Euphemisms and Metaphors for Menstruation in the Old Testament and Two Ghanaian Bible Translations

Charles Owiredu

Daniel Institute, Central University

Abstract

This article discusses the metaphors for menstruation in the Old Testament. It aims to explore the metaphorical conceptualizations of menstruation in the Hebrew Bible and compare them with their translations in two Ghanaian Bibles (Twi and Gã). The Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is used to analyze the data. The findings of the study indicate that in both Ghanaian and Israelite thought regarding menstruation, ideas of indisposition and separation are prominent. This leads to the identification of the metaphors, MENSTRUATION IS AN ILLNESS, MENSTRUATION IS SEPARATION, and MENSTRUATION IS A GENDER MARKER. The understanding of the metaphors of menstruation gleaned from the euphemisms used for menstruation in both cultures seems to give greater comprehension to the Ghanaian reader of the texts on menstruation in the Old Testament.

1. Introduction[1]

In recent times, linguists have dedicated much attention to discussing metaphors beyond figures of speech. Cognitive metaphor theorists are focusing their research on a conceptual level. This shift has become

---

[1] I take cognizance that, for some, the topic at hand could be sensitive, especially since it is engaged by a male author. To honor the lived experiences of women, I interviewed Ghanaian women between the ages of 30 and 70 in the process of gathering information on the euphemisms for menstruation. Ghana has long-standing traditions and rituals associated with menstruation. Since menstruation is seen as a symbol of fertility and womanhood, female respondents were comfortable in discussing it openly as long as euphemisms and metaphors were employed.

SATS
Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

popular in many fields of study, but its application to the field of Biblical Studies has not been sufficiently explored. Several scholars have studied menstrual practices in cultures of the world. Some work has been done in Ghana (Agyekum 2002), and in India, where it is strongly associated with dirtiness (Dhingra Kumar and Kour 2009). However, no significant work has been published on the metaphorical conceptualization of menstruation in the Bible in relation to Ghanaian thought and languages.

Menstruation is a biological experience that is interpreted in different ways in various cultural and religious contexts. The concept of menstruation is at the very core of social relations between men and women in Ghanaian culture, as was also the case in ancient Israelite culture. The conception of menstruation as ill-health or being symbolically unclean and dangerous is present in the thought of Ghanaians as was the case of the ancient Israelites. In both Ghanaian and Israelite cultures menstrual blood is interpreted in terms of pollution or "matter out of place," in the words of Douglas (2002, 50). There is the fear of the danger of the menstruant transferring her impurity to others.

The notion that uterine blood is polluting and therefore sociologically taboo still thrives among traditional Ghanaians. This has led to the plain biological descriptor *menstruation* being avoided and euphemisms being used instead. The euphemisms yield abstract concepts which can be comprehended in concrete terms because they are metaphors. The question this study seeks to answer is, what are the metaphorical conceptualizations of menstruation expressed in the Hebrew Bible and their translations in the Twi and Gã Bibles? This article explores the metaphoric content of the euphemisms Ghanaians use for menstruation in order to find out how similar they are to Israelite conceptions found in the Old Testament. The article seeks to provide a linguistic description of the ways in which verbal taboos relating to menstruation are represented in the Bible. It brings to the attention of linguists and translators the nature of verbal taboos in biblical and African thought, with a special focus on menstruation.

Various Old Testament examples will provide an understanding of the metaphoric conception. The analysis is based on selected texts on menstruation from Genesis, Leviticus, and Ezekiel and their translations into Twi and Gã. The English translations of the Hebrew are my own. The aim is to investigate, from the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the metaphors used as euphemisms for menstruation in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and some African translations. It is shown that these euphemisms instantiate the metaphors, MENSTRUATION IS AN INDISPOSITION/ILLNESS, MENSTRUATION IS SEPARATION, and MENSTRUATION IS A GENDER MARKER. The article argues that one way of unearthing he contextual understanding of menstruation beyond its dictionary definition is by extracting relevant conceptual metaphors from euphemisms assigned to menstruation in various cultures.

It is believed the awareness of such metaphorical conceptualizations can help in the translation process. Therefore, the study explores the conceptual understanding of menstruation expressions, approaching this from the point of view of metaphors to illustrate how they work in religious texts. Examples are limited to menstruation references in the Hebrew Old Testament and two Ghanaian translations. Previous studies of metaphors have not compared menstruation euphemisms in various translations of the Old Testament, especially Ghanaian languages. The aim is to fill this gap. Therefore, the present study will contribute to the existing body of literature seeking to apply cognitive linguistics to the area of Biblical Studies. It also contributes to the ongoing academic discussion on metaphor in the construction of meaning. The article begins with an introduction to the study and a brief discussion of euphemism and the concept of menstruation. Next, attention is given to the discussion of conceptual metaphors.

This is followed by a section on the material and methods for the study. Subsequent sections look at the metaphorical conceptualization of menstruation expressions, specifically in Hebrew, Twi, and Gã. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings.

2. Theoretical Background

This section discusses definitions and various categories of conceptual metaphors analyzed in this study. Since the 1980s, cognitive linguists have been discussing metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon associated with human thinking and behavior. Metaphors are present in our everyday conversations, not just in language, but also in our thought and action (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 3). One cannot imagine a language without metaphor and metonymy, two forces inherent in the basic structure of human speech (Ullman 1979, 223). Though we may think of metaphors as mere figurative speech employed to embellish speeches and texts, we can extract more from them in terms of how humans structure their conceptualizations.

In discussing Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 5) define metaphor as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another." They explain that metaphors reveal how people perceive their world; how they structure their experience. Language is filled with concepts that reveal how speakers conceptualize and make sense of the world (2003, 3). Metaphors can help make an abstract experience more concrete (49). For example, life, an abstract experience, can be made more concrete by describing it in terms of a journey or a war. Kövecses (2000, 4) also defines metaphor simply as "understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another conceptual domain." Mapping is done from a "source domain" to a "target domain" (Lakoff 1993, 202). In other words, "one concept [the target] is understood in terms of the other

[the source]" (Feyearts 2000, 60). Kövecses (2000, 4) notes that "the target domain is the domain that we try to understand through the use of the source domain." That is, CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN (X) IS TARGET DOMAIN (Y). For example, in the metaphor DEATH IS A JOURNEY, one conceptual domain (death) is understood in the terms of another conceptual domain (journey). Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides an important framework for explaining metaphors in language as well as cognition. In analyzing the metaphors of menstruation in the Torah, this study employs conceptual metaphor theory as its framework.

Three subtypes of metaphors proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (2003, 10–33) are used. These subtypes include structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors (Kövecses 2010). Regarding structural metaphors, the mappings are between the source and target domains. For example, the metaphor DEATH IS A JOURNEY maps knowledge between the concept of journey and death. Conceptual correspondences such as these indicate that both concepts (death and journey), have a beginning (i.e., departure) and an end (i.e., destination).

The second subtype, orientational metaphors, are coherent metaphors that aid in making sense of concepts in a coherent manner based on our image-schema knowledge of the world. Kövecses (2010, 35) observes that orientational metaphor is about basic human spatial orientations, such as up-down. Thus, the orientational concepts forming the basis for our evaluations include concepts such as IN and OUT, UP and DOWN, ABOVE and BENEATH, and FRONT and BEHIND. Examples of orientational metaphors are SADNESS IS DOWN, HAPPINESS IS UP. Here, image-schematic knowledge is used. This image-schematic knowledge is acquired from our experiences through our interactions with the world to evaluate our concepts.

The third subtype is ontological metaphors. Cognitive linguists see ontological metaphors as involving ways of viewing intangible concepts as entities. Included in these concepts are feelings, activities, and ideas (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), when these experiences are identified as substances, they can be categorized, grouped, and quantified, which enables researchers to reason about them. By relating our experience to physical objects and substances, we can see parts of these experiences as discrete entities. As observed by Kövecses (2010, 34), ontological metaphors provide a way to view events, activities, and ideas (target domain) as objects, and containers (source domain) that are commonly found in speeches to aid the audience in understanding the abstract concept in terms of the entities. The ontological subtype divides further into personification, entity, and container metaphors. In this article, we will also briefly look at the personification of menstruation.

3. Language and Method

3.1 Languages and data

Several books have been published in Twi and Gã. However, the most accessible source is the Bible. In this study, the data for analysis is drawn from the Hebrew Bible, the Twi and Gã Bible translations, and daily conversational discourses. The Biblical Hebrew data were gathered from Genesis, Leviticus, and Ezekiel. The two Ghanaian languages Twi and Gã are widely spoken in Ghana. About 80% of the population speaks Twi as a first or second language (Garry et al. 2001, 8). Both languages are Kwa languages, which belong to the Niger-Congo family. Twi is an Akan language spoken in Ghana and the Ivory Coast. There are several dialects of this language, but this study employs the Akuapem dialect. Gã is spoken by most of the ethnic groups in Southern Ghana, especially in and around the capital city,

Accra. The native speakers of the language are also known as the Gã or Gãs. This language is taught in Ghanaian schools. Apart from the native speakers of the language who are the inhabitants of Accra, the language is widely spoken as a second language by a large population of Ghanaians who through urban migration have relocated to Accra and its surrounding towns.

In addition to the Bibles in the three languages, I also extracted figures of speech from spoken Twi and Gã in everyday conversation, like the television and the radio. Being fluent in both Gã and Twi, I conducted unstructured interviews with some scholars who are native speakers of both languages to confirm or correct my interpretations of the metaphors. Following this, I extracted the euphemistic expressions used as metaphors, and grouped the data.

The translations from Hebrew into English are mine. Among the several versions of the Twi Bible, the 1964 version is chosen for this study. The Gã Scriptures in this article were taken from the 2006 version of the Gã Bible.

3.2 Mode of analysis

The data gathered were collected by using the source domain-oriented approach. The menstruation expressions were identified and grouped into metaphorical mappings for the analysis. I consulted the Hebrew text to find out which metaphors were used to instantiate the menstruation expressions. I then cross-checked the translations of these expressions in the Twi and Gã Bibles. Next, I described the metaphorical structure of menstruation in Biblical Hebrew and compared it with the data for Twi and Gã. The metaphors extracted from the menstruation euphemisms are categorized according to their different cognitive functions.

In my comparative analysis, I used a methodology suggested by Kövecses (2010) for the identification and description of metaphors.

Throughout the article SMALL CAPS are used for conceptual metaphors. Twi and Gã expressions are put in italics.

4. Ghanaian Euphemisms for Menstruation

4.1 Euphemism

Allan and Burridge (2006) have discussed politeness and impoliteness in relation to what is described as x-phemisms. According to them, x-phemisms are orthophemism, euphemism, and dysphemism. Orthophemism (straight talk) refers to a word or phrase that is more formal, while euphemism (sweet talk) is more colloquial and figurative (Allan and Burridge 2006, 32). For example, in English, the word *menstruation* may be considered an orthophemism, while *period* may be understood as a euphemism. Euphemisms are spoken to save face. By dysphemism, we are referring to a word or phrase that carries connotations that are offensive to the speaker and those being addressed (26). Moreover, there are instances where orthophemisms and euphemisms could be considered dysphemisms.

In the Ghanaian cultural context, menstruation is a verbal taboo (Agyekum 2002), so it is not mentioned by name. People avoid this taboo by creatively using euphemistic expressions to find ways of talking about this uncomfortable topic. For example, in reference to a woman in her menstrual period, the Twi would be, *ne nsa aka fam*, (her hand has touched the ground). There are two models for speaking euphemistically of menstruation in Twi: positive and negative. The positive model is based on the idea that menstruation is power and purification (Agyekum 2002, 378).

In this article, my focus will be on the menstruation euphemisms of the Israelite and Ghanaian cultures. Menstruation euphemisms can be broken down into the following themes: color, visitor, identity, indisposition, and seclusion (Allan and Burridge 1991, 81). This study explores three themes, namely, identity, indisposition, and seclusion. In the next sections, I will be discussing the ideas about menstruation in the Ghanaian culture.

4.2 The menstruant in Ghanaian society

In traditional Ghanaian society, there are many taboos associated with menstruation. These include a menstruant being prohibited from cooking for any man (e.g., Rattray 1927, 74). The menstruant is thought to be so dangerous that even crops have to be protected from her evil influence (Rattray 1932, 380). She is not allowed to enter sacred places nor touch sacred objects (74–75). According to Field (1948, 137), the menstruant is forbidden from entering streams to fetch water. The married menstruant was not permitted to speak directly to her husband, except through a spokesperson, who could be either a child or an elderly woman who has reached menopause.

In a typical Ghanaian traditional society, the menstruant was required to stay outside her home, either behind the house or in a special house built for women to stay in during their menstrual periods. This is because she is perceived to be unclean. She is believed to possess bad magic (Field 1960, 41). Until the close of the twentieth century, it was strongly believed in Ghana that contact with a menstruant would have a negative effect on a person's protective power as well as magical accouterments, including talismans, ancestral stools, and shrines. While menstruating, a woman's clothing or any object that has touched her menstrual blood could be employed to cause harm or could be used to render supernatural influences ineffective. Therefore, she is forbidden to enter the chief's palace or the premises of traditional religious officials. Some Ghanaians believe that menstrual blood is charged with magical powers that can have a negative

influence. The menstruant emits negative forces that can render protective medicines impotent by touching them. Therefore, she is not permitted to enter a man's room in her condition. She is also not allowed in the kitchen because any cooking utensil she touches becomes defiled.

The fear of evil spirits is prevalent in Ghanaian society. Since menstrual blood is believed to possess magical powers to expel evil, Agyekum (2002, 378) asserts that menstrual blood can be used to make talismans. Both the Akan and the Gã believe that menstrual blood can be used in making love potions and charms. Love potions are usually put in men's food. There is also the fertility aspect of the positive model. Among many Ghanaian cultures, the first menstruation symbolizes a transition from girlhood to womanhood. This puts menstruation in a positive light, hence the euphemism for menstruation in Twi, *ɔayɛ asakyima*, (she has flowered) and in Gã, *etsɔ yoo*, (she has become a woman). Agyekum (2002, 380) notes regarding the Akan, that to say a woman has flowered is a way of calling attention to the fact that she is mature and ready to produce fruits.

Within the negative model, menstruation is perceived as pollution, failed production, indisposition, and seclusion (Agyekum 2002, 374–376). Agyekum's observations can be said to be true for the Gã as well. Across tribes and cultures in Ghana, it is taboo to have sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman because she is perceived as being unclean (Agyekum 2002). The menstrual taboo must be strictly kept in order to avoid severe penalties that are levied if it is infringed (Asare-Opoku 1978, 9). Even some Christian men avoid their wives during their period. Despite modern Ghanaian Christians distantiating themselves from traditional taboos, some churches prohibit menstruating women from partaking in Holy Communion.

In order to understand how the Israelites and Ghanaians perceive menstruation, the various euphemisms for menstruation and the metaphorical conceptualization of these euphemisms in Hebrew and selected Ghanaian languages need to be examined. The next section explores the metaphorical conceptualization of menstruation in the Hebrew, Twi, and Gã Bibles.

5. Metaphorical Conceptualizations of Menstruation in the Hebrew, Twi, and Gã Bibles

5.1 The biblical concept of menstruation

The Hebrew term נִדָּה refers to a ritual organized around the natural cycle of a woman. Generally, the term נִדָּה means expulsion and elimination (Milgrom 1991, 744–745). The term derives from the Hebrew root נדה, carrying such meanings as to be tossed about, to move back and forth or to make distant. Figuratively, it refers to "ceremonial impurity," especially, "menstruation" (Brown, Driver, and Briggs 2011, 662); Köhler, Baumgartner, and Stamm (2000, 596) define נִדָּה as "excretion, abhorrent thing or impurity." Gesenius (1979, 535) refers to נִדָּה as "filth and menstrual uncleanness." The word נִדָּה does not literally mean menstruation but is rather a euphemism referring to the ritualistic separation of a woman during her menstrual cycle. This reflects an actual physical separation of a menstruating woman owing to her ritual impurity. In the Old Testament, a distinction is made between different female genital emissions. There is זבה, which is non-menstrual flow (Lev 15:25–30), and נִדָּה, which is menstrual flow (Lev 15:19–24). The term זבה refers to a woman bleeding when she is not menstruating or when she has a discharge of blood beyond the period of her menstruation.

According to Milgrom (1991, 744–745), נִדָּה came to refer not just to the menstrual discharge but also to the menstruant. The menstruant was temporarily discharged from her duties and socially excluded by being

quarantined. According to Leviticus, she was to be separated for seven days (15:19). Whatever she lies on shall be unclean (15:20); whoever touches her bed shall wash their clothes, bathe and be unclean till evening (15:21); whoever touches anything that she has sat on shall wash their clothes, bathe and be unclean until evening (15:22); any man who is contaminated by lying down beside her shall be unclean until evening (15:24). The menstruant waits till her flow ends, then counts seven days with no bleeding; only then is she pure. Following the seven days she ought to bring an offering to the sanctuary for atonement (Lev 15:29–30). Thus, Leviticus conceptualizes the menstruating woman as a CONTAMINANT. In Leviticus 18:19, it was forbidden for a husband to go close to his wife in her state of נִדָּה impurity with the intention to have sexual relations with her. The seriousness of this prohibition is evident in the severity of the punishment imposed on both the man and the woman who violated the prohibition—expulsion from the midst of one's people (Lev 20:18). The meaning of נִדָּה and the ritual that the menstruant must go through instantiate the metaphors MENSTRUATION IS AN INFECTION and MENSTRUATION IS SEPARATION.

5.2 Menstruation as an illness, separation and a gender marker

In this section, the study discusses menstruation as a person in example (1), menstruation as an indisposition or illness in examples (2–11), menstruation as a separation in examples (12–19), and menstruation as a gender marker in examples (20–23).

5.2.1 MENSTRUATION IS A PERSON

One category of conceptual metaphors is ontological metaphors. Personification is one type of ontological metaphor that allows us to understand "a wide variety of experiences with non-human entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 33). According to Kövecses (2010, 50), events are viewed as produced by an active willful agent, henc,e the metaphor, EVENTS ARE ACTIONS. In the Twi menstruation euphemism, there is also a theme of the visitor, so menstruation is personified as a periodic visitor. Menstruation is conceptualized euphemistically as an expected male visitor.

In the Twi euphemistic expression *akoa no abedu* (the man has arrived), the beginning of the woman's period signifies the arrival of a well-known and regular visitor. This visitor comes to stay with the woman for a few days, then leaves, only to return later. Though the Twi word *akoa* literally means a servant, this term refers to a man whose name you would not want to mention.

Menstruation is an event, which can be conceptualized as an action via the metaphor EVENTS ARE ACTIONS. The event, in the case of the Twi conceptualization of menstruation, is the visitation; it is conceptualized as a guest. Thus, MENSTRUATION IS A TEMPORARY VISITOR that comes to isolate women for a period. Also, MENSTRUATION IS A MAN who pays women monthly visits.

Moreover, when MENSTRUATION AS AN ENTITY is conceptualized as being a person, it leads to the metaphor MENSTRUATION IS A PERSON. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 26), viewing an experience as an entity allows us to refer to, quantify, and identify a particular aspect of it. For example, in the metaphor of MENSTRUATION IS AN ENTITY, the Akan view MENSTRUATION (target domain) as an ENTITY (source domain).

As long as this metaphorical man is around, the woman, if married, stays away from her husband and does not cook or have sexual intercourse with him. In this sense, MENSTRUATION IS A RIVAL. A quarter of a month,

---

2 An average of 1980 days in her menstruating lifetime.

60 days in a year, and for some thirty-three years of her life,[2] this visiting rival comes to push the woman into seclusion. Such is the personification of menstruation by virtue of the WOMEN ARE GUESTS metaphor in which the menstrual blood corresponds with a periodic male visitor. This visitor arrives either once or twice every month to take the menstruant on vacation. Thus, the Akan conceptualize MENSTRUATION IS A PERSON. The arrival of the menstrual blood (VISITOR) leads to the expulsion of the menstruant (HOST) from within the house to the periphery of the house. This person stops his visits when the woman has attained menopause, or she is pregnant and not bleeding. The conceptualization of menstruation as a person is absent in Gã thought and the Bible does not have such a notion either.

5.2.2 MENSTRUATION IS AN INDISPOSITION

The themes of indisposition and illness form part of Twi's euphemisms for menstruation. Many cultures associate the loss of blood with injury and loss of strength (Allan and Burridge 2006, 166). The same can be said of the Hebrew and Akan cultures. In Akan thought, blood is life. Therefore, the loss of blood is understood as an illness that could result in death. The metaphor MENSTRUATION IS AN ILLNESS is instantiated in Twi by the euphemistic expressions in examples (4–10) and Hebrew expressions in (1–3):

(1) וְאִם שָׁכֹב יִשְׁכַּב אִישׁ אֹתָהּ וּתְהִי נִדָּתָהּ עָלָיו[2],

And if a man actually sleeps with her, and her impurity touches him. (Lev 15:24)

(2) וְאֶל־אִשָּׁה בְּנִדַּת טֻמְאָתָהּ לֹא תִקְרַב

A woman in her menstrual impurity you shall not approach. (Lev 18:19)

(3) וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁכַּב אֶת־אִשָּׁא דָּוָה

And a man who will lie with a woman having her sickness. (Lev 20:18)

(4) *Te sɛ ɔsabufo fĩ.*

Like the filth of one whose hand is broken. (Twi; Ezek 36:17)

(5) *Ɔnte yie.*

She is not well. (Twi)

(6) *Wanya mmaa yare.*

She has got the sickness of women. (Twi)

(7) *Mabu nsa.*

I have broken [a] hand. (Twi; Gen 31:35)

(8) *Sɛ ɔbarima no ne no da na n'asabu ade no bi ka ne ho a.*

If the man sleeps with her and some of her hand-breaking thing touches him. (Twi; Lev 15:24)

(9) *Nkɔ ɔbea a n'asabu mu ne ho ntewee no ho nkoyi n'adagyaw so.*

Do not go to a woman who in her hand-breaking is unclean, to uncover her nakedness. (Twi; Lev 18:19)

(10) *Nkɔ ɔbea a n'asabu mu ne ho ntewee no ho.*

Do not go onto a woman who in her broken hand is unclean. (Twi; Lev 20:18)

The Twi expression, *ne nsa mu abu*, (his hand is broken) is a metaphorical expression of despair or discouragement. In expressing the emotion of discouragement, the Gã people would say, *enine mli eje wui* (the bones in her/his hands have fallen out). Thus, the emotion of despair is conceptualized metaphorically by the Gã as a boneless hand. Both Twi and Gã expressions could be for men and women. However, the Twi expression, *wabu ne nsa* (she

has broken her hand) is used solely in reference to a woman, to imply that she is menstruating. This has no emotional connotations. The expression seems to suggest that she herself and she alone is responsible for her broken hand. It conceptualizes menstruation as a physical injury, euphemistically expressing the discharging of blood from the lining of the uterus.. This conceptualization of menstruation as hand breaking has no equivalent in Hebrew and is absent in Gã as well.

As expressed in (5), Twi conceptualizes the menstruant as one who is sick. Her sickness is one unique to women as indicated in (6). From (7) we deduce a conceptual metaphor MENSTRUATION IS A HAND INJURY. The Twi translation of Genesis 31:35 uses the breaking of the hand as the euphemism for menstruation.

In (4) and (7–9), the Twi translation *asabu* (hand breaking) agrees with the Hebrew דָּוֶה (sickness), in (3) denoting menstruation as being an injury. That the menstruant is indisposed means she has become incapable of performing her usual domestic duties. This ill-health requires a period of rest. This sickness, perceived as uncleanness and contamination, requires that she is socially isolated and quarantined. The Hebrew דָּוֶה in (3) is a feminine singular adjective meaning *faint* or *unwell*. This suggests that the menstruant is a sick woman. These Hebrew and Twi ideas of menstruation being an illness instantiate the metaphor MENSTRUATION IS AN ILLNESS.

In Levitical thought, menstrual blood is conceived as being a contagion and therefore very dangerous. Thus, menstruation renders the woman ritually ill. Whoever and whatever she touches becomes ritually contaminated. In (1) and (2), the Hebrew phrases נִדָּתָהּ (her impurity) and בְּנִדָּה (in impurity), respectively refer to the woman's menstrual flow. It is also translated "her flowers" (Douay-Rheims) and "her separation" (Young's Literal Translation). The term נִדָּתָהּ could also refer to her menstrual blood, which the Israelites conceived of as a contaminant. These ideas in (1), (2),

and (4) suggest a metaphor MENSTRUATION IS AN INFECTION. In (4) the Twi translates הַנִּדָּה (the impure one) in Ezekiel 36:17 as *ɔsabufo* (a broken-handed woman). The Twi translates the noun נִדָּה in Leviticus 15:24 and 18:19 as *asabu* (hand breaking).

5.2.3 MENSTRUATION IS SEPARATION

The metaphor MENSTRUATION AS SEPARATION arises from the understanding of the domain of menstruation in terms of the domain of exclusion. In the Old Testament, especially in Leviticus, the sense of menstruation being a contagion is prevalent in the context of ritual impurity. In the same sense, the Ghanaians conceive the menstruant as a contaminant. Menstrual blood renders the woman impure and unclean. The social distancing protocol she observes is due to the cultural understanding that she has become ritually dangerous. Various Twi and Gã euphemisms relating to vacation and rest include examples (13–19):

(12) כְּטֻמְאַת הַנִּדָּה
Like the uncleanness of a separated one. (Ezek 36:17)
(13) *Ɔkɔ afikyire.*
She has gone behind the house. (Twi)
(14) *Ɔnkɔ gya ho.*
She does not go near the fire. (Twi)
(15) *Muka mu afɔ.*
The hearth is wet on the inside. (Twi)
(16) *Ni Sara ekpa tsuiasɛɛ yaa.*
And Sarah had stopped going to the back of the house. (Gã; Gen 18:11)
(17) *Kaaya yoo ɔkɔŋ ni okɛ lɛ ayawɔ be ni mli ni etee tsuiasɛɛ.*
Do not go to a woman to sleep with her while she has gone behind the house. (Gã; Lev 18:19)

(18) *Kɛji nuu ko kɛ yoo ni etee tsuiasɛɛ wɔ lɛ.*

If a man and a woman who has gone behind the house have sexual intercourse. (Gã; Lev 20:18)

(19) *Tamɔ yoo ni etee tsuiasɛɛ ni ehe tsee.*

Like a woman who has gone behind the house and is unclean. (Gã; Ezek 36:17)

In example (13) the euphemistic expression *ɔkɔ afikyire* (she has gone to the rear of the house) clearly refers to the state of being secluded during her menstruation. The Gã expression in (14), *tsuiasɛɛ* (the back of the house), carries the same sense as the Twi expressions meaning going into isolation or being quarantined. In (16) and (17), *tsuiasɛɛ* is the translation of the Hebrew נִדָּה. In (18) the Gã euphemistic expression *etee tsuiasɛɛ* shows how the Hebrew דָּוֶה (sickness) was translated. In (19) the Hebrew הַנִּדָּה is translated as *yoo ni etee tsuiasɛɛ* (a woman who has gone to the back of the house.) In (12) the Hebrew expression הַנִּדָּה refers to a woman in her customary impurity. It describes the menstruant as one to be kept at a distance, producing the metaphor, נִדָּה IS SOCIAL DISTANCING.

Since the Ghanaian sees the menstruant as impure, this conception could instantiate the metaphor MENSTRUATION IS POLLUTION. This yields the metaphor MENSTRUATION IS TEMPORARY SEGREGATION. The menstruating woman is removed from the center to the periphery, from the front to the back. This movement instantiates an orientational metaphor, MENSTRUATION IS MOVEMENT TO THE REAR. When a woman is menstruating, she spends this period at the rear of the house.

Example (14) implies the menstruating woman is excused from any culinary duties. As indicated by example (15), the absence of the cook renders the floor of the fireplace wet as there is no production of heat to dry

the place. Thus, examples (13–15) represent a menstruant's social isolation; she is excluded and secluded in a specific place with an opportunity to rest. This experience instantiates the metaphors MENSTRUATION IS SEPARATION, MENSTRUATION IS SECLUSION/SOCIAL ISOLATION, and MENSTRUATION IS A VACATION.

5.2.4 MENSTRUATION IS A GENDER MARKER

The conceptualization of MENSTRUATION IS A GENDER MARKER arises from the understanding of the domain of menstruation in terms of the domain of gender identification/marking. Menstrual blood becomes an object or a substance that distinguishes the female from the male as it is an experience only women can have. In the Old Testament, specifically in Genesis, the sense of menstruation being a mark of identification is evident in Hebrew. In the same sense, the Ghanaian conceives menstruation as a feminine identity-marker as shown below:

(20) כִּי־דֶרֶךְ נָשִׁים לִי

For the custom of women [is] with me. (Gen 31:35)

(21) אֹרַח לִהְיוֹת לְשָׂרָה הָדַל כַּנָּשִׁים

It had ceased to be with Sarah after the custom of women. (Gen 18:11)

(22) *Mifee yei anii.*

I am doing women's thing. (Gã; Gen 31:35)

(23) *Na nea ɛyɛ mmea no to atwa wɔ Sara ho.*

What happens to women had ceased with Sarah. (Twi; Gen 18:11)

In Genesis 31:35, Rachel told her father Laban that she was in her menstrual period so she could not stand up in his presence. The Hebrew expression in (20), נָשִׁים דֶרֶךְ, could mean the *custom of women*, but the expression literally

means *the road that women tread*. It can be deduced from the Hebrew meaning that menstruation is a journey, and as Genesis 18:11 indicates, Sarah had already come to the end of this journey. This is seen in (21) where the Hebrew euphemism אֹרַח כַּנָּשִׁים (after the custom of women) is used for her monthly period. This shows that (21) also instantiates the metaphor MENSTRUATION IS A JOURNEY. In example (22), the Gã also refers to what women do. In (23), the Twi euphemism *nea ɛyɛ mmea*, (what happens to women) refers to menstruation. Thus, the Hebrew, Twi, and Gã languages present menstruation euphemistically as a uniquely feminine custom. This understanding instantiates the metaphor, MENSTRUATION IS A GENDER MARKER. Menstrual blood is the object or substance that marks the identity of a woman.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that all three languages label menstruants as polluting, and therefore to be avoided. There is a common theme that menstruation is synonymous with impurity, separation, and feminine identity. The Hebrew Bible conceptualizes menstruation as SEPARATION, AN ILLNESS, and A FEMININE GENDER-MARKER. Twi conceptualizes menstruation as A PERSON, SEPARATION, AN ILLNESS, and A FEMININE GENDER-MARKER. The Gã people conceptualize menstruation as SEPARATION and A FEMININE GENDER-MARKER.

It is evident from the data that the concept of menstruation as a person is not found in Hebrew and Gã. The euphemism referring to menstrualization as a man is found in Twi. Also, Gã does not use any euphemism that instantiates the MENSTRUATION IS AN ILLNESS metaphor. To translate the Old Testament references to menstruation, Gã uses either the euphemism "custom of women" (FEMININE GENDER-MARKER) or "movement to the back of the house" (SEPARATION/SECLUSION).

In this article, the examination of the euphemistic expressions for menstruation used in the Old Testament and its Twi and Gã translations indicates that there are similarities between the Hebrew Biblical thought and Ghanaian thinking about menstruation. Some prominent themes from the euphemistic expressions for menstruation found in Hebrew, Twi, and Gã are the themes of indisposition, seclusion, and identity marking. In both Israelite and traditional Ghanaian thought and practice, menstruation is generally associated with notions of impurity and pollution. This leads to the enforcement of both residential and culinary taboos. In all three cultures, the menstruating woman is required to observe ritual protocols including social distancing, isolation, and being quarantined. Hence, the metaphor MENSTRUATION IS SEPARATION/EXCLUSION is the most pronounced in all three languages explored.

The findings of this article have demonstrated how important the study of conceptual metaphors is in biblical studies. Apart from adding to the body of literature on linguistics and theology, the present study broadens the path to further cognitive studies of biblical texts in different languages.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to explore the metaphors of menstruation in the Old Testament, drawing insight from the cognitive approach to metaphors. This study has endeavored to provide an answer to the question, what are the metaphorical conceptualizations of menstruation expressions in the Hebrew Bible and their translations in the Twi and Gã Bibles?

I have compared the general metaphorical conceptualizations of menstruation in the three languages, Hebrew, Twi, and Gã. I have shown that there is a common theme that menstruation is synonymous with illness, separation, and feminine identity in both Israelite and Ghanaian thoughts. We can also observe from our data that the menstruation

expressions in the Old Testament and their translations in the Ghanaian Bibles studied instantiate such metaphors as MENSTRUATION IS AN ILLNESS, MENSTRUATION IS SEPARATION and MENSTRUATION IS A FEMININE GENDER-MARKER. Therefore, we can conclude that the ancient Israelites and modern Ghanaians have similar beliefs about menstruating women. In both cultures, menstrual taboo constructs a division between men and women. We may attribute the similarities in the metaphorical conceptualizations to the universality of the unique feminine experience in different cultures as well as the socio-psychological and religious explanations given to these experiences.

It is obvious from the study, that cognitive linguistic investigations into menstruation metaphors contribute a good deal to our understanding of the ways in which people conceptualize menstruation. This study is limited to texts in the Old Testament. However, further research on a larger corpus that includes the New Testament can help us broaden our understanding of menstruation expressions in many more of the languages the Bible has been translated into. It is evident from the data that the insight gathered in this study will motivate scholars interested in exploring the application of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory in the study of metaphors in theological studies.

Works Cited

Agyekum, Kofi. 2002. "Menstruation as a Verbal Taboo among the Akan of Ghana." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 58(3):367–387. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417522000469.

Allan, Keith, and Kate Burridge. 1991. *Euphemism and Dysphemism: Language Used as Shield and Weapon*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2006. *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Asare-Opoku, K. 1978. *West African Traditional Religion*. Accra: FEP.

———. 2006. *Bible in Gã Language*. Accra: The Bible Society of Ghana.

Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. 2011. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

Dhingra, Rajni, Anil Kumar, and Manpreet Kour. 2009. "Knowledge and Practices Related to Menstruation among Tribal (Gujjar) Adolescent Girls." *Studies on Ethno-Medicine* 3(1):43–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/09735070.2009.11886336.

Douglas, Mary. 2002. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge.

Field, M. J. 1948. *Akan Kotoku: An Oman of the Gold Coast*. London: Crown Agents for the Colonies.

———. 1960. *Search for Security: An Enthnopsychiatric Study of Rural Ghana*. London: Faber and Faber.

Feyearts, Kurt. 2002. "Refining the Inheritance Hypothesis: Interaction between Metaphoric and Metonymic Hierarchies." In *Metaphor and Metonymy at the Crossroads: A Cognitive Perspective*, edited by Antonio Barcelona, 59–78. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110894677.59.

Garry, Jane, Carl R. Galvez Rubino, and Adam Bodomo. 2001. *Facts about the World's Languages: An Encyclopedia of the World's Major Languages, Past and Present*. Bronx: H. W. Wilson Co.

Gesenius, H. W. F. 1979. *Gesenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*. 7th ed. Translated by Samuel P. Tregelles. London: Samuel Bagster and Sons.

Holy Bible in Twi: *Akuapem*. 1964. Accra: The Bible Society of Ghana.

Lakoff, George and Mark Johnson. 1993. "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor." In *Metaphor and Thought*, edited by A. Ortony, 202–251. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———.2003. *Metaphors We Live By*. London: The University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226470993.001.0001.

Kittel, R. A. Alt, O. Eissfeldt, and P. Kahle, eds. 1997. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. 5th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Köhler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm. 2000. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Brill.

Kövecses, Zoltan. 2000. *Metaphor and Emotion: Language, Culture and Body in Human Feeling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.2277/0521641632.

———. 2010. *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Milgrom, Jacob. 1991. *Leviticus* 1–16. AB 3. New York: Doubleday. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780300261110.

Rattray, R. S. 1927. *Religion and Art in Ashanti*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 1932. *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*. 2 vols. London: Clarendon.

Ullman, Stephen. 1979. *Semantics: An Introduction to the Science of Meaning*. New York: Harper & Row.