַּעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיֵּת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי:	For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy. ²² (NRSV)
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The land of Egypt is thus part of the way YHWH presents himself as the divine agent who took the addressees from there. This text is usually regarded as part of H and should thus be read along with Lev 17-26.²³ Opposite the land of Egypt is of course אֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן, which is not mentioned all that often, in fact only three times,²⁴ of which only two are in Lev 17-26. In both of the latter cases the land of Egypt is also mentioned:

Leviticus 18:3:

בְּמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבַּתְּם־בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּבְמַעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּבַחֲקוֹתֵיהֶם לֹא תִלְכוּ:	You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. (NRSV)
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This is from the second chapter of the Holiness Code and it is clear that in the larger Pentateuch narrative the addressees are located between Egypt and Canaan. On both sides you have inhabitants who do bad things, things which

¹⁸ Leviticus 11:45; 18:3; 19:34, 36; 22:33; 23:43; 25:38, 42, 55; 26:13, 45.

¹⁹ Leviticus 19:1 to Num 10:12.

²⁰ The only examples without a min are Lev 18:3 and 19:34. In case of the latter the preposition מִן is used.

²¹ See discussion in Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2006), 460, who argue that מִן "expresses primarily separation and distance" and especially "to express the idea of provenance."

²² All English translations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

²³ Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 569, Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1333.

²⁴ Leviticus 14:34; 18:3; 25:38.

may not be imitated. One should also keep in mind that in the Holiness Code itself the very first occurrence of אֶרֶץ is in Lev 18:3 and immediately we are introduced to Egypt and Canaan. This thus sets the tone for what follows in the rest of the Code. Another example is:

Leviticus 25:38:

אָנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לָתֵת לָכֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים: ס	I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God. (NRSV)
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Once again we meet YHWH the liberator, who is bringing the addressees from a not so desirable place to the land of Canaan, which is more desirable. Although the name Canaan is used only twice in the Holiness Code, it is obvious that most of the other occurrences of אֶרֶץ or הָאָרֶץ are actually referring to the land of Canaan, and this will be especially true of the examples which will follow below, where אֶרֶץ is the subject of the verb.

A third more specific kind of אֶרֶץ is found only in Lev 26 in vv. 36, 38, 39, 41 and 44, namely the land of your enemies (אֲרֵצֵיכֶם אֹיְבֵיכֶם). Except for v. 38, to which we will return later, it is always preceded by the preposition בְּ indicating that the addressees will be *in* the land of their enemies.²⁵ For the post-exilic audience this land obviously referred to the Babylonian exile. Thus we have Egypt, Canaan and an implied reference to Babylon. These are the cases where אֶרֶץ refers to what we might call a country. Within the fiction of the Sinai pericope the addressees are on the way between Egypt and Canaan, and in the far distant future the “land of the enemies” lies – well, only if the addressees do not comply with the laws.

C LAND AS THE SUBJECT OF A VERB

The Hebrew word אֶרֶץ occurs as the subject of the verb on the following occasions. With one exception, human beings are usually the subject of these verbs.

1 אֶרֶץ Defiled

On two occasions in Leviticus – 18:25 and 27 – one reads of אֶרֶץ becoming defiled (*qal* of טמא). In Leviticus this verb appears 85²⁶ times, most of which

²⁵ Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar*, 457: “In the first place it expresses the fact of finding oneself *in*, or moving *in* or *into*, a place.”

²⁶ Leviticus 5:3; 11:24(x2), 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32(x2), 33, 34(x2), 35, 36, 39, 40(x2), 43(x2), 44; 12:2(x2), 5; 13:3, 8, 11, 14, 15, 20, 22, 25, 27, 30, 44(x2), 46, 59; 14:36, 46; 15:4(x2), 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10(x2), 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20(x20), 21, 22, 23, 24(x2), 27(x2), 31, 32; 17:15; 18:20, 23, 24(x2), 25, 27, 28, 30, 31; 20:3, 25; 21:1, 3, 4, 11; 22:5(x2), 6, 8.

are in the *qal* with a few *nip'al's*,²⁷ *pi'el's*²⁸ and *hitpa'el's*²⁹ added here and there. In the *qal* the verb usually means to "become defiled" or "unclean."³⁰ Usually a human being is the subject of this verb, but there are quite a few exceptions. Thus in Lev 11:32-36 one reads of different kinds of materials which become unclean when they come into contact with dead unclean animals such as the mouse, weasel and different kinds of reptiles. In Lev 15:9 the saddle on which a person with discharge sits becomes unclean. The same goes later in the chapter for furniture and clothes which come into contact with an unclean person. Then there are the two examples in ch. 18 of the land becoming unclean. In v. 25 the land becomes defiled because of the practices of the nations in v. 24, which then triggers a response from YHWH. In short, the verb **טמא** is not the most useful for my argument. It is true that in most cases people are the subjects of this verb, but there are a few exceptions which include the land. One cannot really built an argument for personification on this verb, but luckily there are some better examples which follow.

2 **פָּרַץ** Spits Out

The other verb found in these verses means **קיא** "spit out" or "vomit up."³¹ In the whole HB it occurs only eight times.³² Half of these are in Leviticus and on every occasion the **פָּרַץ** is the subject of the verb. In the other four instances in the HB human beings are usually the subject of the verb, apart from Jonah's large fish, which also experienced a fair amount of nausea.

3 **זָנָה** Prostitutes Herself

The next verb is **זָנָה**, found seven times in Leviticus³³ and 59 times in total in the HB, usually translated with "to prostitute yourself" or "to fornicate."³⁴ Apart from 19:29, human beings are always the subject of the verb. In 19:29 **זָנָה** is

²⁷ Leviticus 11:43.

²⁸ Leviticus 13:3, 8, 11, 15, 20, 22, 25, 27, 30, 44; 13:59; 15:31; 18:28; 20:3, 25.

²⁹ Leviticus 18:30; 21:1, 3, 4, 11.

³⁰ *BDB*, 379, "become unclean"; *HALOT*, 375, "become ceremonially unclean." The translation by Koehler and Baumgartner (*HALOT*) seems accurate when applied to human beings meaning, that they are excluded from participating in the temple cult, but is a bit strange when applied to things.

³¹ *BDB*, 883; *HALOT*, 1096; *DCH* 7:246-247.

³² Leviticus 18:25, 28(x2); 20:22; Jonah 2:11; Job 20:15; Prov 23:8; 25:16.

³³ Leviticus 17:7; 19:29(x2); 20:5(x2), 6; 21:9.

³⁴ *BDB*, 883, 275-276, describe the example where the land is the subject of the verb (*qal*) as "metaphorically ... a land given to harlotry." They translate the *hip'il* where the father is the subject as "cause to commit fornication." *HALOT*, 275 translates the *qal* example as "abandon someone to fornication," which sounds rather strange since it is actually about the **זָנָה** being abandoned to fornication. The *hip'il* is translated as "encourage to commit fornication." See *DCH* 3: 121.

the subject (verb= *qal*), but only after a daughter was made a prostitute (verb=*hip'il*) by her father.

4 אָרָץ Rests

The verb שָׁבַת occurs 71 times in the HB, of which seven³⁵ are in Leviticus. Of these seven, five are in the *qal* meaning to "cease" or to "stop" and two are in the *hip'il* meaning to "leave out" or more literally "cause to cease."³⁶ Of the five referring to resting, the addressees are once (Lev 23:32) the subject of the verb and in four cases אָרָץ is the subject (25:2; 26:34, 35 (x2)). Clines understands these examples as "land not in use for agriculture," which is clearly correct.³⁷ In Lev 25 it is about the Sabbath year when land will not be used for agriculture. In Lev 26 it is about the land lying empty during the exile.³⁸

5 אָרָץ Gives

The next verb is נָתַן, which obviously also occurs a lot in the OT, with 86³⁹ examples in Leviticus itself.⁴⁰ Most of these are in the first half of Leviticus, often about somebody (a priest, Aaron or Moses) applying blood on the horns of the altars. The only examples of non-human or non-divine agents being the subject of this verb are found in Lev 25:19 and 26:4 and 20, where on both occasions the land and the tree(s) of the land provide produce. In 26:4 they provide and in 26:20 they stop providing. The fascinating thing about v. 4 is that the giving by the land is triggered by YHWH giving rain at the correct times. We will return to these examples later.

6 אָרָץ "Takes Pleasure"

The meaning of the following verb is highly debated amongst OT critics. Some scholars argue that there should be two meanings attributed to the same root.⁴¹

³⁵ Leviticus 2:13; 23:32; 25:2; 26:6, 34, 35(x).

³⁶ Leviticus 2:13 and 26:6. *BDB*, 991-992; *HALOT*, 1407-1408.

³⁷ *DCH* 8: 256.

³⁸ These examples for the Lev 26 actually triggered the old debate about the myth of the empty land. Robert P. Carroll, "The Myth of the Empty Land," *Semeia* 59 (1992): 79-93.

³⁹ Leviticus 1:7; 2:1, 15; 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 5:11, 16, 24; 6:10; 7:32, 34, 36; 8:7, 8, 15, 23, 24, 27; 9:9; 10:1, 14, 17; 11:38; 14:14, 17, 18, 25, 28, 29, 34; 15:14; 16:8, 13, 18, 21; 17:10, 11; 18:20, 21, 23; 19:14, 20, 28; 20:2, 3, 4, 6, 15, 24; 22:14, 22; 23:10, 38; 24:7, 19, 20; 25:2, 19, 24, 37, 38; 26:1, 4, 6, 11, 17, 19, 20, 25, 30, 31, 46; 27:9, 23.

⁴⁰ See *BDB*, 678-381 and *HALOT*, 733-735, for an overview of the range of meanings for this very common verb.

⁴¹ See the difference between *BDB*, 953, who presents only one meaning compared to *HALOT*, 1280-1282, who distinguishes between two different meanings. *DCH* 7: 540-541, actually argues for three different meaning, but the last one occurs only in 4Q424 and thus not in the OT. The first two meanings are basically "be pleased with"

There should thus be a רצה I and a רצה II. The former has a far more positive meaning, namely "to take pleasure" or "enjoy," whereas the second is more about "redeeming" or even "paying."⁴² In any case, if you take both together the verb is used 56 times in the OT, 11⁴³ of which occur in Leviticus. In the more cultic part of Leviticus one finds this concept sometimes expressing the notion that a sacrifice will be deemed "acceptable"⁴⁴ for the sake of the person who brings the sacrifice. Sometimes⁴⁵ it is used in the negative, usually saying that if a ritual is not performed correctly then "it shall not be acceptable" for the person bringing the sacrifice. In all of these above mentioned cases one finds passive verbs which are used as part of a cultic formula. In three of the five instances in Lev 26 (vv. 34 and 43) אָרַץ is the subject of the verb, with the addressees as subject in two further cases (vv. 41 and 43). In this last case it is usually translated as "make amends." It thus probably has two different meanings depending on whether the Israelites or the אָרַץ is the subject. As Hieke puts it:⁴⁶

Die Israeliten hätten ihre Schuld im Sinne von Strafe *anzunehmen* (V 41.43), das Land dagegen werde die Schabbatjahre (als Ersatz) *annehmen* (V 34.43).

Thus when the אָרַץ is the subject of the verb it has a very positive meaning as Hieke shows, sometimes even translated as "enjoy" (NRSV) which actually takes it much further than Hieke. In both vv. 34 and 43 the אָרַץ enjoys the Sabbath.⁴⁷ When the addressees are the subject of the verb it is by no means good news.

for רצה I and "pay, restore" for רצה II. *DCH* seems undecided on how to translate the examples from Lev 26 and argues that they could go both ways. In this regard I prefer to follow Hieke, *Levitikus 16-27*, 1052 (as argued above), who basically sees a positive meaning for the verb when אָרַץ is the subject and a negative one when the addressees are.

⁴² This is according to *HALOT*, 1280-1282.

⁴³ Leviticus 1:4; 7:18; 19:7; 22:23, 25, 27; 26:34(x2), 41, 43(x2).

⁴⁴ Leviticus 1:4 and 22:27.

⁴⁵ See Lev 7:18; 19:7; 22:23, 25. In the first two examples the addressees are forbidden to eat sacred meat on the third day. The third and fourth examples are about certain animals which may not be accepted as certain offerings.

⁴⁶ Hieke, *Levitikus 16-27*, 1052.

⁴⁷ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2001; repr. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 2323 and 2333, mentions that "scholars are at their wits end" in trying to understand this word. Eventually Milgrom settles for a similar translation to the one provide by Hieke above, where both אָרַץ and the addressees accept something, but in the case of the former she is receiving Sabbaths while the latter are receiving punishment. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2273-2274. Hieke was obviously greatly influenced by Milgrom.

7 אָרֶץ Eats

The last example of אָרֶץ acting as a subject is found in Lev 26:38. Yet in this case it is not the promised land, but instead the land of the enemies which will devour (אכל) the addressees.⁴⁸ This term also occurs a lot in the HB, with 104 instances in Leviticus only. In most of these cases human beings are portrayed as those doing the eating, except for fire,⁴⁹ which is often portrayed as consuming a sacrifice and, of course, the land of the enemies, which also consumes the addressees.

In short, it should thus be clear that, apart from טמא, in all other cases the land is the subject of a verb which is usually something done by humans; gods are sometimes animals like Jona's rather large fish. The אָרֶץ at times acts like a person or is at least described by means of anthropomorphic language.

D THE RELATION BETWEEN ADDRESSEES, YHWH AND אָרֶץ

How is the relationship between addressees and YHWH portrayed? And what is the relationship between YHWH and אָרֶץ, or for that matter between the addressees and אָרֶץ?

1 YHWH and the Addressees

The relationship between YHWH and the addressees is defined by the fact that he is the one responsible for bringing them from bad Egypt to good Canaan. Yet according to Lev 26, he is also the one who will eventually make them end up in the "land of their enemies." Apart from being on their way between bad Egypt and good Canaan, in the distant future lies the possibility of the even worse "land of your enemies." Everything in Leviticus is happening at Sinai and Sinai is this in-between place, but YHWH is the one who makes this happen. The clearest expression of the relationship between YHWH and the addressees and the אָרֶץ is found in Lev 25:23, which immediately introduces us to the triangle between YHWH, the אָרֶץ and the addressees:

Leviticus 25:23:

<p>23 וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַּר לְצִמְתָּת בְּיַד הָאָרֶץ בְּיָד גֵּרִים וְתוֹשְׁבֵי אֲתָם עִמָּדִי:</p>	<p>23 The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. (NRSV)</p>
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The addressees are aliens and tenants as far as YHWH is concerned, which usually means that they do not own the land. There is, of course, a tension between what we have here and the beginning of the chapter, which talks about YHWH giving (נתן) the land to the addressees, but whatever "giving"

⁴⁸ *BDB*, 37-38; *HALOT*, 46-47; *DCH* 1:240-247.

⁴⁹ Leviticus 6:3; 9:24; 10:2.

means, the rest of ch. 25 is clear that receiving land in this fashion does not allow one to sell it. In the four cases found in the second half of ch. 25 the individual property of the addressees is referred to as אַחֲזָה.⁵⁰ Many have argued that this term in itself should not be understood as implying any kind of property, but rather a kind of "Nutzrecht."⁵¹ Then you have v. 23 saying that the אֶרֶץ is "for YHWH." This sounds like a warning to the addressees that there is a closer relationship between YHWH and the land than between them and YHWH. The land is "for" YHWH, but to him they are strangers and tenants. The phrase אֶרֶץ הָאָרֶץ is usually translated as "the land is mine"⁵² or in Dutch "het land behoort mij toe"⁵³ which support arguments that אַחֲזָה refers only to "Nutzrecht." The אֶרֶץ belongs to YHWH but the addressees may use it. We are already talking about the relationship between YHWH and אֶרֶץ, which shows that it is difficult to describe the relationship between any two partners of this triangle without mentioning the other.

2 YHWH and אֶרֶץ

As pointed out above, אֶרֶץ is mentioned for the first time in the Holiness Code in 18:3, where we have the clear contrast between the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan. Usually vv. 1-5 and 24-30 are regarded as part of the parenetic frame of the Holiness Code, which in the case of this chapter starts and concludes it nicely. In the second part of the parenetic frame one also finds at least two of the examples mentioned above, where אֶרֶץ is the subject of a verb involving the actions "to become unclean" and to "vomit out." One further thing is important to note from this text. The אֶרֶץ seems to become a kind of intermediary between YHWH and the previous inhabitants.

Leviticus 18:24-30:

<p>24 אֶל-תִּטְמְאוּ בְכָל-אֱלֹהֵי כִּי בְכָל-אֱלֹהֵי נְטִמָּאוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי מְשַׁלַּח מִפְּנֵיכֶם:</p>	<p>24 Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled themselves.</p>
<p>25 וַתִּטְמָא הָאֶרֶץ וְאֶפְקֹד עֲוֹנָהּ עָלֶיהָ וַתִּקָּא הָאֶרֶץ אֶת-יִשְׁבֵּיהָ:</p>	<p>25 Thus the land became defiled; and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.</p>
<p>26 וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֹתָם אֶת-חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת-מִשְׁפָּטַי וְלֹא תַעֲשׂוּ מִכָּל הַתּוֹעֵבֹת הָאֵלֶּה הָאֲזִיחוּ וְהִגְרָה הַגֵּר</p>	

⁵⁰ Leviticus 25:10, 13, 24, 25, 27, 28, 32, 33(x2), 34, 41, 45, 46.

⁵¹ See discussion by Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 66-68, especially n. 241. See also Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2185-2191, or Michaela Bauks, "Die Begriffe מוֹרֶשֶׁה und אַחֲזָה in P^g: Überlegungen zur Landkonzeption der Priestergrundschrift," *ZAW* 116 (2004): 171-188. Most scholars usually draw from an older article by Gillis Gerleman, "Nutzrecht und Wohnrecht: Zur bedeutung von אַחֲזָה und נַחֲלָה," *ZAW* 89 (1977): 313-325.

⁵² See NRSV, NKJV, NIV, NASB etc.

⁵³ De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling.

<p style="text-align: center;">בְּתוֹכְכֶם:</p> <p>27 כִּי אֶת־כָּל־הַתּוֹעֵבֹת הָאֵל עָשׂוּ אֲנָשֵׁי־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵיכֶם וְתִטְמֵא הָאָרֶץ:</p> <p>28 וְלֹא־תִקְיֵא הָאָרֶץ אֶתְכֶם בְּטִמְאָבְכֶם אֲתָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר קִאָּה אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵיכֶם:</p> <p>29 כִּי כָל־אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה מִכָּל הַתּוֹעֵבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְנִכְרְתוּ הַנַּפְשׁוֹת הָעֹשֶׂת מִקְרֵב עַמָּם:</p> <p>30 וְשִׁמְרַתֶּם אֶת־מִשְׁמַרְתִּי לְבִלְתִּי עֲשׂוֹת מַחֲקוֹת הַתּוֹעֵבֹת אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשׂוּ לִפְנֵיכֶם וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ בָהֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: פ</p>	<p>26 But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you</p> <p>27 (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled);</p> <p>28 otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.</p> <p>29 For whoever commits any of these abominations shall be cut off from their people.</p> <p>30 So keep my charge not to commit any of these abominations that were done before you, and not to defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God. (NRSV)</p>
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In vv. 24 and 25 the verb “to defile” or “to become unclean” is repeated three times. First the addressees, then the nations and finally the אֶרֶץ is the subject of the verb. What I find strange about these verses is that v. 25 states that YHWH punished the אֶרֶץ for becoming unclean.⁵⁴ The land became unclean because of the nations living on it. The nations are not punished by YHWH, but instead he punishes אֶרֶץ and it then punishes the inhabitants. On the one hand, the אֶרֶץ is punished although it is not to blame and is an altogether innocent party. On the other hand, the אֶרֶץ becomes an instrument of punishment for YHWH. Land thus functions as an intermediary between YHWH and the inhabitants, but one could also say that the relationship between YHWH and אֶרֶץ has an element of abuse to it. Why should YHWH punish the land for crimes committed by the inhabitants?

In a more positive fashion a similar domino effect is found in Leviticus 26. Once again we find some kind of chain reaction triggered by YHWH in which the land has a role to play, but now with a positive outcome.

⁵⁴ See discussion in Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1579-1580, of other scholars who also struggled to understand these verses. For Milgrom God has no choice but to act since the land is polluted.

Leviticus 26:4

<p>וְנָתַתִּי גְשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעִתָּם וְנָתַנָּה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ וְעֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרִיָּו:</p>	<p>⁴I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall <i>yield</i> its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.</p>
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In this text the same verb “to give” is repeated three times. First YHWH gives rain and then the אָרֶץ gives produce and then the “tree of the field” gives fruit. An action by YHWH triggers an action by אָרֶץ, which in this case has a very wholesome result. The אָרֶץ is the agent or vehicle by means of which YHWH curses (as in ch. 18) and blesses (as now in ch. 26). It should thus be clear that the relationship between YHWH and אָרֶץ is a very close one. In a sense YHWH owns אָרֶץ; it is his to give away, although “giving away” sounds inaccurate in the light of the debate about אֲחֻזָּה, and it is more a case of providing אָרֶץ to the addressees to be used by them. What YHWH seems to be handing out is not so much the land itself, but the opportunity to live off it. At the end of ch. 26 (v. 42), when things start to become positive again, one hears that YHWH will remember his covenant, but also the אָרֶץ.

Leviticus 26:42

<p>42 וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאֶף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֲזָכֹר וְהָאָרֶץ אֲזָכֹר:</p>	<p>then will I remember my covenant with Jacob; I will remember also my covenant with Isaac and also my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. (NRSV)</p>
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In this instance Milgrom argues that the *waw* that precedes אָרֶץ is explanatory and it means that “the essence of the covenant with the patriarchs is the promise of land.”⁵⁵ Milgrom also regards this verse as a “personification of land.”⁵⁶ Hieke is slightly more careful and talks of “fast personifiziert” (almost personified).⁵⁷ Yet when he discusses the next verse (v. 43) he refers back to Lev 18:28:⁵⁸

Israels Fehlverhalten im Gelobten Land führt zwangsläufig dazu, dass Israel das Land (wieder) verlassen muss – dieser Gedanke wurde schon in Lev 18, 28 angesprochen. Dort reagiert das Land *personifiziert* und speit die Bewohner aus, die sich nicht an die Weisung des Landeigentümers (JHWH) halten. Hier steht als eigentlich Handelnder JHWH im Hintergrund. [my italics - EEM]

⁵⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2335.

⁵⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2335. See also Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus* ויקרא (JPSTC; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 191, who also thinks that this is a case of personification of land.

⁵⁷ Hieke, *Levitikus 16-27*, 1095.

⁵⁸ Hieke, *Levitikus 16-27*, 1095.

It is fascinating that Hieke now points back to 18:28 as an example of the personification of land, something he does not explicitly mention in his actual commentary on this verse. He does mention that the portrayal of the land as "spitting out" could be considered a "körperliche Metapher," which makes it at least anthropomorphic language.⁵⁹ It should be clear that אֶרֶץ at times becomes a person who has a very intimate relationship with YHWH. If the relationship between YHWH and the אֶרֶץ is so intimate, how could we describe the relationship between אֶרֶץ and the addressees?

3 The Addressees and אֶרֶץ

In short, the relationship between the addressees and the אֶרֶץ is not always so intimate. The אֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן is the place where the addressees are on their way in order to receive it, so that they can make a living on it, but from the start and especially in the parenetic frame of the Holiness Code the threat of losing or of literally being spat out by the אֶרֶץ hangs like a sword of Damocles over the heads of the addressees. On 12 occasions one finds references to "your land" (אֶרְצְכֶם), which seems to show that there is indeed a close relationship between the addressees and the אֶרֶץ.⁶⁰ These examples appear for the first time in ch. 19 and in some cases they seem to refer to a plot of land, like the examples in 19:9 and 23:22, which both talk of the edges of your land that may not be harvested. In some instances (with the previous two examples included) the term is used in close proximity to references to the גֵּר (19:9, 33; 23:22; 25:45). Are these texts trying to emphasise the right of the addressees to the land by reminding them that it is "their land" after all? Yet the problem with this expression is that half of the examples are in ch. 26. The first three are in the first part of the chapter which tells of all the blessings that YHWH will bestow on the people if they obey his laws. They are very positive, but they are embedded in the conditionality of v. 3.

Leviticus 26:3

<p>3 אִם-בְּחַקְתִּי תֵלְכוּ וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעִשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם:</p>	<p>3 If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, (NRSV)</p>
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All the good things following in the next 10 verses or so are dependent on this condition. And if one looks at the last three examples of אֶרְצְכֶם in ch. 26, then they are actually used to describe the precariousness of the relationship between the addressees and אֶרֶץ. Verse 33 says it well:

⁵⁹ Hieke, *Leviticus 16-27*, 691.

⁶⁰ Leviticus 19:9, 33; 22:24; 23:22; 25:9, 45; 26:1, 5, 6, 19, 20 and 33.

Leviticus 26:33:

<p>33 וְאַתְּכֶם אֶזְרָה בְּגוֹיִם וְהִרִיקְתִּי אֶחְרֵיכֶם תָּרֵב וְהִיְתָה אֶרְצְכֶם שְׂמֵמָה וְעָרֵיכֶם יִהְיוּ תְרֵבָה:</p>	<p>33 And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste. (NRSV)</p>
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There is some irony in this verse. The אֶרֶץ is described as “your land,” but it has no use since it has become a place of desolation.

In short, even if the use of אֶרְצְכֶם seems to imply a solid relationship between אֶרֶץ and the addressees, when one takes the conditionality of ch. 26 into account the relationship does not seem all that solid any longer, but rather more unstable. Add to that the threats in chs. 18 and 20 that the land will vomit out the addressees, then clearly the relationship between the addressees and land is the weakest link in the triangle constituted of YHWH, אֶרֶץ and addressees. The answer to the question posed in the title would probably be that “the אֶרֶץ” is the favourite of YHWH.

E CONCLUSION?

In the light of the principles identified by Habel I think one could make an argument that the ancient authors of the Holiness Code knew about the intrinsic worth of אֶרֶץ and they knew that without אֶרֶץ life itself was not possible. Yet in this text אֶרֶץ refers to Canaan and not what we would call earth or Earth, as the Earth Bible Project Team tend to do. The ancient authors also probably understood something of the connectedness of life. They could not think of their relationship with YHWH without at the same time thinking of אֶרֶץ. I wonder about the principle of resistance, though. The Earth Bible Team had already argued in 2000 for an element of resistance in Lev 18:24-30, when they asked whether there is “more than poetic imagery in the assertion that the land will ‘vomit out’ those inhabitants who defile the land?”⁶¹ Yet I pointed out above that the action of אֶרֶץ was triggered by YHWH punishing it. It seems more a case of YHWH resisting than אֶרֶץ, which has no guilt whatsoever but still gets punished. I also mentioned that there is an element of abuse in the relationship between YHWH and אֶרֶץ. Tucker has asked whether it would be accurate to talk of resistance and whether this is not simply a case of “actions have consequences”?⁶² As he puts it:⁶³

If we foul our nest, we will live in a foul nest. Houses built on fault lines or in the paths of hurricanes likely will fall, and their owners might think the earth angry.

⁶¹ The Earth Bible Team, “Guiding,” 53.

⁶² Tucker, “Ecological Approaches,” 359.

⁶³ Tucker, “Ecological Approaches,” 359.

It is clear though that אֶרֶץ was understood as an actor with its own will (mostly), who could at times make life very difficult for its inhabitants. אֶרֶץ is not simply a victim, but has a fair amount of agency. It is an actor that does things.

I thus do not think that this text (Lev 17-26) is all that anthropocentric. In the light of the two basic assumptions of anthropocentrism as defined by Habel,⁶⁴ namely that we are of a different order than nature, or that nature is an object, it is then evident that neither one is that clear in this text. אֶרֶץ is part of the triangle also involving YHWH and the addressees, and this interrelatedness implies agents of the same order. It should also be clear that אֶרֶץ is not an object, perhaps not so much for the addressees, but that role of objectifying אֶרֶץ seems to be reserved for YHWH, who punished the אֶרֶץ, or even better YHWH, who eventually remembers אֶרֶץ. Yet from the perspective of the addressees, אֶרֶץ is a subject of the kinds of verbs which do not always convey good news for the people living on it. It is no pushover.

When the Holiness Code is read within the historical context of the Persian period, it is clear why the addressees thought of their relationship with the אֶרֶץ as precarious. They write from the perspective of people who have lost their land and only received small parts of it back, since the province of Yehud in the Persian Period was much smaller than the kingdom of Judah conquered by the Neo-Babylonians. It was the loss of land which made them realise their dependence on it and their interconnectedness with it. This in itself does not bode all that well for us, since losing the Earth is not an option. There is no other planet to go to. It is difficult to see how we can take "ecological wisdom"⁶⁵ from this text, unless to underline what we already know.

And here one should also add a word of caution. In the Holiness Code אֶרֶץ is usually אֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן and not Earth, as Habel would like to call it; even if I think that could be the case in Genesis 1, it is not the case here. The Holiness Code in itself was probably also aimed at the growing Jewish diaspora community living in Babylon and Egypt, and thus outside of the אֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן.⁶⁶ The message of these laws for them was probably that you could be Jewish even if you lived outside of the land of Canaan, but the important issue was how you lived, and that identity should rather be linked with how we live and not where we live. This aspect of the text makes it difficult for us to take anything from it, since we have no other place to live than Earth.

⁶⁴ Habel, *Introducing*, 4.

⁶⁵ Ernst M. Conradie, "Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics," *Scriptura* 85 (2004): 126.

⁶⁶ See Eckart Otto, *Das Gesetz des Mose* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2007), 200-201.

I conclude with the words of a modern-day Jewish poet, David Kramer, who writes in Afrikaans, but whose words are not that encouraging. In the song it is Mother Earth singing to humans and the chorus follows:

Welkom hier aan boord (Welcome on board)
 Jammer maar die rit is so kort (Sorry but the trip is so short)
 Welkom hier aan die einde want (Welcome at the end because)
 Die ape het te slim geword. (the apes became too intelligent)

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