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Sexual Hospitality in the Hebrew Bible?

Abstract

Aus ethnologischen und historischen Quellen gibt es verschiedentlich Hinweise, dass im vorderen Orient sexuelle Kontakte unter bestimmten Umständen auch ausserhalb einer Ehe statthaft sein konnten, namentlich im Zusammenhang mit den Anforderungen der Gastfreundschaft. Die Autorin vergleicht die Muster und Rahmenbedingungen für solche Kontakte mit verschiedenen biblischen Erzählungen, in denen Sexualität ausserhalb der Normen der patriarchalen Ehe erwähnt wird. Sie stellt die These auf, dass sich in diesen Texten Spuren solcher Praktiken erhalten haben, wenn auch oft in einer verzerrenden Wiedergabe.

Introduction

My purpose in this article is to present an analysis proving that sexual hospitality constitutes a cultural template, practised in the Arabian peninsula and around the ancient Mediterranean. If it was practised, residuals could surface in some transposition or other in biblical texts.

Little discussed and little known, the custom of sexual hospitality sounds obscure and outlandish. However, since the early Middle Ages throughout 19th and 20th centuries, travellers' reports on the Middle East, North Africa and Asia have recorded a kind of tribal hospitality that includes sexual gratification as part of the hospice. This social world is divided between affiliated brothers and foes; and if a stranger is accepted he will share the privileges of brotherhood. Moreover the stranger could embody a god in disguise who would bestow blessing and fertility on the tribe. Fear of virginal hemorrhage forms another motivation for handing daughters into the strangers' arms. Frequency of occurrences of sexual hospitality show the custom to be a consistent template and not a series of isolated events. In such societies the host's honour depends on the satisfaction of the male guest, and likewise his neglect would be the host's liability, (Briffault, 1927: II, 635-640). The question to be raised cautiously is whether our anthropological evidence of tribal life can be set up as a model for ancient times, the biblical time or the Hebrew people.

In his book *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East*, Raphael Patai offers a survey of customs and traditions regarding family values and sexuality in the Ancient Middle East and biblical time (1959:139-145). Patai first presents the conventional viewpoint that patriarchal hospitality was so highly regarded that it might override the strict considerations of women's chastity. The host would thus sacrifice the chastity of his wife, mistress or unmarried virginal daughters to safeguard his guest's honour and protection. Genesis 19 and Judges 19 present two cases in which virginal daughters and one's wife are offered to outsiders when the

protection and honour of a guest are at stake. Patai, however, proposes an additional hypothesis namely that other cultural templates may have survived in these stories, materialising as their socio-cultural pre-texts¹. To support his hypothesis Patai provides extra-literary information from travellers' reports dating from the 12th to the 19th centuries.² Templates of alternative sexual codes would re-evaluate the dichotomy of patriarchal hospitality versus female chastity competing and culminating in irreconcilable conflict. He thus claims that the custom of sexual hospitality practised in the region sheds a different light on the dichotomy of patriarchal code versus female chastity. The template allows to view these stories from a different angle: "this custom which has been reported from various Arabian tribes, throws additional light on the mores and the relative evaluation of hospitality versus female chastity which constitutes the background the sexual incidents described in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," (Patai, 1959: 139-145).

In order to classify a behavioural pattern as a template, signifying characteristics ought to apply to its occurrences. The following characteristics would sum up to a coherent template. The custom has been practised among tribal, nomadic and decentralised societies and has been practised from Yemen through Central and North Arabia, North Africa and Australia and from Egypt to Afghanistan. The origin of the custom seems to be rooted in ancient times, surviving into and often tolerated by the Islamic era. Commonly, the man concerned is an outsider and not a tribesman. The outsider and/or guest would be led by a family member who thus plays the procurer. The template may vary from one community to another. In some tribes sexual hospitality concerns unmarried daughters, while in other tribes only married women will practise it. In some tribes, the woman would be led to the guest by a family member: a brother, a husband, a mother or even an in-law. In other tribes of Arabia, the woman would look for a guest herself outside patriarchal hospitality altogether.³ In some tribes sexual hospitality endorses complete consummation while in other tribes any sexual pleasure will be tolerated except penetration, in which case death penalty would be due. Once alone with the guest, the hosting woman would initiate the custom by rubbing the guest's feet with butter. Sexual hospitality may vary from one tribe to another and still be classified as a template according to generic signifiers, (Patai, 1959:143). A religious conviction impends on the custom. The tribes that practised it believed that if they failed to perform the rite, nature would show its displeasure by way of a catastrophe. This belief connects sexual hospitality to cultic mysteries that propagate magical correspondence between fecundity cults, nature and divinity. One could categorise sexual hospitality among customs of sacred or cultic sexuality.

¹ pre-text, resonating socio-reality; arche-text – the generic type underlining a text, ante-text – defines a prior text; post-text, a later one relating to the former; all covering inter-textual relations, Mieke Bal, 1988, p.254.

² Patai mentions the following sources: Kitab al-Aghani 817-967; Ibn el-Mojawir 14th century; John Lewis Buckhardt Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys from the beginning of 19th century and the reports of Count Carlo von Landberg, 1848-1924.

³ Yaqt Al-Rumi, 1179-1229, shows relational similarities to customs conducted in ancient as well as medieval Middle East. Yaqt Al-Rumi relates the following: "The customs there are those of Ancient Arabs. Though good people, they have rough and repulsive customs, which explain their freedom from jealousy. At night, their women go outside the town and entertain such men, who are not forbidden to them, sporting with them for the greater part of the night. A man pays no heed when he sees his wife, his sister, mother or father's sister in a neighbour's arms; but himself seeks some other mate and is entertained by her as though she were his wife." As quoted In Patai, 1959:140).

The gender aspect

The custom seems inherently male oriented as it concerns a situation of patriarchal hospitality in which female chastity is waived for the pleasure of a male guest. However, some aspects of the custom favour a woman's interests. Both the woman and the guest concerned have to comply and neither may refuse the other. The guest must sleep with the hostess, disregarding her age or appearance and vice versa (Patai, 1959, 139-145). Other aspects of the template seem favourable to the woman as well. The offspring of this hospitable union will be fully accepted by the hosting tribe and sometimes may even take a special place in the religious practise of the group. Moreover, only if the hostess finds the guest agreeable the host will discharge him with honour, and furnish him with provision for his further journey. If however, the guest fails to please the hostess, the woman will tear his garment. On coming out of the woman's tent, the tribal women and children would welcome the guest. On seeing the damage in the guest's clothing, he will be publicly shamed and chased away by the women and children (Patai, 159:140).

Bearing in mind that the ancient world bounded sex to communal and individual survival, sexuality and motherhood must have been perceived as auxiliaries of crude existence. Continuity could overrule socio-cultural restrictions on some occasions when breaching of rules would enhance it. Under conditions of coarse survival, sexual hospitality like other cults of sacred sexuality can be defined as alternative sexuality that serves its purpose. The texts Patai mentions could have survived as residuals of sexual templates practised as alternative rules of sexuality independently or on extraordinary occasions. Alternative sexuality thus conceives sexuality outside or along-side patriarchal rules. It may have complemented the coarse conditions of ancient communities falling or rising with continuity; this fact sheds an additional light on its socio-cultural character.

Can indicative traces of sexual hospitality be isolated in the Hebrew Bible?

Patai applies anthropological data to biblical texts by hypothesis and assumption. The questions to be asked are whether it is possible to set out Patai's assumptions into a thesis: can characteristics of sexual hospitality be traced in the Hebrew scriptures? Can it be applied to biblical texts? If so, do such assumed residuals point to an ancient Hebrew custom or do they constitute a (inverted) biblical transposition of the surrounding cultures? Perhaps the custom surfaces as a literary representation of a template borrowed from spatial and temporal origins, which could not be ascertained in any way. If sexual hospitality is exhibited as a literary representation, can it be proven to be more than a narrative element? Can anthropological data of tribal life around the world prove that the custom of sexual hospitality was practised among biblical Israelites?

It has already been generally accepted that cults of sacred sexuality were practised in the Ancient Near East and among the Israelites to various degrees. To this, the prophets unwittingly served as authentic reporters (Hosea 1-4, Ezekiel 16, 22, Jeremiah 3:2-3, 7:18, 44:15-20, 26). The fact that it was forbidden and vehemently opposed speaks for an early cultic history and the irresistible influence of neighbouring cultures.⁴ Sexual hospitality could have thus been practised alongside with other fecund templates in the peninsula as well as in

⁴ Deut. 23:17:18 forbids sacred sexuality of both genders; also see Keefe, 1995:82.

ancient Israel. Even if sexual hospitality as such was not practised among the Israelites themselves, it could still surface in the Hebrew Bible as a literary theme representing the custom practised by neighbouring cultures in the Arabian peninsula.

Synchronic analysis of sexual hospitality in the Hebrew Bible

As a student of literature, I shall look for residuals of sexual hospitality in the form of literary imagination. I will thus treat the cultural template of sexual hospitality as a literary theme surfacing in textual transformations in various degrees of representation. Sexual hospitality will be further formulated as a subliminal template according to the signifiers abstracted from the anthropological custom. These can be seen in the following points:

1. A situation comprising outside(r) / inside(r); host/ guest and female chastity compromised.
2. A family member playing to role of the intermediary or procurer.
3. Patriarchal hospitality intersecting female chastity instead of clashing with it.
4. Cultic preliminary displayed in transformation of food and sexuality - ‘butter’ in Judges 5.
5. A tear in a man’s clothes demonstrating shame and weakness.
6. A disaster follows or removed
7. A divine blessing associated with alternative sexuality.
8. A Women’s society showing gender activity, and sexually objectifying a man:
9. Continuity is endangered and / or secured.

Within my structural framework, I will interlink these characteristics with a few biblical texts. For the sake of analysis, I will overlook narrative unity and chronology and isolate the paradigmatic characteristics denoting the custom. In highlighting signifying elements I purport to highlight the synchronic relations, not necessarily between the texts themselves, but between residual elements that show pertinent relations to the template of sexual hospitality. These elements may paradigmatically relate to one another, even when the texts seem remotely associated.

As stated above, sexual hospitality has been found among tribal, decentralised societies. Patriarchal hospitality valorises the functions of host and guest. The functions construe a dimensional dichotomy in space of inside versus outside.⁵ The insider/host classically offers protection and supervision to the outsider/guest. As a rule the outsider is never an insider’s tribesman. What, then, is the function of the outsider? Apart from social honour, he brings divine blessing and fertility. My leading assumptions sum up to the following. In societies based on kinship and god(s), the stranger could be conceived as an enemy, a brother or a god in the flesh. The best dramatic texts will intersect the three possibilities in various transpositions. Following the texts introduced

⁵ Mieke Bal interprets the opposition in a socio-psychological analysis in which inside/outside reflects the embodiment of the House as a site of power. Bal, 1993:359-360.

by Patai, Genesis 19 and Judges 19, I will expose a number of texts. The opening sections will introduce three main themes:

- a. the stranger, outsider and / or guest versus insider/host;
- b. a woman's chastity is compromised;
- c. and divine blessing and fertility instigated by an outsider.

Genesis 19

In Genesis 19, Lot is a patriarchal host and insider. The function of the outsider is divided over two roles. The first protagonists who play the role of the outsider/guest are the 'strangers/angels'. They fully answer to the requirements of the role. The second type of outsiders are the Sodomites. They are outsiders in space in relation to Lot's house, which embodies the inside. As townsmen, they are disqualified as guests and outsiders proper. They demand to be satisfied by the host's male guests but the host offers his virgin daughters instead. Their demand represents a permuted residual of the custom in which the outsider and guest expects to be satisfied by the host's female family member. We find the constituents of the cultural template: outsiders and insiders and a sexual offer in which female chastity is waived by a family member. Lot the insider/ host offers his female family members, his daughters, to the outsiders. This move could contain a transposition of sexual hospitality.

The angels function as metaphysical outsiders in relation to both groups, which lends them their supernatural power exercised on both the townspeople and Lot's family. The angels save Lot's family twice: they strike the inhabitants with light and save Lot's family from the mob, and they save Lot's family from the catastrophe brought upon the city by God. The angels / guests, represent the divine blessing brought upon the host by the outsider / guest who is sheltered and provided for by the hosting family.

Genesis 39

With this analysis in mind, I review the story of Joseph and Potiphar anew. Ignoring the roles of slave and master, we could highlight some recurrent formula of sexual hospitality. Potiphar, the insider, offers lavishly privileges and supervision to Joseph, while Joseph the outsider brings divine blessing on Potiphar's house. The motive of female chastity compromised then surfaces. In the deep structure this motive may shed some light on the implausible treatment of a Hebrew slave by his Egyptian master. The relationship of insider/outsider - host/guest is camouflaged by the social and ethnic dichotomy of Egyptian master and Hebrew slave. The master/slave relationship is modified by ethnicity. Joseph the Israelite is the outsider and the insider is an Egyptian. In its Hebrew representation, the ethnic aspect allows the motive of divine blessing brought forth by the guest to surface. Joseph the outsider endows the insider's household with divine blessing. This sets off the dichotomy of the insider's supervision and protection against the divine blessing embodied in the outsider sheltered by the host. Relaxing her chastity, the host's wife exposes the structure, if we consider sexual hospitality in the story's pre-text. Sexuality however remains unconsummated, and no continuity is secured.

The affiliated element of catastrophe appears indirectly. Ignoring chronology in Joseph's narrative cycle, seven years of plenty befall; however seven years of draught follow bringing hunger over the land (Genesis 41:54-57).

Judges 19 and Genesis 19

Judges 19 exhibits elements similar to those found in Genesis 19. The outsiders are divided into functions of outsiders who are welcomed as guests and outsiders who, being the local people, are disqualified as guests but demand to be sexually gratified. An additional dichotomy is provided by two kinds of locals; those who faithfully fulfil patriarchal hospitality, Lot in Genesis 19 and the old man in Judges 19 and those who show alienation and disrespect to rules of hospitality, the Sodomites and the mob of Gibeah respectively.

In Judges 19 both insiders and outsiders are Israelites. The dichotomy of ethnicity is exemplified by tribal distinction. The recurrent structure emerges. The guest shifts position with the townspeople. While the guest does not demand his "rights", the locals perceiving uninvited outsiders, demand to be sexually gratified. Like the Sodomites, the Gibeah people demand to be sexually satisfied as if they were patriarchal guests from outside town. Their demand reverses the custom too as they claim the male guest for homosexual gratification. The female family members are offered not to the outsider and guest, but to soothe the outsiders who are neither proper outsiders nor guests.

The respective plots enunciate a subliminal pattern. The insider offers his daughter(s) and his guest's wife to outsiders. The motive of homosexuality hints to a secondary layer of marginalisation, aimed to increase the effect of abomination towards all forms of cultic sexuality. This however suggests that the customs were still practised.⁶ One can reflect on Patai's hypothesis. On the surface presentation, the *inside* functions as a place of patriarchal protection, supervision and hospitality for the male guest by the male host, indicates patriarchal bonding. Male bonding overrides the safety and chastity of the female insiders: a daughter, mistress or wife. Patriarchal protection of the female insider(s) is waived for the sake of patriarchal protection of the male outsider. On the other hand, beyond the narrative variant, the pattern of sexual hospitality re-emerges in the recurrent motive of the host offering his female family members to outsiders. This recurrence may denote a marginalised form, embedding the cultural template.

If the assumption of marginalisation is accepted, there is an ideology behind it. Could the abominable story of rape be read as propaganda? I would suggest that odd elements expose the ideology behind the story of the unfortunate Levite's mistress. Consider the following: The plot moves smoothly from one event to the next; so smoothly that one fails to notice the contradictions it entails. In the first place, a man goes to a great length to avenge his mistress' life and honour, whom he had so lightly jeopardised without the slightest resistance or effort to protect. Then an entire nation is mobilised by means of a motive that seems too lean. Consider the odd detail of severing the woman's body. Hebrew culture forbids the Israelites, let alone a Levite, to commit desecration, or touch a dead body or even the belongings of a deceased (Numbers 19:11-22). Even accidental touching would involve a series of purifying rites under threat of excommunication. Here, not only does the Levite desecrate a dead body, but he also sends its parts by Israelite messengers to other Israelites all over the

land. The Levite cuts his mistress' body into twelve parts sending it to all the Israeli tribes. However, two tribes should have been discarded; one being the Levites who are spread among the other tribes and do not own land; and the other being the tribe of Benjamin who are the perpetrators. The mutilated feminine body corresponds to the symbolic number of the Israelite tribes for whom the message of the story is meant. The woman's body embodies the divided nation; it sends a message that unfaithfulness to God and partition would bring disaster. The underlying message strengthens the moralising plot; the sinners suffer a terrible predicament. The partners of the sexualised event meet with catastrophe, i.e. the woman who had exercised alternative sexuality and the Gibeah people who craved after homosexual rape. The condemnation, however, attests to its social existence. The morally deductive message reinforces the extra-literary purpose of the story, which is allegorically bound. The allegorical structure is reinforced by the feature that all characters remain nameless and thus function as types: a good priestly Levite who is an outsider and guest, a sinful mistress, an old man who observes customs of hospitality and the locals who disregard them and play the role of villains. As an allegorical story, it serves an extra literary purpose, which is ideological rather than narrative. To support this thesis I quote from Ezekiel who deploys the domestic relationship between an unfaithful wife and a good man to delineate Israel craving for foreign gods. In this paradigm God is put on a par with the good husband.⁷

Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy. And I will also give thee into their hands, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places; and shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. They shall also bring up a company against thee, and they shall stone you, and thrust you with their swords. And they shall burn thy houses with fire, and execute judgement upon thee in the sight of many women. And I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot...(Ezekiel, 16:37-41).

The pertinent elements recurring in both Genesis 19 and in Ezekiel 16 can be read as follows. There is a righteous man of God embodying the locus of morality and a woman who chooses multiple sexual partners over him. The righteous man exercises a punishment on the woman like an almighty god. He hands the woman over to the lethal mob to be sexually abused; her nakedness is exposed in public and she is shamed, raped, degraded and tortured, her body desecrated and penetrated by a sword. The prophetic text also legitimises the victim's fate morally, which is only implicit in Judges 19. The prophetic text, moreover, links us to the target audience. It answers the question to whom the ominous message is directed with the explicit purpose of repelling and frightening them away from alternative sexuality. The answer is, the women folk. 'And they shall burn thy houses with fire, and execute judgement upon thee in the sight of many women. And I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot...(Ezekiel 16:41).

⁶ Deut. 23:17:18 forbids sacred sexuality of both genders; A. Keefe, in A. Brenner, 1995: 82.

⁷ Brenner 1995:256-274;van Dijk-Hemmes, 1995 244-256; Graetz, 1995:126-145; Sherwood 1995:101-125.

I conclude the following. In Genesis 19, angels who strike the mob blind with divine light save the chastity of Lot's virgin daughters. In Judges 19, the function of female chastity at odds with patriarchal protection is embodied by one virgin daughter and one sinful mistress said to have committed prostitution (Judges 19:2). No angels appear here in contrast to Genesis 19. However in Judges 19, the virgin daughter disappears from the narrative without an explanation, her honour and life saved. The story cumulates with the Levite, the guest, exposing his mistress to the lethal outsiders, and still no angels in view. The ideological message of the story must have been clearly read by the ancient audience.

Genesis 12:10-20, 20 and 26:1-14.

My thesis claims that the theme of sexual hospitality has survived in permuting structures. From this point, I will expand Patai's paradigm related to Genesis 19 and Judges 19, and apply it to Genesis 12:10-20, 20 and 26:1-14. For the sake of isolating paradigmatic isotopes, unity and chronology of narrative will become secondary. Considering the cumulative character of biblical narrative, one should also bear in mind that Aristotelian principles of narrative unities and chronology will show their influence in post biblical periods a few centuries later (Noy, 1968).

Roles and functions shift and intersect in various combinations and induce dichotomy in the selected biblical texts.⁸ The stories presented in chapters Genesis 12:10-20, 20 and 26:1-14 bring to the surface recurrent functions of outsider and insider juxtaposed with relaxing the notion of a woman's chastity. The synchronic structure can be perceived in Abraham-Sarah-Pharaoh, Abraham-Sarah-Abimelech and Isaac-Rebecca-Abimelech constellations. The roles of outsider/guest, husband/brother collapse into one figure, respectively seen in Abraham and in Isaac. Synchronically, Sarah and Rebecca also merge into the relational figure of a wife and/or sister. This shows that these narratives are permuted variations.

These stories exhibit a tension between the level of presentation and the level of generation. The level of presentation contains narrative elements like chronology, characterisation, plot, recurrent motives and aspects of time and place. The level of generation represents paradigmatic structures, like themes, ideas or types drawn from subliminal concentration (Witting 1976: 82-94). On the level of presentation, Genesis 12:10-20, 20 and 26:1-14 present a story involving the relaxation of restrictions concerning a woman's chastity. This motive interlinks these stories with Genesis 19 and Judges 19. The hosts, Lot and the old man of Gibeah both offer their virgin daughters' sexuality (and that of the guest's wife) to the outsiders to protect the guest. However, the Levite offers his mistress for self-protection out of fear of the male outsiders. This motive associates the story of the Levite with the Genesis stories. In Genesis 12:10-20, 20 and 26:1-14, the male guest fears the male host, and suspecting that the latter's patriarchal hospitality might be wanting he offers his wife and/or sister to the insider for self-protection. Genesis 26 seems a fragmented mutation of the two former narratives filling the triangle with Isaac-Rebecca-Abimelech (or his men). Isaac, like his father Abraham finding himself under distressing circumstances of hunger, moves down to Gerar, the land of the Philistines ruled by the recurrent figure of

⁸ on function and roles as formal components, see Propp 1968.

Abimelech; and like his father before him he presents Rebecca as his sister and makes her sexually eligible to other men.

In the Genesis stories and Judges 19, the theme of patriarchal protection is transposed to ironic transpositions as the woman's chastity is waived by the guest/outsider for his own self-protection, though motivation may vary.

On the generating level, these stories show a series of transformations of one cultural pattern; their subliminal templates generate various representations on the level of presentation. Paradigmatically, these texts cross and hybridise patriarchal hospitality with relaxation of female sexual restrictions in guest/host-outsider/insider situations. The synchronic structure determines the recurrent triangle of Abraham-Sarah-Pharaoh and Abraham-Sarah-Abimelech and Isaac-Rebecca-Abimelech (or potentially his men). The roles of outsider/guest, husband/brother collapse into a pertinent function complementing one role. Twice Abraham and once Isaac fill the role of outsider, stranger and/or guest. Both men function as procurers to their female family member, wife and/or sister. Synchronically, Sarah and Rebecca also merge into a relational role of a wife and/or sister whose sexuality is offered to a man outside the patriarchal marital codes. Twice Abimelech, once Pharaoh fill the role of the insider/host; however, in relation to the marital structure they embody outsiders.

Most interesting, illicit sexuality surfaces in Genesis 12:10-20, Genesis 20 and Genesis 26:1-14 in diminishing degrees of representation. In Genesis 12, sexuality is consummated between Sarah and Pharaoh. In Genesis 20, Sarah is brought into the host's house for a nocturnal visit but an angel interrupts the consummation at the last moment. In Genesis 26 Rebecca's chastity is made publicly available under the same false pretences. Yet the woman remains with her husband though her chastity is nearly breached. This can be read in two ways. It could expose a diminishing mutation of the template on the level of narrative presentation. On the other hand it could connote the sexual hospitality, which endorses all degrees of sexuality, from mere foreplay to consummation and penetration. Synchronically in all three cases, the male family-member still functions as a procurer to his female family member, while female sexuality is made available outside marital exclusiveness.

Other elements of presentation could relate to the subliminal structure of sexual hospitality. On approaching Egypt, Abraham does not consider offering Sarah's chastity as a mere necessary evil, but foresees himself as the beneficent of the situation (Genesis 12:13) *yetav li bavorehk*, (I will better myself on your account). Pharaoh showers Abraham with slaves, maids and livestock. This element could enunciate the custom of bride price, 'And he (Pharaoh) entreated Abraham well for her sake...' (Genesis 12:16). However, if Abraham's reward was a bride price for a sister on wrong assumptions, why would Pharaoh not retrieve it when he restores Sarah to Abraham? Having been forced by draught to come to Egypt as a hard-pressed man, Abraham emerges a rich man returning home (Genesis 12:20, 13:1-2). What he did for toil was cheating a mighty ruler whom he had feared in the first place. The reward and provision could denote a pertinent reward offered to the woman's procurer. Though Abraham offers his female family member to the Pharaoh and not the other way round, it could denote the custom in an inverted representation, for a husband offers his wife to an outside man.

Genesis 20:14, Abimelech bequeaths Abraham with a reward nearly identical to that of Pharaoh in Genesis 12:16. Like the former it amounts to men-slaves, women-slaves and livestock surfacing a synchronic pattern: "And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen and men-servants, and women-servants, and gave them unto

Abraham, and restored him Sarah, his wife,” (Genesis 20:14). However, the Abraham’s reward in Genesis 20 is not paid when Sarah is offered, as seen in Genesis 12: 16, but after Sarah is retrieved. In addition, Abimelech tells Sarah, not Abraham, that he will reward Abraham one thousand silver pieces on her account (Genesis 20:16). This could reinforce the role of Sarah as a sexual agent, and Abraham as her procurer duly rewarded for his role.

Fertility and infertility

The thesis I am offering is a structural and anthropological one. For this reason narrative chronology is overlooked. On this line of analysis, I will connect the motive of infertility and fertility to the template of sexual hospitality. I will therefore relate the event of Sarah’s barrenness and pregnancy to the context of sexual hospitality.

Lack of offspring constitutes a determining function in the aforementioned narratives.⁹ An underlying motive of barrenness appears in the stories of Abraham and Sarah, which is counterbalanced by conception in Genesis 16:1-4, and 21:1. Barrenness might provide the missing link in the puzzle. Barrenness is addressed once by a wife offering her husband to another woman, and analogously twice by a husband offering his wife to another man. This structure concerns the thesis offered here. The barren Sarah is offered once to Pharaoh (Genesis 12) and once to Abimelech (Genesis 20). Genesis 12 and 20 show pertinent elements within a consistent pattern. The pattern corresponds to anthropological templates of alternative rules of sexual conduct other than the strict patriarchal matrimony. Deconstructed from this cycle, the relevant pattern emerges as follows: barrenness (Genesis 16:1) – female chastity is waived for sexual hospitality (Genesis 20 and 12) – barrenness is removed (Genesis 21:1-2). Barrenness is modified by the waiving of female chastity to an outside man – outside in relation to the matrimonial structure, which symbolises a closed space. The outside man is a man other than the husband, who appears as a permutation of the tribal outsider and guest. On the level of presentation, the woman is sexually objectified. On the level of generation, the template involves an outside man, who equally functions as a sexual object to the woman resulting in a blessed fertility.

Abimelech - Abimelech’s wife & maids – Abraham

Once the pattern is established, it can be further refined and re-defined. The subliminal structure shows the following isotopes: barrenness - an outsider - hospitality – a woman’s chastity waived -- barrenness removed. The argument so far has remained on the level of inverted transformation, which leaves some space for doubts. I will now expose sexual hospitality as a subtext, which could directly represent it.

The main pattern in Genesis 20 was seen in the narrative of Abraham – Sara – Abimelech. Concomitant to the main construction, the parallel structure is furnished by Abimelech being an insider/host – Abimelech’s wife & maids being the insider’s female members – and Abraham functioning as an outsider/guest. The pattern of: barrenness - an outside man - barrenness removed resurfaces as the recurrent template in the secondary narrative, too. If we ignore the narrative’s chronology for the sake of deconstruction, we see that

corresponding to Abraham's household struck by barrenness, Abimelech's wife and maids are inflicted by barrenness too. Thus one can deconstruct the marginalized pattern outside the matrix structure. This would be formulated as follows. Abimelech's household is struck by barrenness. Abraham as an outsider and/or guest functions as a sexual agent endowing fertility onto the female family members of the insider and host, transposed into the blessing of a God-called man (Genesis 20:7,17). The insider's wife and maids conceive (Genesis 20:17). The guest is then rewarded with privileges and supervision (Genesis 20:14-16). The pertinent elements construe the recurrent template of sexual hospitality proper with clear-cut roles: an insider/ host, a host's female family members and an outsider/guest. Abraham comes to Gerar as an outsider and/or guest. As a blessed stranger and guest, he is endowed with the power to inflict infertility and to re-instigate fertility upon the insider's female family members, namely Abimelech's wife and maids (Genesis 20:17). Having fulfilled his destination, he is rewarded with supervision, the right to settle, property and money by the host.

The divine stranger, guest and/ or outsider

Called a prophet (Genesis 20:7), Abraham functions as a catalyst of fertility for the insider's family. Anthropologically, Abraham as a God-called man can be seen as a biblical transposition of the outsider, stranger and/or guest who brings a misfortune upon the hosting clan if the custom is ignored and removes a catastrophe when the custom is observed. Paradigmatically, Abraham embodies the divine fertile outsider, who could incarnate a god in flesh for the host.

This fragmentary story sheds some new light on the story of the great lady and the prophet Elisha in 2Kings 4.¹⁰ Married to an old man, a woman of means is said to have no children. She invites the prophet to enter their house and eat at their place. Eventually she prepares a room for him in the attic and provides for his needs whenever he visits the town. Blessing of fertility comes unto the woman, the child himself is metaphysically blessed, when he dies and is restored to life by the prophet. The story brings to the surface a few significant details. Elisha is epitomised as a holy man (*kaddosh*) not only as a prophet, like Abraham (2Kings 4). The husband's old age implicitly alludes to the cause of his wife's barrenness. Most significant is the active role the woman takes playing the host. She entertains the man to come into her house to share bread and lodge with them, like Lot and the man from Gibeah. However, the great lady of Shunem is not the only active hostess in the bible; Jael also plays the host for Sisera (Judges 4,5). On another note, we can subtract a recurrent template in this text, i.e. the encounter between the holy man and the barren woman, concluding with the holy man endowing tidings of fecundity on the woman, and her conceiving in consequence thereof. This template takes me back to 1Samuel 1-2. In these texts, the holy man is juxtaposed twice with fecundity, seen once in Eli and once in his sons. We see Eli, the priest endowing a blessing of fecundity on a woman, Hannah, resulting in pregnancies (1Sam. 1:17, 2:20). Most significantly, Eli's second blessing (1Sam. 2:20) is juxtaposed to the practice of his sons lying with the women who are described to crowd at the tabernacle (1Sam 2:22). since the

⁹ "Lack", one of preparatory functions, Propp, 1968:1-30.

¹⁰ I am indebted to Prof. Silvia Schroer from the University of Bern for drawing my attention to this story and its relevance to my discussion on sexual hospitality.

Hebrew scripture is not shy of denoting a rape if there is one, I suggest that the text describes a voluntary practice carried out by both sides.

Anthropological data valorise such customs. Reports of Mediterranean cults of saints attest to pre-Islamic customs in which sacred or alternative sexuality various forms survived. By transformations from ancient periods, such holy men are believed to possess the *baraka*, the divine blessing that descendants of the Prophet Mohamed inherit. It is told that women who dream of sexual intercourse with holy men conceive as a result. It is sometimes condoned to have intercourse with holy men themselves in such communities. Sacred festivities may endorse the practise of blessed sexuality with God-called men themselves or indiscriminating sexuality among the pilgrims at sacred vicinities and saints' tombs during seasonal saints' cults such as the *ziyara*, (Ben-Ami, 1984:188; Taylor, 1999, p. 64).

Popular religion thus sheds an additional light on the outsider who instigates fertility in women. The messenger of tidings of fecundity is subject to recurrent "framing" (Culler, 1988, as quoted in Bal 2002:134) perceiving the divine outsider within the cultural template. We could revisit the appearance of God's messenger before Hagar (Genesis 15:7-15), Sarah and Abraham (Genesis, 18:1-18) and before Manoah's wife with tidings of fecundity Judges (13:1-11).¹¹ An underlying arche-text¹² runs through these texts. In various degrees of representation, intermediaries represent the fecundity of God in the deification of the outsider and stranger. The biblical fertile outsider and stranger transposes intermediaries into God: the metaphysical messenger, *malach*, an angel and the prophet. It is indicative that the divine outsider appears before Hagar and Manoah's wife alone and communicates directly with the latter twice before he forms a discourse with the husband. Deification of the fertile outsider applies to the three angels who visit Abraham with a divine message of divinely blessed fertility (Genesis 18:1-17). Sarah's laugh may underline a transposition of sexuality as the biblical word laugh *zahak* carries sexual connotations.¹³ The stories of Abraham and Abimelech's wife and maids and Elisha and the great lady of Shunem present the prophet as their fertile agent and metaphysical intermediary.

These stories concern women who have some involvement with outsiders leading to sanctification of offspring in various degrees of transposition. Sanctification of offspring can be traced in the angel's blessing bestowed on Hagar's son Ishmael (Genesis 21:13), in God's blessing over Sarah's son Isaac (Genesis 26:3-6), and in Rebecca's son Jacob perceived in his father's blessing, Isaac (Genesis 27:28-29; 28:3-4). On leaving for Haran, Jacob is endowed with a dream revelation of angels going up and down a heavenly ladder at the top of which God reinforces his father blessing with His own, with a heavenly promise of protection. (28:13-15). On returning, Jacob goes through recurrent encounters with metaphysical intermediaries on the border between Haran and Canaan, which forms an area of limbo. Such encounters consist of a company of angels (32:2-3) followed by a wrestling contest with God in flesh (32:26-31). In Samson's supernatural powers, we could recognise residuals of the offspring deified by an outside intervention. After the appearance of the angles, Samson is promised by his mother to be a *nazir* already before birth, a man dedicated to God from birth. She

¹¹ On the sexual aspects of Manoah's wife and the angel see Bal, 1988: 74.

¹² a generic type underlying texts in Intertextual relation, Bal, 1988: 254, see note nr. 1 above.

herself must refrain from touching anything but pure food and drink no wine. Samson's "deification" is reinforced by the magical interdiction, which endows him with supernatural power unless his hair is cut.

The intermediary a family member leading to or offering a female family member

The cultural template of sexual hospitality inherently belongs to family events, involving a male member instigating the event and a female member who is either a cooperating or passive subject. The woman may be a wife, a daughter, a sister or a daughter-in-law. The supervisor respectively may consist of a husband, brother, or an in-law. If such an intermediary is involved, and his/her interest prevails, the woman's interest is subordinated to those of her procurer. One could read a marginalised role of a sexual procurer in various transpositions.

Genesis 12:10-20, 20 and 26:1-14 respectively present Abraham in Egypt and in Gerar, and Isaac in Gerar, in a way in which the Israelites function as the guests and outsiders both ethnically and spatially. In an ironic transformation the outsider/guest offers his wife/sister to the insider/host, which nonetheless makes them their procurers. In Genesis 39:14, Potiphar's wife insinuates that her husband has acted as intermediary bringing a sexual agent into the house in the persona of Joseph: "see he (Potiphar) hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me..." Genesis 39:14. The Hebrew word for mock is *zahak* (kitel), denoting sexuality as in Genesis 26:8, when Isaac makes love to Rebecca (see footnote 11). In Genesis 19 and Judges 19, a father plays the procurer to his daughters. In Genesis 12, 20 and 26, a husband/brother plays the sexual supervisor to his wife/ sister. In Judges 19, the Levite literally hands over his mistress to other men. In Ruth 3, a mother-in-law becomes her daughter-in-law's procurer instructing her how to sexually handle a man and sending her to the threshing floor after the harvest feast at night. Her scheme successful, Naomi sets into motion her daughter-in-law's levirate rights which concludes with the transference of her late husband's rights to her, and the restoration of her social position as well as her maternal line through Ruth. In this case a woman plays the procurer for another woman for her self-interest. However, both women's interests are mutually enhanced by this scheme since they form an integral domestic unit and their survival depends on their symbiotic cooperation, compensating for each other's shortcomings.¹⁴ In the same line, the heterosexual pairs embody a similar symbiosis of interests; like Naomi, Abraham and Isaac offer their female "partners" perhaps to enhance their joined interests as couples.

Patriarchal hospitality converging, not clashing with female chastity

Rules of hospitality concern both men and women. Ancient hospitality being a generic custom may nevertheless abide the genders to accord to different obligations and expectations. The question is whether sexual hospitality could have been part of patriarchal hospitality or a custom in its own right; and whether it is possible to discern hospital rules that distinguish between those of women and those of men.

¹³ The biblical idiom 'to laugh with', or 'to make laugh' *sihek, le-sahek* (pattern *kitel*) has a sexual connotation meaning to make love to, a foreplay, to fool around with, as in the in Genesis 26:8: 'Abimelech king of the Philistines looked at a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was laughing with (*mesahek*) Rebecca his wife.'

¹⁴ see diverse articles in *Feminist Companion to Ruth*, in ed., Brenner, 1993.

Who expects sexual gratification; who instigates it; who offers it; who acts out on it, and who is subject to it? Potiphar opens his entire house and its supervision to the outsider's pleasure while his wife offers him her sexuality (Genesis 39:7). Is it hospitality in transformation, attached to a motive of illicit sex, or can these motives be affiliated with the custom of sexual hospitality? In Genesis 19 and Judges 19, the constructions transpose and revert functions and positions of subject and object. In both stories, the host extends an invitation of unreserved hospitality, "however let all thy wants lie upon me, only lodge not in the street" (Judges 19). Patriarchal hospitality may underline the custom of sexual hospitality for the host of Gibeah who offers his virgin daughter to outsiders in a manner similar to Lot's. From the perspective of the present analysis, the two narratives hybridise the two customs, that of patriarchal hospitality and that of sexual hospitality, suggesting that the two customs intertwine. Synchronic elements emerge in Genesis 12, 20 and 26, in which sexuality and hospitality intersect, sustaining Raphael Patai's thesis that sexual hospitality may have been practised in those times.

The story of Jael and Sisera juxtaposes hospitality with underlining sexuality. Relevant to the context of sexual hospitality is the binary opposition of insider and outsider - host/guest and hospitality that entails expectations of protection and supervision. Hospitality reinforces the spatial dichotomy of outside and inside materialised around a woman's tent (Bal, 1988, p 211-212). A direct denotation of a woman's tent can be seen in Genesis 24:67 when Isaac brings Rebecca, his new bride, into his dead mother's tent.

In Judges 4 and 5, the dichotomy of ethnicity is transposed into a friendly position towards Israelites against a hostile one, as both the outsider Sisera and the insider Jael are non-Israelites. Jael's husband Heber the Kenite is a member of a tribe friendly to the Israelites; the name denotes either a member bound by group or a personal name (Bal, 1988, p 211-212; Even-Shoshan, 1993). Jael is entitled *eshet hever ha-Kenite*, which could mean the wife of a Kenite member or Heber's wife (Bal, 1988, p 211-212). As such, a member of the Kenite clan would be obliged to offer Sisera the required patriarchal custom of hospitality and protection that behoves a host. Sisera as a fugitive, an outsider and a guest who expects to enjoy the host's patriarchal hospitality, must be protected and supervised. He may also expect to be sexually gratified by his host's wife. In this story, rules of patriarchal hospitality entailing supervision and protection may underline sexual hospitality, cumulating in one figure. Jael fulfils both functions, that of a host and that of a hostess which explains her husband merging with the background. Jael comes out of her tent towards Sisera to invite him in; the phrase (*yatsaa likrat,*) reappears in a gender context of a welcome move in Genesis 31:16 when Lea welcomes Jacob claiming him for the night and when Jephthah's daughter welcomes her father in Judges 11:34. Sisera appeals to her for provision and protection as if she were his patriarchal host, but may expect sexual gratification from her as his hostess, which makes him her easy prey. She invites him to enter her woman's tent; he lies down there without a chaperon, a fact which denotes sexuality.

Cultic preliminaries: food and sexuality - Butter in Judges 5

Once alone with the guest, the hosting woman would initiate the custom by rubbing the guest's feet with butter, (Patai, 1959:143). Deborah's poem in Judges 5:24-26 describes Sisera asking for water, while Jael offers him milk and butter *hemah* (butter or butter milk) in a vessel fit for nobles, *sefel addirim* (Judges 5:26). These

elements construe more than superlative enumeration. The Hebrew text uses the word *krv* for Jael's supervision. *Qrb* denotes both ritual offer and supervision, thus hinting at food consumption as well as cultic initiation. The vessel which Jael uses is called *sefel*, a word which appears only one more time in the Hebrew Bible in the sense of a bowl or a basin, not a goblet: "and (Gideon) he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water" (Judges 6:38). The Hebrew word *hemah*, butter, recurs when Job recalls better days: "when my legs were washed with butter" (Job 29:6). The Hebrew word *rgl* may mean feet and legs as well as genitals.¹⁵ Denotations can be read here of sexual initiation signified by rubbing a man's legs with butter, the basin of butter indicating sexual foreplay rather than supervision, or both. Jael offered Sisera milk to drink, but butter in a basin reserved for hosting honourable guests for other purpose than feeding. Butter would denote erotic rubbing of man's legs and perhaps genitals as a cultic preliminary of sexual hospitality, as the cultural template infers. The poem ironically employs the element of cultic preliminary to show how Jael wittingly exploits Sisera's erotic expectations.¹⁶

Once the enigma of the *sefel* and *hemah* is solved and connected, the story unfolds before us like a well-drawn picture. The cultural connotations and metaphoric associations ironically interchange and complement each other in the poem. The basin of butter that Jael offers Sisera displays ambiguity that must have given the contemporary audience a hilarious time; though the sardonic connotation may have been wasted on later generations. Food consumption, sexual consumption and murder interchange as images of food, sexuality and violence action cumulate in a cluster of metaphors. With the round basin of butter, masculine and feminine connotations permute mocking the man who has exercised forceful masculine warfare to destroy Israel and will soon be destroyed by a female hand. The round basin of butter that Jael serves Sisera connotes the womb. Butter correlates to the soft substance of female genitals into which the male guest would penetrate with his hard phallus. However, butter infers the fate that Jael will shortly be dealing to Sisera in pretences of sexual hospitality. Jael the woman uses a phallic shaped instrument, the peg of her woman's tent, to penetrate Sisera's brain, the substance of which resembles white, soft curdled butter. Presented by Deborah's feminine voice, the ironical connotations become poignant. Permanently living a threatened existence, this plot must have given the contemporary audience more than mere literary relief.

A tear in the clothes for shame and weakness

The custom valorises a women's interest considering the fact that if the guest fails to comply with the hostess' wishes, the woman would leave a tear in his garment. On coming out of the tent, the tribal women and children would welcome the guest and seeing the guest's clothing rent, he would be publicly shamed and chased away by the women and children (Patai, 1959: 140).

Rent clothes appear a few times in the Hebrew Bible in the context of weakness or shame. In 1Samuel 15:26-27, Saul holds onto Samuel's clothes, resulting in a tear, which signifies his foreseen fall. In 1Samuel 24:6, Saul retires unguarded for his needs; unwittingly he enters the cave in which David and his men are

¹⁵ "Both male and female genitals are referred to as 'feet' (Deut. 28 :57, Judges 3 :24 ; Sam. 24 :2 ; Isa. 7 :20) Patai 1959:158.

¹⁶ On images of sexuality and reversed rape in Sisera's murder see Bal, 1988:228.

hiding, lurking against the walls away from daylight. Coming from the outside, he is noticed but does not notice them. As Saul must have crouched casting the hems of his cloak backward, David stealthily cut off a piece of his robe. Later David exhibits it to attest his innocence of conspiracy against Saul. Finally, In 2Sam.13:19 a rent robe explicitly denotes sexual shame, as Tamar, raped by Amnon, puts ashes on her head and rends her robe.

A text in which a man's cloak is rent in a sexual context emerges later in post-biblical literature. In Arabic and Hebrew exegetic texts, the Koran (Sura 12) and the Hebrew *Sefer Ha-Yashar* (chapter. 14) the woman rends Joseph's coat and transforms it into an accusing token of shame and falsely exposes the man.¹⁷ In these texts, we do find a man who failed to comply with the woman's wishes, a rent cloth and public shaming.

Sacred sexuality juxtaposed with danger or disaster followed and/or removed and plenty follows

A religious conviction may be attached to the custom. The tribes that have practised it believed that if they failed to perform the rite, nature would show its displeasure by way of a catastrophe. The threat and removal of a disaster may be interlinked with motives of sacred sexuality in general. On disregarding narrative chronology, residuals of sacred sexuality may be juxtaposed with the component of a disaster, which may be removed or befall the personae or community that perform or disregard the custom.

Themes of hunger (Genesis 12:10; 26:1), a land to settle on (Genesis 20:1,15; 26: 6,17) and barrenness (Genesis 16:1-2; 25:21) dominate the genealogical link between Abraham and Isaac. These motives are juxtaposed with themes of hospitality and sexuality, which could be affiliated to show residuals of sexual hospitality. In the core of these stories, a woman is given to a man other than her husband in a situation of hospitality, and/or a relationship of outsider and insider. Eventually, plenty counterbalances dearth and wandering ends with settlement. A landless family plagued by barrenness, an insecure existence, hunger and hardship has an amazing turn of fortune and ends up with blessed offspring, male and female slaves, food, land and livestock after a ambiguous event of illicit sexuality. Abraham's defensive speech to Abimelech implies a conscious pattern in which Sarah would be repeatedly made available during their wandering. Abraham says to Abimelech:

And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her (Sarah), this is thy kindness which thou shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother. And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and men servants, and women servants, and gave them unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife. And Abimelech said, Behold, my land is before thee; dwell where it pleaseth thee. (Genesis 20:13-17).

Next, Sarah is with child: "For Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him" (Genesis 21:2). Like his father before him, Isaac's affairs prosper after he presented his

¹⁷ *Koran* (7th century) Sura 12 mentions a tear at the back while in *Sefer Hayashar* (11th century) ch. 14, the tear in the cloak comes in front. In both texts the tear is used to prove Joseph's innocence, implying that Potiphar's wife was holding to him and not the other way around. *Sefer Hayashar* claims that as the tear was found in front, as the Wife was holding him down; while the *Koran* suggests that as the tear was found at the back it proves that she ran after him clutching tom him. This may elucidate that the stories present two variations of one subliminal template of another context. I would thus claim that the stories surface the subliminal template of a tear inflicted by a hosting woman showing her dissatisfaction with a man by exposing his weakness before the

wife as an eligible woman: "Then Isaac sowed in the land, and received in the same year a hundred-fold: and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great..." (Genesis 26:12). The privileges and protection bestowed by the mighty lord of the land interchange and correlate with divine blessing throughout these stories, while coinciding events of illicit sexuality with a turn of fortune.

The destruction of Sodom is juxtaposed with events of illicit sexuality in Genesis 19 twice. Illicit sexuality precedes the destruction in Lot's offering his daughters (Genesis 19:8) and illicit sexuality follows destruction seen in Lot's daughters lying with their father (Genesis 19:32-38). These sexualised events are juxtaposed with the rescue of the protagonist's family from the catastrophe by divine aid, fertility and the continuity of the line. Lot's daughters conceive sons who father nations.

Sacred sexuality symmetrically reverts the death of Judah's two sons by the birth of Tamar's twin sons (Genesis 38:27-30) coinciding with Tamar pretending to be a sacred prostitute who may not refuse a stranger at the time of the shearing feast. The people of Bethlehem echo their blessing of Tamar's pregnancy in their blessing over Naomi: "and let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bore unto Judah," (Ruth 4:12). The Book of Ruth repeats the context of hunger (Ruth 1:1) recurring in Genesis 12:10, 26:1 and 41:54-57. The Book of Ruth also draws on the theme of the death of two sons recurring in the story of Judah and Tamar. Both forms of misfortune are juxtaposed to an illicit sexuality and an eventual pregnancy. On the chronological level, hunger is removed before the sexualised event and after the death of Naomi's male family-members (Ruth 1:5-6). The removal of hunger, with the additional lack of husband and offspring juxtaposes the event of Ruth illicitly spending a night on the threshing floor with Boaz during the harvest feast (Jensen, in Brenner 1993:174). This narrative alludes to residuals of seasonal festivity and sacred sexuality reinforced by Ruth changing her attire like Tamar shedding her widow dress and putting on that of a sacred prostitute (Genesis 38:13; Ruth 2:23, 3:3-5, 6-18, 4:13).

Like the story of Sodom, the story of Gibeon possibly exhibits residuals of sexual hospitality (Patai, 1959:139). Tribes wage a war, resulting in the near extinction of the entire tribe of Benjamin. Eventually, the catastrophe of a dying tribe is counterbalanced by a multiple sexual union between the dancers of Shiloh and the eligible men of Benjamin. In the point that follows, I will argue that this event is paradigmatically connected to sacred sexuality.

Women's society and sacred activity

Failing to please his hostess, the man will be publicly shamed and chased away by the women and children (Patai, 1959:140). Themes of a women's society represent surviving features of matrifocal culture when women join in a communal activity. Under such circumstances women subject masculine rules, structure and customs to their interest and a man may function as their sexual object.

Women's sacred activity consists of elliptic verses as their activity appears marginalized, overshadowed and intersected by androcentric patterns. Corresponding to the feast that the Persian king offers for his male

public by way of a tear in the man's clothes for proof of his shame. This motive could be seen in a mutilated transposition in the biblical story itself seen in the Joseph's clothes left in Potiphar's wife's hand and later exposed to the public as a token of shame.

guests, queen Vashti organises a feast exclusively for women (Esther 1:9). The king's feast is described lavishly and exuberantly. Spanning over one hundred and eighty seven days, the description elaborates on the order of his guests from high ministers of the palace and colonies, officers, slaves to laymen and lavishes on the rich decorations, expensive cloths and gold vessels. The feast culminates in seven days as the king opens his royal gardens to the bulk of the people pouring free drinks for all. All the while the content of Vashti's women's party remains obscure, limited to a single verse. It is disrupted by the king's manifestation of masculine supremacy. To demonstrate the king's total dominance, he wishes to exhibit the Queen's feminine beauty before his exclusively male society. Vashti refuses to appear. Her lot remains elliptic too. She loses her position: "Let it be written...that Vashti come no more before the King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she" (Esther 1:19b). She probably loses her head as well: "he (the king) remembered what Vashti had done and what was decreed against her (*nigzar aliah*)" (Zalman Arie, 1971: 1186). Is she banished from the palace, or only from the king's grace? Does she survive? As the show of her beauty was meant to reaffirm the hierarchical supremacy between the sexes, Vashti's disobedience is perhaps treated as a collective conspiracy of all women of the empire nationwide: "And Memucan answered before the king and all the princes, Vashti hath not done wrong to the king but to also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. For the deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all the women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes..." (Esther 1:16-17). The conflict between the king and the Queen is magnified into a war of the sexes. Letters are circulated among all men in the manner of a call to arms recruiting the men to unite to subjugate all women, beyond national, ethnic and linguistic barriers throughout the entire empire. Beyond Persia proper, to all colonies of the empire and translated into all local tongues, the king's letter decrees that all men of high and low should enforce their masculine dominance over women at every homestead. What the text infers is that there may have been social communities in which this was not an accepted rule. Women are treated as a collective corpus powerful and capable of organising themselves around a female leader elevated to their role model, and even beyond that, of having the potential to change social reality when awakened. The collective phrase, which the text uses, is "all the women." Vashti's women's party is regarded as a politically hostile movement or riot. The leader is disgraced and eliminated; the activity of the group is disrupted; its details are scrapped from the records, its members and potential supporters are hushed, turned into objects and suppressed, its record erased from the collective memory. We can discern a two-fold aspect of women's society: the women and the maidens. First the mature women of the empire come under the control of the king's thousands of recruits, their husbands. Once the married women are under direct subjugation, the next generation of women are targeted, represented by "all maidens". They all come under the power of the king himself. They are collected into the place, like fruit to be consummated by the king. Vashti's women's party will remain obscure for gap reading for the generations to come (Timothy K. Beal, 1995:93)

Later exegesis around Potiphar's wife, the Hebrew *Tanhuma* and the Arabic *Koran Sura* 12 lets an exclusive party for women alone resurface.¹⁸ These "post-texts" (intertextually spoken) may relate to a social reality of women's secluded feasts.¹⁹ Similar to the Persian king's party, Potiphar's wife organises a party in which she, a socially superior woman, exhibits the sexual qualities and beauty of a socially inferior man, Joseph her slave, to her female guests. On Potiphar's wife's command Joseph appears before the all-female party clad with beautiful clothes exhibiting his beauty, unlike Vashti. Like the tribal custom, the women turn Joseph into their sexual object of pleasure. The post-texts however turn the women's passion into a scenery of humiliation and perversion (Bal, 2001) as the women cut their fingers with their fruit knives unaware, when Joseph's beauty is demonstrated before their eyes (*Koran Sura* 12, *Tanhuma*, Warsaw *Vayshev*, 8,25 (5)).

Genesis 34:1 contains a pertinent phrase of collective women's activity. "Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bore unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land" (Genesis 34:1). The Hebrew proposition *b* in *b-not ha-arets* implies *with, into, in, or among*, which elucidate the social aspect of Dinah's activity of *seeing with, among or visiting the daughters of the land*. The term *daughters of the land* alludes to local maidens, namely non-Israelites. Dinah is initially an active social agent, described as part of her matrifocal unit, a daughter to Leah and an associated member of a group of maidens. The question that remains open is what occasion, activity or gathering Dinah is going to. Like Vashti's women's party, the content of the event remains obscure. A masculinised event disrupts it and the maidens' gathering loses its context and is overshadowed by the tension between the masculine parties. The disruption turns Dinah from a subject of will and purpose into a disempowered object of other people's passion and honour. Shechem sees her; Shechem rapes her; Shechem's soul cleaves to her; he talks to her; he talks to his father about her; his father talks to Jacob, Dinah's father about her; Jacob talks to his sons, Dinah's direct brother, about her; they talk to Shechem about her, who convinces his community to circumcise on her account; her brothers avenge her honour on her account. The event is masculinised circling around male conflicts of interests between the male parties. The conflict culminates in mass circumcision that symbolically mutilates the masculine power of one party and ends with their mass murder in their moment of weakness. Eventually, Dinah's brothers retrieve her from Shechem's house. In terms of pertinent oppositions, the masculine characters desire, rape, love, hate, negotiate, break negotiation, kill and die together: sons with fathers, a brother with a brother, and leaders with their subordinates. Dinah stands alone, abused and uprooted. She is initially presented as her mother's daughter and an active agent within a feminine collective. Like the story of Esther, we can discern a two-fold aspect of women's society: the women and the maidens. With the objectification of Dinah, her maternal backing and maidens' activity are overshadowed and

¹⁸ The particular detail of the Potiphar's wife's women's party appears in Jewish writing in early compilation *Tanhuma* (Warsaw) *Vayshev*, 8,25 (5) also known as *Midrash Yelamdenu* (Mann). These Misrahim texts are believed to rely on earlier rabbinical texts. *Tanhuma's* suggested date of editing moves between 8th to 9th century.¹⁸ However rules of editing and originality of those periods were looser than ours. According to Louis Ginzberg, as *Tanchuma* opens with *yelamdeinu rabeinu*, (our teachers teach that,) the text refers to earlier Hebrew sources and was created independently of the *Koran*. The *Koranic* story however is recorded to have been edited earlier in the seventh century. Both early compilations, the Hebrew *Tanhuma* and the *Koran* may have survived variants of oral tradition, and thus may have related to a cycle or to a tradition of a master's wife's love to her servant. The Jewish early origin of the episode of the women's party could have been drawn from the *Koran*, edited around the years 644-656. However, the *Koran* could also derive its story from Jewish texts lost to us, or on the other hand, from orally transmitted stories. According to Ginzberg, Potiphar's wife's story was already consolidated in the Hebrew Bible and *Testament of Joseph* of the first to second century AE. These were recycled and incorporated in later medieval books, *Tanhuma* 8th-9th and *Sefer ha-yashar*, 11th-12th both of which include the women's feast. Source: Ginzberg, [1910] 1968:224, *The Legends of the Jews*.

¹⁹ Post-text, see note nr. 1 above.

erased. Once the masculinised event is introduced there is no trace left of a feminine collective activity or a matrifocal community that could support Dinah.

Judges 11:40 reasserts the collective association of feminine activity: “And it was a custom (*hok*) in Israel that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days a year” (Judges 11:40).²⁰ In this text the maidens or women of Israel annually conduct a cult around a virgin martyr. I would suggest that the end of the story is its beginning. The story around Jephthah and his daughter sounds like an etiological narration, which subordinates a women’s collective rite, (Judges 39-40). The Hebrew text says *miyamim yemima*, suggesting a habitual repetition, taking place annually.²¹ The Israelite women could have been celebrating female inaccessibility voluntarily chosen. The story of the father and his daughter bound-to-die masculinises and objectifies a sacred custom of women’s community. The masculinised pattern subordinates women’s inaccessibility and the rite that sanctifies it. If female inaccessibility poses a threat to the foundation of patriarchy, the murder of family neutralises it, legitimatised by a vow to the war deity.

The sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter might evoke two confluent templates. The first template relates to residuals of women’s sacred activity that concerns us, while the other concerns patriarchal dominance that threatens it. The first template recounts a vow made in battle similar to Jephthah’s vow for victory, to sacrifice one’s female family member to a divinity. However, death interchanges with sacred promiscuity for the goddess of fecundity. When the ancient Greeks of Magna Grecia were hard pressed by their enemies, they would vow to the gods that they would offer their wives and daughters to the temple of Aphrodite if victory was granted. One hundred of them would be chosen by lot to serve as sacred prostitutes for a certain period (Briffault, III, 1927, p. 204). The sacrifice of a virgin daughter to death or to the temple of the goddess of fecundity underlines a permuting custom. The comparison lies in the deep structure of sacrifice. Common to sacrifices is the desire to forgo personal claims for the sake of the gods, which usually concerns pleasure: food, possession or women. Excess is the equivalent of propitiatory and piatory sacrifice (Briffault, 1927:III, 202), and sexual continence and sexual promiscuity were closely linked, both requiring the forgoing individual rights for the sake of the gods (Briffault, 1927: III, 216-217).

However, these affiliated customs also bear witness to women’s activities related to fecundity. It has been established that consecrated hierodules and virgins were equally revered. This fact leads me to another template attesting to women leading independent sacred activities, which could highlight the sacred gathering of the Israelite maidens. Women functioning as priestesses or sacred hierodules, like their male peers, priests and holy men, are often born to, belong to or form a sacred clan or religious association. This phenomenon has been recorded in India, Morocco and Egypt. The latter had their own female *sheykhah* (chief in Arabic) until late periods; these holy women led a sacred life, devoting themselves to indiscriminate sexual connections and accepting no patriarchal authority (Briffault, 1927: III, 217). Jephthah’s daughter thus relates to a sacred activity of women alone.

²⁰ On the interpretation of *hak* as a collective custom see Bal, 1988: 66.

²¹ Ariel, 1971, ed Avineri, Hebrew Bible.

With these conclusions in mind, I move to the story of the Mistress of Gibea. The narrative of Judges 19 initially features a woman who voluntarily chooses multiple sexual partners. As a template outside the masculine circle, like female continence, it threatens masculine dominance. Similar to the stories brought so far, elliptic narrative represents women's sacred sexuality in this story. The final event of multiple sexual partners concluding the story symmetrically counterbalances the first event that opens it. The initial event manifests a woman's free choice, while the concluding event consists of an issue between the men that surround her, her host, her husband and the outsiders. The woman's free choice is violated and her control over sexuality is removed and displaced into a masculine power-conflict, culminating in a mass rape, lethal abuse, murder and finally a tribal war. The woman, who in the first place gives herself freely to outsiders, is eventually handed over to outsiders by force. The first event features a woman's sexual behaviour possibly embedding a cultic custom, which promises a free choice, pleasure and independence. The second event introduces the predicament of mass rape, torture, death, desecration of one's body, and neither burial nor grave. The last event overshadows and morally undermines the former event. The prophetic passage quoted above elucidates a theology of terror and intimidation aimed to frighten, repel and warn the contemporary women's community of the cultic practices.

The story of the daughters of Shiloh embodies a pertinent template of sacred female gathering. In an obscure sacred festivity to honour God, the maidens of Shilo meet to celebrate and dance,

(the people of Israel to the Benjamin), Behold, there is a feast of the Lord in Shiloh yearly in a place which is on the north side of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-El to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah. Therefore they commanded the children of Benjamin, saying, go and lie and wait in the vineyard; And see, and behold, if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance in dances, then come ye out of the vineyards, and catch you every man his wife of the daughters of Shiloh.' (Judges 21:19-20).

The maidens' gathering entails descriptive details, which suggest a bacchanalian gathering. The cultic character of the event surfaces in a confluent pattern. The phrase *miyamin yemima* 21:19-20 recurs here as in Judges 11:40, recounting how maidens gather yearly to dance in the vineyards. Like the latter text, Judges 21 denotes a sacred women's gathering, which is reinforced by the obscurity of place characteristic of a mystical legend. The place of gathering lies between locations which carry a sacred or cultic connotation each: "the north side of Beth-El (house of a God), on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-El to Shechem (Shechem who raped Dinah), and on the south of Lebonah, (a tree affiliated with fertility cults)". This can be backed by Hosea 4:13: "They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains, and burn incense upon the hills, under oaks and poplars (the Hebrew Lebonah tree) and elms, because the shadow of thereof is good: therefore (for this reason) your daughters commit whoredom and your brides commit adultery." The story of the maidens of Shiloh relates an established gathering known to the Israelite tribes or at least known amongst the elders (Judges 21:17). Backed by the passage from Hosea, the text seems to underline a bacchanalian rite annually conducted, which depicts unwed maidens dancing in the vineyards while unmarried men are lurking expectantly in the bushes. The text may have marginalized a mutually agreed custom among unmarried Israelite of both genders.

If the custom had ever consisted of sexually egalitarian participation the event was intersected by masculine interest and activity. The men chose and “took” the women to secure the continuity of their tribe.

In the tribal customs mentioned above, women select the men and/or practise a custom based on a mutual and egalitarian understanding. A pertinent connotation can be evoked from the Song of Songs: “how shall we watch the Shulammitte dance in-between the companies” (Song of Song 7:1 Hebrew Bible; James Bible, 6:13).²² The text indulges in a woman’s erotic dance performed amidst erotically aroused spectators perhaps for an erotic end. In this text it seems obvious that there is a mutual understanding between the dancer and the watchers. Even if we consider theories alluding that the Song of Songs was a composition by women, (Goitein, in Brenner, 1993, 58-66), and that the spectators were women, not men, it could sustain a notion of sexual independence of women’s society. The Shulammitte song seems to verge on the limits of grotesque according to modern concepts of genres; which is where an analysis could go wrong. The “arch-text” of the poem may not be literary but ceremonial.²³ Tribal customs of sacred sexuality exhibit extremely erotic songs and dances performed among female companies, categorically excluding men, which are part of fertility rites. Such songs are functionally targeting fertility rites not literature. The songs are meant to raise the participants’ spirits into erotic ecstasy, like similar fertility mysteries and magic ceremonies. Thus they are characterised by nudity and lasciviousness. The rite would include more than verbal stimulation cumulating in what our culture considers obscene gestures and sometime masturbation. Such mysteries are known to have been performed among women’s societies proper in ancient societies throughout the Middle Ages and, in our era, in Borneo and Africa (Briffault, 1927: III, 204-205). Concluding I would say that who ever the spectators are, women or men, their calling the dancer to reappear over and over again suggests a ceremonial repetition characteristic of incantation and ecstatic rites in which poetry is functional: “Return, return, O Shulammitte, return, return, that we may look upon thee. What will ye see in the Shulammitte? As it were the companies of two armies.” (Song of Songs, 6:13). Thus the point is not whether the event in Judges 21 can be defined as a mass rape according to our conception or not. The point is that if there ever was a fertility ritual of women’s society, the narration marginalizes, perverts and objectifies it.

In the texts discussed, a women’s community exhibits voluntary activity, away from the patriarchal structure. These cases attest to residual templates in which women behave like a community conducting a (sub)culture and initiate independent customs, rites and activities outside the patriarchal hegemony. Male dominance marginalizes, sexually and/or violently overshadows, disrupts, transects, discards, undermines, oppresses or manipulates it.

Sexual hospitality and sacred sexuality in the context of continuity - secured and/or endangered

The motive of continuity runs through the biblical stories featuring here. Pertinent elements of alternative sexuality relate to the uncompromising need for genealogical continuity. When continuity is thereby secured and propagated, illicit sexuality is blessed and sanctified. This associates it with sacred sexuality proper.

²² Kimholat hammhanayim, companies of spectators, Brenner, ‘Come Back, come Back the Shulammitte’, in A. Brenner, ed., 1993, 245.

²³ arche-text – the generic type underlining a text, (Mieke Bal, 1988: 254).

The story of Sodom in which Lot's offering his daughters to outsiders is juxtaposed with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Against this background, two daughters and a father consummate a sexual union enacting a mythical procreation like a primordial family to sustain the continuity of mankind. Classical to myth, the functions of father and husband and that of wife and daughter converge. Like fertility goddesses, Lot's daughters combat cosmic destruction through sacred sexuality, reinforced by the motives of intoxication and the relaxation of inhibitions: "Our father is old, and there is not a man on the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth. Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father." (Genesis 19:31-32).

Two cases of alternative sexuality sanctify continuity on the communal and national level. The story of Jael and Sisera, twice related in Judges 4 and 5, juxtaposes possible sexual hospitality with the relief of Israel from national destruction. In the cyclic stories of Judges 19-21, marginalized motives of sacred sexuality and sexual hospitality in Gibeah and Shiloh are juxtaposed with tribal war and the near extinction of the Benjaminites. The sexualised event at Gibeah unites the tribes in a war while the bacchanalian scene at the vineyard of Shiloh secures the continuity of the threatened tribe of Benjamin. From this point the Israelites will proceed into unification under a monarchy.

Sanctification and coexistence

Robert Briffault describes the ideology underlying fertility rituals as follows:

Human marriage cannot achieve its object and be fruitful unless it is preceded by a divine marriage of the woman with the powers whence her fertility truly derives. That union is, we saw, effected by various means, by unrestricted promiscuity, prostitution with strangers, ritual defloration by priest or prince, hierodulic prostitution in temples, mechanical defloration by the image of the god. Those measures achieve more than one purpose; the Holy Matrimony not only secures the fertility of the woman, and that of the field and the cattle, but also protects the husband against the perils of defloration. Those perils are minimised or abolished by the ritual character of the Holy Matrimony; the participants in rites of promiscuity, the stranger, the priest do not incur the dangers attaching to defloration for they are representatives of the god," (1927: III, 222, 316).

Sexual hospitality and sacred sexuality in general challenge two major objectives of patriarchal dominance as presented in the Hebrew Bible: pre-nuptial intercourse and adultery. Confluent customs of fertility like sexual hospitality and sacred sexuality render pre-nuptial intercourse and adultery imperative. Reversibly, the Mosaic constitution outlaws them. The Mosaic constitution targeted the abolition of these rites, and the Hebrew God alone claimed the objectives of fertility of women and land. Though theologically this policy made the Hebrew God the richer in metaphors and character, the transition has never been absolute nor complete, if we consider that as late as the mysteries of the *Kabbalah* the Hebrew God still retained His female divine

partners, the Motronite, the Shekhinna and Lilieth (Patai, [1967] 1978). This is beside the present analysis, but I find it important to bring it up, in view of anti-Judaic voices among feminist theologians blaming the Hebrews for killing the female goddess, as if one alleged *deicide* was not enough for us Jews. The stories discussed here were created in the midst of social and cultural clashes of beliefs and customs laying equal claims for sanctification. This tension spanned over periods of intercultural transition; and in this ideological limbo sentiments could have culminated in struggles for life or death but could also have demurely prolonged in coexistence, compromise and relaxation of rules.

Virgin daughters

The first pattern presented stories in which a father offers to hand over his daughter(s) to outsiders (Genesis 19, Judges 19). These events surprise readers generally led to believe that virginity was highly valued in ancient cultures, if not sanctified. Relying initially on Patai's assumption, I tried to prove that another custom might have intersected the narrative, in this case sexual hospitality. This point alludes that virginity could have been overshadowed, made redundant and/ or discarded by other templates. In his book, *The Mothers*, Robert Briffault attests that virginity consists of a permuting value bound to time and place (Briffault, 1927:227). Deducing from reports of old tribal cultures, in some communities, virginity would be regarded as a trifle, a burden and a fearful dread to be rid of before the woman is wed. In these cultures virginal haemorrhage has been associated with the taboo around menstrual blood and thus equally dreaded.²⁴ The stranger and the outsider, the priest, the ruler and/or landlord were believed to be divinely protected, and being elevated above common men were asked to take the duty of relieving maidens of their virginity. We could thus newly review a detail in the story of Esther relating how maidens *en masse* are brought to the King's palace to be deflowered (Esther 2:2-3,12-15). The custom of prenuptial defloration has been practised as close as the Sahara and as far as Ireland and India. These data may shed an additional light on the custom of offering virgin daughters to outsiders surviving in biblical stories. In addition, this custom highlights the motive of deification of offspring endowed by outside intervention.

Wife offered to an outsider

The second related pattern shows a situation with a wife sexually offered to an outsider in a (possible) situation of hospitality, linked to the motive of fertility and continuity. Narratives of barrenness are known to solve the problem by his own wife offering a secondary woman to a man. Sarah (Genesis 16:1-4), Rachel (Genesis 30:3), and Lea (Genesis 30:9) transform their maids to surrogate mothers. The template of sexual hospitality may indicate a compensatory structure applied to the opposite sex. Perhaps the custom purports to solve the problem of a barren husband and a fertile male outside strict matrimony is called in like a surrogate woman to secure offspring. Genesis 20 indicates that all the wombs in Abimelech's clan were closed. However, with Abraham's blessing not only the wife and maids were cured – the text implies that Abraham's prayer also cured Abimelech.

²⁴ On the psychological aspects of fear of virginity and defloration, and defloration by someone else than the bridegroom, see Mieke Bal's interpretation and Freudian approach (Bal 1988)

This may elucidate that Abimelech had been struck by barrenness (20:17). 2Kings 4, also interlinks the husband's old age with woman's barrenness which leads to the masculine addition to the family represented by in the holy prophet, endowing the family with fertility.

The belief that the gods bestow fertility mutually impends on the theology that a woman's sacred union with the divine is its accessory to human marriage. This ideology underlines the concept of sacred union with the divine bridegroom. The fertility god stands for the divine bridegroom and may be incarnated in the stranger and/or outsider as well as a sacred personage, a priest, a high lord or ruler (Briffault, 1927:203, 220, 221). A woman may form a carnal union perceived as *hieros gamus*, a divine marriage prior or along side her earthly marriage. In carnal appearance, the divine bestows the blessing of fertility that is a prerequisite to the human marriage and its purpose, which is continuity (Briffault, 1927: 218, 219, 226, 225,228-9). This ideology explains the fact that sacred hierodules, unmarried and married women participating in sacred festivities will join with strangers without reservations. Also on other occasions the fertile outsider interchanges with the blessed guest, mighty ruler or stranger who may conceive of a god in disguise (Briffault, 1927:221).

In the narrative cycle of Abraham and Sarah the fertile agent shifts positions. The male characters, Abraham, Abimelech and the three angels embody the fertile outsider. As a guest, Abraham plays the role of a holy person functioning as a fertile agent towards Abimelech's female family members. God Himself announces to Abimelech in his dream at night that Abraham is a prophet (Genesis 20:6). Abimelech on his part plays the role of a host and landlord thus functioning as the extra-marital outside-man towards Sarah. Abraham and Abimelech, whose names both contain "father" (*av* in Hebrew) and a high position above the common man, can be perceived as mutations of the divinised outsider before whom female chastity is waived, resulting in a blessed fertility. The three angels in Genesis 18 embody the recurrent metaphysical outsider announcing the blessed tidings of pregnancy. This metaphysical figure has previously appeared before Hagar to comfort her with the news of her pregnancy in the form of an angel, *malach*, which means both a messenger and an angel in Hebrew (Genesis 16:7); and the angel resurfaced again to save her son Ishmael, calling her this time from the distance of heaven to see the brook (Genesis 21:17). The angels reappear to lead Lot and his daughters away from the catastrophe; they also indirectly precede the birth of Lot's daughter's sons. The angel in Judges 13 proclaims the event of Manoah's wife's forthcoming pregnancy, which recalls the pattern seen in Genesis 16 and 18.

A wife or bride offered to a landlord

The following motive highlights events of tension with a landlord, juxtaposed with the relaxation of a wife's chastity. In Genesis we read a number of stories in which one's bride, newly wed bride or wife is offered to the lord of the land in a situation in which the husband is a stranger, guest, or a landless wanderer. Anthropological data valorise that notion that once the wife is lent, the landlord's offspring legitimises the right of that family to

settle on his land and/or share the rights of the landlord's privileged offspring (Briffault 1927: II, 237).²⁵

Perceived in space, the stories of Sarah and Rebecca show female chastity offered from the direction of the *unsafe outside* entailing wandering and hunger in the direction of the *safe inside* of settlement and plenty. Coming back from Egypt Abraham's clan has grossly grown rich (Genesis 12). However, in Genesis 21, coming to Gerar, Abraham's family is subject to the same insecure and dire conditions. Only after Sarah's nocturnal visit to Abimelech's bedroom, does Abraham receive the privilege of settling on Abimelech's land. From that point, Abraham's status changes from the position of a landless wanderer fearing for his life, to that of a legitimate settler on the land of the same man he has dreaded. With the birth of Isaac that follows, the claim of the Abrahamic family on the land seems irrefutable. This pattern is reapplied to Isaac's family. In the cycle of Isaac and Rebecca, the same recurring elements synchronise and complement one another, which supports the thesis of a subliminal structure.

In various forms and degrees of representations, the stories involve two wives Sarah and Rebecca who are offered to outsiders, juxtaposed with events in which their chastity is waived within the context of a guest, host, outsider and/or a mighty ruler of the land. From the sexualised event with the landlord, significantly recurring twice in Abimelech as the main figure, both Abraham and Isaac are allowed to settle on the land of the Philistines. Abraham and his son Isaac establish the same settlement named Beer Sheba twice and in succession. The city is first established by Abraham, and then all over again by Isaac. In both cases the settlement was initiated by the mercy of the same Abimelech and the same Pikhol his aid (Genesis 21 and Genesis 26). The subliminal structure seems nearly identical in these fragments, though there are forty or sixty years between them.

On suggesting a subliminal template, I return to the story of Dinah. The story mentions Shechem's high status twice: "prince of the country" and "more honourable than all the house of his father" (Genesis 34:2 and 20). We revisit here the recurring template of a sexualised event juxtaposed with privileges offered by a high lord of the land. Shechem offers Jacob's clan a permission to settle on their land like Abimelech before him: "and ye shall dwell with us; and the land shall be before ye" (Genesis 34:10). Jacob like Isaac and Abraham, his father and grandfather, wishes to cooperate with the custom that demands the waiving of female chastity of his family member, his daughter for a secure life. His sons reject it. The violent conclusion of the negotiation results in the Hebrew clan resuming wandering, exposed to danger of genocide unlike their predecessors (Genesis 35:2-5): "I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house" (Genesis 34:30b). Remarkably, after the turmoil period of Dinah and her brothers' revolt, the Hebrew clan enters a new period. Building a new altar for the Hebrew God proper they revert into puritan cleansing of all foreign customs: "And Jacob said unto his household and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments" (Genesis 35:2).²⁶

²⁵ According to Briffault, this ancient template could be the origin of the *jus primae noctis* first night right surviving through the Middle Ages.

²⁶ One should be reminded that Rachel stole her father's idols and was never so far mentioned to have gotten rid of them (Genesis 32:19).

The blessed son of

The motive of a woman's chastity erased before a landlord may yet deconstruct another recurring theme, namely the tension between heirs. Genesis brings twice a pertinent structure in which first-born rights are overruled in favour of another son, while the first-born is sent away from the tribal land. If we consider the custom that legitimises only the rights of the landlord's son on the land, this socio-economic custom favours the offspring of the extra-marital union with the landlord on the offspring of the legal father (Briffault 1927: II, 237, III 230-231). We could reread the stories of Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau as a paradigmatic mutation of the custom. Eventually, only one of the offspring inherits the rights over the land. God's protection and blessing could be conceived as a transposition of the landlord's protection and blessing endowed to the privileged son. The other son is denied inheritance, protection and blessing and is destined to leave the tribal territory for a life of wandering and insecure existence like his natural father in his days (Ishmael Genesis 21:10-21 and Esau Genesis 27:39-40).

This leads me to reflect on Abraham's origin. Abraham is mentioned first among Terah's three sons, which hints at a firstborn. However, Abraham leaves the clan's dwelling to wander off to another land (12:1-9). Like the story of Ishmael's expulsion, the decree is regarded as God's plan. A father's blessing, as a paternal decree, merges with God's command and protection as perceived in Abraham's agreeing to send away Ishmael under the auspices of God (21:12-13) or in Isaac's blessing of Jacob (27:28-29). Returning to Abraham's genealogy, we find that when he sends his servant to find a bride for his son he calls Haran, "my country and my homeland" (Genesis 24:4). The son that remained at the original clan's dwelling resurfaces as Abraham's brother Nahor. A paradigm offered in Genesis 25 supplies me with conclusive evidence. Lean in literary elaboration the text delineates a harsh reality of one son only holding his place within the clan and inheriting all, while all other sons are sent away, similar to the paradigm of Ishmael's expulsion. Neither female rivalry nor divine voice explains the policy of inheritance in this seemingly unimportant text. Abraham bluntly gives all that he has to Isaac and for his sake and interest he sends all other sons away with mere presents: "And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from²⁷ Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country," (Genesis 25:5). Who the mistresses' sons referred to here are, remains ambiguous. Keturah was his second wife after Sarah and not a mistress, and Hagar who is not mentioned here had only one son. This enigmatic text however makes a clear division between one legitimate son who inherits all and the other sons who are sent away as seen in the paradigm of Ishmael's expulsion. The expulsion of all but one son runs counter to egalitarian division between heirs. The latter is demonstrated in Numbers chapter 36, which establishes inheritance laws according to members of patrilocal houses, and even considers daughter's rights to inherit under the restriction that if there are no brothers to inherit their father's land, they should marry within their tribe. Job reaffirms the rule of egalitarian inheritance; as not only his sons indiscriminately receive an equal share of land but also his daughters along with them (Job 42:15). The expulsion of offspring runs counter

to the paradigm of an inheritance shared among legitimate heirs. These texts may show that in ancient times, a legitimate heir was chosen according to other customs than we expect.

Multiple male partners

Within cultural templates of alternative sexuality, we find pertinent customs impending on pre-nuptial sex as a prerequisite to marriage. Abiding by the custom, a bride-to-be or a newly wed woman forcefully or voluntarily joins with another man or other men prior to or even after her marriage before her husband is allowed to join her. The latter denotes a custom abiding by a fixed period of continence.

Herodotus, Pomponius and Diodorus recounted the Nasamonian custom as practised in the Arabian peninsula and it was still found among the Aborigines until recent time (Briffault, 1927; III, 223-226). The Nasamonian wedding custom forces a bride to lie with the wedding guests, before her husband comes to her. A period of sexual continence may be integrated in the custom, which traditionally may take a fixed time, days or weeks.

This leads me to review some odd details in Samson's story. The wedding feast that Samson gives requires seven days as accustomed among the Israelites. However Samson's wedding feast is juxtaposed with a Philistine custom to add thirty of their men to the bridegroom. These guests are obviously neither Samson's friends nor acquaintances: "And it came to pass that when they (the Philistines) saw him, that they brought thirty companions to be with him" (Judges 14:11). The phrase, "thirty companions to be with him" should alert us. This odd addition pertains to a custom the purpose of which remains enigmatic. The Nasamonian custom mentioned above might shed some light on the odd detail of thirty wedding companions, who are strangers to the bridegroom but are assigned to accompany him. It seems that the Philistine custom pertains to a fixed number of consummating wedding guests who are recruited whenever a wedding takes place. This detail remains obscure unless we refer to customs of sacred sexuality. Here the context of the fertile stranger resurfaces again in a sexualised event juxtaposed with an entangling framework of a host and outsiders / guests. The text may underline the cultural tension between the two ethnic groups, of which one may have regarded sacred sexuality as abomination. The Israelite Samson thus meets his "guests" with hostility and aggravation, which are deeper than mere ethnic dislike or economic calculation having to provide for them for seven days. Surrounded by his Philistine wedding "guests", he tries to outwit the sacred obligation by imposing an impossible bet. At this point, I would turn the tables and claim that the riddle does not lead to but embeds the core of the tension. The opening line enfolds Samson's sexual accusation. Samson says, "If ye had not plowed with my heifer", (Judges 14:18). The preposition the Hebrew text employs is *b* meaning into, *inside*, *in* as well as *with*. The Hebrew word *egla* heifer, a female calf, may also read as *agala*, a wagon, in this text. Both words are female nouns, denoting servitude, submission, and objectification, while a heifer also denotes female virginity. The connotations of ploughing compares the field with a woman's body opened up by masculine force to be sown by his seed. Samson is thus accusing the Philistine companions of having sexually used his

²⁷ Hebrew text: *al penei* which would mean here in preference of.

bride; which reflects the Nasamonian custom. It is thus a cultural tension that clarifies Samson's extremely violent assault on the Philistine "wedding companions".

Samson's departure to his father's house after the wedding seems another odd detail in the story, and so does his belated claim to his rights as a husband.²⁸ Philistine customs of sacred sexuality might shed a new light on this odd detail in Samson's history: "And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house. But Samson's wife was given to his companion, whom he used as his friend. But it came to pass that a while after, in the time of the wheat-harvest, that Samson visited his wife with a kid..." (Judges 13:19b-20; 14:1). According to the Nasamonian custom a husband may consummate the union only after the bride has lain with the wedding guests. The Nasamonian custom and sexual continence are closely affiliated. Both relate to rites of sacred sexuality impending on a union with the divine bridegroom as an accessory to earthly marriage and fertility through sacred promiscuity. Robert Briffault asserts that marital continence springs from the same pertinent customs expecting the bride to consummate a union with a representative of the gods in the form of the priest, prince, guest and/or stranger, before she joins with her earthly husband (Briffault, 1927, 232- 239). The Nasamonian custom might also protect the husband from the "perils" of virginal haemorrhage at defloration. Through a collective defloration, the wedding guests protect the bridegroom as well as each other as individuals.

The story of Samson's wedding and his thirty guests may elucidate another enigmatic verse found in the Song of Songs: "Behold his bed, which is Salomon's; three scores valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords; being expert in war; every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear of the night" (Song of Songs 3:7-8). Why should sixty valiant men surround Salomon's bed? What perils are they protecting him from? Significantly, this verse is juxtaposed with Salomon's wedding day: "Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Salomon with crown where with his mother crowned him in the day of his of his espousals, and the day of the gladness of hid heart." (Song of Songs 3:11). Thus both texts are concerned with a wedding and male companions surrounding the bridegroom

The customs described above objectify women in a way that may disturb modern women. However, anthropological data also valorise the custom of multiple male partners voluntarily chosen by women. Morocco and Egypt would be the closest contexts to provide pertinent templates. Until the recent century tribes believed that the prosperity of the tribe and its crop depended on the tribal women practising sacred promiscuity. In the Maghreb area of Morocco, the women of a sacred tribe entitled Walad 'Abdi claimed to descend from saints. They divorced "husbands" in succession and in between practised sacred promiscuity (Briffault, 1927:200,217).²⁹ An Egyptian paradigm pertains to a similar class of noble prostitutes who belonged to a sacred tribe called Barmaky (Briffault, 1927:200, 217). Known by the name of ghazye, they led a life of sacred prostitutes and were organised around a female *sheikha* of their own. When they settled down they would marry a *sheikh* and were considered holy. Bearing these data in mind I read the opening line of 2Kings 4:1 with a new

²⁸ On Samson's unconsumed wedding see Mieke Bal, 1988: 78.

²⁹ Doutte, 1909 :560, *La soiete musulmance du Maghreb et Religion dans L'Afrique du Nord*, Adolphe Jourdan, as quoted in Briffault, see above.

mind; it epitomises a woman as one of the female members or wives of the sons of prophets. As the story relates to a widow the holy title valorises her own status belonging to a holy group.

A pertinent template can be seen in the custom in which a woman chooses herself as many sexual partners as possible before her marriage to prove her desirability, or may be eligible for marriage only after having been impregnated proving her fertility to her future husband (Briffault, 1927:200, 217). These customs allow additional insights to the biblical stories discussed here. It is possible that these stories echo such fertility customs, or surface the tension between communities of which one group observes the customs while the other considers it an abomination. Both Genesis 19 and Judges 19 juxtapose the issue of virgins, a mistress or wife with multiple sexual partners. Judges 19 opens with a mistress or wife who practises sexuality with multiple partners on her own accord in the first place. Her husband then fetches her from her father's house without much ado, which may suggest tolerance towards the custom. Eventually he hands her to the mob, which sardonically mirrors her initial choice to choose multiple sexual partners herself.

Sarah

Finally, I shall newly review the position of the female figure in these transpositions. If we transpose Sarah from the position of sexual object into the position of sexual subject one can highlight pertinent structures which surface women's interests. In the cyclic stories of Abraham and Sarah, the role of fertile outsider is filled by permuting agents all interacting with one and the same female character, culminating in Sarah's pregnancy. Metaphysical intermediary is transposed into various characters. It is seen in the mighty ruler twice, namely Pharaoh and Abimelech, and it recurs in the three angels and guests carrying the tidings of fecundity.

In their various forms, these fragments evoke mythical connotations of the fertility cult embedded in a marginalized and residual transformation. Albert Bates Lord proposes a thesis claiming that biblical stories of the forefathers and foremothers can be seen as diminishing transformations of ancient myths about gods and goddesses altered by oral traditional literature. The narrative transposes a myth around the divine family into an epic saga about earthly family members of a high descent (Lord, 1980). We could read Lord's assumptions in the following. The transposed narration draws on high mimesis of myth around a family of gods and goddesses and is adapted to mid mimesis thus conceived as a saga of forefathers and foremothers. Oral retelling retains elements of the myth in diminishing representations in the transformational stories about human beings of diminished magnitude. The family saga in its new shape still contains the crises, conflicts and dramatic development of the myth around that divine family. Theophany (embodiment of divinity) diminishes its representation, conceiving of a domestic family privileged by metaphysical intermediaries. The Hebrew Bible will transpose polytheistic elements into monotheistic themes of God's intervention in person or by messengers. Etymological analysis could reinforce this assumption. The name Sarah is associated with *sar* meaning to dominate and imposing power as a superior. The name Sarah also bears a direct resemblance to Asherah the Hebrew fertility Goddess. This analysis is reinforced by the divine elevation of Sarah in Genesis 17:15 by adding *h*, God's letter, to her name along side Abraham's name; she is first called Sarai and then Sarah. This elevation could be interpreted as an Israelite transformation of cultic deification. Sarah commands Hagar and

Abraham to join to procreate, which embeds a mythical theme of superiority and power over fertility. As an etymological contrast, we could consider the etymological connotations of the name Hagar. Hagar means *the one that dwells*, or an inhabitant. The names of Sarah and Hagar could be thus extracted out of their domestic and ethnic conflict between a mistress and a slave woman, and be read as a residual narrative of a mythical conflict between a goddess and a mortal woman about the power of fertility. The goddess first commands the earthly woman Hagar to abide by the fertility rite and offer her sexuality, in honour of the fertility goddess. In the aftermath the earthly woman rebels against her goddess as her growing pregnancy lifts up her hubristic pride. These cumulating connotations could underline residuals of fertility myth. This allows us to view the cycle of stories around Sarah within the framework of sexual hospitality and fertility customs at large.

Conclusion

Alternative rules of sexual conduct attest to the biological fact that sexuality practised by women outside an exclusive partnership increases the prospect of conception, offering the highest chance of pregnancy to every woman. Such practices of sacred sexuality may even ensure better breeding by seed imported from outside the clan.

Has sexual hospitality served the patriarchal structure, or has it served the matriarchal interest? Could sexual hospitality be seen within the patriarchal society, or did it function within matriarchal society? Evidence of alternative sexuality in general speaks for the fact that sacred sexuality may not necessarily have undermined the patriarchal rules proper. I tend to believe that cultural templates of alternative sexuality, outside or side by side with patriarchal rules, may have complemented the coarse conditions of continuity unconditionally bound to survival, both on the communal or individual levels. Templates of that nature may have coexisted alongside, condoned and even blessed by the community when they enhanced the same goal ensuring the interest of both genders. These assumptions may bear witness to a richer, more pragmatic and perhaps even more tolerant communal life than we perhaps can imagine.

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