

*A Fiaola Reading of Micah 7 Towards
A Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutic*

*By
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**A *FIAOLA* READING OF MICAH 7 TOWARDS
A TUVALUAN ECOLOGICAL HERMENEUTIC**

A Thesis Presented to the
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Samoa

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Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Theology

by
Fiafiaga Lusama

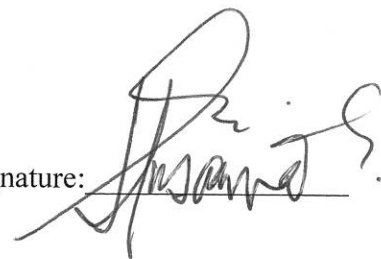
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ABSTRACT

Climate change and its impact on our people and our land is real. The Tuvaluan people have responded to these challenges differently. Recently, our people see immediate migration as the most viable option to address these impacts. This raises questions regarding our land, culture, and identity, especially with regards to the rising sea levels.

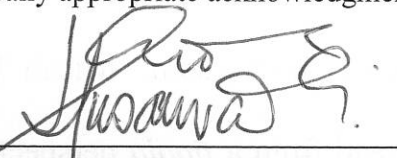
The thesis will address this ecological crisis from a biblical perspective in light of a Tuvaluan concept of *fiaola*. Micah 7 will be the focused biblical text and it will be read from a *fiaola* perspective utilizing literary criticism. The primary aim is to highlight ecological aspects in the text that will help enlighten the ecological crisis in the Tuvaluan context. This will help to draw out a message of Hope to my people. A message that will encourage my people to stay behind and fight and adapt to the challenges of climate change.

The guiding questions of this thesis include: Is there hope for our people and land in this crisis? Who will hear our *tagi* as *fiaola*? How would we respond as *fiaola*? Where will my people regain *ola* from a *fiaola* situation? In attempting some answers to these questions, I will then give a Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutic of *fiaola* as an alternative for our church members and people of Tuvalu, to base their understanding of the ecological crisis and their response to the crisis.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is about 8000 words in length, excluding the bibliography, has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Signed: 

Date: OCTOBER, 2017.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my dearest parents Petelu and Siatunuu Lusama, not forgetting my grandchildren Lakei T, Fianter T, and Angela P and especially to my dear wife Skeeter Lusama. May God bless you all.

Acknowledgments

This work would not have materialized without the support of many people. I therefore, would like to firstly acknowledge the great contribution and endless effort given by my supervisor Rev. Makesi Neemia in helping me in this work. *Faafetai tele lava*. I would also like to acknowledge the great support of Rev. Dr. Arthur Wulf, for his assistance in completing this written work. *Faafetai tele lava*.

To my parents Petelu Lusama and Siatunuu Lusama, your prayers and support has made this journey a successful one within my four years at this College. *Fakafetai, Fakafetai lasi*. To my Children, Claunita T. Lusama, Kilonu Lusama and Petelu jnr Lusama, and especially to my beloved granddaughters Lakei T, Fianter T and Angela P, thank you for the support that always grants me strength to overcome the challenges.

Last of all, to my dearest wife Skeeter Lusama, it has been a blessed journey with you during these tough and unforgettable four years in Malua Theological College; your wholehearted support was what I needed to succeed.

God bless you all.

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List of Abbreviations

ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
NBC	New Bible Commentary
NIB	New Interpreters Bible
TNAC	The New American Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
OTL	Old Testament Library

Introduction

Climate change is now one of the major issues at the global level. It is as much a social and moral issue as it is an environmental issue. Its far-reaching effects will touch all of us in some way. In fact, the rising of the sea level has impacted some of the low-lying atolls across the world especially in the Pacific region. This is due to the increase in temperature caused by climate change.

The current climate change that the world is experiencing, has historically been associated with wealthy countries when developing their economies. Sadly, the people who are affected the most are those in impoverished countries, who have historically contributed least to the problem. And even worse, these poor countries do not have the financial resources to cope with the problem.¹

In recent years, Tuvalu has become a global media target with the production of a number of documentaries about this small archipelago. The common story of a small atoll country whose very existence is threatened by sea-level rise. In this regard, Tuvalu is now taken as a prime example of the problems associated with climate change and sea-level rise. As time goes on, Tuvalu will perceive through the lens of environmental displacement and vulnerability to climate change.

Today, this is the reality faced by the people of Tuvalu. The people constantly struggle to overcome the fear of living on a sinking island. To address this ecological crisis, Tuvalu like most Pacific island nations, depend upon wealthier nations to assist with resolving this environmental crisis. However, most Tuvaluans seem to lose hope; that is, even though assistance is pouring in to counter the crisis, most people see immediate migration overseas as the most viable option. Many see migration as the easiest way out of this crisis without a thought of trying to handle it locally.

This thesis is an attempt to help the members of the Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu (EKT) (and to some extent the whole people of Tuvalu) to stay strong, and persevere against this crisis of climate change from their own Tuvalu local context. As a Christian nation, Tuvaluans, like most Pacific Island nations, look to the Bible

¹ See Robin Globus Veldman, "Introduction: Climate Change and Religion - Review of Existing Research" *JSRNC* 6.3 (2012), 256-257.

for guidance in times of crisis. In this regard, it is hoped that reading the Bible will draw out the spirit of nationhood and a biblical perspective to help our people address this ecological problem. It will also address the issue of land in the biblical text and then draw some analogies that can help Tuvaluans relate to their own land as well. Overall, the thesis will give a message of hope from which, members of the EKT can draw strength and perseverance, to face the ecological crisis caused by climate change from their own local context.²

To achieve the above aim, the thesis is structured as follows. Chapter One will discuss the Tuvalu context. This will include a brief discussion of the island and its people, its geographical location, economic, social, religious and environmental background. It will also address climate change and its impact on Tuvalu. In all, the discussion highlights the ecological crisis facing the people of Tuvalu prompted by climate change. This chapter will raise questions about the ecological crisis and how Tuvaluans respond to it. These questions will help guide the biblical reading in the next chapter.

Chapter Two will look at a biblical text, namely Micah 7. The first part will highlight my reading method and why this text was chosen; that is, Micah 7 will be read from a Tuvaluan *Fiaola* perspective using literary criticism as an interpretive tool. A Tuvaluan *Fiaola* perspective, I believe, is a reading that considers my position as a victim of the ecological crisis. Moreover, questions raised in Chapter One will guide my approach and dialogue with the text to see how Micah 7 speaks to my condition as a *Fiaola*. Focus will be on literary devices such as the literary structure of the text and grammatical formation. Looking specifically at multiple meanings and connotation of Hebrew terms, will draw out other alternative meanings relevant to my situation as a victim of the ecological crisis.

Chapter Three will highlight relevant connections from the findings in Chapter One and Chapter Two and deduce a Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutics. This dialogical approach between the biblical situation and the situation of Tuvalu, will draw some implications on the Tuvalu ecological crisis. Thus, Chapter Three will form the basis from which a Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutic will emerge. I

² Veldman, "Introduction: Climate Change and Religion - Review of Existing Research", 255-275. Veldman reviews the connection between Religion and Climate Change. He concludes that there is genuine connection between Religion and Climate Change, In this regard, Religion needs to engage with this crisis more in its praxis and reflections.

believe, this hermeneutic will help members of the EKT (or people of Tuvalu) deal with the ecological crisis they are facing now.

The conclusion will give findings and implications of the whole study above. It will also set up some recommendations to help members of the EKT address the environment crisis rather than simply leaving their island behind.

TUVALU CONTEXT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Introduction

This chapter will consider the context of Tuvalu and Climate Change. The discussion will be divided into two main parts. The first part is a brief background of Tuvalu. It will look at Tuvalu's geographical location, social and economic situations. This will hopefully give a general overview of the Tuvaluan context before the challenges of climate change.

The second part will discuss a general overview of climate change and its impact on Tuvalu. The discussion will provide observations, facts, and personal experiences on the impact of climate change to the people of Tuvalu and its land. This will raise important and significant questions that will help guide the biblical investigation on the following chapter.

1. Brief background of Tuvalu

The Western Pacific nation of Tuvalu, formerly known as the Ellice Islands consists of nine tiny coral atolls (26 Sq. km), home to about 12,000 people. Its location is south of the equator and west of the dateline about midway between Hawaii and Australia. Tuvalu is one of the world's smallest nations and became an independent state on the 1st of October, 1978.¹ Tuvalu's economy has been challenged in a way that it was known as a remote nation without mineral export to support and to sustain the economy. The Tuvalu Trust Fund (TTF), was established for "the intended purpose of helping to supplement national deficits, underpin economic development, and help the nation achieve greater financial autonomy."²

Tuvalu's main economic revenue comes from its EEZ, (Exclusive Economic Zone). The EEZ is a sea zone prescribed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the sea over which a state has special rights regarding the exploration and use of

¹ Atlas Pacific Islands and Australia, <http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/pacific/andaustralia.html>.

² Temate Melitiana, Personal Communication, January 16, 2017.

marine resources, including energy production from water and wind.³ In other words, Tuvalu's only asset is its sea region; for example, fishing companies pay licenses to enter Tuvalu waters for fishing.

Moreover, the economy is also funded by donors like the United States of America, Japan, Taiwan, Asian Development Bank and at large the World Bank. These countries and global institutions provide substantial funding to assist our developments; for example, infrastructures and other important developments that benefit our people.

With regards to general migration, the Tuvalu Population Statistic figures from 2012 to 2016 recorded an increase annually; that is, the population movement to overseas data shows that in 2012, 257 people left for overseas. The following years 2013, 2014 and 2015 recorded 2316, 2522 and 3237 respectively.⁴ It is assumed that most of these people have been migrated permanently. Considering the total population of Tuvalu, these are significant numbers. In other words, if this trend continues, there will be no one left on the islands in the very near future.

Looking at our brief historical background, we can see that our people depend mainly on donations and support from foreign countries. The main concern is, will these donors continue to help us while we are amid oblivion? Perhaps these so called good Samaritans can aid our people while benefitting themselves at the same time; that is, there is always some political agenda in most of the assistance rendered by wealthier nations.⁵ However, these political handouts are not enough and no one knows when they will cease; thus, increased effort from the locals is needed to help counter the ecological crisis. Furthermore, land is perceived as an inheritance from God. Losing the land will have major impact on the identity of the people of Tuvalu. In this regard, Tuvalu people, I believe, must try and persevere as much as we can to hold on to our heritage from God.

2. Climate Change

Per scientific research, climate change was caused from carbon emission from fossil fuel burning and industries. Later, during the development of the climate change

³ Samasoni Auina, Personal Communication, December 12, 2016.

⁴ Grace Alapati, Personal Communication, December 10, 2016.

⁵ Sallie Mcfague, *The Body of God, An Ecological Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), vii.

regime in the late 1980's and 1990's, they discovered the stratospheric "ozone hole."⁶ Although the greenhouse warming theory was put forward more than a century ago by the Swedish chemist Svante Arrhenius (1896), climate change did not emerge as a political issue until the 1990s. As late as 1979, efforts by the organizers of the First World Climate Conference to attract participation by policy makers proved unsuccessful, and even in 1985, when a major workshop on climate change was held in Villach, Austria.⁷ The increase in carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentration has risen rapidly within the last decades; the scientists have therefore confirmed and addressed this issue as the humanity's emission of greenhouse gases is the main cause of warming seen in the second half of the twentieth century.⁸ Consequently, without any doubt, climate change is a man-made destruction, in which every human being contributed, whether we contribute less or more, we are all considered as partakers to the problem of climate change. However, the greenhouse warming theory was in place centuries ago, this means there was enough time for wealthier countries to do something about the problem before it got out of hand.

2.1 Impacts of Climate Change in Tuvalu

2.1.1 Unpredictable weather patterns

Tuvaluan people have experienced a lot in weather changes recently. Speaking with one of the elders, he claims that Tuvalu usually has its own cyclone season during the year. Hence, people always have time to prepare when that time of the year approaches.⁹ However, these new weather changes have contributed to an unpredictable weather pattern for the people of Tuvalu; that is, there is no longer a cyclone season because cyclones now tend to come at any time of the year.

2.1.2 Long period of drought

This part relates to the above problem of unpredictable weather patterns. Not only are cyclones expected throughout the year but in some cases, long droughts have

⁶ Daniel Bodansky, "The History of Global Climate Change Regime," 2. Also see Robin Globus Veldman, "Introduction: Climate Change and Religion - Review of Existing Research", 258.

⁷ Daniel Bodansky, "Protection of Global Climate for Present and Future Generations of mankind," *The History of Global Climate Change* 43/53 (1988): 26.

⁸ Richard Black, "The brief history of Climate Change," in *IPCC Assessment Report*, Science and Environment (2013), 5.

⁹ Siaosi Finiki, Personal Communication, January 12 2017. Siaosi Finiki is currently the oldest person alive in the community of Funafuti.

become a common occurrence. From my own experience as a Tuvaluan born and raised, I have also experienced these weather changes. One such experience I can recall, was during the first worst drought period on my Island Nukulaelae in 2011-2012. This drought lasted for 16 months where every single family faced the challenge of water shortage. This drought, not only affected the supply of drinking water, but it also impacted greatly on our crop and poultry farming. Consequently, the people started slaughtering their chickens in fear of unnecessary loss due to this lack of water. This experience was the worst drought ever to affect our people. The plight was made even worse since there are no rivers on the island. That is, the only source of fresh water for families came from rain water which was stored in tanks and water cisterns.

2.1.3 Rising sea level

The rise of sea level is another major change, if not, the most challenging impact of climate change facing our people today. According to the Tuvalu Meteorological Director Niko Iona, the results of monitoring sea level saw a constant increase year by year.¹⁰ This increase in sea level is particularly obvious during the King tide season.¹¹ During this season, some of the houses which were once above sea level have now submerged below the rising sea. These changes, he adds, was a direct impact of global warming which causes climate change.¹²

The most significant impact of the rise in sea level is loss of land. As already indicated above, Tuvalu has limited land mass, not only for living but also for farming. Rising sea level has added a lot of pressure to this aspect of Tuvalu life. More and more land will continue to be lost when covered by the sea, thus, leaving the people with nowhere to live and farm.

Furthermore, the overflow of seawater on to the land has affected the soil, especially good soil used for agriculture. This has led to soil contamination and made it unsuitable for agricultural activities. This is problematic for our people since our land is our major source of food. Losing suitable land for food production directly affects the livelihood of our people.

¹⁰ See Australian Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO 2011. *Climate Change in the Pacific: Scientific Assessment and New Research Volume 1: Regional Overview. Volume 2: Country Reports*, 235-236.

¹¹ The King tide season now happens twice a year in the months of January and April. This is when the tide is much higher than the normal high tides experienced throughout the year. It has also become a tourist attraction since these unusual high tides point to the impact of climate change.

¹² Niko Iona, Personal Communication, January 15, 2017.

As a Tuvalu native resident, what does this mean for us now? What will happen to our survival as a people? Our traditional belief in Tuvalu is "the land is us and we are the land"; what will this mean in regards to our identity as Tuvaluans? In other words, what will we be when our land is gone? The land is shouting out *fiaola!* Our people too are shouting out *fiaola!*

Tuvaluans, like most Pacific Island people, believe that land is a gift and blessing from God. Therefore, caring and cultivating the land has always been their utmost priority. It is their belief that if they treat the land well, the land will look after them as well. The Government of Tuvalu has taken every step to maintain good cultivation of the land. According to the Agriculture Director Itaia Lausaveve, their office is constantly seeking support from the outside world in trying to find suitable crops that can grow on Tuvalu under a Government program called "The Tuvalu adaptation program against climate change." He further stated that this is part of a food security adaptation program and a way of assisting the lives of the Tuvaluan people.¹³

2.1.4 Social Problems

In close connection to the above issues, social problems underlie some of the challenges that are caused by climate change. The people have now become heavily dependent on imported goods as a substitute, due to the contamination of large parts of farm land. On the down side, this encourages the inefficiency of our people. Communal relations are also affected by individualism in the way people seem to look after their own self interests. Considering the increase in consumerism, the people of Tuvalu is now facing the problem of the increase in the cost of living; the people feel that the cost of living nowadays is more expensive compared to a few decades ago. This leads to more social problems such as theft and other criminal activities.

Summary

It is obvious from the discussion above that climate change has seriously challenged the livelihood of the people of Tuvalu. Unpredictable weather, droughts, social problems, and especially the rise in sea level have impacted the people of Tuvalu in ways that we have never experienced before. The constant loss of land by the rising sea level not only affects living conditions but more significantly our Tuvaluan identity. Like other Pacific nations, land is a core part of Tuvalu identity; our way of existence as

¹³ Itaia Lausaveve, Personal Communication, December 19, 2016.

we have always known, is now at risk. The reality is, we need to survive, and we need our land. In Tuvaluan terms, we are in a *fiaola* situation; our people are crying out *fiaola*. Our land is also crying out *fiaola*. Considering this ecological crisis, important questions are raised. What can we do now? Where are we to go? How can we solve these problems? Again, these questions encompass the *Fiaola* cry. That is, a victim's cry for survival.

***FIAOLA* READING OF MICAH 7**

Introduction

This chapter will now turn to the Bible and how a reading of the biblical text may help us address the ecological crisis discussed in Chapter One. The selection of Micah 7 is intentional because I believe it speaks of ecological aspects that are relevant to our aims.

The discussion will begin with an overview of the *fiaola* hermeneutics and method of reading which will be used in the exegesis. This will be followed by the exegesis of Micah 7, highlighting the ecological concerns in the text which are relevant to the formation of a Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutics.

2.1 Methodology

As indicated above, Micah 7 will be analysed through a *fiaola* reading and a *fiaola* hermeneutics. Special focus will be on ecological issues in the text. I will use Literary Criticism to unravel these ecological concerns in the text.

The word *fiaola* in the Tuvaluan language is a combination of two different words, *fia* and *ola*. The word *fia* means vying or crying for something; the word *ola* simply means life. Therefore, *fiaola* means vying or crying for life.¹ The word *fiaola* implies someone who needs to gain and/or regain stability in life; in other words, *fiaola* is a cry for help or an act of survival. The *fiaola* hermeneutic will acknowledge my place as a victim of the ecological crisis crying out for life.

The text will also be analysed with literary criticism. The focus will be on literary devices such as the literary structure of the text and grammatical formation. In other words, I will be looking specifically at multiple meanings and connotation of Hebrew terms, to highlight other alternative meanings that are relevant to my situation as a victim of the ecological crisis.

¹ Jackson W. Geoffrey, "fiaola" in *Tuvalu Dictionary: Tuvalu-English and English-Tuvalu*, (USA: Jackson Geoffrey, 2001), 68.

2.2 Exegesis of Micah 7

Most scholars see this text as a combination of proclamations of judgment and restoration.² It is within the restoration part that signifies hope for the inhabitants of the land. This resonates well with one of the main questions that I want to find out from the passage. Is there any hope for the people given their current crisis? Secondly, is there a way or a solution to resolve the *fiola* situation that the people now find themselves in? Theologically, what is God's plan for these poor people? With regards to the land, what have they done to cause the land to cry out for help?

Chapter 7 is generally acknowledged as a song of lament where the prophet expresses God's concern for his people.

Verses 1-3

The prophet Micah opens the chapter with an accusation of officials as unfaithful and corrupt. A plight that he himself has become a victim, for he refers to himself as someone who is searching for a vine in an empty vineyard. The significance of the summer harvesting echoes the law in the book of Deuteronomy. According to this law, after seven years, the owners of the vineyards are not to harvest their fields for a year; this allowed the foreigners and the poor people to harvest what was left on the vineyard.³ However, for Micah, the owners of the vineyards did not leave any harvest for him. So he cries out for help, seeking a faithful person but found none. What is left are corrupt people likened to sour grapes.⁴ For Micah, his cry for help seems endless.

The Hebrew term *אֵין-אֶשְׁכּוֹל* literally means 'no bunch of grapes' and thus depicts the hopelessness in the society.⁵ For Micah, this is the reason why he laments, since there are no more upright people in the land. Hence the prophet is not lamenting or 'woe' to oppression from outside, rather he is disappointed about how the people has laid the burden on the shoulder of their own household.⁶

² Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, eds., *Encountering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1999), 456. Also see Ralph L. Smith *Micah-Malachi WBC* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1984), 11-12; Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah TNAC* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 107.

³ Hans Walter Wolff, *Micah, A Commentary* (USA: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 205.

⁴ Smith *Micah-Malachi*, 55.

⁵ John Joseph Owens, *Analytical Key to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Bakers Book House, 1989), 842.

⁶ D. A. Carson, R. T. France, and G. J. Wenham., eds., *NBC* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1984), 831-834.

In verse 3, *כַּפַּיִם* is translated 'hands', but in Hebrew it refers to the palm of a hand.⁷ It depicts a picture of receiving things from others. However, it says they are skillful of doing evil giving a picture of the injustices in the society. Most importantly is how the prophet specifically talks about the officials, the concern here is for those who hold the power; their judgments are mainly based on the bribes they get from the people. In other words, the wealthy and the rich will have more and the poor will get poorer. This is the great disappointment for the prophet; he could not believe the people of God could do this to their own flesh and blood.

Verses 4-6

Verses 4-6 see a shift of judgment upon the evildoers. There is great injustice in the society; love is like the enemy of the father and a son, no more true relationship between men and women, there is hatred everywhere. In fact, the prophet only sees corrupt business practices, violence, and deceit. The people are only looking out for their own personal gain, especially in their acceptance of bribes. Trust has become an issue especially between family members. Even in close relationships like father and son, mother and daughter, and so forth. In this regard, such a society will not stand but will eventually collapse.⁸

Verse 7

The prophet now finds rest in verse 7 where he sees hope in God. And through Micah, God warned his people that He would not allow these injustices to continue upon His people. The prophet now finds hope amid the tragedy. He can still experience personal salvation and perhaps others will too.⁹ Moreover, this is the first time where the people have finally confessed their sins and their willingness to suffer because of it.¹⁰ In this light, it seems that God's assurance of restoration and protection upon his people coincides with the people's confession of their sins, and their acceptance of any punishment that stems from it.¹¹

Verses 8-20

⁷ Owens, *Analytical Key to the Old Testament*, 843.

⁸ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 55.

⁹ Arnold and Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, 456.

¹⁰ Smith *Micah-Malachi*, 58.

¹¹ Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 124-125. Also see Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 58.

The prophet divided this last part of the song into four stanzas: Zion's faithful confession (8-10); Micah's promise that all nations will find salvation in rebuilt Zion (11-12); worldwide desolation (13); his request that God will again shepherd his people (14), and lastly (15-20) is the message of hope from God and the people's hymn of praise.¹²

This final part of the book reflects the meaning of Micah's name "who is like God", while the conclusion of the book portrays the image of the Deuteronomic law. In the first stanza, the prophet is begging the people to refrain from their sins. This is the only way to renew their covenant with God. In other words, no matter how much they disobey God, He will always find a way to get them back. They will be vindicated by God before the eyes of their enemy and no one other than their God can do that.¹³

The second stanza (11-12) gives assurance to the people that God will one day give back their freedom. The building of the walls highlights security and protection from God. Thus, not only will protection come from outside forces, but from within as well; from those unfaithful people likened to sour grapes.

Verse 13 highlights one of the ecological concerns of the text. It implies the connection of the desolation of the land and the wickedness of the people. Interestingly, does this mean God is destroying his own creation just because of some evildoers' deeds? It seems that the land is paying for the sins of the people. Verses 14 and 15 provide a solution to the above crisis. For Micah, he prays that God will again lead his people into the blessed land as He has done previously. In other words, Micah wishes for the life that was once with the land to be renewed so that the people will share in this life again.

The sovereignty of God continues until verse 17 where great punishment befalls all nations. The Hebrew term לִחְכֹּךְ meaning lick is in a form of piel. The form piel is intensive, therefore it is not just a normal punishment but one where they will pay heavily for the price of their wrong doings. The metaphor of a snake also reflects the

¹² James Limburg, *Hosea-Micah, Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (USA: John Knox Press, 1988), 195. Also see G. J. Wenham et al., eds., *NBC* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 332.

¹³ James L. Mays, *Micah, OTL* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1976), 47.

enormity of the punishment they will go through; they will be treated like animals of the forest.¹⁴

Lastly, Micah closes the lament with the affirmation of God's everlasting love upon His people. No other god was compassionate enough to forgive the sin of his people except for God who will again show His faithfulness in every way. No matter how sinful the people are, no matter how far they go away from God, God will always find a way to bring them back to Him.

2.2.1 *Fiaola* Reading of Micah 7

Chapter 7: 1 begins with a preposition "woe," which signifies grief. Grief that detects someone with symptoms of great physical or mental distress. The prophet's suffering and grief is caused by the nonexistence of fruits which were supposed to be left in the vineyard during the fallow year. In other words, the leftovers from the harvest should have been the life saver for the poor and the foreigners according to the law. However, Micah found nothing in the vineyard and he now cries *fiaola* since his lot is no longer.

It is also to be noted here that *fiaola* is like a saying in the Samoan language; in fact, it has the same spelling and pronunciation. Dr. Vaitusi Nofoaiga's interpretation of the word *Fiaola*, in his Samoan context, shares a similar meaning. For Nofoaiga, *fiaola* means "wanting life" or "seeking life." He then further explains that *fiaola* in Samoan is looking for opportunities to get life; in other words, *fiaola* is an "opportunity seeker."¹⁵ This understanding, I believe, shares a similar meaning with my understanding of *fiaola* as "vying for survival." That is, to survive, a person must seek and look for opportunities to get life.

¹⁴ Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 133. Also see Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 59.

¹⁵ Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "Seeing Matthew 7: 24 - 8: 22 as a *Fiaola* (opportunity seeker), A reading from a Samoan Postcolonial location in Hybridity." A paper presented at the OBSA meeting at Piula Theological College, Samoa, 2015.

Another word that is closely associated with *fiaola* is *tagi*. *Tagi* in Tuvalu is simply crying. However, the reason for crying varies according to the occasion; for example, a person usually cries when faced with difficult problems especially the passing away of a close relative. Then there is someone who cries when he or she is full of joy. For *fiaola*, it is always a cry of sadness and suffering; that is, *tagi* also illustrates an ideology of someone in a *fiaola* situation. The plight of climate change in Tuvalu is a good example of people who *tagi* because of sadness and desperation. They have no other reaction to climate change but to *tagi*; their *tagi* signifies *fiaola*, and at the same time they are asking themselves – ‘where and how will they find *ola*’.

This *tagi* of *fiaola* is evident in the beginning of Chapter 7 where Micah cries out “woe.” It is a cry of a person grieving or in distress because of unfortunate circumstances. The prophet has been emotionally affected by the sinful nature of the people of God. Perhaps, Micah sees a bleak future for coming generations. Also, these injustices have affected the land; that is, the land in which *ola* was sacred has now become a place without *ola*. For Micah, a *fiaola* will not get what he or she cries for in this land. Furthermore, the land will suffer for no one is left to cultivate and maintain its fertility. In other words, land cultivation makes the land fertile to provide *ola* for the people, but the land is now idle and has lost its usefulness.

In verse 2, the author begins with the Hebrew word אָבַד, which literally means, *has perished*. Therefore, it refers to something that has died because of a harsh condition; or it could refer to something which has been demolished because of the carelessness of the owners. This is probably an indication of the reality of the society that the prophet lives in.¹⁶ Moreover, looking at the first verse, this may explain why

¹⁶ Frederick W. Schmidt, “Micah” *ABD*, Vol 4 (New York: Doubleday Publishing Group, 1992), 807.

the prophet did not find any good fruits of the summer harvest. With regards to the vine tree mentioned here, scholars understand this as referring to the people of Israel; those whom were chosen by God, and were expected to bare good fruits within their lives.¹⁷ However, Micah’s experience was the totally opposite of God’s expectations.

Moreover, it was believed that if a tree does not bare good fruits, it is either a sign of a bad tree, or the land is unproductive. This implies that people who are expected to bare good fruits could not yield good ones because they have become bad ones by rejecting God through sin. This kind of society gives a grim picture of how dishonesty and greed have gotten to a point where one cannot trust the most intimate of human relations such as a friend, lover, wife, father, child, or master.¹⁸

Furthermore, when we analyze the different characters in this chapter, we see a division within the characters. On one hand, there are wealthy and noble people who are also evildoers; on the other hand, there are people suffering, grieving and who have been treated badly. These people are victims of unfair treatment by the authorities or evildoers. From a *fiaola* point of view, these people are crying out for help. For the prophet, there is no help or life in the land; the land itself is crying out for justice and fairness. In other words, the land is *fiaola* as well.

Verse 13 above talks about the *tagi* of the land. The land has paid the price for the wickedness of the unjust people. However, God has also offered a remedy for the land’s *tagi*; for the people to repent from their sins. This is the only way God will renew the land and make the people enjoy the fruits of the land again.

However, Micah still believes that there is hope. For Micah, this hope lies with God. The prophet trusts that only God can hear his cry of *fiaola*. God will again

¹⁷ Wenham, *NBC*, 831

¹⁸ Limburg, *Hosea-Micah, Interpretation*, 193.

rebuild the walls and extend the boundaries; the prophet will again experience God's protection and care. God's salvation will bring light to the prophet, a light and salvation for the prophet will be bad news for those evildoers. It will be their downfall and their sins will be punished.

This leads us to the question of *fakaola*. *Fakaola* in Tuvalu simply means 'to save' or 'saviour'. In my opinion, Micah's *tagi* is also an attempt to look for a *fakaola*. For the land is full of injustices where evildoers continue to enjoy mistreating the poor to get more wealth; Micah, on behalf of the people who are suffering cries out for a *fakaola*. For Micah, *fakaola* comes from God; in fact, he believes God is their *fakaola*. In his act as *fakaola* God will destroy his enemies and rebuild his people on the land; God also guarantees protection and care for his faithful people. A question then arises, does the *fiaola* have a part to play in this process of *fakaola*? Can a *fiaola* be a *fakaola* to others as well? In regards to land, can people be a *fakaola* for the land?

One other word that is commonly associated with *tagi* and *fiaola* in Tuvalu is *malemu*. *Malemu* in Tuvalu simply means drowning. It usually happens to those people who cannot swim. *Malemu* can also apply to someone that has suffered a lot, especially those who are suffering from the pressure of trying to meet obligations in life. From a *fiaola* perspective, a person who is *malemu* will *tagi* as a *fiaola* longing to be saved by a *fakaola*. These Tuvaluan words point to hope; that is, there is hope in our *tagi* and *fiaola* and even though we are *malemu*, there is always hope in the *fakaola*. From an ecological perspective, Tuvalu land is *fiaola* and is *malemu* from the rising sea level, how can the people of Tuvalu be a *fakaola* to their land?

Summary

The exegesis above highlights some important aspects of Micah 7 which can help in the formation of a Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutics. Micah's cry for salvation because of the injustices in the land can be seen as the *tagi* of a *fiaola*; A *tagi* of a person who is *malemu* in the context of continuing injustices. For Micah, the only hope for salvation lies with God; in other words, Micah sees God as the *fakaola* for the *fiaola*.

Chapter 3

**MICAH 7 AND THE TUVALU ECOLOGICAL CRISIS:
AN ATTEMPT TOWARDS A TUVALUAN ECOLOGICAL
HERMENEUTIC**

Introduction

This chapter will highlight some analogies between the exegetical reading of Micah 7 and the Tuvalu ecological crisis. This will draw out a message of hope to deal with the ecological crisis affecting our people.

Secondly, it will look at some of the alternatives or practical solutions which will help our people stand against climate change. These alternatives will provide an answer to our *tagi* of *fiaola*. These resolutions or answers may provide a *fakaola* for the Tuvaluans - a *fakaola* in terms of a sustainable environment that would provide confidence for the people to live and enjoy our land.

3.1 Micah 7 and Tuvalu Ecological Crisis

In our investigation in Chapter Two above, the text of Micah 7 highlights some issues that could help formulate an ecological hermeneutic from a Tuvaluan context.

3.1.1 Injustices

Micah 7 identifies the acceptance of bribes, asking for rewards, oppression, and sin as forms of injustices in the land. These evildoers include the judges who accepted bribes, the prince who asks for rewards, and the great one who is greedy and corrupt, and not the least, the best of society who are useless.¹ For Micah, there is no righteous person in the land, and this is why God's judgment fell upon the people and the land.

¹ Smith, *Micah-Malachi*, 55.

In the Tuvalu context, I believe, the wealthy countries and their selfish concern about their own economies prompted the injustices now facing Tuvalu. Even though they give help in terms of handouts and assistance, their ulterior motive is to first and foremost serve their own interests, especially economic ones. These wealthy countries are the main contributors to climate change through their industrial developments; for these nations, the plight of Tuvalu and island nations are secondary. Furthermore, some Tuvaluans who do not care about the land and think of saving themselves first, I think, fall in this category.

3.1.2 The land as innocent victim

The impact of the injustices performed by the evildoers on the land is very significant. God in his judgment of the injustices, made the land desolate. In other words, the land is an innocent sufferer in this case. The question that arises then is, how does the land respond to this? How can we hear the voice of the land crying (*tagi*) out *fiaola*? For Micah, the redemption of the land also lies with the positive response of the people to God's salvation.

The Tuvaluan context shares similar concerns especially with regards to land. The land, besides the people, is also significantly most affected in this crisis. For the Tuvaluans, the people and the land are interconnected so the contamination of the land by sea water and its slow disappearance under rising sea levels has impacted their livelihood in all facets. So, for the Tuvaluans, their *tagi* is also the land's *tagi*. Moreover, their *tagi* of *fiaola* is synonymous with that of the land. In other words, the redemption of the land depends highly on the response of the people to the crisis.

3.1.3 Hope

For Micah, there is hope of restoration for both the people and the land. As discussed in Chapter Two above; this hope is based solely on God's continuous care

and love for his people. For this redemption to be fully effective, the people (and the land) must repent from their sins. Therefore, the people (and the land) must respond positively to God's redemption act. Micah helps his people through prayers and confessions and thus God restores His people and maintains their covenant with Him. Hence, we can identify the situation of Micah as the people rejecting God, as they opt to do injustice in the presence of God. A society that is full of hopelessness, but God's love remains intact with them. At last, they regain what they have lost, such as freedom, happiness and their independent environment, as they respect their neighbours and provide offerings to their living God.

For the Tuvaluans, there is also hope; although the ecological crisis is in a vital and extreme situation, hope is still possible through God. As Christians, Tuvaluans believe God in his own way will help them. The challenge for them is how this divine help comes in practical ways. First and foremost, the people must repent from their sins. In other words, the people must acknowledge and know their sins so they can refrain from them. From an ecological perspective, their lack of care for the environment, whether in a large or small scale, must change. The people must show more concern in their treatment of the land and its environment.

Our people have a different situation as our lives have been threatened by the impacts of climate change. These impacts, as indicated above, puts us in a *fiaola* situation for the land has been destroyed, and it has put our people in an unstable situation. That is, the contamination of our land has caused the insufficient provision for our people with their everyday needs.² A harvest that was usually enjoyed by our

² Hans Gunter Branch, et. al, eds., *Coping with Global Environmental Change, Disaster and Security*, (Berghot Foundation: Springer Press, 2011), 12

people has turned into an empty harvest. Our land is suffering; the people is suffering too.

Tuvalu is our heritage and was once where everyone used to live happily; now it has become a land and a place of hopelessness. We are facing a tumultuous situation, a situation that will impact our future generations significantly.³ If this crisis continues at this rate, the coming generations will no longer enjoy our land that is our heritage from God.

The inevitable result will be a forced migration.⁴ An image that reflects the exile period within the book of the Prophet Micah, is when Israel was taken away from their prominent land to serve and worship other nation's traditions and gods.

3.2 An attempt towards a Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutic

I believe a Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutic can be achieved in and through our understanding of *fiaola*. The burning questions that drive us are: Is someone hearing our *tagi* of *fiaola*? What do we need to do as *fiaola* in order to be saved from this crisis? And where will we get *fakaola* from? As Christians, we believe, God is our *fakaola*. However, as victims experiencing the crisis first hand, we need God's help in practical solutions. Therefore, are we getting *fakaola* from these wealthy countries? Do we get *fakaola* from our own people?

From our discussion above, I believe, the global and local responses to this crisis is all part and parcel of *fakaola*. However, the thesis is interested mainly with how locals, or our people, understand this crisis in their *tagi* of *fiaola*. Also, how our people respond as *fiaola* and hopefully be part of or be a *fakaola* for our land and our wellbeing

³ Enele Sopoaga, A speech presented at the Small Island Region Adaptation Plan for Climate change. Lima Peru, December 09, 2014. Sopoaga's speech highlights a hopeless future for our future generation. It is a presentation to convince other nations that we need *ola* through their support.

⁴ Etienne Piquet, Antonio Pecouel, Paul De Guchteneire, eds., *Migration and Climate Change* (Unesco: Cambridge University Press: 2011), 2.

as well. In that sense, our people will no longer see migration as the first and immediate response to the crisis, but will help to combat the crisis as much as we can.

Micah sees hope in God as Israel's *fakaola*. He then suggests that to receive *ola* again from the *fakaola*, the people must rebuild their relationship with God. The people must repent and return and worship God and keep their covenant with Him. The question then arises for us Tuvaluans, what did we do wrong? What are our sins? How do we repent in our actions? For us, the wealthy nations are the ones who need repentance. They should decrease their gas emissions to save the planet, to save us. In saying this, I also believe, our main sin is relying too much on foreign help but less effort in helping our own situation. We need to be more vigilant and proactive to help ourselves first before depending on our bigger brothers to help.

Fiaola is not so much just an act of *tagi* and hope for the best that someone will help; *fiaola* is also the person who *tagi*'s. This person needs to act to seek *ola* and in most instances become a *fakaola* to others. I do not believe that it is God's plan for us to leave our country. The crisis is a man-made destruction, it is also possible that we as humans are responsible for correcting this unfortunate mistake.

Finally, as Tuvaluans, we must reaffirm our interconnectedness with our land. What would we be if our land is there no more? To give our land a voice, this interconnectedness must be revisited and reaffirmed. Our response to the crisis is the same as giving a voice for our sinking land. What we do is not for us only but for our land.

Therefore, *fiaola* encompasses hope (in God), rejecting injustices through repentance, and reaffirming the interconnectedness with the land and environment. It is this understanding that will drive us to do more in addressing our ecological crisis.

Therefore, *fiaola* serves as a relevant Tuvaluan hermeneutic to face the ecological crisis facing our people today.

3.2.1 Alternatives for Tuvalu against Climate Change

Tuvalu has recently adapted a strategic plan that focuses on the reclamation of the land 200m from the actual ground or land. The aim of this alternative plan of reclaiming the land is part of maintaining and regaining our underground water that is affected by rising sea level. This alternative has been an effective plan so far. Moreover, this alternative also targets the capability of re-planting and organising crop farming so that our people may continue to work on their land.

Tuvalu was also recorded as the least contributor to climate change through fossil fuels, especially in the number of motor-vehicles on the islands compared to other countries. This finding helps the government in their policies to control the importing of motor-vehicles as a way of decreasing the emission of fossil gas. Moreover, electricity has been targeted by our leaders so that in the near future, we will no longer rely on electrical power, but will be fully functioning using energy solar power. These alternatives are part of the implementation plans set up by some Nations. Their plans include helping small island regions and their adaptation plans against the impacts of climate change.⁵

Moreover, our leaders will continue to target other countries in terms of voicing our concerns as a small hopeless Nation that stands openly on the frontier lines of the sinking small Nations. This alternative can be an unsuccessful process, as these big countries have different opinions on climate change in terms of defending their injustices. However, on the other hand we still have the support in terms of funding, and

⁵ Steffen Bohn, *Upsetting the Offset, The Political Economy of Carbon Market* (England: May Flybooks Press, 2009), 182.

projects that help our people go against climate change. Although these funds cannot cater to the demand of our plans, it is still helping our people on the road forward against climate change.⁶ These alternatives not only sustain and pursue our strategic plan, but it is also a way to search for solutions and answers for the critical ecological crisis. Our leaders have been searching everywhere to find answers, one of our Prime Minister's speech in a climate change conference in Peru, convinced the representatives by saying;

*Look into the eyes of the first child you see, and imagine
What those eyes will see in ten to twenty years. Will they
see hell or will they see a sustainable planet?*⁷

This is what our Prime Minister Honourable Enele Sopoaga stated during the meeting in Peru; it was a way to convince and to acknowledge the reality of our future generations. It was also a political alternative in terms of high level negotiations. The focus of these negotiations is to defend our Nation from the impacts of climate change which causes huge risks to our ecological development. Wealthy nations on the other hand are also defending themselves by disagreeing that climate change is an understanding of controversy, inaction and opportunity.⁸

These alternatives, I believe, is our way forward towards combating climate change. They are ways in which we at least can maintain our Land as our habitat from God. From a *fiaola* hermeneutic perspective, these are proactive ways of seeking opportunities to achieve *ola*.

⁶ Richard W. Mansbach and Kirsten L. Taylor, *Introduction to Global Politics*, 2nd edition. (London: Routledge, 2013), 102.

⁷ Enele Sopoaga, A speech presented at the Small Island Region Adaptation Plan for Climate change. Lima Peru, December 09, 2014.

⁸ Mike Hulme, "Why we Disagree about Climate Change" in *Understanding Controversy, Inaction and Opportunity*, (London: Cambridge University, 2009), 110.

Conclusion

Tuvalu is our heritage, given to us by God to live and enjoy. It is a place where our people should live and share our valuable culture and traditions; land and culture gives us our identity. However, our identity and livelihood has now been severely challenged by the impacts of climate change. It is in this context that this paper attempts to address the impacts of climate change; impacts, our people are desperate to find the answers to, and to find ways to sustain our land and hold on to our identity.

Migration has now been seen by most Tuvaluans as the most viable option to handle this crisis. It is a move, I think, that disregards all our history and especially our identity; for land is the main identity marker for us, therefore, losing our land will affect us significantly as a people.

From a *fiaola* perspective, Micah chapter 7 and the Tuvalu context was read highlighting aspects that may help in understanding and coping with the ecological crisis. Micah 7 identifies the wrongdoings, the injustices and the perpetrators in the land. He also highlights the interconnectedness of the injustices and the fate of the land. Amid all God's judgment on the people and land, Micah also relays a message of hope; a message that resonates well with our people. Tuvaluans must stay and rebuild, and maintain the land, for God will help us. The prophet with his hopelessness inevitably turned into happiness when God restored His people.

In Micah 7, the prophet cries out *fiaola*; he saw no *ola* in the land. However, he also plays a significant part in helping God fulfil his restoration plan for his people. In other words, Micah as a *fiaola* has also become a part of a *fakaola* for the people and land. From the Tuvaluan context, the *fiaola* should not just *tagi* but be proactive in bringing about the *fakaola* for our people. Immediate migration should not be the primary solution to the ecological crisis. As *fiaola* we must be the first to act and the first to seek opportunities to help our own survival.

I believe, a Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutic of *fiaola* encompasses our drive for survival. It also involves seeking opportunities for survival. More importantly, it highlights our faith in God. We *tagi* as representative of our people and land because we are *fiaola* and *tagi* towards God. A *tagi* and *fiaola* of a Tuvalu Christian who has deep faith that God in his own way will hear and respond positively to our *tagi*.

Our actions regarding strategic planning which are now in place is a way forward in vying for our survival. It is our part in God's delivery of a *fakaola* for our *tagi* of *fiaola*. Therefore, hope for us is partially in our own hands. As one common saying goes, "We must do our part and God will do the rest."

It was the hope of this thesis to provide a way that may help the members of the EKT or the people of Tuvalu as a whole fight against the negative impacts of climate change. I believe, this Tuvaluan Ecological Hermeneutic of *fiaola* is one significant contribution to our people in understanding and addressing the challenges on climate change, especially the rising sea levels. At the same time, our faith in God, who does not abandon our people in our time of crisis, remains secure.

Glossary

<i>fiaola</i>	vying for survival
<i>fakaola</i>	save or saviour
<i>fia</i>	vying or crying for something
<i>malemu</i>	drowning
<i>ola</i>	life
<i>tagi</i>	cry or plead

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