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A Woman on the Border: A Feminist-Structuralist-Deconstructive Reading of the Character of Miriam in Exodus 2:1-10; 15:20-21 and Numbers 12:1-16.

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A Woman on the Border: A Feminist-Structuralist-Deconstructive Reading of the Character of Miriam in Exodus 2:1-10; 15:20-21 and Numbers 12:1-16.

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Abstract

Miriam is a character within the Hebrew Bible who is surrounded by conflicting descriptions. On the one hand, she is Moses' sister, a leader and a cult-musician (Exodus 2:4, 15:19-20); on the other hand she is a rebel and an example of ritual uncleanliness (Numbers 12:1-16). Amidst such a wide variety of views we wish to produce a reading, a 'counter-voice', in order to illustrate how the description of Miriam as a subservient female/ a rebel is both established as well as questioned in the three texts chosen for the present study (Exodus 2:1-10; 15:20-21; Numbers 12:1-16).

We approach this endeavour with the aid of feminist, structuralist and deconstructive aims. The stand of poststructuralist feminism is stated to be the vantage point brought to bear upon the texts under analysis with specific interest given to any issues related to the treatment of Miriam and/or other female character(s) within the passages. Structuralist critique is used in order to establish a normative reading of the texts in question with the aid of more traditional research, which is then questioned by the means of deconstructive critique in order to illustrate how the depiction of Miriam in the first reading is at tension with the one uncovered in the limits and inconsistencies of biblical texts.

Through the above observations we wish to portray Miriam as a woman who constantly breaks through any predisposed characterisations imposed on her by the biblical text and/or previous interpretations. We present her as a 'woman on the border', disturbing the perceived stability of male domination in the texts in which she appears.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible
AJBI	*Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute*
AJPS	*Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
BAR	*Biblical Archaeology Review*
BDB	F. Brown, S. Driver and C. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon,* New Edition (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006).
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BIS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BL	Biblical Limits
BLC	The Bible in Literature Courses
BLLT	The Bucknell Lectures in Literary Theory
BMW	The Bible in the Modern World
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BR	*Bible Review*
BS	The Biblical Seminar
BS	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BTrans	*The Bible Translator*
BZAW	Beihefte zur *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

CBCNEB	The Cambridge Bible Commentary of the New English Bible
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBNS	The Century Bible, New Series
CBSC	The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CEV	Contemporary English Version
CMP	Cultural Memory in the Present
CPSS	A Christian Peace Shelf Selection
CTM	*Currents in Theology and Mission*
DT	Darby Translation
EC	Epworth Commentaries
ECC	The Eerdmans Critical Commentary
ERHBFT	Erev-Rav-Hefte. Biblisch-feministische Texte
ET	Eträge der Forschung
FCB	The Feminist Companion to the Bible
FT	*Feminist Theology*
GBSNT	Guides to Biblical Scholarship. New Testament Series
GKC	W. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A.W. Cowley, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910).
GNT	Good News Translation
HAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HBI	The Heritage of Biblical Israel
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
ICC	The International Critical Commentary

INT	Interpretation: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IS	*In die Skriflig*
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSNTSup	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament,* Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament,* Supplement Series
KEHAT	Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
KHCAT	Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament
LBC	Layman's Bible Commentaries
LXX	Septuagint
MBI	Methods in Biblical Interpretation
MH	*Medical History*
MT	Masoretic Text
MTS	Marburger theologische Studien
NA	New Accents
NAC	The New American Commentary
NCBC	The New Century Bible Commentary
NCV	New Century Version
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament

NIV	New International Version
OBS	Oxford Bible Series
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	The Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Series
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
PC	Picador Classics
PPFBR	Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research
RP	Religion and Postmodernism
RRC	Re-Reading the Canon
SB	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature, Dissertation Series
SBLSym	Society of Biblical Literature, Symposium Series
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SLR	Studies in Literature and Religion
SPHS	Scholars Press Homage Series
SPRS	Scholars Press Reprint Series
TCC	Theories of Contemporary Culture
UCOP	University of Cambridge Oriental Publications
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WC	Westminster Commentaries
WH	Women and History
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Introduction

*Women are at the boundary of the symbolic order, the border between
men and chaos. As borderline figures, women partake of the properties of
a border: they are neither inside nor outside*

J. Cheryl Exum[1]

The description of women as attested above by Exum is exceedingly similar to the portrayal of

'woman' in the logocentric system[2] as depicted by the late philosopher Jacques Derrida. According

to Derrida, woman is the one who is both located and displaced: she can be identified as the man's

other, a credible alternative to the current system, yet she is also the one without definition, the one

without essence or place.[3] Or, to put it in another way, the woman could be described as the

parergon,[4] or the 'frame', because, as Exum stated, she is neither inside nor outside. As a frame she

is not part of the image of male hegemony celebrated by logocentric thinking, yet she is essential to

its establishment. Consequently, the woman is the one who is shunned to the margins. She is neither

an outsider nor an insider, definable as the man's other yet without a definition of her own.

And intriguingly, it is also at the location of the boundary that we discover the protagonist of our

thesis, Miriam. In all three passages to be studied, we not only locate her on the geographical

borders presented in the texts (the shore in Exodus 2:3-4; 14:29-31; 15:20 and the desert/outside the

camp in Numbers 12:14-15) but as a character she also partakes in the features of a border, that is,

she remains as the one without a fixed definition. Indeed, although in Exodus 2:4-10 Miriam could

be suggested to act as a subservient female enabling the continuation of the patrilineal line, she also

appears to transcend this role by acting as the master-mind as well as the subject of her plan. At the

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[1] 'Second Thoughts about Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1.8-2.10,' in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist
Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy* , FCB 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) p.86.
[2] According to Derrida, Western philosophy has from its infancy relied on the eternal search for, and the firm belief in,
discovering the transcendental signified, a truth beyond contestation, a centre to which language points toward and logic
provides access. The assumption of the existence of this type of truth Derrida roughly calls the metaphysics of presence
and/or logocentrism. See D. Rutledge, *Feminism, Deconstruction & the Bible,* BIS 21 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996) p.70.
[3] J. Derrida and C.V. McDonald, 'Choreographies: Interview,' in N.J. Holland (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Jacques
Derrida*, RRC (University Park: the Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) pp.26-28.
[4] We will approach this issue later.

sea event Miriam's song-dance performance is placed in the shadow of the lengthy Song of the Sea (presented allegedly by Moses, Exodus 15:1), yet during her performance she emerges as a leader, a cult musician and a dancer *extraordinaire* (Exodus 15:20-21). In Numbers 12, Miriam appears as a rebel to be banished into the desert (vv. 14-15), yet she is also described as a leader raising community as well as leadership concerns (vv. 1-2). Such a vast array of portrayals of Miriam, and the contradictory nature of the said portrayals, begs the question as to the presentation of Miriam in the biblical material and to the way in which she should be viewed.

Even the feminist biblical consensus is most varied as regards the way Miriam and her significance to biblical critique should be understood. Whilst Esther Fuchs sees Miriam as little more than an unnecessary character within an androcentric plot,[5] Phyllis Trible has acclaimed Miriam to be an image of a woman who is a prophetess, a leader and a theologian.[6] Indeed, since the biblical corpus is open to a variety of opinions, the manner one chooses to interpret the appropriate material must be carefully considered. Although we agree with Fuchs that the biblical narratives do appear to have been created by patriarchal[7] writers for a patriarchal audience,[8] it seems premature to doom the entire biblical text to a patriarchal pit simply because a female-friendly narrative is not readily accessible in the text or in the realm of traditional biblical exegesis. Yet, ignoring the patriarchal strands and searching for 'positive images' of women must also be avoided, for this act can result in

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[5] E. Fuchs, 'A Jewish-Feminist Reading of Exodus 1-2,' in A. Odgen Bellis and J.S. Kaminsky (eds.), *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures,* SBLSym 8 (Atlanta: SBL, 2000) p.314. Here Fuchs is specifically referring to Miriam's role in Exodus 2.

[6] P. Trible, 'Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows,' in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion,* pp.173, 183.

[7] By patriarchy we refer to the manifestation and institutionalisation of male hegemony over women/children/family/society in general (G. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy,* WH 1 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986] p.239.

[8] Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman,* JSOTSup 310 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003) p.7. See, also, Exum, 'Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?' in G.A. Yee (ed.), *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies,* 2nd Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) p.66 and N. Steinberg, 'Feminist Criticism,' in T.B. Dozeman (ed.), *Methods for Exodus,* MBI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.168.

emphasising characteristics that are in the service of patriarchal interests (we will return to this issue later).

Rather, the most profitable course of action seems to stem from that which Eryl Davies calls a 'resisting reading' of a text. That is, we must uncover 'the ideological undercurrents' within biblical texts and, furthermore, 'probe, question, challenge and – if necessary- reject its [the text's] patriarchal assumptions.'[9] Indeed, rather than discard the biblical corpus as overtly patriarchal or ignore these trends in the passages under research, we must challenge what we perceive to be the underlying suppositions within a text and question these statements on their own terms in order to turn our attention to the 'counter-voices'[10] within those very same texts. Because we assume that by the very act of participating within the realm of logocentric thinking any given argument will by definition incorporate within itself its counterargument,[11] we will also assume that a reading, or a 'counter-voice', can be resurrected from the Hebrew Bible (= HB) that pays heed to the inherent conflicts and inconsistencies within the ideological framework of biblical texts. Our intention therein is not, however, to expose the lack of proficiency or even the 'stupidity' of a particular author but, as Yvonne Sherwood has noted, to present the inherent conflicts, 'the inevitable

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[9] E.W. Davies, *The Dissenting Reader: Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) p.53.

[10] Here it is worth noting the remarkable work of I. Pardes, who, in her volume *Countertraditions in the Bible: a Feminist Approach* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), makes a considerable contribution toward researching instances of antithetical female voices in the Hebrew Bible, somewhat based on the definition of heteroglossia as demonstrated by Mikhail Bakhtin (pp. 4ff). Pardes analyses these 'countertraditions' in the biblical portrayal of, among others, the book of Ruth and the Song of Songs, concluding that the characterisation of femininity in the Hebrew corpus is not uniform but rather diverse and often conflicting. As an example of the mode of her analysis, she briefly mentions the portrayal of Miriam in the canon, which she describes as exceedingly fragmentary as well as varied. Indeed, she finds disharmony within the biblical texts themselves, which describe Miriam as both an adversary of Moses (Numbers 12:1-16) and as a national deliverer (Micah 6:4). Such depictions lead Pardes to support her understanding of Miriam as a more significant character than recorded, as well as the presence of other possible traditions concerning her not included in the corpus (pp.6-12).

[11] Y. Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Reading Hosea in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: T&T Clark, 2004) pp.150-151.

contradictions and flaws,' upon which a text has established itself due to its participation in Western metaphysics and the limits of language.[12]

And it is from this point of view that we will approach the passages regarding Miriam. We will consider her as a character whose story is to be found in the sites of conflict 'that it is in the text's interest to repress.'[13] We will seek to find an image of Miriam established within the margins of the narratives, to reveal a woman not only important but necessary to the establishment as well to the undoing of the worldview constructed in the stories in which she appears.

We will approach this task in the following manner. Firstly, we will discuss the method to be used in this thesis, namely that of deconstruction, structuralism and feminism. Feminism, and mainly the position of post-structuralist feminism, will be the specific interest as well as the point of view that will be brought to bear upon each of the texts under consideration. We will use the aid of structuralist methods, mainly as demonstrated by Daniel Patte and David Jobling, together with the help of more traditional scholarship, to establish a credible first reading of the passages as well as the perceived ideological/theological motif inherent in the text itself. Any conclusions so drawn will then be questioned in the deconstructive section. This should help us to establish an interpretation, or a 'counter-voice,' to reveal an understanding of the narratives that shows the inconsistencies and gaps within the reading appropriated. To achieve this goal, a compilation of methods advocated by Derrida, Sherwood and D.J.A. Clines will be used, all of whom have done significant research in the realm of deconstruction and especially biblical deconstruction.

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[12] Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* p.167.
[13] Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* p.303.

Secondly, we will review some of the works of other feminist biblical scholars who have written about Miriam in their expositions. Although the review presented is not an exhaustive one, it should offer a glimpse into the trends among feminist biblical scholars as regards Miriam's character and the most usual or often used arguments concerning her. We will concentrate our analysis on the three passages already mentioned, namely Exodus 2:1-10; 15:20-21 and Numbers 12:1-16 and will draw upon any other material as appropriate. We will suggest that although the research in question has been most enlightening and even provocative, a reading that is able to draw upon both the normative and the subversive elements within the texts is acutely missing. This is the need that we hope to answer in the forthcoming chapters of this thesis.

Indeed, in the chapters that follow we will present a detailed study of the passages mentioned above, attempting to construct a reading that will reveal Miriam as a character resisting definition, that is, as noted in the title of this thesis, a woman on the border. To begin our quest, we will consider Miriam and her function in Exodus 2:1-10. We will note that Miriam emerges as a character that upsets the notion of male hegemony beyond repair. This is because she not only precedes and supersedes Moses in her role as a mediator, but, in addition, she disrupts the dichotomy between human and divine by combining in her person the divine planner and the human subject, questioning the need for a divine planner and a human mediator in the exodus proper.

The same disruption of boundaries can also be observed in Exodus 15:20-21, where Miriam not only appears on the shore, which by definition is a realm associated with boundaries, but where she is also presented as a cult official, demanding praise from the Hebrew men (and women) and thus establishing herself as a leader alongside Moses. We will also address the content of her worship and argue that her act of praise could be understood as an act of persuasion. That is, in Miriam's Song Yahweh's miracle at the sea is understood as comparable to his creative acts at the beginning

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of time, compelling Yahweh to cease his acts of bloodshed since his fame has now been declared in all the earth (Exodus 9:16).

Finally, we will conclude our research with a study of Numbers 12, where we will present Miriam as a leader with both leadership and community concerns. These concerns, we will argue, portray Miriam in a maternal role, a function which Yahweh had decidedly abandoned only a few verses earlier in Numbers 11:16ff. Thus Miriam's actions in vv. 1-2 could be seen as a challenge to Yahweh's chosen form of hierarchical control, a reminder of the maternal prerogatives Yahweh had relinquished. In addition, although the paternal mode of leadership is the form of conduct that will ultimately have pre-eminence in Numbers 12, we must note that the simile used to establish Yahweh's fatherly domination *vis-à-vis* Miriam in v. 14 opens the very structure of Yahweh's mode of hegemony up for dispute. That is, by portraying Miriam as a wilful daughter, Yahweh demonstrates the instability of his acts of domination which can only be maintained if all of his subjects remain under his control and hence can be both challenged and undermined by a subject in possession of an independent will.

Through the above observations we wish to portray an understanding of Miriam which endeavours to view her as an important character, even a subversive one within the Hebrew corpus. However, our intention is not just to present another 'positive portrayal' of Miriam but to offer a reading which is established within the complications, contradictions and conundrums that can be found in the very texts that could be suggested to promote or to devalue her. We wish to portray Miriam as a woman who rebels against fixed definitions, and rejoices in remaining the text's ever present wholly 'other:' a woman on the border.

Chapter 1

Methodology

1. Introduction

The purpose in the following chapter is to examine the various methodologies used in this dissertation, namely those of deconstruction, structuralism and feminism. Though the research will also draw upon strands of canonical criticism in so far as the passages will be studied in their final form without reference to their previous editorial stages and/or historical development, any conclusions thus drawn will be used in support of feminist deconstructive/structuralist aims and hence the said method will not receive individual treatment in this section.

2. Deconstructive Criticism

The critical method of deconstruction has received much attention in recent decades by those well versed in it, those with a cautious critical mind, and also those with no direct experience of Jacques Derrida's writing. Indeed, deconstruction has been variously described as 'a corrective and a critical movement' (Gayatri Spivak)[1], an analysis that 'offers liberation not from common sense but from extreme positions hardly anyone holds' (Michael Fischer)[2] and a useless exercise for religious communities (Robert Morgan and John Barton).[3] It is my purpose to critically evaluate the reading strategy that is called deconstruction[4] and its use for biblical studies.[5]

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[1] 'Practical Politics of the Open End,' in M. McQuillan (ed.), *Deconstruction: a Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) p.397.

[2] *Does Deconstruction Make Any Difference? : Poststructuralism and the Defense of Poetry in Modern Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) p.114.

[3] *Biblical Interpretation*, OBS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp.256-257.

[4] Deconstruction is a concept that cannot be described by a single definition. Derrida himself depicts deconstruction as a strategic device rather than a system ('The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations,' trans. K. McLaughlin, in A. Montefiore [ed.], *Philosophy in France Today* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983] p.40); however, as Sherwood has demonstrated, in the attempt to define deconstruction as a non-system, Derrida cannot avoid the implication that deconstruction is 'accessible to definition' (*The Prostitute*, p.165). Indeed, despite Derrida's unwillingness to define deconstruction, such endeavours have been taken up by other scholars in the academic field, among others, by William A. Beardslee ('Poststructuralist Criticism,' in S.R. Haynes and S.L. McKenzie [eds.], *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993] pp.224-225), C. Norris (*Deconstruction: Theory and Practice,* Revised Edition, NA [London and New York: Routledge, 1991] p.31),

2.1 Back to Babel: Derrida

One of the most accessible, or at least so claimed[6], writings by Jacques Derrida in the realm of

biblical studies is his analysis of the Tower of Babel narrative (Genesis 11:1-9). Since this

dissertation focuses on biblical research, an exploration of Derrida's application of deconstruction to

this myth appears appropriate. Though Derrida has done biblical deconstructive analysis elsewhere,[7]

the Tower of Babel is a text that, as Craig Bartholomew notes, 'Derrida gives sustained attention to

and returns to repeatedly.'[8] Indeed, this story is not only analysed in detail on two separate

occasions,[9] but Derrida's reading of Genesis 11 also illustrates with some clarity his approach to

language and translation in general. However, my aim in this chapter is not merely to repeat

Derrida's analysis of the narrative, but rather to briefly illustrate the version of deconstruction that

will be adopted throughout this thesis by bringing into the discussion the works of Sherwood and

Clines, among others. Indeed, to repeat Derrida's own method of deconstruction would be

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G.A. Phillips ('The Ethics of Reading Deconstructively, or Speaking Face-to-Face: The Samaritan Woman Meets Derrida at the Well,' in E. Struthers Malbon and E.V. McKnight [eds.], *New literary Criticism and the New Testament,* JSNTSup 109 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994] p.287) and B. Johnson, 'Teaching Deconstructively,' in G.D. Atkins and M.L. Johnson (eds.), *Writing and Reading Differently: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition and Literature* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985) p.141. A popular definition of deconstruction, according to Sherwood, is that "'every structure is constituted by necessary exclusions': the idea that, in creating structures –be they political systems, philosophies, narratives or theologies –we *choose,* consciously and unconsciously. We choose because our range of vision is limited, because we inhabit certain contexts and not others, and because we can never achieve perfect, even-handed justice, even though we may strive for it" ('Jacques Derrida and Biblical Studies,' http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/ article.aspx?articleId=332 [21/2/2009, her italics]). This definition is one among many and does not define deconstruction all-inclusively. However, it is an example of the type of research that Derrida's 'non-system' has created and aids to enlighten us in the quest to grasp deconstruction as a critical method.
[5] Especially in his later life Derrida wrote a considerable amount as regards issues relating to faith and religion. Some of his best known works are: "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources or 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," trans. S. Weber, in J. Derrida and G. Vattimo (eds.), *Religion,* CMP (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) pp.1-78 and *The Gift of Death and Literature in Secret,* 2nd Edition, trans. D. Wills, RP (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). However, because Derrida's mode of deconstruction is treated as a reading strategy in this thesis, his relationship with religion *per se* will not be studied further. For a collection of other scholars' readings of Derrida's contribution to biblical studies/ philosophy of religion, see Sherwood (ed.), *Derrida's Bible: Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and Sherwood and K. Hart (eds.), *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005). The latter work also includes an interview with Derrida (pp.27-50).
[6] See the abstract of J. Derrida, 'Des Tours De Babel,' trans. J.F. Graham, *Semeia* 54 (1991) p.3.
[7] For example, In *The Gift of Death* Derrida attempts an analysis of parts of the gospel of Matthew, Philippians 2:12-13 and Genesis 22 (pp.54-116).
[8] C.G. Bartholomew, 'Babel and Derrida: Postmodernism, Language and Biblical Interpretation,' *Tyndale Bulletin* 49, 2 (1998) p.307.
[9] Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel,' pp.3-34; *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. C.V. McDonald, trans. P. Kamuf and A. Ronnell, (New York: Shocken Books, 1985) pp.98-110.

impossible, since his analysis is subject to all the different 'texts'[10] that affect his analysis, for example, his background, linguistic and philosophical preferences/expertise and scholarly experience. However, what we can do is to adopt some of the principles he brings to bear on the texts he analyses, critique them in the light of the works of other authors, and formulate an approach most appropriate for this dissertation.

However, before approaching Derrida's reading on Genesis 11, we must note that Derrida never presents his study as following a strategic formula. Indeed, as Sherwood has noted, Derrida's work reads 'less like manuals than poems:' the language is often metaphorical, his reading intertextual and resisting the style of causal reasoning. [11] Nevertheless, to maintain clarity and in order to illustrate some of the deconstructive principles operating in Derrida's readings, the subsequent deconstructive principles will be demonstrated from his work as follows.

In his study of the Tower of Babel narrative, Derrida could be described as attempting to unfold a moment of 'double' or 'bifurcated writing', that is, to deconstruct the story in a manner that opens its 'biface' or an interval of contradiction that suspends the text between two mutually incompatible possibilities.[12] As Derrida has argued elsewhere, by partaking in the logocentric system of Western thought all texts will carry within themselves features which will contradict and/or undercut the text's and/or the author's intentions.[13] We are introduced to the world of *différance*, a term coined by Derrida, which is a combination of the two uses of the French verb 'différer', to 'differ' and to

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[10] According to Derrida, '*there is nothing outside of the text*,' [his italics] that is, that which structures our expression of thought and experience will always remain mediated. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) pp.158-159. For a brief synopsis of Derrida's understanding of 'textuality', see, also, Routledge, *Reading Marginally,* 81-82 and Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* pp.169-170.

[11] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.159.

[12] Derrida, *Positions*, trans. A. Bass (London and New York: Continuum, 2004) pp.38-39.

[13] In *Dissemination,* Derrida argues that deconstructive reading should aim at a 'certain relationship' not perceived by the writer, between that which he 'commands' and that which he 'does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses' (*Dissemination,* trans. B. Johnson [London and New York: Continuum, 2004] p.xv). See, also, Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* pp.150-151, 167.

'defer'. Indeed, Derrida notes that *différance* is 'the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time.'[14] This is because *différance* implies spatial difference, i.e. signs exist due to their difference to other signs, and time, for a sign will always defer that which it is referring to. Thus, in all of its differing/deferring, a sign cannot exist in and of itself;[15] rather, every element is constituted 'on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system.'[16] That is, a sign will always carry with itself the 'trace' of its 'other' (that which the sign is not) without which a sign can be neither constituted nor understood.[17] Since all meaning becomes thus mediated or 'borrowed', by extension, then, every attempt to establish a particular meaning will lead to the discovery of the 'other' meaning, and every attempt to establish a particular reading will lead to the disclosure of the 'other' reading.

And to discover such an 'other' reading appears also to be the goal in Derrida's study of the Tower of Babel. As one of his 'first steps'[18] we could propose that Derrida employs the motion of reversal, that is, the uncovering of the hierarchies within the text and consequently the uplifting of the marginal part.[19] Indeed, we are referring here to the inherent oppositions, more specifically to binary oppositions within a text, through which we indicate the structure within Western tradition to divide the world into opposed couplets in which one term is in a privileged position.[20] As Derrida notes, 'in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*,

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[14] Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982) p.8.
[15] Derrida, *Positions,* p.23.
[16] Derrida, *Positions,* p.24.
[17] See G.C. Spivak's reading of trace, 'The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent... [trace] is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience' ('Preface,' in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. xvii).
[18] As J.A. Smith notes, the acts of reversal and displacement are both part 'of a two-sided, yet single, deconstructive move' ('Marks of an Apostle: Context, Deconstruction, [Re]citation and Proclamation in Philippians,' [Ph.D. diss., Sheffield University, 2001] p.34). Therefore, the terms 'first step' and 'second step' are used in inverted commas, for though they are two functions, they are intended to occur simultaneously. See, also, Derrida, *Positions,* p.39.
[19] Derrida, *Positions,* p,39.
[20] For a list of such dichotomies, see M. McQuillan, 'Introduction: Five Strategies for Deconstruction,' in M. McQuillan (ed.), *Deconstruction: a Reader*, pp.9-10.

but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other…or has the upper hand.'[21] Thus, when discussing binary oppositions, we are not referring simply to a sign and its 'other,' but to the establishment and the preference of one concept over the 'other', for example, relevant to our thesis, the preference of man over his 'other', woman.[22] Returning to the Tower of Babel story, the main binary opposition which Derrida identifies is the hierarchy between God and Shem, the two proper names that Derrida suggests are waging war in the story. Out of the opposing forces, Shem could be described as the dominant one: it is his attempt to create a universal tongue, which is to be imposed by 'violence, by force, by violent hegemony over the rest of the world.'[23] However, by concentrating his analysis on Babel Derrida subverts the power-play in the text in order to make the marginal concept more dominant.[24] Babel, the name that God bestows upon himself in order to disrupt the Semites' violent endeavour, becomes the interval, the 'biface',[25] the concept around which the story will deconstruct itself.

Through his analysis of the name Babel, Derrida could be suggested to begin his 'second step', that is, the use of the deconstructive method of displacement.[26] Derrida argues that Babel appears as a signifier (that is, as a linguistic component) with several referents (that is, the entities the signifier represents): it is a proper name with a specific meaning (the city of God/ Babylon), and a common

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[21] Derrida, *Positions,* pp.38-39.

[22] Hélène Cixous, a French feminist theorist and novelist, discusses the elevation of man over woman in Western thought in her essay 'Sorties' in which she notes that the history of Western thought is the history of constructed inequality passing for fact, and consequently the history of the West is a history of logocentrism and/or phallocentrism (H. Cisoux, 'Sorties,' in D. Lodge [ed.], *Modern Criticism and Theory: a Reader* [London and New York: Longman, 1988] pp.287-293). Although Cixous' work on gender studies goes beyond Derrida's work on the implications of deconstruction to feminist critique, Derrida does come to a similar understanding regarding male pre-eminence in his coining of the term *phallogocentrism* to indicate 'the complicity of Western metaphysics with a notion of male firstness' (a translator's note in Derrida and McDonald, 'Choreographies,' p.29).

[23] According to Derrida, the Shems want to make a name for themselves and they also bear the 'name of name' ('Shem' in Hebrew means 'name'). They wish to impose their tongue on the world on the basis of the edification of the tower (*The Ear of the Other*, pp.100-101).

[24] See Derrida, 'Des Tours De Babel,' pp.3ff.

[25] Derrida, *Positions,* p.39.

[26] Sherwood describes the method of displacement as a 'strategic device that prevents a new hierarchy forming, or an old one reforming, as the absolute paradigm or truth' (*The Prostitute*, p.174).

noun the meaning of which is linked with the Hebrew verb בלל, 'to confuse'.[27] This, according to

Derrida, is the state and desire in every proper name: the wish to be understood as a common name,

yet to be respected as a proper name. Consequently, the name that God bestows upon himself

(Babel) is a name established within division and ambiguity.[28] As Derrida notes,

> He [God] says: Translate me and what is more don't translate me. I desire
> that you translate me, that you translate the name I impose on you; and at
> the same time, whatever you do, don't translate it, you will not be able to
> translate it.[29]

By giving himself the name Babel, God therefore places himself in the middle of the translation,

between 'univocality and plurality,'[30] dooming mankind to wander forever in the circle of

interpretation. God becomes the victor over Shem's colonialising efforts of a single idiom by

introducing the impossibility of translation and the limits of language.

However, in the beginning of his article 'Des Tours De Babel', Derrida also notes that "the 'tower of

Babel' does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompletion, the

impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of

edification."[31] The conundrum of translation and the multiplicity of idioms represent not only the

incompleteness and the lack of structural order within translation and/or language, but also the ever

unfinished business of reaching a stable referent or truth itself, a 'true' translation. As regards

Yahweh, it is intriguing that in the HB the name 'Yahweh' is absent in speech (since his name

cannot be spoken) and, as Sherwood has noted, even in writing he is described with a name that is

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[27] Derrida notes, 'He [God] imposes confusion on them [the Shems] at the same time as he imposes his proper name, the name he has chosen which means confusion, which seems confusedly to mean confusion and which the Shems understand in their tongue, confusedly, as confusion' (*The Ear of the Other,* pp.101-102).

[28] According Derrida, the multiple uses of the name Babel (proper/common name) illustrates the wish to maintain respect as the proper name, yet to partake in the 'common' world and to be understood. Derrida states that this division of the proper name, 'insofar as it is the division of God –in a word, insofar as it divides God himself - in some way provides the paradigm for this work of the proper name. God himself is in the double bind, God as the deconstruction of the Tower of Babel' (*The Ear of the Other,* p.102).

[29] Derrida, *The Ear of the Other,* p.102.

[30] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.201.

[31] Derrida, 'Des Tours De Babel,' p.3.

no name at all. Indeed, since Yahweh's self-identification in Exodus 3:14 (I am/will be who I am/will be) could be described as both a definition and an evasion of definition, the divine 'name' becomes a 'cue for a series of infinite displacements.'[32] God constitutes the ultimate absence, the forever deferred presence, the one without a fixed definition whenever he is present in a narrative. Furthermore, in the story of Babel, Yahweh is 'present' as confusion, creating additional absence. He is 'translated' in the common tongue as confusion, yet this translation is both 'confused' and 'uncertain.'[33] Yahweh is בבל, the constantly deferred God, the one who is forever not present, and even if he is present, he is wrapped up in confusion.

Drawing the analysis of Derrida's reading to a close, it must be noted that Derrida's interpretation of the Babel narrative is unique in several respects. First of all, his analysis is similar to an allegorical reading: it is established within a world of proper names, translations, the forces of reason as opposed to the forces of deconstruction.[34] Though such an analogy might provide most interesting possibilities, it could also be described as limiting. Indeed, Derrida's interpretation of the Babel narrative is considerably bound by his interest in translation, which could be claimed to divert his interests from other issues present in the text. Yet, Derrida's openness about his personal bias also redeems his work. Derrida never states that his reading is the only 'correct' one to be gleaned from Genesis 11; rather, he argues that he uses Babel as an example because he thinks it can provide 'an epigraph for all discussions of translation.'[35] As a reading strategy Derrida's interpretation can therefore offer an illustration of a possible way to interpret the narrative without arriving at a conclusive, universal truth.

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[32] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.249.
[33] Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, p.102.
[34] See Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, pp.201-202.
[35] Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, p.100.

However, within Derrida's approach the role of an individual reader is not quite as uncomplicated as could be inferred from the above. Although Derrida is open about his own bias in a given text, and even redefines the meaning of a text[36] as Sherwood observes, because deconstruction supposedly remains bound within the text, it "theoretically takes place independently of any reader: the reader… 'discovers' the contradictions that have already been produced."[37] Consequently, the role of the reader is noticeably diminished, for theoretically any reader should be able to reproduce Derrida's own interpretation by simply discovering the 'text' within the text. However, the position taken in this thesis is that no reading is free of subjectivity and thus to suggest that one could simply reproduce somebody else's reading or that a text could be read without the reader's involvement remains an impossibility.[38] Rather, we suggest that both texts and readers create meanings,[39] and consequently the position of the reader, be that feminist, androcentric or some other, will have a bearing on the meaning produced. We thus note that although Derrida's reading strategy can be desirable, some of his theoretical claims leave his stance ambiguous, a position that contemporary scholars might be justified to readdress.

Thirdly, Derrida's reading provides an unconventional approach through which various biblical characters, even Yahweh himself, can be reestablished. As Sherwood further notes, Derrida's description of Yahweh as the 'master-deconstructor' (and Derrida's alignment with the deity) suggests

> a provocative new image of the deity as …. punster and dismantler of
> stories who speaks confusingly and refuses to conform to the ideal of
> univocality with which he has been traditionally associated.[40]

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[36] See n.10.
[37] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.168.
[38] M.A. Tolbert, 'Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics,' *Semeia* 28 (1983) p.117.
[39] Exum, 'The Hand that Rocks the Cradle,' in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women,* JSOTSup 215 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996) p.90.
[40] Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* p.202.

Indeed, rather than treating Yahweh as the guarantor of patriarchal truth as is often the case within logocentrism,[41] we can observe God as a multiple image, one that resists uniformity, and embraces undecideability. More specific to our thesis, this manner of understanding God also opens up the possibility of reading Yahweh as a deity who is often described as masculine, yet could also be suggested to reflect the influence of the (hu)man's other, even that of the feminine.[42] Moreover, such reading releases the woman in the corpus to become defined not by patriarchal hegemony, but to find her expression within the limits and margins of logocentric thinking.

Thus, by reversing power-plays, uplifting marginal parts and revealing moments of indecision within a text, Derrida has offered an avenue for interpretations that resists closure. Biblical narratives and characters can become sites of discovery, where an interpretation is to be found by engaging with the 'other', with the marginalised, in the story. Such a strategy can therefore help to shed some new light on characters that have been defined by previously 'correct' interpretations, in our case especially narratives that concern women.[43] Consequently, deconstruction can help to redefine the world of biblical exegesis as one that rejoices in plurality rather than uniformity.

2.2 Back to Hosea: Sherwood

Yvonne Sherwood has continued to explore biblical deconstruction in her volume on Hosea 1-3.[44] After a lengthy exposition concerning previous readings on Hosea, a semiotic analysis, and an introduction to deconstruction, she commences her quest by teasing out of the text three binary

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[41] As Derrida has demonstrated in *Dissemination,* our current metaphysical climate is not only based around a logocentric understanding but also a patrocentric understanding, in which the father-God remains the guarantor of the system. And as long as father God remains as the guarantor, our comprehension of truth will remain closely affiliated with our comprehension of gender. See Derrida, *Dissemination,* pp.67ff (especially pp.143-154).

[42] For example, Luce Irigaray encourages women to envisage the divine as feminine; however, not in the form of a transcendental God but as a 'horizon' incarnated within women through the act of 'becoming.' For more information, see Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies,* trans. G.C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp.57-72; Irigaray, *Luce Irigaray: Key Writings* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004) pp.150 ff.

[43] See D.N. Fewell, 'Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)razed City of Writing,' in G.A. Yee (ed.), *Judges & Method*, pp.116-118, 120-121.

[44] Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* pp.150ff.

oppositions (innocence-deviance; Yahweh-Baal; love-hate). Accordingly, she sets to deconstruct

these dichotomies with the help of some of the terms that Derrida had previously coined in other

texts to reveal instances of double writing.[45] Although all of these phrases are specific to the texts

Derrida had previously analysed, and therefore by definition not transferable to other writings, it is

the principles underlying Derrida's expressions that interest Sherwood. She restricts her examination

to four terms: the *palaeonymy* and three undecideables (*pharmakon*, *supplement* and *parergon*) and

seeks to apply the principles behind these phrases to her own reading of Hosea. To explain the

origin of these terms or to critique Sherwood's use of them in light of Hosea 1-3 is beyond the scope

of this dissertation; however, we can illustrate the use of these expressions from Sherwood's work

as follows.

Palaeonymy, or 'the preservation of names,'[46] is the principle of an entity being able to exist (to be

read/written) only to question its existence. That is, *palaeonymy* is to use an old term (because

deconstruction needs to be written) but under erasure (*sous rature*), to use it in inverted commas, 'to

use it but not entirely agree with it.'[47] Sherwood reveals such a dichotomy as existing in the binary

opposition of love-hate, more precisely in the names that God bestows upon Hosea's daughters.

Both of the names, 'Not-Loved' (Hosea 1:6), and 'Not-My-People' (Hosea 1:9), retain the 'old'

affirmation of 'Loved' and 'My-People' while being negated by לא (not), which, however, does not

erase the presupposed positive names. Rather, the 'old' affirmations are put 'under erasure,' to be

observed but not subverted.[48] Furthermore, even when in Hosea 1:10 a new name is introduced, the

old (negative) name is never completely erased. That is, instead of 'erasing' the name 'Not-My-

People' by reinstating the implied positive name ('My People'), the new name is 'Sons of the Living

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[45]A list of some of these undecideables is given by Derrida in *Positions*, p.38.

[46] Derrida, *Dissemination,* p.3.

[47] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.175. See, also, Derrida, *Positions*, p.60.

[48] Sherwood also notes that issuing negative names in the beginning of the narrative strikes at the core of Israel's theological heritage (which presupposes love and belonging), challenging 'the violent hierarchy which places love above rejection (*The Prostitute*, pp.241-242).

God,' causing not a reversal of the old negative name, but retention of both the old and the new. The names are established in a moment of double writing, where two opposed 'meanings are to converge *in the same place*,'[49] where the 'new name' is haunted by the 'memories of the old.'[50] Overall, the names of Hosea's daughters could thus be argued to reveal a moment of indecision, of undecideability, where the binary of love-hate is momentarily suspended.[51]

A similar moment of displacement can also be found in the name God bestows upon himself: 'Not-Your-God' (Hosea 1:9). At the moment of speech, an act which is often understood to indicate presence, Yahweh deconstructs his own being and presence by declaring his absence and non-being.[52] That is, the definition Yahweh utters ('Not-Your-God') defies both identification and presence; yet Yahweh speaks and defines himself with a name which suggest an old name ('Your-God'). Accordingly, neither presence nor being are completely eliminated; rather, we could claim that the dichotomy of presence-absence and being-non-being are kept open, where neither term is allowed to dominate. Moreover, later in the text Yahweh 'presents' himself through further mutually exclusive terms, for example, a husband (Hosea 2:14-23) and a parent (Hosea 11:8-10), a lover (Hosea 14:4-8) and an animal (a lion, Hosea 5:14). Thus, it becomes impossible to conceive Yahweh as a single entity, as a being or a non-being, as present or absent. Rather, God is fragmented throughout the text and even his very existence is 'placed under erasure' (Hosea 1:9).[53]

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[49] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.243 [her italics].
[50] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.243.
[51] The children also function as undecideables, since they disturb several binary oppositions within the text. For example, they are aligned both with the mother (Hosea 1:2) as well as the father (Hosea 2:4); the guilty and the innocent. In addition, they disturb the notion of legitimate-illegitimate, since we are not certain of the identity of the children's father. Thus, the children act as undecideables, since they do not corroborate exclusively with either side of the appropriate binaries (Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, pp.244-245).
[52] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, pp.248-249
[53] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, pp.250-251.

The second term to be approached, *pharmakon*, is an expression which has its origins in Derrida's reading of Plato's *Phaedrus*.[54] There a single word, *pharmakon,* can stand for two opposed meanings: remedy and poison.[55] Sherwood finds this principle of 'opposed meanings' at work in the concepts of 'nakedness' and 'wilderness' as well as in the name of Hosea's son, Jezreel. Sherwood argues that in Hosea 1-3 'nakedness' and 'wilderness' are both used

> in such a way that they acquire a hinged, double and opposite meaning. Both refer to a time of innocence and beginnings but also to corruption and endings.[56]

For example, 'nakedness' represents both sexual innocence and intense eroticism and 'wilderness' can refer to both a reunion with God as well as to a place of abandonment.[57] In addition, neither of the suggested meanings for 'nakedness' nor 'wilderness' are established in a privileged position; rather, opposed interpretations are held in a constant tension in the text, questioning the motifs and the stance of a God who would use such metaphors to both entice and condemn Israel.

Jezreel, in turn, is declared by Sherwood to be 'the ultimate pharmakon,'[58] since Jezreel is a name which partakes and resists several dichotomies, for example, Jezreel-Israel (the evoked rival meanings of ישראל /יזרעאל) place-time (Jezreel refers to both a valley plain and a point in history), affirmation-rejection (the historical event is viewed by Elisha as positive and by Hosea as negative) and male-female (Jezreel is associated with both male and female genders in different parts of the text). Moreover, Jezreel becomes a motif for a glorious future (Hosea 1:11) but without erasing its past which is clouded in contradictory interpretations.[59] Glory and ambiguity, past and future, both reside in Jezreel. And most importantly, none of these 'double meanings' is ever brought into a place of decision, a place of preferring one connotation over the other. Instead, they are left in a

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[54] Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp.98ff.

[55] See Derrida, '… *pharmakon,* even while it means *remedy*… makes legible that which *in the same word* signifies, in another spot and on a different level of the stage, *poison...*' (*Dissemination*, pp.100-101) [his italics].

[56] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.210.

[57] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, pp.210-214.

[58] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.245.

[59] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.246.

constant state of undecideability, where more puns and associations are placed upon the terms without a hope of balance, or of harmony.

The principle of the *supplement* is presented in Sherwood's work in the opposition innocence-deviance. According to Sherwood, Hosea 1-3 assumes an unadulterated beginning of innocence, to which Yahweh wishes to entice Israel; however, as Derrida has demonstrated in his reading of Rousseau's 'Confessions' and 'Essays on the Origin of Languages,' the idea of purity of origins is little more than an illusion, constantly disrupted by the appearance of the *supplement*, that is, a concept which is neither 'accident nor essence.'[60] Or, as Sherwood summarises, the *supplement* embodies the idea that 'pure is always already impure, good is always already evil, and that in all violent hierarchies the superior term is always already dependent on, and contaminated by, its inferior.'[61] God's command to Hosea to take a prostitute as a wife further establishes this claim: not only is the image of the innocent, pure beginnings of the wife-Israel distorted beyond repair but 'the implication is that the people will not understand purity unless it is defined against impurity.'[62] We are submerged in the infinite play of the *supplement,* where there can be no 'beginning without harlotry and no innocence without knowledge.'[63] Conflicting concepts can only be defined as opposed to one another, and '"derivation' is as necessary and original as the 'origin.'"[64]

Parergon, in turn, is a concept which expresses the belief in the confusion of borders, or as Derrida states, 'the *parergon* is precisely a detachment which is not easily detached.'[65] It symbolises the undefinable separation of an inside from its outside, that is, a frame from the painting it adorns, the

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[60] Derrida, *Positions*, p.40.
[61] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.182. See, also, Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp.167, 199.
[62] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.209.
[63] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.208.
[64] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.209.
[65] Derrida and C. Owens, 'The Parergon,' *October* 9 (1979) p.22.

drapery on statues from their bodily surfaces,[66] in short, the impossible task of differentiating boundaries.[67] The idea of *parergon* is expressed in Sherwood's work in her understanding of the inseparability of Yahwism from Baalism. Indeed, not only is Yahweh, the supposedly better first husband (Hosea 2:2, 15), understood as distraught and violent with serious character flaws (Hosea 2:2-13) but his inadequacies are even reflected in the fact that his wife (with all her faults) has deserted him. Moreover, Yahweh is not ultimately distinguished from Baal, but rather made into his image: Yahweh is portrayed as a lover, provider, and a master, exactly the same terms used to describe Baal (Hosea 2:5, 8, 10, 14-17). The connection between Yahweh and Baal could consequently be portrayed as that of a *parergon*. As Sherwood further notes, 'the prophet deconstructs his argument that Israel should become separate by demonstrating that the inside, pure religion, cannot be detached from its Canaanite frame…'[68] Because Yahweh and Baal have become the mirror images of each other, the systems of belief they represent cannot be easily detached. Rather, Yahwism and Baalism become intertwined, resulting in the 'frame' of the Canaanite faith being united with the Hebrew heritage, suggesting the lack of Yahwism to be 'autonomously self-defining.'[69]

The above illustration is but a sample of Sherwood's deconstructive work. Needless to say, her reading provides a very unique angle to the 'disturbing, fragmented, outrageous and notoriously problematic text'[70] which is the book of Hosea. Her interpretation is not only sensitive to the conflicting currents running through Hosea 1-3, but also to the possible readership of the book, even giving credence to the feminist deconstructive endeavour in her analysis of Gomer's marriage in the

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[66] Derrida and C. Owens, 'The Parergon,' *October* 9 (1979) pp.21-27.
[67] See Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.186.
[68] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.227.
[69] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.227.
[70] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.11.

last chapter of her volume.[71] Furthermore, Sherwood is exceedingly careful to remain truthful to the text before her, even to the extent that she wishes to challenge the standard scholarly exposition of Hosea which often supports only one side of the dichotomies presented. Rather, she wishes to show that 'the assumption that to support the thesis, one must disprove or denounce the antithesis, is not reflected in this text.'[72] Indeed, Sherwood is content to leave her reading in a place of indecision rather than imposing one, universal interpretation; however, she also recognises her own subjective involvement in the reading process and encourages further study of the passages in question.

However, there is one aspect of Sherwood's work that is questioned here, which is the lack of reconstruction in her work. True to her deconstructive aims, Sherwood's reading of Hosea proves the text to be riddled with undecideables and contradictory attitudes, which, however, might leave a person of religious conviction wanting something more. Admittedly, as was noted earlier, one of the aims of deconstruction is the prevention of the forming of new hierarchies, and thus in this regard Sherwood has achieved her goals in a commendable fashion.[73] However, from the standpoint of a person of faith who might still wish to gain revelation from the biblical text after a deconstructive enterprise has been executed, deconstruction might prove as a useful insight into biblical critique but leave the end result lacking in some respects. That is, if Hosea is viewed as established within ambiguity, it becomes exceedingly difficult to ascertain the manner in which to glean understanding from the text. Undoubtedly, the HB as a whole is riddled with contradictions and mutually exclusive stances and thus I do not indicate that a better way to approach Hosea would be to impose *the* new

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[71] Sherwood approaches her reading of Gomer's marriage with a mix of deconstruction, feminist criticism and reader-response theory. She concentrates her efforts to demonstrate that Hosea 1-3 is not just an allegory 'of the religious life in Israel' but also 'of the mechanisms of patriarchal control' (p.306), which she perceives as two ideologies inherently linked in the text. She approaches this goal by deconstructing three binary oppositions she perceives in the passage: subject-object, accuser-accused and (in)dependence. Although it is possible to read her statements regarding these dichotomies as relevant to the four Derridean terms as described earlier, she does not explicitly apply them to any of her conclusions (*The Prostitute*, pp.306-322).

[72] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.252.

[73] In addition, deconstruction could be compared to the 'strand of midrashic interpretation that entertains antitheses and establishes endless obscure interconnections within the text' (Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, pp.194-199; see, also, Rutledge, *Reading Marginally*, pp.139-159).

'correct' or 'better' reading as 'opposed' to those that have gone before. Rather, I would wish to enquire as to the fashion in which Sherwood would view her reading as contributing to the understanding of a community of faith in light of biblical hermeneutics.

Overall we must admit that Sherwood's careful analysis of Derrida's work, and her consideration regarding Derrida's understanding of deconstruction, is exceedingly impressive, which makes her interpretation of these issues more than estimable. Her analysis serves as a highly creditable example of applying Derridean principles to biblical exegesis and will most certainly remain as one of the established works on biblical deconstruction.

2.3 Back to Psalm 24: Clines

In his reading of Psalm 24, D.J.A. Clines has adopted a deconstructive reading strategy which is fundamentally different to both that of Derrida and Sherwood. Indeed, though Clines is also in search of moments where the text is at 'odds with itself,'[74] his way of reaching these moments come as the result of asking questions of the text rather than using Derridean terminology or even looking for specifically established moments of double writing (like those of *pharmakon*, *palaeonymy*, *parergon* or *supplement*). Consequently, his exposition of Psalm 24 reads as if one is listening to Clines' internal dialogue as he is experiencing the narrative. He begins his reading by stating that Psalm 24, though cherished by the Judaic/Christian community, is based on an incorrect knowledge of the world (it is not established on an underworld sea) and furthermore is 'riddled with religious ideas as unacceptable as its cosmology, and further, that it is not even internally coherent.'[75] He sets out to illustrate his argument through 'ideologically slanted' reader-response criticism followed by a

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[74] D.J.A. Clines, 'A World Founded on Water (Psalm 24): Reader Response, Deconstruction and Bespoke Interpretation,' in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible,* JSOTSup 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) p.176.
[75] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.172.

deconstructive critique, ultimately posing the question of how one should comprehend such a sacred piece of literature once the process of deconstruction has passed.

Clines commences his quest by presenting two issues that are particularly troublesome to him as a reader. Firstly, he states his uneasiness with the idea that holiness, rather than being able to purify that which is unholy, is attached to a certain place and/or to people with ethically pure lives. This portrayal, Clines argues, implies that there are vast amounts of places/people that are unholy and at risk of contaminating that which is holy, indicating that holiness is in need of protection and at the mercy of the 'doorkeepers'.[76] Secondly, he states his discomfort with the ideology of a victory in war as glorious. Clines argues that the poem does not perceive more worthwhile matters, for example, creating the world as praiseworthy, but insists on exalting military triumphs. However, in Clines' opinion these victories are only achieved by numbers, alliances, tactics or chance, which he does not deem as 'glorious' accomplishments.[77]

Next, Clines follows a deconstructive reading by teasing out of the text four moments during which the text seems to be in apparent contradiction with itself. Firstly, there is the issue of possession/holiness: according to Clines, because the cultural conventions surrounding the text in question imply that items become holy because of their attachment to the deity, it becomes unclear how one particular 'hill' can both belong to the Lord and be designated as holy (v. 3) since in v. 1 it is stated that the whole world belongs to the Lord.[78] Secondly, Clines observes that although the earth belongs to the Lord (v. 1), this expression is questioned by some of the occupants on earth being enemies with whom Yahweh wages war, creating ambiguity in Yahweh's claim of

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[76] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' pp.173-175.
[77] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' pp.175-176.
[78] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' pp.176-177.

ownership.[79] Thirdly, another deconstructive argument is found in the idea that the upright, innocent worshippers entering the temple are promised 'vindication' from God (v. 5).[80] Given that presumably both the worshippers and God are aware of their moral virtue (after all, it is only those with clean hands that can ascend to the hill, v. 4), it remains uncertain for whose benefit the vindication is provided. Finally, the poem seems to set a double standard for the worshippers and Yahweh. The Lord can be 'mighty in battle' (v. 8), or as Clines states, be off 'soldiering away, seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth,'[81] while his faithful subjects must have 'clean hands' to enter his sanctuary (v. 4). In other words, while Yahweh can ascend the hill straight from the battlefield, with his hands everything but clean, his subjects cannot.

Having deconstructed the text, Clines is eager to find an approach to reconstruct his conflicting findings. He proposes the method of a 'customized' or 'bespoke' interpretation.[82] That is, he suggests that an interpreter needs to acknowledge indeterminacy in meaning and also to provide readings acceptable to an interpretative community (s)he chooses to serve.[83] In the spirit of the 'customized interpretation', Clines offers his own reading of Psalm 24, based on an allegorical understanding. He describes the world in the Psalm as the world of meanings; therefore, to ascend 'the mountain of particular meaning, we need a pure heart…to will one thing.'[84] We mount the hill in our singularity, but when we attain the blessing for our quest, which is the needed vindication, we also enter into the company of other seekers of meaning, 'a veritable Fishian interpretative community.'[85] The interpreters, who have ascended the hill, consequently become the kings of

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[79] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.177.
[80] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.177.
[81] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.178.
[82] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.173.
[83] Clines notes that if an interpretation is not accepted by a community, it will not survive. Therefore, 'legitimacy in interpretation is really a matter of whether an interpretation can win approval by some community or other' ('Psalm 24,' p.179).
[84] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.185.
[85] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.185.

glory, in which glory is the 'recognition by a public who acclaim success in the quest for meaning.'[86] However, an interpreter will also recognise the abyss that lurks underneath their success, that is, the infinite indeterminacy in meaning. Indeed, although we live as if meanings were fixed, as if the foundation of the world was solid 'all the way down to bedrock,' a successful scholar comprehends that meaning is always founded 'not upon pillars but upon seas and rivers,'[87] ever restless and open for exploration.

Through such an act of deconstruction and reconstruction, Clines states that he wants to show the inherent fragilities and contradictions in a text, the 'inconclusiveness of interpretations,' but also 'to stitch them together again no matter how.'[88] This is because 'the mind demands more order than deconstruction will leave us with,'[89] a sentiment that is quite true especially concerning communities of faith. And reconstruction, even if only a temporary one, is one of the strengths of Clines' approach. He does not merely undermine a text but seeks a meaning beyond such an enterprise, even if such a meaning is to be deconstructed again.

Indeed, Clines' method of deconstruction is helpful in several ways. Because of his lack of use of deconstructive terminology or otherwise complex language, Clines' reading is very clear and easy to follow. Also, because Clines does not set to pursue any predetermined deconstructive principles, his interpretation appears to have more scope to explore various deconstructive arguments than can perhaps be perceived either in the works of Sherwood or Derrida. Yet, I would not consider Clines' deconstructive reading as ideal. Indeed, Clines' work could appear as lacking due to the utter absence of deconstructive systems and/or vocabulary, which to a novice to deconstruction might

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[86] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.185.
[87] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.186.
[88] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.186.
[89] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.186.

leave the theoretical basis Clines uses to achieve his reading in ambiguity. Moreover, Clines'

attempt to reconstruct the text he has deconstructed might appear as contradictory to his

deconstructive aims. However, as has been previously indicated, Clines' act of reconstruction is an

element of research which as a whole is celebrated in this thesis. Due to my own placement in a

religious community, [90] the act of reconstruction is viewed as a positive endeavour in order to glean

further meaning from a text under research, even if the reading produced is to be deconstructed by

another reader at another time. However, in this thesis the act of reconstruction is pursued in a

manner differing from that of Clines. Rather than provide an allegorical reading or provide

reconstruction with a section of its own, we will attend to this endeavour whilst the passage under

research is being deconstructed by emphasising the feminine voice in the story. In so doing we wish

to empower women characters 'by making them the subjects of their own discourse'[91] and thus

provide an alternative reading of the portrayal of women in the HB, which is not in opposition with

the perceived androcentric 'main thesis' in a text but rather exists in tension with it.

However, ultimately the deconstructive method used in this dissertation will not be identical to

Derrida, Sherwood or Clines. Rather, it could be described as lying somewhere between them. Like

all of the authors, we will present our personal interest in the texts studied, in this case, by placing

them within the field of feminist biblical research with hopefully illuminating results. We will also

follow some of the deconstructive strategies illustrated in Derrida's reading of the Tower of Babel,

although the example set will not be rigorously followed. Rather, like Clines, we will adopt more of

an inquisitive approach to the narratives in question with the primary focus placed upon the four

moments of double writing as presented in Sherwood's work as appropriate. We must note,

however, that we will not use the deconstructive vocabulary as faithfully or as meticulously as

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[90] The Pentecostal movement.
[91] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.92.

Sherwood has done as regards her research; rather, we will use three of the four predetermined deconstructive phrases (*pharmakon, supplement* and *parergon*)[92] as illustrated by Sherwood as guidelines and the expectation is to discover other elements in the texts open for deconstruction, that is, other moments of double writing outside of the predetermined ones, although admittedly not all of these (especially those outside feminist biblical research) can be catered for. Finally, as was noted, we will participate in the act of reconstructing the various female expressions within the texts studied in order to establish meaning whilst the appropriate narratives are being deconstructed.

3. Structuralist Reading

One of the ways this dissertation will differ from a number of deconstructive readings, including those of Derrida, Sherwood and Clines, is the considerable use of structuralist methods.[93] Indeed, texts, and especially biblical texts, are found in their current form because the structures inherent in them made them not only understandable but persuasive. Therefore, in order to study the 'counter-voice' in a narrative, a proper hearing to the 'first voice' is preferable, that is, an analysis of the methods a text itself can be perceived to use to establish hierarchies and convictions.[94] As Patte notes, the process of communication should not be considered as objective but as organised in a certain way as to transform 'the views (or old knowledge) of readers.'[95] A text could thus be observed as aiming to produce 'a meaning effect' upon its audience, to influence a person's way of comprehension, which is hardly a neutral enterprise.

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[92] During the course of the research it was discovered that none of the deconstructive issues addressed was specifically adaptable to the concept of *palaeonymy* and thus this concept was not applied in this thesis.

[93] For another paper that draws from both structuralist and deconstructive methods, see K.M. Craig, and M.A. Kristjansson, 'Women Reading as Men/Women Reading as Women: A Structural Analysis for the Historical Project,' *Semeia* 51 (1990) pp.119-136. See, also, M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

[94] For a brief synopsis of structuralist criticism, see D. Jobling, 'Structuralist Criticism: The Text's World of Meaning,' in G.A. Yee (ed.), *Judges & Method*, pp.90-114 and the Bible and Culture Collective, 'Structuralist and Narratological Criticism,' in *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) pp.70-118.

[95] D. Patte, *Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics*, GBSNT (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) p.13.

However, even if one is tempted to discover a certain meaning-effect within a text, it is important to keep in mind that meaning-effects can be described as multiple and influenced by the structuralist methods/theories one is using.[96] Also, because of the manifold nature of structuralist theories, one single theory/method cannot be applied to every text, and even if an appropriate one is discovered, there are no guarantees that the meaning-effect produced is the one 'in the text' rather than one imposed upon it by the reader. Indeed, the claim to a certain kind of objectivity is one of the most common accusations laid at the door of structuralism, an issue that needs to be addressed.[97] As was stated earlier, the position taken in this thesis is that there cannot be a 'pure' method devoid of the reader's involvement and, therefore, a complete mastery of a text or a reading that is purely 'objective' will remain impossible. Thus, that which we wish to gain by the structuralist critique of the text is not to produce the 'correct' way of reading the passage upon which a 'counter-voice' is later imposed; rather, our aim is two-fold: firstly, to project a reader's response (in this case the perception of this particular reader) of the writer's ideology onto the text[98] and secondly, to study the stated ideology in light of more traditional scholarship. This is not to indicate that all long-established readings are in agreement in every aspect as regards the texts they study, that 'traditional scholarship' is more in line with 'the meaning' of the text, or that such readings cannot be of use at the deconstructive stage. Rather, we wish to portray the ideological context of the texts under consideration as it has often become understood and even established through the dominant interpretative community, which, as both Sherwood and Exum note, has most often been male and thus subservient to such interests as well as those present in the biblical texts.[99] Indeed, we suggest that even these readings are riddled with subjective interests and, as with their feminist counterparts,

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[96] Patte, *What Is Structural Exegesis?* GBSNT (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) p.15. See, also, Patte, 'Structural Criticism,' in S.R. Haynes and S.L. McKenzie (eds.), *To Each Its Own Meaning*, p.156.
[97] For a criticism of the 'objective' position sometimes encountered in structuralism, see Jobling, 'Structuralist Criticism,' pp.102-106 and the Bible and Culture Collective, 'Structuralist and Narratological Criticism,' pp.95-110.
[98] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.90.
[99] Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* p.256; Exum, 'The Hand,' pp.89-90.

partake in the somewhat ambiguous but necessary endeavour to 'read between the lines'[100] and are thus as open to deconstruction as the texts they study.[101]

In addition, as was indicated above, we must note that androcentric readings are not the only interpretations bound by subjectivity or the limits of language. Feminist readings likewise partake in the world of Western metaphysics and thus an admission of subjectivity is not a guarantee of a controversial reading strategy. Indeed, as our research will illustrate, feminist interpretations can on occasions be used to support the 'dominant' voice within a text as well as the so-called 'counter-voice'. However, because feminist readings attend to the woman's point of view in a given text, they can be most beneficial if used to expose an oppressive ethos towards women in biblical texts and, in addition, to rearrange such a discourse by the provision of an alternative reading. [102] As Sherwood has noted, neither feminist nor androcentric readings 'diligently follow all textual detail' available in a passage, and thus a feminist critic might be able to help her venture not by reading against the 'grain',[103] so to speak, but by meticulously following the presentation of the feminine 'stubbornly to the letter',[104] exposing the instability within the ideological framework of the text itself.

In order to illustrate the 'first-voice' within a given narrative, various structuralist methods will be used to aid this quest, namely A.J. Greimas' theory of performance (based on Propp's theory of 'story'), as well as his actantial model.[105] These formulas will be applied as they have been

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[100] Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* p.264.
[101] See Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* pp.255-265.
[102] Note here some similarities between feminism and deconstruction: both reject authorial intent as the ultimate source of meaning and also endeavour to 'read against the grain' of the texts in which they operate. See Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* p.294.
[103] By the above statement we do not wish to undo the phrase 'reading against the grain' when such a phrase is used to describe a reading strategy that resists the prevalent ideology within a biblical passage.
[104] Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* p.265.
[105] For a lengthy analysis of Greimas' use of the above mentioned two strategies, see Patte, *What Is?,* pp.35-52. Jobling also appropriates these theories in his analysis of biblical texts in *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Three Structural Analyses in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 13-31, Numbers 11-12, 1 Kings 17-18),* JSOTSup 7 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978).

presented in the writings of Patte and Jobling, who have made these theories more closely connected with biblical studies.

Patte's first formal attempt at creating a coherent structuralist method appeared in 1976 (*What is Structural Exegesis?*).[106] After an opening discussion on structuralist and historical-critical methods, he gives a detailed exposition of the use of Saussure's linguistics, Greimas' narrative theories, and Lévi-Strauss' mythical analysis. However, that which Patte did not fully explore was the benefit gained from combining narrative and mythological research, and therefore his exposition could be suggested to lack coherence. This trait has been somewhat lessened in his more recent works, where Patte has conjoined the two respective models and also considerably decreased the use of structuralist terms. One of his most easily accessible volumes is *Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics* (1990), which introduces a six-step model of analysis for New Testament texts.[107] His approach is most useful, especially since not only is his exposition clear and uncomplicated, but he also pays specific attention to the religious dimensions of texts, that is, to convictions and systems of faith. However, the absence of detailed narrative/semantic analysis might make his approach disagreeable to some who want to remain faithful to a more detailed analysis of the respective research methods and the conclusions that can be gained by approaching the narrative/semantic features in their own right.

Jobling, in turn, has brought structuralism into the realm of HB criticism. Though he is not as wide-ranging in his methodological arsenal as Patte, his system of analysis is very pragmatic. In addition, even though he uses structuralist models and terms, his research is clearly explained and illustrated. One of his longest expositions of the HB is on Numbers 11-12, in which he attempts a 'thorough'

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[106] See n.96.
[107] See n.95.

structuralist analysis of the pericope, and consequently uses a variety of methods, including those by Propp and Lévi-Strauss.[108] His analysis is very detailed and balanced, and also rigorously organised, which, however, causes some overlap between sections. Indeed, like Patte's earlier works, Jobling attempts to keep narrative and semantic analysis separate, and therefore his study could also be claimed to lack coherence. However, although the respective expositions are presented separately, both the narrative and semantic research add to the general meaning-effect that Jobling attempts to create, and therefore the somewhat disjointed feeling in Patte's 1976 volume is largely avoided. Jobling's approach, therefore, offers a detailed way of analysing narrative/semantic features without completely alienating them from one another. However, his work could still be improved by bringing, for example, the conclusions of the respective readings together in order to make his research not only more consistent but also to appreciate the overall meaning-effect his study has created.

In this dissertation, Jobling's model of analysis will be loosely followed, combined with Patte's insights concerning structuralist models. The structuralist/deconstructive exposition will be divided into the two appropriate parts (one based on more of a narrative approach and the other on semantic analysis), though admittedly there will be, as in Jobling's research, some overlap. We will also follow Patte in his attempt of further joining narrative/semantic analysis as presented in his later work. This will be done through drawing upon some of the implications discovered in the structuralist reading during the deconstructive phase in order to illustrate how different meaning-effects not only create each other but require each other's presence.

Before relinquishing our research into structuralism and, for the benefit of the narrative research used in the dissertation, the use of Greimas' theory of performance and the actantial model will be

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[108] Jobling, 'A Structural Analysis of Numbers 11-12,' in *The Sense of Biblical Narrative,* pp.26-62.

briefly illustrated. This will be done in light of one of the passages that has already been discussed, namely, Genesis 11:1-9.

3.1 Structuralist Narrative Analysis

Greimas' actantial model can be briefly illustrated as follows[109]:

Sender ⟹ Object ⟹ Receiver

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Helper ⟹ Subject ⟸ Opponent

The purpose of this model is to illustrate the relationships of the perceived participants in a given narrative: the sender initiates a sequence to send an object to a receiver; to accomplish this task, the sender attains a subject, who, during the mission, is equipped with helpers to complete the task; however, the task rarely goes undisturbed and, therefore, the subject is most often confronted by opponents of various kinds; ultimately, if successful, the subject is attributed with the desired object and delivers it to the original sender. Or, to put it in the words of Vladimir Propp,

> Some misfortune takes place; the hero is asked to help; he goes off on his quest; along the way he encounters someone who puts him to the test and then rewards him with some magical agent; thanks to this magical medium he find the lost object; the hero returns and is rewarded.[110]

Although the relations in the actantial model or in the above illustration might appear somewhat simplistic, it is important to note that the model that might appear 'obvious' from the surface level narrative structure is not necessarily the one advocated in the story. Indeed, as Jobling illustrates in his analysis of 1 Kings 17-18, the main programme of the narrative (the main actantial model) has to be based on the convictions perceived in the story, rather than the behavioural patterns of the

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[109] Patte, *What Is?,* pp.42-43.
[110] V. Propp, 'Structure and History in the Study of the Fairy Tale,' *Semeia* 10 (1978) p.72.

respective actants.[111] One of the ways to discern the stated system of convictions (or faith)[112] is through the observation of inverted parallelisms in the beginning and end of a chosen thematic unit.[113] In other words, as noted by Patte, having distinguished a complete unit, it is advisable to locate the parallelisms (the items that are the same) and inversions (the items that have changed) in each unit to observe which belief systems the author could be understood to be attempting to transform.[114] Applying this theory to the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), we notice that the start and end of the unit (in Genesis 11:1-2 and in vv. 8-9) are descriptive of the actions of the men (parallelism); yet, the inversions are as follows: in v. 2 the men move/settle together, in vv. 8-9 they are scattered; in v. 1 they have one tongue, in v. 9 several; in v. 2 their movement/settling is decided by the men themselves, in vv. 8-9 the scattering is caused by God. In light of the command to fulfil the earth as present in Genesis 1:28 (cf. Genesis 10:32), it seems that the scattering of the men should be seen as the implementation of the original command, as suggested by K.A. Matthews and N.M. Sarna.[115] Therefore, Yahweh's act of dispersion could be viewed as a positive deed, which is opposed by the men wishing to settle in Babel. The following actantial model can be introduced:

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Yahweh	Fulfilling the earth	The men
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	The men	The men

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[111] 'Ahab's Quest for Rain: Text and Context in 1 Kings 17-18,' in *The Sense of Biblical Narrative,* pp.63-88.
[112] Patte, 'Structural Criticism,' p.154. Convictions are here understood as 'self-evident' truths as opposed to 'ideas' which are 'demonstrated truths' (p.157).
[113] These units are those through which a discourse is organised, differentiated from narrative units which often form sub-units within a thematic one (Patte, 'Structural Criticism,' p.158).
[114] See Patte, 'Structural Criticism,' pp.157-159; 163-164.
[115] See K.A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26,* Vol. 1a, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996) pp.473-474 and N.M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis,* HBI (New York: Schocken Books, 1966) p.67.

This model acknowledges not only Yahweh's original plan, but also men's manifold position in the stated plan: they are the receivers of the blessing as well as the opponents of the command they are the supposed subjects of!

Greimas' actantial model as demonstrated above can, however, only exhibit narrative relationships. To describe the unfolding of the narrative process, we must turn to his theory of performance, which can be summarised as follows[116]:

Initial Correlated Sequence (the harmony breaks)

I.   Contract
                  CS1 Establishment of volition
                  CS 2 Receiving of power/knowledge (helpers)
II.   Disjunction
                  DS Movement to location of the performance proper
III.   Performance proper
                  PS 1 Confrontation
                  PS 2 Domination
                  PS 3 Attribution

Final Correlated Sequence (the harmony re-established)
(S= Syntagm)

The model can be illustrated in the following manner. During the initial correlated sequence, the harmony existent in a given society is broken by a 'lack', which is filled in the final correlated sequence. This lack can be, for example, a disruption of a functioning social order.[117] To fulfil the lack, a hero, or several heroes, is (are) 'mandated to reestablish the original social order:'[118] the society, the 'sender', acquires a 'subject', a hero, with whom a contract is thereby struck. At CS1, the subject agrees to the contract 'to neutralize whatever disrupts (or threatens to disrupt) the

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[116] This table is largely based on Jobling, 'Ahab's Quest for Rain,' pp.66-67 with some additions from Patte, *What Is?*, pp.37-51. See, also, the brief study that Jobling has made about parallel elements in Greimas' and Propp's respective theories on performance/story (p.67).
[117] Patte, *What Is?*, p.38.
[118] Patte, *What Is?*, p.38.

original social order',[119] and at CS2 he gains helpers for his quest, in a Proppian fairytale usually a

magical object.[120] At the disjunction syntagm, the subject moves to a new location to fulfil his task

and accordingly at the performance stage, he attempts to carry out the contract: firstly, he confronts

his opponent (PS1), secondly, he endeavours to overcome his opposer (PS2), which, thirdly, if

successful, 'provides some type of glorification for the hero,'[121] an attribution of the required object

(PS3).

However, it needs to be noted that not all of the syntagms take place in every narrative and not

necessarily even in this order. Indeed, in our example of Genesis 11, we commence with an initial

correlated sequence which, however, is counter to the narrative main programme: instead of

fulfilling the command to populate the earth (Genesis 1:28; 10:32), we discover that the men not

only have one language but they also live in the same place.[122] After this introduction, the men

devise their counter-plan to the narrative main programme:[123] they make a contract between

themselves (counter-CS1) in an attempt to make a name for themselves (v. 4). They acquire their

helpers (counter-CS2) in the form of the various building materials (brick and bitumen); however,

their construction plans are interrupted by Yahweh (counter-opponent), who ascends among the men

(disjunction), and subdues them by confusing their tongue (counter-counter PS1). Consequently,

from the point of view of the counter-programme, or the 'obvious' actantial model as described in

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[119] Patte, *What Is?,* p.38. According to Patte, the volition (will) is manifested at this stage in two ways, either as a 'modal statement of volition', or as a 'process' statement. In the former, the subject has a will to accomplish the task, whereas in the latter, the subject becomes convinced to accept the contract (*What Is?,* p.44). In our analysis of Genesis 11, the volition is clearly a modal statement: the subjects have the will to build the city/tower.
[120] Patte, *What Is?,* p.38.
[121] Patte, *What Is?,* p.38.
[122] Because in v. 2 the men move eastward and settle in a plain in Shinar, it could be stated that a disjunction syntagm also takes place at this point.
[123] According to Patte, a narrative is structured with a pattern of transformations which are coupled with opposed transformations. These are the counter-programmes without which there would be no narrative development (*The Religious Dimensions of Biblical Texts: Greimas' Structural Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis,* SemeiaSt [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990] pp.57-58).

the surface structure, we could perceive the respective relations as follows: the men are the senders, receivers and subjects of their effort to build Babel, opposed in this task by Yahweh.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
The men	Building Babel	The men
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
Brick, bitumen	The men	Yahweh

However, as was noted earlier, in light of the system of faith in the narrative, the men should be perceived as the supposed subjects, receivers and also the opponents, contrasted with Yahweh's mandate to fulfil the earth. Thus, in order to restore the rightful course of action, Yahweh temporarily replaces the men as the subject in order to confront them as well as to reposition them in their intended place as the subjects in the original plan. Ultimately, by mixing their tongue and scattering the men, Yahweh restores the original narrative main programme and the actantial model would therefore appear as follows:

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Yahweh	Fulfilling the earth	The men
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
Mixing the tongues/ scattering	Yahweh	The men

The account closes with a disjunction syntagm (when the men are scattered, v. 8), as well as with a final correlative sequence which contains an etymology (v. 9). By the end of the narrative (Genesis 11:9), the three inversions suggested at the start (multiple languages and scattering, which are both

caused by God) have consequently all occurred and the men (parallelism) are also reestablished as following the main programme.

The benefits of the above analysis are in the clear display of the different stages of the narrative as well as in the description of the specific relations amongst the various actants. As a result, the exposition can help us to describe some of the perceived meaning-effects in the narrative, as well as the manner they are established in the story. Yet, that which is lacking in the above study is a search for the semantic elements as well as any counter-voices within the story. These features, with the help of deconstructive research, will be examined in detail in the forthcoming chapters.

4. Deconstruction and Feminism

> For some, feminism means equal pay, abortion rights, and a partnership in a law firm. For others, feminism means a celebration of women as separate and distinct from men. To others still, feminism is a subversive ideology used to undermine authority and create alternative power structures. There is no thematic identity to 'woman' in these various arguments, which doesn't mean that feminism ought not to support them all in different contexts. [124]

Indeed, the term known as feminism is not composed of a single definition, ideology or understanding: there are possibly as many descriptions of feminism as there are feminists. Yet, as was stated earlier, because this thesis strives to produce a feminist structuralist/deconstructive reading, the relationship between deconstruction and feminism needs to be addressed.

According to Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck, the said arrangement is currently (in 1989, when the article was published) a moot issue. They argued that the liaison between deconstruction and feminism has been set up as a heterosexual marriage, where 'deconstructionists, or theorists, are

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[124] D. Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. En Abyme* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) p.7.

male, and feminists, who take responsibility for gender, properly female.'[125] Such a display of power politics has left feminism in the shadow of deconstruction, and deconstructionist practice, so they claim, has barely changed (if at all) by involvement with gender politics. However, the validity of such an argument needs to be questioned, for, firstly, if the 'marrying-off' of deconstruction to feminism is based upon change, then we have not only a problem with feminism and deconstruction, but also with most theories that incorporate within themselves more than one approach. Indeed, the choice of research methods should surely not depend on their ability to change each other but rather on the compatibility of, for example, ethical concerns, goals, or convictions underlying the approaches chosen. Moreover, the description of feminism and deconstruction as a marriage is an ironical and, as Diane Elam has noted, a highly oversimplified concept. She argues that "there is a sense in which feminism already 'is' deconstruction, and deconstruction 'is' already feminist," and yet, they do not 'collapse into one another and eliminate their differences.' Indeed, Elam quotes as an example the works of Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, Barbara Johnson, Joan Scott, and Drucilla Cornell, and ponders whether their studies would be best characterised as deconstructionist or feminist. She concludes that 'to say simply that any of this work is either only deconstruction or feminism, or even first of all one or the other, would be to miss the complex ways in which it is politically deployed and ethically implicated.'[126] Accordingly, deconstruction and feminism remain both as highly multifaceted enterprises, forming a much deeper and layered relationship than Brodzki and Schenck's description would let us comprehend.

Ultimately, the relationship between deconstruction and feminism does not need to be one of a power-struggle. Rather, it could be described as an interdependent one, or even as a 'pedagogic'

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[125] B. Brodzki and C. Schenck, 'Criticus Interruptus: Uncoupling Feminism and Deconstruction,' in L. Kauffman (ed.), *Feminism and Institutions: Dialogues on Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) p.195.
[126] Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction,* p.19.

one, where both modes of research can learn lessons from each other,[127] and from which both parties

can benefit. Because deconstruction has a concern for the 'other', this 'other' can on occasion be a

concept that is not always 'feminist', but neither does the 'other' have to be beyond the

understanding and empathy involved in feminism, even if most often in feminism this 'other' is the

woman. [128]

However, before we can embark any further on our quest, we need to first define that which is

meant by feminism in this dissertation. Out of the various positions available, we will concentrate

our analysis on that which is termed post-structuralist feminism. The implications of this chosen

form of understanding will be briefly discussed below.

4.1 Post-Structuralist Approach

> It is without a doubt risky to say that there is no place for woman, but this
> idea is not antifeminist, far from it; true, it is not feminist either. But it
> appears to me to be faithful in its way both to a certain assertion of women
> and to what is most affirmative and 'dancing,' as the maverick feminist
> says, in the displacement of women.[129]

The above quote is a comment made by Derrida in an interview entitled 'Choreographies'. Previous

to this statement, Derrida has speculated about the location of 'woman's place', which he prefers not

to define, since committing woman to a place could lead her to be confined in one of her traditional

places, that is, either 'at home' or 'in the kitchen.' Rather, Derrida wishes to see the woman as

usurping the need to be defined by locale, place or economy, to become part of a dance, or a

movement. Indeed, in the economy of deconstruction, it is the woman who remains the one

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[127] Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction,* pp.21-22. The 'pedagogic' model has also been presented by Barbara Johnson, whom Elam quotes to support her thesis.
[128] The term 'the Other', as relevant to the marginalisation of women, was coined by Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley, PC (London: Pan Books, 1988) p.16. However, the stated marginalisation has since been often extended to designate other oppressed groups, for example, the interests of 'womanist' scholarship. See R.J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988) pp.viii-xi.
[129] Derrida, 'Choreographies,' p.27.

displaced:[130] she is the one without essence, identity, the horizon that cannot be reached, the one to

be desired and the one without a fixed definition.[131] However, this 'non-identity' does not stop

Derrida from hypothesising about that which is beyond our current understanding of woman, even

the binary dichotomy of men/women. He further states,

> I would like to believe in the multiplicity of sexually marked voices. I
> would like to believe in the masses, this indeterminable number of
> blended voices, this mobile of nonidentified sexual marks whose
> choreography can carry, divide, multiply the body of each 'individual,'
> whether he be classified as 'man' or as 'woman' according to the criteria
> of usage.[132]

Derrida's 'dream' as demonstrated is thus a vision beyond the present binaries, a world which is

marked by plurality and, consequently, allows for difference without determinism. It would be easy

to reproach Derrida for having dreamt an almost utopian ideal without practical application. Indeed,

Derrida himself admits that although his dream is something he 'would like to believe in', due to the

rigidity of the enclosure of 'everything for life in the figure 2', the dream will remain improbable if

not impossible.[133] Therefore, we remain in suspension for the woman, expecting for that which is to

come, for that which is beyond our present circumstance.

In light of the above arguments, Derrida's woman might appear indeterminable and somewhat

unreal, with little application to the women living in the modern world. Although Derrida is careful

to state the need to engage 'the *real* conditions in which women's struggles develop,'[134] his

unwillingness to explore the 'dark continent'[135] that he equates with woman leaves something to be

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[130] See, also, G.C. Spivak, 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman,' in M. Krupnick (ed.), *Displacement: Derrida and After*, TCC 5 (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1983) pp.172-174.

[131] Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, trans. B. Harlow (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978) pp.49, 51, 53, 55, 61, 63, 67, 69, 71, 87, 89, 97, 103, 107, 109, 111, 121. For a synopsis of the appropriation of the stated imagery in *Spurs*, see E.T. Armour, *Deconstruction, Feminist Theology, and the Problem of Difference: Subverting the Race/Gender Divide,* RP (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999) pp.89-101.

[132] Derrida, 'Choreographies,' p.40. See, also, Derrida, 'Women in the Beehive: A Seminar with Jacques Derrida,' *Differences* 16, 3 (2005) p.151.

[133] Derrida, 'Choreographies,' p.40.

[134] Derrida, 'Choreographies,' p.30 [his italics].

[135] See Armour, *Deconstruction,* pp.100-11.

desired. True, Derrida does locate the woman at the edge of the current economy;[136] yet as Ellen Armour notes, he stops short of exploring the woman that the fractures in the system have exposed.[137] The woman is the mystery that will remain undefined.

Yet, this is not to say that Derrida leaves the feminist critic with no arsenal at his/her disposal. Regarding women's struggles, Derrida has provided the means to critique the prevalent phallogocentric system: by inhabiting the present metaphysical presuppositions in order to engage in the world of economy, ideology and politics, even if these suppositions are to be questioned at a later phase,[138] Derrida, as Rutledge states, 'acknowledges the necessity of relatively determinate truths even as he relativises them.'[139] In other words, women must inhabit the reasoning, language and logic of traditional metaphysics in order to be understood, yet also in order to analyse and criticise the prevalent structures. Women need to inhabit that which is present, in order to affect change for that which is yet unseen. However, that which is yet unseen remains indeterminate in Derrida's texts.

Thus, we could note that although Derridean deconstruction can be useful for feminist agendas, if we were to use only that which Derrida says about deconstruction for the benefit of the stated project, such uses could be described as limited.[140] However, if we wish to adopt the type of interdependent relationship as was earlier suggested, we can also propose new coalitions between deconstruction and feminism. A manner in which such a coalition could be approached has been presented by Elam, who argues for that which she calls 'groundless solidarity,' defined as a

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[136] Derrida, 'Women in the Beehive,' pp.146-147. For Derrida's use of feminine tropes to describe the limits of phallogocentric economy, see, for example, Derrida's application of 'hymen' (*Dissemination*, pp.219ff). For a synopsis, see Rutledge, *Thinking Marginally,* pp. 83-84; Armour, *Deconstruction*, pp.77-78, 92ff.
[137] Armour, *Deconstruction,* p.100.
[138] Derrida, 'Choreographies,' p.30; 'Women in the Beehive,' p.145.
[139] Rutledge, *Reading Marginally*, p.128.
[140] Rutledge, *Reading Marginally*, p.87.

'deferral of consensus but *not* at the cost of political solidarity or ethical judgment,'[141] that is, the necessity of political action based upon suspicion of identity as well as ethical concern. A relationship between feminism and deconstruction could thus be formed not on the basis of what women 'are/ are not' nor what they 'can/cannot do,' but upon constant negotiation founded upon the recognition of difference as well as the inexhaustibility of this difference. Such recognition could provide an avenue of discovering true multiplicity, yet also produce a point of engagement in modern society. As Elam further notes, 'the question … becomes how to operate within the established terms of sexual difference, examining where those lines of difference have been drawn, while at the same time upsetting the terms and redrawing the lines.'[142] Groundless solidarity can thus be defined as ethical action not in spite of difference but because there is difference: as difference is recognised, an avenue is provided for the need of constant intervention and re-definition 'precisely because there is undecidability.'[143]

Elam's attempt to reconcile deconstructive and feminist agendas is appealing in several ways, not only because it appreciates the vastness of concepts inherent in the understanding of 'woman' but also because with the aid of deconstructive thinking she liberates this 'woman' to be a place with undefined boundaries. Albeit such a concept might be difficult to those wishing to retain a certain essence to woman or to those unnerved by the plurality of meanings such an understanding uncovers, we find this particular concept helpful because as a strict definition of womanhood is deferred, our understanding can be opened beyond the definitions presented to us in the world of previous interpretations and/or readings. Moreover, such a world can be expanded to a space of constant re-definition. Indeed, in this thesis we will approach the subject of our research (Miriam)

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[141] Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction,* p.25 [her italics].
[142] Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*, p.56.
[143] See Johnson, 'Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,' pp.193-194 as quoted by Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction,* p.82.

with an understanding of such an alterity, brought about by the interests inherent within this particular feminist (woman) reader.[144] We will suggest that the concept of a woman both as a reader and as a subject of study is a '*permanently contested site of meaning*,'[145] whose status and identity are, even if temporarily defined, constantly open to question and re-negotiation. She is the Derridean woman, residing in the borders of the logocentric economy; yet she is also able to reorder the stated discourse by giving a voice to her character through an understanding that is in constant tension with the borders in which she resides: she is a figure on the margin but her marginality is also the source of her empowerment. The 'woman' becomes a place of contradiction, a traveller on a journey to discover her own otherness, not claiming inclusiveness or the status of an entity, as if there were permanent stability within her own person, but discovering indeterminacy in the freedom to be beyond that which others, or herself, might prescribe.

5. Applying the Methodology to Exodus 1-2, 14-15 and Numbers 12

In this dissertation post-structuralist feminism will be taken as the particular interest that will be brought into all of the analysis that will follow. We will also recognise that the 'feminist subject' can be a male or a female, and therefore we will accept input from scholars on both sides of the gender divide. We will attempt to inquire as to the validity of the arguments that we perceive as upheld in the stories or by the efforts of more traditional scholarship and, consequently, endeavour to question the understanding which holds the woman as well as Yahweh captive to patriarchal presuppositions. Although we will begin our study with the assumption that the HB was written by a patriarchal mind to a patriarchal audience,[146] we will also argue that the Hebrew corpus is not irredeemably oppressive, but due to its partaking in logocentrism holds within itself other 'voices'

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[144] Notably, as illustrated earlier by Sherwood, the position of a feminist reading subject is one at odds with deconstructive aims which often refutes the position of a reader within the process of meaning (see p.14). If approached from the point of 'groundless solidarity', we can argue that the presence of a reader is a necessity within the stated process; however, it is also open to re-definition and negotiation.
[145] Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction,* p.32 [her italics].
[146] Fuchs, *Sexual Politics,* p.7.

which can be reconstructed into an alternative reading of the passages under consideration. Accordingly, we will search for alternative forms of interpretation of both the heroes and the villains in the stories, and also, most importantly, for a different understanding of the description of Miriam. We will suggest that Miriam was not simply Moses' sister (Exodus 2:4), a singer/dancer at the Reed Sea (Exodus 15:20-21), or a troublemaker in Numbers 12:1-2, but a leader of great significance, being a disturber of dichotomies (Exodus 2:1-10); a leader on a par with Moses (Exodus 15:19-21) as well as a maternal character challenging the notion of paternal hegemony (Numbers 12:1-2). These conclusions will not be presented as *the* way the passages *should* be understood, but as *a* way to view Miriam and her character as yet another example of a woman residing in the boundary of patriarchal assumptions, 'jamming the theoretical machinery itself.'[147]

We will arrive to these conclusions via a careful structuralist as well as a deconstructive critique, with each of the analyses of Exodus 1-2, 14-15 and Numbers 11-12 being divided accordingly into the two respective parts. Exodus 1-2 will follow the set mode of structuralist critique via the means of the actantial model as well as Greimas' theory of narrative syntagms, although the narrative arrangement will not be portrayed quite in the same strict fashion as presented in the example in this chapter. The same structuralist principles will also be applied to Numbers 11-12, although some of the structuralist features will not be examined to their fullest potential. This is because the structuralist analysis in this thesis is performed to facilitate the presenting of the 'first voice' of the narrative prior to a deconstructive reading. Therefore, because of the complex nature of the narrative, a complete structuralist analysis of Numbers 11-12 would be too time-consuming as well as distracting as regards the deconstructive emphasis of the analysis. The chapter on Exodus 14-15 will yet again adopt a slightly different structuralist method, using the actantial model and narrative

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[147] Irigaray, *This Sex which Is not One,* trans. C. Porter and C. Burke (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) p.78.

theory similarly to the other chapters but due to the mixture of both poetry and prose in the passage, apply it only to the appropriate parts of the narratives which will facilitate a deconstructive reading.

In the structuralist reading we will attempt to illustrate some of the binary oppositions perceived to be present in the texts and also how these dichotomies have been understood, even supported, among traditional scholarship. Having identified the dichotomies necessary for our research, we will aim to produce a 'second voice', that is, to deconstruct the stated oppositions and establish an alternative reading of the narrative. As was stated earlier, the interest within this thesis is established mainly in the moments of double writing that Sherwood has applied in her study of Hosea 1-3; however, the use of deconstructive terminology will not be rigidly applied and towards the end of our analysis of Numbers 11-12 will become increasingly rare. This is because that which is of interest to us in the deconstructive phrases as used by Sherwood is the practical application of the terms rather than strict adherence to the described terminology.

Through the above analysis, we hope to present a unique and also provocative image of Miriam. We wish that our research will lead to a new-found appreciation of her character as well as to an understanding of her importance within the biblical corpus.

6. Conclusion

We started this chapter by analysing Derrida's approach to the Tower of Babel narrative, and brought into the conversation the deconstructive works of Sherwood and Clines. We concluded that the method to be followed in this dissertation would be a combination of the above approaches. We would appropriate some of Derrida's reading strategies as well as Sherwood's research into predetermined deconstructive angles. In addition, we would accommodate Clines' strategy of posing questions to the text as well as reconstructing the results of the research. However, in order to reveal

those structures which the text itself and/or more traditional scholarship confesses to uphold, the use of structuralist methods would also be appropriated, namely, as present in the writings of Patte and Jobling.

We also remarked that combining deconstruction with feminism would add a new dimension to this thesis, namely, by creating a 'subject' position defined by radical alterity, yet still embedded in the pre-existing sex/gender codes of the modern day as described by Derrida and Elam. This could lead to the 'subject' affecting change in the respective codes through constant negotiation, based on an interdependent relationship between deconstruction and feminism. In the realm of biblical study, such an emphasis could lead to the unveiling and renegotiation of the sex/gender codes in biblical texts, with the hope that an image of the woman as the radical other might be discovered. It is from the above elements that a method of reading will be attempted, which could deepen our understanding of the character of Miriam as she is portrayed in Exodus 1-2, 14-15 and Numbers 11-12. Finally, it should be noted that all translations of biblical passages in the following chapters are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Chapter 2

Out of the Shadows: A Review of Feminist Readings of Exodus 1-2, 15 and Numbers 12

1. Introduction

The title of this chapter is intentionally a reference to Phyllis Trible's famous article, 'Bringing Miriam out of the Shadows.'[1] First published in *Biblical Review* in 1989,[2] the article is one of the most popular and easily accessible feminist expositions of the character of Miriam. Today several feminist authors have followed suit to highlight the role of Miriam in biblical texts and in early Jewish religious heritage.

However, in academic circles the character of Miriam has not received her due attention. Indeed, to date, the only lengthy expositions published regarding Miriam are what were originally two Ph.D. dissertations, the first by Rita Burns in 1987[3] and the second by Ursula Rapp in 2002[4]. Both of these works have feminist concerns at heart, but the methods used have been influenced by some of the prevailing academic trends of the time: Burns' volume is a literary/source-critical study, whereas Rapp has used rhetorical analysis to support historical-critical observations, apt for an author writing in the climate of German scholarship which even today is heavily influenced by the latter method. Because the interest in this thesis lies in feminist-deconstructive analysis of the texts in their final form, neither of these volumes are directly relevant for unravelling the issues present in this dissertation. However, due to the fact that both of these scholars portray a detailed analysis of all seven[5] of the biblical references to Miriam (leaving out Exodus 2 as unauthentic references), the

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[1] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' pp.166-186.
[2] *BR* 5, 1 (1989) pp.170-190.
[3] R.J. Burns, *Has the Lord indeed Spoken only through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam*, SBLDS 84 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987).
[4] U. Rapp, *Mirjam: Eine feministisch-rhetorische Lectüre der Mirjamtexte in der hebräischen Bible*, BZAW 317 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002).
[5] Exodus 15:19-21; Numbers 12:1-16, 20:1, 26:59; Deuteronomy 24:8-9; 1 Chronicles 6:3; Micah 6:4.

literary-critical exposition in both volumes will be of great value. The work of Burns will be analysed in this chapter; meanwhile, as Rapp's exposition is more detailed as well as more extensive, her thesis will be approached mostly at the deconstructive stage.

To the credit of Rapp and Burns, it needs to be stated that no other volume, let alone one with feminist concerns, has since been published with Miriam as its sole focus. The main scholarly debates concerning Miriam tend to emphasise only individual passages, most commonly those of Numbers 12, Exodus 15 and, occasionally, Exodus 2. Since these three narratives are also the main focus in this thesis, I will restrict myself to reviewing the feminist scholarly consensus on Miriam only with regard to the above passages and touch upon any others as appropriate. The review to follow should not be considered as an exhaustive discussion of all the work feminists have done on Miriam but rather as a short summary of the main debates ranging over the issue.

2. Exodus 1-2

2.1 Translation: Exodus 1:15-22, 2:1-10

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives,[6] whose names were Shiprah and Puah, "When you tend as a midwife and you look at the two stones,[7] if you see a son, kill him, but if you see a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God and they did not do what the king of Egypt had said to them but they let the boys live. And the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this matter that you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "The Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women for they are lively.[8] Before the midwife arrives to them, they have given birth." And God did good to the midwives and he increased the people and they became very numerous. Because the midwives feared God, he gave them houses.[9] Pharaoh commanded all of his people saying: All the sons born (to the Hebrews)[10] you must throw into the Nile but all the daughters you shall let live.

A man from the house of Levi took the daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and she gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was goodly, she hid him for three months. When she could no longer hide him, she got for him a basket of papyrus. She coated it with tar and pitch. She put the child in it and she put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood afar off to know what would be done to him. The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile and her maidens went walking along the bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it for her.

Then she opened it and she saw him, the boy. And behold, a child crying. And she pitied him and she said, "This is one of the Hebrew boys." Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call for you a nursing woman from among the Hebrews to nurse the boy for you?" The daughter

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[6] The LXX reads the phrase as μαίαις τῶν Εβραίων, 'the Hebrews' midwives'; whereas the MT prefers to understand the midwives as those of Hebrew origin. For an exploration of the role of midwives in ancient societies, see C.L. Meyers, *The New Cambridge Bible Commentary: Exodus,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp.40-41.

[7] The exact meaning of 'two stones' האבנים is unclear. It is only used once more in the HB for a potter's wheel (Jeremiah 18:3). J.I. Durham takes the stones to mean testicles (*Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus,* WBC 3 [Waco: Word Books, 1987] pp.11-12) and C. Houtman the female sexual organs (*Exodus,* p.243 as quoted by G.F. Davies, *Israel in Egypt: Reading Exodus 1-2*, JSOTSup 135 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992] p.65). However, if a discreet infanticide is intended, either of these interpretations render the following instruction nonsensical, unless the phrase refers to genitals in general as argued by W.H.C. Propp (*Exodus 1-18*, Vol. 2, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1999] p.139). N.M. Sarna may be right that the reference could be to two bricks upon which women would have crouched to give birth (*The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus,* Ebook [Skokie: Varda Books, 2004] p.7) or, as U. Cassuto has noted, to an Egyptian birthstool (*A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. I. Abrahams, PPFBR [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967] p.14). It is also possible to understand the reference to indicate a prenatal examination as argued by S. Morschauser ('Potters' Wheels and Pregnancies: A Note on Exodus 1:16,' *JBL* 122, 4 [2003] pp.731-733.

[8] Some commentators have taken כי חיות to mean that the Hebrew women are 'animals' who do not need help delivering (see J. Osherow, 'Brides of Blood: Women at the Outset of Exodus,' in in P.S. Hawkins and L. Cushing Stahlberg [eds.], *From the Margins. 1, Women of the Hebrew Bible and their Afterlives,* BMW 18 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009] pp.46-47); however, Durham translates חיות as 'robust' or 'full of life' (*Exodus,* p.10, 12; see, also, BDB, p.313 and Sarna, *Exodus,* p.7). Notably, כי חיות is a term that does not readily translate either way; however, since vocabulary related to family life and fertility are strongly present in Exodus 1-2, Durham's translation seems preferable. Yet, we must note that due to the presence of כי חיות in a reproductive context, it is possible to read the term as carrying hints of fast reproductive capacities, in which case an 'animal like' quality might have been implicated although not vocalised.

[9] Progeny is meant here (cf. Ruth 4:11). See M. Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus,* HBI 2, 1 (New York: Behrman House, 1969) p.31; A.H. McNeile, *The Book of Exodus*, WC (London: Methuen, 1908) p.5.

[10] The LXX adds here 'to the Hebrews', which seems appropriate considering the context.

of Pharaoh answered her: Go! And the young woman went and she called the mother of the boy. And the daughter of Pharaoh said to her: Cause this boy to go[11] and nurse him for me and I, I will pay wages for you. And the woman took the boy and she nursed him. When the boy grew she brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh and he became to her a son and she called his name 'Moses' and she said, "Because from the waters I drew him."[12]

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[11] הילִיכי, see Propp, *Exodus*, p.219 and Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.88-89. A more natural reading could be 'take this child/boy with you', as suggested by Durham (*Exodus,* p.14).

[12] The meaning of Moses' name will be discussed later.

2.2 Comment

> …its [the story's] message to women is: stay in your place in the domestic
> sphere; you can achieve important things there. The public arena belongs to
> men; you do not need to look beyond motherhood for fulfilment.[13]
>
> J. Cheryl Exum

Cheryl Exum is probably the single most interesting of the relatively small number of feminist

biblical scholars who have analysed Exodus 1-2. The reason for this is to be found in her three

lengthy articles published on the issue, one in 1983[14], an exemplary specimen of rhetorical criticism,

one in 1994[15], a criticism of the previous article as well as an exposition of the subversive elements

in the text, and one in 1996[16], a further criticism of both articles as well as a self-reflective analysis

of her writing process. With the benefit of hindsight, Exum in her 1994 paper criticises some of the

more optimistic views she expressed concerning the female characters in the 1983 article, an

endeavour which she also continues in her 1996 paper. In so doing she incidentally highlights the

two most common trends among feminists who have approached the passage: either to valorise

positively the female characters or to abandon such characterisations as patriarchal propaganda.[17]

However, in both her 1994 and 1996 articles, Exum gives us a glimpse of the possibilities provided

by an alternative reading centred on the concept of women's power, an approach derived from a

combination of deconstruction and psychoanalytic literary criticism, which Exum develops

especially in her 1996 paper.

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13 'Second thoughts,' p.81.

14 Exum, "'You Shall Let Every Daughter Live': A Study of Exodus 1.8-2.10," in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion*, pp. 37-61. First published in *Semeia* 28 (1983) pp.63-82.

15 Exum, 'Second Thoughts'. The year is in reference to the original print. Note that Exum published another article in 1985 ("'Mother in Israel': A Familiar Figure Reconsidered," in L.M. Russell [ed.], *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985] pp.73-85) that touched upon Exodus 1-2. However, the comments in this article were, as she notes herself, more of a 'feeble objection' rather than a developed thesis and therefore will not be consulted in this chapter (Exum, 'The Hand,' p.82).

16 Exum, 'The Hand,' pp.80-100.

17 See, also, S. Shectman, *Women in the Pentateuch: A Feminist and Source-Critical Analysis,* HBM 23 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009) pp.18-19.

In her 1983 article Exum sought to illuminate the role of women in Exodus 1-2, as has already been noted, by means of a detailed rhetorical analysis, a comparatively new form of criticism at the time.[18] The article was a revision of a paper she had been invited to present at the joint Symposium for the 'Women and Religion Section' and the 'Liberation Theology Group of the American Academy of Religion' in 1981. However, as she notes herself, 'at that time, one of the goals of the emerging feminist biblical criticism was to uncover positive portrayals of women in the Bible - as if one could simply pluck positive images out of an admittedly androcentric text.'[19] And through literary critical enterprise, her article does exactly that. Her paper divides Exodus 1:1-2:10, regarding narrative arrangement, into two parts with three movements which are all carefully analysed for the perceived meaning in the passage. She also investigates the possibilities found in key words and phrases, in the act of paralleling characters and, among others, in the literary form of irony to extract ways in which the narrative portrays women's roles. Although Exum admits that the text does have an androcentric bias and revolves around Moses, she insists that the story has powerful, positive female-friendly themes to draw upon, such as 'women as defiers of oppression' and 'women as givers of life.'[20] She declares the following towards the end of her paper, which could be regarded as a kind of a summary of her opinion about the narrative portrayal of the women in question:

> The midwives' fear of God, the princess's [*sic*] compassion, the resourcefulness of Moses' mother, and the quick thinking of his sister, all work together to overcome the evil designs of the king of Egypt. In the refusal of women to cooperate with oppression, the liberation of Israel from Egyptian bondage has its beginnings.[21]

Expositions similar to Exum's 1983 paper are especially common among feminist biblical commentators who also wished to join in the effort of 'plucking positive images' from the HB.

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[18] See Exum, 'The Hand,' p.83.
[19] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.81.
[20] Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.60.
[21] Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.60.

Prime examples of such works are those of Jopie Siebert-Hommes, who produced a rhetorical exposé similar to Exum's 1983 article,[22] and Phyllis Trible, whose research offers a subversive overview of the portrayal of Miriam in biblical texts, although it lacks the same detailed and coherent approach as the papers by Exum and Siebert-Hommes.[23] That which is evident in all of the above studies is the depiction of the women in Exodus 1-2 with various admirable and/or seditious characteristics. Yet, some of these portrayals are often done at the expense of the more androcentric features in the text or, as is most evident in Trible's work, even in spite of them.[24] Such an act, however, can be exceedingly counterproductive since, as Exum notes in her 1996 paper, 'if we read according to the ideology of the text available to us in the surface structure, and stop there, we are left with the ancient (male) authors' views of women…'[25] Indeed, even a close reading of a text, if the goal is to affirm rather than redefine the ideology presented, can lead to idealising the women that appear to the critic as positive, which in the light of the patriarchal tendencies in the biblical corpus might not be that admirable at all. Therefore, although some of the results presented in the above writings are certainly valuable and will be studied in more detail at a later point, others could be stated to be equally no more convincing than those already presented by the 'older' commentators, who saw the women's actions in Exodus 1-2 as agreeable, or at least nothing to be critiqued, without the need of feminist influences.[26]

In her second article Exum positions herself quite radically against some of the statements she made in her first paper. By the time of her 1994 article, ideological criticism had started to gain

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[22] J. Siebert-Hommes, 'But if She Be a Daughter… She May Live!: 'Daughters' and 'Sons' in Exodus 1-2' in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion*, pp.62-74. A revision of this article was reprinted in Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live! The Literary Architecture of Exodus 1-2 as a Key for Interpretation,* BIS 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1998) pp.110-123.

[23] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' pp.166-186.

[24] Although Trible acknowledges some of the patriarchal features of the text, she states in her introduction that she aims to resurrect a woman-friendly reading from the 'fragments' she can uncover ('Bringing Miriam,' p.166). For further critique of Trible's writing, see Shectman, *Women,* p.22 and Exum, 'The Hand,' p.83.

[25] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.88.

[26] See Cassuto, *Exodus*, pp.12-21; M. Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary,* trans. J.S. Bowden, OTL (London: SCM, 1962) pp.23-27; McNeile, *Exodus,* pp.5-9.

ground within feminist biblical circles and was also reflected in Exum's own work, namely, in the publication of *Fragmented Women* in 1993[27] (Exodus 1-2 did not feature in this volume). When she was approached to provide a reprint of her 1983 article for *A Feminist Companion to Exodus-Deuteronomy*[28], she could not let her earlier paper stand without 'some comment about how my thinking had changed.'[29] Thus, she wrote a companion piece addressing some of the issues she had found troublesome in her earlier paper and/or in the biblical text itself. These were, firstly, that the method of research she had chosen in her 1983 article confined her to the ideology of the text rather than prompting her to critique it, and secondly, the lack of investigation of the absence of women after the beginning stages of Exodus. In the rest of her paper Exum attempts to develop an appraisal concerning the above issues.

Exum commences her quest by claiming that although the women in Exodus 1-2 could be suggested to have admirable qualities, such characteristics only result in serving patriarchy rather than valuing women.[30] She notes that women can be used as heroes and/or subverters of authority, because as long as they remain and are even rewarded for staying in their traditional domestic roles as mothers, sisters and midwives (Exodus 1:15; 2:1-2, 4), they also remain in the service of patriarchy. Thus while they are risking their lives for the 'common good', they also guarantee their own bondage. She states,

> Sayings like 'the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world' and 'behind every great man there is a woman' are meant to make women feel important, while in reality such sayings serve an androcentric agenda by suggesting that women should be satisfied with their power behind the scenes.[31]

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[27] Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, JSOTSup 163 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).
[28] Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion.* Original print in 1994.
[29] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.82.
[30] Exum, 'Second Thought', pp.80-82.
[31] Exum, 'Second Thoughts', p.82.

In addition, Exum views the stated androcentric agenda to be at work even in the supposedly positive depiction of God using the women, that is, the 'weak and lowly to overcome the strong and powerful.'[32] She notes that even such a portrayal has a negative side, since it appeals to 'women's subordinate position' and does not interrogate 'the text's androcentric motivation.'[33] Indeed, rather than aid women to overcome oppression, their 'heroic' deeds keep their lowly position intact and in service of the patrilinear line.

Towards the end of her paper Exum addresses the absence of women from the rest of the exodus story as well as any subversive moments that can be observed from the text. These issues are also addressed in her 1996 paper, and will be approached shortly; however, here it is important to notice that Exum's critical stance against the patriarchal features in the HB as illustrated above has found support among other feminist biblical critics. Indeed, her position finds an echo already as early as 1895 in *The Woman's Bible*, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton exclaimed the women in the exodus as having 'no individual life' or a 'life-long name' and, moreover, how 'the character of the Jewish nation' in all of their 'devious wanderings' should have 'no influence in regulating the lives of women' in the modern world.[34] This line of argument has been continued by several feminist biblical critics, among others, Esther Fuchs,[35] Athalya Brenner,[36] and Susanne Scholz, all of whom criticise the patriarchal ethos of the story in question. In addition, Scholz goes on to critique the way in which not only gender but also national and ethnic stereotypes remain intact in the story.[37] Although issues relating to race are not often addressed among (white) feminist biblical scholarship,

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[32] Exum, 'Second Thoughts', p.79.
[33] Exum, 'Second Thoughts', p.80.
[34] E.C. Stanton, *The Woman's Bible* (Boston: North Eastern University Press, 1993) p.73. Part I originally published in 1895. See, also, Shectman, *Women,* pp.12-13.
[35] Fuchs, 'Exodus 1-2,' pp.307-326.
[36] *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and literary Type in Biblical Narrative*, BS 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994) pp.98-100.
[37] Scholz, "The Complexities of 'His' Liberation Talk: A Literary Feminist Reading of the Book of Exodus," in A. Brenner (ed.), *Exodus to Deuteronomy: A Feminist Companion to the Bible,* FCB Second Series 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) p.24.

Scholz's paper does find a response in the work of the womanist scholar Rita Weems. She has summarised the issue as follows,

> …Exodus 1 does not challenge the notion of differences between people, be they male and female, or Egyptian and Hebrew. In many ways, the author of the exodus story simply proposes to recast those differences. The notion of differences between people is not challenged...[38]

That is, although women join hands across ethnic boundaries, they remain in their 'proper' place as mothers/daughters/midwives and thus the concept of the superiority of the Hebrew males (even if not that of the Egyptian persuasion) remains unchallenged. In addition, Weems notes that although 'the Egyptians' perceptions of Hebrew differences' can be ridiculed and even exploited in the story, ultimately the Hebrews remain superior to the Egyptians due to their religious hegemony, exposing the Egyptian sovereignty and attempted domination of the Hebrews 'as a farce' (Exodus 1:9-22; 7-11; 14:30-31).[39] The concept of gender/racial prejudice is thus cleverly used, even manipulated in the text, but not ultimately overturned. All of these issues create further oppositions and hierarchies in the text, which we will approach in a later chapter. However, here we can note that an understanding of difference is clearly present as well as employed within Exodus 1-2 and thus the ideological motive prompting such a display needs to be carefully considered.

The acknowledgement of oppressive features in the Hebrew corpus, as demonstrated in the above expositions, is certainly necessary to appreciate the ideological framework of the texts studied. However, we must ask whether the display of the oppressive features without a consideration for possible redeeming characteristics in the text is altogether helpful. Indeed, such a practice might prove problematic to those who wish to glean Scriptural truth from these texts and, more importantly, as Davies notes, the rejection of the patriarchal ethos of the biblical corpus does not lead to the rejection of the consequences that have occurred as the result of the text's oppressive

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[38] R.J. Weems, 'The Hebrew Women Are not like the Egyptian Women: The Ideology of Race, Gender and Sexual Reproduction in Exodus 1,' *Semeia* 59 (1992) p.32.
[39] Weems, 'The Hebrew Women,' pp.30, 32-33.

ethos.[40] Revealing these strands and attempts to account for them can, however, be 'a step in the

right direction,'[41] as Exum notes at the end of her 1994 article. Yet, the question remains as to how

to proceed to glean understanding from a narrative that appears to accommodate oppression.[42]

A possible example of such an endeavour can be found in Exum's 1996 article. [43] In this paper, as

was noted earlier, Exum repeats some of the arguments she presented in both her 1983 and 1994

papers and also extends her critique of the methodology she has chosen. Since the publication of

Fragmented Women in 1993, Exum's studies have been informed not only by her interest in

psychoanalytic theory but also by the rise of deconstructive theories. With the help of these two

strategies, she wishes to answer the question she avoided in her earlier 1983 publication, namely,

'Why are women allowed to play such an important role in the early chapters of Exodus?'[44] She

states that the answer to this question comes down to the following issues: the acknowledgement of

women's power and the attempt of patriarchy to control it.

Exum suggests that although the women in Exodus 1-2 could bee seen as male creations, they still

exude moments of feminine power: they subvert authority and, moreover, outwit and overcome

men! Therefore, because the women are powerful, Exum argues that 'they present a threat to

patriarchal society', and it is thus in the interest of those controlling the social/symbolic order to

present women as 'using their power in the service of patriarchy.'[45] Indeed, moments of female

power and its use for patriarchal interests are by no means rare in Exodus 1-2. For example, the

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[40] Davies, *Dissenting Reader,* pp.24-25.
[41] Exum, 'Second Thoughts,' p.87.
[42] Some commentators have become almost ambivalent about the characterisation of the women in Exodus 1-2 and tend to emphasise both the feminist and 'anti-feminist' features in the text without coming to a particular conclusion. As an example, see the expositions by Drorah O'Donnell Setel, 'Exodus,' in C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe (eds.), *Women's Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition with Apocrypha* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 1998) pp.30-39 and Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, 'Divine Puppeteer: Yahweh of Exodus' in Brenner (ed.), *Exodus to Deuteronomy*, pp.75-102.
[43] See, also, Pardes who compares Exodus 1-2 with the myth of Isis and Osiris (*Countertraditions,* pp.89-93). Although possible influences could be admitted, because the interest in the present thesis is in the deconstructive elements in the text itself rather than ones produced by comparison with other religious myths, Pardes' argumentation will not be considered further in this dissertation.
[44] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.93.
[45] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.96.

women form alliances across ethnic and class boundaries (which in biblical stories they rarely do), yet this is done for the preservation of the male line. In addition, the women rescue Moses, yet three (or five) women are needed for the act instead of just one, which lessens their individual importance in the story. Moreover, after their act of rescue is complete, all of the 'mothers' yield their power to their son, Moses, and disappear from the story.

However, Exum argues that this reversal of roles between Moses and the women is never complete. For example, as in Exodus 2:5-10, a foreign woman (Zipporah) will rise yet again to save Moses in Exodus 4:24-26. In addition, elements of feminine power resurface later in another form, in that of 'womb envy,' as feminine attributes are applied to the deity and Moses in Numbers 11:12 (we will return to this issue later).[46] Furthermore, male hegemony will be challenged outright by Miriam in Numbers 12:1-16, which, although unsuccessful, leaves us traces of the manner in which 'a woman's point of view remain[s] to unsettle patriarchal authority.[47] A further investigation of such traces would certainly be most beneficial for feminist biblical research, and as Exum admits herself, 'more remains to be done to provide an effective feminist critique of the exodus and wandering traditions.'[48] For such a project, Exum's work has definitely provided some useful inspiration as well as insight.

Although Exum's 1996 paper sometimes repeats the arguments presented in her earlier articles, it does offer insight into the counter-voices in the narrative, in particular as regards her understanding of the methodology she has chosen. Obviously, the two approaches used, namely psychoanalytic theory and deconstruction (a combination especially apt for gender studies), are of help here. Particularly intriguing are Exum's appreciation of female power as presented in the description of

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[46] Exum, 'The Hand,' pp.98-99.
[47] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.100.
[48] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.100.

the women in Exodus 1-2 as well as her understanding of 'womb envy' in Numbers 11, both of which are theories that will be considered later in this thesis. However, although Exum has provided us with a possible way to approach biblical texts, her conclusions appear in some respects inadequate. That is, although Exum points out particular ways that feminine power does disturb the patriarchal ethos of the HB, her reading still leaves the hierarchy between men/women, and the privileged position of men in the hierarchy, in place. Thus we could note that Exum's attempt at deconstruction falls short of establishing the narrative between two mutually incompatible readings, where new/old hierarchies can no longer be reformed.[49] We propose that we must step beyond Exum's research and seek to discover a way to study Exodus 1-2 in a manner which brings the oppositions in the story to a point beyond repair, enabling the woman to be truly the 'subject' of her own discourse, as Exum earlier suggested.[50] Therefore, although Exum's work on Exodus 1-2 is commendable in several respects, we must go further to unearth the potential for feminist critique in the story. This will be our goal in the deconstructive chapter on Exodus 1-2.

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[49] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, pp.173-174.
[50] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.92.

3. Exodus 15

3.1 Translation: Exodus 15:1, 20-21

Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to Yahweh. They said, "I will sing to Yahweh for he has triumphed gloriously. Horse and chariot[51] he has cast into the sea."

Then Miriam, the prophetess, sister of Aaron, took in her hand the drum[52] and all of the women followed her with hand drums and with dances. And Miriam answered[53] them,[54] "Sing to Yahweh for he has triumphed gloriously. Horse and chariot he has cast into the sea."

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[51] The Hebrew has סוס רכבו. According to Sigmund Mowinckel, cavalry was used in Egyptian warfare at a later stage, so to use 'rider' here would be an anachronism ('Drive and/or Ride in O.T.,' *VT* 12, 3 [1962] pp.278-299, especially pp.280-285). Since the exact dating of this passage or indeed the use of cavalry in warfare is debatable, Mowinckel's suggestion must be approached with caution. However, since either the use of 'chariot' or 'rider' does not change the present analysis, 'chariot' will be used for now.

[52] Through interdisciplinary studies, Meyers has argued that the תף, 'hand drum' is a 'small handheld percussion instrument… it consisted of a round wooden frame, about twenty-five to thirty centimetres in diameter, with a skin or hide – or two parallel hides - stretched over it' ('Miriam, Music, and Miracles' in D. Good [ed.], *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005] p.32). For its use in Israelite music, see pp.33ff.

[53] The meaning of ענה,'to answer, to respond' (BDB, pp.772-773) will be discussed later..

[54] להם, 'them' is masculine plural. This renders Durham's conclusion that Miriam answered 'the movement of the women to follow her with her invitation to them to sing' problematic (*Exodus*, p.202).

3.2 Comment

> The historian is not a truthteller, but a storyteller… and a nation's official history is ultimately no more than a story about which there is widespread agreement.
>
> Emory Elliott[55]

The exodus account could be described as a master narrative for both the Jewish and Christian heritage and foundational for their respective understanding of 'human suffering and divine redemption.'[56] It is the 'official history' that is seen as normative in the lives of the Jews, and is reflected upon in the rest of the theological exposition of the HB. In the midst of the story we have a few verses, namely Exodus 15: 20-21, that include a song of celebration by Miriam and other women after the lengthy Song of the Sea.[57] It has not escaped the attention of feminist biblical authors[58] that the fact that Miriam is referred to during such a climactic event in Israelite history has particular importance. However, possibly due to the brevity of the account, the discussion concerning Miriam's contribution to the celebration tend to circle around three issues, namely her title as a prophetess, whether v. 20 consists of the entirety of her song, and whether she could be considered as a cult official. In the following these three issues will be briefly approached.

3.3 Miriam the Prophetess

In the Hebrew corpus, Miriam is the first woman to be given the title 'prophetess' (Exodus 15:20) and possibly even the first person, since the meaning of Aaron's (Exodus 7:1) and Abraham's (Genesis 20:7) prophetic activity remains unclear. The exact nature of Miriam's prophetic office,

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[55] E. Elliott (ed.), *Columbia Literary History of the Unites States,* p.xvii as quoted by A. Bach, 'With a Song in her Heart: Listening to Scholars Listening for Miriam,' in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion*, p.250.

[56] Meyers, 'Miriam,' p.28.

[57] The Song of the Sea is often attributed to Moses. See T.B. Dozeman, C*ommentary on Exodus,* ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) p.337; Sarna, *Exodus,* p.56; B. Jacob, *Das Buch Exodus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1997) pp.428, 440; Noth, *Exodus,* p.123. Cassuto associates the song with both Moses and Aaron (*Exodus*, p.181).

[58] Meyers, 'Miriam,' pp.28ff; Trible, 'Subversive Justice: Tracing the Miriamic Traditions,' in D.A. Knight and P.J. Paris (eds.), *Justice and the Holy: Essays in Honor of Walter Harrelson*, HS (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989) pp.102-103; J.G. Janzen, 'Song of Moses, Song of Miriam: Who is Seconding Whom?' in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion*, pp.187-199; G. O'Day, 'Singing Woman's Song: A Hermeneutic of Liberation,' *CTM* 12, 4 (1985) pp.203-204.

however, is also the cause of some debate with the proposed arguments often established as follows: firstly, that Miriam's role is considered to be 'prophetic' in some sense (and hence the title 'prophetess' is quite accurate); secondly, that her office is a remnant of some kind of leadership role no longer traceable; thirdly, that her role is understood to be in the realm of poetry and music, even cultic, in which case the title 'prophetess' is hardly accurate and may even be an anachronism. The last one of these positions will be dealt with later; however, in the following we will briefly review the claims made by some of the holders of the first two positions.

Support for Miriam's role as 'prophetic' has been given by, among others, Susan Ackerman and Carol Meyers. Ackerman, whose article was published in 1992, was, like Exum's 1994 paper, affected by much of the criticism towards the 'successes' of the revisionist method as well as questions directed towards the patriarchal ethos of Scripture. Accordingly, Ackerman sets herself the task to 'explore the anomalous position' of four prophetesses (Nodiah, Hulda, Deborah and Miriam) within Israelite religion, 'asking in particular how *any* women could have come to be considered prophets given the overwhelmingly male character of the Bible's prophetic tradition.'[59]

Finding the biblical scholarship regarding women to be at best ambivalent, Ackerman looks to combine her research on Miriam with another method, namely, the four-part theory of 'social drama' by Victor Turner. This theory investigates 'public episodes of tensions irruption' as they were portrayed within the Ndembu society, and how the various stages of this 'irruption' could be described as a ritual containing the following parts: 1) breach of social relations; 2) a phase of crisis; 3) an attempt at '*redressive*' action; 4) the '*reintegration* of the disturbed' into the community or the recognition of an 'irreparable schism' between parties.[60] Turner claims that these

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[59] S. Ackerman, 'Why Is Miriam Also among the Prophets? (And Is Zipporah among the Priests?)' *JBL* 121, 1 (2002) p.51 [her italics].
[60] V. Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors,* pp.33, 38-41 [his italics], as quoted by Ackerman, 'Why?,' p.65.

phases are applicable to the description of communal relations and, in addition, can also be found reflected within narratives, even religious narratives.[61] Hence, with the use of Turner's four-part theory Ackerman attempts to ascertain why Miriam could have been established as a prophetess. She notes that Miriam's status could have resulted due to her function whilst in a period of what Turner calls 'liminality' or 'anti-structure,' a place where a person is 'betwixt and between the conventions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.'[62] Ackerman further suggests that the wilderness wanderings could be understood as such a liminal point in time, a stage between 'breach' and 'reintegration', during which 'the social identities that have previously defined liminal entities dissolve.'[63] Miriam could thus have acted as a prophetess due to social disarray; however, Ackerman notes that the Hebrew society becomes reformed at Sinai and, subsequently, Miriam's claims regarding her prophetic function would have been perceived 'as presumptuous' leading to the cessation of her office.[64]

Ackerman's article presents an informative study of the understanding of the exodus as a rite-of-passage and the consequent placement of Miriam's leadership within such framework. Although her insight into liminality is most interesting and establishes a credible analysis of the Israelites' experience in the wilderness, three issues are worth noting here. Firstly, as Meyers has stated, since at other points in Israel's history female prophetesses are present even within established communities, the validity of Ackerman's reading might be put into question (2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chronicles 34:22-28; Isaiah 8:3).[65] Secondly, even if we accept that Miriam's position could have existed as the result of social disarrangement, Ackerman does not fully investigate the implications

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[61] Turner, 'Social Dramas and the Stories about Them,' pp.141-168 as quoted by Ackerman, 'Why?,' pp.65-66.
[62] Turner, *Ritual Process*, p.95, as quoted by Ackerman, 'Why?', p,67.
[63] Ackerman, 'Why?', p.70.
[64] Ackerman, 'Why?', pp.75-80.
[65] Meyers, 'Miriam,' p.30.

of this experience for all of the characters in question.[66] That is, although a liminal phase might offer an opportunity for female leadership, in the exodus story it is not only Miriam but also Moses and Yahweh who express their fullest potential on the shore: Moses will become the leader *extraordinaire* by guiding the Hebrews throughout the sea event, ultimately receiving their trust as Yahweh's servant (Exodus 14:1-4; 13ff; 31). In addition, Yahweh will perform his most miraculous deed on the shore, as well as be accredited as the focus of the Hebrews' faith (Exodus 14:30-31; 15:1ff). Thus, that which we might gain from Ackerman's research is not only a credible analysis of the reason behind Miriam's prophetic function but the importance of liminal experience as regards the leadership of *all* of the actants. This might entice us to research the implications of liminal/marginal experience for both male and female leadership and also to question the modes and expressions of government within reaggregated communities.

Finally, we must note that a regrettable element in Ackerman's work is the lack of analysis of the content of the prophetic function. Indeed, if combined with her research into liminality, such an endeavour may have added to the discussion regarding the function of female prophetesses.[67]

In this regard, the work of Carol Meyers is more informative. A professor of Biblical studies and archaeology, it is hardly surprising that she has used an interdisciplinary method in her study. In light of Meyers' previous research, which supports the idea of mostly an egalitarian community in premonarchic Israel,[68] her observations concerning Miriam are mainly positive. She claims that

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[66] Ackerman notes the participation of both Moses and Yahweh in acts of leadership during the liminal period. This suits her understanding of the liminal community being required to submit to a leadership of some kind as well as to tests and trials imposed by the said leadership. She even notes the 'fluidity' of Moses' status during his early adult years until his reestablishment in Exodus 3:1-4:17. However, she does not discuss the implication of the sea even as regards Moses'/Yahweh's leadership in any significant manner ('Why?', pp.68-71).

[67] Such issues could include, for example, the trivialisation not only of social order but of order within offices, since Miriam appears to conjoin the roles of a cultic leader and a prophetess in her act of worship in Exodus 15:20-21.

[68] Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp.139ff.

Miriam, as the first woman to be called a prophetess, becomes the 'paradigmatic female prophet of ancient Israel,' and, moreover, that her performance as well as other Hebrew texts can provide insight into 'female prophetic traditions,' more explicitly into 'the presence of a gender-specific tradition, grounded in musical performance.'[69] Thus, Miriam could be considered as an example of a prophetess whose role is strongly if not solely connected with musical performance.

Indeed, Meyers claims that the three aspects of Miriam's celebration that are mentioned in Exodus 15:20-21, namely the drum, the dance and the song, indicate a performance genre associated with women especially evident in the context of unexpected military victories.[70] She points to the findings of terracotta statues in the Mesopotamian area, namely women (never men) holding a percussion instrument, which could strongly indicate a connection between female musicians and the frame drum as an instrument.[71] Moreover, if these findings are conjoined with Scriptural research where an association is often made between women, drums, dancing and song,[72] Meyers proposes that wherever the drum is mentioned in the HB,[73] female musicians could have been involved.[74] Therefore, if this statement is supposed to be true, this profession in ancient Israel could have signified 'an area of prestige and, occasionally, of attendant social power for these female musicians.'[75] However, Meyers does admit that over time such guilds may have become less prominent and even disappeared or dissolved into other forms of music. Yet, archaeology could be suggested to testify to a relatively long time of operation as does the need for percussionists due to

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[69] Meyers, 'Miriam', pp.27-28.

[70] Note the presence of women celebrating with hand drums specifically in contexts of military victory in Exodus 15:20; Judges (5:1); 11:34; 1 Samuel 18:6-7 and Jeremiah 31:4 (Meyers, 'Miriam,' pp.31, 40-41). Eunice Poethig suggested the naming of this genre of performance as 'victory songs' ('The Victory Song Tradition of the Women of Israel,' Ph.D. Dissertation, 1985 as quoted by Meyers, 'Miriam,' pp.40, 48). See, also, S.D. Goitein, 'Women as Creators of Biblical Genres,' *Prooftexts* 8, 1 (1988) pp.5-7.

[71] Meyers, 'Miriam', pp.31, 34-36.

[72] See n.70.

[73] The hand drum is mentioned in the HB in Genesis 31:27; Exodus 15:20; Judges 11:34; 1 Samuel 10:5; 18:6; 2 Samuel 6:5; 1 Chronicles 13:8; Job 21:12; Psalms 68:25; 81:2; 149:3; 150:4; Isaiah 5:12; 24:8; 30:32; Jeremiah 31:4; Ezekiel 28:13.

[74] Meyers, 'Miriam,' p.36.

[75] Meyers, 'Miriam,' p.37.

the more rhythmic rather than melodious/harmonious nature of Israelite music.[76] Thus, Meyers concludes that Miriam as a musician should not be considered as an 'aberration' within the religion of ancient Israel but rather as the visible and audible 'representative of her many invisible –and inaudible -sisters.'[77]

One might wonder why Meyers' theory is referred to here rather than within the section which addresses the possible cultic nature of Miriam's performance. The reason is simply this: Meyers starts her article by stating that Miriam is the archetype of female prophetesses, yet the only function Meyers attributes to her in her paper is that of poetry and music. I suppose that Meyers is not claiming that being a poet/musician is equivalent to the role of a prophet; however, she never links these two offices in any significant manner. Therefore, it seems that although Meyers does attempt to define Miriam's role in some fashion, like Ackerman, she takes Miriam's function as a prophetess for granted before examining issues that are of more interest to her. However, Meyers' approach could be suggested to be most original, especially because of the lack of feminist biblical critics with archaeological concerns, and should therefore be encouraged. Yet, archaeological findings are always open to interpretation, and Alice Bach is probably correct in stating that even if the women's musical tradition as suggested by Meyers would have existed, the amount of authority that Meyers assigns to these musicians appears to be overstated.[78] In addition, musical tradition alone cannot tie Miriam to a prophetic office, especially since the content of Miriam's Song does not appear to include a prophetic declaration but rather an invitation in the form of a hymn to praise God (we will return to this issue later). Although, as in the case of Deborah (Judges 5:1-31), song-writing and poems could certainly be a part of a prophetic function, we suggest that Exodus 15:20-21 does not

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[76] Meyers, 'Miriam the Musician', in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion*, pp. 229-230.
[77] Meyers, 'Miriam the Musician', p.230.
[78] Bach, 'With a Song,' p.249.

on its own support such a conclusion but rather leaves Miriam's prophetic designation open to dispute.

Because of the seeming contradiction between cultic and prophetic elements in Exodus 15:20-21, some feminist biblical scholars have suggested that Miriam's function is a remnant of an office no longer known. Trible has claimed that although Miriam is called a prophetess in Exodus 15:20, 'the title remains undefined and its meaning open;'[79] however, later in her article she seems to support a conclusion that Miriam's Song is to be understood in a prophetic light[80] and that Miriam's role could even be seen as encompassing several functions, namely those of a 'percussionist, lyricist, vocalist, prophet, leader and [a] theologian.'[81] O'Donnell Setel, in turn, has claimed that Miriam could have functioned in a ritualistic role, perhaps as a cultic musician as is descriptive of the Levites in later traditions (1 Chronicles 15:16; 2 Chronicles 35:15, cf. Numbers 26:59; 1 Chronicles 6:3). However, her cultic title could have been altered by later editors due to the designation 'prophet' being more acceptable for a woman within the particular cultural context than that of a 'priest.'[82] Thus Miriam's designation as a prophet could be an indication of female authority that 'did not survive into later periods.'[83] Finally, Athalya Brenner has suggested that Miriam was designated as a prophetess due to an 'almost stereotyped description of public figures as prophets…'[84] Indeed, here Brenner refers to what she calls the description of a pre-monarchic 'Ideal Leader', which included several components, among others, cultic responsibilities, juridical knowledge, military prowess and prophetic abilities.[85] Therefore, Brenner states that Miriam could

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[79] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' p.171.
[80] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' p.175.
[81] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' p.173.
[82] O'Donnell Setel, 'Exodus,' p.36. See, also, Burns, *Hast the Lord Spoken?*, pp.46-48.
[83] O'Donnell Setel, 'Exodus,' p.36.
[84] Brenner, *Israelite Woman*, p.61. Brenner also notes the suggestion made by Noth, which implicates the existence of a larger tradition surrounding Miriam since lost or forgotten and whose 'independent role we can therefore no longer detect' (pp.61-62; Noth, *Exodus,* pp.122-123).
[85] Brenner, *Israelite Woman*, p.53.

have been described as a prophet regardless of her actually having acted in that role, because she was a leader in other capabilities.

Out of the three scholars examined, it is intriguing that only Brenner seems to earnestly ascribe Miriam's role to the realm of the unknown, whereas both Trible and O'Donnell Setel narrow it down in some measure. Indeed, the claims made by Trible are especially confusing, since she appears to contradict herself by first claiming that Miriam's role is unidentifiable, but then she ascribes it to the realm of the prophetic as well as several other functions. O'Donnell Setel's comment concerning Miriam's title being due to editorial work is plausible; however, since our aim is to study the biblical texts in their final form, it will only stand if Miriam's role cannot be described as prophetic in any manner even in other texts. Brenner's argument concerning the 'Ideal Leader', in turn, is worth a mention, though its applicability to Miriam is questionable because of her lack in several of the abilities that Brenner states for the role in question. However, it needs to be noted that on the basis of Exodus 15:20-21, Miriam's role is hard to define. This is because her role as a prophetess is not explicitly developed in this passage, and if we wish to maintain the designation as authentic, then resigning her title to the unknown seems to be the best alternative.

Yet, ignorance is not an attitude often favoured among theologians, and therefore this position has not gained much following. Indeed, some feminist biblical scholars have accepted the premise of O'Donnell Setel's argument and concluded that Miriam's stance could be described as a cult musician/poet, with her designation as a prophetess of little or no significance. This position will be examined shortly; however, before we can effectively do so, we need to address the issue of the stance of Miriam's Song in the celebration as a whole.

3.4 Miriam's Song

It has been one of the most debated topics among feminist biblical scholars whether Miriam should be considered as the author/the presenter of the whole Song of the Sea (vv. 1-18) or of her Song only (v. 21). Indeed, the portrayal of Miriam as the primary leader at the sea celebration has been suggested by various feminist critics;[86] however, since the submission of Frank M. Cross and David N. Freedman's joint volume on Yahwistic Poetry in 1950,[87] the lines of argumentation to support such a conclusion have remained at best as variations of the comments put forward by the authors mentioned. These will be summarised in the following.

Cross and Freedman argue that the language and style of the Song of the Sea point to an early date and hence they suggest that the Song is possibly even the 'oldest of the extant sources for this event in Israelite history.'[88] As regards the ascription of the Song, they claim that the entire Song is 'the Song of Miriam' and, in fact, it would be easy to associate the hymn with a great leader (Miriam), but 'more difficult to explain the association of Miriam with the song as a secondary development.'[89] Indeed, Cross and Freedman propose that v. 21 serves as the opening verse and the title of the song, in accordance with standard practice. Therefore, the so-called 'Miriam's Song' at the end of the 'Song of the Sea' would not signal a secondary performance or a different/shorter form of the 'original song;' rather v. 21 is 'simply the title of the poem taken from a different cycle of traditions.'[90]

However, several aspects of the above theory need to be reconsidered. As Brevard Childs has noted, Cross and Freedman's argument concerning the 'standard' practice of having v. 21 as the title and

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[86] Trible, 'Subversive Justice,' pp.101-103; Meyers, 'Miriam', p.28; Brenner, *Israelite Woman*, pp.51-56; and O'Donnell Setel, 'Exodus,' p.35.
[87] F.M. Cross and D.N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry,* SBLDS 21 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).
[88] Cross and Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam,' *JNES* 14, 4 (1955) p.239.
[89] Cross and Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam,' p.237.
[90] Cross and Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam,' p.237.

the opening verse of the poem has not been sufficiently established.[91] In fact, the shorter hymn does

not necessarily presuppose the longer hymn because, as Burns states,

> it is remarkable that two-line chants connected in one way or another with
> battle seem to have been especially prone to circulate independently.[92]

Biblical examples of such songs are plentiful, some of which were even allegedly sung by women (1

Samuel 18:6-7; 21:11; 29:5; 2 Chronicles 7:3; 20:21; Psalm 136). In addition, because the Song of

Miriam is clearly set apart from the Song of the Sea, this could further indicate independence of

some description.[93] It is even possible that, as Marc Rozelaar has suggested, the Song of Miriam

could have been the original form from which the Song of the Sea was created;[94] however, as

Bernhard Anderson has stated, brevity on its own does not necessarily indicate antiquity,[95] which

leaves Rozelaar's theory, though plausible, in the realm of conjecture.

Although it is understandable that feminist biblical scholars (especially those from the revisionist

generation) would have received the theories advocated by Cross and Freedman with joy, a more

prominent role for Miriam is difficult to prove if based on authenticity. Also, it needs to be noted

that arguments from silence, such as those made by Cross and Freedman, can prove to be

problematic, since the fact that Miriam's appearance is difficult to explain does not necessarily mean

that there is no explanation.

Indeed, the authors who wish to give the Song of Miriam more of a 'secondary' role have found

plenty of reasons for Miriam to appear. Such suggestions have been presented by, among others,

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[91] B.S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary,* OTL (London: SCM, 1974) p.247.

[92] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.14-15. See, also, B.D. Russell, *The Song of the Sea: The Date of Composition and Influence of Exodus 15:1-21*, SBL 101 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2007) pp.33-34.

[93] It is for this reasons that the theory which portrays the Song of Miriam as an abbreviation of the Song of the Sea will not be considered. See the summary as laid out by Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, p.14 and H. Schmidt, 'Das Meerlied: Ex. 15 2-19.' *ZAW* 49 (1931) p.59.

[94] M. Rozelaar, 'The Song of the Sea (Exodus XV, 1b-18),' *VT* 2, 3 (1952) p.226. See, also, Noth, *Exodus,* p.122; Goitein, 'Women as Creators,' p.7 and Schmidt, 'Das Meerlied,' p.59.

[95] B.W. Anderson, 'The Song of Miriam Poetically and Theologically Considered,' in E.R. Follis (ed.), *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry,* JSOTSup 40 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987) p.289.

Cassuto, who claims that the women sung the Song antiphonically with the men as a refrain at the end of each strophe of the Song of the Sea[96] or perhaps at other appropriate places within the longer hymn, as noted by Millard Lind.[97] These positions find support in the research of Propp, who has highlighted the use of short songs as possible antiphonal refrains in the biblical corpus (Numbers 21:7; 1 Samuel 18:7; 21:11).[98] Indeed, since the verb preceding Miriam's Song, ענה, is most often translated as 'to answer, to respond',[99] antiphonal singing could indeed be indicated, possibly in the form of a response to the Song of the Sea as suggested by the above authors.

However, whether Miriam's Song should be understood as a response is a matter of some debate. Contrary to the readings given above, Gerald Janzen claims that Exodus 14:29 and 15:19 form an analepsis,[100] in which case we should understand the Song of the Sea as a response to an already sung Song of Miriam rather than *vice versa*.[101] Incidentally, Miriam's Song is sung to להם, 'to them' (masculine plural), which could denote Moses and the men[102] and, moreover, 'to answer' is not the only possible interpretation of ענה, which could also be indicative of 'singing' without a responsive element.[103] Thus, as Janzen notes, Miriam could be legitimately understood as the leader and the lead-singer of the victory celebrations, a conclusion supported by other feminist biblical critics.[104]

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[96] Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.182. See, also, T.E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, INT (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991) p.161 and Freedman, 'Moses and Miriam: The Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-18, 21),' in P.H. Williams and T. Hiebert (eds.), *Realia Dei: Essays in Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Edward F. Campbell, Jr. at His Retirement* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999) pp.70-71.
[97] M.C. Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel,* CPSS (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1980) p.47.
[98] Propp, *Exodus,* p.548.
[99] BDB, pp.772-773.
[100] Janzen, 'Song of Moses,' pp.190-191. See, also, Russell, *The Song of the Sea*, pp.36-37.
[101] Janzen argues that if ענה would have implied antiphonal singing, it would have been indicative of the men being encouraged to 'answer' to the Song of Miriam rather than *vice versa* ('The Song of Moses,' p.193).
[102] Janzen, 'Song of Moses,' pp.192-193.
[103] See Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.209 and Russell, *The Song of the Sea*, p.37.
[104] Janzen, 'The Song of Moses,' p.193. See, for example, Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?,* pp.11-40 and Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.201-232. Both scholars argue that Miriam was the leader at the sea event; however, their manner of arriving at such a conclusion is different to that of Janzen.

Subsequently, one can see a place of indecision being reached, where the commentators with both feminist as well as more androcentric issues at heart have reached a different conclusion while by and large seeking to find meaning in the Song of Miriam in its final form. The question, therefore, will remain whether Miriam's performance is 'just' a refrain, an analepsis, or whether the key to unlocking Miriam's role at the sea event is to be found elsewhere. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the deconstructive section on Exodus 15.

3.5 Miriam as Cult Official

Some biblical feminist scholars have found Miriam's prophetic title in Exodus 15 problematic to such an extent that they prefer to refer to Miriam as a 'cult official,' based on her ritualistic performance in vv. 20-21. Elements of this theory were presented earlier by O'Donnell Setel and Meyers and the possibility of Miriam's cultic status has also been tentatively inferred by other biblical critics.[105] More substantial theories in favour of Miriam's cultic role have been advocated by Martin Brenner and Rita Burns, both of whom connect Miriam's celebration to a specific cultic event in Israelite history: Brenner with the performance of the Levites in the Passover rituals during the Second Temple period (1 Chronicles 23:32; 24:31; 25:1-7, 5ff; 2 Chronicles 35:15)[106] and Burns with 'a liturgical event at the Hebrew shrine'[107] during the wilderness wanderings.

However, as was stated earlier, the issue of the origin of the Song of the Sea/ the Song of Miriam is debatable and cannot be decided for certain, leaving both the theories of Brenner and Burns in the realm of conjecture. Yet, that which is notable in both of their claims is the recognition of the cultic nature of the Songs. Although the form inherent in both poems is varied and could not, without

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[105] See Janzen, 'Song of Moses,' p.199 and A.S. Ostriker, *Feminist Revision and the Bible*, BLLT 7 (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993) p.44.
[106] M.L. Brenner, *The Song of the Sea: Ex 15:1-21*, BZAW 195 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1991) pp.19, 45.
[107] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, p.40.

difficulty, be assigned to just one genre,[108] the hymnic qualities of the Song of Miriam (and the Song of the Sea) are undeniable and have also been noted, among others, by Walter Brueggemann, Bernhard Anderson and James Muilenburg.[109] Indeed, Miriam's Song begins with an imperative plural, שירו, 'sing!', summoning the community to praise Yahweh followed by כי, 'for', and a description of Yahweh's saving actions, not too dissimilar to the depiction in Psalm 117 as is argued by Anderson.[110] Furthermore, as Burns notes, in Exodus 15 the clause following 'for' ('he has triumphed gloriously. Horse and chariot he has cast into the sea') appears to be both the 'motivation to praise and the praise itself,'[111] that is, Yahweh's affirmative actions are considered to be the reason for devotion and they also formulate the essence of the veneration. The formal characteristics of the song as well as the content could thus be suggested to connect the Song firmly to the cultic experience of the people, possibly also supported by the presence of dancing and the hand drum in the performance as was earlier described by Meyers.

However, the relevance of the cultic nature of the poem as regards Miriam's function at the celebration has been rarely discussed among feminist biblical critics: while they have either emphasised her role as a prophetess or focussed on the authenticity of her Song (as can be testified by the earlier part of the research), the possibility of her role as a cultic practitioner has received very little attention. To date, Burns remains as one of the few and perhaps the only scholar who has concerned herself with a lengthy discussion of the precise nature of Miriam's religious activity. Her observations will shortly be discussed below.

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[108] The Song of the Sea and/or the Song of Miriam have been described as, among other things, a victory psalm/ song/ hymn/ Ode de Triumph (Cross, and Freedman. 'The Song of Miriam,' p.238; Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior,* p.47; Meyers, 'Miriam,' p.40; Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.173 and Noth, *Exodus*, p.122), an enthronement psalm (Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, Vol. 1, trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas [Oxford: Blackwell, 1962] p.126); a thanksgiving psalm (Schmidt, 'Das Meerlied,' pp.59ff) or a hymn with elements of the thanksgiving form (Noth, *Exodus,* p.123).

[109] W. Brueggemann, "A Response to 'The Song of Miriam' by Bernhard Anderson," in E.R. Follis (ed.), *Directions*, pp.298-299; Anderson , 'The Song of Miriam,' pp.288-289 and J. Muilenburg, 'A Liturgy on the Triumphs of Yahweh,' in T.F. Best (ed.), *Hearing and Speaking the Word: An Anthology of the Works of James Muilenburg*, SPHS 7 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984) p.238.

[110] Anderson, 'The Song,' pp.288-289.

[111] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?,* p.31.

Firstly, we must note that Burns observes Miriam's victory celebration at the sea not as a random expression of joy but as a cultic re-enactment of a battle. She establishes her claim on the basis of her research of other supposed cultic victory celebrations (Exodus 32:1ff; Judges 16:23ff; 1 Chronicles 15:1ff; 2 Samuel 6:1ff; 2 Samuel 2:14; cf. 1 Samuel 30:16) and argues that since a context of a cultic battle/victory is heavily implied in all of the passages, we should accordingly understand the words used in these events for 'dancing' (רקד/שחק/צחק) as illustrative of ritual combat/dance.[112] Moreover, warfare rituals could also be inferred from poetic passages/ psalms especially as regards the temple cult (Isaiah 30:29-32; Psalm 46:9-11, 48:5-9, 149:1-9), and, in addition, even from the specific term used in Exodus 15:20 to indicate dancing (מחלת, cf. Exodus 32:19).[113] Indeed, Burns suggests that Miriam's celebration should be 'viewed alongside other instances of ritual dance' and thus understood as a re-enactment.[114]

Secondly, Burns states that the song and the dance were not impulsive expressions but carefully chosen to create a semblance of warfare to accompany the cultic representation. She notes that the hand drums might have functioned to accompany the violent movements of the Divine Warrior (Exodus 15:20) [115] and, in addition, the song could be understood as a war-cry, representing the sounds on a battlefield (Exodus 32:17; Psalm 47:5-6; 68:1-2; 98:1ff; 132:8; 149:6; Isaiah 30:32; Zephaniah 3:17).[116]

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[112] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.16-25.
[113] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.25-31. Burns notes that the root חול ('dance/ writhe') is encountered often in early poetic passages, which might have been used for victory celebrations involving ritual combat. See, also, her use of Kittel's interpretation of Isaiah 30:32 (p.26).
[114] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, p.19.
[115] Burns suggests the possibility of the use of the 'timbrel' in ritual contexts, supported by her reading of rituals in ancient Egypt (*Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.38-39).
[116] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.31-38.

Here two issues will be raised as regards Burns' argumentation. Firstly, she needs to be commended for drawing parallels between Exodus 15:20-21 and other cultic celebrations,[117] thereby setting Miriam's Song firmly in the tradition of communal worship. Secondly, whether the song could be considered as a re-presentation of the sea event, as Burns claims, needs to be discussed.

Although we agree it is possible that in some cultic celebrations of Yahweh ritualistic combat could have taken place as suggested by Burns (Isaiah 30:29-32; Psalm 149:1-9), there is, however, very little proof that Exodus 15:20-21 should be taken in such a way. Firstly, the connection between the phrases used to describe 'dancing' in the various passages inferred by Burns to illustrate ritualistic combat has not been sufficiently established. For example, in Judges 16:25 and in 1 Chronicles 15:29 it seems to be indicated that both Samson and David were 'dancing' on their own, which would have made it difficult for either of them to present a combat ritual of the kind Burns appears to be advocating. Secondly, although מחלת and צחק are used in Exodus 32:6, 19 to imply the actions of the people, since מחלת can depict dancing without a ritual element[118] and the use of צחק has already been problematised by its use to describe Samson's performance (Judges 16:25), to portray Miriam's dance as ritual combat becomes difficult. To observe her dance as an enactment is further complicated by the use of ענה, 'to answer', which Burns connects with the 'noise of war' heard by Joshua in Exodus 32:17.[119] However, ענה lacks the required markers for the same use in Exodus 15:21, making the connection between a war-cry and Miriam's Song less likely.[120] Furthermore, as Rapp has noted, because Burns needs such a broad context for her thesis, drawing parallels even from events that involve non-Hebrew celebrations (Judges 16:25 and 1 Samuel 30:16), the reliability

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[117] See, for example, Exodus 32; 2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 15; Psalm 149. All of these events are arguably celebrations of a victory within a cultic context with the additional presence of song and/or dance.
[118] See, for example, Judges 11:34 and 1 Samuel 18:6-7; 29:5.
[119] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, p.20.
[120] Rapp, *Mirjam*, pp.221-222.

of her argument is put in question.[121] Overall, it thus appears that Burns is focused on presenting Exodus 15:20-21 as a cultic event at a shrine, and hence the said understanding directs her judgement as regards the meaning given to the various elements in Exodus 15:20-21. However, if these elements were to be studied in context as well as in their narrative placement, the song could be opened up for other interpretations.

In conclusion, then, having looked at the various feminist approaches to Miriam, what can we state about Miriam's performance at the sea? We have certainly illustrated that Miriam's actions do appear as cultic in nature, even if they are not in the form of a ritual battle or a cultic re-enactment as Burns has argued. However, Miriam's title as a prophetess and her position within the sea event as a whole has been open to various views, ranging between affirmation of her prophetic and/or her primary standing at the event to the denial or at least the lessening of her role in the story. Miriam's performance seems to portray a moment of indecision, leaving us amongst a variety of interpretations without a clear understanding of her significance. These issues as well as others will be returned to in the deconstructive section of the thesis.

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[121] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.216, 221-222.

4. Numbers 12

4.1 Translation: Number 12:1-16

Miriam and Aaron spoke about[122] Moses concerning the Cushite woman whom he had married because he had married a Cushite woman.[123] And they said: "Has Yahweh indeed only spoken to[124] Moses? Has he not also spoken to us?" And Yahweh heard them. Now the man Moses was very humble,[125] more than any man on the face of the earth. Suddenly Yahweh said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting the three of you!" And the three of them came out. Yahweh came down in a pillar of cloud and he stood at the door of the tent. He summoned Aaron and Miriam and both of them came forward. He said, "Now listen to my words! If there is among you a prophet of Yahweh,[126] in a vision I reveal myself to him, in a dream I speak to him. Not so with my servant Moses. In all of my house he is faithful.[127] Mouth to mouth I speak to him,

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[122] דבר ב is a 3rd feminine singular. Since the addressees of the complaints are nor revealed and Moses does not respond to the said statements, it is plausible to assume that Miriam and Aaron spoke 'about' Moses rather than 'against' him (cf. Deuteronomy 6:7; 1 Samuel 19:4; Psalm 119:46). See, also, Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.38-40 who prefers the translation presented here since it keeps the woman's point of view in the story open.

[123] The Vulgate omits this sentence as a gloss; the LXX repeats the phrase as stating that the woman in question is an Ethiopian or, as in the case of the Targum, a beautiful woman whom Moses had sent away, connecting the Cushite woman with Zipporah (Exodus 18:2). See E.W. Davies, *Numbers*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) p.118 and J. Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (New York: JPS, 1990) pp.93, 309.

[124] דבר ב is here translated as to 'speak to/with' since it is the reception of God's word that is under consideration in (cf. Numbers 12:6-8). Also, note that in Numbers 12, when God is the subject of דבר ב, the recipient of his communiqué comes directly after the preposition (vv. 2, 6, 8). See Rapp, *Mirjam*, pp.38-44.

[125] ענו (in the singular) occurs only here. The plural, often used in Psalms, denotes 'afflicted'. In the Talmud ענו usually indicates submissive, meek or humble; whereas the Qere gives a slightly different spelling; however, it still supports the understanding of the Talmud. LXX also favours gentle, humble and meek (for further details, see S.B. Dawes, 'Numbers 12.3: What Was Special about Moses?,' *BTrans* 41, 3 [1990] pp.336-337). Afflicted seems hardly appropriate to the context; however, G.W. Coats has argued that humble/meek is equally ill-suited and ענו should rather be interpreted as 'honourable,' indicating responsibility as well as personal integrity ('Humility and Honor: A Moses Legend in Numbers 12,' in D.J.A. Clines, D.M. Gunn and A.J. Hauser [eds.], *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature,* JSOTSup 19 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982] pp.100, 102). However, as Dawes has correctly noted, in Talmudic as well as later Jewish literature humility is a virtue highly valued and is not connotative of loss of strength. The translation 'humble' is further supported by the description of Moses in Jewish traditions as the epitome of humility (Nedarim 38a; Ben Sira 45.1ff; cf. Exodus 3-4; 32:32). Therefore, in Numbers 12:3 Moses' portrayal as humble could indicate his full dependence upon God and his ability to put others' interests before his own ambitions, an interpretation that is certainly fitting in the context of Numbers 12 ('Numbers 12.3,' p.340). See, also, R.S. Briggs, *The Virtuous Reader: Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2010) pp.49-63.

[126] The MT reading of the phrase is ambiguous. The LXX translates the sentence as 'if a prophet among you is of the Lord,' an interpretation which with the omission/replacement of the name Yahweh is supported by Davies, *Numbers*, pp.121-122, G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1903) pp.124-126 and F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religions of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) p.203. Notably, the MT can be retained if we comprehend the sentence as a broken construct chain where a pronominal suffix intervenes between the construct and its genitive, rendering the translation 'if any of you is Yahweh's prophet' (D.N. Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980] pp.236-237). Alternatively, it is also possible to read נביכם as an 'anticipatory genitive', which would translate the phrase as 'a prophet of yours, of Yahweh'. See D.C. Hymes, "Numbers 12: Of Priests, Prophets, or 'None of the Above,'" *AJBI* 24 (1998) p.11.

[127] J.S. Kselman has suggested an emendation which reads the two lines as parallel (But my servant Moses is surely loyal/ in all my house he is faithful; see 'A Note on Numbers XII 6-8,' *VT* 26 [1976] p.502). However, it seems that an element of contrast is intended in the passage and therefore the original reading will be retained.

clearly[128] and not in riddles. He sees the form of Yahweh.[129] So why were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" The anger of Yahweh burned against them and he left. The cloud departed from above the Tent, and behold, Miriam was leprous like snow.[130] Aaron turned to Miriam and behold, she was leprous. Aaron said to Moses: "Please my lord, do not now hold against us the sin that we were foolish to commit. Do not let her be as the dead, as one when he comes out of his mother's womb, his flesh is half eaten away." Moses cried out to Yahweh saying: "Oh God, heal her now!" Yahweh said to Moses, "If her father spat in her face, would she not be in disgrace for seven days? Let her be confined for seven days outside the camp and afterwards she may be brought back." And she was confined outside of the camp for seven days and the people did not move on till Miriam was brought back.[131] After the people left Hazeroth, they encamped in the desert of Paran.

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[128] מראה, 'clearly' (or 'in appearance' as in the LXX) is a slightly different form of the word 'vision' used earlier in v. 6. It is possible that the Masoretes would have intended two different interpretations for the same word, although no satisfactory conclusion can be reached (see Davies, *Numbers,* p.123). Rapp's reading, that מראה in v. 8 is indicative of Moses' special status and his revelation authority versus מראה in v. 6 which describes revelation available for all, is also a possibility (*Mirjam,* p.97).

[129] Both the expressions 'mouth to mouth' and 'he sees the form of Yahweh' imply a unique, intimate relationship with Yahweh (cf. Exodus 33:11 and Deuteronomy 34:10). However, to avoid 'such a bold anthropomorphism,' both the LXX and Syriac read in the latter case 'the glory of the Lord' (Davies, *Numbers,* p.123). Yet, both of these expressions emphasise the unique relationship of Moses above and beyond all other leaders and/or prophets and therefore the language and images used could be seen as more than appropriate. See, also, B.A. Levine, who interprets the phrase 'face to face'/ 'mouth to mouth' to mean 'direct communication' rather than suggesting Moses would have met God face to face (*Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary,* AB [New York: Doubleday, 1993] pp.341-342).

[130] For a discussion on the nature of Miriam's ailment, see pp.91-95.

[131] The LXX has 'was cleansed', possibly connecting the incidence with the ritual of a person cleansed from צרעת (Leviticus 14:9). See N.H. Snaith, *The New Century Bible: Leviticus and Numbers* (London: Nelson, 1967) p.236.

4.2 Comment

> The lineage of Miriam is a lineage of generations of women who have
> been rejected or humiliated for doing exactly the same things as their male
> counterparts.
>
> Katherine Doob Sakenfeld[132]

In Numbers 12 we have three leaders, one of whom is justified, one lowered, and the female one not only punished, but banished. The question 'Why was only Miriam punished?' has echoed through various commentaries, mostly those of feminist persuasion.[133] The reason for this inequality has been the cornerstone for dividing opinions either to those who argue that Miriam's punishment was somewhat deserved (mostly supported by source theorists or older male commentators),[134] or to those who state that the punishment was undeserved and possibly reflects the patriarchal mindset of the author (mainly feminist biblical commentators),[135] and yet others who have attempted to resurrect a more 'woman friendly' reading of the chapter, although such studies are few and far between[136].

The depiction of Miriam's (and Aaron's) rebellion is portrayed within a sequence of events, which together with Numbers 11 could be suggested to form a unit of murmuring narratives that after the departure from Sinai (10:11-13, 33ff) set the stage for three other evils to come: the story of the

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[132] 'Numbers,' in C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary,* p.52.

[133] Sakenfeld, *Journeying with God: A Commentary on the Book of Numbers,* ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) p.82; M. Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers,* JSOTSup 158 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) p.197; D.N. Fewell and D.M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, & Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) p.115; I. Fischer, 'The Authority of Miriam: A Feminist Rereading of Numbers 12 Prompted by Jewish Interpretation,' in Brenner (ed.), *Exodus to Deuteronomy,* p.171. See, also, Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, pp.234, 236 and Davies, *Dissenting Reader*, pp.65-66.

[134] See, e.g., Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary,* trans. J.D. Martin, OTL (London: SCM, 1968) pp.92-93; Davies, *Numbers*, p.114; Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.32; Milgrom*, Numbers,* p.93.

[135] See, e.g., Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' pp.175-176; Pardes, *Countertraditions,* p.9; Fewell and Gunn, *Gender*, pp.115-116.

[136] See Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.48ff. Most of the more 'optimistic' readings are found among commentators who rely at least in part on rabbinical texts. See, E.A. Phillips, 'The Singular Prophet and Ideals of Torah: Miriam, Aaron, and Moses in Early Rabbinic Texts' in C.A. Evans and J.A. Sanders (eds.), *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition*, JSNTSup 154 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) pp.78-88, and I. Fischer, 'The Authority,' pp.159-173.

faithless spies (13:1-14:45), the rebellion of the Levites (16:1-17:12) and the rebellion of Aaron and

Moses themselves (20:1-13; 22-29). In Numbers 12, the murmuring motif is clearly present, though

the stage containing Yahweh's answer and punishment is obviously expanded:

1. The people complain [vv. 1-2]
2. Yahweh hears/ appears [v. 2]
3. Yahweh is angry/punishes [vv. 4-10]
4. People plead with Moses [vv. 11-12]
5. Moses intercedes [v. 13]
6. The punishment is lifted [vv. 14-15].[137]

A clear pattern, however, has not been a warrant for clarity. Indeed, as Martin Noth has stated,

Numbers 12 'in itself... is so broken and disunified that its original content and meaning can no

longer be determined with certainty.'[138] The apparently disjointed issues of the Cushite woman and

prophetic authority, as well as some grammatical issues and inconsistencies, have suggested to many

that Numbers 12 is the result of the joining of two sources by a more or less capable editor.[139]

Although it is quite possible that the present narrative is the result of the joining of previous sagas,

the relevance or even the accuracy of such an enterprise needs to be highlighted. As Bernard

Robinson notes, 'should we not do him [the author] the compliment of trying to make sense of what

he wrote?'[140] There is a reason why the possible sources were so combined and an exegetical

exercise into uncovering such reason can be most fruitful for those seeking meaning in the biblical

corpus in its final form. However, because in their approach to the story feminist biblical scholars

have most often separated the issue of the Cushite woman in v. 1 from that of the prophetic authority

in v. 2, for the sake of clarity this chapter will also be split appropriately as follows,

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[137] For details of this murmuring pattern, see G. J. Wenham, *Numbers,* OTG (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997) pp.51-52. See, also, J. van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers*, CBET 10 (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994) pp.220-221, who relies on Childs' understanding of the murmuring motif (see Childs, *Exodus*, pp.258-259).
[138] Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. B.W. Anderson, SPRS 5 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981) pp.126-127.
[139] For possible source theories on Numbers 12, see van Seters, *The Life of Moses,* pp.234-235; Davies, *Numbers*, pp.113-115; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions,* pp.126-128; Budd, *Numbers*, pp.133-134; Coats, 'Humility and Honor,' pp.98-99.
[140] B.P. Robinson, 'The Jealousy of Miriam: A Note on Num 12' *ZAW* 101 (1989) p.429.

1. The issue of the Cushite woman.

2. The issue of prophetic authority.

3. Miriam, the perpetrator.

4.3 The Issue of the Cushite Woman

Regarding the Cushite woman mentioned in v. 1, we have two issues that need investigating, namely, the identity of the Cushite and the reason why a quarrel concerning her has been placed in Numbers 12. As regards the first issue, we could hypothesise that either she is Zipporah, the Midianite woman Moses married in Exodus (Exodus 2:21; 18:2; cf. Numbers 10:29),[141] another wife of Moses, possibly the second,[142] or that all the references to Moses' wife being a Cushite (Numbers 12:1), a Kenite (Judges 1:16; 4:11) or a Midianite (Exodus 2:16, 21; 18:2) refer to one unidentifiable foreign woman.[143]

With regard to the latter theory put forward by Noth and Burns, it needs to be stated that though the possibility of three different traditions about Moses having married a foreigner is warranted, since in this thesis Numbers 12 as well as other narratives are dealt with in their final form, the conclusion has to remain that either Moses had three different wives or that all of the different nationalities refer to a single individual. In the context of Numbers 12, if the Midianite Zipporah (Exodus 2:16, 21) is to be equated with the Cushite woman, then evidence is needed for the area of Cush being the same area or at least related to Midian. According to Mukti Barton, a womanist scholar, Zipporah was a black woman, most likely an Ethiopian. She claims that,

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[141] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender*, p.114; Phillips, 'The Singular Prophet,' pp.80-82; Fischer, 'The Authority,' pp.162-164; R. Schwartz, 'If There Be a Prophet,' in R. Schwartz (ed.), *All the Women Followed Her: A Collection of Writings on Miriam the Prophet & the Women of Exodus* (Mountain View: Rikudei Miriam Press, 2001) pp.166-167. See, also, n.145.

[142] Weems, *Just a Sister*, p.75; Davies, *Numbers*, pp.118-119; Budd, *Numbers*,136; Robinson, 'Jealousy,' p.429; A. Abela, 'Shaming Miriam, Moses' Sister, in Num 12,1-16,' in T. Römer (ed.), *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, BETL 215 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008) p.534 and D.T. Adamo, *Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament* (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1998) pp.68-73.

[143] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, p.69; Noth, *Pentateuchal Traditions,* pp.168-169.

Both historical and biblical evidences indicate that ancient Ethiopia stretched beyond the Red Sea. Black people inhabited Arabia as well. Thus Zipporah was not just a Cushite or Ethiopian resident in Midian, most probably Midian was a part of ancient Ethiopia.[144]

However, even if Ethiopia would have stretched to Midian and to Cush, all that this proves is that Moses' wife was black but not necessarily the same woman, since Midian and Cush would still have been two different regions inside the same country. Indeed, in Habakuk 3:7 Midian and Cush are paralleled; however, they are still mentioned as two separate entities and therefore should hardly be equated.[145] Furthermore, if we follow the most capable research presented by David Adamo, we can note that Midian and Cush do not appear to have been used as interchangeable terms in the Near East;[146] rather, 'Cushite' was most probably an indication of an African *en general* rather than of a Midianite.[147] If Adamo's argument is presumed correct, then it is most probable that the woman in question was another foreign wife of Moses. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the author sees it necessary to repeat the fact that Moses had married a Cushite woman, hardly

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[144] M. Barton, 'The Skin of Miriam Became as White as Snow: The Bible, Western Feminism and Colour Politics', *FT* 27 (2001) p.70.

[145] Davies, *Numbers,* p.118; Hymes, 'A Pluriform Analysis of Numbers 10.11-14.55,' (Ph.D. diss., University of Wales, Bangor, 2010) pp.145-146. Hymes has also noted the lack of evidence as regards comprehending Cush/Cushan as a sub-tribal unit similar to the Midianites (pp.145-146). For those in support of such a view, see V. Fritz, *Israel in der Wüste: traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung der Wüstenüberlieferung des Jahwisten,* MTS 7 (Marburg : Elwert, 1970) p.76 and Noth, *Numbers,* p.94.

[146] Adamo, *Africa,* p.70. Rapp argues that Cush could have been used as a euphemism for Midian and thus she identifies the woman as Zipporah, in which case her marriage to Moses would be a reminder of the mode of shared leadership advocated by her father, Jethro (Exodus 18:13-27). Therefore, the challenge to Moses' singular authority would have been strengthened by Zipporah's Midianite connections rather than been weakened by them (Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.68, 70-72, 391). Rapp also interprets Exodus 18:2 as implicating that Moses had given Zipporah a parting gift rather than divorced her (p.75). In light of Adamo's thesis as presented above, Rapp's theory remains open to debate.

[147] According to Adamo, the term 'Kush' was used by the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians and the Hebrews to refer to Africa and Africans. It was originally used by the Egyptians to refer to an area beyond Semna and Kerma (see J.D. Hays, 'The Cushites: A Black Nation in Ancient History,' *BS* 153 [1996] pp.270-280, who associates Kush with an area corresponding to that of the modern Sudan) but was later extended to embrace the lands further south. In the HB, the term is used to cover an area corresponding to the Ethiopias of the classical period (cf. Ezekiel 29:10; Isaiah 11:11; 18:1-2; 45:14; Esther 1:11;), hence the identification of the Cushite woman as an Ethiopian (in the modern day) might be misleading (*Africa,* pp.11-15; 28-37). B.J. Diebner has suggested that the Cushite woman was a member of the Jewish Elephantine community and thus Numbers 12 legitimises marriages between 'orthodox' Jews and those from the said community during the post-exilic period ('… for he had married a Cushite woman (Numbers 12:1),' *Nubica* 1/2 (1990) p.504 . However, this interpretation puts later concerns on the text and will not be considered in this thesis.

needed if the woman in question was the previously known Zipporah. The repetition could even hint at a recent marriage, as Ludwig Schmidt, Davies and Adamo have suggested.[148]

However, even if we accept that Moses had married a second woman (possibly after having divorced Zipporah, Exodus 18:2), the reason for the exact nature of the accusation against her needs to be discussed. Trible has argued that the controversy could have been over priestly authority as opposed to the later presented issue of prophetic influence (vv. 2, 6-8);[149] however, the relevance of Moses' foreign wife as regards priestly prerogatives is difficult to sustain since there is no indication toward the proposed understanding in the present narrative. Weems has suggested the cause to be rivalry among sisters-in-law; yet, her argument seems to be more warranted from Weems' personal experience rather than from the text itself.[150] Rodney Sadler and Randall Bailey, in turn, have claimed that Moses had somehow elevated his position amongst his siblings through his marriage to a Cushite, perhaps due to the woman's status or even skin colour.[151] If the former, to this we have no explicit reference in the text; if the latter, the woman's skin-colour would not have been that different to that of the Hebrews if she was indeed of an African origin and therefore was unlikely to be the cause of the argument.[152]

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[148] L. Schmidt, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zum Pentateuch*, BZAW 263 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998) p.271; Davies, *Numbers,* p.118 and Adamo, *Africa,* p.70.

[149] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' pp.174-175. See, also A.O. Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes:Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) p.104.

[150] Weems, *Just a Sister,* pp.76-79. Family jealousy or other issues related to family arguments have also been suggested by Robinson, 'Jealousy,' pp.430, 432; Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968) p.262; M. Buber, *Moses: the Revelation, and the Covenant* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) p.168, cf. S.D. Sperling, 'Miriam, Aaron and Moses: Sibling Rivalry', *HUCA* 70-71 (1999-2000) p.51 and Abela, 'Shaming,' p.534. However, although reading family issues into the text is a possibility, nothing in the text suggests that the debate concerned the personal relations between the siblings and/or the foreign woman.

[151] R.S. Sadler, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin? An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2005) pp.36-39 and R.C. Bailey, 'Beyond Identification: The Use of Africans in Old Testament Poetry and Narratives,' in C.H. Felder (ed.), *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) pp.179-180.

[152] Bellis, *Helpmates,* pp.103-104 and M. Barton, 'The Skin,' pp.73-74. Barton, however, still maintains that racial prejudice was the root of the argument. Indeed, several scholars view Miriam's punishment with a skin disease as 'poetic justice', that is, her skin turned as 'white as snow' as opposed to the dark skin of the Cushite. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, p.204; J. Williams, "And She Became 'Snow White': Numbers 12:1-16," *OTE* 15 (2002-01) p.266; H.

However, even if the woman was not of different colour, she was definitely a foreigner.[153] Indeed, the author chooses not only to repeat twice that Moses had married the woman but that she was a Cushite. Arguments to the contrary have nevertheless been presented by some scholars, who either emphasise Moses' previous union to a Midianite that was not objected to,[154] the ban on exogamy which was only instigated later,[155] or even the lack of stigmatisation associated with marriages among Israelites/ Egyptians and Cushites as noted by David Hymes.[156] However, three issues are worth noting here. Firstly, the HB does not present a uniform standing on the issue of mixed marriages[157] and thus, even if we could argue that Numbers 12 presents an anti-racialist attitude towards mixed marriages as Hymes claims,[158] even Sadler (whose conclusions Hymes uses to support his analysis) agrees that Miriam's angst towards the Cushite could have risen out of 'color prejudice' even if Yahweh ultimately approved of Moses' choice of wife.[159] Secondly, to dislike a foreigner as the main leader's wife is not an issue tied to religious legislation, and thirdly, the fact that the Midianite woman is not objected to could be due to the fact that Moses may have married and divorced Zipporah at an early stage (Exodus 2:21; 18:2). In addition, the fact that one foreigner was not objected to does not necessarily mean there was no cause to object to the second one (especially since the first one had gone sour). Indeed, if something other than the Cushite's ethnic

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Wagenaar, 'White as Snow: Numbers 12 from an African Perspective,'
http://theol.eldoc.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/2002/Whiteassnow/White_as_Snow.pdf (18/3/2011) and Bailey, 'Beyond identification,' p.180.
[153] See Adamo, who claims that Miriam objected to the Cushite because she was a foreigner who did not know Yahweh. He further suggests that Moses had consulted Yahweh who had told him to marry a Cushite; however, Miriam claimed to have seen a vision counter to Moses' actions, which led to the controversy (*Africa,* pp.68-70). Although Adamo's perception of the woman's foreign nationality is attested to, the remainder of his reading is highly conjectural.
[154] Davies, *Numbers,* p.119; Robinson, 'Jealousy,' p.432; van Seters, *The Life of Moses,* pp.238-239. Note that van Seters agrees that the issue in Numbers 12:1 is one of inter-racial marriages, but not of exogamy.
[155] Davies, *Numbers,* p.119.
[156] Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.148.
[157] See G.N. Knoppers, 'Intermarriage, Social Complexity, and Ethnic Diversity in the Genealogy of Judah,' *JBL* 120, 1 (2001) pp.15-30 and K.S. Winslow, 'Ethnicity, Exogamy, and Zipporah,,' http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Documents/ exogamy.htm (18/3/2011).
[158] Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.148.
[159] Sadler, *Can a Cushite?,* pp.39-40.

origin would have been the cause of the dispute, it would have been more appropriate to identify the woman by means of the offending attribute rather than her nationality.

Burns is probably correct in suggesting that in Numbers 12:1 Miriam is raising a community concern regarding the marriage rather than a private dispute.[160] The public element of the debate can be seen in the fact that Miriam was a public figure and a leader among the Hebrews (cf. Exodus 15:20-21), her punishment is made public (Numbers 12:10-15) and the people wait upon her return (Numbers 12:15).[161] Such a reading is further supported if the narrative is read in the broader context of Numbers 11 as well as Numbers 21, which explicate the public nature of the murmuring narratives.[162] However, whether such a public debate was raised because of the foreign element causing problems as regards religious issues or, for example, because the Hebrews did not want the second marriage of their leader to be to a foreigner, cannot be decided for certain. Nevertheless, that which seems probable is that the foreign nationality of the second wife was in some form the cause of the argument.[163]

4.4 The Issue of Prophetic Authority

In v. 2 Aaron and Miriam challenge Moses' unique status as the deliverer of the divine word; however, the exact content of the complaint is open to debate. Several commentators have argued that Numbers 12 is a reflection of later arguments between prophetic and/or priestly groups[164] but

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[160] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?,* pp.69-70.
[161] See, also, Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis, pp.148-149.
[162] Note the public nature of the murmuring in Numbers 11:1, 4-10 and, as in Numbers 12:1-2, the complaint has no addressee. In Numbers 21:5, where דבר ב is used to describe the complaint in a manner similar to Numbers 12:1-2, the people complain again in public and this time the issue is also directed at God and Moses. Indeed, murmuring narratives are most often made on a public stage, so there is very little reason to believe that Numbers 12 should be treated differently.
[163] See, Davies, *Numbers*, p.119; Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.69-70 and Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.93.
[164] See, for example, Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.51-67; Coats, *Rebellion*, pp.263-264; Sperling, 'Miriam,' pp.54-55; Cross, *Canaanite Myth,* pp.203-204; K. Butting, *Prophetinnen Gefragt: Die Bedeutung der Prophetinnen im Kanon aus Tora und Prophetie,* ERHBFT 3 (Knesebeck: Erev-Rav, 2001) pp.5-51; 56ff; Fischer, 'The Authority,' pp.165ff; Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.178-193; A.H.J. Gunneweg, 'Das Gesetz und die Propheten: Eine Auslegung von Ex 33,7-11; Num

such claims, although most intriguing, have the tendency to superimpose later issues on the text and thus should be approached with caution. In addition, the attempt to connect Numbers 12 to priestly prerogatives, as is most notably the case in the research of Burns,[165] confronts several problems. One is the total lack of reference (barring the presence of Aaron) to priestly matters, as well as the upstaged issue of prophetic authority in vv. 6-8 as noted by Philip Budd.[166] Furthermore, the presence of Miriam would be difficult to maintain if the issue was priestly in nature,[167] since even though Miriam obviously had cultic functions (Exodus 15:20-21), she is never described as a priest. If we are to read the narrative in its final form, it is thus advisable to abandon the attempt to find an explanation in later rivalries and approach the text as it stands.

Some clues to the root of the controversy can be found in vv. 6-8, where a comparison is made between prophetic revelation and that of Moses, that is, the communiqué received by the prophets is characterised by 'dreams' and 'visions' (v. 6) whilst with Moses Yahweh speaks 'clearly' and 'face to face' (v. 8). Thus, Trible and Naomi Cohen have argued that the disagreement in question could be concerning oracular authority. Furthermore, Trible suggests the issue to be not simply one of authority but most importantly the equal distribution of it. She claims that 'for Miriam the prophetic task centres not upon a single male (Moses) but embraces diverse voices, female and male.'[168] Miriam's requirement would have therefore been the fulfilment of Moses' own desire in Numbers 11:29, where he wished for all Yahweh's people to prophesy. Cohen, however, has argued that rather than being an issue of gender equality, the claim for oracular authority is based upon a misunderstanding concerning different types of prophetic revelation. The type represented by Miriam and Aaron is expressed by the formula דבר ב, which describes a state possessed by God,

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11,4-12,8; Dtn 31,14f.; 34,10,' *ZAW* 102, 2 (1990) p.174-175, 178-178 and Anderson, 'Miriam's Challenge,' *BR* 10, 3 (1994) p.55.
[165] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.51-67.
[166] P.J. Budd, *Word Biblical Commentary: Numbers,* WBC 5 (Waco: Word Books, 1984) pp.134-135.
[167] See Davies, *Numbers*, pp.115-116.
[168] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' p.175.

whereas Moses' experience is that of an 'active partner in a dialogue situation.'[169] Therefore, the requirement of a leadership standing in the case of Miriam and Aaron, according to Cohen, is based on their misapprehension of the type of prophetic revelation experienced by Moses rather than on egalitarianism as is claimed by Trible.

Both of the above arguments are based on the understanding that the debate is concerned with prophetic leadership of which the experience of Moses is supposedly the highest example, an interpretation also supported by other scholars.[170] However, as is claimed by Coats, within the context of vv. 6-8 it appears that Moses is not described as *the* prophet but rather Moses' mode of communication is *contrasted* with that of a prophet: the revelation that Moses receives is clear and unmediated, whereas prophetic visions always require interpretation.[171] Such an understanding is further supported in v. 7, where Moses is described as the faithful servant (עבד) in all of Yahweh's house (v. 7). The title of a 'servant' is on occasions placed upon kings and other heroes of the faith in the HB (I Kings 14:18; I Kings 18:36; I Samuel 23:10)[172] and in reference to Moses seems to implicate not only loyalty and/or responsibility but also intimacy,[173] that is, as Noth argues, Moses is Yahweh's 'confidant' as well as the one entrusted with his master's 'house,'[174] most probably a reference to the 'house of Israel' as argued by George Buchanan Gray.[175] Thus, as Rapp has noted, the description of Moses as Yahweh's 'servant' in all of Israel could signify 'communal and

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[169] N.G. Cohen, "דבר... בי: A 'Enthusiastic' Prophetic Formula," *ZAW* 99 (1987) pp.220-222.

[170] W.C. Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam: Women Prophets in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008) pp.81, 83; J.H. Greenstone, *The Holy Scriptures: Numbers with Commentary* (Philadelphia: JPS of America, 1939) pp.119, 123; Milgrom, *Numbers,* pp.94, 96; Levine, *Numbers,* pp.328ff.

[171] Coats, *Rebellion,* p.263. See, also, Davies, *Numbers,* p.123.

[172] Due to the lack of royal imagery in the passage as well as the apparent attempt to distinguish Moses from prophets/other leaders (Numbers 12:6-8), it seems plausible that, as Hymes notes, in Numbers 12 Moses is being described as the 'unique paradigmatic' leader rather than a royal or prophetic figure *per se* ('Numbers 12,' pp.30-31).

[173] Gray, *Numbers,* pp.125-126; Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers,* p.235 and Levine, *Numbers,* p.331.

[174] Noth, *Numbers,* p.96.

[175] Gray, *Numbers,* p.125. See, also, Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.45; Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.96 and Davies, *Numbers,* p.122.

political power,' which are qualities not necessarily included within a prophetic office.[176] In

conclusion, Noth is probably right in stating that in Numbers 12:6-8 Moses is portrayed as *'much*

more' than a prophet:[177] he is the servant with uninhibited access to Yahweh.

If Moses' status is therefore to be understood as beyond that of a prophet, how should Miriam and

Aaron's request in v. 2 be understood? If we follow Cohen's understanding (with the alteration that

Moses' standing is above prophetic), then the request could be perceived as a mere

misunderstanding. Indeed, though Cohen's research on the prophetic experience based on the

formula דבר ב is debatable (and inside the context of Numbers 12 difficult to sustain),[178] her basic

idea seems warranted, namely, that the prophetic experience of Miriam and Aaron is one of a

possessed, passive state as opposed to Moses' clear and unmediated experience (vv. 6-8). Yet,

accepting the argument in v. 2 as a mere 'misunderstanding' has one major problem, that is, the

presence of Aaron in the story, since in the general context of Numbers he is a priest, not a

prophet.[179] The most common explanation to sidestep this issue is that Aaron is merely acting as

Miriam's stooge[180] whereas Davies has merely stated that it is easier to envisage Aaron in a

prophetic role than Miriam in priestly one.[181] Leaving Davies' comment to one side, we must note

that to accept Aaron as merely a spokesperson is contradicted by the fact that both Aaron and

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[176] Rapp, *Mirjam,* p.98.

[177] Noth, *Numbers*, p.96 [his italics].

[178] If all cases of דבר ב are to be understood as indicating a passive, prophetic state, then Numbers 12 becomes nonsensical (cf. v. 8). Fischer has, however, suggested that דבר could still be an indication of a prophetic utterance, that is, Miriam and Aaron speak to Moses 'in the form of prophetic speech,' accusing Moses for having separated from the Cushite woman whom Fischer identifies as Zipporah ('Authority,' pp.162,167). Fischer's reading would harmonise the possible different interpretations of דבר ב in the passage (all referring to 'speaking to' in the sense of prophetic utterance); however, Rapp is correct in her differentiation of the possible subjects of דבר ב, that is, although דבר ב can be identified as a divine word when Yahweh is the subject (Numbers 12:6-8), דבר ב is not encountered within the biblical corpus as an implication of divine utterances when a human is the subject (cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-22, where דבר ב means to speak 'in the name of' Yahweh) (*Mirjam,* pp.40-41), leaving both the comments of Cohen and Fischer in the realm of conjecture.

[179] In Exodus Aaron is called a prophet but only as a mouthpiece of Moses (7:1). Aaron and his sons' duties as priests and their position as superior to that of Levites are described in Numbers numerous times (3:38; 8:20-22; 18:1-7). See, also, Davies, *Numbers*, pp.lxi-lxvi.

[180] Weems, *Just a Sister*, p.74; Robinson, 'Jealousy,' p.432; Coats, *Rebellion*, pp.261-262 and Noth, *Numbers*, pp.94-95.

[181] Davies, *Numbers*, p.117.

Miriam are said to have spoken against Moses (v. 8), and Aaron even admits their (not her, i.e. Miriam's) guilt (v. 11). Thus, if the argument in v. 2 is merely a misunderstanding of Moses' standing *vis-à-vis* prophets, the presence of Aaron in the argument in v. 2 needs some clarification.

Could it be possible, therefore, to understand the argument in v. 2 as superseding the office of a prophet, maybe to the issue of equal distribution of authority between the sexes as Trible suggested earlier? However, although modern feminist sensibilities would probably prefer Trible's interpretation, it is noteworthy that in the text the reason for this diversification is not based on gender but on vocation (v. 2 'Has he not also spoken to us?'). Though the fact that Miriam is a woman undoubtedly plays a part in the narrative, at the stage of the enquiry in v. 2 gender does not appear to be the main issue.

So what should we perceive to be the issue of concern in v. 2? Already in 1895 Stanton suggested,

> In this narrative [Numbers 12] we see thus early woman's desire to take some part in government, though denied all share in its honor and dignity. Miriam, no doubt, saw the humiliating distinctions of sex in the Mosaic code and customs, and longed for the power to make the needed amendments.[182]

Though the emphasis in Stanton's claim is clearly on the issue of gender, the matter of government is also clearly present. Closer to the 21st century, Exum has also suggested that in Numbers 12 Miriam is claiming a 'position of authority comparable to Moses.'[183] Indeed, if we perceive Moses' position to be that of the 'servant,' the pre-eminent unique leader over the people as was earlier demonstrated (v. 7), then the request could also be stated to adhere to a requirement in the realm of generic leadership. However, neither Exum nor Stanton have substantiated their claim in any significant manner and therefore the issue requires further research. Here we can note that Miriam and Aaron's request appears to pertain to the realm of oracular activity as well as leadership in

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[182] Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, p.102.
[183] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.100.

general, the content of which remains uncertain. We will return to this issue at the deconstructive reading of Numbers 12.

4.5 Miriam the Perpetrator

The treatment of the female in the text, as was noted earlier, has raised some dispute among feminist biblical scholars.[184] Edward Zweiback Levenson summarises this position well,

> Diminishing the stature of the Israelite first female national leader has a specific function: it supports the subordinate status that the society ordains for women in general. As Miriam is reduced in status, so are all women reduced, and their leadership ambitions thwarted.[185]

Indeed, not only could Miriam's punishment in Numbers 12:10-15 be considered as disproportionate to the 'crime' committed as suggested by David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell,[186] but her punishment could also be described as illustrative of the subordinate position of women within family and society in general, as noted above by Zweiback Levenson. The question thus remains, if both Miriam and Aaron should be seen as the perpetrators of the rebellion (vv. 1-2, 11), why is only Miriam punished, and why is she punished at all?

Sakenfeld has suggested three answers to this question. The first one is that 'Aaron was not originally a part of the story.'[187] Such a view is mainly favoured among source theorists[188] who claim that Miriam's punishment with a skin disease was originally part of the Cushite woman debate (rather than the prophetic qualm in v. 2) to which Aaron was secondarily added. This standpoint finds support in Miriam being mentioned before Aaron in v.1 and in the use of the 3rd person feminine singular of דבר ב in the same verse. However, although these theories are most intriguing

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[184] See n.133.
[185] E.R. Zweiback Levenson, 'Sexegesis: Miriam in the Desert' *Tikkun* 4, 1 (1989) p.44.
[186] Gunn and Fewell, *Gender,* p.116.
[187] Sakenfeld, *Journeying,* p.82.
[188] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?,* p.72; Noth, *Numbers,* pp.92-93, 96; Davies, *Numbers,* p.117-118, 124; Coats, *Rebellion,* pp.261-263.

from a source-theoretical point of view, they do not explain the evident guilt of Aaron (vv. 8, 11) or the reversal of the names in v. 4 in the final form of the story. Indeed, whatever the prehistory of the narrative, as Sakenfeld herself notes, 'the final version…. distinguishes between the fates of Aaron and Miriam.'[189] As Numbers 12 now stands, different treatment is bestowed upon the male and the female without much explanation as to why Aaron is not punished alongside Miriam.

The second option presented by Sakenfeld is that 'Aaron's escape from punishment relates to his role as the first high priest.'[190] She herself favours this alternative and continues,

> Since Aaron was the paradigmatic priestly figure, the one from whom all priestly lineage was descended, it probably was not conceivable to the narrator that Aaron could be presented as contracting such a skin disease.[191]

If we understand Aaron's status in Numbers 12 as he is elsewhere described in Numbers, namely, as that of a priest (Numbers 3:38; 18:1-7), then his role could certainly be argued to have a bearing on the narrative.[192] As Burns has demonstrated, in Numbers 12:10 Aaron could be described as acting in a priestly role in accordance with Levitical laws: he 'turns' and examines/ judges the symptoms of Miriam's illness, claiming her to be afflicted with 'leprosy', which thus follows the pattern set in Leviticus 13-14.[193] The exclamation in v. 10 (behold, she was leprous) would therefore come to signify Aaron's judgement of Miriam as ritually unclean.[194]

However, the portrayal of Aaron's actions as priestly has been challenged by Rapp. She criticises Burns for connecting Miriam's leprosy with cultic impurity, and instead argues that Miriam's

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[189] Sakenfeld, *Journeying*, p.83.
[190] Sakenfeld, *Journeying*, p.83. See, also, Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, p.102; Fewell and Gunn, *Gender*, p.115.
[191] Sakenfeld, 'Numbers,' p.52.
[192] Sakenfeld has further noted the resemblance of Aaron's role in Numbers 12 to that in Exodus 32, in which he is also spared from punishment regardless of his actions (*Journeying*, p.83).
[193] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?,* pp.74-75.
[194] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.74-75. She claims that originally Miriam's leprosy was merely a sign of divine punishment but by the addition of Aaron into the narrative, her illness became understood as ritual uncleanliness (pp.73-74).

condition should be understood as social stigma.[195] Rapp claims that Aaron, instead of acting as a priest, represents a certain point of view on leprosy,[196] encouraging the readers to view the change in Aaron's behaviour (from an opponent of Moses in vv. 1-2 to a submissive figure under Mosaic authority in v. 11) as something to be aspired to.[197] Rapp's reading has several strengths, of which we can mention her research into the community and social elements present in the description of Miriam's illness,[198] her extensive research in non-cultic texts which involve Aaron,[199] as well as her understanding of the relation of Numbers 12 to other texts where צרעת is linked with a political offence.[200] Her reading, consequently, presents an alternative, non-cultic expression of Miriam's condition.

However, arguments against Rapp's thesis also need to be considered. Firstly, Rapp claims that Burns' evaluation of Aaron as a priest is not verified with a specific text and the four elements that Burns claims are present in such passages remain relatively unspecific.[201] However, Burns states most clearly that her analysis is based on no less than 25 occurrences of the pattern for priestly examinations in Leviticus 13-14, which, apart from the use of the verb פנה, 'to turn' for ראה, 'to see,' is most convincingly illustrated.[202] In addition, although Rapp's argument that Aaron is presented in

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[195] Rapp, *Mirjam,* p.107.
[196] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.98-99.
[197] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.101-103, 105.
[198] Note the reference to the people in vv. 14-16, which emphasises not only the communal element of the punishment but also possibly the people's agreement with the reprimand as well as participation in carrying it out. Also, the phrase כמת, 'like the dead,' (Numbers 11:12; Psalm 31:12) could tie Miriam's condition in the realm of social death, supported by Yahweh's interpretation of her condition in v. 14. See, Rapp, *Mirjam*, pp.105, 107, 113-115.
[199] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.108ff.
[200] Rapp, *Mirjam,* p.100. However, Rapp also notes that because the meaning of the leprosy is not explained in Numbers 12, this serves to distinguish Numbers 12 from other related texts (2 Samuel 3:29; 2 Kings 5:1-26).
[201] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.106.
[202] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?* pp.74-75. Burns notes the four elements mentioned earlier as follows: 1) there needs to be a clause beginning with a waw consecutive, which in our case is connected to פנה. The phrase introduces the priestly examination of the symptoms of the diseased person; 2) the one observing the person has to be a priest (Aaron); 3-4) the event is completed with הנה and a waw consecutive, which introduces a statement of the person's symptoms, followed by a judgement of their cleanliness. In Numbers 12:10 these two stages are conflated in the judgment of Miriam's condition as צרעת. However, Hymes has suggested that in the absence of ראה, there is no visual examination in the passage ('Pluriform Analysis,' p.153). Yet, it is notable that in 2 Chronicles 26:20 פנה is used to describe the priests' depiction of the צרעת troubling Uzziah much in the same manner it is used in Numbers 12:10 to describe Aaron's

a non-cultic role in Numbers 12 is based on most convincing research on other such occurrences, the study leaves out the larger framework of Numbers in which Aaron is presented as a priest (Numbers 3:38; 18:1-7) and therefore will only aid us from a source-critical rather than canonical point of view.

Yet, there are elements in Burns' research that are certainly open to critique, one of which is Burns' understanding of the nature of Miriam's illness as ritual impurity.[203] Jobling has suggested that because Miriam's condition is likened by Aaron to those who are 'dead' and whose flesh is 'consumed' (v. 12), Miriam's illness should be described not as ritual uncleanliness but rather as 'burnt out leprosy'. Thus, Miriam would have been 'transformed into a post-leprous condition; not rendered unclean, but marked.'[204] Indeed, Jobling's argument appears more faithful to the text than that of Burns. He notes that the description of the flesh as 'dead' and 'eaten/consumed' points not to raw flesh which renders uncleanliness (Leviticus 13:10-11, 14-15) but to dead, white flesh (Leviticus 13:12), which was considered clean (Leviticus. 13:13). Accordingly, Jobling further suggests that Miriam's expulsion from the camp should be understood as a shortening of the trial period to one week as opposed to the two weeks required for people suffering from skin diseases as described in Leviticus 13:4-6.[205]

Jobling's reading is most convincing, not least because it accounts for Aaron's description of Miriam's condition in v. 12 as well as the reason for her week-long expulsion; however, there are

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depiction of Miriam's ailment (Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.75-76). See, also, Erica Brown who notes that the repetition of 'behold' in the passage could be understood as forcing the reader to 'look at Miriam's bodily derangement the way that Aaron himself did' ('Can Prayer Heal? A View from Tradition,' in R. Schwartz [ed.], *All the Women*, p.285). Thus, the absence of ראה does not necessitate a lack of visual examination.

[203] As Hymes has noted, in Numbers 12:10 we have no clear admission of Miriam's (un)clean state ('Pluriform Analysis,' p.153). However, such a statement might well have been conflated into Aaron's observation of Miriam as suffering from צרעת in a manner similar to that in 2 Chronicles 26:20 (Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?*, pp.75-76).

[204] Jobling , 'Structural Analysis,' p.33 [his underlining].

[205] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.33.

some issues in his argument that need to be addressed. Firstly, as has been suggested by several scholars, it is unlikely that Miriam's skin disease should be equated with modern day leprosy.[206] Rather, the description of צרעת 'as snow' could be a reference to a skin condition causing flakiness such as psoriasis, as is advocated by E.V. Hulse, Athalya Brenner and Hymes.[207] Notably, the term 'white' is not even used in the passage; however, since one of the defining characteristics of צרעת is whiteness (Leviticus 13: 3, 4, 10, 13 etc.),[208] it is possible that כשלג could refer not only to the flakiness of the skin but also to the whiteness of the scales peeling off. Indeed, this seems to be the image conveyed in Aaron's use of the picture of a stillborn baby, where the skin has been 'half' rather than 'totally' consumed, that is, the top layer of the skin had began to lose its colour and peel off whilst exposing raw/red flesh underneath.[209] Such an image of a fetus that had already begun to 'putrefy *in utero*'[210] would thus be appropriate to describe Miriam's regrettable state also.

However, if we assume the above description of Miriam's ailment to be correct, we must also note that, *contra* Jobling, there is no indication within the Levitical laws that Miriam's condition would have required isolation. In the case of צרעת that covers the whole body (which presumably is Miriam's condition since no body part is specifically mentioned), all that was required was for the priest to declare the diseased person clean once all of his/her skin would have turned white without necessitating expulsion at any point (Leviticus 13:12-17). As Jacob Milgrom has noted, such Levitical rulings seem contradictory to other scriptural attestations of צרעת כשלג, where ritual

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[206] See N. Kiuchi, 'A Paradox of the Skin Disease,' *ZAW* 113, 4 (2001) p.505; J.E. Hartley, *Word Biblical Commentary: Leviticus,* WBC 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 1992) pp.187-189; E.V. Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy' and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible," *MH* 20, 2 (1976) p.203; A. Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament,* JSOTSup 21 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982) pp.89-90 and Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.147.
[207] Hulse, 'Leprosy,' p.203; Brenner, *Colour Terms,* p.90; Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.147.
[208] See Kiuchi, 'Paradox,' p.507. See, also, Sadler, *Can a Cushite?,* pp.37-38.
[209] Hulse, 'Leprosy,' p.203; Brenner, *Colour Terms,* p.90.
[210] Davies, *Numbers,* p.125 [his italics].

(im)purity is not implied (Exodus 4:6; 2 Kings 5:27).[211] In addition, Nobuyoshi Kiuchi has argued that צרעת, when covering the whole body, might have even been a sign of approaching death rather than healing,[212] certainly appropriate in Numbers 12 (cf. Numbers 20:1)[213] where, *contra* Horst Seebass, Milgrom and Hymes, there is no reference as regards Miriam being healed from her condition.[214] Rather, Moses' intercession for her healing is refuted by Yahweh who describes Miriam as a shamed daughter to be sent outside the camp for seven days (Numbers 12:14). It is thus possible that Noth is correct in suggesting that Miriam's expulsion from the camp is to do not with her illness but with the issue of one being spat upon by one's father (Numbers 12:14).[215] From a feminist point of view such a conclusion is disturbing: not only does this leave Miriam as a diseased, 'marked' woman for the rest of her life but also portrays God as an unforgiving father who will not only punish his daughter but will also not restore her back to wholeness. We will return to this issue in a forthcoming chapter.

That which we can conclude from the above is that Miriam's illness seems to find its most natural expression when understood against the Levitical laws, and thus Aaron's function in the story can also be understood as that of a priest, as demonstrated by Burns. Yet, it needs to be noted that Aaron's actions are those of a priest only after Yahweh's verdict (vv. 6-8), not before it. In fact,

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[211] Milgrom, *Leviticus*, p.786. However, Milgrom understands כשלג to refer solely to flakiness rather than to the concept of purity.

[212] Kiuchi, 'A Paradox,' p.508. Note, also, her argument as regards ritual cleanness not necessarily presupposing healing (pp.507ff).

[213] See C. Camp, 'Over Her Dead Body: The Estranged Woman and the Prince of the Promised Land,' JNSL 29, 2 (2002) pp.5-10 about the possible connection between Miriam's ailment/death (Numbers 12:9ff; 20:1) and the rules regarding corpse defilement in Numbers 9:6-10 and 19:13,20.

[214] H. Seebass, *Numeri 10,11 - 22,1*, BKAT 4, 2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2003) p.64; Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.98 and Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.150. See, also, Dirk Schinkel, who has argued that Miriam's illness should be seen as serving a pedagogical function regarding Moses' unique status (cf. Exodus 4:6-7) ('Mirjam als Aussätzige? Zwei Bemerkungen zu Num 12,' ZAW 115, 1 [2003] pp. 99-101) and Schwartz, who concludes that Miriam's illness is a confirmation of her authority and her exclusion from the camp an indication of her communion with Yahweh ('Prophet,' pp.171-175). However, since the implication of punishment seems strong in the text (Numbers 12:8-15) and Miriam remains inflicted with her ailment, understanding her illness as serving a pedagogical function or to affirm her status seems unlikely.

[215] Noth, *Numbers*, p.97. However, Noth also suggests that the seven day exclusion 'tacitly implies that Miriam was immediately cured of her leprosy' (p.97).

Aaron's priestly status is not mentioned in Numbers 12:1-5 or in Yahweh's rebuke in any form. Therefore, Aaron's participation in the priesthood does not necessarily warrant his redemption from punishment as Sakenfeld suggested earlier. However, because his status as a priest in the narrative can be well argued, the said reason is the most feasible of the ones so far examined, although for now it will remain conjectural.

The third suggestion as regards Aaron's lack of punishment as proposed by Sakenfeld is that Miriam had developed a considerable following, especially among women. She admits that there is no direct evidence of this but 'if such a movement did exist this story may represent an effort to criticise and discredit it while upholding the male leadership of both Aaron and Moses.'[216] The fact that Miriam was a leader among the Hebrews seems obvious from both Exodus 15:20-21 and Numbers 12:1-2; however, whether she had gained 'considerable following' will remain open to debate. Yet, 'considerable following' is not necessarily needed to discredit Miriam: the fact that she was a woman might have been enough.

Indeed, some feminist theologians have suggested that Miriam is the one punished because she is the dispensable one, the woman.[217] Although prior to the punishment the issue of gender does not appear to be obvious nor present in the text (after all, Miriam and Aaron complain together, vv. 1-2), after Miriam is stricken with the skin disease the issue of inequality seems inescapable. And what is even more disturbing is that Yahweh seems to be the primary agent advocating the discrimination: after all, both Moses and Aaron plead for her (vv.11-12) and Aaron even admits his guilt in the

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[216] Sakenfeld, *Journeying*, p.83.
[217] Fewell and Gunn, *Gender*, p.115; Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' p.177; M. Barton suggests that God expected more empathy from Miriam ('The Skin,' p.76). See, also, the interpretation given by Camp who relates the passage to the Jewish identity struggle during the post-exilic period. She argues that as a 'sister' Miriam is an insider of the community but as a 'woman' she is also an outsider. Thus, in order to establish the Aaronic priesthood and to solidify the Jewish identity as fundamentally male over against the female 'other', the text discredits Miriam's authority. Her estrangement becomes the combined atonement for Aaron's insubordination as well as Yahweh's injustice, providing an 'icon of evil apart from both God and men' ('Over Her Dead Body,' pp.3-5, 12).

affair (v. 11). Rather, it is Yahweh who causes Miriam's ailment (v. 9-10);[218] it is he who compares Miriam (and only Miriam) to a disobedient daughter (v. 14) and causes her to be banished outside the camp (vv. 14-15). Thus, it appears that it is only in Yahweh's eyes that Miriam is perceived as a rebellious daughter and the only one in need of correction.[219] She is to be isolated and even though she is later brought back (v. 15) the Pentateuchal tradition remembers her no more till the event of her death (Numbers 20:1).

Thus, if we agree that Miriam's punishment is due to her status as a woman, we are faced with an exceedingly uncomfortable reading of the passage as regards a feminist audience; however, whether gender displays quite as a dominant feature in the text as presented above needs to be questioned. Indeed, such a statement leaves the issue of the leadership dispute in v. 2 in a secondary position, which on account of vv. 6-8 seems an unlikely solution. Also, to account for Miriam's punishment 'just because she is a woman' sounds rather vindictive and requires very little comprehension of the overall framework of the story. That which we suggest is that the ideological framework in Numbers 11-12 is more complex than the above reading accounts for and thus we need to look beyond the surface structure of the text to provide an understanding of Miriam's position.

Overall, what can we thus conclude from the above research? Firstly, we can note that the problem with Moses' marriage with the Cushite (African) woman seemed to be linked with matters regarding foreign marriages, although the exact nature of the problem was not specified. Secondly, the issue behind the argument in v. 2 appeared to be connected to Moses' supreme authority in leadership rather than oracular authority *per se*, as was tentatively suggested by Stanton and Exum. Thirdly, we noted that as a punishment for her insolence, Miriam was struck with a skin disease (possibly

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[218] See pp.240-241.
[219] See, also, Anderson, who identifies Yahweh as the 'major problem' in the present story ('Miriam's Challenge,' p.55).

psoriasis) which, in accordance with Levitical laws (Leviticus 13-14), was examined by Aaron the high priest. However, we also stated that despite Moses' intercession (v. 13), Miriam's condition remained permanent since there were no indications of her being healed of her affliction. Fourthly, we argued that in the final form of the passage the text clearly separated the fates of the male and female perpetrators, although the exact reason for this injustice remained unclear, possibly related to Aaron's role as the high priest.

Thus, as can be observed from the above comments, the feminist biblical critique on Numbers 12, as well as the text itself, seems to leave us in a moment of ambiguity, of indecision, where no one 'correct' reading can be imposed on or gleaned from the text. In a forthcoming chapter we will argue that in Numbers 12 there are numerous conflicting ideas and moments of 'double writing' around which, however, another reading can be reconstructed, a reading which can assign value to women generally and to Miriam especially.

5. Conclusion

The story of Miriam, as portrayed in Exodus 2:1-10, 15:20-21 and Numbers 12:1-16, seems to paint a picture which forces the reader to see 'doubly' or, at the very least, to question that which is being read. Firstly, Exodus 1-2 is a narrative that is centred on a male infant, yet it is also a portrayal of strong female characters as well as moments of feminine power, as was argued most convincingly by Exum. Secondly, in Exodus 15:1-21 we discover a passage which is dominated by Moses and the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-18); yet it also describes a woman whose musical performance appears to trespass its supposedly secondary position (Exodus 15:20-21). Thirdly, although Numbers 12:1-16 seems to depict Miriam in the role of an antagonist *vis-à-vis* Moses (vv. 1-2; 14-15), the uncertain nature of the cause of the original dispute in vv. 1-2 as well as the reason for and/or the severity of her punishment seem to leave us in a moment of indecision, where we are

invited to question not only the supposed coherence of the text but also the ideology it seemingly portrays.

Indeed, we suggest that with the aid of feminist deconstructive reading we can observe in the biblical narratives traces of another appraisal: a story which can assign value and prominence to Miriam in all of the three passages addressed. We state that the moments of ambiguity described above are remnants of the counter-voices, the counter-thesis and the counter-stories inscribed within the biblical texts themselves due to their partaking in the realm of logocentric thinking. These 'traces', we claim, can present an image of Miriam as a constantly present and persistent voice within the Hebrew corpus, establishing significance for her character. To produce such a reading will be our task in the deconstructive section of this thesis.

Chapter 3

Voice and Counter-Voice: Exodus 1-2

1. Introduction

> The women give life not just as mothers but also as plotters. With their
> wombs and their intelligence, they cooperate with God's providence. They
> are tricksters, but nowhere are they condemned for their subterfuge.[1]
>
> Gordon Davies

The women in Exodus 1-2 are admittedly an integral part of the plot, as the quote from Davies

confirms. However, it needs to be asked whether their delineation as 'mothers', 'plotters',

'tricksters' and having 'wombs' and 'intelligence' is, in fact, an act of praise or an insult. Indeed, in

the statement above the women's powers of deception, intelligence and reproductive functions are

mentioned side by side, yet perhaps to have their intellect praised at all is a note worth mentioning.

However, is this really the best we can do as regards the women of Exodus? Granted, Exodus 1-2 is

a story with the (male) main character, Moses, at its centre,[2] with the women attending to his needs

and then disappearing, or, as Esther Fuchs puts it, the women 'were necessary, but they were a

means to an end.'[3] However, is there a way we can follow Exum, as we did in the previous chapter,

to discover women's power in the narrative?[4] Moreover, what can we discover about the main

protagonist of our dissertation, the anonymous sister of Moses, in this thesis assumed to be Miriam?[5]

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[1] *Israel in Egypt,* p.63.
[2] As regards the narrative arrangement of Exodus 1-2, see Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!,* pp.57-58; Exum, 'You Shall Let,' pp.38-39, and J.S. Ackerman, 'The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1-2),' in K.R.R. Gros Louis, J.S. Ackerman and T.S. Warshaw (eds.), *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives,* BLC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974) pp.74ff. Although the exact division within the respective parts of the story is arguable, all of the above authors agree that the narrative structure elevates the story of Moses.
[3] Fuchs, 'Exodus 1-2,' p.308.
[4] Exum, 'The Hand,' pp.96ff.
[5] Within Exodus 2 the sister of Moses remains anonymous, yet it is possible to view her as Miriam. In the final form of the canon Miriam, Aaron and Moses are understood as siblings (Numbers 26:59; 1 Chronicles 6:3) and the reference in Exodus 15:20, which states that Miriam is Aaron's (as opposed to Moses') sister could be explained if we understand the statement to work in the standard way of fratriarchy, that is, 'the system in which the eldest brother is recognized as the head of the family' (Cassuto, *Exodus*, pp.181-182). See, also, Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.145. However, the authenticity of the addition in Exodus 15:20 has been questioned. According to Noth, the sibling relations, which are assumed in later traditions (Numbers 26:59; 1 Chronicles 6:3), should not be considered as understood in Exodus 15:20 (*Exodus*, p.122); whereas Burns has noted that the designation of Miriam as Aaron's sister (Exodus 15:20) could be better explained by allowing this designation to be the work of a priestly writer who wanted to portray Miriam as related

In order to provide an interpretation that affirms women, and Miriam specifically, not just as 'mothers' or 'tricksters' but as leaders in their own right, a structuralist and deconstructive understanding of Exodus 1-2 will be presented. We must note, however, that although this thesis is concerned with Miriam, the deconstructive section addressing her involvement will be presented last. This is because in order to understand Miriam's role in the story, an investigation into the other characters is required first: once we perceive their significance, Miriam's place becomes much more evident as well as comprehensible. Therefore, after the structuralist analysis, a deconstructive reading will be offered of the other main characters first, followed by an analysis of the role of Miriam.

2. Structuralist Reading of Exodus 1:1-22

2.1 Initial Correlated Sequence

The opening verses of Exodus 1, as G.F. Davies notes, tells the story of the Hebrews' presence in Egypt 'with a kind of Wagnerian melody by deriving its new developments from variations on motifs from Genesis.'[6] Indeed, the narrative begins with a list of the names of the sons of Israel who moved to Egypt (vv. 1-5), followed with a note that the 'old' generation had passed away[7] but that the Hebrews continued to grow (vv. 6-7). Such an opening sequence provides us with a 'transition' from patriarchs to people, from Jacob's sons to the Hebrews,[8] inviting us to recollect God's promises in Genesis, where God predicted the multiplication of the patriarchal family (Genesis 12:2; 48:3-4) as well as the provision of Egypt as an escape from danger, in this case famine (Genesis

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to this particular cultic leader (*Has the Lord Spoken?* p.84). Overall, the assumption that the anonymous sister of Moses in Exodus 2:4 is Miriam could thus be viewed as inauthentic. However, because in this thesis the narratives are treated as a unit in their final form, the sibling relation will be assumed.

[6] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.28. See, also, Sarna, *Exodus,* p.3

[7] Note that the reference to the death of an entire generation (Exodus 1:6) not only separates the story of Exodus from that in Genesis but if compared with Judges 2:10 could also signify a 'breakdown of tradition and memory.' See Dozeman, E*xodus,* pp.65-67.

[8] See B. Weber, '"Jede Tochter aber sollt ihr am Leben lassen!': Beobachtungen zu Ex 1:15-2:10 und seinem Kontext," *BN* 55 (1990) p.66; Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.65; Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.75-76; W.H. Schmidt, *Exodus, Sinai und Mose: Erwägungen zu Ex 1-19 und 24,* EF 191 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983) p.20.

45:7-8).[9] Thus, Exodus 1 could be considered as drawing from a wealth of traditions associated most often with Genesis, including the creation motif. James Ackerman has noted the preponderance of creation-related verbs in Exodus 1:7: פרו (they were fruitful); ישרצו (they multiplied/swarmed); ירבו (they increased); יעצמו (they grew); and תמלא (she was filled). Compared to the two other 'creation accounts' in Genesis 1 and 9 (in Genesis 9 the world is 'recreated' after the Flood), the fivefold verb pattern of blessing has been retained (Genesis 1:28 and 9:1-2) and three verbs in all three accounts are the same. The presence of such powerful themes lends support to Ackerman's assumption that we are to anticipate the cosmic importance of the situation in hand.[10] He notes,

> the Exodus is conceived as a new act of God's creation, at least equal in importance to the establishment of the cosmic order described in the early chapters of Genesis.[11]

Indeed, by introducing us to the 'echo–chamber of history',[12] the text links the current events with other appropriate traditions and in so doing provides us with a way to perceive the characters in the story: Yahweh is the creator-god, the cause behind the Hebrews' prosperity (Exodus 1:7), and the proliferation of the Hebrews is thus a testimony to '*God's ongoing work of creation*,' as Terence Fretheim has noted.[13] The Hebrews could therefore be described as the microcosm of a macrocosm: they are the re-establishment of Yahweh's creative order and thus the fulfilment of the destiny of man as indicated in Genesis 1 and 9.[14]

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[9] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.28.

[10] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.76. Siebert-Hommes has similarly noted that the verbs פרה and רבה also occur in Genesis 47:27, which states that the commission to fill the earth was fulfilled after the Hebrews had moved to Egypt. Exodus 1:7, therefore, could be referring back to this stated fact. Also, after Exodus 1:7 the root רבה is no longer in conjunction with 'be fruitful' but with עצם (become mighty, numerous, e.g. Exodus 1:9, 20), strengthening the claim that the divine commission of multiplication has been fulfilled (*Let the Daughters Live!,* p.61).

[11] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.74.

[12] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, p.106.

[13] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p.25 [his italics].

[14] Note also the number of seventy descendents of Israel *vis-à-vis* the seventy descendents of Noah in Genesis 10:1ff, which could be another indication of the cosmic nature of the event described (Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.78; Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.8 and Sarna, *Exodus,* 4).

However, in the exodus story Yahweh's creative purposes soon become endangered. In Exodus 1:13-14 we are told of the slavery inflicted upon the Hebrews by the Egyptians, in which the verb עבד, 'to serve', is repeated five times as opposed to the five-fold emphasis of creation-related verbs in v. 7.[15] Pharaoh's regime of slavery is thus put in direct contrast with Yahweh's acts of creation. However, it is important to notice that Yahweh does not only appear as the creator-god in Exodus. Indeed, we soon find that Yahweh also wishes to gain the Hebrews' service, which is made explicit on several occasions (Exodus 4:23; 8:1; 9:1). The servitude required by Yahweh, however, seems to be portrayed in the text differently to that of Pharaoh: Pharaoh's regime is cruel, oppressive and unjust (Exodus 1:13-14),[16] whereas Yahweh is described, as Jon Levenson argues, as a 'redeeming and delivering God,'[17] as the God who will take sides with the oppressed (Exodus 3:8; 6:6-8).[18] Therefore, as opposed to Pharaoh's lordship, we could suggest that Yahweh would bring true justice by restoring the Hebrews' servitude back to himself, the creator and the life-giver.[19] Through their deliverance the Hebrews would thus be released from oppression and become a nation that would serve Yahweh, the life-force behind the Hebrews' prosperity (Exodus 1:20-21).

Consequently, to present the opening sequence of Exodus 1 in structuralist terms we could describe the main programme of the story as well as the initial correlated sequence through Greimas' actantial model in the following manner: God, 'the sender', or the initiator of the events, intends that the Hebrews, 'the subjects', should bring him the desired object, their 'life and service'. In addition, Yahweh's creative power could be seen indirectly as fulfilling the role of a helper; however, since

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[15] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.83. For the possibility of understanding the stated slavery as compulsory state labour, see Meyers, *Exodus,* pp.34-35.

[16] Davies notes that the use of ענה (*pi.* 'to afflict a dependent'), פרך ('ruthlessly'), and הבה ('come now') in Exodus 1:8-14 indicates that the conflict between the Egyptians and the Hebrews is also a matter of injustice, since all of the words imply either directly or by context a degree of wrong-doing (*Israel in Egypt,* pp.57-58). See, also, R. Coggins, *The Book of Exodus,* EC (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000) pp.5-6 and Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.72.

[17] J.D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible,* p.144 as quoted by W.A. Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses: Explaining the Lord's Actions in the Exodus Plagues Narrative,* PBM (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006) p.38.

[18] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.31.

[19] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.60.

by the end of the sequence (v. 7) Pharaoh's regime has not been introduced, the role of the opponent remains as of yet unfulfilled.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
God	Life/servitude	God
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
(Yahweh's creative force)	The Hebrews	

Having established the *status quo* at the start of the passage, we can return to Patte's model of inversions and parallelisms, [20] as was demonstrated in the methodology chapter. By observing the parallelisms and inversions at the start and the end of a narrative unit, we noted that we could attempt to uncover the presupposed convictions that the author desires to elucidate and/or to change in the course of the story. Looking at the beginning of Exodus, then, we can observe that the Hebrews are located in Egypt (v. 1); they are exceedingly prosperous (v. 7); and they are a free people (vv. 1-7). Looking at the end of Exodus 1, the Hebrews are still prospering in Egypt (vv. 20-21, parallelism) but now their existence in Egypt has become one of slavery (vv. 11-14, 22, inversion). Thus in keeping with the prophecies, which anticipated oppression in Egypt and the Hebrews' consequent departure (Genesis 15:13-16; 50:24-25), the text appears to manipulate the theme of prosperity to portray Egypt as ultimately an unfavourable option for the Hebrews. Such a connection is made even stronger, as G.F. Davies and J.S. Ackerman have noted, by the earlier implications concerning the Hebrews' fertility (Exodus 1:7, 9, 12, 20), which not only helps us to recollect Yahweh's promise to the patriarchal family to make them into a great nation (Genesis 12:2; 48:3-4) but also to give their descendents a land to inhabit (Genesis 12:2, 7, 15:7-21).[21] Due to the

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[20] Patte, 'Structural Criticism,' pp.157-159.
[21] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.30-31 and Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.77-78.

fulfilment of the first promise, it appears that from the beginning of the exodus story we are to

anticipate the fulfilment of the latter, in which case the Hebrews' departure from Egypt becomes a

necessity.

And, as was noted earlier, such a plan is quick to unfold in the narrative. In vv. 8-10 we are told of a

new king who does not 'know' Joseph[22] and who consequently views the Hebrews as a threat,

causing their enslavement to the Egyptians.[23] Indeed, in Pharaoh's speech in Exodus 1:9-10 we have

a clear 'us/them' mentality, a division between the two nationalities, a position that is later

sanctioned even by Yahweh himself (Exodus 8:23). However, as G.F. Davies has noted, Pharaoh's

speech is not judicial (accusative/defensive) but rather deliberative (dissuasive), based on

hypothetical assumptions. It portrays the world in assumed couplets (e.g. safety/danger;

naivety/cunning; inaction/action) of which, according to Davies, the first term could be seen as

'appearance' and the second as 'reality'.[24] For example, the way things first seem, the 'appearance',

is that the Egyptians are quite safe and the Hebrews are not a threat. However, this is overthrown by

the 'reality' that the Hebrews could wage war. Therefore, the feeling of safety in the Egyptian camp

is seen as an illusion, an 'appearance,' the recognition of which should lead to action (to deal

shrewdly) rather than inaction (do nothing). It could thus be suggested that the 'appearances' are

distorted in Pharaoh's speech in order to form a common view of reality, and this is done most

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[22] The importance of knowledge will be discussed in the deconstructive section.

[23] The reason why the Hebrews are perceived as a threat is not entirely clear from the passage. One of the most common reasons given is paranoia (T. Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines: The Women of Exodus 1-4,' in *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament* [London: SPCK, 1994] p.86; J.E. Lapsley, 'Saving Women, Transgressive Values of Deliverance in Exodus 1-4' in *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women's Stories in the Old Testament* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005] p.71 and Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.81). Some suggest that Pharaoh's worry was legitimate (Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus,* pp.20-21) or was caused by hatred/jealousy (Cassuto, *Exodus,* pp.9-10). However, because the cause of Pharaoh's fears is not stated, we must agree with Davies, who notes that the reason for Pharaoh's fears remains unknown and we can at most only speculate the possible reasons (*Israel in Egypt,* pp.46-47). Yet, as will be later illustrated, because the theme of 'knowledge' is such a prevalent one in Exodus (Exodus 1:8; 2:25; 3:7, 5:2; 6:3), it is possible that Pharaoh's speech is presented as an example of his foolishness (Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.44; see, also, Fuchs' analysis of Pharaoh's disposition *vis-à-vis* the midwives in 'Exodus 1-2,' pp.311-312).

[24] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, pp.47-53. We must be careful not to use the stated categories rigorously, for the couplets could equally be understood as 'true' and 'false', or even as binary oppositions.

effectively: Pharaoh associates himself with his people[25] and separates the Hebrews from the Egyptians by means of a hypothetical 'war' scenario, which, if considered with all the other 'facts,'[26] becomes most persuasive.

However, biblical commentators, feminist and non-feminist alike, have not failed to notice the inherent irony in Pharaoh's speech.[27] Exum sums up this position well:

> Pharaoh is portrayed humorously, his speech is ironic, his solution not wise, and the very thing he seeks to prevent ('lest they multiply… and go up from the land') will come to pass.[28]

Indeed, it is Pharaoh who first calls the 'sons of Israel' (vv.1, 7, 9) a people, עם (v. 9), contrasting them with the Egyptians, 'his people,' עמו, in v. 9. Therefore, it is Pharaoh who first recognises the children of Israel as a 'people', 'giving them [the Hebrews] a status like his own people just mentioned.'[29] As Pharaoh defines it, the conflict in Exodus 1 exists because there are two peoples in his land of an unequal strength,[30] which also confirms God's promise to make the Hebrews[31] into a great nation (Genesis 12:2). In addition, Pharaoh uses two adjectival forms of verbs used in the proliferation theme in v. 7,[32] and even predicts the exodus itself: by fearing that the Hebrews might 'go up from the land', עלה מן־הארץ, he uses the expression applied to the exodus itself in, among other places, Genesis 50:24 and Exodus 3:8, 17.[33] J.S. Ackerman has made a further interesting

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[25] The first person plural is used three times in vv. 9-10 to associate Pharaoh with the Egyptians.

[26] The other 'facts' include, for example, that the Hebrews are 'more numerous and mighty than' the Egyptians (v. 9) and that the Hebrews would join the Egyptians' enemies in case of war (v. 10).

[27] See Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.28; Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.79-81, and Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.71.

[28] Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.43.

[29] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.28. See, also, Durham, *Exodus,* p.6.

[30] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, p.56. See, also, A. Dillmann, who understands Pharaoh's statement in v. 9 to indicate that the Israelites are too numerous and powerful *for* the Egyptians (*Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus,* KEHAT 12 [Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1880] p.5).

[31] The exact meaning of the term 'Hebrew' is debatable. For possible definitions, see Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, pp.27-29; Schmidt, *Exodus*, pp.29-31, I. Willi-Plein, 'Ort und Literarische Funktion der Geburtsgeschichte des Mose,' *VT* 41, 1 (1991) pp.112-113 and Dozeman, *Exodus,* pp.75-77. For our purposes the exact meaning of the term is not of significance; however, because apart from 'the sons of Israel,' 'Hebrews' is the chosen term to describe the people as a nation in the text, 'Hebrews' will be used to indicate the Israelite nation in our analysis.

[32] Note the use of רב, 'numerous,' and עצום, 'powerful' (see Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.80). I would wish to add to this list of similarities the use of רבה, 'to increase,' (v.7).

[33] See Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.28.

observation regarding the themes and phraseology used in vv. 9-10, which are remarkably similar to those in the 'tower of Babel' narrative in Genesis 11:1-9.[34] Not only are both of these accounts embellished with various building activities/materials, but they also begin with הבה, 'come,' and an exhortation followed by פֶּן, 'lest'. Furthermore, in both narratives we can witness the frustration of 'man's proud wisdom and purposive activity' when it runs counter to Yahweh's intentions: the construction of the tower of Babel is obstructed and likewise Pharaoh's scheme will eventually turn counterproductive.[35] Therefore, though the accounts do not provide an exact parallel,[36] the similarities can serve to further emphasise, at least to a modern reader, the foolishness of Pharaoh's endeavour and consequently also the foolishness of the ruler himself.

2.2 Performance Syntagm

In the establishment of Pharaoh's 'shrewd' plan, the narrative has gained its counter-programme: the Egyptians[37] are to diminish the Hebrew population by rigorous service. This plan is carried out during the performance syntagm in vv. 11-22, where the Egyptians endeavour to implement the proposed oppression three (arguably four) times.[38] However, we soon discover that the Egyptians never manage to overpower the Hebrews and therefore the last stage of attribution (PS3),[39] that is, the diminishment of the Hebrews through service, never materialises. As G.F. Davies has noted, the tension in the narrative appears to rise after each time as we are told that the Hebrews multiplied

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[34] See, also, Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.56-57 and Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!,* p.66.
[35] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.81.
[36] For example, in Genesis 11 there are no slaves/masters, and therefore the building project has quite a different purpose.
[37] In v. 11 we could suggest that a contract syntagm takes place, since it is the Egyptian people who progress to effect the Hebrews' enslavement and thus accept Pharaoh's commission to 'deal shrewdly' with the Hebrews (v. 10).
[38] Forced labour is first referred to in v. 11 and made harder in vv. 13-14 (these two stages could be considered as one action). The midwives are called upon in v. 15 and the annihilation plan is established in v. 22. Exum considers the entire narrative (Exodus 1:8-2:10) as organised into two parts with three movements. The first part is the threat to the Hebrews (Exodus 1:8-22) and the second the threat to one Hebrew, Moses (2:1-10). The three movements correspond to the above-named three 'solutions' to annihilate the Hebrews ('You Shall Let,' p.39).
[39] See n.58.

despite the oppression.[40] The Hebrews refuse to submit, and their helper (Yahweh) is making them stronger than their opponent by constantly increasing the Hebrews' number. Such a conundrum serves further to highlight the 'life-giving power of God,' which is presented here in stark contrast to the 'death-bringing power of Pharaoh.'[41] The question remains: whose power will prevail?

Of the three attempts to oppress the Hebrews, the second endeavour is narrated in considerable detail. Though the plan is still to diminish the Hebrew population, now the subjects are two midwives[42] whom Pharaoh seems to wish to engage in a 'discreet' genocide by causing the death of the Hebrew baby boys.[43] The midwives do not receive any obvious help, though the 'birth stool' in v. 16 could be perceived as one. This time the opponent, Yahweh, is also revealed in vv. 20-21.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Pharaoh	Death of the Hebrew boys	Pharaoh
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
(Birth stool)	The Midwives	Yahweh

Pharaoh's edict in v. 16 (cf. v. 22) seems to establish a clear dichotomy between men and women, where men (or the baby boys) are viewed as a more serious threat to the Egyptian welfare and thus sentenced to death.[44] Such an understanding could seem reasonable if Pharaoh fears an insurrection

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[40] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, pp.43-44, 69-70.

[41] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.84. See, also, Weber who correctly points out that the opposition of life and death is an antithesis that is constantly realised throughout the exodus (Exodus 1-14/15). For further information, see 'Jede Tochter', pp.67-71.

[42] According to Noth, the number of the midwives (two) must mean that the Hebrews lived close together and were not very numerous (*Exodus,* p.23). See, also, McNeile, *Exodus,* p.5. However, Ackerman is probably right in stating that because the narrative is gradually narrowing from a nationwide crisis to a family unit, the number of the midwives is probably a reflection of this process ('Literary Context,' p.85) and could even be part of the poetic character of the narrative (Cassuto, *Exodus,* pp.13-14; Childs, *Exodus,* p.16). In addition, a small number makes it easier to identify with the midwives and thus engages the empathy of the audience (Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' pp.89-90).

[43] Note here Cassuto, who states that the idea was for the midwives to kill the children secretly in order to make the deaths look like they would have been due to natural causes (*Exodus*, p.12). Though such an idea is not explicitly stated by Pharaoh, this is a perfectly legitimate interpretation of his words.

[44] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.74.

(Exodus 1:9-10), since the boys would eventually be able to fight but women could simply be assimilated into the Egyptian population.[45] However, as some scholars have noted, it is also possible to view Pharaoh's command as another example of his 'folly.' Fretheim and Trevor Dennis have both noted how, by killing off the males, in time Pharaoh would also have depleted 'his slave-labor force'[46] and, as Exum states, the action is not even 'the logical way to control overpopulation, which would be to kill females.'[47] In addition, Pharaoh's decision not to kill sons and save daughters is immediately 'undermined by those who are saved':[48] the death edict in both Exodus 1:16 and 22 is instantly followed by two *women* (the midwives/ the mothers) who by their actions undo Pharaoh's command by saving the male heir(s). Irony appears to be rife in the passage, yet one needs to ask whether the women's actions help, as Fretheim suggests, to highlight '*the importance of the activity of women in the divine economy*'[49] or to support the notion of male pre-eminence. As Weems has argued, it appears that the suspected author does not challenge the premise that women are different from men but rather shows how the women in the narrative have been able to exploit those assumptions to their own ends.[50] After all, though the women are the ones who guarantee the survival of the Hebrews, all of their deception and trickery is done to effect the salvation of the boys (not the girls), and even *the* boy who will eventually liberate the Hebrews.[51] Indeed, as Weems further notes, it is Moses (and Aaron) rather than the women who confront Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1, 3), proving the premise of men posing more of a threat to the empire to be true.[52] The purpose of the irony in the passage, therefore, could be argued to support the notion of male superiority as well as to ridicule the 'wisdom' of the foreign ruler and does not readily provide a premise for egalitarian agendas.

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[45] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.85.
[46] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p.33; Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' p.90.
[47] Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.44. See, also, Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.73.
[48] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p.32. See, also, Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.51, and Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.73.
[49] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p.33 [his italics]. See, also, Dennis, 'Heroines,' p.103.
[50] Weems, 'The Hebrew Women,' p.33.
[51] See Exum, 'Second Thoughts,' p.80.
[52] Weems, 'The Hebrew Women,' p.33.

It is also in this sequence (Exodus 1:15-22), as was noted earlier, that the position of Yahweh as the opponent of Pharaoh is made explicit, although to an attentive reader the said conflict has been previously implied in the various associations made with the Genesis traditions. Indeed, the midwives, commanded by Pharaoh to kill the new-born baby boys, disobey him by accepting a different mandate in Exodus 1:17: they fear God and let the Hebrew boys live. As many biblical commentators have noted,[53] this fear of God is not fear *per se*, for example, comparable to the horror experienced by the Egyptians in v. 12, but rather, as Greenberg states, a 'religious--standing (*sic*) in awe of the divine,' which leads to 'conducting' oneself 'morally'.[54] This 'moral conduct,' however, is not just any good work but seems to stem from an understanding of God's created works and one's alignment with those works.[55] Such an alignment can be observed not only in the midwives' actions to preserve life, but also in the broader narrative arrangement of Exodus 1:15-22,[56] and in the play on similar sounding words, namely ראה, 'to see' and ירא, 'to fear': instead of 'seeing' the two stones (v. 16), the midwives 'fear' (v. 17) God.[57] The midwives' faith and refusal to cause death is thus put in direct opposition to Pharaoh's command, revealing the King of Egypt and his death-dealing schemes as the true villain in the story.

However, the midwives' opposition to Pharaoh's plan does not go unchallenged, and so in vv. 18-19 they are called back to meet with Pharaoh to present their reasoning for their insubordination (PS1).[58] Although some commentators have found the midwives' excuse so convincing that they

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[53] Durham, *Exodus,* p.10; Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.87; Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.74-76; Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' p.92.
[54] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus,* p.30. See, also, Sarna, *Exodus,* p.7 and Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.79.
[55] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.32.
[56] See the narrative arrangement as presented by Davies, which highlights the roles of God and Pharaoh in the narrative and also corresponds the women's non-action (their non-compliance to Pharaoh's order) with God's action (the proliferation of the midwives). It is thus made apparent that the women can respond to Pharaoh but not to God, who 'acts and things simply happen,' which lessens Pharaoh's claim to divinity (*Israel in Egypt,* pp.71-73).
[57] Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!,* pp.55-56.
[58] In the performance syntagm, that is, in the part of the story where the subjects (the midwives) attempt to fulfill the mandate agreed at the contract stage (to save life, v. 17), three stages are included. At PS1 the subject confronts his/her

still accept it as a valid reason,[59] most biblical commentators have noticed the sarcasm and/or

mockery displayed in the comparison of the vigorous Hebrews with the Egyptian women, an

argument the 'wise' Pharaoh assumes without question (we will return to this issue later).[60] It does

indeed appear that the midwives manage to convince Pharaoh with their explanation (PS2), since

there is no recollection of the midwives being punished for treachery.[61] Rather, they and the

Hebrews are rewarded by God for their compliance in vv. 20-21 (PS3).

Following the stated blessing in Exodus 1:20-21, the story reverts back to its original course

following Pharaoh's counter-programme. And this time Pharaoh has devised a final solution: he

mandates his entire nation to kill the Hebrew baby boys. This portrays Pharaoh as the utmost source

of death with, presumably, at least some of the Egyptians as his willing subjects:

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Pharaoh	The Hebrews (baby boys)	Death
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	The Egyptians	

It is also at this point that the narrative of Exodus 1 comes to an abrupt end. There is no attribution

from the Hebrew or the Egyptian perspective (PS3), that is, we do not know the outcome of

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enemy (Pharaoh), at PS2 (s)he attempts to dominate his/her opponent (the excuse, v. 19), and if successful, at PS3 (s)he is attributed the desired object (they are dealt with well by Yahweh, vv. 20-21).

[59] H. Holzinger takes it as fact that 'Arab and Syrian women of today are said to have easy births' (*Exodus,* KHCAT 2 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1900] p.4). See, also, Dillmann, *Exodus,* p.11. Esther Schor depicts the midwives' ruse as a description of an ideal birth ('Saviors and Liars: The Midwives in Exodus 1,' in P.S. Hawkins and L. Cushing Stahlberg [eds.], *From the Margins,* p.45) and Lapsley suggests that the midwives' excuse is both a truth and a lie ('Saving Women,' pp.73-74).

[60] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.87; Childs, *Exodus,* p.17; Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.51; Meyers, *Exodus,* pp.37-38; B. Baentsch, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri: übersetzt und erklärt von Bruno Baentsch,* HAT 1, 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903) p.8.

[61] Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' p.92; Dillmann, *Exodus,* p.11.

Pharaoh's plan or consequently the condition of the Hebrews. Instead, after Exodus 1:22 the tone of the narrative as well as the subject of narration change fundamentally. As Donald Wicke has observed, the narrative emphasis turns from general to specific: instead of focusing on a nation, the Hebrews (Exodus 1), the emphasis falls on a single Hebrew family unit, [62] even on a single Hebrew baby boy, Moses (Exodus 2). Moreover, because the birth of Moses occurs abruptly and immediately after a declared death-sentence on the Hebrew boys (Exodus 1:22), [63] it could be suggested that, as J.S. Ackerman has noted, in Exodus 2 'the outcome of the first chapter's struggle is being determined.' [64] Indeed, the birth and survival of a single Hebrew after Pharaoh's edict could be an indication of the prevalence of life over death or, as Beat Weber notes, through the birth of the saviour, the oppression by the Egyptians is pre-decidedly broken.[65] Moses' life and rescue could thus be described as a microcosm *vis-à-vis* the Hebrews, the macrocosm: through the survival of Moses, the 'victory over death and bondage' is secured also for his countrymen.[66]

3. Structuralist Reading of Exodus 2:1-10

3.1 Initial Correlated Sequence

Exodus 2 opens in a very ordinary fashion concerning itself with a marriage and the birth of a son. As was noted earlier, the narrative focus has narrowed from an embryonic nation in Exodus 1 to a newborn individual, whose fate appears to foreshadow that of the Hebrews. Therefore, it seems plausible that in Exodus 2 the life-affirming main programme as presented in Exodus 1 is resumed:

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[62] D.W. Wicke 'The Literary Structure of Exodus 1:2-2:10,' *JSOT* 24 (1982) pp.99-100. See, also, Weber, 'Jede Tochter,' p.50.

[63] The beginning of Exodus 2 ('Now a man from the house of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi …') completely breaks from the preceding verse in Exodus 1:22, initiating a new narrative. However, the narratives are held together by some common themes and structures. Exum has noted, for example, how both narratives have in their beginning unidentified men (Pharaoh and the Levite) and both stories continue with the actions of women ('You Shall Let,' pp.39-40). This further supports Wicke's idea that the narrative structure is from general (Exodus 1) to specific (Exodus 2) ('Exodus 1:2-2.10,' pp.99-100). Indeed, whereas Pharaoh commands a nation (general), the Levite is only in charge of his family unit (specific). Similarly, the women in Exodus 1 attempt to secure the future of the nation, whereas in Exodus 2 the focus is on a single infant.

[64] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.89

[65] Weber, 'Jede Tochter,' p.70.

[66] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.89.

Yahweh, the sender, intends that the Hebrews, the subjects, should bring him their life and service; however, this time the focus is on an individual Hebrew, Moses.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
God	Life/servitude	God
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	Moses (as yet unnamed)	

In addition, as in Exodus 1, in Exodus 2:1-10 we find numerous cross-references and comparisons to other Genesis traditions. Of these, two are of particular interest. Firstly, we will raise the often debated issue of the description of Moses as טוב, 'goodly', in Exodus 2:2. According to Benno Jacob, טוב could be an inference to the creation narrative in Genesis 1, where God depicts his creation as טוב, 'good.' Jacob further argues that the mother regarding her child as 'goodly' could be deemed as her subjective perception, where her eyes rest happily on the child in a manner similar to God viewing his creation (Genesis 1:4ff).[67] However, Fuchs dismisses the stated connection by noting that the mother was plainly pleased with the baby's physical features,[68] a conclusion also supported by Cassuto who, following the LXX, translates טוב as 'beautiful and healthy.'[69] Indeed, it is notable that in the Pentateuch טוב or variations thereon are not limited to their use in Exodus 2 and/or the Creation account (Genesis 24:16; 26:7; 27:9; Deuteronomy 6:18; 15:16) and even within Exodus, the term appears quite separately from references to creative acts (Exodus 14:12). Moreover, as G.F. Davies has stated, equating Moses with the state of the creation would lead to

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[67] Jacob, *Exodus,* p.21. See, also, Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' p.97; Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!,* pp.114-115; Dozeman, *Exodus,* pp.80-81; Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) p.28; A. Reinhartz, '*Why Ask My Name?': Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p.103.
[68] Fuchs, 'Exodus 1-2,' p.313.
[69] Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.18. See, also, Childs, *Exodus,* p.18.

equating Moses' mother with Yahweh, a comparison hardly intended by the story.[70] Therefore, if we are to see a connection between Genesis and the use of טוב, the most that can be said is that טוב could be perceived as 'one thread among many'[71] tying Exodus 2:1-10 with the broad framework of the creation motif rather than an implication of a specific event.

The second term to be discussed is תבה, the 'ark/basket' (v. 3), which in the HB is used only here and of Noah's ark (Genesis 6-9). Exum has drawn parallels between the Flood story and Moses' birth narrative and has noted, for example, the common themes of being rescued from drowning as well as the use of the ark as a medium of salvation, either of humanity or of Moses.[72] Salvation through water is indeed a theme that is carried all the way to Exodus 14-15, which could be suggested to link the story of the Flood, Moses' birth and the salvation of the Hebrews even more firmly together.[73] In addition, as Noah is presented as the head and beginning of a new created order (Genesis 9:9ff), now in Exodus 2 Moses could be perceived in the same role. As Fretheim states,

> 'Both Noah and Moses are adrift in a watery chaos, but they are divinely chosen ones in and through whom the good creation will be preserved. *The saving of Moses is thus seen [by the narrator] to have cosmic significance.*'[74]

The importance of Moses' 'ark' and rescue is therefore not only bound to his fate as an individual or to the Hebrews as a nation, but carries within itself the purpose of the created order of God himself. As God's creative force was active in prospering the Hebrews (Exodus 1:7, 12, 20-21) it is now active in preserving Moses, securing future acts of liberation.

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[70] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.105-106.
[71] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.106.
[72] Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.54.
[73] Note the use of סוף, 'reed' in Exodus 2:3,5 and 13:18 (Sarna, *Exploring Exodus,* p.29; Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.81; Coggins, *Exodus,* pp.8-9).
[74] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.38 [his italics].

However, we must note that there are also several differences between the Flood story and Moses' birth narrative,[75] and thus one must be careful not to imply that a direct reference between the two stories would have been intended. Rather, we suggest that like the use of תבה, טוב could be yet 'another reverberation from Genesis.'[76] That is, by connecting Moses' origins with the Genesis traditions, his birth becomes connected with Yahweh's purpose as well as with the fate of his fellow Hebrews, whose history and function is in some measure remembered in the birth of their hero.

After the announcement of the birth of Moses in Exodus 2:1-2, a programme opposed to Yahweh's life-affirming purposes appears in the following verse. Here the *status quo* is broken on account of the presumed death threat from Exodus 1:22, which leads Moses' mother to hide her child and eventually to place him in the previously mentioned basket/ark among the reeds in the Nile (v. 3).

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
God	Moses (as yet unnamed)	Life
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
The ark, the Nile	The Mother	Pharaoh

Although the mother's actions to save her son could be described as negligent or even unimaginative,[77] they could also be portrayed as ironical: as Fretheim notes, by following Pharaoh's orders and disposing of her child, Moses' mother ends up saving her son, albeit she does take extra precautions.[78] Indeed, she does not simply 'expose' the baby[79] but proceeds with the construction of

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[75] For example, in Genesis 6-9 the whole of humanity is threatened, whereas in Exodus 2 the threat exists only for the Hebrews; the condemnation in Genesis 6-9 is divine, in Exodus 2 the judgment is due to Pharaoh (Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.106). Note also the lack of divine involvement in Exodus 2:1-10 as stated by Coggins, *Exodus,* p.8.
[76] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.106.
[77] Fuchs, 'Exodus 1-2,' p.313.
[78] Fretheim, *Exodus,* pp.36-37. See, also, Reinhartz, *'Why Ask My Name?,'* p.103; Sarna, *Exodus,* p.8; Durham, *Exodus,* p.16.

the 'ark' which she places into the river, the very place which previously was described as the means of death (Exodus 1:22) but has now been transformed into a means of life.[80]

3.2 Disjunction Syntagm

Having placed the basket into the river, Moses' mother separates her son from the Hebrews and thus disjoins him (disjunction) from his own kin. There is no obvious recipient in the narrative, for we do not know for whom the child is intended; however, an attentive reader could presume that Moses' life will be preserved in accordance with Yahweh's purposes.

This stage in the story is also tempered by Moses' yet unnamed sister, Miriam, who watches the basket among the bulrushes to know what would be done to him (v. 4). The appearance of Moses' sister (and the later appearance of his brother Aaron, Exodus 4:14) could be stated to come as a surprise, since it seems that Moses was intended to be the first-born (Exodus 2:2). Some suggestions to harmonise these accounts have been made;[81] however, it is more likely, as both Cassuto and J.S. Ackerman have noted, that Exodus 2:1-10 is a story which simply 'gets right to the heart of the matter, shearing away all details considered irrelevant to the outcome of the story.'[82] And being one of such 'irrelevant details' seems also to be the fate of Miriam. She appears without a name or an introduction, and as an individual person, she is mainly referred to as 'his [Moses'] sister' (v.4, 7), conjoining her function with the rescue of her brother.[83]

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[79] Childs argues that the story of Moses has elements of an exposure story that have been seriously altered (*Exodus,* p.12); whereas Durham notes that the story should not be considered to be an exposure one at all because such a tale would turn 'a positive story… into a negative one' (*Exodus,* p.15). The debate concerning the 'exposure' nature of the narrative is often linked with the Sargon of Akkad myth (Childs, *Exodus,* pp.8-11; Durham, *Exodus,* p.15; Noth *Exodus,* pp.26-27; Sarna, *Exploring Exodus,* pp.29-31; Schmidt, *Exodus,* p.34) and although parallels between the two tales might be intriguing, their relevance to our thesis will not be examined further.

[80] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.37 and Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.117-118.

[81] See McNeile, who suggests that the sister of Moses would have been Amram's child from a previous marriage (*Exodus,* p.6).

[82] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,'p.89; Cassuto, *Exodus,* p.17.

[83] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.97-98.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Moses' mother	Moses	
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
Miriam	The Nile	Pharaoh's edict

In v. 5 the daughter of Pharaoh enters the story, though whether her appearance is a welcomed one is a matter of debate. As an Egyptian, she could be viewed as an opponent because of her association with her father, lending credit to the assumption that she would almost certainly obey her father's edict.[84] However, she also assumes the character of the unknown recipient from the previous pericope, since it is she who sends her maid (the subject) to get the basket (the object) for her (the receiver). In addition, in v. 6 we find out that the daughter of Pharaoh has compassion on the child and therefore her possible role as the opponent is reduced,[85] although Moses' fate still remains uncertain.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Pharaoh's daughter	Moses	Pharaoh's Daughter
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	Slave girl	Pharaoh's Daughter

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[84] Weber, 'Jede Tochter,' p.62.

[85] As Davies notes, v. 6 is a turning point in the narrative, where the daughter of Pharaoh can decide either to kill the infant or to rescue him. However, her possible role as the opponent is tempered with intimacy: the readers are allowed access into the daughter's thoughts (v. 6). Indeed, the exclamation in v. 6 (And behold, a child crying) could be described as free indirect discourse, which lets us access the daughter's mind rather than hear her words. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that in the same narrative the only other time the narrator focuses within a character is regarding the thoughts of Moses' mother (vv. 2-3), with whom the daughter of Pharaoh appears to be both compared to and associated with (this issue will be discussed later). It is only at a later point in v. 6, when we discover that the daughter of Pharaoh took pity on the boy, that the tension is lessened (*Israel in Egypt,* p.92-95). Lapsley also notes that by letting us access the daughter's thoughts we are encouraged to respond to the child with compassion, as the daughter does, and in so doing the narrative legitimises an emotionally motivated ethical reaction ('Saving Women,' pp.76-77).

3.3 Contract and Performance Syntagm

The following verses (vv. 7-8) are some of the most complex narrative structures in Exodus 2:1-10, for in the short exchange between Miriam and the daughter of Pharaoh several actions/stages take place simultaneously. As Miriam enters the scene in v. 7, she gains the role of a sender, or the initiator, for it is Miriam who through her proposal to Pharaoh's daughter initiates an agreement (a contract) with her concerning attaining a wet-nurse ('Shall I go and call for you a nursing woman from among the Hebrews to nurse the boy for you?'). Miriam's proposal has gained praise from biblical commentators due to its carefully crafted nature.[86] As J.S. Ackerman notes, the proposal is so crafty that Pharaoh's daughter has to do nothing but agree with it with a brusque, one-word command 'go.'[87] Furthermore, G.F. Davies has shown how the speech of Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2:9 repeats the roots of הלך (to go) and ינק (to nurse) from Miriam's earlier suggestion (v. 7), causing the daughter of Pharaoh to take on not only Miriam's suggestion but even the vocabulary Miriam used to state her proposition.[88] Thus, although it may appear that the daughter of Pharaoh is the one in charge commanding both Miriam and Moses' mother (vv. 8-9), she is in fact only acting in accordance with that which Miriam had already proposed! It thus seems plausible that in the text Pharaoh's daughter could be described not as a compasionate, benevolent Egyptian as is suggested by some biblical scholars,[89] but rather, as J.S. Ackerman notes, as a 'dumb' foreigner, easily controlled by the will and the wit of a Hebrew slave girl![90]

Furthermore, Miriam's actions could also be described as courageous, if we follow G.F. Davies and Jacqueline Lapsley and agree that the statement in v. 6 concerning the daughter of Pharaoh's

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[86] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p.39; Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.20; Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.55; Childs, 'The Birth of Moses,' *JBL* 84, 2 (1965) p.120; Jacob, *Exodus*, p.25.
[87] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.93.
[88] Davies, *Israel in Egypt*, p.109.
[89] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, p.41; Fretheim, *Exodus*, pp.38-39, Coggins, *Exodus*, p.10 and Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.58.
[90] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.86, 93.

experience regarding the boy was part of her internal dialogue.[91] Thus, Miriam would have no knowledge of the daughter's pity *vis-à-vis* Moses: it is not until the daughter of Pharaoh agrees to Miriam's plan with the word 'go' (v. 8) that we gain some assurance that she is not an opponent.[92] Therefore, vv.7-9 could be seen as forming a performance syntagm, where the subject, Miriam, faces an opponent, the possibly 'hostile' daughter of Pharaoh (PS1).[93] However, the opponent is subdued (PS2) through an act of persuasion (v. 7) combined with the daughter's disposition to compassion (v. 6). Miriam's plan to secure her brother's future is therefore accomplished in v. 9 (PS3): Miriam, the initiator of the plan (the sender) and also the subject (the one sent), goes to get Moses' mother to act as the wet-nurse.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Miriam	Wet-nurse	Pharaoh's Daughter
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	Miriam	(Daughter of Pharaoh till v.8)

In v. 9 the daughter of Pharaoh adds to the wet-nurse contract certain legal requirements,[94] which are presumably accepted by the mother as the child is taken to live with his kin. No helpers are introduced at this point in the story and, interestingly, no opponents either, although it is probable that Pharaoh would find such an arrangement objectionable. In addition, Noth doubts whether a

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[91] See n.85.

[92] Pharaoh's daughter's agreement seems to be the result of both modal statement of volition, that is, the daughter had compassion on the child, and a process statement of volition, that is, she was convinced by Miriam's proposal. See p.35 n.119.

[93] See n.58.

[94] As Exum has noted, the expansion the daughter of Pharaoh makes to Miriam's earlier 'contract,' namely the payment of wages, is of importance, for it attests to the daughter's legal right to the child ('You Shall Let,' p.55). Childs specifies that the requirements in a wet-nurse contract would contain statements of the individuals involved; the length of the contract; conditions of work; nourishment; fines for breach; wages and a witness. Most of these elements are to some extent present in Exodus 2:8-10 ('The Birth,' pp.112-114).

mere daughter of Pharaoh could have performed such a legal function on her own initiative;[95] however, as Childs has convincingly demonstrated, a noble or a slave could hire/be hired as a wet-nurse, which often preceded the act of adoption, and therefore one's status in society was not necessarily a hindrance to such a procedure.[96] Thus the arrangement between the daughter of Pharaoh and Moses' mother could be viewed as legitimate and as part of the adoption arrangements for Moses.

3.4 Final Correlated Sequence

Irony is rife yet again in the final correlated sequence of the passage in which the adoption of Moses is formalised. As J.S. Ackerman summarises, 'the child is delivered from Pharaoh's clutches by being given over into his daughter's hands!'[97] By the act of adoption in v. 10,[98] Moses' life becomes secured by the same royal house that sought his destruction and, moreover, Moses will return later to cause destruction to the Egyptian hegemony that secured his survival.

However, due to his deliverance from danger, Moses also becomes disconnected from his own people (the Hebrews) causing a certain ambiguity in his identity. Not only has Moses become בן, a 'son', to an Egyptian in v. 10 as opposed to his status as a son to a Hebrew in v. 2,[99] but even his name suggests a certain duality of meaning. That is, the name Pharaoh's daughter gives him, משה, is interpreted as a passive, 'the one drawn out', referring to the daughter's compassionate act ('Because from the waters I drew him,' v. 10), as opposed to the more appropriate active verb, 'the one who draws out', referring to Moses' future role as the deliverer of the Hebrews.[100] As G.F. Davies notes, the confusion in Moses' name might suggest 'the ambivalence in which Moses will

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[95] Noth, *Exodus,* p.26.
[96] Childs, 'The Birth,' pp.112-114.
[97] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.94.
[98] For the adoption formula ויהי לבן, see Childs, 'The Birth,' p.114.
[99] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.112.
[100] See Schmidt, *Exodus,* p.34 and Noth, *Exodus,* p.26.

now live:'[101] instead of the passive object he has been in Exodus 2:1-10, the naming sequence could implicate his future activity.

Furthermore, looking at the parallelisms and inversions as discussed at the start of Exodus 1, we can observe other issues of concern: by the end of Exodus 2:10 Moses is, like the Hebrews, both alive/prosperous (Exodus 1:20-21, 2:10) and in Egypt (Exodus 1:22, 2:10); however, unlike his countrymen, he has also maintained his freedom as opposed to the Hebrews who are now slaves (Exodus 1:11). In other words, the inversion of belief that Egypt is an unfavourable option to the Hebrews, or to this particular Hebrew, has become problematic. In fact, because the immediate need to move out of Egypt (slavery) is now completely removed from Moses' life, such an arrangement might appear to him even objectionable. Therefore, by the end of Exodus 2:10, not only has the identity of Moses become questionable, but through him, the entire operation of the exodus has become a matter of ambiguity.

4. Deconstructive Reading of Exodus 1-2

> The stories of deliverance told in the early chapters of Exodus both rely on human constructions of identity (ethnic, gender, and class) and simultaneously undermine those very categories through the transgressive acts of deliverance performed by women.[102]

In the above quotation Lapsley highlights her understanding of the female characters in Exodus 1-4 as challenging and overturning patriarchal presuppositions. She claims that even the story itself 'lifts up values that are in tension with traditional patriarchal values'[103] and criticises Exum for her 'monolithic' description of patriarchy in her 1994 paper as was illustrated earlier.[104] Whilst Lapsley should be commended for her efforts in searching for an alternative understanding of the respective

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[101] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.115.
[102] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.69.
[103] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.85.
[104] Exum, 'Second Thoughts,' pp.75ff.

characters, we must note that her reading portrays the biblical corpus as inscribing subversion to the level of authorial intent, leading to the negligence of some of the more oppressive features present in the text. Moreover, even if we accept that patriarchy can present itself in manifold guises, to find such a 'subversive' portrayal of women as Lapsley suggests readily depicted in a story presumably written by men for a patriarchal audience[105]seems unlikely. Indeed, it is equally possible to read Exodus 1-2, as Weems noted earlier, as ultimately supporting the notion of male pre-eminence, although the said ideology is sometimes ridiculed for ironical purposes.[106]

However, rather than choosing one of the above positions exclusively, we could invite ourselves to search for another kind of reading, for the 'step in the right direction'[107] as suggested earlier by Exum. We must seek not for an understanding that ignores or elevates the oppressive ethos of the text but rather determine an interpretation which takes the underlying patriarchal assumptions in the narrative into account, whilst exploring for moments of subversion without reinscribing patriarchal values. To approach such a reading we will address the three binary oppositions we focused on in the structuralist reading (Yahweh/Pharaoh, Hebrew/Egyptian, men/women) and, by carefully studying each one, attempt to portray the instability inherent in these oppositions and place our understanding of the text in the realm of indecision.

4.1 Yahweh/Pharaoh

The conflict between Yahweh and Pharaoh in Exodus 1-2 has been sufficiently illustrated in the structuralist section. Nevertheless, the constant competition between the two rulers begs a further enquiry into the status of Pharaoh in the narrative. He is a male Egyptian, to be sure, but apart from

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[105] See p.2 n.8.
[106] Weems, 'The Hebrew Women,' pp.32-33.
[107] Exum, 'Second Thoughts,' p.87.

a 'clever despot',[108] as Childs suggests, should he be understood as having any other significance?[109] Some clues can be gleaned from the textual representation itself. As was stated earlier, Yahweh as the bringer of life seems to be constantly contrasted with Pharaoh, the deliverer of death.[110] And within the story, life and death are not insignificant factors but are depicted as having cosmic importance: the Hebrews are a new act of God's creation (Exodus 1:7; cf. Genesis 1:28; 9:1-2), the continuation of which is put in jeopardy by Pharaoh's death-dealing schemes (Exodus 1:9ff).[111] Thus, if Yahweh is recognised as the God of life, it seems plausible that Pharaoh should be understood as more than an adverse ruler.[112] Rather, even his namelessness could be an indication of a shift of emphasis away from the King of Egypt as a historical figure to, as Fretheim notes, '*a symbol for the anticreation forces of death* which take on the God of life.'[113] Moreover, as will be demonstrated, Yahweh himself takes on some of the attributes of Pharaoh at a later stage, which further highlights the co-dependent relationship between Pharaoh and Yahweh. With a kind of 'Freudian slip', this co-dependency enhances Pharaoh's claims to divine status: Yahweh, the deity supreme, by absorbing some of Pharaoh's death-dealing ways (rather than *vice versa*),[114] becomes the main protagonist in advertising the qualities of his opponent. However, whether such an enterprise makes Pharaoh fully divine is a matter open to debate,[115] though in light of the above

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[108] Childs, *Exodus,* p.15.

[109] Brueggemann views Pharaoh's portrayal as that of an insubordinate vassal (Brueggemann, 'Pharaoh as Vassal,' pp.31-32 as quoted by Ford, *God, Pharaoh, and Moses,* p.39); however, Ford is probably correct in stating that because in the narrative the Egyptians and the Hebrews are contrasted ('my people/your people') and the Hebrews are to be 'sent' to 'serve' Yahweh, understanding Pharaoh as being able to retain control over his slaves if he would have acted in a manner acceptable to Yahweh seems strange (*God, Pharaoh, and Moses,* pp.39-40).

[110] Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!,* pp.94-95, 97-98.

[111] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.27.

[112] Note here the research made by Ackerman and Siebert-Hommes, which connects the description of Egypt with a realm of death as described in various places in Genesis, an image that is further supported by the exodus story (Genesis 37:35; 45:28; 46:30; 47:29; Exodus 1:6; 14-22). See, Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!,* pp.95-97 and Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.115-118.

[113] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.27 [his italics].

[114] For example, it is Pharaoh who first orders the killing of the first-born sons (Exodus 1:22), an act copied by Yahweh in Exodus 11. Similarly, it is Pharaoh who first requests servitude from the Hebrews (Exodus 1:9ff), an action mimiced by Yahweh at a later stage (Exodus 4:23; 7:16; 8:1; 9:1).

[115] For a possible interpretation of Pharaoh as a divine being, see J.E. Currid, 'Why Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart,' *BR* 9, 6 (1993) pp.47-48.

discussion we could probably grant him at least a demi-god status as the master of death-dealing forces.

Accordingly, we could suggest that in Exodus 1-15 we have two rulers/gods opposed to each other as the masters of either life or death. Yet, the exact cause of their conflict needs to be determined. Although from the structuralist reading it could be presupposed that the hostility is due to both Yahweh and Pharaoh requiring servitude from the Hebrews (Exodus 1:9ff; 8:1), it could also be suggested that this antagonism is only symptomatic of a much deeper conflict. Indeed, according to D.M.G. Stalker, the intent behind the exodus is to be 'the great constitutive action of God by which he not only brought the nation of Israel into being, but also gave his plan for the salvation of mankind its final shape.'[116] Barry Pentley, in turn, suggests that in the events of the exodus 'God provided a memorial of mercy and love for the Hebrews.'[117] However, is this 'memorial of mercy' and 'plan for the salvation of mankind' really the purpose of the exodus? In light of a further examination of the storyline it appears that the liberation of the Hebrews could be seen as a *by-product* of Yahweh's mighty acts rather than *the* purpose. This argument can best be illustrated from an examination of the theme wisdom/ knowledge as presented in Exodus 1-15. The verb 'to know', ידע, and its variations occur six times in Exodus 1-2 alone,[118] and is constantly used throughout the exodus narrative: Yahweh is referred to as the God who ידע, 'knows,' (2:25; 3:7; 6:3),[119] whereas the two Pharaohs addressed in Exodus 1-15 don't 'know' either Joseph (1:8) or Yahweh (5:2). In addition, Yahweh repeats his miraculous acts during the 'plagues narrative' (Exodus 7-11) so that

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[116] D.M.G. Stalker, 'Exodus', in M. Black and H.H. Rowley (eds.), *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (Don Mills: Nelson, 1962) p.208.

[117] B. Pentley, 'Moses and the Gods of Egypt: An Introduction to the Ten Plagues,' *Sola!* August (2005) http://ekklesia.to/articles/ (13/6/2009).

[118] Exodus 1:8, 18; 2:4, 14, 18, 25. See Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live*!, p.55.

[119] In 3:7 Yahweh 'knows' the suffering of Israel, and in 6:3 Yahweh states that he did not make himself 'known' (previously) as Yahweh. The content of 'knowing' in 2:25 is unclear. See Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses,* pp.45-46, 219.

Pharaoh/Egyptians/Hebrews may ידע כי, 'know that,' Yahweh is God or variations on this theme.[120]

Thus, although Yahweh constantly requires Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go (Exodus 6:11; 7:14; 8:1),

no indication is made that the signs/wonders are presented for the *sole* purpose of inducing Pharaoh

to release the Hebrews. Rather, as Donald Gowan pointedly notes, it seems that 'knowledge is the

expressed aim of the plagues.'[121] And not just any knowledge but the acknowledgement that Yahweh

and Yahweh *alone* is God![122] Indeed, the recognition of Yahweh's divinity appears to be of such

significance in the exodus story that, as Dorian Cox notes, a 'proper' demonstration is needed for

this purpose.[123]

However, at what cost is such a purpose achieved? Granted, in Exodus 1-2 Yahweh is constantly

portrayed on the side of life; however, it will not take long for Yahweh to adopt the ways of his

opponent and reveal a darker side of himself. During the plague narratives Yahweh not only

commits the same atrocities as Pharaoh (for example, he kills the first-born sons in Exodus 11), but

he goes far beyond: Yahweh plunders Egypt of her wealth (12:36), kills their cattle (9:1-7) as well

as some bystanders (9:19-25), destroys their crops (8:20-32; 9:13-35; 10:1-20), causes severe

diseases (9:8-12) and darkens their sun (10:21-29). Though according to Exodus 9:15 it could be

read that by choosing not simply to slaughter all Egypt to rescue his people, Yahweh has shown his

power by withholding some of his might,[124] it is difficult to see how exactly this makes Yahweh a

more amicable ruler than Pharaoh since such a demonstration has still been done for the

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[120] Exodus (3:19; 4:14; 6:7;) 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29-30; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4, 18.
[121] D.E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) p.134.
[122] Gowan, *Theology,* pp.137-138; Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses*, p.53. See, also, D.J. McCarthy, 'Moses' Dealings with Pharaoh: Ex 7,8-10,27,' *CBQ* 27, 4 (1965) pp.345-346; R.B. Chisholm Jr., 'Divine Hardening in the Old Testament,' *BS* 153 (1996) p.415 and L. Eslinger, 'Freedom or Knowledge? Perspective and Purpose in the Exodus Narrative' (Exodus 1-15)' *JSOT* 52 (1991) pp.57-58. A suggestion has been made by Currid that the plagues were directed against Egyptian gods ('Why Did God,' pp.47-48; see, also, McCarthy, 'Moses' Dealings,' p.344). Although this claim finds support from Exodus 12:12, because the emphasis in the passage under research (Exodus 1-2) is on the battle waged between Yahweh and Pharaoh, the argument will be left for further research.
[123] See D.G.C. Cox, 'The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Its Literary and Cultural Contexts,' *BS* 163 (2006) p.311.
[124] Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses*, pp.53-67.

advancement of Yahweh's fame (v. 16). By contrast, the oppression caused by Pharaoh appears to have been for the well-being of his nation rather than for his own glory, lessening his claim for egocentric motives (Exodus 1:9-10). Overall, as Gunn has noted, 'the signs and wonders conceal destruction and suffering, deserved and undeserved—an excess of havoc we might be tempted to argue.'[125] Indeed, human anguish seems to be the price to be paid for divine acknowledgment in Exodus. Though this might eradicate Yahweh's image as a life-affirming deity, it seems that in Exodus identity and acknowledgment are much bigger priorities than simply acting as a humanitarian aid-worker.[126]

Furthermore, adding to Yahweh's undesirable traits, we can also mention the manner he deals with his own people, the Hebrews. As was noted earlier, both Pharaoh and Yahweh require servitude (Exodus 1:9ff; 4:23); however, the compliance Yahweh demands appeared in the text to be portrayed differently to that of Pharaoh: Pharaoh's means of rulership was oppression as opposed to Yahweh's freedom in service.[127] Yet, the question needs to be asked whether such a drastic difference between the respective reigns can be gleaned from the text.

One possible answer to the above question may be found if we examine the term that is used for both occasions, namely עבד (Exodus 1:13-14; 4:23; 7:16; 8:1; 9:13). Disturbingly, עבד is used for both the enslavement of the Hebrews in Exodus 1:13-14 as well as the service required by Yahweh in Exodus 4:23, which begs the question of the exact difference between the two respective 'servitudes.' One possibility is to understand עבד and its derivates to imply religious service when applied to Yahweh (Exodus 3:18; 5:1-3); however, from the broader use of the term it is obvious

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[125] D.M. Gunn, "The 'Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart': Plot, Character and Theology in Exodus 1-14," in D.J.A. Clines, D.M. Gunn and A.J. Hauser (eds.), *Art and Meaning,* p.89
[126] Gowan, *Theology,* p.128.
[127] Fretheim *Exodus*, pp.30-31; Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses,* p.38; Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.60.

that religious devotion is not the only form of obedience required by the deity. [128] Indeed, the

importance of submission to Yahweh's commands is evident especially in the plague narratives[129] as

well as elsewhere in the Pentateuch: the slightest breach of order, even in the form of a mere

complaint (Numbers 11:1-20, 31-34) could end up in a death sentence (Numbers 14:26-35; 21:6-7),

illness (Deuteronomy 28:58-59) or banishment (Numbers 12:14-15). The significance of obedience

seems to be presupposed even in Exodus 1-2 in the dutiful responses and life-affirming actions of

the various women, as has been previously demonstrated. Yet, in favour of those who advocate a

difference between Yahweh' rule and that of Pharaoh, it has to be admitted that the 'slavery'

required by Yahweh is not the exact mirror image of that of Pharaoh: under Yahweh's leadership,

the Hebrews are not commanded to build storage cities or bound with hard labour. Yet, they remain

bound by different means, namely, by obedience to Yahweh's whims and wishes. As Gunn

poignantly notes,

> … a certain irony underlies this story [of exodus] which tells of freedom
> gained, slavery overthrown, yet which presents the real struggle for
> Israel's 'release' as being between rival masters.[130]

Indeed, the freedom Yahweh offers is still under a 'master' ruling over his 'subjects'. If rigorous

labour was of importance to Pharaoh, rigorous obedience was of importance to Yahweh. The slavery

presented seems to be simply that of a different kind.

One more issue to be considered in this section is the questionable manner by which Yahweh brings

about some of his victories, namely, his ability to manipulate the minds of his opponents. The issue

of Yahweh hardening Pharaoh's heart is a long-debated one, and here we do not have the space to

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[128] Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses*, pp.34-38.
[129] See, for example, Exodus 7:16-18; 8:2, 21; 9:2-3;10:4.
[130] Gunn, 'Exodus 1-14,' p.81 [his underlining].

do it justice.[131] To summarise, we can note that the HB assigns the act of hardening at times to both Yahweh and Pharaoh,[132] and thus an argument which assigns this deed exclusively to only one party seems an unconvincing one.[133] Understanding the hardening as the result of both parties is a reading supported by several scholars;[134] however, there is some disagreement on the exact proportion of attribution of guilt. Indeed, balancing human free will with divine omnipotence is not an easy task, and readings tend to slide the scales in favour of either Yahweh or Pharaoh.[135] Ford has provided an excellent discussion on the issue, in which he claims that Yahweh is behind the hardening *some* of the time, influencing Pharaoh's decisions and 'working upon' him to act in a certain way, but directly only on those occasions when, based on previous conduct, we can assume that Pharaoh would have hardened his heart anyway and thus Yahweh could be claimed to simply strengthen Pharaoh's resolve (Exodus 9:12; 10:20, 27).[136] However, the question of whether overriding a person's free will is justifiable in any circumstances remains: if God can play both sides of the chessboard, what is the point in playing? Ford notes that the image portrayed of Yahweh in Exodus is not perhaps a comfortable or an appealing one, yet one that provokes and expects a response from the characters in the story as well as from the audience.[137] In this thesis, that 'provoked' or 'expected' response is not a positive one. If Yahweh can, at least in part, influence or override human decisions, then the morality of that which he is asking or advocating is lessened.

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[131] For possible explanations for the hardening motif from form/source criticism, see Kirk-Dugan, 'Divine Puppeteer,' pp.95-96; Childs, *Exodus,* pp.170-175; Propp, *Exodus,* pp.310-317; R.R. Wilson, 'The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart,' *CBQ* 41, 1 (1979) pp.21ff. Because in this thesis the main emphasis is on the narratives in their final form, these theories will not be discussed further.

[132] Pharaoh (8:15, 32; 9:34), Yahweh (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:20, 27).

[133] S.R. Driver claims that Pharaoh first hardened himself, followed by Yahweh's act (*The Book of Exodus,* CBSC [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911] pp.53-54), whereas Dennis, Noth and Eslinger find Yahweh as the primary agent of hardening (Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' pp.111-112; Noth, *Exodus,* p.68; Eslinger, 'Freedom,' pp.56-58).

[134] Fretheim, *Exodus*, pp.96-103; Gunn, 'Exodus 1-14,' pp.74-81; Cox, 'The Hardening,' pp.308-311; Chisholm, 'Divine Hardening,' pp.411, 428-429.

[135] Fretheim and Cox seem to prefer to uphold human responsibility, whereas Chisholm and Gunn elevate divine interference. See n.134.

[136] Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses,* pp.101-102, 153-154. As regards Exodus 4:21; 7:3 10:1, he states that the texts act as a summary of the responsibilities allocated to all three main characters (pp. 84-99, 102).

[137] Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses,* p.216.

To conclude this section, then, the question needs be asked as to what exactly is the difference between the rulership of Yahweh and Pharaoh? As has been articulated, it definitely is not a question of freedom vs. oppression and certainly not one of life or death. If anything, it appears to be one of perception: to the Hebrews enslaved by the Egyptians, Yahweh's offer of 'freedom' might have appeared as a desirable option; yet, from the Egyptian point of view, Yahweh and his ten plagues might have made him appear as the worst sort of tyrant! Ultimately, any supposed differences between the respective 'gods' seem to be debatable, and made more ambiguous by their co-dependent relationship. In other words, as was demonstrated, because Yahweh adopts Pharaoh's death-dealing ways, requires servitude and, moreover, interferes with Pharaoh's mind (Exodus 14:4), it could be suggested that by committing these actions Yahweh creates, or even faces, his own mirror image in Pharaoh, a dark side which Yahweh is happy to manipulate and accommodate. Ultimately such an obscure relationship between the two deities problematises the differences between the respective 'gods', and consequently the nations they represent. As Yahweh and Baal in Sherwood's reading of Hosea could be described as *parergons*,[138] the two deities in the exodus also seem to result in the two undecideables: life resides in death, slavery in freedom, Egypt in Israel, and the 'gods' see each other in one another's reflection.

4.2 Hebrews/Egyptians

As was noted in the structuralist reading, understanding the Hebrews and the Egyptians as fundamentally different from one another is established early in the exodus story (Exodus 1:9-10) and is later confirmed by Yahweh himself (Exodus 8:23). However, although this distinction has already been challenged by the undecideable characters of the 'gods' of the respective nations, there are also other moments in the narrative where the difference between the Hebrew/Egyptian identities become questionable. In the following we will briefly examine each of these instances.

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[138] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, pp.214ff.

Before we can approach this line of enquiry, we must first observe the grounds upon which the difference between the Hebrews and the Egyptians is based in the story. As can be expected from the portrayal of the respective rulers, the distinction seems to relate to their particular characteristics: to be an Egyptian means to align with Pharaoh to oppress the Hebrews (Exodus 1:8-14) and ultimately participate in their destruction (v. 22), whereas to be a Hebrew means to align with Yahweh (vv. 17, 20-21) and to produce life (vv. 7, 12 2:2) even despite oppression (Exodus vv. 12, 20).[139] The only occasion when this alignment is subverted in Exodus 1-2 is in the presentation of Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2:1-10; however, as noted by Fretheim and J.S. Ackerman, the women's actions seem to be portrayed in an ironical light and do not necessarily challenge the stated difference in the text.[140]

However, we suggest that the appearance of difference as demonstrated above is challenged from within the very ideological framework that is presented as sustaining it. Such moments can be observed especially in the portrayal of the female characters in the story, first of all, the midwives. As was noted earlier, the midwives could either be rendered as Hebrew (MT) or through an altered consonantal reading as Egyptian.[141] Predictably, arguments in favour of either of these options abound. For example, Exum has argued that if the midwives were Egyptian, they could be classified with Pharaoh's daughter as God-fearing foreigners, which would add a point of irony into the passage (that is, the midwives fear the Hebrew rather than the Egyptian god).[142] However, Fretheim notes that several ironical points are missed if Egyptian nationality is favoured. These include the

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[139] See, also, Weems, who argues that in Exodus 1 a social conflict is witnessed, in which a difference between the Egyptians (the powerful who dominate) and the Hebrews (the powerless who resist) is established ('The Hebrew Women,' p.32).

[140] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.37, and Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.93-93. Although Fretheim notes some of the subversive elements implicated by the women's actions, he fails to connect them to issues pertaining to race. In Ackerman's thesis the issue of race is not perceived as a subversive element but is understood as contributing to the 'ironical' outcome of the story (p.94).

[141] See p.49 n.6.

[142] Exum, 'You Shall Let,' pp.48-50. For other arguments in favour of this theory, see Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.85-86, and Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus,* pp.26-27.

entire Egyptian nation (which is addressed in Exodus 1:9-10; 22) being compared to two Hebrew midwives (who are addressed in vv. 16 and 18); the fact that Pharaoh can bend the will of his entire nation but not two Hebrew women; and the matter that the fear of the Hebrew midwives leads to success (Exodus 1:17, 20-21), whereas the terror of the Egyptians leads to failure (Exodus 1:12).[143]

It is notable that none of the above claims supports the designation of the midwives as either Hebrew or Egyptian exclusively; rather, the text appears to remain ambiguous in this regard since the midwives' actions do not clearly portray them either way.[144] However, we could agree that by preserving the lives of the Hebrew baby boys the midwives align with life (Exodus 1:17) which in the above analysis was deemed as a Hebrew characteristic; yet, we must note that the midwives' actions also have a darker side. That is, by saving the boys, the midwives not only give cause to Pharaoh's ultimate solution in Exodus 1:22 but they also save those whom later would cause death to others. Only a moment after their escape from Egypt the Hebrews are commanded to fight against Amalek (Exodus 17:8-15), proving themselves quite as apt as the Egyptians to follow the orders of their 'deity' to commit actions of bloodshed if required. In addition, the midwives' non-compliance could also be argued to result in the death of some of the Egyptians. By adding to the prosperity of the Hebrews, they participate in the commencement of the rather blood-soaked path that results in the Hebrews 'going up from the land' (Exodus 1:10; 3:8; 7-14). Furthermore, as Fuchs has stated, when Pharaoh's 'ultimate solution' is portrayed (Exodus 1:22), intriguingly, in the MT the nationality of the baby boys is not indicated. This could imply that Pharaoh has ordered the execution of the Egyptian as well as the Hebrew boys![145] Although the stated omission might be

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[143] Fretheim, *Exodus*, pp.31-32. For other arguments in favour of this option, see Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.86, and Jacob, *Exodus,* p.15.
[144] See, also, Dozeman, Exodus, pp.74-75.
[145] Fuchs, 'Exodus 1-2,' p.312. See, also, Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.49 and Jacob, *Exodus*, p.18.

understood humorously, the above reading lends further support to the rather uncertain portrayal of the midwives in the story, which connects life and death in one action that presupposedly saves life.

The difference between Hebrew and Egyptian is brought into a further state of quandary, as Weber states, by the "parallelization and synchronization of both of the 'mothers' and their relation to their 'mutual' child [Moses]." As representatives of the Hebrew/Egyptian nations the women should be enemies, yet they become partners in their attempt to preserve Moses' life.[146] Cassuto has noted how the motions of 'seeing', ראה, and 'taking', לקח, are mirrored in the functions of both of the mothers (vv. 2-3, 5-6),[147] and G.F. Davies has added to this list one instance of opposite action (חמר, to 'coat' v. 3; פתח, to 'open' v. 6) as well as a moment that reveals the social statuses of the respective women.[148] Even the emotional responses of the mothers are similar: they are both concerned about the welfare of the child.[149] However, this does not mean that the women are parallel in all of their actions. As Lapsley argues, a moment of irony is revealed when Moses' mother obeys Pharaoh's edict and renders her son to the Nile; yet the daughter of Pharaoh acts as presumably a Hebrew would and saves the boy from the river. She notes, 'ethnic identity is supposed to define loyalties, but they are here blurred by the ironies attending the women's behavior.'[150]

Notably, the stated irony could simply be intended as a stylistic feature in the text as has been argued by some;[151] however, that which the aforementioned position neglects to consider is the very

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[146] Weber, 'Jede Tochter,' p.57.
[147] Cassuto, *Exodus,* p.19.
[148] Moses' mother hides/cannot hide her son (vv. 2-3) whereas the daughter of Pharaoh sends a servant (v. 5) (Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.102). In addition, as Scholz has noted, in v.10, apart from Pharaoh's daughter being once addressed as the 'daughter of Pharaoh', the author uses female pronouns to refer to both the daughter of Pharaoh and the mother, creating ambiguity between their respective identities ('The Complexities,' pp.25-26).
[149] If we agree that v. 6 is part of the internal dialogue of the daughter of Pharaoh, then her emotions are revealed to us in a manner similar to the mother, whose thoughts concerning her son have been revealed in v. 2. Though the emotional responses are not the same, both women could be observed as showing compassion towards the child in so far as they decide to preserve his life rather than obey Pharaoh's edict.
[150] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.76. See, also, Reinhartz, *'Why Ask My Name?,'* pp.105-106.
[151] See n.140.

fact that confusion as regards ethnic representation implies indirectly that ethnic characterisations

are not completely sustainable. If Hebrews can act like Egyptians and *vice versa*, we have entered

into a world of indecision where making distinctions between nationalities becomes impossible due

to the characters' portrayed ability to choose their own liabilities regardless of their ethnicity.

Nevertheless, it could be suggested that such a characterisation is present in the story to preserve

Moses' life as is further argued by Lapsley,[152] but *contra* to the stated proposal we suggest that even

such an agenda does not unanimously portray either Moses' mother or the daughter of Pharaoh as a

sustainer of life. That is, although as a Hebrew Moses' mother produces life (Exodus 2:2), by

placing her son into the Nile, even with the precautions taken, she still puts his life in danger

(Exodus 2:3).[153] Likewise, although the daughter of Pharaoh does save Moses from the Nile

(Exodus 2:6), she also preserves the life of the one whom Yahweh would later use as an agent to

wreak havoc on the Egyptian nation (Exodus 7-11). Overall, it appears that even within the confines

of the 'women's world' (as opposed to the exodus proper) life and death do not remain as separate

entities.[154] Rather, the inference is that as the national identities of persons become ambiguous, so

does the difference between life and death: death will lurk at the door of life even if only as an

implication of an impending doom. Opposed concepts thus become merged within the two mothers,

whose parallel as well as opposed actions question the stability between the implied difference of

their respective nationalities.

However, the women are not the only point of ethnic confusion in the narrative. We also have the

main protagonist, Moses. As was noted in the structuralist reading, he is the incarnation of two

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[152] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.79.

[153] Such dangers could be, for example, drowning, starvation or being found by an unsympathetic Egyptian.

[154] Lapsley argues that the actions of the women in Exodus 1-4 offer a different perspective on the social constructions of ethnic divisions as well as class lines, which are integral to the exodus proper ('Saving Women,' p.83). However, in light of the above portrayal of the respective nationalities as well as their 'deities', we could note that rather than provide a 'different paradigm for divine action' as argued by Lapsley (p.83), the women's deeds display the indecision inherent in these dichotomies (class/ethnic/life-death) present throughout the narrative.

identities in one body, a 'son' to an Egyptian and a son to a Hebrew (Exodus 2:2, 10). It is important to notice that the terms בן, 'son', and בת, 'daughter', form a chiastic structure in Exodus 2:2-10, where the term 'son' is repeated only in vv. 2 and 10.[155] Once Moses has been recognised as a Hebrew 'son' in v. 2 his identity becomes questionable as he is referred to only with the terms ילד, 'boy' (vv. 3, 6-10), and נער, a possible reference to Moses' lack of legal status (v. 6).[156] Though he is briefly identified as a Hebrew in v. 6, his identity is only re-established in v. 10, where he becomes, as he was in v. 2, a 'son', but this time he is an Egyptian. Moses' dual identity as a Hebrew and as an Egyptian is thus well established in the text, questioning our understanding of Moses' ethnic background.[157]

To add to this confusion, we also have the ambiguities related to Moses' naming process. Although the fact that an Egyptian woman would give her adopted son a Hebrew name might appear strange, Greenberg has suggested that Pharaoh's daughter prophesied unknowingly when she gave Moses his name. Consequently, the grammatical ineptitude of her interpretation is no greater than other naming sequences elsewhere in the HB which rely on assonance rather than etymology.[158] Furthermore, as J.S. Ackerman has suggested, Pharaoh's daughter's poor grasp of Hebrew could be another ironical moment in the story, where instead of naming Moses' in accordance to his status as a 'passive babe,' she in fact unwittingly confirms Moses' future destiny.[159]

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[155] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.89. See, also, Weber, 'Jede Tochter,' p.53, who argues for an inclusio made with the lexemes בת־לוי/בת־פרעה and בת/בן.

[156] See Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.112-113.

[157] See E. Jay, "'When Egypt's Slain, I Say, Let Miriam Sing!': Women, Dissent and Marginality," in K. Tsuchiya (ed.), *Dissent and Marginality: Essays on the Borders of Literature and Religion,* SLR (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) p.83.

[158] Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus,* p.43. For example, the name 'Reuben' sounds like ראו בן, 'to see a son,' but gains a different interpretation based on a play on consonants (Yahweh looked [ראה] on my misery [בעניי], Genesis 29:32). See Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 16-50,* WBC 2 (Dallas: Word Books, 1994) p.243.

[159] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.94-95.

Yet, one cannot ignore the possibility that as the daughter of Pharaoh was an Egyptian, משה could also have been derived from Egyptian. Werner Schmidt has argued that 'Moses' could have been formed from the Egyptian verb *mś/mśj*, 'to give birth/produce', which could indicate either the active form 'the God X is born' or the passive 'the God X has born a child.' In our case the name 'Moses' could therefore simply be a short form of either of these names, of which the name of the particular god has fallen out.[160] Noth and Childs also prefer משה to have been derived from Egyptian, though they suggest that the narrator could not have been aware of the said origin.[161] Indeed, Noth claims that if the author would have been aware of the suggested meaning, he would not have failed to explain adequately the strangeness of the naming process.[162]

In favour of W.H. Schmidt, Noth and Childs we must admit that the possibility of an Egyptian aristocrat having bestowed upon Moses a name with a Hebrew etymology appears unlikely. Yet, because the text seems to prefer a Hebrew understanding, the possibility of משה having been a Hebrew name cannot be ruled out. An intriguing attempt to harmonise both the Egyptian and Hebrew origins of Moses' name has been suggested by Ina Willi-Plein. She argues that the author knew of Moses' Egyptian name and also its meaning, which she derives, as does W.H. Schmidt, from the Egyptian roots (*mś/mśj*) implying 'birth', of which the word 'son' is also formed. The author, Willi-Plein claims, plays with the stated meanings in the text by emphasizing the keyword ילד in its various forms (vv. 2-3, 6-9) to explain Moses' journey from a Hebrew, a Levite, to an Egyptian son. In addition, through the Hebrew etymology given in v. 10 the reader/hearer of the story gains a sense of direction for the birth-narrative, that is, not only the transition of Moses from a

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[160] Schmidt, *Exodus*, p.34. See, also, R.E. Clements, *Exodus*, CBC (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972) p.15; Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.81 and Baentsch, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri,* p.12.
[161] Noth, *Exodus,* p.26; Childs, *Exodus,* p.12
[162] Noth, Exodus, p.26.

Levite to the Egyptian court, but also the revelation of the birth-story as a precursor of the exodus proper.[163]

Indeed, such a duality of meaning would support Moses' ambiguous status in the narrative, which is made even stronger by Willi-Plein's assumed play on Moses' name in both its Egyptian and Hebrew forms in the story. [164] However, since we cannot be positive of the author's grasp of Egyptian, to determine whether משה is an exclusively Hebrew or Egyptian name must remain uncertain. Furthermore, a similar duality of meaning can be observed if we follow the interpretation given to משה in the text itself.

As was noted, משה is understood by Pharaoh's daughter as 'the one drawn out' since it was she who 'drew him out of the water' (v. 10). This interpretation emphasises the daughter's role in Moses' rescue and thus also Moses' Egyptian heritage. Yet, משה could also be interpreted with the better suited active verb, 'the one who draws out', referring to Moses' future role as the deliverer of the Hebrews. Both Hebrew and Egyptian, activity and passivity, reside in משה and we could suggest that משה suspends the dichotomy between Moses' respective identities and past/future functions. Indeed, as a 'passive' baby Moses is associated not just with his Egyptian but also with his Hebrew heritage (Exodus 2:2, 10) and as an 'active' man Moses' Hebrew roots might be in the foreground[165] but he is still not recognised by his countrymen as one of the Hebrews, at least not in status (Exodus 2:14). Later he is identified by the daughters of Reuel again as an Egyptian (2:19) and, furthermore, even

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[163] Willi-Plein, 'Ort,' pp.115-118. See, also, Weber, 'Jede Tochter,' p.51.
[164] See, also, Meyers, *Exodus,* p.44 and Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.81.
[165] See, for example, Exodus 2:6, 11 and 3:6. Thus, it seems safe to assume that the author wishes Moses to see himself and to be seen as a Hebrew (Durham, *Exodus,* p.19 and Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.82ff). However, such a wish is questioned by the broader framework of the text, which never manages completely to eradicate the relevance and/or the importance of Moses' Egyptian heritage. Dozeman has suggested that the biblical author emphasises the influence of the environment on Moses' character development: in Egypt he is identified as a Hebrew who, like Pharaoh, resorts to murder (Exodus 1:15-16, 22; 2:12); outside of Egypt he is recognised as an Egyptian who resorts to saving life (2:16ff; Dozeman, *Exodus,* pp.56-57). This reading is most appealing; however, it does not quite account for the complexity of Moses' adoption as well as his subsequent identification as an Egyptian (Exodus 2:19).

when Moses resides with his countrymen, he is not one of 'them': he is not a slave, and even when he is a slave to God, he is still in a favoured position above the rest (Exodus 32:7-14; Numbers 11:24-25; 12:6-8).[166]

Therefore, it appears that because משה can be understood as either passive or active, as either Egyptian or Hebrew, משה could also be claimed to question any clear distinctions that can be made between the respective dichotomies. Like Jezreel in Sherwood's reading of Hosea,[167] משה can inhabit several dichotomies without erasing any of the meanings associated with it. משה could thus become the *pharmakon* in our reading, a concept with two opposed meanings, where משה can imply both activity and passivity, the past and the future, Hebrew and Egyptian, without favouring one term above the other.

4.3 Men/Women

The dichotomy between men and women is established in Pharaoh's speech where, as was noted earlier, the baby boys are considered as a threat to the Egyptian empire and sentenced to death (Exodus 1:16, 22). Although this ideological premise is on occasion ridiculed in the story (Exodus 1:19; 2:2-10), the notion of male pre-eminence appears to be held intact in the overall narrative since, as Weems stated, it is the men (Moses and Aaron) who ultimately rescue the Hebrews.[168] Furthermore, as Exum has noted, by employing several women to save Moses the power the women wield in the narrative is diffused considerably.[169] For example, if Moses' mother had been the only 'saviour' in the narrative, she could have emerged as a heroine. By adding at least two other women, her role is diminished. In addition, as Fuchs argues, not only does this division of responsibility

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[166] See, also, Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.82.
[167] Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* pp.245-246.
[168] Weems, 'The Hebrew Women,' p.33.
[169] Exum, 'Second Thoughts,' p.83. See, also, Fuchs, 'Exodus 1-2,' p.315.

result in none of the women being able to claim prominence based on their actions, but they also remain either anonymous, foreign, or vaguely characterised, lessening the probability of any claims for future significance.[170] Therefore, we must note that although the women play a decisive role in Exodus 1-2, they could also be claimed to serve patriarchal interests and thus do not readily present a moment of subversion in the story.

However, the manner in which the women are presented above is not the only way to read Exodus 1-2. In the following, we aspire to discover instances of women's power in the story, as was demonstrated by Exum in an earlier chapter, and perform a deconstructive reading of their roles in order to produce an alternative understanding of the narrative. To approach such a reading, two issues are of importance to consider: firstly, we need to address in more detail the reasoning inherent in the midwives' excuse in Exodus 1:19 and, secondly, to discuss whether the actions of the women in Exodus 2:1-10 can be described as characteristic of women only or, in the words of Lapsley, as specifically 'women's values.'[171]

Most biblical commentators have not failed to notice the complete charade the midwives put together to explain their insubordination to Pharaoh.[172] As Dennis (with the help of Jonathan Magonet) has pointed out, the explanation given by the midwives is a smart ploy that plays to Pharaoh's gender and racial prejudices. While comparing the quick, even 'animal-like'[173] reproductive capabilities of the 'Hebrews' (who have given birth even before the midwives have

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[170] Fuchs, 'Exodus 1-2,' p.315. Reinhartz claims that although the anonymity of the women emphasises the role of Moses in the story, the women's anonymity also 'highlights and subverts' their typified roles as mothers/sisters/daughters (*Why Ask My Name?*, pp.102-106; Shectman, *Women*, p.109). However, since these roles are still centered around Moses, whether such a portrayal should be viewed as affirmative is open to debate.
[171] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.85.
[172] See n.60.
[173] See p.49 n.8.

come to their aid) to that of the 'Egyptian women',[174] the midwives not only compare the Egyptians

favourably with the Hebrews[175] but also draw their excuse from a realm of experience with which

Pharaoh would not be familiar. As Dennis notes,

> the pharaoh, being a man, and therefore never having witnessed the Hebrew
> women, or any other women for that matter, giving birth, believes it [the
> excuse]![176]

Indeed, the midwives' ploy cleverly incorporates a mix of preconceptions, a story about 'animal-

like' Hebrews and the more drawn-out births of the Egyptian women, which Pharaoh on the

account of his own limited experience with childbirth, would be unlikely to question.

However, if we accept the midwives' tale as a mix of prejudice and presumptions, even as a

'transparent lie', [177] we must enquire as to why, if the lie is so 'transparent,' would Pharaoh fall for

it? Granted, we could suggest that he is simply a foreign fool, a dumb foreigner masquerading as a

'wise' king;[178] yet, foolishness *per se* does not adequately explain Pharaoh's behaviour or, rather, it

does not explain the cause of his foolishness. As Dennis indicated earlier, it is most intriguing that in

the story the reason behind Pharaoh's ignorance does not appear to be his nationality or even his

status. Rather, it is his sex that renders him ignorant towards birth: as a man, never having witnessed

a birth, Pharaoh is unable to spot the midwives' trickery.[179] Thus, whilst it may be necessary to

portray Pharaoh as a foolish, foreign ruler, in order to trick Pharaoh in matters of childbirth it is also

necessary to ridicule him first and foremost as a man, regardless of his status or nationality. Like

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[174] Note that the Egyptians are described as 'Egyptian women,' whereas the Hebrews are merely described by their nationality.

[175] Renate Ellemenreich has suggested that the midwives must have attended to both Egyptian and Hebrew women in order to compare them ('2. Mose 1, 15-21: Pua und Schiphra – zwei Frauen im Widerstand,' in E.R. Schmidt, M. Korenhof and R. Jost (eds), *Feministisch gelesen: 32 ausgewählte bibeltexte für Gruppen, Gemeinden und Gottesdienste,* Vol. 1 [Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1988] p.42). See, also, Durham, *Exodus*, p.12. Yet, if one accepts the excuse as a lie, for the midwives to have attended Egyptians becomes unnecessary.

[176] Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' pp.93-94. See, also, Meyers, *Exodus*, pp.40-41.

[177] Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' p.93. See, also, Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.87.

[178] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.87; Exum, 'Second Thoughts,' p.79.

[179] Note Sarna, who argues that midwifery was an exclusively female profession during the times described (*Exodus*, p.6).

Yahweh who knows (Exodus 2:25) and Pharaoh who does not know (Exodus 1:8; 5:2), the midwives' advantage lies in their knowledge, in the knowledge of the 'other' sex which Pharaoh as a man does not possess.

Understood in this light, the female trickery is displayed in its full force. It not only ridicules foreign rulers but, more importantly, the superiority of male wisdom. In addition, if we view Pharaoh as a death-dealing demi-god, as presented earlier, the midwives' trickery could even be suggested to challenge the dichotomy between women and the divine. If we are to view Pharaoh and Yahweh via the image of the *parergon*, and thus also Pharaoh's knowledge (or the lack of it) as a *parergon* to that of Yahweh,[180] we could claim that through Pharaoh the entire enterprise of divine knowledge in Exodus is challenged, unsettled by the notion of feminine wisdom.

This same potency of female authority presents itself also in Exodus 2:1-10. We will argue that within this passage the women are portrayed as examples and precursors of the forthcoming liberation, or, as Lapsley notes, 'the transgression of gender, ethnicity, and class inscribed in this story of deliverance offer a template for the divine liberation.'[181] In order to illustrate this principle and also to answer the second issue as regards whether the values presented in Exodus 2 are typical 'women's values', we will study some of the works of Siebert-Hommes, G.F. Davies and Lapsley, all of whom have done significant work on the semantics of Exodus 2:1-10.

Firstly, we will return to the corresponding actions of the respective mothers as described earlier, which included perception (ראה, 'to see') and movement (לקח, 'to take'). Within movement we

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[180] Note that although the respective Pharaohs are portrayed as lacking in knowledge whereas Yahweh is described in possession of it (Exodus 1:8; 2:25; 5:2), even Yahweh needs the women in the story to exemplify the values he would accommodate during the exodus proper and thus is not exempt from his lack of female knowledge. See pp.140ff.

[181] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.79. Although the 'divine liberation' that Lapsley refers to here is the 'liberation of all of humanity,' presumably by the salvific act of Christ, based on the following semantic analysis her comments could be equally applicable to the exodus proper.

could also incorporate הלך, 'to go/walk' (2:7-9), ירד, 'to come/go down' (2:5), and שלח, 'to send' (2:5). In addition, a semantic field of communication can also be observed in the text: both אמר, 'to say', and קרא, 'to call', are used in the narrative (2:7-10). Therefore, it is striking, as G.F. Davies notes, that when Yahweh enters the story, all of the above semantic fields will reappear.[182] Indeed, starting off in Exodus 2:23 and 25 Yahweh will 'see' the Hebrews and answer their 'cry'. In Exodus 3 Moses will go 'to see' the bush and is afraid to 'look at' God (vv. 3, 6). Yahweh himself will 'come down' to deliver the Hebrews in Exodus 3:8 and consequently Moses is 'sent' to Pharaoh (3:10-15) so that the king of Egypt would let the Hebrews 'go' (3:18, 21). In addition, on various occasions, either Moses, Aaron or Yahweh are related to speaking activities (4:10-11, 14-15, 30).[183] Such literary harmony is hardly coincidental, possibly intended to foreshadow Yahweh's upcoming rescue, as suggested by Siebert-Hommes and Lapsley;[184] however, if the intention behind the literary harmony is merely to foreshadow Yahweh's actions, it seems that the author might have written into his text more than he bargained for. Though the list of associations could be longer, the one above suffices to illustrate the fact that in his acts of, for example, 'coming down', 'sending' and 'seeing,' Yahweh could be suggested to have adopted the path set for him by the women. Indeed, we must note that because Yahweh is notably absent in Exodus 1-2, any claims based on 'divine involvement' are pre-empted, that is, arguments in favour of the deity having directed the women in their actions.[185] Instead, the women are independent and self-sufficient, an example Yahweh will be most eager to follow. As Lapsley states in another part of her article, the women's deeds introduce

> the values of deliverance even before YHWH or Moses has begun to think
> of leading the Hebrews out of Egypt. When God enters the scene and in a

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[182] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.109.
[183] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.109-110.
[184] Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!,* pp.56-57, and Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.88.
[185] Although an admission is given as to the (hidden) activity of God within the theme of proliferation (Exodus 1:7; 20-21), *contra* Ackerman ('Literary Context,' pp.90-91) and Sarna (*Exploring Exodus,* p.27) we must note that Yahweh enters the story as an active partner only in Exodus 2:23 and thus to assume him to be involved within the women's actions in Exodus 2:1-10 seems misguided (Gowan, *Theology*, pp.1-2; Osherow, 'Brides of Blood,' p.47).

> sense takes over the task of deliverance from the women, at that moment
> the transgressive 'women's values' become the normative 'divine
> values.'[186]

We could thus suggest that the women do more than 'foreshadow'. Their actions find an imitator in the male deity, causing disquiet in the dichotomy between women and men, even between women and the divine. In fact, if we perceive Yahweh as mimicing the women's deeds, we could suggest that with another kind of a 'Freudian' slip, Yahweh's acts promote the qualities of the women. Like the *supplement* as illustrated by Sherwood, where 'the superior term is always already dependent on, and contaminated by, its inferior,'[187] Yahweh, the 'superior' deity could be claimed to be dependent and reliant on his 'inferiors', the women and their actions, in order to establish his own rule.

In addition, the dichotomy between the women and the divine is disturbed even further by some of the verbal phrases the women are subjects of in Exodus 2:1-10. G.F. Davies has noted the appearance of צפן, 'to hide' (2:2-3), יצב, 'to stand firm' (2:4), and חמל, 'to have pity' (2:6), and concludes that their occurrence in the narrative could 'intimate' God's presence while Yahweh himself remains notably absent.[188] Indeed, God is the most common subject of 'hiding' in the HB (Job 17:4; 21:19; Psalm 31:20; Proverbs 2:7),[189] and, in addition, Lapsley has noted that pity is not a value tied exclusively to women,[190] which also supports G.F. Davies' observation that out of 41 uses of חמל in the HB, 21 have God as the subject.[191] The implications of יצב will be discussed later; however, within close proximity of יצב we also have ירד, 'to go down' (v. 5), which, as J.S. Ackerman has pointed out, often refers to God's movement in history, most remarkably in the tower

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[186] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.87. Here Lapsley is referring to such 'women's values' as, for example, deflecting violence and preserving life (p.85). See, also, Osherow, 'Brides of Blood,' pp.46-51. Although the women could be portrayed as life savers, we must note that the women's' actions could be argued to cause both life and death as was stated before. Thus, we suggest that in the women's actions a moment of indecision is portrayed, an element also present in Yahweh's deeds, which likewise produce both life and death (Exodus 1-2; 7-14).
[187] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.182.
[188] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.110-112.
[189] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.110-111.
[190] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.77. See, also, Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' p.100.
[191] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.112.

of Babel narrative in Genesis 11:7.[192] Therefore, if the respective mothers are all connected with verbal phrases that are often associated with Yahweh, are we merely to conclude that the women 'intimate' God's presence? Not in the least. Rather, we suggest that God becomes manifest through the intelligence, the functions and the emotions of these women while he himself remains absent, questioning the exact difference between the women's actions and those of God (we will return to this issue later).

Intriguingly, this act of manifestation is nowhere clearer than in the appearance of Pharaoh's daughter. Siebert-Hommes has noted how the designations 'Elohim' and the 'king of Egypt' are contrasted in Exodus 1:15-21; 2:23 (both are mentioned four times);[193] however, the designations 'Pharaoh' and 'Pharaoh's daughter' are both mentioned five times (Exodus 1:11, 19, 22; 2:5, 7-10, 15).[194] In Exodus 2:5-10 it thus appears that 'Pharaoh' does not find his mortal enemy in 'Yahweh', whose name only appears in Exodus 3:14, but rather in his own daughter.[195] This could be deemed as appropriate since Pharaoh's daughter displays several qualities that will become characteristic of Yahweh in the exodus story: she will, for example, come down and see (Exodus 2:5); speak and have pity (v. 6).[196] As a subject of the above verbal phrases, Pharaoh's daughter further problematises the distinction between the woman and the divine: she emerges as a subject in her own right, but she also gives us a glimpse of the absent deity. We could even suggest that Pharaoh's daughter is yet another example of the *supplement* at work, the sign of the deferred presence where

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[192] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.81-82, 91-92.

[193] However, note the four mentions of Elohim in Exodus 2:24-25 which tilts the scales in favour of God.

[194] Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!*, pp.98-99.

[195] Such a reading is especially appropriate if we follow Weber, who has noted how Pharaoh's daughter shares in the characteristics of both Moses' mother and Pharaoh: like the Hebrew, Pharaoh's daughter is a woman and she preserves life; like her father, she is an Egyptian and powerful ('Jede Tochter,' p.59). Pharaoh's daughter thus partakes in the supposed characteristics of both the Egyptian and Hebrew races, understanding of which is similar to our reading of the relationship between the respective ethnicities/deities as presented earlier.

[196] See Fretheim, who notes that the activity of the daughter of Pharaoh 'is directly parallel to that of God with Israel' (*Exodus,* p.38).

the woman's existence is needed to hint at Yahweh's intentions even while he himself remains absent.

However, where do all of the above arguments leave the acclaimed protagonist of our thesis, Miriam? As was noted in the introduction, once we have discovered the significance of the other main characters in the narrative, Miriam's role becomes much more apparent. This is because Miriam's position in the story touches upon all of the previous binary oppositions either directly or by implication (Yahweh/Pharaoh; Hebrew/Egyptian; life/death).[197] Having already examined those, we are able to pursue an analysis exclusively of the manner her role challenges the notion of male superiority in the passage without digression, specifically the pre-eminence of Moses.

To begin with, we can note the description of Miriam's faith as presented in Exodus 2:4, which is portrayed via the verb יצב. This verb, as G.F. Davies has demonstrated, is often translated as 'stand afar', even though within the HB the verb 'most generally applies to an encounter with God or a divinely elected leader,' of which an encounter with God is much more common.[198] Indeed, that a divine experience is anticipated also in Exodus 2 is further supported by the presence of ירד, 'to come down' in the following verse, which, as was noted before, often indicates God's movement in history (Genesis 11:7; Exodus 3:8). In addition, within the broad framework of the exodus story we find יצב used again in Exodus 14:13, where there seems to be an attempt to connect its appearance with that in Exodus 2:4. This link is achieved not only through the portrayal of the following events, that is, the rescue of the Hebrews/Moses through water (Exodus 2:5-10; 14:15-31), but also through the appearance of specific phrases, such as על־שפת היאר/הים ('upon the shore of the river/sea',

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[197] The dichotomy between Yahweh and Pharaoh is present in the background due to the assumed death threat in Exodus 1:22; the opposition between Hebrew/Egyptian appears in the portrayal of Pharaoh's daughter and Moses' mother/Miriam; and the dichotomy of life/death retains its place as a central theme throughout the story.
[198] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.111-112. Davies claims that of the 46 times the verb is used in the HB, only 7 refer to taking one's position (in battle), 8 to being in the presence of a divinely elected leader, and 26 to standing before God, or God being the subject of the standing.

Exodus 2:3; 14:30), סוף ('reed', Exodus 2:3, 5; 13:18) and ראה, 'to see (Exodus 2:3, 5; 14:13). In Exodus 14:13, יצב is closely connected with the Hebrews' witness of Yahweh's salvation ('Stand firm and see the deliverance of Yahweh') and thus, as Siebert-Hommes notes, יצב could be understood as an encouragement for the Hebrews to trust in 'the saving presence of Yahweh.'[199] Although Exodus 14:13 will be studied in more detail later, here we can note that the use of יצב in both Exodus 2:4 and 14:13 seems to indicate that יצב implies a 'faith' or a 'conviction' of some kind. Specific to Exodus 2:4, this could imply that, as G.F. Davies suggests, Miriam perceives Moses to be the leader elected by God, or that Miriam bears witness to the works of God, or both.[200]

We have thus arrived at two possible readings of Exodus 2:4. We can suggest that Miriam's faith is either directed towards Moses and his status as one elected by Yahweh, or that Miriam's faith is in anticipation of a work Yahweh is about to commit. The first of these options seems to be in accordance with the structuralist reading, where we suggested Moses to be the centre of the story and accordingly also the centre of Miriam's actions. However, the second option directs our focus away from Moses and onto the expected 'work of God', which in light of the following verses would be Moses' miraculous rescue from the water (Exodus 2:5-10).

Although one might wonder as to the exact difference between the two readings proposed, it is interesting to note that in light of the way in which Moses' rescue is executed, the 'work of God' that we are to expect in Exodus 2:5ff is, in fact, not a 'work of God' at all. Indeed, since Yahweh is not even present in the story, to understand the rescue as somehow effected by God seems mistaken, as was noted earlier.[201] Rather, we suggest that in Exodus 2:5-10 the 'work of God' becomes identified with the 'work of the women.' Such a reading is especially appropriate if we understand

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[199] Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!,* p.118.
[200] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.112.
[201] See n.185.

Pharaoh's daughter as a trace of divine presence in the story: while in v. 4 we are told that Miriam יצב, expects a 'work of God', in v. 5 Pharaoh's daughter ירד, 'comes down' (cf. Genesis 11:7; Exodus 3:8), and gives us a glimpse of the divine presence, of the 'work of God' in the story. Yet, the said work is one the daughter of Pharaoh will effect herself! It should be noted that by manifesting a trace of Yahweh's presence, Pharaoh's daughter does not make Yahweh fully present: it is still the daughter of Pharaoh who will 'come down,' 'see,' and 'send' rather than the deity. However, by giving us a trace of divine intent through the verbal phrases used we suggest that the text invites us to identify Moses' rescue with a 'work of God', even when the deity is not present in the text to effect it. The 'work of God' becomes thus merged with, even replaced by, the 'work of the women' in the narrative: it is the women who effect a work that can be identified with a divine purpose rather than *vice versa*.

Such a reading subsequently questions our first understanding of the verb יצב, which identified the object of Miriam's faith to be Moses' status as a divinely elected leader. Indeed, if we understand the object of Miriam's faith to be not Moses but the 'work of God' or rather, the 'work of the women,' then the need for Yahweh's intervention or even Moses' election becomes questionable. That is, if the women can effect a 'work of God' without the need for the active participation of either Moses or Yahweh, the necessity to elevate Moses to a position of a divine mediator becomes open to debate.

Furthermore, we must note that Exodus 2:4 is not the only occasion where Miriam's actions could be suggested to question Moses' pre-eminence in the exodus. Another such instance can be observed in Miriam's communiqué with Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2:7-9. Indeed, her stance before the daughter of Pharaoh could be likened to the stand Moses and Aaron take before Pharaoh later in the story (Exodus 5:1ff). Such a connection can be observed via the already stated fact that Moses' fate

appears to be portrayed as corresponding to that of the Hebrews: their fortunes are intertwined not only in their salvation through water (Exodus 2:5-10; 14:1-31), but also in the act of mediation that occurs before the stated event. Just as Miriam suggests a solution to Pharaoh's daughter regarding Moses (Exodus 2:7), Moses and Aaron suggest a solution to the 'Hebrew problem' before Pharaoh (Exodus 5:1). Moreover, as Yahweh needs Moses to 'go' to save the Hebrews (3:10), Pharaoh's daughter needs Miriam to 'go' to fetch a nurse (2:8). As Moses provides a link between Yahweh/Pharaoh and the Hebrews (Exodus 5:1; 6:6ff), Miriam provides a link between Pharaoh's daughter and the Hebrews/Moses. Both of the siblings thus act as mediators; however, there are several aspects of Miriam's performance which could be claimed to outshine the deeds of her brother.

Firstly, as was stated earlier, Miriam's proposal to Pharaoh's daughter has gained praise due to its carefully crafted nature. Exum describes Miriam's speech as a 'daring proposal, ostensibly offered as a helpful suggestion.'[202] The careful phrasing of the proposition ('Shall I go and call for you a nursing woman from among the Hebrews to nurse the boy for you?' v. 7) suggests a solution to the issue at hand, as if the daughter of Pharaoh had already decided to keep the baby, and by the repetition of 'for you' Miriam could be portrayed as caring for the needs of Pharaoh's daughter.[203] Indeed, Miriam's proposition is certainly persuasive, even empathetic;[204] however, whether it is manipulative depends on our perception of Pharaoh's daughter. If she is, as J.S. Ackerman suggested in the structuralist reading, a 'dumb' foreigner,[205] then Miriam's proposal could perhaps be understood as coercive. However, if we accept that Pharaoh's daughter presents us with a trace of the divine intent in the story, then Miriam's suggestion could be claimed to act as the trigger which

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[202] Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.55.
[203] Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.55; Cassuto, *Exodus,* 20; Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' p.101.
[204] See R.G. Branch, 'Women who Win with Words: Deliverance via Persuasive Communication,' *IS* 37, 2 (2003) pp.295-299.
[205] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.86.

makes this intent a reality. By suggesting the fetching of a wet-nurse, Miriam begins the legal procedure which, as Childs noted earlier, often led to the adoption of foundlings.[206] Miriam's proposition thus takes the first step to actualise the divine purpose and starts the process to make the arrangements for Moses' adoption. That which makes Miriam's suggestion crafty, we could argue, is therefore not, in fact, her powers to deceive but her powers to perceive the divine purpose and to act accordingly.

In contrast, the proposal that Moses makes to Pharaoh, even under divine impetus, falls on deaf ears (Exodus 5:1ff). Whether as the result of Pharaoh or Yahweh hardening Pharaoh's heart, it will take approximately ten chapters for Moses to arrange the Hebrews' release, the consequences of which, as Gunn noted earlier, are much deserved and/or undeserved human suffering and death (Exodus 7-11).[207] Understood in such a way, we might be predisposed to view Miriam's mode of intervention as preferable to that of Moses. Whilst the deliverance implemented by Moses might display more grandeur as regards the function of miraculous signs, wonders and death, Miriam's plan of action requires intelligence, little effort and even less time, achieving her task swiftly and without bloodshed. In this regard Miriam's function in the text could indeed be described as life saving,[208] even humane, as opposed to the scheme realised by Moses, which is arguably among the longest and the most drawn out chain of negotiations in the entire HB.[209]

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[206] Childs, 'The Birth,' pp.112-114.

[207] Gunn, 'Exodus 1-14,' p.89.

[208] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.79. See, also, Osherow, who notes the absence of violence in the deeds of the women in Exodus 1-2 ('Brides of Blood,' p.48).

[209] We could argue that since the plan to liberate the Hebrews is Yahweh's (Exodus 3:7-10), Moses is acting only as Yahweh's stooge and thus we should not blame him for acting upon Yahweh's orders. However, it is interesting that Moses never seems to question the morality of Yahweh's actions. Rather, that which Moses questions is his ability to carry out Yahweh's orders (Exodus 3:11; 4:10), Yahweh's ability to effect his plan (Exodus 5:22-23), whether the Hebrews will believe him (Exodus 4:1) and whether Pharaoh will be willing to let the Hebrews go (Exodus 6:12). Moses never questions whether the means Yahweh takes to effect the liberation are commendable. In addition, even when Moses shows some initiative during the plague narratives, his actions remain in agreement with those of Yahweh (Exodus 11:4-8; 14:13-14). Thus, even if the manner the exodus is effected is not for Moses to decide, he is still a (willing) participant in Yahweh's endeavour. See, also, Gunn, 'Exodus 1-14,' pp.84-87.

Secondly, we can observe that Miriam's acts of intervention are followed swiftly by acts of obedience, a characteristic which, as was noted earlier, appeared to be valued most highly by Yahweh (Exodus 4:11-12, 14-17). [210] Accordingly, in Exodus 2:7 Miriam emerges at the side of Pharaoh's daughter immediately once she has discovered Moses,[211] and, in addition, once Miriam has been given the order to fetch the wet-nurse, she obeys the instruction without delay (v. 8). Likewise, the daughter of Pharaoh's agreement with Miriam's plan in v. 8 seems almost instantaneous, and she only adds to Miriam's proposition that which is necessary to implement some of the legal requirements (v. 9).[212] Although the conformity of the daughter of Pharaoh with Miriam's plan could be perceived as ironical, as was suggested by J.S. Ackerman and G.F. Davies,[213] if we view Pharaoh's daughter as a glimpse of the divine presence in the narrative, her response could also be interpreted as being in perfect accordance with this intent. Unlike Pharaoh, who needs to address his people with a persuasive speech before being certain of their compliance (1:9-10), Pharaoh's daughter undoes her father's scheme by the simple command 'go!' (2:8), a command even Pharaoh is later forced to accept (Exodus 12:31-32).[214] Furthermore, even Moses is told to 'go' (3:10), yet he needs a couple of chapters worth of persuasion (and some miraculous signs) to accept Yahweh's commission (3:1-4:17). Even at the very end of the conversation Moses still begs God to send someone else (Exodus 4:13), which leads to Yahweh's wrath (4:14), and we thus never receive a confirmation of Moses' acceptance of his mission.[215] Subsequently, we could suggest that both Moses and Pharaoh could be seen as examples of the fact that lengthy conversations or persuasive speeches do not necessarily indicate intelligence, or a deep conviction.

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[210] See pp.126-127.
[211] In fact, Miriam appears so quickly that we are not even certain how she got there. See, Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.93; Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.93.
[212] See n.94.
[213] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.93, and Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.109.
[214] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.114.
[215] Gunn, 'Exodus 1-14,' pp.82-88.

Rather, in their brevity the daughter of Pharaoh and Miriam exemplify the merits of obedience and efficiency, and consequently bring into question the virtues of their male counterparts.

Thirdly, and most importantly, although both Miriam and Moses act as mediators in the exodus, it is only Miriam who takes responsibility for both the design and the execution of her plan. Indeed, fetching a wet-nurse for the child is an idea both devised and vocalised by Miriam (Exodus 2:7);[216] however, Moses receives his instructions from Yahweh (Exodus 3:4ff) and thus he can only at most question Yahweh's dealings (Exodus 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10; 5:22-23) but is unable to implement his own agenda. Rather, Moses occupies only the place of the protagonist (or in structuralist terms, the place of the 'subject') at any one time, whereas Yahweh consistently reserves for himself the place of the instigator (or the 'sender').[217] Conversely, Miriam acts in both roles concurrently: she is the sender and the subject simultaneously. The clearly established hierarchy between the human subject and the divine sender, between Moses and Yahweh, becomes fractured within Miriam, who conjoins both roles in a joyous harmony at a time when Yahweh is notably absent.

Indeed, Miriam is the first person in the exodus to devise and successfully follow through a plan to secure the future of her kin (Exodus 2:7-9).[218] It is she who stations herself to see what would be done to her brother (v. 4);[219] it is she who communicates with Pharaoh's daughter (v. 7); it is she who comes up with the plan to get a wet-nurse (v. 7); and it is also she who gets the nurse and thus begins the proceedings to secure her brother's future (vv.8-10). Moreover, Miriam is the first person

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[216] Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.93; Exum, 'You Shall Let,' p.55; Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.20.

[217] Notably there are two exceptions to this pattern in Exodus 11:4-8 and 14:13-14. However, as Gunn notes, for most of the plague narratives Moses acts as a puppet of Yahweh ('Exodus 1-14,' pp.84-87). See, also, n.209.

[218] Although the midwives and Moses' mother save lives, the result of their actions is either not wholly successful or planned out. The midwives save the Hebrew baby boys, yet their deed results in Pharaoh's 'final solution' in Exodus 1:22. In addition, although Moses' mother constructs the ark (Exodus 2:3), she does not appear to have a plan as regards who would discover the child.

[219] Since Miriam is the active subject of יצב, it seems plausible to assume she would have positioned herself in v. 4 (Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!,* pp.117-118)

in the exodus story to ידע, 'to know' (v. 4). As was argued earlier, the theme of knowledge is of extreme importance in the HB and it is mostly the prerogative of Yahweh: he is the God who knows (2:25; 3:7) whilst the Egyptians/Hebrews/Pharaohs are worked upon *to* know that Yahweh is God.[220] Yet, Miriam appears in Exodus 2:4 without any divine persuasion and/or revelation; rather, in light of the use of both יצב and ירד in the surrounding verses as noted earlier,[221] her knowledge could be indicative of the deliverance that is about to take place:[222] she is to 'know' the 'work of God' or the 'work of the women' as realised in Exodus 2:5ff. Such an understanding of Miriam's function establishes a conundrum with the divine knowledge of Yahweh in the story, already disturbed by feminine wisdom as demonstrated by the midwives in Exodus 1:19.[223] That is, if a plan of deliverance can be both created and executed in the mind of a young woman (Exodus 2:8), this might be considered to call into question the suitability of the scheme implemented later by Yahweh and Moses. Indeed, the scheme devised by Yahweh requires not only bloodshed and violence (Exodus 7-11), but, as noted, it also appeared to be realised mainly for the purpose of the various subjects (the Hebrews/the Egyptians/Pharaoh) knowing that Yahweh is God. This may lead us to question not only the means of deliverance but the rather egocentric motive behind Yahweh's acts, an attitude which seems to be utterly lacking in the deeds undertaken by Miriam. After all, Miriam does not gain anything through her act: her future is not made secure nor is her life removed from danger. If Miriam can thus be an example of both the planner and the protagonist without the need for violence or the reassurance and/or the recognition seemingly required by Yahweh, her actions could be claimed to make the demand for a divine planner and a human mediator debatable and potentially redundant.

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[220] See n.120.
[221] See pp.144-146.
[222] Notably, neither the content of Miriam's (Exodus 2:4) nor Yahweh's knowledge (Exodus 2:25) is explicitly stated, albeit in Exodus 3:7 Yahweh is portrayed as 'knowing' the Hebrews' 'suffering'. The result of the knowledge of Miriam and Yahweh can, however, be seen in the parallel as well as diverse acts of liberation both of them undertake (see, also, Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses,* p.45).
[223] See pp.138-140.

To conclude, it could be argued that Miriam problematises the prevalence of man in the exodus, that is, the prevalence of Moses and even that of Yahweh. She unites within herself the two complete opposites in the narrative, the woman and the man, the woman and the divine, the planner and the protagonist, thus becoming *the* undecideable and *the* other. She is the architect, the subject, the designer and the implementer, and most importantly, the woman, the already existing wholly 'other.' Miriam's presence in Exodus 2:4-9 could even be portrayed in similar terms to those uttered by Elaine Showalter and used by Sherwood to depict Gomer in Hosea 1-3: she is the 'the wild card, the joker in the pack, who upsets the logocentric and phallocentric stack of appellations.'[224] It is her presence that most radically questions the ideological framework of the exodus story, that is, the prevalence of man, the preference for a violent liberation, the centrality of a divine planner and the need for a male saviour.

5. Conclusion

We started this section by pondering over Exum's theory about female power and discussing a comment made by G.F. Davies, which seemed to connect the women's biological functions with those of their intellect. In the course of this analysis, some of these comments have been found to be of value. As suggested by Exum, wondrous moments of women's power have been concealed within Exodus 1-2, some of which were discovered with the aid of Davies' exceptional semantic analyses.

First, we approached the description of Yahweh and Pharaoh in the story and concluded that although they appeared as opponents, their respective characteristics made them each other's *parergons*, which questioned the difference between them as well as that of the faith systems they represented. Likewise, we ascertained that the difference between the Egyptian and the Hebrew

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[224] E. Showalter, 'Critical Cross-Dressing,' p.124 as quoted by Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* p.298.

nationalities became unstable in the actions performed by the women in the story: their deeds were portrayed to trespass the possible recognition of the Egyptians with death and the Hebrews with life, which problematised the division between the respective ethnicities. In addition, the most unusual naming sequence as regards our understanding of משה (Exodus 2:10) opened the possibility of Moses' identification as a Hebrew and as an Egyptian simultaneously without preference given to either nationality.

Next we studied the portrayal of the women in Exodus 1-2 in more detail. And, as Exum had suggested earlier, we discovered moments of feminine power concealed within the narrative. We could first observe the outworking of this power in the midwives, who outwitted a demi-god in a moment of male foolishness. It was continued in the portrayal of Moses' mother and the daughter of Pharaoh, who not only manifested Yahweh's presence in the narrative but served as examples of the forthcoming liberation that Yahweh would provide. Miriam, in turn, unsettled the notion of male pre-eminence by questioning the position of both Moses and Yahweh in the exodus story. She combined divine intent with human action, the *wo*man with the deity, transcending the most controversial of binaries in one act of conformity. Overall, we discovered that through the actions of the women we were able to portray the instability of the ideology of difference in the story. Rather than being contained by the narrative,[225] we claimed that the women's power escaped the internment of patriarchal hegemony from within the very text that sought to control it, indicating the volatility of male domination.

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[225] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.96.

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Chapter 4

Voice and Counter-Voice: Exodus 15:20-21

1. Introduction

> One cannot help wondering whether their [the women's] revolutionary celebration of God's victory for the weak through the weak is linked with various leading women in order not only to prove the point but also to tame the force of the message.
>
> George J. Brooke[1]

In his article, 'Power to the Powerless: A Long-Lost Song of Miriam,' George Brooke examines the fragments of a song discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, a possible extension to the brief Song of Miriam in Exodus 15:21. Within the extracts, Brooke notes that the topic of God achieving victory through 'the weak and downtrodden' for the 'powerless'[2] appears to be strongly indicated, and this is a subject which in the biblical corpus is often associated with other songs supposedly composed by women, such as the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and the Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10).[3] Brooke's proposal above, namely that the proclamation of God's victory through the 'weak' would have been mainly associated with female Israelite leaders in order not only to 'make a point' but also to 'tame the message', is intriguing. That is, specifically to our research, we must raise the question whether the message in the Song of Miriam is 'tamed' by the fact that a woman is singing it, or is the message retained but 'a point is made' of women's second-class status within Hebrew society? It is to these questions and to many others that this chapter will endeavour to find an answer.

However, before we can commence this quest, some issues relating to methodology need to be addressed. Firstly, we acknowledge that both the story of the opening of the Sea of Reeds in Exodus 14 as well as the following songs in Exodus 15 are extremely complex pieces of both prose and

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[1] 'Power to the Powerless: A Long-Lost Song of Miriam,' *BAR* 20, 3 (1994) p.64.
[2] Brooke, 'Power to the Powerless,' p.63.
[3] Brooke, 'Power to the Powerless,' p.64.

poetry with possibly several editorial stages and/or sources;[4] however, since in this thesis the texts under research are approached in their final form, such issues will not be given further consideration. Secondly, some adaptation to the structuralist/deconstructive approach that has so far been used is required, since the Song of Miriam is a piece of poetry rather than prose and, thirdly, the narrative material surrounding Exodus 15 does not contain a single mention of Miriam (or any other women), which therefore questions the usefulness of conducting a reading of the Song's immediate background (Exodus 14). Due to these issues, we will approach the structuralist/deconstructive analysis of Exodus 15 in the subsequent manner. In order to appreciate the event in which the Song of the Sea and the Song of Miriam were performed, a short structuralist reading of Exodus 14 regarding any issues relevant to our research will be presented, followed by a deconstructive reading of the text. Next, we will focus on the Song of Miriam itself, briefly outlining as well as comparing some of the features in the Song of Miriam to those in the Song of the Sea, which will be further examined in a deconstructive reading. We will also study the mythological elements inherent in both poems, which should facilitate an appraisal of the content of Miriam's worship. With the help of the above studies, we will attempt to locate any Miriamic traditions both in Exodus 14 and 15 in order to reveal an image of a woman crucial to the cultic experience of the Hebrews.

2. Structuralist Reading of Exodus 14

The beginning of Exodus 14 could be described as part of an elongated disjunction syntagm (Exodus 13:17-14:2). At this stage the hero moves to another location to accomplish the task he has agreed with his sender at an earlier stage: in our case, the Hebrews receive permission to leave Egypt to go

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[4] For further information on the possible sources behind Exodus 14-15, see Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* pp.476-484; Childs, *Exodus,* pp.218-224; 244-248; Noth, *Exodus,* pp.108-126; Coats, 'The Traditio-Historical Character of the Reed Sea Motif,' *VT* 17, 3 (1967) pp.253-265.

and serve their God (Exodus 12:31-32). William Propp, following an adaptation of Vladimir Propp's theory of narrative, has labelled this phase appropriately as 'the Hero returns/flees homeward.'[5] If we understand the land of Canaan as home, which seems reasonable in light of the opening sequence in Exodus 1[6] as well as the subsequent references to Yahweh's promise of land (Exodus 3:8, 17; 6:4, 8; 13:11), then the title could certainly be deemed appropriate. At this stage the Hebrews could thus be described as returning 'home', with Moses as their leader (Exodus 3:10) and Yahweh as the instigator behind the events (Exodus 3:8).[7]

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Yahweh	The Hebrews	The seashore/Canaan
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
Pillar of cloud/fire (Exodus 13:21-22)	Moses and the Hebrews	

However, the return is interrupted in Exodus 14:3-9, where we are introduced to the villains in our story. In Exodus 14:3-4 we discover Yahweh's plans to harden Pharaoh's heart and to overpower his troops. Accordingly, in Exodus 14:5-9 we read of Pharaoh's regret concerning his decision to let the Hebrews depart, followed by the subsequent pursuit of his former slaves.[8] This description would seem to place both Yahweh and Pharaoh in the role of the opponents of the Hebrews; however, the issue of Yahweh hardening Pharaoh's heart has been sufficiently discussed in the previous chapter

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[5] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.33. Note that the division of verses given by Propp are different to those suggested above.
[6] See pp.101ff.
[7] D.J. McCarthy understands the Hebrews' exit from Egypt as an act of escape of which Pharaoh had no knowledge ('Plagues and Sea of Reeds: Exodus 5-14,' *JBL* 85, 2 [1966] pp.154-155). However, his reading is based on issues related to source/literary theory and will not be considered further.
[8] Propp has appropriately titled this phase as 'The Hero is Pursued' (*Exodus 1-18,* p.33).

and will not be addressed here.[9] The description of the Egyptians' preparation for the pursuit as underlined in vv.6-9, however, deserves further examination.

As Durham has noted, the scale of the measures taken by the Egyptians in vv. 6-9 seems to emphasise the magnitude and efficient organisation of the Egyptian army, which adds 'both to the despair of Israel's virtually defenceless plight and also to the luster of the victory Yahweh is to win for them.'[10] However, although the overwhelming size of the Egyptian army would certainly add to Yahweh's victory (Exodus 14:21ff), whether it makes the Hebrews' plight more comprehensible is a matter open to debate. Although it has been argued by several scholars that the Hebrews' distress as described in Exodus 14:10-12 could be deemed understandable,[11] absolving the Hebrews of unbelief would seem to disregard one of the key elements present in the complaint, namely the request the Hebrews make to Moses ('Didn't we say to you in Egypt: Leave us alone and let us serve the Egyptians?').[12] This is the first time that this proposal is presented and although it is plausible, as Fretheim suggests, that it could have been made at some point prior to this occasion,[13] or was just an impromptu accusation shrouded in unbelief as claimed by Napier,[14] putting a hypothetical scenario into the mouths of the Hebrews also serves to connect their response to that of Pharaoh in Exodus 1:9-10. That is, in Exodus 1:9-10, as was previously demonstrated, Pharaoh predicted a scenario of war regardless of the apparent lack of reasoning behind the said act.[15] Accordingly, in Exodus 14:10-12 the Hebrews fear an army after having witnessed all of Yahweh's miracles, including the

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[9] See pp.127-128.

[10] Durham, *Exodus,* p.191.

[11] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.156; Durham, *Exodus*, pp.191; Janzen, *Westminster Bible Companion: Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) p.100; B.D. Napier, *Exodus,* LBC (London: SCM, 1964) p.48 and Meyers, *Exodus,* p.114.

[12] Hyatt, Durham and Meyers see in the complaint traces of a murmuring tradition (J.P. Hyatt, *Exodus*, NCBC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] p.152; Durham, *Exodus*, p.191 and Meyers, *Exodus,* 114).

[13] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p.156. See, also, Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.164 and Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* p.495. Durham notes that the accusation in v. 12 would have been a logical reply to Moses' suggestion regarding the exodus before the plagues narratives (*Exodus*, p.192).

[14] Napier, *Exodus,* pp.48-49. See, also, Dillmann, *Exodus*, p.148 and Baentsch, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri*, pp.123-124 who argue that the accusation is probably an exaggeration.

[15] See p.105 n.23.

slaughter of all the Egyptian first born sons (Exodus 11). Both the Hebrews and Pharaoh, therefore, appear to act in a manner that portrays them as foolish men. They both tremble before either imagined or what they consider to be 'invincible' enemies regardless of the apparent lack of foundation for these qualms.

Furthermore, as Cassuto notes, the responses of Pharaoh and his officials regarding their regret of letting the Hebrews leave (Exodus 14:5) and the Hebrews' regret concerning leaving Egypt (14:11-12) are linguistically remarkably similar: both lament 'what they have done' and consequently do not perceive any other purpose behind the events.[16] Both Pharaoh and the Hebrews appear to regard their previous decisions as mistakes due to their lack of ability to appreciate plans other than their own, considering the outcomes of their own perceived (hypothetical) scenarios to be of more value. As Göran Larsson notes, 'it is now as if they [the Egyptians and the Hebrews] had seen nothing' of Yahweh's might.[17] Rather than being frightened or convinced by Yahweh's power as displayed in the plague narratives, both parties pursue their own agendas. Consequently, as Propp notes, the Hebrews could be regarded as the Egyptians' equals for 'obtuseness'.[18] Both fear that which they do not either believe in or regard as important.

In response to the Hebrews' plea, Moses instructs them not to fear but to יצב, 'to stand firm,' to see Yahweh's salvation (Exodus 14:13-14). Fretheim has called Moses' speech as 'a word of pure gospel,' an '*oracle of salvation,*'[19] whereas Durham has noticed the commanding element in Moses' words.[20] After all, Moses does not plead with the Hebrews but rather exhorts them with imperative/jussive verbal forms (וראו ;התיצבו ;אל־תיראו). Indeed, it seems that although Moses'

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[16] Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.164.
[17] G. Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: the Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999) p.99.
[18] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.494.
[19] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p.156 [his italics].
[20] Durham, *Exodus,* p.192.

message brings comfort,[21] it also includes clear instructions for the people, encompassing a double function: whilst consoling the Hebrews regarding the forthcoming victory, in order for the Hebrews to perceive it they must act in accordance with Moses' instructions.[22] That which Moses' encouragement also makes clear is that the Hebrews are not saved due to their acts or, as Childs notes, even due to their faith;[23] rather, the Hebrews are to stand witness to Yahweh's works and it is through the sea event that Yahweh will instil faith in the people. It is by observing the destruction of the Egyptians that the Hebrews' fear will be turned into 'a quiet trust' (Exodus 14: 31) as Janzen states,[24] rather than *vice versa*.

Following Moses' declaration, the next stage of our story, the performance syntagm, is commenced: Pharaoh and Yahweh will face each other in battle, and in one miraculous act of deliverance Yahweh will rescue his people and destroy his opponent.[25]

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Yahweh	Salvation	The Hebrews
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
The wind, sea etc.	Yahweh/ Moses	Pharaoh/ the army (Yahweh)

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[21] As Fretheim notes, 'Do not be afraid' is a common phrase of assurance in theophanies (Genesis 26:24) or an encouragement to those lamenting (Lamentations 3:55-60) (*Exodus,* p.156).

[22] A possible interpretation has been presented by Dozeman, who views the encouragement as a war oracle, thus accounting for both the encouraging as well as the imperative elements in Moses' statement (*Exodus,* p.314).

[23] Childs, *Exodus,* p.238.

[24] Janzen, *Exodus,* p.101.

[25] For various more 'natural' interpretations of the sea event, see Cassuto, *Exodus*, pp.167-168; Buber, *Moses,* p.75 and L.S. Hay, 'What really Happened at the Sea of Reeds?' *JBL* 83, 4 (1964) pp.401-402. However, the text in its final form appears to be very clear that although both natural and supernatural elements are present, the only person to be attributed with the miracle in text is Yahweh, who is in charge of all the elements (Exodus 13:17-18, 21; 14:1-4, 8, 15-18, 21, 24, 26, 30). See Childs, *Exodus*, pp.226-229; Durham, *Exodus*, p.196; G.A.F. Knight, *Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) p.106; Schmidt, *Exodus*, pp.63, 65 and Coggins, *Exodus,* pp.60-61.

Ironically, a stage of attribution already occurs in v. 25 where Yahweh gains one of his primary goals: the acknowledgment by the Egyptians of his lordship (Exodus 14:4).[26] Interestingly, as both Propp and Jacob have noted, the confession of the Egyptians ('Yahweh is fighting for them!') is not only in line with the promise of Yahweh's military prowess as stated by Moses in Exodus 14:14,[27] but it precedes the confession of the Hebrews. Moreover, even when the Hebrews acknowledge Yahweh, their confession is proclaimed in a manner similar to the Egyptians' ('Yahweh is a man of war,' Exodus 15:3).[28] Therefore, it could be claimed that the Hebrews as a nation are perhaps not only slow but also reluctant to believe, being overshadowed even by their deadliest enemy in matters of faith.

Indeed, it is only post the sea miracle in Exodus 14:30-31, that both Yahweh and Moses receive their attribution from the Hebrews. According to Fretheim, because the same language of belief is used for both Yahweh and Moses ('The people feared and trusted Yahweh and his servant, Moses' v. 31), Moses' status is elevated to one who not only serves and represents Yahweh, but also embodies 'the God in whose name he speaks.'[29] In light of further narratives regarding Moses' special status among the Hebrews, such an observation seems justified (Exodus 33:18-23; Numbers 12:6-8); however, it should be tempered with a comment from Durham, who states that the exaltation of Moses is completely dependent upon the previous exaltation of Yahweh.[30] Though Moses is vindicated, it is Yahweh who is the primary focus of the Hebrews' faith[31] and it is he, not Moses, who is further celebrated in Exodus 15.

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[26] Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.170; Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* p.500; Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.160. See, also, pp.124-125.
[27] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.501; Jacob, *Exodus*, p.418.
[28] Fretheim, *Exodus*, p.160.
[29] Fretheim, *Exodus*, pp.160-161.
[30] Durham, *Exodus*, p.197.
[31] Note the three-fold emphasis of 'Yahweh' in vv. 30-31 whereas Moses is only mentioned once as Yahweh's servant (v. 31). Similarly, Moses is mentioned as the lead singer of a hymn only in Exodus 15:1; however, the focus of the poem is clearly on Yahweh (Exodus 15:1b).

3. Deconstructive Reading of Exodus 14

> Of all the initiatives taken by human beings in Exodus 1-14, it is those of
> the women, however, that display the greatest courage, invite our keenest
> admiration, and have the most powerful influence on events.
>
> Dennis[32]

In the above statement, Dennis offers praise to the courageous acts of the women in the exodus, which as regards our study of Exodus 1-2, could be suggested to be legitimate.[33] However, it appears that Dennis' statement might have overestimated the women's involvement in the overall story. In fact, if it is the women in Exodus 1-14 who gain our 'keenest admiration', how can we sustain such a position when arguably in the most climactic moment in the Judaic-Christian history, namely at the sea crossing (Exodus 14), women are not even present? Indeed, several feminist biblical commentators have been quick to note the disappearance of women in general, and Miriam in particular, after the beginning chapters of Exodus until the song-dance performance in Exodus 15:20-21.[34] However, disappearance does not necessarily equal absence. That is, even though women might not be present in writing in Exodus 14, they could still be stated to be present in the one way they can, namely, to borrow a phrase from Lapsley, in whispers.[35] As will be demonstrated, in Exodus 14 women, and most importantly to our thesis, Miriam, can be observed to reappear through very specific wordings and phrases, continuing the instances of feminine power as illustrated in Exodus 1-2.

As was stated in an earlier chapter, the use of יצב, 'to stand firm,' in Exodus 14:13 seemed to be connected to its use in Exodus 2:4. [36] This connection was created through the appearance of

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[32] 'Unsung Heroines,' p.113.
[33] See pp.137ff.
[34] See Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' pp.169-173; Kirk-Duggan, 'Divine Puppeteer,' p.86; O'Donnell Setel, 'Exodus,' pp.34-35 (notice, that O'Donnell Setel never explicitly connects the 'sister' in Exodus 1-2 with Miriam); Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' pp.109-110; Janzen, *Let the Daughters Live!* p.118.
[35] Lapsley, 'Saving Women,' p.69.
[36] Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!* pp.117-118.

specific wordings and phrases, such as על־שפת היאר/ הים ('upon the shore of the river/sea', Exodus

2:3; 14:30), סוף ('reed', Exodus 2:3, 5; 13:18) and ראה, ('to see', Exodus 2:2, 5; 14:13). In addition,

these similarities were made even more apparent by the subsequent events to be followed, that is,

Moses or the Hebrews being saved through water (Exodus 2:5-10; 14:21ff). The above linguistic

features could be present in the text in order to create continuity between the 'microcosm' and the

'macrocosm', that is, as noted by Siebert-Hommes, the rescue of Moses and that of the Hebrews.[37]

Thus, Miriam's stance in Exodus 2:4 could be described as her 'standing' before a divinely elected

leader or a 'work of God';[38] likewise, in Exodus 14:13 the Hebrews could be asked to 'stand' before

God and witness their own rescue.[39] These parallelisms concentrate our focus on the object of יצב,

the deliverance of either Moses or of the Hebrews, creating continuity between their fates. However,

we suggest that if we follow the linguistic similarities to the letter, a connection can be perceived not

only between the objects but also the subjects of יצב, that is, Miriam and the Hebrews (Exodus 2:4;

14:13). Indeed, it is Miriam and/or the Hebrews, who both 'stand firm', or are instructed to 'stand

firm', יצב, 'on the shore', על־שפת (Exodus 2:3, cf. 14:13-14; 14:30) of 'the sea of reeds', ים סוף

(Exodus 13:18) or within close proximity to the 'reeds', סוף (Exodus 2:3, 5) 'to see', ראה, or 'to

know', ידע, the salvation (Exodus 2:4; 14:13). It thus appears that these linguistic parallels create

continuity between both the objects and the subjects of יצב, conjoining the fates of Moses and the

Hebrews in more than one way.[40]

Firstly, we must note that Moses' exhortation in Exodus 14:13 ('Stand firm and see the deliverance

of Yahweh') is in the imperative form and indicates elements of an authoritative command, as noted

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[37] Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!* pp.115-118. See, also, Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' p.91.
[38] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* pp.111-112.
[39] Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!* p.118.
[40] Unsurprisingly, the connection between יצב in Exodus 2:4 and Exodus 14:13 has been made only by a very small number of biblical commentators. For example, Fretheim, whose otherwise quite pro-feminist and insightful commentary does not even mention the importance of the verb יצב in Exodus 2, and though he recognizes the verb in Exodus 14 as a sign of divine initiative, makes no connection between the two passages (*Exodus,* p.156).

by Durham.[41] If the Hebrews are commanded to יצב, that which they are commanded to do supposedly contains properties they currently lack. Notably, such a lack can be highlighted if we observe the respective behaviour of the subjects of the verb יצב both in Exodus 2:4 and 14:13. Firstly, in Exodus 2:4, Miriam initiates her act of יצב, which is presumably voluntary. However, in Exodus 14:13-14, the Hebrews need to be instructed to יצב, because they are engulfed in panic at the approach of the Egyptian army (vv. 10-12).[42] Secondly, a further parallel could be noted in the action that the Hebrews are commanded to perform in addition to 'standing firm', that is, 'to be silent,' חרש (Exodus 14:14).[43] As was illustrated earlier, in Exodus 2:4-9 Miriam's deeds were characterised by compliance as well as lack of speech, until it was absolutely necessary to execute Moses' rescue in Exodus 2:7. Her conviction thus led to few words and plenty of action, the complete opposite of the Hebrews in Exodus 14:10-12 who have no difficulty in vocalising their concerns. Consequently, we could suggest that Miriam's behaviour as illustrated in Exodus 2:4-7 highlights the desired qualities associated with יצב, namely those of voluntary obedience and silence, which the Hebrews demonstrate themselves to be utterly lacking.

Secondly, such an interpretation is further reinforced by the comparison of ראה in the respective passages.[44] Although Miriam herself is not indicated 'to see', in both of the verses before and after Exodus 2:4 seeing is a fundamental part of the performance that follows (vv. 2, 5): the mother 'saw' that Moses was goodly and decided to keep him (Exodus 2:2) and the daughter of Pharaoh 'saw' the basket in the river (Exodus 2:5). In addition, in Exodus 14 ראה appears several times tying the

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[41] Durham, *Exodus,* p.192.
[42] Note that the Hebrews are also instructed 'not to fear', אל־תיראו (v. 13); however, Miriam acts in Exodus 2:4-7 on her own initiative and thus does not need to be so instructed.
[43] Fretheim has noted that the call for silence is not for 'not moving a muscle' but for a cessation in speech, which indicates the lack of the Hebrews' involvement in the forthcoming victory (*Exodus,* p.157). This interpretation is certainly fitting with the comments offered above, as well as Childs' earlier observation regarding Israel not being saved due to her faith but because of Yahweh's decision (Childs, *Exodus,* p.238). See, also, Dillmann, *Exodus,* p.148.
[44] Thomas Krüger has noticed the use of the verbs to 'see', 'fear' and 'believe' throughout Exodus 1-14 (15). However, although he briefly mentions the faith-filled acts of the midwives in Exodus 1:15-22, he does not elaborate on the contribution of the women in Exodus 1-2 ('Erwägungen zur Redaktion der Meerwundererzählung [Exodus 13,17-14,31]' *ZAW* 108, 4 [1996] pp.528-529).

elements of fear, Yahweh's salvation, and the Hebrews' witness to the salvation together: in Moses'

words of encouragement (Exodus 14:13) ראה is repeated three times and twice in the statement of

the people's faith in Yahweh and Moses in Exodus 14:30-31.[45]

However, although ראה appears as a keyword in both Exodus 2:1-10 and 14:13-31, the behaviour of

the characters in the respective narratives as described by ראה is somewhat different. As was noted

in an earlier chapter, in Exodus 2:1-10 the 'seeing' of the women led without delay to acts of rescue;

however, as Janzen notes, the 'seeing' of the Hebrews has to be first changed from terror (Exodus

14:10, 13) to 'seeing' the deliverance Yahweh has provided (Exodus 14:31).[46] While the Hebrews

need convincing, even after all the miracles they have experienced (Exodus 7-11), the women 'saw'

the salvation even before there was any indication of it. Ironically, in the one instance that the

'seeing' of the women should have led to fear, the 'seeing' did indeed lead to fear but to the 'fear of

Yahweh.' The midwives, instead of 'seeing' and consequently killing the male Hebrew boys

(Exodus 1:16), chose to fear Yahweh and preserve life (Exodus 1:17).[47]

Although ראה is not applied in our passage to Miriam, we can note that she is not completely left out

of the above comparison. This is because her deeds could be claimed to extend beyond those of the

other women and the Hebrews in the exodus story. Indeed, contrary to some biblical translations of

Exodus 2:4,[48] Miriam does not ראה, 'see' the forthcoming salvation; rather, she ידע, 'knows'. And, as

was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the theme of knowledge is of crucial importance in the

exodus, establishing Miriam and her 'knowledge' as a counterpart to the knowledge of Yahweh,

both of which led to differing acts of deliverance of the respective objects (Moses/ the Hebrews).[49]

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[45] Cassuto, *Exodus,* pp.164, 172.
[46] Janzen, *Exodus*, p.101.
[47] See p.110.
[48] See, for example, the NIV; NCV; CEV; DT and the GNT.
[49] See pp.150-151.

We could therefore suggest that Miriam's deeds become a further description of desirable conduct for the Hebrews: her actions of יצב and חרש are to be commended, but she also ידע, 'knows' rather than ראה, 'sees.' That is, her example goes beyond that which is required: she exceeds the mere act of 'seeing' the liberation (which was undoubtedly part of her function in Exodus 2:4ff) to embrace the more active 'knowing' or 'participating' in the deliverance. This, of course, is contrary to the Hebrews who in their terrified state not only act opposite to the supposedly desired response but can also only witness the action without partaking in it.

However, Dennis has noted that it is not only the Hebrews whose 'seeing' in the exodus corpus appears to be less than flattering when compared to the acts of the women in Exodus 1-2. Dennis claims that whereas the midwives displayed loyalty and courageousness, both the Hebrews and Moses succumbed to sheer terror.[50] Here Dennis is referring to the account of Moses' calling in Exodus 3, where Moses goes to 'see' the burning bush and consequently hides his face because he 'fears' to look at God (Exodus 3:3, 6). Although to ascribe 'sheer terror' to Moses on account of Exodus 3 might be an overstatement, the matter Dennis has raised is still of value. That is, where the women 'saw' or 'knew' and acted accordingly, both Moses (Exodus 3:6ff) and the Hebrews (Exodus 14:13-14) required encouragement to see beyond their current circumstances. As was stated, the call of Moses is a conversation covering the space of two chapters which also include two signs that Yahweh performs in Moses' presence (Exodus 4:1-8). Likewise, the Hebrews appear most unwilling to accept Moses' and/or Yahweh's leadership (Exodus 5:19-20) and even once they have witnessed the miracles and believed in Moses and Yahweh (14:30-31), they still remain fickle in their stance (15:24; 16:3).[51]

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[50] Dennis, 'Unsung Heroines,' pp.91-92.
[51] As Krüger notes, it seems Pharaoh's resistance to Moses leads to the resistance of the Hebrews to Moses (Exodus 5:1-21). It is only after the plagues that they show certain willingness to follow Moses; yet they question his authority again in Exodus 14:11-12. In Exodus 14:31 the trust between the Hebrews and Moses is reestablished; however, the story after Exodus 15:22 'shows it did not last for long' ('Erwägungen,' p.529).

Admittedly, it could be suggested that Moses somewhat redeems himself through his words of encouragement in Exodus 14:13-14; however, two issues are worth noting here. Firstly, Moses' words of support are followed by a reproach from Yahweh regarding Moses 'crying out' to him (Exodus 14:15). Although a possible sign of poor editorial work or the loss of intermittent material,[52] the statement could also be an indication of Moses' own despair,[53] somewhat lessening his courageous stand. Secondly, the verbs that Moses uses in his speech (יצב, 'to stand firm', ראה, 'to see', and חרש, 'to be silent') appear to indicate that the behaviour that is exemplified is not his own but that of Miriam. Indeed, although all of the women in Exodus 1-2 could be claimed to have overshadowed both Moses and the Hebrews due to their faith-filled acts as was demonstrated above, it is Miriam who initially 'stood firm' in Exodus 2:4 and consequently performed the deeds[54] the Hebrews were encouraged to do in Exodus 14:13-14: not only did she 'stand firm' (Exodus 2:4; 14:13), was 'silent' in doing so (Exodus 2:4; 14:14), but she also 'saw' (or rather 'knew') the salvation (Exodus 2:4; 14:13, 31).[55] If we hence accept the previously presented argument that through the use of יצב in both Exodus 2:4 and 14:13 we have a connection between not only the objects of the verb (the rescue of Moses/the Hebrews) but also of the subjects (Miriam/ the Hebrews), we could note that יצב 'makes an addition'[56] to the view presented earlier by Siebert-Hommes that the linguistic similarities only connect the fates of Moses and the Hebrews.[57] Indeed, יצב could be argued to act as the *supplement* in the text by bringing us the memory not only of Moses' rescue, but also the manner in which the rescue was achieved. It brings us the woman

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[52] See, McNeile, *Exodus,* p.85; Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* p.497; Durham, *Exodus,* p.192; Baentsch, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri,* p.124.
[53] Janzen, *Exodus,* p.101. Propp sees it as more likely that Moses is addressed here as the people's representative (*Exodus 1-18,* p.497). See, also, Noth, *Exodus,* p.113 and Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.314.
[54] See n.42.
[55] It is possible that ראה is used in the passage instead of ידע due to the different functions of the Hebrews/Miriam in their respective stories: while the Hebrews witness the salvation (Exodus 14:13-14), Miriam is the one to effect it (2:4ff).
[56] See Sherwood, *The Prostitute,* p.184.
[57] Siebert-Hommes, *Let the Daughters Live!* pp.115-118.

Miriam and her acts of יצב, ידע/ראה and חרש, which are now encouraged as the paradigm of faith for the Hebrews to follow.

4. Structuralist Reading of Exodus 15:1, 20-21

The account of the exodus is closed with a hymn of praise regarding Yahweh's mighty victory over the Egyptians, first verbalised by Moses and the sons of Israel (vv. 1-18). This is followed by a short narrative account (v. 19) and lastly expressed in song by Miriam and a cohort of singing and dancing women (vv. 20-21). Notably, the Song of Miriam and the beginning verse of the Song of the Sea are similar in content and structure; however, some minor differences between them have caused floods of research into the importance of the respective songs and their lead-singers, as has already been discussed in an earlier chapter.[58]

Within these songs, the following features may be considered of significance for our research. First of all, the second lines of the hymns are identical: 'Horse and chariot he has cast into the sea' (Exodus 15:1, 21). However, the introduction and the first lines of the respective hymns vary considerably. Concerning the Song of the Sea, it is stated, 'then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to Yahweh. They said…' The account seemingly implies that Moses and the sons of Israel are the joint subjects who deliver a victory hymn to Yahweh collectively.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Moses and the sons of Israel	Song	Yahweh
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	Moses and the sons of Israel	

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[58] See pp.69-72.

By comparison, in the Song of Miriam it is stated, 'then Miriam, the prophetess, sister of Aaron, took in her hand the drum and all of the women followed her with hand drums and with dances. And Miriam answered them…' Hence, we could suggest that as opposed to Moses who shares his position as a subject with the Hebrew men, Miriam appears as the only subject of her song and, accordingly, the cohort of women in v. 20 could be described in a role approximating that of helpers rather than secondary subjects. In addition, with her song Miriam is portrayed as 'answering them', though within the narrative context the nature of this 'answering', ענה, or the identity of the masculine plural 'them', להם, is open to debate.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Miriam	Song	'Them'
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
The women/ the hand drums	Miriam	

The first lines of the respective songs also vary in content. In the Song of the Sea, the first line reads, 'I will sing to Yahweh for he has triumphed gloriously.' The use of a singular verb form could make Moses the principal agent delivering a victory hymn to Yahweh; however, as Hyatt has noted, it is possible that the 'I' here is a collective one. [59] Propp also suggests that the 'I' might refer to each individual Hebrew, also supported by later translations which appear to have changed the 'I' to 'we' to adapt the material for liturgical use.[60] Yet, within the narrative context the reference of 'I' to Moses alone[61] would be in accordance with the recognition Moses received at the end of the previous chapter (Exodus 14:31), and would also harmonise his song with that of Miriam where she

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[59] As Hyatt notes, the 'I' in Exodus 15:1 'could be Moses, or the person taking the role of Moses in the cult, or the personified community' (*Exodus*, p.164).
[60] Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* p.509. Indeed, the LXX, the Vulgate, the Targuums and the Syriac Bible have adapted the wording to conform to a plural. See Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* p.470.
[61] See p.61 n.57.

appears to be the only lead-singer of her song (Exodus 15:21). The fact that Moses was the inaugurator of the Song of the Sea, or at least the first line of it, would definitely therefore suit the context; however, the first singular pronoun form is used also in v. 2 and could therefore be simply a stylistic feature.[62] Consequently a firm decision on the subject cannot be reached.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Moses (and the sons of Israel)	Song	Yahweh
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	Moses (and the sons of Israel)	

Regarding the first line of the Song of Miriam, it is stated, 'Sing to Yahweh for he has triumphed gloriously.' Although Miriam is the lead singer of her song, and the song *in toto* is addressed to Yahweh, the first phrase of her worship is a masculine plural exhortation, שירו, 'sing'. This exhortation is presumably addressed to the masculine plural להם, 'them', although the identity of the audience is, as was noted earlier, uncertain. The Song of Miriam could thus be characterised as an encouragement to worship directed at as yet unidentified audience, as opposed to a statement of devotion as described in the Song of the Sea.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Miriam	Song	Yahweh/ 'them'
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	Miriam	

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[62] Childs, *Exodus,* p.250.

Overall, we could state that although both songs are similar in content, the respective introductions as well as the first lines contain some significant differences and these will be further examined in the deconstructive reading of the passage. These differences may be summarised in the table below.

	The Singer of Song	Introduction given to the character	Helpers	The receiver of the song	Sender of the song (1st line)
Moses	Moses and the sons of Israel	None	None	Yahweh	Moses (and the sons of Israel)
Miriam	Miriam	She is a prophetess and a sister of Aaron.	The women and the hand drums.	'them'/ Yahweh	Miriam

5. Deconstructive Reading of Exodus 15:1, 20-21: The Role of Miriam in Exodus 15

The various textual issues in the Song of Miriam as well as in the surrounding poetry and narrative material have generated diverse accounts regarding Miriam's position at the sea event, as was implied in an earlier chapter. These readings (apart from source-critical theories or ones that rely on arguments based on time of composition) will be briefly summarised as follows. One possibility is that, since ענה can indicate 'singing' with or without a responsive element and, as Janzen notes, because both להם and שירו are masculine plurals, it is plausible that Miriam and the women would have performed their song before the Song of the Sea in order to encourage the men/people of Israel to sing to Yahweh.[63] Yet, since on occasions male pronouns can have female referents,[64] Miriam could appear as the leader of women only, singing antiphonically with 'them' as Burns has suggested.[65] Continuing the same principle, the imperative שירו could also be taken to imply a female audience. However, because the most common translation of ענה is to 'answer',[66] the Song

[63] Janzen, 'The Song of Moses,' pp.187-199. Janzen argues that the antiphonal character of the song would have become present as the men responded to the women rather than *vice versa*. See, also, Russell, *The Song of the Sea,* p.37.
[64] W. Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A.W. Cowley, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910) §135o.
[65] Burns, *Has the Lord?* pp.12-13. See, also, McNeile, *Exodus,* p.93 and Driver, *Exodus,* pp.140-141.
[66] BDB pp.772-773.

of Miriam could also be taken as a reply to the Song of the Sea, possibly after each strophe or at other appropriate places within the longer hymn, as suggested by Cassuto and Lind.[67] Alternatively, if one wishes to retain the narrative order, we could argue that the Song of Miriam serves as an 'anticlimax' at the end of the narrative,[68] although this position has not gained much following. Rather, the narrative placement of the song at the end of Exodus 15 could simply be intended to form an inclusion with Exodus 1-2 and does not reflect the actual order of performance.[69] However, this conclusion can be used to favour any of the previous arguments, and does not form a coherent statement of its own.

It is at this point in the narrative where a moment of indecision is reached, both as regards the order of the respective songs and the importance of their lead-singers. Indeed, if ענה is understood as 'to sing' and the following masculine plurals as implying the people of Israel, then Miriam gains a formidable role in a historical cultic celebration.[70] Yet, if we agree that Miriam 'answered them', that is the women, then Miriam retains a leadership position but is diminished in influence.[71] However, if we believe that Miriam was merely 'answering' the Song of the Sea and thus provided a refrain to the celebration (Cassuto and Lind),[72] then her leadership role is even further reduced and, moreover, if she was a creator of an 'anticlimactic' event after the main celebration in Exodus 15:1-18, she could be described as unnecessary.[73]

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[67] Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.182 and Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior,* p.47. See, also, Freedman, 'Moses and Miriam,' pp.70-71 and Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.327.

[68] This position is suggested by Trible, when she notes that in the current narrative setting the Song of Miriam is 'anticlimactic, no more than an after-thought, a token of the female presence' ('Bringing Miriam,' p.171).

[69] Janzen, 'The Song of Moses,' p.197; Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.161; Russell, *The Song of the Sea,* p.38; Trible 'Bringing Miriam,' p.172; Burns, 'The Book of Exodus,' in B. van Iersel and A. Weiler (eds.), *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm,* Concilium 189 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987) p.17; F. van Dijk-Hemmes, 'Some Recent Views on the Presentation of the Song of Miriam,' in Brenner (ed.), *Feminist Companion,* p.203.

[70] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' pp.171-173; Meyers, 'Miriam', pp.28ff; Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, pp.52-56; O'Donnell Setel, 'Exodus,' pp.35-36; Janzen, 'The Song of Moses,' 191-194; Russell, *The Song of the Sea,* pp.36-39.

[71] See n.65. Burns argues from a literary/source-critical point of view that Miriam's song is the oldest recording of the celebration and thus she maintains that Miriam was the leader of the cultic event (pp.12-40).

[72] Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.182; Lind, *Yahweh is a Warrior*, p.47.

[73] See Stanton, *The Woman's Bible,* p.81.

Indeed, amongst the various readings suggested, ענה appears as a verb which is laden with various nuances and motifs. It could even be described as the *pharmakon* of Exodus 15, where ענה can be used to support all of the above interpretations which are simultaneously mutually exclusive.[74] However, this is not to say that the text itself does not provide any means of comprehending the verb. According to Freedman the writer/editor of the passage appears to have made it 'clearly understood' that it was Moses who composed and performed the Song of the Sea, with Miriam in a secondary role.[75] To support such a conclusion we can note the immediate placement of the Song of the Sea after the prose account in Exodus 14:1-31 and, moreover, the lack of any apparent conjunction of Miriam's Song with Moses' performance. That is, Miriam's Song is divided from the Song of the Sea not only by a narrative description (v. 19) but also by the presentation of the respective subjects of the songs: in vv. 20-21 it is Miriam and the women who perform her song *vis-à-vis* Moses and the Hebrew men who vocalise the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1). In addition, even the content of Miriam's Song mimics the first line of the Song of the Sea (v. 1), questioning the integrity and even the need for Miriam's Song. It does indeed seem that in the text an effort to distance the two performances from each other is well-established and, accordingly, we could suggest that to understand Miriam's Song as an intermittent chorus or as a performance involving only the women appear as the two most plausible arguments. However, in the following we will question the sustainability of the distinctions discussed above as well as investigate the validity of the arguments presented accordingly.

Regarding the possibility of Miriam having been the leader of women only as argued by Burns, we must note that, as Janzen states, instances when male pronouns get female referents are only

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[74] Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp.100-101.
[75] Freedman, 'Moses and Miriam,' p.71.

occasional in the HB and normally female referents are indicated by the appropriate markers.[76] Furthermore, the search for a female referent is not even necessary in Exodus 15:20-21, where a male referent is readily available in the preceding verse, that is, as Janzen further notes, in the mention of the sons or 'children' of Israel in Exodus 15:19.[77] This observation is also supported by Rapp, who argues that although v. 19 is often overlooked in modern feminist biblical scholarship, it is a crucial part of the Miriamic passage. Indeed, v. 19 not only takes the reader back to the prose in Exodus 14:29, but by the use of כי (then/for) also signals the start of a new unit as well as the introduction to Miriam's praise, connecting the passage harmoniously with the prose as well as the verb pattern in v. 20 as opposed to the poetry ending in v. 18.[78] Consequently, Rapp argues that Exodus 15:19-21 could be established as a 'second ending' to the exodus event vs. the 'first ending' which is described in Exodus 14:29-31. As a 'second ending', Exodus 15:19-21 would thus act as an authorial critique on the 'first ending', which emphasises the destruction of the Egyptians (v. 30) and Mosaic authority (v. 31).[79] As Rapp notes, Exodus 15:19-21 could even be read as an authorial utterance on the 'actual' order of events: because Exodus 15:19c[80] repeats the content of Exodus 14:29a,[81] and, moreover, v. 19ab[82] appears as somewhat of a review of the events in Exodus 14:22-28, Rapp believes the original narrative conclusion could have consisted of Exodus 15:19-21, which would have joined directly after Exodus 14:28, causing Miriam's performance to 'them', that is, the

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[76] Janzen, 'The Song of Moses,' p.192. Burns uses the *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* §135o to support her thesis of the use of masculine markers for female referents (*Has the Lord?* pp.12-13); however, even *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* locates only five occurrences of the said usage in Exodus, and the list excludes Exodus 15:20 (Exodus 1:21; 2:17; 11:6; 22:25; 25:19).

[77] Janzen, 'The Song of Moses,' pp.192-193. See, also, Russell, *The Song of the Sea,* p.37.

[78] Rapp, *Mirjam,* p.204. See, also, Janzen, 'The Song of Moses,' p.191 and Russell, *The Song of the Sea,* pp.36-37.

[79] Rapp, *Mirjam,* p.206.

[80] 'But the sons of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea.'

[81] See n.80.

[82] 'When Pharaoh's horse, chariot and horsemen went into the sea, then Yahweh returned over them the waters of the sea.'

people of Israel,[83] to be the focal point of the celebration without a mention of the people's faith in Yahweh or Moses.[84]

Rapp's interpretation of Exodus 14:29-15:21 is most compelling, not least because her reading restores Miriam's Song as a hymn in its own right without necessitating the need to understand it as a 'refrain' or a repetition of Moses' Song. In addition, it explains the song's current textual placement (as a critique) as well as the presence of an additional narrative clause (Exodus 15:19) repetitive of that in Exodus 14:29. Yet, to embrace Rapp's approach requires the twofold acceptance of Exodus 15:19-21 as a critique of the 'first ending' as well as Miriam's Song having been the original performance at the sea. The second one of these proposals, though suitable for feminist biblical aims, we must disregard if we wish to gain meaning from the narrative in its final form. Yet, this conclusion could be supported from Rapp's reading, if we were willing to view this 'second ending' as a critique on the 'first ending' and thus the narrative placement of the song could be explained on the basis of authorial intent.

Rapp's reading of the 'second ending' as a critique on the 'first ending' gains support from several issues that are somewhat interrelated in the text. Firstly, there is the translation of the verb ענה, which Rapp must translate as merely 'to sing', for otherwise the element of critique on the first ending would, by her own admission, have already been provided and the Miriamic ending would lose its priority.[85] In favour of Rapp, as was noted earlier, ענה can be used of singing without a responsive element (1 Samuel 18:7; 21:11);[86] yet, as was also noted, the most common meaning of

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[83] Rapp, *Mirjam*, pp.213, 222.
[84] Rapp, *Mirjam*, pp.210-211; 226ff.
[85] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.209.
[86] See, also, Russell who argues that although the women in 1 Samuel 18:7; 21:11; 29:5 may have chanted the song amongst themselves, the song is not introduced as a refrain; rather, ענה marks the beginning of the song, lending credibility to Rapp's interpretation (*The Song of the Sea*, p.37).

the verb is 'to answer, to respond,'[87] yielding credibility to an argument based on responsive or

antiphonal singing, as was earlier argued by Burns, Lind and Cassuto.

However, more recently Wilda Gafney has suggested another way to comprehend the 'responsive'

element of ענה. She argues that ענה could refer to an act of prophecy, more specifically to an act

where the prophet(ess) is considered as a dialogue-in-partner with a deity.[88] Although prophets can

be perceived as communing with Yahweh in the HB (Exodus 4:1, 19:19; 2 Chronicles 34:23), to

aspire to this activity on the basis of Miriam's Song appears to be misplaced, since most of the

occasions quoted by Gafney to support her thesis either do not use the verb in question or, of those

that do, only one uses the verb indicating a prophetic utterance.[89] Another possibility, as Irmtraud

Fischer has suggested, is to perceive ענה as Miriam 'answering for' the people, that is, responding,

as a prophetess, for them to the miraculous act of God (Deuteronomy 18:18).[90] A similar position is

also taken by Gafney, who argues that Miriam, as a prophetess, 'answered' the deliverance of the

Hebrews in the form of an oracular 'choreo-poem,' which Gafney associates with interpretative

prophecy.[91] Indeed, Rapp argues that it is possible to understand Miriam's Song as establishing, as

one of the functions of prophecy, the creative interpretation of past events.[92] This observation leads

to Rapp's second statement in support of her understanding of Exodus 15:19-21 as a critique,

according to which Miriam's standing as a prophetess not only relates to her performance as an

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[87] BDB, pp.772-773.
[88] Gafney, *Daughters of Miriam,* pp.53-56, 70-71.
[89] As examples of this type of prophecy Gafney quotes Exodus 4:1, 9:19; Isaiah 6:11, Ezekiel 24:20, Zechariah 5:2, Jeremiah 23:21-39, 1 Kings 18:26, 37; 2 Chronicles 34:23 and Micah 3:7, 6:5 (*Daughters of Miriam*, pp.55-56).
[90] Note that Fischer is correct that connecting ענה with the preposition ל– is unusual (leading to her translation of answering 'for' rather than 'to'); however, because of the uncommon character of the occurrence, we should interpret the phrase in light of that which comes after it rather than the preposition itself, which has multiple possible meanings. See I. Fischer, *Gotteskünderinnen: Zu einer geschlechterfairen Deutung des Phänomens der Prophetie und der Prophetinnen in der Hebräischen Bibel* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2002) pp.66-67.
[91] Gafney, *Daughters,* pp.56, 80-81.
[92] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.224.

interpretative act but establishes her as an independent figure, far-removed from subordination to Mosaic authority.[93]

Consequently, we arrive at a dilemma where the manner we interpret the exact nature of Miriam's Song also somewhat determines our understanding of ענה, or *vice versa*. Of the interpretations presented as regards the possible prophetic function of ענה we can note that although the kind of prophetic activity suggested earlier by Gafney might not be applicable to Miriam's Song, ענה could still be taken as referring to an act that Miriam performs 'for' or even 'to' the community, in this case an act of interpretative prophecy, as was suggested by Rapp and Fischer (and Gafney). However, this conclusion has two considerable problems. Firstly, as has been sufficiently illustrated in an earlier chapter, Miriam's Song carries unmistakably cultic inferences which, therefore, places her song firmly in the context of the cult rather than oracular activity.[94] Secondly, even if Miriam could be said to have interpreted the event as a miraculous act of God,[95] the form her 'prophecy' takes is a hymnic exhortation to praise God rather than a message to/from the people/Yahweh, which consequently lessens the probability that Miriam's actions should be taken as prophetic.[96] Regarding the nature of Miriam's activity in Exodus 15:19-21, we must therefore conclude that Miriam's role seems to be cultic rather than prophetic, and if she was a prophetess (Exodus 15:20), for this we must find evidence elsewhere.

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[93] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.224.
[94] See pp.72-73.
[95] Such actions of interpretative prophecy regarding past events can be found, for example, in Jeremiah 2:1ff; Ezekiel 16:1ff; Amos 4:1ff and Hosea 1:1ff.
[96] According to Brenner, there is a long standing tradition that connects the act of prophecy with music. However, of the passages she mentions, 2 Kings 3:15 connects prophecy with music but not with a call to worship, and we are not aware of the content of the utterances that were induced in 1 Samuel 10:5ff. Isaiah 5:1-7 could be described as a prophecy in the form of a song but it is used by Isaiah to prophesy against Israel rather than to call the people to worship. Other passages which link music with prophecy appear to be from the period of the temple cult which understood the Levitical singers as continuing the prophetic function (1 Chronicles 25:1-7; 2 Chronicles 20:14ff; 35:15); however, such issues place later interests on Exodus 15:1-21 and will not be considered further (*The Song of the Sea*, pp.44-46). For a reading similar to Brenner's, see Butting, *Prophetinnen gefragt*, pp.39-40 and Dozeman, *Exodus*, pp.342-343.

Therefore, it appears that if we lose the prophetic aspect of Miriam's performance in Exodus 15:19-21, we also lose the element in Rapp's argument which would see Miriam's prophetic standing as a critique of Moses. Admittedly, Rapp wishes to establish Miriam as an independent, self-sufficient leader; however, Miriam does not have to appear as a prophetic figure to gain significance. As has been noted by Burns, quite apart from prophetic connections, Miriam is still described as a leader and a protagonist in a celebration that is of religious and historical significance in the Judaeo-Christian heritage. Moreover, Miriam appears in the exodus event without introduction, possibly pointing towards a wider and richer Miriamic tradition since lost or forgotten.[97] With the support of other biblical passages which imply the importance of Miriam as a community leader (Numbers 12:1ff),[98] Rapp could be correct in her recognition of Miriam as an independent figure; however, Rapp still wishes to view Miriam's independence as a sign of critique upon the status of Moses in Exodus 14:29-31. Rapp finds further evidence for this claim in Miriam's title as the 'sister of Aaron', which she argues is used to separate Miriam from her filial connection to her now famous brother Moses. With her association with Aaron instead, Miriam is established as an independent leader who, with Aaron, forms an opposition against Moses and his status as the servant of God.[99]

Although Rapp's reading is a legitimate interpretation of the passage, what her argument neglects is the recognition of the apparent lack of any statement of criticism directed against Moses in Exodus 15:19-21. Indeed, it is possible to view Miriam's connection to Aaron as a criticism not directed at Moses but rather against the priestly hierarchical system as present in Exodus. That is, although in Exodus 15 Miriam is presented as a cultic leader, [100] only a few chapters later cultic roles would be

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[97] Burns, *Has the Lord?,* p.40; Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' pp.171-172.
[98] See pp.85, 222.
[99] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.214-215. See, also, Shectman, *Women,* p.114.
[100] Burns, *Has the Lord?* pp.11-40. See, also, pp.72ff.

forbidden to females and transferred into the hands of the Aaronic priests (Exodus 29:1ff).[101]

Therefore, as Janzen notes, Miriam could be seen as a 'prototype' of 'true worship of the God of the exodus', leaving her example of devotion in a stark contrast with that of Aaron, whose first proper act of service is the building of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32.[102] Subsequently, Miriam could be viewed as the epitome of cultic excellence, appearing in Exodus 15 not only as a cultic leader but as a critique upon the future high-priest and the system he represents.

However, although the above arguments might appear mutually exclusive, with some amendment they can both be seen as reinforcing the same issue, that is, Miriam's role as a significant leader. Indeed, to view Miriam as associated with Aaron to establish her as an independent figure *vis-à-vis* Moses, as was argued by Rapp, as well as to see her as Aaron's sister in order to emphasise her cultic qualities, as was argued by Janzen, both of these observations could serve to establish Miriam as an independent cultic leader with a status possibly equal to that of Moses. The only element we thus lose is Rapp's claim of Miriam's status as a critique, which in light of the already mentioned lack of appraisal in the text as regards Moses seems warranted.

Miriam's role as an independent, cultic figure is indeed strongly implied in the text and is made even stronger if we accept as the audience of Miriam's performance the people of Israel, as suggested by both Rapp and Janzen, rather than just the 'sons' of Israel as the literal translation of בני ישראל would imply (Exodus 15:19). More recently Martin Leutzsch has attempted a reading where he treats the 'sons of Israel' (Exodus 15:1, 19) as an inclusive term throughout Exodus 15, indicating that both men and women (and Miriam) participated in the Song of Moses in Exodus

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[101] Indeed, women could not act as priests in the Israelite cult (Exodus 29:1ff); however, as Meyers noted in a previous chapter, it seems possible that women might have continued to participate in musical ensembles ('Miriam the Musician,' pp.207-230).

[102] Janzen, 'Song of Moses,' p.199.

15:1-18. Consequently, the celebration was continued and concluded by the performance of Miriam and the women in Exodus 15:20-21, which was sung to 'them', that is, the collective people of Israel.[103] As Janzen noted earlier, because in its narrative placement the Song of Miriam is sung להם, 'to them', and even the exhortation that follows is gendered male, the 'sons of Israel' in Exodus 14:29/15:19 seem to be the likeliest referent.[104] Yet to understand this phrase as inclusive in a text that separates the 'sons of Israel' and Moses on the one side, and Miriam and 'all the women'[105] on the other, appears slightly premature, although not impossible. The issue is further complicated by the respective readings of Janzen and Leutzch, both of which support the collective understanding of בני ישראל, yet disagree regarding the exact placement of the song within the procession, further problematising our understanding of the position of Miriam's Song within the celebration.[106]

Overall, it appears that we are left with two possible readings: if we take the respondent to Miriam's encouragement to be a purely male audience, then we have a description of a female leader who is commanding praise from the sons of Israel. However, if the audience is described as both male and female, the command is no less potent. That is, in the latter case the respective performances of the songs have not only become joined, but truly united: Miriam is encouraging both the men and the women following her to worship, without the dictation of an appropriate 'gender-specific' order. As illustrated in the readings of Janzen and Leutzch, the exact placement of Miriam's Song in the event is, however, difficult to decide, since the textual evidence can be used to support various readings.

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[103] M. Leutzsch, 'Mirjams Lied am Shilfmeer – Zum Verhältnis von Gewaltverarbeitung und Freude im Kontext der Schilfmeererzählung,' in M. Geiger and R. Kessler (eds), *Musik, Tanz und Gott: Tonspuren durch das Alte Testament,* SB 207 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2007) pp.49-50.

[104] Janzen, 'The Song of Moses,' pp.192-193. See, also, Russell, *The Song of the Sea,* pp.37-38.

[105] Rapp argues that the group of women following Miriam in Exodus 15:20 did not consist of all of the women present at the sea event; rather, the women were of specific community status, either upper class women or those with a specific education/abilities (*Mirjam,* pp.218-220). However, although this is a possible reading of the passage, because Rapp's understanding relies on her reading of activities within the king's court as found in Esther and Jeremiah, the applicability of her reading to Exodus needs to be questioned.

[106] Janzen would place the song in Exodus 14:29 after which the narrative process would follow without disruption (*Exodus*, p.109), whereas Leutzch treats Miriam's Song as the conclusion/climax of the celebration ('Mirjams Lied,' pp.49, 51).

Of those of Janzen and Leutzch we can tentatively note that the latter of these positions is more difficult to sustain due to the presence of v. 19, apparently unnecessary if Miriam's Song is taken as a conclusion to the event. Nevertheless, whichever of the previous readings is deemed to be the most appropriate, the fact that Miriam is commanding the praise of the Hebrew men at a point during the celebration is inescapable.

To conclude this section, we will return to the first argument made by Rapp as regards the 'second ending,' namely her understanding of ענה as to 'sing.' As was noted, the verb ענה appears to be a word with two mutually exclusive meanings: it can legitimately be used to describe either singing or responsive singing, therefore making the assumption of the preliminary nature of Miriam's celebration as presented in the works of Rapp and Janzen problematic. Indeed, the issue whether Miriam was the inaugurator of the celebrations or was a respondent to Moses' Song appears to be a question the text simply will refuse to answer: it is between these conclusions that the narrative suspends us without offering any further insight. Miriam was obviously an integral part of the event; however, the narrative refuses to state explicitly the nature of her importance. Instead, we are shown a moment where the Hebrew men are submitting under female leadership with or separate to the female singers/dancers, probably after each stanza or after the Song of Miriam has been sung.[107] A moment of indecision has thus been reached, yet perhaps indecision is the best possible conclusion that could be yielded from the story. In other words, if we observe the act of deconstruction as being made of reversal, that is, uncovering of hierarchies, and displacement, that is, preventing a new/old

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[107] Furthermore, even if we take the more traditional interpretation of ענה as to answer/respond, and consequently view Miriam's song as sung after each stanza in the Song of the Sea, the corresponding songs are still left in a beautiful moment of indecision. That is, if the first stanza of the Song of the Sea is perceived as having been sung by Moses ('I will sing to Yahweh for he has triumphed gloriously'), we could read the procession of the hymn in the following manner: Moses sings his first line of praise to Yahweh, which is followed by Miriam's exhortation for all the men/women to sing, which results in the men/women joining in the celebration (see Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.341). Indeed, regardless of whether Miriam starts the song or joins it after Moses' first stanza, she has stepped into a leadership role alongside her brother having all of Israel follow her.

hierarchy from forming,[108] the Song of Miriam leaves us in an ultimate moment of displacement, where no hierarchies can be formed because none is described as present. Miriam's leadership will remain in the shadows, giving the appearance of importance yet refusing to be submitted into an organisation of oppositions, power or superiority. Her song becomes an undecidable, around which gender biases and issues of male-firstness will melt away in a joyous harmony with its other.

6. The Content of Miriam's Song: The Mythological Background

The content of Miriam's Song has rarely been studied by feminist biblical scholars, which could be considered as regrettable, for the song makes up one of the two verses of Miriam's performance in Exodus 15:20-21, and is therefore worth examining. Moreover, as Brueggemann notes, since the manner in which the sea event would be comprehended by the people is largely affected by the characterisation of the event by the poet,[109] the role of the author as well as the content of the words composed gain a position *extraordinaire* within our comprehension of the sea event. However, before a reading of the content can be appreciated, we must first approach the mythological roots of both the Song of Miriam and the Song of the Sea, since Miriam's Song shares some affinities with the latter (Exodus 15:1). Granted, both of these songs are highly complex compositions, and cannot possibly be studied extensively in our short analysis. Therefore, we will concentrate on one particular aspect present in both hymns that is of interest in this thesis, that is, the well-attested matter of a mythical Sea-battle and the following enthronement as the background of both of the songs.[110]

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[108] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, pp.173-174.
[109] Brueggemann, 'A Response,' p.299. See, also, Childs, *Exodus*, p.249.
[110] See, e.g., Cassuto, *Exodus*, pp.177-181; Fretheim, *Exodus*, pp.166-170; Hyatt, *Exodus*, p.164; Durham, *Exodus*, pp.205-207. See, also, Propp who has compared the entire exodus narrative to a Canaanite myth (*Exodus 1-18*, p.34). Mowinckel connects the battle with the sea to a creation myth, the celebration of which he suggests was part of the Enthronement Festival (*The Psalms*, pp.106ff).

Before we continue this line of enquiry, it should be noted that the exact content and origin of the myth of the Sea-battle are debatable. Indeed, Robert Luyster argues for a Babylonian source,[111] Walter Wifall for Egyptian traditions,[112] and Cross, Bernard Batto, John Day, Carola Kloos and Meyers agree on the Canaanite origin of the mythology.[113] For our purposes the exact nature of the source is not of interest or importance. Rather, what is of importance is that all of the above myths carry within them certain similarities, that is, they all portray or are associated with a creation story, where a deity conquers an opponent at a battle located at a sea and thus establishes cosmological order in the world. In both the Babylonian and the Egyptian myths, where the enemies are respectively either *tiamat,* 'the monstrous sea-embodiment',[114] or Apophis, a serpent resident in the 'lake', the mythological region of the dead, [115] the slaying of the monster results in the creation of the world or the sustenance of the created order. In the Canaanite myth Baal is opposed by the Prince Sea, Yamm, the victory over which also results in the establishment of order in the created world (the restraining of the sea and Baal's kingship).[116] Thus, it appears that in all of the myths a primordial Sea-battle is presented, the results of which could be claimed to have cosmic significance and repercussions.

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[111] R. Luyster, 'Wind and Water: Cosmogonic Symbolism in the Old Testament,' *ZAW* 93, 1 (1981) pp.1-2.

[112] W. Wifall, 'The Sea of Reeds as Sheol,' *ZAW* 92, 3 (1980) pp.325-332; Hay also tentatively suggest this possibility ('What Really Happened?', p.403).

[113] Cross, *Canaanite Myth,* pp.112-144; B.F. Batto, 'The Reed Sea: *Requiescat in Pace*,' *JBL* 102, 1 (1983) pp.30-35; J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament,* UCOP 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) pp.1-18; 97-101; C. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 1986) pp.139ff and Meyers, *Exodus,* p.119.

[114] Luyster, 'Wind and Water,' p.2.

[115] Wifall, 'The Sea of Reeds,' pp.327-328.

[116] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.555; Cross, *Canaanite Myth,* pp.112-120; Day, *God's Conflict*, pp.4ff; Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat,* pp.205-212.

Furthermore, such a battle also appears to be inferred in the Song of the Sea:[117] the Divine Warrior rises to battle (Exodus 15:3), and hurls his opponent into the sea (v. 4). The תהמת, 'ancient deeps' (v. 5), a possible reference to the great primordial ocean,[118] cover them, and they ירדו במצולת, 'sank to depths'(v. 5), an associated term of the primeval Abyss.[119] In addition, as Kloos has demonstrated, in the sea event as a whole we find other elements often associated with the mythic Sea-battle in other biblical texts, including the act of drying up the waters (Exodus 14:16ff; Isaiah 51:10; Psalm 106:9; Nahum 1:4; Ezekiel 30:12), the drowning of the enemy (Exodus 14:16ff; 15:1, 4, 21; Psalm 78:53; Psalm 136:13-15) as well as the presence of wind/thunder and lighting (Exodus 14:21; 15:10; Isaiah 11:15-16; Psalm 77:16-21; Nahum 1:3-6).[120] The reference to the natural elements could emphasise Yahweh's role as the mythological storm God, especially noticeable with the Canaanite myths, where, as T.W. Mann notes, all of the above entities are treated either as Baal's messengers or the means of his warfare.[121] Furthermore, as Luyster has argued, within the biblical tradition itself Yahweh's ability to control the natural elements is of utmost importance,[122] which gives credence to the significance of Yahweh's control of the natural world at such a pivotal moment in history.

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[117] Luyster, 'Wind and Water,' pp.1-10; Batto, 'The Reed Sea,' pp.30-31; Wifall, 'The Sea,' pp.327-329. Kloos has argued for the separation of the battle with the sea from the myth of creation in Baal mythology and consequently the same separation also for the Hebrew myth (*Yhwh's Combat*, pp.67-86). However, *contra* Kloos, we agree with Cross, Day and Propp that it seems likely that the creation and the Sea-battle were closely associated in the Canaanite tradition to the extent that Baal's victory over Yam or the sea dragon might have even been part of the creation story (Day, *God's Conflict*, pp.4-18; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, pp.112-120; Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* p.555) or at the very least part of the same cycle of tradition (see L.R. Fisher, 'Creation at Ugarit and in the Old Testament,' *VT* 15 [1965] pp.313-324). Moreover, refusing a link between the battle and creation in the HB based on the Canaanite myth denies the Hebrew corpus potential for originality. Indeed, contrary to the analysis given by Kloos (*Yhwh's Combat*, pp.70-86) we agree with Day and Cross that there is evidence to support the assumption that within several passages in the HB a connection between creation and a violent conflict with the sea is retained (Psalm 24; 74:12-17; 89:10-15; 104:1-9; Job 38:8-11) and where the connection is not apparent, this could be due to the myth of the Sea-battle being employed for other reasons, for example, to apply the theme to historical events (Exodus 15:1-18; Isaiah 17:12-14; Habakkuk 3:1ff) (Day, *God's Conflict,* pp.1ff; Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* pp.555, 557-559).
[118] Durham, *Exodus,* p.206 and Sarna, *Exodus,* p.57.
[119] Batto, 'The Reed Sea,' pp.32-33. Note also the presence of the 'mighty waters' in v. 10, which could be a reference to the 'intransigent elements' which had to be defeated by Yahweh before the commencement of creation and which must be ever defeated throughout history. See H.G. May, "Some Cosmic Connotations of Mayîm Rabbim, 'Many Waters,'" *JBL* 74, 1 (1955) pp.9-21.
[120] Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat,* pp.198-200.
[121] T.W. Mann, 'The Pillar of Cloud in the Reed Sea Narrative,**'** *JBL* 90, 1 (1971) pp.19-24.
[122] Luyster, 'Wind and Water,' p.2. See, for example, Psalm 18:9-15; 29:1-4,10; 89:6-17; 104:5-9, Isaiah 11:15, 51:10.

However, it should be noted that the battle described in Exodus 15 is not primarily a mythical one. Indeed, Cross and Freedman have declared that Exodus 14-15

> is a historical conflict: the enemy is Israel's historically-limited foe. Pharaoh is a tough opponent, but there is not the slightest hint that he is the Enemy, the symbols of cosmic chaos, dissociation, or death.[123]

In their favour, it must be acknowledged that in Exodus 15 the sea and the wind are completely under Yahweh's command and aid his mission rather than hinder it: not 'chaos' but human agents are the opponents of Yahweh.[124] Also, as Brueggemann suggests, the problem of evil presented in Exodus 15 is not a theoretical one but one that concerns survival.[125] In the final form of Exodus 15, the Hebrews are celebrating a real victory in a real time and place, a moment of 'social release of much pain and rage'[126] rather than a mythical accomplishment. However, though the statements made by Cross, Freedman and Brueggemann correctly emphasise the 'actual' event, Cross and Freedman seem too strict in disallowing even for the possibility of mythical allusions. As was demonstrated above, traces of a mythical battle within Exodus 15 are more than probable and, as Day and Propp have further noted, a battle between Yahweh and the Sea/sea monster at a time simultaneous or closely associated with the creation seems to be widely attested in other writings in the HB, though these are mostly limited to prophetic and poetic passages.[127] According to Cassuto, the reason for this could be the Torah's refusal to cite 'anything that cannot be understood literally,' therefore leaving the more imaginary language for the poets and the prophets.[128] The truth of this hypothesis is debatable; however, that which we can observe is that although the mythical content of the Sea-battle might be downplayed in Exodus 15, or, as Cross notes, be 'extraordinarily

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[123] Cross and Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam,' p.239. See, also, S-M. Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East*, BZAW 177 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1989) pp.123-124.
[124] See, also, Luyster, 'Wind and Water,' p.6.
[125] Brueggemann, 'A Response,' p.300.
[126] Brueggemann, 'A Response,' p.300.
[127] See n.117.
[128] Cassuto, *Exodus,* pp.179-180.

restrained,'[129] the form has remained in the poem:[130] the elements of the mythical battle have retained their place, even if they have been re-employed to serve another purpose. With this in mind, the event in Exodus 15 could be declared to be both a 'real' and a 'mythical' occurrence: Yahweh has come to the aid of his people and renewed his creative actions by establishing his dominion over the powers of the cosmos once more. He is both a historical God, who comes to the aid of his people in a specific time and place, and also a cosmological God, whose recreative acts recollect his mighty victory in the Sea-battle before the start of time.

7. The Song: More than Mythology

> … here [in Exodus 15] traditional mythical language is used to express the belief that the emergence of Israel as a people during the exodus was due to a creative act by Yahweh equal to that of the original creation of the cosmos itself.
>
> Bernard Batto[131]

In the above statement Batto has beautifully summarised some of the implications using a motif of the Sea-battle has for our comprehension of the Song of Miriam. Indeed, in line with the mythological ethos of the poem, the motif focuses our attention upon Yahweh as the deliverer as well as the creator and, accordingly, upon the Hebrews as the renewed act of God's creation (Exodus 15:16). As Fretheim has noted, the God portrayed in Exodus has been 'powerfully active in the realm of nature': he has caused the increase of the Hebrews (Exodus 1:7), sent the plagues (Exodus 7-11) and reinstated his power over the natural world (Exodus 14-15). Since in the overall framework of the exodus Yahweh's power in the realm of creation is strongly implied, it is hardly surprising that it is this aspect of his character that is the point of focus also in Exodus 14-15.[132]

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[129] Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, p.141. See also P.D. Miller, *Divine Warrior in Early Israel,* HSM 5 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) p.115.
[130] See Cassuto, *Exodus,* pp.179-180; Muilenburg, 'Liturgy,' p.153; cf. Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat,* pp.149, 151-152, 205-212.
[131] 'The Reed Sea,' p.35.
[132] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.167.

However, we must note that the connection between Yahweh's victory and the creation motif may have implications beyond the immediate interests present in the text. This is because, as Fretheim stated, these allusions connect our understanding to other appearances of the theme, which include the first time we were introduced to the motif in Exodus 1-2. As was noted in an earlier chapter, before Yahweh had become directly involved with the exodus, the women had not only been involved with creative miracles (e.g. the midwives in Exodus 1:15-21) but they had exemplified the *modus operandi* Yahweh would later adopt: it was a woman who first thought to make the realm of death, the Nile, into a realm of salvation,[133] an act that in a more grandiose manner is repeated by Yahweh in Exodus 14; it was a woman who placed Moses' basket on the shore of the river, היאר על־שפת (Exodus 2:3), a location Yahweh would also adopt for the Hebrews (albeit by the sea) in Exodus 13:18; 14:30. And, like the women in the text, Yahweh would also 'come down,' (Exodus 2:5; 3:8), 'see,' (2:2, 5, 25) 'send,' (2:5; 3:10-15) and command 'to go' (2:8; 3:10). Overall, we could suggest that the use of the creation motif in the Song of Miriam/ the Song of the Sea may be understood as a double-edged sword. Because the poet[134] uses this particular theme to celebrate the sea miracle, our understanding of the event is shaped accordingly:[135] an allusion is made not merely to the miracle and the mythical Sea-battle but, inadvertently, also to the women who inaugurated the course of events.[136]

Therefore, the Song of Miriam could be comprehended as a highly appropriate closure to the exodus account. Indeed, several feminist biblical commentators have noticed the manner in which Miriam is

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[133] See Ackerman, 'Literary Context,' pp.117-118; Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.117.

[134] Because the exact importance of Miriam's leadership is shrouded within indecision as was earlier demonstrated (pp.170-181), whether Miriam created or repeated the song becomes impossible to decide. For our purposes to achieve consensus on this issue is not vital, for that which is evident is that Miriam still acted in a leadership role in a cultic event regardless of her skills of composition. However, if we agree that the song was created by Moses, we could argue that such a disposition would add another moment of indecision into the text: in the final verses of the exodus it is the great male leader who not only celebrates Yahweh in his song but also recognises the importance of the role of the women in Exodus 1-2.

[135] Brueggemann, 'A Response,' p.299.

[136] See pp.140-142.

the one who joins the start and the end of exodus;[137] however, not many have recognised the aptness

of the action. That is, Miriam's Song reminds us that the exodus gained its first momentum through

the hands of the women, received its direction through the acts of the women, and received its

closure through the voices of the women. Miriam's Song could, therefore, be even perceived as a

moment of indecision, even of irony in the story: while celebrating Yahweh's victory, it also

celebrates the women who exemplified the course of Yahweh's deeds.[138]

However, the use of the creation motif has also other implications for our thesis, namely, the manner

we perceive the presence of holy war ideology within the poem. Only a few biblical commentators

have expressed concern regarding the celebration of the destruction of the Egyptians, and as was

noted earlier, Brueggeman has even defended such a position.[139] Yet, there are some biblical

scholars, to whom the idea of glory within battle is a difficult concept. Among others, Clines has

noted,

> Victories are won by superior numbers, by alliances, by tactics, and by
> chance. And a victor deserves praise for nothing other than winning. This
> is not my idea of glory, and the fact that someone says military prowess is
> what makes God glorious does not impress me.[140]

Although Clines' comment might appear somewhat overstated, the essence of his argument has been

echoed among feminist biblical scholars who have found the image of warfare in the Song of

Miriam problematic. Among these are Marie-Theres Wacker and Rapp, whose thesis is based on

Wacker's work. Wacker argues that far from agreeing with violence, Miriam's Song (Exodus

15:1/21) lives out a utopian ideal according to which the liberation of others is not to be paid by

someone else. Wacker further notes that Miriam could be understood as rejoicing over the

destruction of 'war materials,' an argument she sustains by stating that the phrase סוס ורכבו could be

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[137] See n.34.
[138] In this way, the women's actions could be argued to act as a *supplement* to Yahweh's achievements as suggested on pp.140-142.
[139] Brueggemann, 'A Response,' pp.299-301.
[140] Clines, 'Psalm 24,' p.176.

translated as 'horse and chariot' as opposed to 'horse and rider'. In this case it would be the 'war materials' that are thrown into the sea, rather than human beings as described in detail in the Mosaic song (Exodus 15:1-12).[141] Based on such an understanding, Rapp argues that Miriam's Song should be seen (yet again) as a critique of the Mosaic ending (Exodus 14:29-15:18), since the latter emphasises the death of the Egyptians.[142]

Although Wacker and Rapp's reading of Miriam's Song is original and certainly credible, there are several issues that problematise this understanding. These are presented by Leutzsch most capably in his article; however, of the numerous objections Leutzsch has stated, we will mention only three. To begin with, we can note that it is possible to understand רכבו as indicating a 'rider' rather than a 'chariot,' especially since the phrase סוס ורכבו is used only in a limited number of instances in the HB (Job 39:18; Jeremiah 51:21; Haggai 2:22; Zechariah 12:4) and thus the exact interpretation is open to debate.[143] However, even if the translation of רכבו as 'chariot' might be a suitable understanding of the passage in question, it is not easy to understand 'horse' as either 'war machinery' or even 'war materials,' which questions the manner Wacker and Rapp understand the difference between items that can be destroyed whilst still adhering to pacifistic principles. Moreover, we surely cannot assume that the horses and the chariots would have advanced into the sea without any riders.[144] Overall, it therefore appears that, like the Song of the Sea, Miriam's Song

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[141] M-T. Wacker, 'Mirjam: Kritischer Mut einer Prophetin,' in K. Walter (ed.), *Zwischen Ohnmacht und Befreiung: Biblische Frauengestalten* (Freiburg: Herder Verlag Gmbh, 1988) pp.46-47, 193.
[142] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.225. See, also, Fischer, *Gotteskünderinnen*, p.67.
[143] Leutzsch, 'Mirjams Tanz,' p.44. Notably, the presupposedly late invention of cavalry does not need to affect this translation. See, for example, Jacob, who understands the phrase 'horse and rider' as an image of the prideful and the sovereign whom God brings to shame rather than as a statement of the existence of Egyptian horse riders (*Exodus*, p.441).
[144] Leutzsch, 'Mirjams Tanz,' pp.43-44.

views Yahweh as the 'man of war' (Exodus 15:3), the one who throws[145] his opponent, including

human beings, into the sea and accordingly celebrates the deity's violent deeds.[146]

Another possible reading of Exodus 15:21 has been presented by Alice Bach. She argues for the

prospect that the female performers might be rejoicing 'in the destruction of the dominant male

culture, exemplified by and encoded within the language of warfare.'[147] Following on from Meyers'

research on victory song traditions,[148] she compares the Miriamic lyrics with those attributed to

Sappho, a reputed leader of a female community that performed music on Lesbos in the seventh

century.[149] She claims that some of the lyrics could be perceived as containing criticism of warfare,

a feature which she states is also present in the Song of Miriam.[150] However, as Sarah Shectman has

noted, the very fact that the women are celebrating a military victory holds within itself the

suggestion of the preservation of patriarchal values: whilst one form of male culture might have

been overthrown, the implicitly male culture advocated by the conquering deity has not only

survived but gained a position of ascendancy.[151]

Indeed, it must be admitted that the likelihood of the ideals of feminist pacifism having been

intentionally worded into the Song of Miriam seems improbable. Furthermore, since Miriam

celebrates a victory effected by the Divine Warrior (Exodus 15:21), it could be constructed as

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[145] Leutzsch has noted that Miriam's Song seems to celebrate Yahweh as the subject of violent deeds, the one who רמה, 'throws' his opponent into the sea, a possible indication of the 'warlike work of the bow' (cf. Jeremiah 4:29; Psalm 78:9). This interpretation would prescribe Yahweh's actions in the realm of violence and be in accordance with the preceding narrative (Exodus 14:1-31) as well as the song of Moses (Exodus 15:2-18) ('Mirjams Tanz,' pp.45-47). However, Leutzsch also notes that even though Yahweh might be capable of violent deeds, the Song does not encourage violence among men (p.51).

[146] Leutzsch, 'Mirjams Tanz,' pp.45ff; Dozeman, *Exodus,* pp.333, 341; Gowan, *Theology,* p.131; Lind, *Yahweh,* pp.49-51.

[147] A. Bach, 'De-Doxifying Miriam,' in S.M. Olyan and R.C. Culley (eds), *A Wise and Discerning Mind: Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long,* BJS 325 (Providence: BJS, 2000) p.4. For a similar argument, see E. Lüneburg, 'Schlagt die Trommeln, tanzt und fürchtet euch nicht!' in Schmidt, Korenhof and Jost (eds.), *Feministisch gelesen*, pp.49-50.

[148] See pp.64-66.

[149] Bach, 'With a Song,' pp.247-249.

[150] Bach, 'De-Doxifying Miriam,' p.4; 'With a Song,' pp.247, 249.

[151] Shectman, *Women,* p.46.

controversial to claim that the 'man of war' (v. 3) should be seen as an advocate for feminist principles. Are we thus to conclude that Miriam's Song agrees with and celebrates the violent measures taken by the deity to effect the sea miracle? Not necessarily. As has been demonstrated earlier, on occasion we might perceive an interpretation of a text beyond that of authorial intent. In this case, we wish to argue that Miriam's Song resists the dichotomy of being classified as either a celebration of war or a manifesto for pacifism; rather, the Song suspends the dichotomy between war and peace by incorporating both elements into the hymn.

Initially, we must note that in the exodus it was Yahweh's intent to have the Hebrews/the Egyptians know that he is God[152] as well as to have his name declared in all the earth (Exodus 9:16). And, as Fretheim has poignantly noted, without the faith-filled response of the Hebrews 'the great deeds of God would have been without a voice in the world.'[153] Accordingly, Miriam's Song could be understood as participating in this act of declaration: it is in her Song, where Yahweh's actions become condensed into two stanzas which celebrate solely the sea event and the God who effected it, as opposed to the Song of the Sea, which elaborates both on past and future events.[154] The Song of Miriam could even be described as a point of culmination, the ultimate expression of Yahweh's fame, the moment which, as Leutzsch notes, focuses exclusively on God's action at the sea.[155]

Miriam's Song indeed declares Yahweh's fame in a most capable manner; however, we must note that the purpose of the Song does not appear to have been solely the declaration of Yahweh's deeds.

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[152] See p.125 n.120.

[153] Fretheim, *Exodus,* p.161. See, also, Georg Fischer, who argues that although the term ידע does not appear in Exodus 15, the announcement that the Hebrews will know that Yahweh is God (Exodus 6:7) is fulfilled in abundance in the celebratory hymn ('Das Schilfmeerlied Exodus 15 in seinem Kontext,' *Biblica* 77, 1 [1996] p.40).

[154] Dozeman has described Miriam's Song as a counter-voice to the Mosaic one since it emphasises solely Yahweh's acts at the sea (*Exodus,* pp.331, 343).

[155] Leutzsch, 'Mirjams Lied,' p.51. See, also, Russell, who has suggested a chiastic structure for Exodus 15:1-21 in which vv. 19-21 serve to bring vv. 1-18 to a climax by drawing the readers' attention back to the sea event (*The Song of the Sea,* pp.24-25). Notably, Russell agrees with Janzen on the function of vv. 19-21 as an analepsis and thus he still comprehends Miriam's Song as the commencement of the celebration rather than its conclusion (pp.36ff).

Rather, if we examine the Song of Miriam in conjunction with the Song of the Sea, we can observe that the proclamation of Yahweh's fame seems to have gained an ulterior motive: to effect a peaceful march to the Promised Land (Exodus 15:13-18). We will argue that the Song of Miriam could be understood as an act of persuasion, where the declaration of Yahweh's deeds is joined with the hope that such a proclamation would effect the cessation of bloodshed as described in the latter half of the Song of the Sea. To support this reading, we must return to study the expressions used in the Song of the Sea in more detail.

As has been noted by several scholars, the Song of the Sea could be divided into two parts: verses 1-12 describe the Sea-battle itself, and verses (12)/13-18 the following events, that is, the establishment of Yahweh's reign.[156] The first part of the hymn uses various means of warfare to describe the sea event (see p.183); however, after v. 13 expressions related to battle are conspicuously absent.[157] Apart from the general 'terror' often associated with holy war (vv. 14-16),[158] and the mention of Yahweh's arm in v. 16, there is not a single direct allusion to warfare. In fact, even the arm of the Lord, majestic in drowning enemies and destroying armies in vv. 6 and 12, is only remembered as bringing dread, to make the nations 'still as stone' (v. 16). However, Cross has argued that the imagery of fear used in vv. 14-16 could be an indication of future actions of combat, namely, that Yahweh has already won the forthcoming battles in accordance with holy war ideology.[159] In addition, Cross further argues that the 'land/mountain of inheritance' in v. 17 could

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[156] Although there is some disagreement among scholars as to the exact division of the parts, there is some agreement as regards observing the Song as presented in two parts. See Cross and Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam,' pp.241-242; Childs, *Exodus,* pp.250-252; J.D.W. Watts, 'The Song of the Sea – Ex. XV,' *VT* 7, 4 (1957) p.371; Rozelaar, 'The Song of the Sea,' p.227; Fischer, 'Das Schilfmeerlied,' pp.35-36 and Russell, *The Song of the Sea,* pp.25-26.

[157] Note Fischer, who argues that while vv. 1-11 are filled with imagery related to the rescue at the sea, the language in vv. 12-18 is connected to different types of themes such as to 'guide' (v. 12f), the 'fear' of the people (vv.14-16) and to 'make firm' (vv. 17f) ('Das Schilfmeerlied, p.35).

[158] Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, p.141; Miller, *Divine Warrior,* p.116 and Dozeman, *Exodus,* pp.339-340.

[159] Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, p.141. See, also, Miller, *Divine Warrior,* p.116.

be understood as the 'land of which he [Yahweh] took possession,'[160] another possible indication of military activities.

However, the question needs to be raised whether warfare is what is indicated in vv. 13-18. First of all, although הר נחלתך, 'the mountain of your inheritance,' or, as BDB demonstrates, a mountain of 'possession' or 'property' (v. 17)[161] could be an indication of the land of Canaan or various sanctuaries therein,[162] within the context of the poem the cultic significance of Yahweh's dwelling seems to be in view (Exodus 15:13, 17), which makes the equation of the mountain with Canaan problematic if not impossible.[163] Also, the significance of the term inheritance/possession can only be revealed if we are aware of the action that has causes such an 'inheritance' to be acquired. As was noted, according to Cross the act referred to is not only Yahweh's miraculous deed at the sea but Yahweh 'possessing' the land; however, even the mythical tale Cross uses to support his thesis, namely the myth of Baal, does not offer such an interpretation. That is, even Cross' own reading of the myth leads us to believe that the temple is built for Baal because he has defeated the sea,[164] not because of his ensuing victories as is also noted by Kloos.[165] This would certainly suit the context of Exodus 15, where Yahweh's feat at the sea is followed by a statement that the nations will 'hear and tremble' (Exodus 15:14), that is, the nations will hear of Yahweh's exploits and be stricken with

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[160] Cross, *Canaanite Myth,* p.142. See, also, Watts, who has also argued that vv. 14-16 should be read as a description of the conquest ('The Song of the Sea,' pp.377-378).
[161] BDB, p.635.
[162] Cross argues that the 'mountain of inheritance' is a reference to Canaan whereas the shrine refers to the sanctuary at Gilgal (*Canaanite Myth,* p.142). See, also, Watts, 'The Song of the Sea,' p.377.
[163] Propp has done an excellent summary of the possible locations of Yahweh's mountain. As regards Canaan, he states that although Canaan is often called Yahweh's 'inheritance' (cf. Psalm 78:54), Canaan is rarely called Yahweh's mountain and within the context of the book of Exodus it is unlikely that it would have been so called. Other possible places for Yahweh's mountain are Sinai, Zion, Shiloh, Gilgal and Northern Israel, of which Propp claims Sinai is the most probable candidate if we accept that the Song originates from the period of the exodus event. However, due to the vagueness of the description given to Yahweh's mountain, no firm conclusion can be reached. See Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, pp.562-568.
[164] Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, pp.112-116.
[165] Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat,* pp.138-139, 205-212. See, also, Day, *God's Conflict,* pp.7-10.

terror (Numbers 22:2-6; Joshua 5:1; 9:24-25).[166] Accordingly, Yahweh can take his inheritance because of his already existing fame rather than *vice versa* (Exodus 15:14-16).

However, Cross should be commended for his observation that on occasion fear seems to be a strong accompaniment of holy war, as could be demonstrated from other biblical passages (Joshua 2:18-13; Deuteronomy 2:24-25; 11:24-25). Yet, if we wish to approach Exodus 15 in its final form and in its final placement, it is not the battles in other biblical books that are of interest to us, but rather how the theme of fear is handled within the Song as it is now presented.[167] Indeed, if presume that the exodus and the wilderness period is "the time of holy war 'par excellence,'"[168] perhaps even the constitutive event influencing other such descriptions elsewhere in the HB as suggested by Brian Russell,[169] then the passage certainly deserves to be observed in its own right. And intriguingly, within the Song, fear is not mentioned in connection with warfare. Rather, 'fear', אימתה, as described in Exodus 15:16, appears to be connected with an emotional state. Propp has convincingly argued that the phrases related to fear in Exodus 15:14-16, that is, 'they will tremble' (Exodus 15:14, ירגזון),[170] 'anguish will seize' (Exodus 15:14, חיל אחז),[171] 'they will be terrified' (Exodus 15:15, נבהלו),[172] 'trembling will seize' (Exodus 15:15, יאחזמו רעד),[173] 'they will melt' (Exodus, 15:15, נמגו),[174] and 'on them will fall terror and dread' (Exodus 15:16, תפל עליהם אימתה ופחד) are all

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[166] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.533.

[167] See, also, Lind who argues that the sea event qualified Israel's understanding of holy war imagery. That is, although the Song of the Sea does contain vocabulary related to holy war which Israel shared with the Near East (Exodus 15:14-15), these statements gained a new meaning when used 'in connection with the exclusive act of Yahweh at the sea' and might have incited the memory of the sea event at a later time (*Yahweh*, p.50).

[168] Lind, *Yahweh*, p.16.

[169] Russell, *The Song of the Sea*, pp.139ff.

[170] According to BDB, רגז can refer to an emotional state (to be agitated) or an associated action (quiver/quake) (p.919).

[171] Associated emotions such as sorrow, fear and pain can be described as 'seizing' the sufferer (2 Samuel 1:9, Isaiah 21:3) (Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.533). Driver might also be correct in connecting the phrase with birth pains (*Exodus*, p.137).

[172] Propp takes the verb to indicate an emotional state (*Exodus 1-18*, p.534), an interpretation also supported by BDB, p.96. Driver suggests that the verb could also mean to be confounded 'by any strong emotion, especially fear' (Judges 20:41) (*Exodus*, p.138).

[173] Note the chiastic pairing of 'trembling' and 'terrified' in v. 15 (Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.534).

[174] Driver takes the phrase to be figurative for 'were incapacitated and helpless through terror and despair' (Joshua 2:9, 24) (*Exodus*, p.138).

descriptions most often connected with an agitated emotional expression.[175] The verb 'to melt' is especially suitable for this purpose, for apart from describing moistening, it also recollects other instances where mountains 'melt' before God, symbolizing the 'loss of moral firmness, particularly courage' (Judges 5:5; Isaiah 34:3; Micah 1:4). Such a reading within Exodus 15:1-18 is especially apt, since the verb can parallel the 'nations' progressive discomfiture' with the behaviour of the sea as described in Exodus 15:8: 'they [the nations] are perturbed, they quiver, they run like water, they are petrified.'[176] This metaphor culminates and is also contrasted with the nations ultimately being 'still as stone' in Exodus 15:16. As Cassuto notes, in Exodus 15:5 Yahweh's power caused the Egyptians to go 'down in the depths like stone'; now in v. 16 the noun 'stone' is used again to remind us of this power which in the future will petrify all of Israel's enemies (cf. 1 Samuel 25:37).[177] They will be 'struck dumb as a stone,'[178] while Israel passes by[179] in their midst: as the waters of the sea stood still for the Hebrews to cross (Exodus 14:29; 15:8), now their enemies could be argued do the same.[180] Such a peaceful march is effected by Yahweh's preceding fame, which, after all, was his initial goal in Exodus 9:16.[181]

In light of the above arguments it seems likely that the Hebrews are expecting a peaceful march to Yahweh's dwelling: Yahweh's fame will cause the nations to tremble (15:14) and Yahweh can lead his people to his holy mountain without further acts of violence (15:13, 17). For this reason we can

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[175] Although in this thesis all of the above verbs have been interpreted in the future tense, an admission is made that the Song of the Sea uses various perfect and imperfect verbal forms to describe the event. For a brief study of the issue, see Freedman, 'Moses and Miriam,' pp.67-83.

[176] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.535.

[177] Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.177. Durham has also noted how the terror experienced by the nations is skillfully described as a growing 'paralysis of fear' (*Exodus*, p.208).

[178] Durham, *Exodus*, p.208. See, also, Russell, *The Song of the Sea*, p.16.

[179] Although עבר, 'cross over/ pass by' could be understood as indicating the forthcoming violent conquest (Dozeman, *Exodus*, p.34; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, p.141), we must note that the verb also occurs in non-military contexts in the HB (Deuteronomy 2:4ff). In addition, עבר could be taken as a parallel to the sea crossing, implicating the paralysed terror of the peoples as Israel 'passes by', an argument which certainly finds support in the parallel actions of the sea and the nations as noted above (vv. 8, 14-16; Russell, *The Song of the Sea*, p.30). For the pluriform nature of the verb, see Propp *Exodus 1-18*, pp.537-538.

[180] Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.537; Russell, *The Song of the Sea*, pp.15-16, 30; Cassuto, *Exodus*, p.177.

[181] See, also, Kloos, *Yhwh's Combat*, pp.138-139 and Russell, *The Song of the Sea*, p.31.

note that the declaration of Yahweh's fame in the Song of the Sea/the Song of Miriam could be argued to have established a somewhat contradictory paradigm. By incorporating within themselves either directly (the Song of the Sea) or by implication (the Song of Miriam) both the celebration of war and peace, the Songs concurrently promote opposed causes. Indeed, if we understand both of the Songs as most capably declaring Yahweh's military feat (Exodus 15:1-12, 21) and, in addition, if we agree that the Songs were a joint celebration as was argued earlier, Miriam's Song could be understood to be in support of, even if not the vocalization of, the more pacifist endeavour as described in Exodus 15:13-18. Why the peaceful march is not depicted in the Song of Miriam will be discussed shortly; however, the nature of the joint celebration does indicate that both peace and war are either inscribed or implicated within both presentations. As in Sherwood's reading of Hosea 1-3, where there can be 'no beginning without harlotry and no innocence without knowledge,'[182] in the Songs there can be no war without peace and no conflict without resolution. We could even suggest that like the *supplement*, the ideal of a peaceful march seems to both add to and even complete[183] our comprehension of Yahweh as the man of war (15:3), who becomes inseparable from his portrayal as a deity in favour of peace (Exodus 15:13-18).

However, it appears that a peaceful march is not the only expectation the Hebrews have placed upon their conquering deity. Indeed, apart from resisting the dichotomy between war and peace as illustrated above, the hymns could also be argued to resist the opposition between the respective subjects of these actions, that is, the distinction between Yahweh as a warrior (Exodus 15:3) and Yahweh as a parent (Exodus 15:13-18). It is notable that having described the function of the divine warrior in Exodus 15:1-12, in the second part of the poem the issue of warfare seems to be by-passed in favour of a more intimate connection between the Hebrews and their God. Verse 13 reads:

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[182] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.208. See, also, p.19.
[183] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.184.

'in your grace you will lead the people whom you have redeemed, you will guide them in your strength to your holy dwelling'. Further, in v. 16 the Hebrews are referred to as a nation that Yahweh has 'created.' To study these passages a little further, the following observations can be made.

Firstly, as stated in v. 13, Yahweh will lead his people in his grace, חסד, indicating kindness or even lovingkindness.[184] Propp understands חסד as 'an emotional state motivating action,' which in this case most likely rises from Yahweh's relationship to Israel's ancestors (Exodus 15:2).[185] Thus, we could argue that Yahweh rescues Israel out of loyalty to his promises, which would certainly be fitting within the wider context of Exodus.[186] Secondly, this lovingkindness has led to an act of 'creation' (v. 16) and 'redemption' (v. 13) of Israel. גאל, to redeem or act as kinsman,[187] is probably a reference back to Exodus 4:22, where Yahweh declares Israel to be his firstborn son.[188] In other words, as with חסד, it is out of duty and in this case out of filial duty that Yahweh has decided to redeem the Hebrews, tying himself in a kinship relationship with the people. Similarly קנה, though often in reference to acquiring through effort of payment,[189] in some contexts can also indicate creation, that is, to 'beget' or 'become a parent of.'[190] As William Irwin has demonstrated, in a limited selection of passages קנה implicates parental relations, most obviously in Genesis 4:1 and Deuteronomy 32:6, in both of which the maternal/paternal connection between the subject and the

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[184] BDB, pp.338-339.
[185] Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* p.532. See, also, Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.339.
[186] Regarding Yahweh's promises and their fulfilment in Exodus, see pp.101ff.
[187] BDB, p.145. See, also, Sarna, *Exodus,* p.25.
[188] See Propp, *Exodus 1-18,* pp.217, 532 and Cassuto, *Exodus,* p.176.
[189] BDB, pp.888-889. See, also, Driver, *Exodus,* pp.43-44; Dozeman, *Exodus,* p.168.
[190] Durham, *Exodus,* p.208 and W.A. Irwin, 'Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?' *JBL* 80, 2 (1961) p.135. Propp is correct in noting that 'creation' *per se* is not the point of the verb (see Cross and Freedman, 'The Song of Miriam,' pp.242, 249) but that 'procreation' seems to be more in view (*Exodus 1-18,* pp.539-540). Indeed, קנה could be argued to appear in this sense possibly even up to eight passages (including Exodus 15:16) in the HB, that is, in Genesis 4:1, 14:19, 22; Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 74:2; 139:13; Proverbs 8:22 and Isaiah 11:11 (Irwin, 'Wisdom,' pp.135ff). However, Propp later argues that the meaning to 'acquire' dominates over 'procreate' in the said verse (pp.539-540).

object is clearly the point of focus.[191] In light of the use of both חסד and גאל in the verse, which appear to imply Yahweh's emotional or parental relationship to the Hebrews, it seems to follow that to translate קנה as to 'beget' is more than appropriate. This interpretation is further supported by the use of נחע, 'lead,' and especially נהל, 'guide,' and נוה, 'dwelling,' in the passage, all of which appear to evoke a pasturing quality,[192] possibly implying Yahweh's care for his people.

Therefore, it seems probable that after the miracle at the sea the Hebrews are expecting Yahweh to take up a nurturing role towards his people without necessitating further actions of warfare. Indeed, we could argue that as the Songs challenge the perceived dichotomy between war and peace, they also resist the distinction between Yahweh as the warrior and Yahweh as the parent. Rather, in the Songs Yahweh becomes described as the remedy and the poison,[193] the war-maker and the peacemaker, the deity with contradicting identities both of which are celebrated in the Songs performed in his honour.

However, before we close our reading of the Song of Miriam, we must address one more issue, namely, our earlier suggestion of Miriam's Song being understood as an act of persuasion. Naturally, we could arrive at such a conclusion by stating that Miriam's Song partakes in the declaration of Yahweh's fame (Exodus 9:16), joining in the wish presented in the Song of the Sea for a peaceful march to the Promised Land (Exodus 15:13-18). However, the element of persuasion has an added implication for the Song of Miriam. As we stated earlier, the use of the creation motif in both of the Songs relates our understanding of Yahweh as the creator God to other instances where the theme was used elsewhere in the Exodus. This included the first time we were introduced

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[191] Irwin, 'Wisdom,' p.135.
[192] Brenner suggests that נהל means 'to lead to a watering station and cause to rest there,' whereas נוה, 'dwelling,' 'has the specific meaning of the abode of a shepherd or the flocks' (*The Song of the Sea*, p.127). See, also, Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, p.532; Driver, *Exodus*, p.137; Sarna, *Exodus*, p.58 and Dozeman, *Exodus*, p.339.
[193] Derrida, *Dissemination*, pp.100-101.

to the motif in Exodus 1-2, where the actions of the various women were portrayed as illustrative of Yahweh's conduct later in the story. However, that which we must add is that the stated parallels have one significant discrepancy: both of the mothers in Exodus 2:1-10 had accepted Moses as their son (vv. 2, 10); yet, by the end of Exodus 15 similar filial connections between Yahweh and his people appear to be absent, or at least not emphasised.[194] Therefore, we could argue that the wish for a parental liaison between the Hebrews and Yahweh as presented in Exodus 15:13-18 could be understood as an appropriate closure to the exodus account, since the stated desire draws to conclusion the parallels between the respective actions of the women and the deity. In addition, the suggested correspondence is emphasised by the role of Miriam in both accounts: in Exodus 2:7 she encouraged Pharaoh's daughter to adopt Moses, whereas in Exodus 15:21 her Song is the last act of declaration of Yahweh's fame at the sea event. Since, as Leutzsch has noted, Miriam's Song could be presented as the moment which focuses solely on Yahweh's deeds at the sea and could thus be portrayed as the culmination of the celebration,[195] we could also depict the Song as the ultimate expression of persuasion. That is, because Miriam's Song celebrates Yahweh's military triumph without introducing the wish for the peaceful march (Exodus 15:13-18), the Song becomes the decisive expression of Yahweh's feat and, accordingly, the decisive expression of coercion. By conjoining her presentation with that of the Song of the Sea, Miriam's Song embodies the hope of a peaceful march without directly stating it, remaining as the celebration of warfare and Yahweh's fame as was the deity's stated desire in Exodus 9:16. Accordingly, it can be suggested that the Song of Miriam establishes a conflicting paradigm of both devotion and persuasion, where Yahweh is both adored as well as coerced in a single act of declaration.

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[194] A parental role for Yahweh is referred to in Exodus 4:22-23; however, apart from his duty to redeem his 'son' (cf. Exodus 6:6; 15:13), there is no action that precedes or follows the statement that would particularly indicate parental care. Rather, Yahweh's relationship to Israel is spelled out in terms of obligation (cf. Exodus 6:2-8) (Gunn, 'Exodus 1-14,' p.82).

[195] Leutzsch, 'Mirjams Lied,' p.51.

8. Conclusion

To return to the quote from Brooke at the beginning of this chapter, we asked if the message in the Song of Miriam is 'tamed' because a woman is singing it, or is the message retained but a point is made about women's secondary status? In this thesis we have shown the answer to be neither. Indeed, in Exodus 15:19-21 we witnessed not an intermittent chorus, but a female cultic leader taking her rightful place as the orchestrator of the celebration alongside her brother Moses. In addition, we suggested that Miriam's Song presented a moment of indecision in the text, where Miriam did command praise from the Hebrew men/women, yet the exact significance of her role was not disclosed in the text.

Furthermore, we argued that Miriam could also be described as present in Exodus 14, where the verb יצב, 'to stand firm' as used in Exodus 2:4 and 14:13 acted as a *supplement*, where the phrase brought us not only the memory of Moses' rescue, but also the manner in which the rescue was achieved. It recalled the deeds Miriam committed in Exodus 2:4-9 (יצב, ראה/ידע and חרש), which became the paradigm of faith for the Hebrews to follow in Exodus 14:13.

We also examined the content of the Song of the Sea and the Song of Miriam and suggested that both Songs took their inspiration from the mythological Sea-battle, which tied our understanding of the Songs with the creation motif and the other instances where the theme had been used elsewhere in Exodus. Thus Miriam's Song became understood as an appropriate closure to the exodus account, since it reminded us of the actions of the women in Exodus 1-2. In addition, the Song gained an ironical twist since, as it established a declaration of Yahweh's fame (Exodus 9:16), it also by implication participated in the wish for a peaceful march to the Promised Land as presented in Exodus 15:13-18. Indeed, by describing Yahweh's relation to the Hebrews as that of a parent rather than that of a warrior, Exodus 15:13-18 presented us with an image that was in tension with the

portrayal of the 'man of war' in Exodus 15:1-12. Hence, we argued that Miriam's Song could be understood as an act of persuasion, where Yahweh as the warrior was adored in order to effect the emergence of Yahweh's parental qualities. Miriam's Song established a conundrum where the dichotomy between war/warrior and peace/parent was suspended by joining both concepts in a harmonious unity performed as an act of worship.

Chapter 5

Voice and Counter-Voice: Numbers 12

1. Introduction

> Like a set of mirrors, it [the text] encourages the reader to notice how
> elements of the text reflect on each other. Even more, it resembles a
> kaleidoscope. It is full of divergent views, so that the reader need only turn
> it and turn it to see that all of them are in it.[1]
>
> Benjamin Sommer

Although the above quote by Sommer refers to the various and often contradictory depictions of the character of Moses in Numbers 11, his observations could be equally valid if applied to the description of Miriam in Numbers 12. Indeed, while Rapp illustrates the portrayal of Miriam in Numbers 12 as negative and dangerous,[2] according to Seebass we should remember that the ending of Numbers 12 does not reflect Miriam as one shamed but rather as one respected by her people.[3] Furthermore, I. Fischer has claimed that Numbers 12 could be considered as a narrative of Miriam's rebellion, corresponding to the stories regarding Aaron and Moses' insurgence in Numbers 20:2-13, explaining her death before the people enter into the Promised Land. Fischer thus claims that since Numbers 12 is part of the bigger narrative framework illustrating the demise of all three Hebrew leaders (Moses, Aaron and Miriam) prior to the crossing of Jordan, it can only be seen as hostile to women if torn out of its wider context.[4]

Numbers 12 is indeed a story open to a variety of views, a narrative which, to refer to Sommer, reflects divergent points of engagement which are all simultaneously present in the story. In reference to Rapp, one can find in the narrative an affirmation of what Ilana Pardes calls the 'patriarchal presuppositions', including the low position of women within leadership and/or family

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[1] 'Reflecting on Moses: the Redaction of Numbers 11,' *JBL* 118, 4 (1999) p.624.
[2] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.117.
[3] Seebass, *Numeri*, pp.60-61, 73.
[4] Fischer, 'The Authority,' pp.171-172.

(Numbers 12:14). Yet, we can also observe an account of 'antithetical approaches,'[5] that is, a discourse contrasting with the Mosaic hegemony to be observed, for example, in Miriam's office as a prophetess (Numbers 12:6-8), the audacity with which she demands to be heard (Numbers 12:1-2), and the severity of her punishment (Numbers 12:14).[6] Moreover, as was demonstrated in the translation of Numbers 12, the story contains several textual difficulties, which renders parts of the narrative and our understanding of these parts, even of the story as a whole, as rather ambiguous. However, in this thesis these instances of lack of clarity will be considered not as a sign of poor editorial work but as part of the construction of the narrative, giving the story 'less seams and more woof and weave.'[7] That is, through our exploration of Numbers 12, we wish to portray a narrative which revolves around indeterminacy and ambiguity, portraying Miriam as a complex character with qualities that determine her as both an outcast and as a heroine.

In order to achieve this goal, a structuralist analysis of both Numbers 11:4-35[8] and 12 will be presented first, followed by a deconstructive reading of the appropriate parts of the narratives. Although Miriam does not appear in Numbers 11:4-35, a structuralist/deconstructive reading of this passage is nevertheless important for not only is Numbers 11-12 arguably a unit,[9] but our reading of Numbers 11:4-35 also affects our understanding of Miriam in Numbers 12, as well as our comprehension of the function and status of the other main characters in the story.

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[5] Pardes, *Countertraditions*, p.10.
[6] Pardes, *Countertraditions*, p.11.
[7] Hymes, 'Numbers 12,' p.3.
[8] Because Numbers 11:1-3 appears to function as a 'schematic summary' of the 'complaint stories to follow' (D.T. Olson, *Numbers,* INT [Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996] p.63) due to space we will not analyse it separately but only refer to it when relevant to our analysis.
[9] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' pp.26ff; Milgrom, *Numbers,* pp.376-380. For a contrary opinion, see Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' pp.125-126.

2. Structuralist Reading of Numbers 11-12

2.1 Numbers 11:4-35: The Quail Story

The narrative in Numbers 11:4-35 appears as a compilation of two themes, namely that of leadership (cf. Exodus 18), and lack of meat (cf. Exodus 16). Although in their present form the stories have been interwoven into one unit,[10] for the sake of clarity these themes will be approached separately.

The story of the quail presents Moses as the leader as well as the mediator between Yahweh and his people (Numbers 11:11-15). However, as opposed to the brief portrayal of Moses in Numbers 11:1-3, where he is described as a willing mediator or, as Milgrom notes, as an 'archetype of the prophetic intercessor,'[11] this image becomes somewhat altered in the present story. Indeed, biblical scholars have described Moses as having an 'outburst of his discontent' (Greenstone),[12] lacking the 'selfless concern for his people' he had displayed earlier (Milgrom)[13] and believing himself to be an inadequate leader whilst complaining against the people as well as Yahweh concerning his current disposition (Ashley).[14] In other words, as Marc Brettler states, in the present narrative, 'the attitude of Moses toward the Israelites is highly negative.'[15] Moses' humility and patience as displayed in Numbers 11:1-3 have been replaced by bitterness and doubt, resulting in a complex set of questions regarding Moses' displeasure with the people, himself and the deity.

These objections are most clearly displayed in Moses' complaint in Numbers 11:11-15, as has been illustrated by Rapp. Moses' relationship, and discontentment, with Yahweh seems to be addressed in vv. 11(b-d) and 14(a)-15(d). This liaison is characterised by the term רע, 'bad', that is, the

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[10] In this chapter we will follow the division of the stories as set out by Sommer (quail story: vv. 4-15, 18-24a, 31-35; the elders' story: vv. 16-17, 24b-30, 'Reflecting,' p.604) with the amendment that Moses' complaint is seen as part of both the elders and the quail story (see Rapp, *Mirjam,* p.152 and van Seters, *The Life,* pp.228-229).
[11] Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.83.
[12] *Numbers,* p.109.
[13] *Numbers,* p.85.
[14] T.R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers,* NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) p.210.
[15] M.Z. Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995) p.69.

unhappiness experienced by Moses is characterised by Yahweh's ill treatment of him, namely, Moses' loneliness in leadership which he sees as a punishment from God.[16] The exact nature of the displeasure is further unfolded in vv.12(a-g)-14(a-c), which describe Moses' relationship with the Hebrews. In these verses Moses depicts his connection with the people as increasingly adverse: not only is the cause of the complaint, כל־העם הזה, 'all this people', constantly repeated,[17] but by contrasting the phrases אם־אנכי, 'if I' (v. 12) with ואם־ככה את, 'if thus you' (v. 15), a connection and a contrast between the two verses is established, which elaborates on the relationship between Yahweh and the Hebrews and also distances Moses from this affiliation with the use of אנכי in v. 12.[18] This distance is made even stronger by Moses' doubt concerning his ability to provide meat in v. 13 and to carry the people in v. 14.[19] Indeed, as Sakenfeld notes, Moses considers himself inadequate for the mission God has given him and since it is Yahweh who has given Moses a mission he cannot complete, 'everything is God's fault, as Moses sees it.'[20] It is Yahweh and his 'evil' treatment of his chosen servant that leads Moses to consider even death as preferable to his current situation (Numbers 11:15).

Moses' complaint could thus be described as a confrontation sequence, where Moses is opposed to Yahweh and his chosen mode of leadership.[21] Or, from the point of view of Moses' counter-programme, Moses has become the initiator, or the 'sender', who delivers an objection to Yahweh, the one who, as Moses understands, has made his role in leadership difficult.

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[16] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.156-158. See, also, Milgrom, *Numbers,* pp.85-86 and Ashley, *Numbers,* p.210.
[17] See, also, Hymes, who sees the use of the term as contemptuous ('Pluriform Analysis,' p.98).
[18] If joined together, vv. 12 and 15 could read: If you treat me like this (v.15a), that I have to carry these people like a nurse (v. 12b-g), then rather kill me (v. 15b). See Schart, *Mose,* p.161f as quoted by Rapp, *Mirjam,* p.155.
[19] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.155-156.
[20] Sakenfeld, *Journeying,* p.72. See, also, Baentsch, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri,* p.507.
[21] As Davies has noted, the driving force behind Numbers could be suggested to be Yahweh's willingness to deliver his people to the Promised Land, the postponement of which is depicted through various 'murmuring' stories. These demonstrate the journey as constantly 'interrupted and delayed by the sins of the people' (*Numbers,* p.lviii). See, also, Budd, *Numbers,* p.xxv-xxvi and Jobling, 'Sturctural Analysis,' pp.33ff. Consequently, Moses' antagonistic position towards Yahweh in Numbers 11:11-15 could also describe Moses as an opponent not only of Yahweh's mode of leadership but of the main programme as a whole, since Moses' act of murmuring causes a delay in the endeavour.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Moses	Complaint about the burden of the people/ meat	Yahweh
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	Moses	Yahweh

Moses' antagonistic position *vis-à-vis* Yahweh as well as his sentiments towards the people as demonstrated above can be further examined by exploring the narrative which precedes Moses' complaint. Indeed, Moses' grievance occurs after an affair instigated by the 'rabble' in v. 4, who prompt a craving among the Hebrews for meat. The exact meaning of the 'rabble', האספסף, is unclear; however, if we follow the account in Exodus 12:38, which refers to 'many mixed people,' ערב רב, it seems that all the non-Hebrews travelling with the people are indicated, most likely the desired meaning also in Numbers 11.[22] What follows is a short description of the qualities of the manna (vv. 7-9) and a note regarding the displeasure of both Yahweh and Moses, although the murmuring is not stated to have been directed at them specifically (v. 10).[23]

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
The rabble	Complaint about meat	Moses? Yahweh?
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
The Hebrews	The rabble/the Hebrews	Moses/Yahweh

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[22] See Levine, *Numbers,* pp.320-321. See also van Seters, who notes further parallels between the Exodus account and Numbers 11, which includes the number of the people in both accounts (600 000; Exodus 12:37; Numbers 11:21) and, in addition, in Exodus 17:7 'Yahweh' is in the midst of the people, whereas in Numbers 11:4 it is the rabble that is in their 'midst' vs. Yahweh (v. 20) (*The Life of Moses*, p.229). Such a description could be used to further highlight the element of unbelief in the story.

[23] According to Coats, v. 13 implies that Moses had mediated the request for meat to Yahweh; however, Yahweh had placed the request on Moses in anger, possibly due to Moses' unbelief as implied in vv. 21ff (*Rebellion,* p.103). Although this reading is possible, it is not evident from the text, since no act of intercession by Moses regarding the people's request for meat occurs. See, also, Hymes, who interprets the people's request for meat as a wish or a desire rather than a direct question ('Pluriform Analysis,' p.119).

In light of the preceding events, therefore, one might wish to enquire as to the exact cause of Moses'

objections in Numbers 11:11-15. Indeed, although the people might appear discontented, they are

weeping in private by their tents (v. 10) rather than rebelling against or complaining at/about Moses,

which somewhat questions Moses' motives and makes the possible reasons behind his complaint at

best ambiguous.[24] However, this ambiguity might be explicable if one observes Moses as a person

'seduced'; that is, a person who has been deceived by the protagonists of the original complaint (the

people) to form an opposition of his own. Whilst in Numbers 11:4-6 the rabble could be considered

as having instigated an affair which persuaded the Hebrews to follow suit, now in Numbers 11:11-

15 the complaint of the people has given rise to Moses' unhappiness.[25] As Jobling has demonstrated,

via such an arrangement the text appears to separate the instigators from those deceived by the

original perpetrators, which, appropriately, leads to the punishment of the instigators only (the

rabble, Numbers 11:34).[26] Jobling's statement is especially compelling if viewed in the light of

Yahweh's response to Moses' objections. Indeed, Yahweh states that the act of weeping is a

rebellious deed directed not at Moses (vv. 13-14) but against the deity (v. 20) and, moreover, it is

not Moses' duty to provide the meat (v. 13), but Yahweh's, who is more than able to provide that

which is needed (vv. 18-20, 23).[27] Yahweh's reply, therefore, reinforces the people's complaint not

as a reason for Moses' self-doubt but as a rebellion against Yahweh, which both dispels the need for

Moses' murmuring and necessitates punishment for the original instigators in the story.

That which follows is the implementation of Yahweh's counter-programme to Moses' and the

people's complaint: the provision of the meat as a punishment for the rebellion. However, although

it seems to be inferred in the story that it is the rabble who are both punished and buried in Numbers

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[24] Sommer, 'Reflecting,' p.613.
[25] Milgrom, *Numbers,* pp.376-377.
[26] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' pp.39-40.
[27] See Jobling, 'A Structural Analysis,' p.30 and L.J.M. Claassens, *The God who Provides: Biblical Images of Divine Nourishment* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004) pp.6-7.

11:34,[28] the narrative is not completely clear whether the rabble are the only ones in need of correction in the story. Indeed, since Moses' reply in vv. 21-22 regarding Yahweh's statement about the provision in vv. 18-20 appears somewhat ironic,[29] both Jobling and Milgrom have argued that the punishment of the plague could have originated as a proof of God's power to Moses, as a response to Moses' 'faltering faith,'[30] which, especially in light of God's statement that he will fulfil his word for 'you' (Moses) in v. 23 appears convincing.[31] This interpretation is especially suitable if we perceive Moses to be a leader deceived into a state of opposition by the people's rebellion as suggested by Jobling, in which case it could be suggested that Moses lacks conviction of Yahweh's might. In this case the provision of the quail would function both to convince Moses of Yahweh's power and punish the rabble for the affair they instigated.[32] However, if Moses' statement in vv. 21-22 is understood not as a declaration of unbelief but as stating the impossible task of Yahweh ever satisfying the Hebrews, as Baruch Levine has suggested,[33] Moses could be described as an 'anti-prophet' and a 'snitch', complaining about the people to Yahweh and therefore encouraging Yahweh to punish them, the opposite role of a faithful intercessor.[34] Moses would thus appear not only as a bitter and doubting leader, but also as an advocate *against* the people. Whichever way the correspondence between Moses and Yahweh is understood, what is clear is that the cause of the plague seems to be in some measure related to Moses' behaviour. He does not intercede for the people but rather remains frustrated and bitter, possibly even working against those he leads.

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[28] See p.208.

[29] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.30. See, also, Gray, *Numbers,* pp.112-113.

[30] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.30; Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.88.

[31] Sommer, 'Reflecting,' p.613.

[32] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' pp.29-31,40.

[33] Levine, *Numbers,* p.325.

[34] Sommer, 'Reflecting,' pp.613-614.

The demonstration of Yahweh's might occurs in Numbers 11:31-34 where the רוח, 'wind', from Yahweh causes the quail to rise from the sea. Accordingly, the people venture forth to gather the quail that has fallen outside/around the camp.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Yahweh	Quail	The Hebrews
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
Wind	Hebrews	(Yahweh)

However, as was predicted, this 'blessing' soon turns sour, and the punishment foretold in v. 20 comes to pass (Numbers 11:33),[35] resulting in an attribution/domination sequence,[36] that is, the death and burial of the rebels, presumably outside the camp (Numbers 11:34). Intriguingly, Moses does not receive any punishment for his doubts, nor are the people at large afflicted, but rather the ones who partook in the original rebellion as is indicated by the aetiology (קברות התאוה, 'the graves of craving').[37] The aetiology could also be treated as the final correlated sequence of the narrative, since a return to the status quo seems to be presumed (v. 34).

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[35] This could be described as an act of domination, since in Numbers 11:31-33 Yahweh could be described as overpowering the people with a plague. Both Coats and Budd have noted that the punishment predicted in v. 20 is incompatible with the actual judgment in v. 33 (Coats, *Rebellion*, p.109; Budd, *Numbers,* p.125); however, it is possible that the differences within the respective punishments could simply be a literary device to build up to a dramatic climax in v. 33 (see van Seters, who suggests that vv. 19-20 are a build-up to the statement of judgment in v. 23; *The Life,* p.232). For possible theories as regards the above elements being a part of a negative quail tradition superimposed onto a positive one, see Davies, *Numbers,* pp.102-103; Fritz, *Israel in der Wüste,* pp.70-75; Coats, *Rebellion,* pp.106ff.

[36] At the stage of domination, the hero overpowers his opponent and at the moment of attribution receives the object desired in the beginning of the narrative. In our case, the cause of the discord (the rabble) is removed from among the Hebrews and Moses is presumably convinced of Yahweh's might.

[37] Ashley, *Numbers,* p.219; Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.30 and Milgrom, *Numbers,* pp.92-93.

2.2 The Elders' Story

In the story of the elders, Moses' status could be described as a more positive one, even more elevated than his role in the quails narrative. Indeed, although Moses' complaint regarding the 'burden of the people' (v. 11) could tie the objection to the appointment of the 70 elders, depending exactly which part of the complaint *in toto* (vv. 11-15) is decided to adhere to the elders' story,[38] the narrative as a whole seems to characterise Moses as a humble, even if privileged, servant of the deity (Numbers 11:29). Gray describes Moses as a leader who has 'more at heart the good of the community as a whole than his own personal honour or continued pre-eminence', and observes that 'this fine trait in Moses' character… stands out clearly.'[39] Sommer has portrayed Moses as 'good-hearted', 'endowed with prophetic spirit greater than that of any other human,' and 'humble in spite of it all'.[40] Moses' pre-eminence and his humility appear indeed to be at the forefront of the elders' narrative, which can be seen both by the solution that Yahweh devises to bring about a relief to Moses' burden of the people, as well as in the story concerning Eldad and Medad. Both of these issues will be presented in what follows.

After Moses has confronted Yahweh regarding his unbearable burden, that is, his inability to carry the people לבדי, 'by myself,' (Numbers 11:14),[41] Yahweh instructs Moses to bring 70 elders to the Tent of Meeting to share in the spirit of Moses and consequently in his burden (vv. 16-17).

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[38] See n.10.
[39] Gray, *Numbers,* p.115. Also quoted by Sommer, 'Reflecting,' p.611.
[40] Sommer, 'Reflecting,' p.611.
[41] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.156. See, also, Baentsch, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri,* p.506; Dillmann, *Die Bücher Numeri, Deuteronomium und Josua,* 2nd Revised Edition (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1886) p.58.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Yahweh	'Share' in leadership	Moses
HELPERS	SUBJECT Moses	OPPONENT

Thus, in light of Yahweh's response it appears that Moses has been successful in his request for aid and has been attributed with the desired result of shared leadership, as is argued by Dennis Olson.[42]

However, in the story it remains unclear how these 70 elders are meant to help Moses in his task. According to Timothy Ashley, the fact that the elders share in the 'spirit' of Moses indicates that this passage is not a mere duplication of Exodus 18:25-26, where the elders are assigned administrative duties. Rather, the endowment with the spirit implies sharing in spiritual matters and, consequently, in the burden of the people.[43] However, we need to notice that even though the elders did share in Moses' spirit, their prophetic activity was only temporarily (v. 25). Accordingly, it seems plausible that the elders were not meant to act as prophets or even as spiritual counsellors but, rather, their prophetic experience was a sign of their initiation into office,[44] or at most an empowerment to an office in leadership.[45] Yet, it is difficult to decide what exactly the elders were meant to do, since the text is not explicit in this regard. If we take Numbers 11 as parallel to Exodus 18, then E.W. Davies is probably correct in suggesting that the elders were meant to help Moses by

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[42] Olson, *Numbers*, p.67.
[43] Ashley, *Numbers,* p.211.
[44] See Hymes, 'Numbers 12,' p.23; Davies, *Numbers,* p.104 and Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.89; Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.160-161.
[45] J. Ebach, has argued that although the elders did not prophesy again, the spirit remained upon them to empower them for leadership ('…und behutsam mitgehen mit deinem Gott,' pp.103, 106 as quoted by Butting, *Prophetinnen gefragt,* p.48). For a similar reading see, also, Levine, *Numbers,* p.340. Butting has suggested that the phrase לא יספו could also be translated as they did not 'add' to the words of Moses, that is, to the Torah (cf. Deuteronomy 4:2). Therefore, the content of the elders' act of prophecy would have remained within the bounds of the Torah (Butting, *Prophetinnen gefragt,* p.48).

providing aid in administrative duties, although a final decision on the subject cannot be stated for certain.[46]

However, Noth has produced another reading, wherein he claims that the theme of relieving Moses of his burden has already been dealt with in Exodus 18:13-27, and therefore the elders in Numbers 11 were set as models for ecstatic prophecy, for they prophesied 'unceasingly'.[47] However, several problems can be observed with this understanding. First of all, the MT reading clearly indicates that the elders only prophesied on this one occasion[48] and, as E.W. Davies has stated, there is very little reason to change this translation to suit Noth's reading.[49] Rather, the fact that the elders did not prophesy again serves to highlight the distinction between the prophetic revelation of Moses and that of the elders, that is, Moses receives constant revelation (Numbers 12:6-8) whereas the elders only prophesied once. Secondly, it is not certain that ecstatic prophecy is implied in the text, not only because נבא in *hitpael* can imply prophetic activity in general,[50] but also because the nature of the elders' prophetic function is not specifically disclosed in the text. In addition, as A.H.J. Gunneweg and E.W. Davies have noted, it is unclear how 70 ecstatic prophets would have helped Moses in his task.[51] Thirdly, according to the MT, Yahweh 'took from the spirit that was on Moses' (v. 25), which, as Milgrom and Sommer note, seems to indicate that the spirit bestowed upon the

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[46] Davies, *Numbers,* pp.104-105. Hymes has produced an alternative reading, where he regards the elders as providing 'contextually bound assistance to Moses' in day-to-day leadership issues on a temporary basis ('Pluriform Analysis,' pp.99-101).

[47] Noth, *Numbers,* p.89. On ecstatic prophecy, see, also, Buber, *Moses,* pp.164-165 and Milgrom, *Numbers,* pp.89, 380-383. Note, also, Gunneweg, who understands v. 25 to indicate that the elders did not 'cease to be prophets' albeit he denies the relevance of ecstatic prophecy *vis-à-vis* the passage ('Das Gesetz,' pp.170, 176). See, also, Seebass, *Numeri,* pp.29, 31.

[48] ולא יספו, 'and they didn't again' (v. 26).

[49] Davies, *Numbers,* p.104.

[50] Gafney notes that the use of נבא in *hitpael* to describe ecstatic activity needs to be derived 'descriptively' from the text in question since lexically it is used for both ecstatic and other forms of prophecy elsewhere in the HB, for example, in 1 Kings 22:8,18 and Ezekiel 37:7ff (*Daughters,* pp.34-47).

[51] Gunneweg, 'Das Gesetz,' p.176 and Davies, *Numbers,* p.104. Gunneweg has criticised Noth's interpretation due to the apparent lack of proof that the early prophets would have understood their status or their spirit to have been derived through Moses, or that this was so understood by others ('Das Gesetz,' p.170).

elders originated from Moses,[52] to whom ecstatic activity is not ascribed in Numbers 11-12.[53]

However, Ashley has argued that this wording could have been used simply to illustrate the primary

position of Moses, rather than to imply that it was Moses' spirit being shared. Ashley claims that the

spirit was Moses' only insofar as it rested upon Moses, but ultimately the origin of the spirit was

Yahweh.[54] Yet, although Yahweh certainly is the origin of the spirit *in toto* (Numbers 11:29),

Ashley has somewhat neglected the contrast created in the narrative which is between the authority

of Moses and that of the elders. That is, as has been noted, the elders differ from Moses as regards

their temporary state of prophecy, which finds its origin in Moses and is even instated to help Moses

with his burden of the people (Numbers 11:14, 16-17, 24-25). Therefore, we could argue that as

opposed to the elders' limited oracular function, Moses is described in the story as the authority

supreme, or, as Sommer notes, as a candle lighting another candle: Moses' spirit can be shared

without loss to him and, moreover, in the text Moses' 'light' is still described as clearly 'brighter

than [that of] the other seventy'. Indeed, Moses is the servant of God and the pre-eminent leader

only with whom Yahweh communes (Numbers 11:17; 12:7-8)[55] as opposed to the elders, whose

leadership remains subsumed under that of Moses (Numbers 11:17; cf. 12:6-8).[56]

Thus, in light of the previous discussion we can conclude that Moses' request for shared leadership

as presented in Numbers 11:14 could be described as only partially met by Yahweh since, as Jobling

notes, the story seems to affirm Moses' unique status "precisely at the moment of its

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[52] Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.87 and Sommer, 'Reflecting,' pp.609-610.
[53] See Seebass, *Numeri*, p.34.
[54] Ashley, *Numbers,* p.211.
[55] Sommer, 'Reflecting,' p.610. Sommer refers here to rabbinic commentaries which describe Moses as a candle and as a teacher, both of which illustrate the irreducibility of Moses' pre-eminence even though his power is shared. This view has been questioned by Milgrom, who argues that the distribution of Moses' spirit would have diminished his powers (*Numbers*, p.377). Both readings are possible, yet since Moses' pre-eminence is in view in the larger framework of Numbers 11-12, the former reading seems more compelling.
[56] See, also, p.225, especially n.113.

'dissipation'":[57] it is Moses who selects the elders and brings them to the Tent of Meeting (v. 16); the spirit to be shared is that of Moses (v. 17); and even while Moses is with the elders, Yahweh speaks directly only with him (v. 25). Therefore, although Moses does receive some help with the burden, his wish for a shared leadership status could be argued to remain ultimately unmet. Rather, if anybody receives attribution[58] in the story, it is Yahweh and his choice of Moses as his servant (Numbers 12:7) whom other leaders can assist but not be equal of.

However, some ambiguity as regards Moses' pre-eminence is created in the story by the appearance of Eldad and Medad, two men who did not gather at the Tent of Meeting with the others and find themselves subsequently prophesying inside the camp (v. 26).[59] What follows is a short disjunction syntagm (Joshua running to Moses at the Tent of meeting) and a confrontation, where Joshua pleads with Moses to stop the unseemly activity within the camp. However, Moses overrules Joshua's concerns with his wish for all men to prophesy and therefore the next stage, that is, Joshua being granted/attributed with his wish for the prophecy in the camp to cease, never occurs. Instead, we are confined into a moment of indecision, where Moses' status *vis-à-vis* Eldad and Medad is left unclear. If Eldad and Medad have gained their spirit directly from Yahweh, as is implied by the wording ותנח עליהם הרוח, 'the spirit rested on them' (without any reference to Moses)[60] and, moreover, if they did not cease to prophesy (there is no mention of this in the text as there was

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[57] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.32.
[58] See n.36.
[59] Whether Eldad and Medad were among the 70 selected men is uncertain, because in vv. 16, 24 there is no mention that the elders were 'listed' or 'registered' as in v. 26. For possible interpretations, see Ashley, *Numbers,* pp.214-215; Gray, *Numbers,* pp.114-115 and Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.32.
[60] See Fretheim, 'Numbers,' in J. Barton and J. Muddiman (eds.), *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) p.119; Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.32 and Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.90; W.H. Bellinger Jr., *Leviticus and Numbers,* NIBC 3, OTS (Carlisle and Peabody: Hendrickson and Paternoster, 2001) p.222. This view is further strengthened by the fact that within Moses' wish in v. 29 the reference is to God's spirit and not to Moses', which would tie the independent action of the spirit in vv. 26 and 29 together.

regarding the elders in v. 25),[61] then Eldad and Medad could be considered a threat to Moses' unique status.[62]

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Yahweh	Spirit	Eldad and Medad
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	Yahweh	Moses?

In light of this possible conflict it is interesting to observe that Moses recedes from the role of a probable opponent with his response in v. 29, which , as was noted earlier, welcomes rather than opposes Eldad and Medad's prophetic activity (cf. Numbers 12:3). Indeed, John Sturdy regards Moses' declaration as 'attractive,' even 'modern,'[63] certainly apt for a leader who is wishing to share his exclusive role. We could even suggest that Moses is pleased about Eldad and Medad's prophecy since Moses' wish for shared leadership appears to have prevailed (Numbers 11:14). However, even if the pre-eminence of Mosaic authority might be questioned in Numbers 11:26-30, such moments of uncertainty will remain transitory. Indeed, this phase is overtaken in Numbers 12, where Yahweh will declare his favouritism of his chosen servant beyond all others (Numbers 12:6-8) and Moses' unique status is reinstated above reproach.

2.3 Numbers 12

> Whether they 'turn aside from under their husbands,' or whether they
> assert a will independent of their father, or whether they just happen to be

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[61] Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.90.

[62] Noth argues that behind Eldad and Medad were prophetic groups that at a point in Israel's history had to 'battle for recognition' (*Numbers*, p.90). Thus, the story of Eldad and Medad could serve as a reminder that God's Spirit among the people should be welcomed and was not to be restricted by human rituals or institutions. See, also, Sakenfeld, *Journeying,* p.76 and Budd, *Numbers,* pp.126-127.

[63] J. Sturdy, *Numbers,* CBCNEB (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1976) p.86. See, also, Dillmann, *Numeri,* p.61.

> a convenient scapegoat for the male Subject of the story, women pay with
> their bodies. Sometimes with their lives.
>
> Gunn and Fewell[64]

The story in Numbers 12 provides the required validation for Mosaic authority, as was noted above; however, it comes at a heavy price for the female character in the narrative (Numbers 12:14-15). Indeed, Miriam provides, as Gunn and Fewell have noted, the convenient scapegoat for the male subject in the story: she pays with her body for an offence that was constructed by both Miriam and Aaron together (12:1-2, 10). Although this portrayal might lead us to describe Miriam as a mistreated female and, as was argued already in 1895 by Cady Stanton, her fate as a 'mere excuse for man's injustice,'[65] the question needs to be addressed whether such a depiction of Miriam can reasonably be gleaned from the story. Indeed, within the context of Numbers 11-12 we might be surprised to find that Miriam appears not as the voice of the discriminated, but as a common criminal, put in the same category as the other 'deceivers' and 'seducers' in Numbers 11. This can be illustrated as follows.

Like the elders' and the quail narratives, Numbers 12 also starts with a complaint: Miriam and Aaron present, as was argued earlier, a public concern regarding Moses' marriage to a Cushite[66] as well as a complaint concerning his singular authority (vv. 1-2). Moses himself does not appear to be troubled by these objections (v. 3); however, Yahweh hears them and is displeased (vv. 2ff). We could thus describe both Moses and Yahweh as the opponents in this syntagm, since Moses is the cause of Miriam's and Aaron's distress and it is because of Yahweh's decision in favour of Moses (Numbers 12:6-8) that the 'imbalance' in the distribution of authority exists.

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[64] *Gender, Power and Promise,* p.116
[65] Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible,* p.102.
[66] Burns, *Has the Lord Spoken?,* pp.69-70. See, also, p.85.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Miriam and Aaron	The complaint (the Cushite and oracular authority)	General public
HELPERS	SUBJECT	OPPONENT
	Miriam and Aaron	Yahweh/Moses?

The exact content of the complaint in vv. 1-2 is, however, ambiguous. As Rapp has noted, at least two issues are open to question. Firstly, there is the matter of the exact interpretation of דבר ב which could be translated as speaking 'to', 'through', 'against' or 'with', which consequently problematises the addressees as well as the specific content of both of the complaints.[67] Secondly, there is the issue of the vague manner in which the topics of marriage and prophecy are connected in the objection.[68] Indeed, it is difficult to disagree with Rapp as regards the confusion present in the opening sequence of Numbers 12: Miriam (and Aaron) are portrayed only vaguely, the content of her critique is ambiguous, and even her social circumstances are only hinted at, making it almost impossible to identify with her character.

However, as regards the relation between the issue of marriage and prophecy, Jobling has provided a reading which might offer us an understanding of the stated matter. He suggests that if we read Numbers 12 against the background of Numbers 11, we could perceive the issue of leadership as being the primary concern in the dispute.[69] If we approach Numbers 11:4-35 as a single narrative, we can observe a pattern, already addressed in our structuralist analysis, in which the rabble instigated a weeping amongst the people regarding the lack of meat (Numbers 11:4). This complaint

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[67] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.384. Rapp prefers to translate דבר ב as 'speak about' in v. 1 and 'speak with' in v. 2 (*Mirjam*, pp.38-44). See, also, p.77.
[68] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.384.
[69] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' pp.36-37.

gave cause for Moses' complaint, which led not just to a grievance regarding meat but Moses' lonesome role in leadership (Numbers 11:11-15). In the final form of the text, then, the issue of food could be seen as giving rise to the issue of leadership in general and Mosaic pre-eminence in particular.[70] Accordingly, in Numbers 12:1-2 we observe another issue, Moses' familial arrangements, leading to a dispute regarding leadership responsibilities. As noted by Milgrom, it is interesting to observe that in both Numbers 11 and 12 the initial complaint was begun by or was focussed on the foreign element among the Hebrews (the rabble and the Cushite)[71] and, in addition, in Numbers 12, the issue regarding the Cushite woman is not raised again in the remainder of the narrative. Rather, as Olson has noted, it is Moses and his role as the 'supreme channel of God's word to the Israelites'[72] that is challenged in the story, since it is Moses' pre-eminent status that is elaborated on in Yahweh's speech in vv. 6-8. It thus seems plausible that the main issue of the dispute presented by Miriam and Aaron in Numbers 12 is to be found in Moses' singular status rather than within his choice of wife. This reading not only justifies some earlier biblical scholarship which has long viewed the complaint regarding the Cushite as a smokescreen,[73] but it also clarifies the position of the complaint regarding the Cushite *vis-à-vis* the claim based on leadership in light of the broader narrative framework.

If the main issue of the dispute is considered to be Moses' pre-eminent position rather than his marriage, instead of addressing the complaint as a whole we must rather concentrate on uncovering the exact nature of the issue regarding Moses' status. The statement 'Has Yahweh indeed only spoken to Moses? Has he not also spoken to us?' has been suggested to indicate prophetic

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[70] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.37.
[71] Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.379.
[72] Olson, *Numbers,* p.71.
[73] See, Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.94; Ashley, *Numbers,* p.224; Budd, *Numbers,* p.138; Gray, *Numbers,* p.121; Anderson, 'Miriam's Challenge,' p.16; Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.145.

authority;[74] however, as was previously noted, it seems that the concern is leadership in general.[75]

Rapp has argued that in Numbers 11 the prophetic gifting of the elders enabled them to serve as

leaders; likewise in Numbers 12 the argument put forth by Miriam and Aaron could give rise to

further leadership responsibilities.[76] To support such a reading we may note that if oracular

authority would have been the main cause for complaint in Numbers 12:2, Yahweh would have only

needed to reaffirm the siblings' prophetic standing and no other action would have been necessary.

Instead, Yahweh not only reaffirms prophetic activity apart from Moses (Numbers 11:26; 12:6) but

also establishes Moses' role, as Noth has stated, as more than a prophet. [77] He is Yahweh's 'servant'

entrusted with the house of Israel (v. 7),[78] a position which, as was noted by Rapp, implied

responsibilities beyond those associated with a prophetic function. [79] It therefore seems appropriate

that, as in Numbers 11, where the elders' prophetic experience enabled them not to act as prophets

but as administrators,[80] in Numbers 12 prophetic capabilities function as an initiation or sign of

leadership activity which is not defined by or goes beyond the scope of a prophetic office. Miriam

and Aaron's quest could accordingly be understood not as a wish to share in oracular authority,

which in light of Numbers 12:6-8 they already have done in some form (this issue will be discussed

later); rather, their argument establishes a claim to partake in Moses' rulership, to share in their

brother's 'burden' (Numbers 11:11).

Moses' unique status is further affirmed in v. 3, where he is described as the most humble man on

earth. Although some commentators take v. 3 to be a gloss,[81] it appears that the description of Moses

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[74] See pp.86-87.
[75] Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, p.102; Exum, 'The Hand,' p.100.
[76] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.160-161.
[77] Noth, *Numbers,* p.96.
[78] See pp.87-88.
[79] Rapp, *Mirjam,* p.98.
[80] Davies, *Numbers,* pp.104-105.
[81] Note that in an earlier publication Coats treated v. 3 as a gloss (*Rebellion,* p.261). Davies suggests that the statement should be read in parenthesis (*Numbers,* p.121).

as 'humble' is not only in accordance with Jewish rabbinical tradition, which treats Moses as the epitome of humility (*Nedarim* 38a; *Ben Sira* 45.1ff; cf. Exodus 3-4; 32:32), but also illustrates Moses' complete recognition of his dependence on God, as argued by Dawes.[82] Although it is doubtful whether v.3 should be treated as the centre of the story, as has been claimed by Coats,[83] the presence of v. 3 is nevertheless important to highlight Moses' desirable qualities and serves to emphasise his status as a leader beyond others.

In v. 4, we have a disjunction syntagm where Yahweh calls the three siblings out to the Tent of Meeting. He further summons Aaron and Miriam, presumably to the entrance of the tent in v. 5, leaving Moses out of the communication about to take place in vv. 6-8.

SENDER	OBJECT	RECEIVER
Yahweh	Response to the complaint	Miriam and Aaron (Moses).
HELPERS	SUBJECT Miriam and Aaron	OPPONENT

In light of the elders' story in Numbers 11:24-25, we could suppose that Yahweh has called Miriam and Aaron to the Tent to initiate them into office and grant them their wish of equal leadership status.[84] However, such hopes soon diminish as Yahweh declares his preference for his chosen servant.[85] Moses is, as Budd has noted, 'Yahweh's man in a special sense.'[86] He is the mediator

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[82] Dawes, 'Numbers 12.3,' pp.338-340. See, also, p.77 n.125.

[83] Coats, 'Humility and Honor,' p.99.

[84] See Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.35. This action on the part of Yahweh certainly follows the paradigm he sets already in Numbers 11, where Yahweh appears to give a blessing (the quail) that at a later point reveals itself to be a punishment (Numbers 11:31-35).

[85] This could be described as the first two stages of a performance syntagm: a confrontation (Yahweh confronts Miriam and Aaron) and a domination (Yahweh overpowers Miriam and Aaron with his argument).

[86] Budd, *Numbers,* p.138. Here Budd is referring to Moses' role as a Davidic figure which, however, is questioned based on the lack of royal imagery in the text.

supreme, established as unique in his own category (vv. 6-8). In addition, as Rapp has noted, in the

overall framework of the story we seem to have several oppositions set in place, where Moses is

elevated above all other men (v. 3), the house of Israel (v. 7) as well as over other prophets (vv. 6-

8).[87] It indeed appears that in Numbers 12 we have that which Coats calls a 'Moses legend': a story

which centralises around Moses' virtues and elevates Moses' status and power within his chosen

community.[88] He is to have prominence over all in Israel, even over the offices his siblings hold.

Having declared Moses' position of pre-eminence, Yahweh departs in anger from the tent in v. 9.

The next verses (vv. 10-15) further establish Moses' uniqueness, for they provide the opportunity

for Moses, as Dozeman notes, to 'demonstrate his special status as a charismatic leader.'[89] In vv. 10-

15 Moses pleads with Yahweh to heal Miriam of her skin disease (v. 13), fulfilling his function as

the servant-intercessor.[90] Furthermore, Aaron not only addresses Moses as 'my lord' in v. 11,[91] but

also acknowledges his and Miriam's guilt, pleading with Moses to heal Miriam of her condition (vv.

11-12). Accordingly, Moses is attributed with the acknowledgement of his superior status by both of

the siblings: Aaron due to his admission (v. 11), Miriam due to her illness (v. 10).

A clear hierarchy is thereby formed between Moses, Aaron and Miriam, where Moses, the servant

and intercessor of Yahweh, is announced as the pre-eminent leader (vv. 6-8, 13); Aaron, the one

who acts in accordance to priestly prerogatives (Leviticus 13:12-17),[92] is submitted to Moses'

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[87] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.76.
[88] Coats, 'Humility and Honor,' p.99. See, also, Gray, *Numbers,* p.120; Budd, 'Numbers,' in J.D.G. Dunn and J.W. Rogerson (eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) p.142; Davies, *Numbers,* p.117; Sturdy, *Numbers,* p.88.
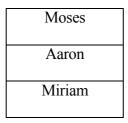[89] Dozeman, 'The Book of Numbers,' in T.B. Dozeman, D.T. Olson, R.E. Clements *et al*., *The New Interpreter's Bible,* Vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998*)* p.110.
[90] Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.98. He further notes that the brevity of the encounter might indicate Moses' lack of enthusiasm for the task. However, as has been demonstrated in the reading of Exodus 1-2, brevity is not necessarily a prerequisite for lack of conviction.
[91] See Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.157.
[92] See pp.91ff.

authority (v. 11); and Miriam, the 'shamed daughter,' will remain as the one condemned (vv. 14-15).[93]

Moses
Aaron
Miriam

It is at this point, as has been earlier stated, that several (non-)feminist biblical authors have raised their concern as regards Miriam's punishment.[94] Indeed, if Aaron affirms 'their' guilt (v. 11) and they both complained against Moses together (vv. 1-2), why should only Miriam suffer the consequences of this deed? Although in a previous chapter we argued that the reason could be related to Aaron's role as the high priest,[95] it seems that the text itself might offer us a different interpretation. As Jobling demonstrated earlier, in Numbers 11-12 there appears to be a clear distinction between the fortunes of those who have instigated an act of rebellion and those who have been 'seduced' to follow their cause.[96] In Numbers 11:4 the rabble initiated a complaint regarding the lack of meat which caused the Hebrews to follow suit; in Numbers 12:1 it seems to be Miriam who instigates the grievance and 'seduces' Aaron to pursue her cause. In support of this understanding is the fact already stated, that Miriam is mentioned first in v. 1 and the form of דבר used in v. 1 is a 3rd person feminine singular, possibly indicating the primary agent of the action in question as suggested by E.W. Davies and Sperling.[97] Therefore, if Miriam instigated the disagreement in v. 1, she would also be the one who would bear the punishment: in Numbers 11:34 the rabble is stricken with a plague and buried whilst the Hebrews are saved (Numbers 11:33-34);

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[93] See pp.94-95.
[94] See p.79 n.133.
[95] Sakenfeld, 'Numbers,' p.52.
[96] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' pp.39-40.
[97] Davies, *Numbers*, p.124 and Sperling, 'Miriam,' p.48. See, also, Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.93; Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.148; Fischer, 'Authority,' p.161; Rapp, *Mirjam,* p.32.

accordingly, in Numbers 12:14, it is Miriam who is condemned to illness while Aaron remains unharmed.[98] We could argue that the difference in the respective treatments of Miriam and Aaron is therefore explicable purely on the basis of guilt. Miriam is punished because of her role as the instigator rather than due to her status as a woman whilst Aaron avoids punishment not because of his status as the high priest but because he did not initiate the complaint. As a result, as Jobling further notes, Miriam takes the side of the "foreign rabble; women [e.g. Gen 3] and foreigners [e.g. Deut 7:4] are great seducers, and the 'foreign woman' the greatest of all [Prov 2:16, etc.]!"[99]

The account in Numbers 12 is closed by a return to the *status quo*: as requested by Yahweh, Miriam is excluded for seven days (v. 15). This causes a halt in the movement of the people until Miriam's eventual return (v. 15), which is marked by another move of location by the Hebrews in v. 16.

3. Deconstructive Reading of Numbers 11-12

> She [Miriam] serves as a reminder that even in cultures that emphasize domestic roles for women, some women do achieve public leadership. Miriam's story here typifies much of such leadership: it is exceptional, it is not regarded as fully comparable to that of men, and it is much more easily challenged, compromised, and undercut.
>
> Katherine Doob Sakenfeld[100]

As has been previously argued, in both Exodus and Numbers Miriam appears as a public leader of significance: she establishes herself as an equal to Moses in her performance at the sea event in Exodus 15:19-21, whereas in Numbers 12 she appears as a community leader (v. 1), a recipient of God's word (v. 2) and even important enough to participate in a leadership dispute (v. 2).[101] However, unlike the offices of those of her siblings, Miriam's gifting is, to refer to Sakenfeld, challenged, undermined and undercut by the events of Numbers 12. As was suggested earlier by

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[98] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.40.
[99] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.48. However, in the political hierarchy Jobling establishes for Numbers 11-12, Miriam is elevated one position over that of the rabble, since she is punished but not killed for her actions.
[100] Sakenfeld, 'Numbers,' p.55.
[101] Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' pp.148-149.

Jobling, Miriam could be viewed as the instigator of the dispute (vv. 1-2), punished accordingly with a skin disease and stigmatised for life (vv. 10-15), never heard of again until her death and burial in Numbers 20:1. It would thus seem that Miriam's story could be described as a tragedy; a story of 'an outcast, a rejected woman without voice or power,'[102] as lamented by Trible. However, as we stated at the start of this chapter, the audacity with which Miriam demands to be heard and the severity of her punishment may tell another story,[103] a story to be uncovered among the inconsistencies and narrative gaps in Numbers 12. By approaching these discrepancies, we wish to portray Miriam as a leader of great importance, an advocate for a collective form of leadership, an ambition which is also shared by the people (Numbers 11:11-15, 29; 12:1-2, 11-12) but rejected by Yahweh (Numbers 11:16-17, 25; 12:6-8). In order to arrive at such a conclusion, we need to first discuss the one opposition that in Numbers 12 appears to create the basis for all the others, that is, as was demonstrated in the structuralist reading of Numbers 11-12, the opposition between Moses and all the other prophets/leaders. This discussion will be followed by a detailed analysis of the presentation of gender in Numbers 11-12, which should aid us in picturing Miriam not as an outcast, but as an outspoken leader for a non-autocratic form of leadership.

3.1 The Binary Opposition between Moses and the Prophets

As has been demonstrated, in Numbers 11-12 Moses is portrayed as the unique, pre-eminent leader elevated above all others and all other offices (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25; 12:3, 6-8); however, the sustainability of such a distinction needs to be questioned. Firstly, as was noted in the structuralist reading, Eldad and Medad make Moses' position uncertain because of their reception of the spirit without Moses' involvement. Unlike the elders, Eldad and Medad receive their spirit directly from Yahweh and do not cease to prophesy (Numbers 11:26-30), which, as Milgrom notes, could make

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[102] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' p.177.
[103] Pardes, *Countertraditions*, p.11.

them contenders for Moses' office in leadership (cf. Numbers 12:6-8).[104] Secondly, in order to maintain Moses' chosen position, Yahweh needs to defend his servant against even further competitors for the said role in Numbers 12:6-8, that is, against Aaron and Miriam's claims in vv. 1-2. However, although Yahweh's speech in vv. 6-8 displays Moses as the leader *extraordinaire* and as such places him above all contestation, this declaration could also be said to undermine Yahweh's own argument. That is, whilst affirming Moses' superiority, the act of direct discourse spoken not to Moses but to Miriam and Aaron breaks Yahweh's own rules of engagement with all the 'other prophets'. Rather than speak to Miriam and Aaron in dreams or riddles (v. 6), Yahweh addresses them in direct speech, and, in addition, in v. 5 he summons Miriam and Aaron to the Tent of Meeting in a manner that requires no interpretation. As Gunn and Fewell note,

> …we must insist that language *does* more than it *says*. God's speech, spoken directly to Miriam and Aaron, subverts his very point…. Miriam and Aaron have no need to rely on Moses to make sense of what God has said. Just as we must, God takes great risks with words. For words are powerful, surpassing their speaker's intentions.[105]

Indeed, although God's speech to Aaron and Miriam could be considered as merely ironic,[106] somehow different to his discourse with Moses,[107] or, as Jobling states, an act to end any communication from Yahweh to his people via other means than Moses,[108] the very fact that Yahweh speaks to Aaron and Miriam in a direct manner unravels the very foundation that Yahweh attempts to establish in vv. 6-8. That is, even if Yahweh's direct speech to Miriam and Aaron could be explained via the above reasons, because Yahweh can choose to speak directly to them reveals that behind Yahweh's mode of leadership lies not Moses' superior qualities but Yahweh's

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[104] Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.90.
[105] Gunn and Fewell, *Gender,* p.115.
[106] A. Bledstein, 'Family Matters; A Multidimensional Reading of Miriam's Humiliation and Healing,' *Biblical Research* 46 (2001) p.58, Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.94 and Sperling, 'Miriam,' p.54.
[107] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.86-88. She argues that through Yahweh's communication only with Moses elsewhere in the HB (Exodus 33:7ff; Numbers 11:25 and Deuteronomy 31:14), the theological/social implications inherent in the assignment of particular places and spaces to people in the story (Numbers 12:4-5, 9-10, 14-15) as well as Moses' separation from his siblings in v. 5 all help to establish a different meaning to Yahweh's communication with Miriam and Aaron versus the one he shares with Moses.
[108] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.46.

preference.[109] As with Eldad and Medad, so with Miriam and Aaron, Yahweh can choose to bestow

his spirit (Number 11:26)[110] upon them and speak to them (Numbers 12:2, 5-8) if he so desires.

Therefore, we could claim that it is not Moses' means of communication (v. 8) or even his

servanthood (v. 7) that elevate Moses above all others; rather, Moses' position is due to Yahweh's

choice to grant him these privileges. Indeed, this is the conclusion that Wacker arrives at in her

analysis of Numbers 12, although she attempts to temper it on the grounds of other biblical evidence

which do not grant Moses such a pre-eminent position.[111] Yet, the issue remains that, as Christoph

Uehlinger notes, within Numbers 12 it is 'the authoritative word of Yahweh' which dictates the

outcome of events.[112] After all, it is Yahweh's decision to elevate Moses' position and submit all

other forms of leadership under his authority (Numbers 11:24-25, 12:6-8).[113] In support of this

conclusion Noth has suggested that the peculiar phrase, 'the man Moses', in v. 3 could be

understood as a device to highlight the 'humanity' of Moses, "so that the unique distinction

accorded to this 'man' should be traced back exclusively to Yahweh's free will and be regarded as a

divine gift."[114] This interpretation, though debatable, would certainly fit the tone of the story: the

position of Moses is to be seen as the result of a divine choice, and is therefore beyond contestation.

And this contestation is even beyond Moses himself! As Buber notes, in Numbers 11 Moses does

not seem to view his superiority as something to be desired; rather, it is a 'fate with which he has

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[109] See Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.164 and Camp, 'Over Her Dead Body,' p.12.
[110] Numbers 11:26 makes it clear that Eldad and Medad's spirit came on them independently to that of Moses. Since neither Aaron nor Miriam is ever mentioned to have gained their spirit via Moses' intercession, it is reasonable to assume their spirit was of independent origin as well.
[111] Wacker, 'Mirjam,' pp.49-50.
[112] C. Uehlinger, "'Hat YHWH denn wirklich nur mit Mose geredet?' Biblische Exegese zwischen Religionsgeschichte und Theologie, am Beispiel von Num 12," *BZ* 47, 2 (2003) p.233.
[113] Olson, 'Between Humility and Authority: The Interplay of the Judge-Prophet Laws (Deuteronomy 16:18-17:13) and the Judge-Prophet Narratives of Moses' in M. D. Carroll R. and J.E. Lapsey (eds.), *Character Ethics and the Old Testament: Moral Dimensions of Scripture* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007) p.57. See, also, Hymes, 'Heroic Leadership in the Wilderness, Part 2,' *AJPS* 10, 1 (2007) pp.17-18 and Anderson, 'Miriam's Challenge,' p.55.
[114] Noth, *Numbers,* p.95.

been charged by God and which oppresses him.'[115] In Numbers 11:14 Moses clearly states that he does not wish to continue to act as the singular leadership figure and, furthermore, after Moses' status has been challenged by the prophetic activity of Eldad and Medad as was earlier discussed, Moses does not object to their gifting, but rather wishes for all men to prophesy (Numbers 11:29). The response could be a sign of Moses' democratic, even selfless, approach towards leadership, as is suggested by Milgrom,[116] or possibly a further indication of Moses' desire to cease from his role of pre-eminence, as is claimed by Buber.[117] Whichever the case (for both readings are possible),[118] Moses appears more than willing to relinquish his role of supremacy. However, when Moses' siblings make an appeal in most emphatic terms for an equal share of Moses' leadership (Numbers 12:1-2),[119] Yahweh involves himself in affirming Moses' uniqueness before Moses has even had a chance to state his position.[120] In light of the preceding narrative, it is possible that Moses would have been in favour of Miriam and Aaron's request, an option which is taken away by Yahweh's sudden appearance. Overall, it therefore seems that in Numbers 11-12 Moses should not be seen as opposed to the other leaders or to the request of his siblings, but as sharing their argument for collective leadership; however, Moses will remain 'chained to his desk,' so to speak, as long as the key to the lock is held by Yahweh.

Interestingly, in Numbers 11-12 it appears that the leader(s)/ the people at large are in favour of diversity within their situation as opposed to the unity/singularity ordained by Yahweh. That is, in Numbers 11:4-35, the people wish to have their diet extended to include meat as opposed to the diet that consists only of manna (Numbers 11:4-9). The complaint leads to Moses' wish to have his role

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[115] Buber, *Moses,* p.166.
[116] Milgrom, *Numbers,* pp.86, 91.
[117] Buber, *Moses,* p.167.
[118] See Sommer, 'Reflecting,' pp.614ff.
[119] It is only here within the HB where the words אַךְ, 'indeed', and רַק, 'only' appear this close together. See Davies, *Numbers,* p.120.
[120] 'Suddenly' in v. 4 could be an indication of an abrupt involvement of the divine, in which case Moses might not have had a chance to state his position (Ashley, *Numbers,* p.224; Gray, *Numbers,* p.124).

of leadership spread amongst the elders/the people (Numbers 11:11-15, 29) and, accordingly, in Numbers 12:2, we discover that Miriam and Aaron are seeking to share in Moses' 'burden of the people.' However, as Jobling notes, in all of the three instances Yahweh's preferred *modus operandi* appears to be that of singularity as opposed to the diversity advocated by the people. In the first story the only mode of sustenance that Yahweh perceives as sufficient (and the one that will prevail) is the manna rather than manna *and* meat (Numbers 11:18-20; 31-34). In the elders' narrative, Moses remains as the leader supreme, an argument further strengthened by Yahweh's declaration in Numbers 12:6-8. Yahweh's intention, therefore, seems to be to retain a 'hierarchy of unmixed entities,' that is, the hierarchical organisation of Mosaic supremacy and even the singularity of the diet consisting of manna, rather than succumb to the people's requirements.[121]

It is within this context of Yahweh's desired supremacy of Moses and the desired diversity within leadership as advocated by Moses/the people, that we can also better understand the role of Aaron in Numbers 12. As has been demonstrated, after the departure of Yahweh from the Tent of Meeting in v. 9, Aaron assumes his role as a priest and acts accordingly to depict Miriam as afflicted with a skin disease (Leviticus 13:12-17). Yet, his role prior to this occasion causes some difficulty, since the claim for an equal standing with Moses in v. 2 appears to be based on oracular activity. As regards Miriam, this would seem to confirm her as a leader with a prophetic gift, making her designation as such in Exodus 15:20 authentic.[122] However, within the context of Exodus, Aaron is only a prophet through Moses (Exodus 7:1), and in Numbers he is the paradigmatic priest (Numbers 3:38; 8:20-22; 18:1-7). According to Rapp, Aaron should be seen in Numbers 12, as in other non-cultic references

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[121] See Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' pp.39ff [his underlining]. Within his analysis Jobling includes various other examples, such as the separation of the people from the rabble (p.51) and how Moses' complaint in Numbers 11:11-15 threatens to dissolve the boundaries between a leader and those led (pp.47-48).

[122] Schmidt, *Gesammelte,* p.275. See, also, Fritz, *Israel in der Wüste,* p.76 and Dillmann, *Numeri,* p.65.

to Aaron, as the mediator of divine revelation, although utterly dependent upon Moses for the task (Exodus 3-4).[123]

Although I would disagree with Rapp as regards Aaron's non-cultic function in Numbers 12, Rapp has raised an important issue concerning the variety of roles that Aaron occupies within Exodus and Numbers. Indeed, Aaron is described as Moses' spokesperson (Exodus 4:16), Moses' prophet (Exodus 7:1), as well as a priest (Exodus 32:1-6, Numbers 3:10). Aaron's manifold designations, therefore, could offer another possible way to view his character in Numbers 12. If the wish of the leaders and/or the people in Numbers 11-12 is for diversity and, specifically in Numbers 12, diversity within leadership, Aaron could be seen as stating a claim for an equal leadership role through the only route currently available, that is, either through a prophetic experience (Numbers 11:16-17; 24-26) and/or Yahweh having spoken to/with him (Numbers 12:2). Due to Aaron's limited experience in mediating Yahweh's word through Moses as his 'prophet' in Exodus and, as L. Schmidt has noted, due to Aaron's service in Numbers as a priest which involved enquiring after the Lord in some capacity (cf. Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 28:6; Zechariah 7:3),[124] Aaron's claims could be considered as credible, validating his request for an equal standing with Moses. Within Aaron's vocation in Numbers 12 (and within Miriam's vocation in both Numbers 12:2 and Exodus 15:20) we could experience a moment of indecision, since within the same narrative Aaron can legitimately aspire to both cultic (Numbers 12:10) and oracular functions (Numbers 12:2). Indeed, Aaron's stance problematises the division established between the offices of a prophet (Numbers

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[123] Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.172-173.

[124] Schmidt, *Gesammelte*, p.276. See, also, Anderson, 'Miriam's Challenge,' p.55. Notably, the instances where Yahweh speaks only to Aaron in Numbers are rare and mostly in the realm of cultic practices (18:1, 8, 20); however, the fact that these instances are present in Numbers lend further support to Schmidt's claim. In addition, Schmidt has argued that since in Numbers 12:6-8 Moses is only compared to prophets and, in addition, because the final editors of the passage supposedly considered prophets to have a closer contact with Yahweh than priests (cf. Numbers 11:26; Deuteronomy 34:10-12), Aaron's claim to equal authority with Moses could also be considered as refuted since the stand based on prophetic authority had already been rejected (*Gesammelte,* pp.276-277). Although a possible reading, we must note that we cannot be certain as to the view of the final editors of the passage regarding the closeness of prophets/priests to Yahweh and thus Schmidt's suggestion must remain conjectural.

12:6), priest (Numbers 12:10) and that of Moses (Numbers 12:7-8), since within the story itself (and

even within the broad framework of Numbers)[125] such a distinction is made unstable by Yahweh's

ability to commune with equal clarity as well as capacity with all three.

However, even if Aaron's claim to leadership might be viewed as legitimate, after Yahweh's speech

in vv. 6-8 the prospect of Miriam and Aaron sharing Moses' office becomes untenable. As was

stated, although Yahweh is more than able to share his spirit with other leaders (Numbers 11:26) or

speak to them in a similar manner to Moses (Numbers 12:2, 5-8), he can also choose not to do so,

even if this choice is adverse to the leaders in question. In accordance with Yahweh's preference, by

the end of Numbers 12 Moses is re-established as the supreme leader who communicates with

Yahweh directly (vv. 8, 13) and Aaron remains as the priest who depicts Miriam's illness (v. 10)

and intercedes with Yahweh via Moses (vv. 11-12).[126] However, the role that Miriam retains after

Yahweh's departure from the tent is one of ambiguity. Yahweh declares her to be a shamed daughter

and to be excluded from the camp for 7 days (vv. 14-15); yet, as Rapp notes, we do not know

anything of Miriam's thoughts, feelings or, notably, even status *vis-à-vis* Moses post her return to

the camp.[127] Although the silence could be an indication of the cessation of her office in Numbers

12,[128] if Moses' supremacy is regarded as the main point of focus in Numbers 12 rather than the

termination of other forms of leadership,[129] we could hypothesise that after Numbers 12 Miriam

could have continued to function as a leader in some capacity.[130] However, her humiliation would

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[125] See Numbers 3:5-10; 12:2; 6-8; 18:1, 8, 20; 27:21.
[126] See pp.91ff.
[127] Rapp, Mirjam, p.116. Rapp suggests that Miriam's inclusion in the camp in v. 15 might be an indication of her inclusion back in the system of social relations/ranking (p.114).
[128] See Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' p.36 and Milgrom, *Numbers,* p.97.
[129] After all, the elders presumably retained their office in Numbers 11 (vv. 16-17; 24-25; cf. Exodus 18:24-26); Eldad and Medad continued to prophecy (Numbers 11:26) and Aaron continued to act as a priest even after Yahweh had departed (Numbers 12:10-12).
[130] Notably, in Numbers 12:1-16 we do not discover if Miriam ever returned to a ritually clean state. Indeed, as was noted earlier (pp.92-94), Miriam's skin condition would have deemed her as ritually unclean until all her skin had turned white (Leviticus 13:12-17). Yet, we do not receive any confirmation that her ritual status would have changed upon her return, although her pending death in Numbers 20:1 might imply this. Moreover, since it is explicitly stated in v. 15 that

certainly have lessened her status and granted her at most the lowest ranking in the leadership pyramid amongst her siblings.

As the statuses of Moses, Aaron and Miriam are thus established towards the end of Numbers 12, the question needs to be raised as regards why Yahweh is so insistent in retaining the above hierarchy and denying Moses/the people their preferred form of shared leadership? If the mode of operation that is maintained in Numbers 11-12 is based purely on Yahweh's choice, what is there for Yahweh to be gained or lost if he was to agree with the *modus operandi* preferred by his people? The answer to these questions lies deep within our next binary opposition, a dilemma that has already been addressed in our previous deconstructive reading of Exodus 1-2; 14-15, that is, in the chasm between men and women.

3.2 The Binary Opposition between Men and Women

> Applying maternal imagery to the deity and the human hero of the story [Moses] is a way of appropriating maternal power. Patriarchy does not have to worry that God and Moses, acting as mother and midwife, will subvert androcentric interests and undermine the social order because they are guarantors of the patriarchal social order.
>
> Exum[131]

As has been previously illustrated, in Numbers 11:11-15 Moses displays his bitterness and frustration at his role as the singular, pre-eminent leader; however, that which is most interesting about this complaint for our purposes is that, as Exum has indicated above, Moses uses feminine imagery to state some of his claims. In v. 12 he states: 'Did I conceive all of these people or give them birth? Because you tell me to carry them in my bosom just as a nurse carries an infant to the land you promised to their fathers' (v. 12). The use of a feminine analogy in this passage is striking, not only because to refer to Israel as Yahweh's child/son is rare in the HB (Exodus 4:22;

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the people waited for her, it is possible that her status may have been in some sense restored (see Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.151).

[131] 'The Hand,' pp.98-99.

Deuteronomy 32:5-6; Jeremiah 31:9; Hosea 11:1), but also because to present Yahweh in a parental role, moreover, in a maternal role, is exceedingly uncommon.[132] Yet, according to Exum, the description might be applied to Yahweh/Moses not in order to subvert patriarchal interests, but because the application of feminine imagery results in the appropriation of maternal power. Whilst feminine metaphors might provide an apt analogy for the purposes of Moses' complaint, as long as it is Moses and Yahweh who are portrayed in the roles, the simile will remain within the control of androcentric understanding. However, Exum's proposition will be questioned in the following. We need to consider whether the application of female images to Yahweh and Moses leads, as Exum suggests, to the containment of female power, or could it be argued to challenge patriarchal values as well as the autocratic rule of the father (Numbers 12:14).

Firstly, we must consider the nature of the imagery applied to both Moses and Yahweh in Numbers 11:12. In the verse, Moses is described as a אמן ('the one nursing') which is gendered masculine and could therefore render the possible translation of a 'foster father,' as suggested in the LXX. Yet, as has been testified by several biblical scholars, the overwhelming presence of female metaphors in the surrounding vocabulary makes the understanding of Moses' role as a nurse more than plausible.[133] Exum has suggested, however, that in Numbers 11:12 Moses should be understood not as a nurse but as a midwife, a role which is portrayed 'by *real women* in Exodus 1-2.'[134] Nevertheless, in light of the presence of terms such as the 'suckling child,' ינק, and 'bosom', חיק, L. Juliana M. Claassens seems to be correct in suggesting that Moses' role should be understood either as that of a substitute mother or that of a wet nurse, the one who quite literally carries a suckling infant in her 'bosom' until the child has been weaned.[135] Snaith has further noted that the phrasing

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[132] See, for example, Isaiah 42:14; 46:3-4; 49:15; 66:12-13; cf. Isaiah 40:11; Deuteronomy 32:13-14.
[133] Claassens, *God who Provides,* p.6; Olson, *Numbers,* p.66; Davies, *Numbers,* p.107; Noth, *Numbers,* pp.86-87; Sakenfeld, *Journeying*, pp.72-73.
[134] Exum, 'The Hand,' p.98 [her italics].
[135] Claassens, *God who Provides,* p.6.

of v. 12 implicates that Moses is meant to breast-feed the Hebrews,[136] an interpretation which would also support the understanding of Moses' role as one encompassing the duties of a nurse.[137]

As regards the role assigned to Yahweh in Numbers 11:12, Budd claims that describing Yahweh as a mother, as Exum suggested earlier, is pushing the imagery too far.[138] Budd's argument is, however, undermined by Noth who admits that although the idea of the motherhood of Yahweh is 'unusual' in the HB, it seems to be present, nevertheless.[139] Indeed, it is difficult to disagree with his conclusion, unless one can attribute 'giving birth' to somebody else than a person's mother. By implication it is stated in v. 12 that Yahweh has both conceived (הרה)[140] and given birth (ילד)[141] to his children, statements which Yahweh never counters or refutes in the course of the narrative.[142]

Moreover, as Claassens has demonstrated, the image of God feeding his people with manna/ other food is on occasion tied to the image of nursing and/or motherhood elsewhere in the HB (Deuteronomy 32:13-14; cf. Exodus 16:1ff) as well as in the Midrash (*b.Yoma* 75a; *Exod. Rab.* 1:12; *b. Sotah* 11b; *Sifre Numbers* 89).[143] These readings may well encourage the reader to comprehend manna as the Hebrews' daily nutrition whilst in the wilderness, comparable to a mother's breast milk, 'always there and always enough.'[144] In light of such an understanding, the Hebrews' discontentment with manna in Numbers 11 could be seen as ironic, that is, as descriptive of children taking for granted the sufficiency of their mother's milk/provision.[145] This interpretation would definitely suit the context of Numbers 11, where not only are the desirable qualities of manna

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[136] Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers*, p.229. See, also, Olson, *Numbers,* p.66 and Sakenfeld, *Journeying*, p.73.
[137] See, also, Childs' exposition of wet-nurse contracts ('The Birth of Moses,' pp.112-114).
[138] Budd, *Numbers,* p.128.
[139] Noth, *Numbers,* p.86.
[140] BDB, p.247.
[141] BDB, p.408.
[142] See p.237.
[143] Claassens, *God who Provides,* pp.1-9.
[144] Claassens, *God who Provides,* pp.1-7; especially p.7.
[145] Claassens, *God who Provides,* pp.6-7.

described in great detail (Numbers 11:7-9) but the Hebrews are portrayed as 'suckling children' in need of both maternal care as well as sustenance (Numbers 11:12-13).[146]

Overall, it thus appears that both Numbers 11:11-15 as well as the Midrashic readings support the understanding that, as Noth states, 'Yahweh himself is Israel's mother,'[147] an image only slightly altered when Moses complains about Yahweh charging him with the care of the children, that is, with carrying them to the Promised Land.[148] As Claassens further notes, it seems that Moses does not wish to care for the Hebrews as a nurse/substitute mother but rather urges the 'the real Mother' to take on the responsibilities she had presumably neglected.[149] The provision of food and care should not be left to Moses, who has neither the means nor the patience to deal with Yahweh's children (vv. 13-14). In fact, Moses claims he would rather die than care for the Hebrews (v. 15)!

However, even if the Hebrews are in need of motherly care, that which is implied by this care needs to be studied further. Some insight into the issue can be gained if we examine the Hebrews' various pleas in Numbers 11-12 in more detail. Generally speaking, we can observe that the various grievances appear to be related to difficulties concerning the desert march, mainly those of food (Numbers 11:4) and leadership (Numbers 12:2).[150] And, intriguingly, it is the said requests that are also perceived in Moses' complaint as signs of Yahweh's bad parenting: in v. 12 Moses states that

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[146] Some biblical scholars have either ignored the maternal imagery in Numbers 11:12 or not adequately addressed these implications when applied to Yahweh. See, for example, Levine, *Numbers,* p.323; Bellinger, *Leviticus and Numbers,* p.221; Sturdy, *Numbers,* p.85 and Greenstone, *Numbers,* p.110.
[147] Noth, *Numbers,* p.86. See, also, Claassens, *God who Provides,* p.6.
[148] Noth, *Numbers,* p.87. Read in context, the 'carrying' seems to refer to a nurturing role, that is, Moses has to carry the Hebrews to the Promised Land as a nurse carries an infant. Therefore, I would disagree with Noth, who argues that the closing words of v. 12 abandon the female imagery by shifting the metaphor from being carried in the bosom to being led/carried to the Promised land (*Numbers,* p.87). Rather, by using the same word (carry the suckling child/ carry to the Promised Land) the text seems to connect the idea of being nursed with the journey to Canaan. This would emphasise the 'impossibility' of Moses' mission: he has to care for suckling children whilst leading them on a desert march.
[149] Claassens, *God who Provides,* p.6. See, also, Olson, *Numbers,* p.66. Notably, the wish for Yahweh to accept his parental responsibilities could be suggested to be similar to the latter half of the Song of the Sea which also articulates the desire for Yahweh's parental care (Exodus 15:13-18). See pp.195-197.
[150] In Numbers 11:1-3 the difficulties are not specified; however, they presumably resulted from the 'general hardships of desert life' as suggested by Budd (*Numbers*, p.121).

he cannot carry the people to the Promised Land and, accordingly, in vv. 13-14 the stated action is comprehended as illustrative of Moses' inability to provide the meat required or to lead the people on his own. Thus, we could suggest that providing nourishment as well as leadership are perceived by Moses as maternal prerogatives, since it is Yahweh as the mother who is criticised for his lack of tending to these issues (v. 12).[151] As Moses states, Yahweh had been a willing mother in 'conceiving' and 'giving birth' to the people (v. 12); however, now he is unwilling to carry out the duties associated with the stated role. Instead, Yahweh has decided to deal 'badly' with his servant and offloaded his responsibilities onto Moses, who observes this change in function as 'evil' and admits his inability to perform effectively the duties required (vv. 11-15).[152] Indeed, it is interesting to note that Moses does not apportion the blame for his present circumstance on the Hebrews whom he sees as needy, 'suckling children' nagging for meat to eat (vv. 12-13);[153] rather, the blame is laid on Yahweh who Moses perceives as a negligent parent.

It appears, therefore, that Moses is in agreement with the Hebrews in their wish for maternal care (Numbers 11:4-6) and is somewhat exasperated by the fact that he is expected to function in such a role (Numbers 11:12). The division made between the 'instigators' and those 'deceived' in the structuralist reading seems henceforth to be ultimately unstable, since Moses does not appear to need any 'seduction' to adhere to the Hebrews' cause. As was noted above, Moses views the people as children in need, lacking in the maternal care that Yahweh is supposed to provide (Numbers 11:12-14). Furthermore, in the story it is only Yahweh who interprets the people's murmuring as a rebellion, [154] as a wish to go back to Egypt (Numbers 11:18-20);[155] however, Yahweh's

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[151] See Claassens, *God who Provides*, p.6.
[152] Milgrom, *Numbers*, pp.85-86; Dillmann, *Numeri,* p.58. See, also, pp.203-204.
[153] Milgrom, *Numbers*, p.86. See, also, Hymes who interprets the Hebrews' cry for meat as a want rather than need, in which case it could be described as 'infantile' ('Pluriform Analysis,' p.108).
[154] Claassens views the Hebrews' plea for meat as a rebellion towards Yahweh, since she understands manna as an all-sufficient provision (*God who Provides,* pp.6-7, 10-12). However, even if in Yahweh's/ the author's opinion manna could have been viewed as sufficient, this does not necessarily disqualify the Hebrews' opinion on the issue. Indeed, in

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interpretation of the complaint is only one possibility, and it certainly does not match either the content of the people's request or Moses' response (Numbers 11:4-6, 11-15).

Conversely, that which Yahweh's response does match is the understanding of Yahweh in a paternal role towards the Hebrews. As James Hurley and Gerda Lerner have both noted, within the family unit the father would have held absolute control over his subjects,[156] and thus any rebellion amongst the 'children' could be perceived as a challenge to the father's authority, a description which finds support elsewhere in the HB (Leviticus 18:8; 20:11; Deuteronomy 22:13-21, 28-29, 27:20; 1 Samuel 2:27-36). Accordingly, in view of Yahweh's response to Moses' complaint in Numbers 11:16-20, we could certainly state that Yahweh appears to be more concerned about 'rule and order,' and less about 'nurturing.'[157] Instead of providing food to nourish his people, Yahweh will supply them with meat that will eventually kill them (Numbers 11:31-34), taking his anger out on the Hebrews' bodies, 'the all-too-common response of a distressed parent,'[158] as suggested by Gunn and Fewell. Furthermore, to respond to the leadership dispute, Yahweh will delegate some of his duties to others, to other *men*, a somewhat ironical reply to Moses' need for maternal relief, as Exum has noted.[159] In addition, Yahweh's preference for male-dominated leadership is further demonstrated in Numbers 12, where Yahweh establishes Moses as the pre-eminent leader over other modes of rulership (vv. 6-8) and also identifies himself as the autocratic father in v. 14. All these issues

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Exodus 16:1ff, where the people also make a request for meat, this wish is granted by Yahweh and is not interpreted as a rebellious act worthy of punishment.

[155] Jobling, 'Structural Analysis,' pp.30, 34; 42-43. However, as Coats states, the fact that Egypt appears in the wording of the people's complaint does not seem to be intended as anything more than a point of comparison, though more could be implied (*Rebellion*, pp.101-102). Also, although 'weeping' (בכה) can be a predecessor to murmuring (cf. Numbers 14:1), the phrase in itself does not need to have a negative connotation, cf. Genesis 43:30; 1 Samuel 1:10; Lamentations 1:2 (*Rebellion,* pp.100-101).

[156] J.B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1981) pp.33-34. Lerner has done some excellent research on patriarchy and paternalism. She notes that the latter concept is descriptive of family relations, in which the 'father held absolute power over all the members of his household', and in exchange owed them, for example, economic support (*The Creation of Patriarchy,* p.239).

[157] Gunn and Fewell, *Gender,* p.113.

[158] Gunn and Fewell, *Gender,* p.113.

[159] See Exum, 'The Hand,' p.99.

regarding Numbers 12 will be discussed shortly; however, here we can note that Yahweh seems to retain his more father/male-based role throughout Numbers 11-12, apparently oblivious to the wishes of his people.

However, even if Yahweh's preferred *modus operandi* in Numbers 11-12 is illustrative of the rule of the father (Numbers 12:14), the fact still remains that the people appear to be wishing for something else, that is, the care of a mother (Numbers 11:4-6, 12). This raises the question of whether Yahweh's preferred mode of conduct can be considered as a better form of leadership than the model advocated by Moses/the people? The answer to this question seems to be the same as it was in Exodus 1-2, that is, in matters of preference, the correct answer is a matter of perception: the people prefer the mother (Numbers 11:12) but Yahweh obviously the father (Numbers 11:16-20, 31-34; 12:14). And, subsequently, whose side one takes depends on the mode of conduct one prefers.

Indeed, in the course of Numbers 11-12 both the fatherly and the motherly models are presented and projected onto Yahweh. Whilst the fatherly model seems to be descriptive of the prevailing *modus operandi* in the narrative, that is, the hierarchical organisation of Mosaic supremacy and the singularity of Yahweh's rule (Numbers 12:6-8, 14), the maternal model was observed to consist of shared leadership (Numbers 11:14) as well as providing nourishment for the people (Numbers 11:4-6, 12-13). And, intriguingly, in the course of Numbers 11-12 Yahweh shows himself most capable of establishing himself within both means of leadership. On the one hand, as the father, Yahweh can institute Moses' pre-eminence (Numbers 11:16ff; 12:6ff), punish his rebellious children for murmuring (Numbers 11:1, 31-34; Numbers 12:9-10, 14) and identify himself as well as his conduct with that of an exasperated father (Numbers 12:14). On the other hand, Yahweh can share his spirit among leaders apart from Moses (Numbers 11:26; 12:2) and provide nourishment for the people, albeit to punish them rather than feed them (Numbers 11:31-34). Thus, Yahweh has shown himself

capable in function if not in intent of addressing not only his paternal but also his maternal prerogatives as suggested in Numbers 11:12. Consequently, we can note that within Numbers 11-12 Yahweh is able to identify with the conduct of both the mother and the father; however, in the course of the narrative it is the role of the father which will carry pre-eminence (Numbers 12:14). As Kirk Duggan notes, Yahweh will remain as the deity with a 'big ego', wielding 'lots of power' and suffering 'no encroachment of that power.'[160]

Nevertheless, it is intriguing to note that this act of preference does not lead to the ultimate rejection of the mother: Yahweh never denies that he has 'conceived' the people, 'given' them 'birth' or that he should 'carry' them to the Promised Land (Numbers 11:12). In addition, he even acts in a manner somewhat consistent with the description of the maternal mode of conduct, as was noted above (Numbers 11:26, 31-33; 12:2, 5-8). Rather, his function as the mother is smothered with forceful definitions of the father, which in the following sequence of events is established through various functions and expressions identifying Yahweh with the paternal mode of operation (Numbers 11:16ff). However, the stated paternal definition does not completely eradicate Yahweh's characterisation as the mother. Indeed, if we follow Luce Irigaray and argue that a god is but a reflection of everything that is ideal in mankind,[161] then the very fact that in Numbers 11:12 the wish for a mother is clearly acknowledged indicates that the deity has to accept a part of a feminine identity due to his people's portrayal of him as such, even if Yahweh's maternal side is somewhat neglected.

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[160] Kirk-Duggan, 'Divine Puppeteer,' p.102.
[161] Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies,* pp.67-69. For a short summary of Irigaray's argument, see Amour, 'Crossing the Boundaries Between Deconstruction, Feminism, and Religion,' in N.J. Holland (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations,* pp.206-211.

It is around this concept of motherhood and fatherhood, of perception and choice, that we can also

best comprehend the character of Miriam in Numbers 12. Firstly, we must note that both of the

issues Miriam introduces in Numbers 12:1-2 could be argued to carry similarities to the complaints

raised by Moses in Numbers 11:11-15. Indeed, in Numbers 11:14 Moses objected to his role as the

unique leader, further expressed in his wish for all men to prophesy in v. 29. Miriam's request for a

position in leadership in Numbers 12:2 could thus be seen as the fulfilment of Moses' desire and the

realisation of his yearning for aid, as noted by Trible.[162] Furthermore, as Moses presented an issue

raised by the community regarding food (Numbers 11:13), Miriam introduces another concern

which, as was previously demonstrated, was the cause of trouble and upset within the community

proper, namely Moses' marriage to a foreigner (Numbers 12:1).[163] Miriam's role in Numbers 12:1-

2 could consequently be stated to parallel that of Moses in Numbers 11:11-15: they both raise

matters regarding the community at large (food/marriage) as well as leadership disputes. Secondly,

because of the similarities in the content of the complaints, we can also observe that the position of

the subject bringing the complaint can be likewise portrayed: Moses describes himself as a 'nurse'

who has been charged with maternal duties he had failed to address (Numbers 11:12); accordingly,

Miriam initiates a query that firmly partakes in the realm of maternal prerogatives (community

welfare/leadership; Numbers 11:12; 12:1-2). Yet, unlike Moses, Miriam is not about to trouble the

'real' mother who obviously does not want to be troubled (Numbers 11:16-25). Rather, as Rapp

stated earlier, the audience of Miriam's complaint is not disclosed,[164] which could lead us to believe

that Miriam is not seeking to address Yahweh with the stated matters[165] but to gain a solution

through alternative means. Although Pardes might be going too far in calling Miriam a 'mother

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[162] Trible, 'Bringing Miriam,' pp.175-176. Rapp views Numbers 12 as a negative response to the wish of shared leadership as presented in Numbers 11 (*Mirjam*, p.161). See, also, pp.226-227.
[163] See pp.81-85.
[164] Rapp, *Mirjam*, p.384.
[165] Note, that the initial complaint in Numbers 11:4 (which led to Moses' complaint in Numbers 11:11-15) is not either addressed to anyone.

figure,'[166] Miriam could nevertheless be seen as partially fulfilling the role that Moses detested (Numbers 11:15) and Yahweh rejected (Numbers 11:12), that is, to show maternal care towards the Hebrews by bringing forth community as well as leadership concerns without seeking aid from either the deity or Moses.

The maternal implications inherent in Miriam's claim can be further supported if we can find confirmation of that which would have necessitated Miriam to adopt the role in question, that is, witness to the negligent behaviour of the 'real' mother as (s)he was presented also in Numbers 11:12. Such an affirmation can be found in a statement made later in the narrative by Aaron: 'Do not let her [Miriam] be as the dead, as one when he comes out of his mother's womb, his flesh is half eaten away' (Numbers 12:12). Within this imagery, as E.W. Davies noted earlier, Miriam is compared to a stillborn child, 'whose body had already begun to putrefy *in utero*.'[167] However, apart from possible implications to the nature of the skin condition Miriam suffered,[168] one might enquire as to the applicability of such a simile to our context. More precisely, we need to question the reason behind using the image of a dead child to apply to Miriam's condition as opposed to, for example, the corpse of an adult stricken with צרעת or the body of an insurgent, an image which is on occasion used elsewhere in the HB of those who rebel against authority and are consequently stricken with a skin condition (2 Samuel 3:29; 2 Kings 5:25ff; 2 Chronicles 26:19ff). In other words, why use the metaphor of a dead child when there are other more appropriate images available? Gunn and Fewell have suggested the following, 'the language of Aaron's petition to Moses and of God's response brings together the issues of gender, relationship, and uncleanness and pushes the

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[166] Pardes, *Countertraditions,* p.9.
[167] Davies, *Numbers,* p.125 [his italics].
[168] See pp.93-94.

nature of divine-human relationship to a head.' This is because within the speech of Aaron,

Miriam's innocence seems to be implied: she is 'a stillborn baby, a loss to her mother.'[169]

Indeed, it is only in Numbers 11-12 where the issue of Yahweh's possible motherhood, of him

having conceived and given birth to his children (Numbers 11:12), is brought into a close context

with another maternal metaphor, that is, the notion of a mother losing her child (Numbers 12:12).

The use of the image of motherhood on both occasions is astounding, not only because of the stated

matter of the lack of maternal metaphors applicable to Yahweh in the HB, or even the proximity of

the verses, but also because of the similarity of the surrounding contexts, that is, a leadership dispute

or, more specifically, a dispute regarding Yahweh's chosen form of leadership (Numbers 11:11-15;

12:2). If we therefore accept that within the context of Numbers 11-12, Yahweh is the descriptive

mother of the Hebrews and the Hebrews are his suckling children (Numbers 11:12), the inference

appears to be that Yahweh, who in Numbers 11:12 gave birth to his people, is in Numbers 12:12

portrayed as a mother who has now witnessed the death of a daughter.[170] And, disturbingly, the

implication in the wider framework of Numbers 12 seems to be that it is the mother, Yahweh who is

also the one responsible for Miriam's 'death'.[171] It is Yahweh who causes the illness (vv. 9-10); it is

Yahweh whom Moses pleads with to heal Miriam (v. 13); and it is Yahweh, who refuses to return

her to wholeness (v. 14). Furthermore, it is Yahweh who not only neglects his parental duties

(Numbers 11:12) but who already in Numbers 11 has caused the death of his 'children' when they

displeased him (Numbers 11:1-3, 31-34). Such a description of Yahweh is at best disturbing, yet the

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[169] Gunn and Fewell, *Gender,* p.116.
[170] See Trible, who also notes how in Numbers 12:12 'Aaron unites birth and death in describing the horror God has inflicted upon Miriam,' recalling the similes used by Moses regarding Yahweh's motherhood in Numbers 11:12 ('Bringing Miriam,' pp.177-178).
[171] *Contra* Gafney (*Daughters,* p.84) and Seebass (*Numeri,* pp.72-73) we must note that the text clearly indicates that Yahweh is the one who justifies Moses by punishing Miriam, rather than Moses acting on his own accord or even as one authorised by Yahweh. Indeed, it is Moses who pleads with Yahweh to heal Miriam, surely an unnecessary act if Moses would have been the one inflicting the punishment.

portrayal of Yahweh as an unjust, negligent mother seems to be at the heart of Aaron's statement in v. 12.

However, the above argument does relativise one element in Aaron's plea in vv. 11-12, namely his acknowledgement of both his and Miriam's guilt (v. 11). In light of such a confession, is it even possible to view Miriam as without fault, or if we perceive her as the instigator of the complaint in Numbers 12:1-2, could we understand her punishment as deserved? Indeed, if we follow the structuralist reading of the narrative, the latter suggestion appears convincing; however, two issues are worth noting here. To begin with, although the narrative seems to portray Miriam as the instigator, it appears that Aaron was not without fault. In fact, Aaron states his own involvement in the 'sin' twice in one verse (v. 11) and in vv. 4-5 his name appears prior to Miriam's perhaps implying that he held a more senior role in the affair.[172] It is therefore plausible that, as Moses was in agreement with the people in their/his grievance against Yahweh in Numbers 11:11-15, Aaron was in full support of Miriam's claim in Numbers 12:1-2. Miriam's plight was his plight, and therefore her 'guilt' was his 'guilt' as well.

However, even if Aaron was prepared to accept his share of the guilt in the affair (v. 11), how can we understand such a free admission of culpability in light of the previous argument regarding Miriam's (and consequently Aaron's) implied innocence in v. 12? If Miriam is innocent, then surely there is no need to declare one's guilt. It is from this perspective that Aaron's request in vv. 11-12 could be viewed as a diplomatic masterpiece. That is, if we accept that Miriam and Aaron's claims in vv. 1-2 were both legitimate requests, Aaron's confession could be viewed as a statement of both fact and persuasion: whilst pleading for Miriam's innocence (v. 12), Aaron simultaneously acknowledges that in light of Miriam's punishment in v. 10 Yahweh is unlikely to change his mode

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[172] See, also, Abela, 'Shaming,' pp.526-527 and Shectman, *Women*, p.115.

of leadership regardless of the legitimacy of the claims of his leaders. Therefore, an act of devotion is needed if Miriam is to be rescued from her condition. And it is for this purpose that Aaron and Miriam's 'guilt' needs admitting: as Miriam manipulated the circumstance in her favour in Exodus (2:7; 15:21), now in Numbers Aaron could be argued to attempt the same feat by appealing to Moses (and through him to Yahweh) to heal Miriam. However, although Aaron might confess the supposed 'guilt' in v. 11, we must note that he will not do so without reminding Yahweh of the real reason Miriam is ill. The last statement in Aaron's plea is, in fact, not his acknowledgement of culpability, but the metaphor regarding the dead child (v. 12). Hence, the understanding of Miriam's ailment as an unfortunate event which, in light of the larger narrative framework has occurred because of the 'mother,' becomes the last act of proclamation to occur in Aaron's plea. Indeed, even if Aaron is prepared to admit his and Miriam's guilt, we could argue that he will not do so without acknowledging that which he perceives to be the real state of affairs, namely that Miriam's illness exists because of Yahweh's unjust rule.

Unsurprisingly, Yahweh is not about to accept such a misconstrued apology and is swift to change the metaphor: in his opinion, Miriam is not an innocent baby but a wilful daughter, who has been spat on by her father (v. 14). Although there is no legislation in the Pentateuch concerning fathers spitting on their daughters and, as E.W. Davies has suggested, the verse might be fragmentary,[173] in light of the context it seems most probable that the reference could be to a community practice,[174] an allusion to some kind of a 'degrading custom' (cf. Deuteronomy 25:9; Isaiah 50:6; Job 30:10), which would have required a seven day isolation.[175] This seems the most likely interpretation, since Miriam's illness did not require isolation (Leviticus 13:12-13), as was previously argued.[176] Rather,

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[173] Davies, *Numbers*, p.125.
[174] Ashley, *Numbers*, p.228.
[175] Budd, *Numbers*, p.137. For the association of spitting and shame especially within social relations, see Hymes, 'Pluriform Analysis,' p.151 and Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.113-114.
[176] See pp.94-95.

as Noth has stated, it seems most probable that Miriam's segregation would have resulted from the offence Miriam had caused her 'father'.[177]

Yahweh's declaration of his identity as the wronged father in v. 14 is illustrative of his use of paternal control throughout Numbers 11-12 as has been previously demonstrated. By identifying himself with the father and Miriam with the daughter, Yahweh returns the metaphor to the realm of the paterfamilias: while Yahweh himself remains as the 'head of the house,' the daughter is demoted to the status of the 'least valued member.'[178] And, accordingly, any dishonour caused by this 'least valued member' would also bring shame on the father (Deuteronomy 22:13-21, 28-29).[179] Hence, a humiliation of the culprit has to follow, as is evidenced by Miriam's seven-day expulsion (Numbers 12:14). By interpreting his relationship to his people through the actions of a father, Yahweh has thus re-established his autocratic reign, far removed from the realm of female leadership: he is not a grieving mother as implied in Aaron's speech (v. 12) but, as Gunn and Fewell state, an "angered father who will not tolerate insubordination – not from a 'daughter.'"[180] Yet, as was previously noted, the re-establishment of Yahweh's paternal control does not result in the cessation of his maternal function; rather, whilst the use of the paternal metaphor might have a sound of finality to it, it also ironically displays the fluidity of Yahweh's control.

Indeed, the depiction of Miriam as a 'wilful daughter' *vis-à-vis* the father both re-establishes the deity's hegemony (v. 14) and also inadvertently demonstrates the instability within the stated

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[177] Noth, *Numbers*, p.97
[178] Gunn and Fewell, *Gender,* p.116. See, also, Davies who has noted how in biblical laws in the instance of rape of a daughter or a miscarriage of a wife, it was the father/husband who was considered as the victim and compensated accordingly (Exodus 21:22; Deuteronomy 22:28-29) (*Dissenting Reader,* pp.2-3). An interesting study of women's position has also been conducted by Tal Ilan, who concludes that within rabbinical teaching the birth of a daughter was regarded not only as bad but as a disappointment. For example, according to *Ben Sira* 22.3 'the birth of a daughter is a loss' and, in addition, *Ben Sira* 42.9-11 describes daughters as a constant worry to their fathers (*Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996] pp.44ff).
[179] Uehlinger, 'Hat YHWH?' pp.243-244. See, also, pp.235-236.
[180] Gunn and Fewell, *Gender,* p.116.

domain. That is, since in the passage the pre-eminence of the father is founded upon his use of authority over a 'wilful daughter', it is also implied that the position of the father can become compromised if the woman in the story does not remain in her 'proper place.'[181] Within the family unit, as was already suggested by Hurley and Lerner, the *pater* could be construed as the ultimate figure of authority whose position of prominence may well be questioned due to the misconduct of his children.[182] And, intriguingly, we have no clear indication that Miriam ever submitted under the restrictions placed upon her by the father. Although she is banished from among her kin and brought back seven days later as instructed by the father (v. 14), we do not know anything of Miriam's thoughts, feelings or even status *vis-à-vis* Mosaic authority upon her return, as was previously noted (v. 15).[183] Rather, the rebellious daughter is brought back amongst her people without any direct admission of remorse. As Claudia Camp notes,

> Naming Miriam as a rebel is no surprise; the in-gathering of the rebel
> surely is. The boundary of the camp may be in flames, but the
> (E)strange(d) Woman lives inside.[184]

As a 'wilful daughter', we could thus suggest that Miriam remains haunting the ideal of paternal hegemony at the very moment of its re-establishment. If Yahweh's fatherly dominion can be maintained if all of the father's subjects remain under his control, Miriam serves as the reminder of one's ability to refuse to comply.

Furthermore, the instability of paternal supremacy can also be demonstrated if we approach the various illustrations used in the story to depict Miriam's stance. As noted, during the course of

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[181] Notably, the only locations defined in Numbers 12 are those assigned by Yahweh: in the beginning of the story we find Aaron and Miriam at an unidentified location, brought within a defined locality only when Yahweh urges them to come to the Tent of Meeting in vv. 4-5 (see Rapp, *Mirjam,* pp.82, 114).

[182] See pp.235-236. That a father's authority may be undermined by the behaviour of his daughter seems also to be suggested in *Ben Sira* 42.9-11, where a daughter may cause the father to be a 'laughingstock' to his enemies and a 'byword' in an assembly (Ilan, *Jewish Women*, pp.48-49).

[183] See p.229. Camp has argued that since the people waited for Miriam's return, this could indicate either that the people identified with the rebellious woman or, alternatively, that God's will became infused with that of the people, that is, Yahweh's cloud remained in place prior to Miriam's return, giving a 'divine affirmation' of her inclusion ('Over Her Dead Body,' pp.6-7).

[184] Camp, 'Over Her Dead Body,' p.9.

Numbers 12:1-16 Miriam is described as a 'maternal' character (vv. 1-2), a 'wilful daughter' (v. 14) as well as a child 'dead to the mother' (v. 12). Although these various portrayals are undoubtedly part of different metaphors to illustrate Miriam's changing situation in the narrative, interestingly, some of these representations are incompatible with the notion of the absolute sustainability of fatherly control. That is, whilst the simile of a child or a daughter can be suggested to reinforce the supremacy of the father due to his authority over the aforementioned family members (Genesis 24:23; Exodus 2:21; 20:1-17; Numbers 30:5),[185] the description of a mother and a 'wilful' daughter concurrently destabilise it. As a mother, a woman becomes removed from under the authority of her *original* paterfamilias (Genesis 2:24; Deuteronomy 22:29; 24:1-4),[186] and as a 'wilful' daughter she can remain outside of or at the very least challenge fatherly domination as is even depicted by Yahweh himself (Numbers 12:14).

Describing Miriam through these various metaphors we are thus reminded that Yahweh's authority is a very fluid concept, only sustainable if Miriam retains her assigned role within her family of origin. However, by the very portrayal of her as presented in Numbers 12 we are informed that Miriam cannot and will not remain so. She can choose to act as the 'mother' (Numbers 12:1-2), the 'child' (12:11) or exert her own will as the 'daughter' (12:14), depicting fissures within paternal hegemony through which she may escape to challenge Yahweh's reign.

In the character of Miriam the text could indeed be suggested to demonstrate the fragility of Yahweh's dominion: it is a temporary chasm sustained by force and administered by the *pater* (Numbers 12:6-8), conversely questioned by the very ideological framework that endeavours to sustain it. Miriam suspends our understanding of fatherly domination by becoming the constant

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[185] See Davies, *Dissenting Reader,* pp.1-5.
[186] Notably, a married woman would come under the authority of her husband (Exodus 20:17; Numbers 30:6-15; Deuteronomy 24:1-4); however, this particular liaison is not addressed in Numbers 12.

reminder of the entities (mother/child/daughter) which Yahweh wishes to manipulate or to neglect, yet he cannot either control or forget. The woman in the text continues to exert her influence from the borders of patriarchal hegemony, illustrating an avenue of resistance through which a woman can retain her voice whilst '*never being simply one.*'[187] She becomes a depiction of an alternative economy to the supreme rule of the father (Numbers 12:14), dispersed within the enigma of maternal care (Numbers 11:12; 12:1-2), the independence of a daughter (Numbers 12:14) and the fragility of a child (Numbers 12:12) whilst not being enclosed in any one of these portrayals.[188]

Overall, we can state that in Numbers 11-12 we have been presented with a most exceptional narrative. Although it portrays a tale of the establishment of paternal control, ultimately the story depicts a tale of the father which can only be established in conjunction with the story of the 'mother/daughter/child.' Such a conundrum leaves the audience in a moment of indecision, where to choose one mode of conduct over the other becomes a matter of personal preference: as Yahweh could decide to prefer the autocratic rule of the father (Numbers 12:14), the audience may choose to favour the care of the mother (Numbers 11:12).

4. Conclusion

We have argued that in Numbers 12 we are presented with a Moses legend, that is, a story to elevate Mosaic authority while disrupting any form of opposition that might rise against this mode of leadership. We discovered that within the story Miriam was depicted as the primary antagonist *vis-à-vis* Moses' singular leadership (Numbers 12:1-2), consequently condemned to illness and a life of stigma. However, we also noted that this portrayal was questionable due to the following issues.

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[187] Irigaray, *This Sex*, p.31 [her italics].
[188] See, also, Brueggemann, who suggests that Miriam could be considered as presenting a 'genuine alternative' to what became of Mosaic authority ('Miriam,' in *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes*[Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002] p.132.

Firstly, we suggested that Moses' prominence in the text was the result of Yahweh's choosing rather than Moses' superior virtues or means of communication (Numbers 12:6-8). Indeed, Yahweh had demonstrated his ability to communicate with other leaders in a manner similar to Moses (Numbers 11:26; 12:2, 5-8) and Moses himself appeared to be most willing to relinquish his pre-eminent post and accordingly supported other forms of leadership (Numbers 11:14, 29). Secondly, it was stated that Moses appeared to view his loneliness in leadership as a punishment from God (Numbers 11:14), the result of Yahweh having neglected his maternal prerogatives of providing the people with nourishment and adequate leadership (Numbers 11:12-14), leading to Moses' request for aid (Numbers 11:14).

Accordingly, these conclusions led us to comprehend Miriam's appearance in Numbers 12:1-16 as a challenge not to Moses but to Yahweh's chosen mode of paternal hegemony. We argued that the description of Miriam as a 'wilful' daughter (Numbers 12:14) disrupted the notion of the supremacy of the father within the family unit at the exact moment of its re-establishment: since the *pater* could only retain his dominion if all of his subjects remained under his control, the description of Miriam in the role of a rebellious daughter or even that of a 'mother' (Numbers 12:1-2) challenged the prevalence of Yahweh's hegemony over the original family unit. Furthermore, since in Numbers 11-12 the woman could be described through the various metaphors illustrated (mother/daughter/child), we claimed that Numbers 11-12 left the audience in a moment of indecision where to prefer either the paternal or maternal mode of conduct was to be observed as a matter of personal preference.

Conclusion

Often, the landscapes of biblical literature appear initially to be plain and simple. No shadows, no unfamiliar regions, no hidden depths. But the closer you look, the more complex they become.

Timothy Beal[1]

As we have approached the character of Miriam in biblical texts, we have discovered that passages which, as Beal notes, could be deemed to portray a story that is 'plain and simple' have, in fact, revealed an image of a woman which is not only astoundingly complex but also undefined, or rather, resists definition. Indeed, we recognised that even within feminist biblical research there appeared to be a discrepancy as regards whether Miriam's character should be understood as a positive role model for women, or rejected as a male-construct, portraying only those qualities suitable for subservient females. Amidst such a wide variety of views we sought to find another reading, a 'counter-voice', within the biblical narratives that could establish a positive, coherent portrayal of Miriam in a manner that takes into account the patriarchal ethos of the text, yet seeks to undermine the stated ethos within the texts studied.

We started by appropriating the selected methodology, which was deemed to be a mix of feminist, structuralist and deconstructive aims. The position of feminism, and especially that of post-structuralist feminism, was stated to be the vantage point which would be brought to bear upon issues rising from the texts. Indeed, we noted that the stated stance which assigns woman the stand of radical alterity and non-definition, or, as Derrida noted, the position of not having a single defined space in the current system,[2] could open a situation for women to discover their otherness within logocentrism. If combined with Elam's understanding of 'groundless solidarity,'[3] a fruitful coalition with feminism and deconstruction was established through which women could be enabled

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[1] *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther*, BL (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) p.ix.
[2] Derrida, 'Choreographies,' pp.27-28.
[3] Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction,* p.25.

to affect change from within rather than without the structure, to define their alterity as an expanding universe of difference and constant re-negotiation.

We also studied the structuralist methods as demonstrated by Patte and Jobling, and agreed that a variation of their strategies, especially as regards their use of Greimas' actantial model and narrative theory, would be an appropriate manner to attempt to discover a way that the passages under research could first be read whilst still remaining within the confinements of the text and its supposed ideological agenda. In addition, we would bring into the conversation the work of traditional scholarship in order to observe the manner this agenda had often been comprehended as well as supported within the dominant interpretative community. This reading, or 'first voice', would then be critiqued by a deconstructive approach in order to uncover the inconsistencies within the proposed ideological framework. We argued that, as Sherwood notes, by partaking in the logocentric system of Western thought,[4] any 'book' will always contain its 'counterbook,' and thus any given text will always debate with, critique, and undercut itself.[5] Hence, we wished to illustrate the manner in which narratives constantly question the logic they present, and to push the limits of the logic to its logical conclusion. In so doing we hoped to reveal another reading, or a 'counter-voice,' which could account for not just the perceived agenda present in the text itself, but the fallacies in the said agenda, the fissures in the ideological framework and the gaps within more traditional readings of the narrative.

In order to construct such a reading we addressed some of the deconstructive practices as demonstrated by Derrida, Sherwood and Clines. We appropriated Derrida's understanding of the 'Tower of Babel' narrative by absorbing some of his deconstructive principles, although we also

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[4] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.167.
[5] Sherwood, *The Prostitute*, p.150.

criticised especially his understanding of the reader in the production of meaning and thus

reaffirmed our appreciation for the subjectivity of any given reading project. We also

accommodated the deconstructive understanding as presented by Sherwood, who in her study of

Hosea 1-3 had demonstrated most capably the use of four predefined deconstructive phrases

(*palaeonymy, pharmakon, supplement* and *parergon*), instances of that which Derrida called

'double writing' that had been introduced in Derrida's works at a previous time. Even though we

noted our wish to continue the search for these features, we admitted that some of the deconstructive

instances to be discovered in this thesis could fall outside of these definitions. Also, we stated that

the vocabulary employed by Sherwood as regards deconstructive strategies would not be rigidly

followed. Finally, we drew from the work of Clines, especially as regards his ability to ask questions

from the text he analyses, and, due to my own placement within a religious community, his

willingness to attempt to discover meaning in a text once it had been deconstructed. Indeed, the act

of reconstruction was noted to be of importance in this thesis because, as a believer, the act of

continuing to glean meaning from the Scriptures even after a deconstructive enterprise had been

executed was deemed to be significant.

Next we approached the studies of some feminist biblical scholars who had addressed the character

of Miriam in Exodus 2:1-10, 15:20-21 and/or Numbers 12:1-16. We discovered that the

understanding of Miriam's portrayal had been open to a variety of views with very little consensus

as regards the comprehension of her character. Regarding Exodus 2:1-10, while some had

understood Miriam's assistance in securing Moses' future as admirable, even heroic, others had

deemed her to be simply an instrument of patriarchal propaganda. Indeed, only a very few readings

could be found which attempted to establish an understanding of Miriam which acknowledged both

the supposedly 'women-friendly' and the patriarchal elements in the passage. Miriam's performance

at the sea, in turn, seemed to have been generally viewed as positive and as an example of female

leadership; however, there was little agreement as to whether Miriam's office should be understood as that of a cult official or that of a prophetess. Moreover, there was some debate as regards the importance and/or the prominence that should be attributed to her Song *vis-à-vis* the Song of the Sea, and an analysis of the content of her worship was lacking at best. All of these issues rendered Miriam's character and the importance of her actions at the sea event difficult to define.

The portrayal of Miriam in Numbers 12 seemed to have divided the scholarly consensus between three potentially conflicting stances: there were those who saw her affliction with a skin condition as justified; those who understood her punishment as a reflection of the patriarchal mindset of the author; and those who had attempted a 'woman-friendly' reading of the passage, most often with the aid of rabbinical understanding. Following an examination of these divergent views, it seemed reasonable to draw the following conclusions: firstly, we suggested that the problem with Moses' marriage with the Cushite (African) woman was linked with matters regarding foreign marriages, although the exact nature of the problem was not specified; secondly, we argued that the issue regarding oracular authority in v. 2 was related to Moses' supreme authority in leadership rather than, as was often claimed, to prophetic authority *per se*; thirdly, we noted that Miriam's affliction could be understood as צרעת covering her whole body (possibly psoriasis as suggested by Hulse *et al*), which was examined by Aaron in accordance to the Levitical laws (Leviticus 13:12-17); and fourthly, we claimed that in the final form of the passage the text clearly separated the fates of the male and female perpetrators, although the exact reason as to why Aaron was spared remained unclear. Indeed, we noted that if we read Numbers 12 as a unified narrative, Miriam and Aaron could be argued to have protested together (Numbers 12:1-12, 11); yet, according to Numbers 12:10-14 Aaron was spared from punishment, which we suggested was possibly due to his status as the high priest. These conclusions rendered our understanding of the text problematic, portraying Miriam as a tragic figure and Yahweh as demeaning towards women. However, we also stated that

such a conclusion was not to read Numbers 12 as patriarchal beyond repair, but by addressing the deductions stated above as well as any conflicting interests or narrative gaps to be found in the text, we could construct another reading, which could assign value to women in general and to Miriam specifically.

In the following chapters we sought to ascertain such a counter-reading in our research of Exodus 1-2, 15 and Numbers 12. As regards Exodus 1-2, we focused our attention on three binary oppositions that we perceived to be inherent in the ideological framework of the text. Firstly, we studied the distinction between the two respective 'deities' in the account, that is, the difference between Yahweh and Pharaoh. We suggested that traditional scholarship and even feminist research had most often comprehended Yahweh to be portrayed as the God of life (Exodus 1:7), opposed to Pharaoh, a demi-god and a ruler of the anti-creational forces of death (Exodus 1:22); however, we noted that the wider description of Yahweh in the exodus story questioned the rigidity of this distinction. Since Yahweh was able to partake in the characteristics of his opponent, that is, to demand obedience from the Hebrews (Exodus 4:23; 8:1), commit actions that resulted in death (Exodus 7-11) and even to manipulate the minds of his adversaries (Exodus 4:21; 10:1-2; 14:1-4), the conclusion we drew was that Yahweh and Pharaoh appeared not as enemies but as the two 'others' in the exodus account. Indeed, their relationship could be understood as that of a *parergon,* since the death-dealing schemes of Pharaoh could be found resident in the supposedly life-giving programme of Yahweh, making the difference to be found in the faith systems which the respective rulers represented ambiguous.

Secondly, we approached the presentation of the two respective ethnicities in the exodus story. We found that the portrayal had resulted in the appropriation of the qualities displayed by the two rulers: the Egyptians with death (Exodus 1:11-22), the Hebrews with life (Exodus 1:7, 12, 20-21).

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However, such a distinction could be argued to have been questioned by the deeds of the women presented in the narrative. Indeed, although some had claimed that the description of the women could have added to the humour value of the text, we suggested that the ambiguous depiction of the midwives (Exodus 1:15) as well as Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:1-10) opened a chasm in the sustainability of the presentation of ethnic portrayals in the story, making it tenable to identify the Egyptians as well as the Hebrews with the qualities of both life and death. In addition, we claimed that the main protagonist of the passage, Moses, created further discrepancy in the said dichotomy: he was identified as both an Egyptian (Exodus 2:10) and as a Hebrew (Exodus 2:2) and even his name משה suggested a double reading (the one 'drawn out' and the one who 'draws out'). Therefore, we argued that because משה could inhabit several dichotomies (Egyptian/Hebrew, past/future, active/passive) without erasing any of the meanings associated with it, the concept could be described as a *pharmakon* in our reading, where a term was able to carry within itself mutually exclusive components.

Thirdly, we addressed the distinction between men and women in Exodus 1-2, where the consideration of men as the most valued members of society was illustrated in Pharaoh's command to kill Hebrew baby boys (but let the girls live, Exodus 1:16, 22) and even in the employment of three women to rescue one male infant (Exodus 2:1-10). However, the dichotomy became destabilised at various points during the narrative. Firstly, we noted that the midwives questioned the notion of male pre-eminence by outwitting Pharaoh with their ingenious excuse in Exodus 1:19. Although it had most often been suggested that the midwives' excuse was an 'obvious ruse', and hence Pharaoh was a fool to have fallen for it, the reason behind Pharaoh's foolishness had rarely been addressed. Indeed, we argued that it was the midwives' knowledge regarding childbirth, the knowledge only available to the 'other' sex, which rendered Pharaoh as unable to spot the midwives' trickery. Thus, Pharaoh's undoing could be stated to be due not to his status or

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nationality, but to the lack of knowledge he possessed because of his sex as a man. In addition, if we accepted that in Exodus 1-2 Pharaoh was portrayed via the image of the *parergon vis-à-vis* Yahweh, and, consequently, also his knowledge (or the lack of it) as a *parergon* to that of Yahweh, we claimed that through Pharaoh not only the enterprise of male wisdom but that of divine wisdom was challenged, where feminine knowledge could be stated to unsettle the superiority of male perception.

Furthermore, both Moses' mother and Pharaoh's daughter continued to upset the notion of male pre-eminence by exemplifying the acts of salvation Yahweh would perform during the exodus proper. Like the mothers, Yahweh would, for example, ראה , 'see' (Exodus 2:2, 5; 2:25) שלח, 'send' (Exodus 2:5; 3:10-15) and אמר, 'say' (Exodus 2:6-10; 3:5-7, 12ff) and thus the same semantic fields which had described the actions of the respective mothers in Exodus 2:1-10 would be re-established when Yahweh entered the story. We suggested that although such similarities in the accounts were hardly accidental, possibly with the objective of foreshadowing Yahweh's upcoming rescue as had been claimed by some scholars, these similarities could also be argued to have established an added dimension within the text beyond that of authorial intent. That is, by repeating the same actions the women had performed Yahweh could be claimed to imitate the example set forth by the women and, consequently, the women could be suggested to be more than foreshadowers; rather, *they* were the examples of the very actions Yahweh would show himself to be most eager to adopt. We argued that as an example of the *supplement,* Yahweh, the 'superior' deity, appeared to be dependent on his 'inferiors', the women and their actions, to establish his own rule, which consequently made ambiguous the exact nature of the distinction between the works of the women and those of the deity in the narrative.

In addition, this divide became further fractured in the description of Pharaoh's daughter. In Exodus 2:5-10 she became the subject of several verbal phrases which most often have Yahweh as their subject in the HB, such as ירד, to 'come down' (Exodus 2:5; 3:8) and חמל, 'to have pity' (Exodus 2:6; Jeremiah 15:5). Moreover, it also appeared that Pharaoh's daughter was described as an opponent to her father's scheme in the passage in a similar fashion to that of 'Elohim' and his portrayal as an opponent to the king of Egypt in Exodus 1:15-21; 2:23. We thus suggested that Pharaoh's daughter became illustrative of Yahweh's presence in the story, a glimpse of divine intent through whom the deity's presence could be implied without him ever entering the narrative. Pharaoh's daughter could hence be perceived as adding further ambiguity to the question of the division between the deity and the women by appearing to conjoin two opposed entities whilst still advocating Yahweh's absence.

The divergence created in the notion of male pre-eminence as demonstrated by the various women in the narrative was seen to be deepened and even brought beyond repair in the portrayal of Miriam in the story. Indeed, we suggested that Miriam not only continued to dispute the notion of male superiority, but the challenge Miriam presented was specifically to question the prominence of Moses in the exodus proper.

Firstly, in Exodus 2:4 we studied the description of Miriam's conviction as implied by the verb יצב. Due to the appearance of יצב in the HB, most often as relating to an encounter with God or a divinely elected leader,[6] we concluded that the verb could imply that Miriam perceived Moses to be the leader elected by God, or that Miriam bore witness to the works of God, or both. The first of these readings would have reaffirmed the notion of Mosaic pre-eminence in the story, whereas the second interpretation focused our understanding on the forthcoming 'work of God,' namely that of

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[6] Davies, *Israel in Egypt,* p.111.

Moses' rescue. However, we also discovered that in light of the manner Moses' rescue was executed, the 'work of God' would have been better understood as the 'work of the women'. Indeed, we noted that because Pharaoh's daughter could be understood as a glimpse of the presence of the divine in the story (Exodus 2:5), the text invited us to identify Moses' rescue with a 'work of God', even when the deity was not present in the text to effect it. If we could consequently perceive a 'work of God' as identified with a 'work of the women', that is, a salvation that the women had achieved themselves without the need for a divine planner and/or a human mediator, the requirement for Yahweh's intervention or even Moses' election later in the exodus story became questionable.

Secondly, the notion of male pre-eminence continued to be challenged in Miriam's communiqué with Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2:7-9. We noted that Miriam's role in the event could be understood as a precedent for Moses' function as the mediator in the exodus proper (Exodus 5:1ff); however, Miriam's mode of mediation could be considered as preferable to that of her brother in several ways. Firstly, Miriam's proposal was carefully crafted, which enabled the accomplishment of her mission with swiftness and without bloodshed, unlike the exodus proper which entailed several plagues as well as the space of approximately ten chapters to achieve the desired goal. Secondly, both Miriam and Pharaoh's daughter exemplified the merits of obedience, a characteristic valued most highly by Yahweh (Exodus 4:11-12, 14-17; 5:1); however, both Pharaoh and Moses required convincing speeches and/or acts of persuasions to assure them of a desirable course of action (Exodus 1:9-10; 3-4; 5:1ff). Thirdly, and most importantly, Miriam was both the designer and the executer of her plan and as such disturbed the rigid dichotomy between Yahweh as the divine instigator and Moses as the human subject later in the exodus narrative (Exodus 3:7-10).

Indeed, Miriam was the first person in the exodus to devise and successfully follow through a plan to secure the future of her kin (Exodus 2:7-9) and, moreover, she was portrayed as the first character

in the exodus story to ידע (2:4), which thus established a conundrum versus Yahweh's mode of knowledge in the story. Indeed, both of the characters' 'knowledge' led to liberation; yet, the deliverance effected by Yahweh required not only violence and death (Exodus 7-11) but it appeared to have been executed for self-centred motives (that the Hebrews/Egyptians/Pharaoh may know that he is God, Exodus 7:5; 8:10, 22; 9:14; 10:2). Such a display of egocentrism seemed to portray Yahweh's plan in an unfavourable manner when compared to the remarkably selfless as well as life-affirming deeds performed by Miriam in Exodus 2:4-9. Therefore, if a plan of deliverance could be both created and executed in the mind of a young woman (Exodus 2:7-8), the necessity for a divine planner and a human mediator became open for debate.

Consequently, we argued that Miriam could be portrayed as uniting within herself the two complete opposites in the narrative, the woman and the man, the woman and the divine, the planner and the protagonist, thus becoming *the* undecideable and *the* other. She became the 'joker' and the 'wildcard', questioning the notion of male pre-eminence and even the pre-eminence of the divine in the broad framework of the exodus.

In the following chapter we continued to study Miriam as she appeared in Exodus 14-15. We suggested that although Miriam was not mentioned by name in Exodus 14, her example of faith as presented in Exodus 2:4 was well commemorated in Exodus 14:13-14. We suggested that although a parallel between these passages had been recognised by scholars wishing to draw links between the objects of the respective events, that is, the rescue of Moses/the Hebrews through water, the use of יצב in both passages inadvertently also brought us the connection between the appropriate subjects, that is, Miriam and the Hebrews. The understanding of the parallel was supported by other similarities in the accounts, such as the physical location על־שפת היאר/הים ('upon the shore of the river/sea', Exodus 2: 3; 14:30), the assonance created by סוף ('reed', Exodus 2:3, 5; 13:18) and the

use of ראה (Exodus 2:2, 5; 14:13), as well as the correspondence between the respective actions committed by both Miriam and the Hebrews in both accounts (ראה/ידע יצב, and חרש).

We then approached Miriam's performance at the sea event as described in Exodus 15:19-21. We observed that the exact significance of Miriam's Song became most difficult to define due to some textual ambiguities in the narrative. Indeed, the use of ענה in Exodus 15:21 had led to several observations as regards the nature of her performance: some had interpreted the verb with its most common translation of 'to answer', concluding that the Song was an 'answer' or an intermittent chorus/ refrain to the Song of the Sea; others had argued that the verb should be understood as to 'sing' and thus gave Miriam's Song a place of prominence at the sea event; yet others had understood ענה to imply prophetic activity, in which case Miriam would have 'answered' for the community to the miraculous act of God. Of these interpretations we argued that the last position was the least probable due to the hymnic qualities inherent in Miriam's Song, that is, the use of an imperative plural, שירו, 'to sing', summoning the people of Israel to praise Yahweh followed by כי, 'for', and a description of Yahweh's saving actions, a depiction not too dissimilar to other portrayals of worship encountered elsewhere in the HB (cf. Psalm 117). In addition, since the event lacked any direct indication of prophetic activity, we suggested that if Miriam should be comprehended as a prophetess within the generic framework of her function (Exodus 15:20), we had to find evidence for such a description elsewhere.

To understand ענה as implicating either 'answering' or 'singing' consequently became the two most probable interpretations of the verb which also provided two mutually exclusive understandings of Miriam's position within the sea event. However, we noted that, regardless of which interpretation was to be accepted, Miriam's performance provided further clues as to her importance at the celebration. Indeed, we agreed that since Miriam's Song was addressed to the masculine להם,

'them,' it seemed likely that her Song would have been directed at the 'sons of Israel' (v. 19), the closest probable male referent to be found within the vicinity of her performance. Such an interpretation would make the audience of Miriam's song either the Hebrew men, in which case a female leader would have commanded the Hebrews to שירו, 'to sing' to Yahweh, or the Hebrew men and women, which would have resulted in a joined experience of worship; however, to decide between these possibilities proved to be problematic. Since Miriam could be understood as having either been the inaugurator or a respondent to the sea event with two possible audiences, we were left in a beautiful moment of indecision, where Miriam was described in a cultic leadership role, yet the exact nature of this office was never made explicit. Rather, the text could be suggested to have left us in an ultimate moment of displacement, since the forming of a clear hierarchy of either male or female dominance was an act the text simply refused to perform.

Following this we examined the mythological background of both the Song of the Sea and the Song of Miriam, and suggested that both Songs took their inspiration from the well-attested legend of a Sea-battle, albeit the origin of this myth was the cause of some debate. In addition, we argued that the use of the battle imagery associated the event with the creation motif, which concurrently tied our understanding of the Songs with other instances where the theme had been used elsewhere in the Exodus. Miriam's Song was thus understood as an appropriate closure to the exodus account, since it reminded us of the actions of the women in Exodus 1-2. Indeed, as was demonstrated earlier, the women had been a part of re-establishing Yahweh's creative order and even exemplified the *modus operandi* for Yahweh's future acts of liberation. Miriam's Song could, therefore, be perceived as a moment of irony in the story: while it celebrated Yahweh's victory, it also celebrated the women who had directed the course of the exodus proper.

Furthermore, we suggested that Miriam's Song could also be understood as a moment of culmination in the sea celebration. As Leutzsch had suggested, within Miriam's Song the violent deeds of the divine warrior became condensed into two stanzas, which celebrated exclusively Yahweh's deeds at the sea.[7] Indeed, the description of Yahweh as having רמה, 'cast/thrown', the רכבו, 'rider/chariot' into the sea did not present Yahweh in a pacifist manner *contra* the claims of some feminist biblical scholars, but rather as a violent warrior whose victory was made known in Miriam's Song. However, we also suggested that the declaration of Yahweh's fame (Exodus 9:16) did not seem to be the only motif inherent in the Song. Rather, if we examined the Song of Miriam in light of the latter half of the Song of the Sea, we could observe that the proclamation of Yahweh's fame seemed to have gained an ulterior motif: to effect a peaceful march to the Promised Land (Exodus 15:13-18). In the latter half of the Song of the Sea we noted that the march to Yahweh's holy dwelling seemed to be comprehended not as an implication of a holy war as had been argued by some, but as a description of a peaceful event, which had resulted from the nations 'hearing' of Yahweh's victory and thus 'trembling' and 'melting' away in fear (Exodus 15:14-15). Moreover, in the passage the image of a warrior had been substituted for a more intimate connection between Yahweh and his people, namely, that of a parent. This connection was recognized most clearly in the use of, for example, גאל, 'to redeem or act as kinsman' and קנה, 'to beget', both of which we argued were verbal phrases that emphasised Yahweh's filial connections with his people. It was thus suggested that Miriam's Song could be understood as suspending the dichotomy between war/warrior and peace/parent by joining both concepts in a single act of worship. Indeed, as an act of declaration of Yahweh's fame Miriam's Song could also be perceived as an act of persuasion where, by implication, the wish for a peaceful march had become resident in the declaration of Yahweh as 'the man of war' (15:3), establishing Yahweh as a deity with contradicting identities, both of which were celebrated in the Songs performed in his honour.

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[7] Leutzsch, 'Mirjams Lied,' p.51.

We then followed Miriam's character as she appears in Numbers 12. We argued that the narrative presented us with a Moses legend, that is, a story which was designed for the elevation of Mosaic authority and consequently to discredit any opposition that might rise against the said hegemony. Appropriately, in Numbers 12:1-2 we discovered that Miriam was portrayed in the role of an antagonist *vis-à-vis* Moses' singular leadership and it was due to her role as the presumed instigator of the complaint (as opposed to Aaron who was depicted in a supporting role)[8] that she was to be punished for her insubordination and accordingly banished outside the camp (v. 14).

However, the above portrayal of Miriam had been criticised by several (feminist) biblical critics. It was suggested that since in the final form of the text both Miriam and Aaron complain together (vv. 1-2) and, furthermore, Aaron admits his culpability in the affair (v. 11), the following punishment of Miriam alone could be observed as unwarranted. Indeed, we noted that the elevation of Mosaic power in Numbers (11)-12 appeared to be based on highly questionable grounds and could be understood as open to debate for the following reasons.

Firstly, we suggested that the establishment of Moses' elevated status as presented in Numbers 12:6-8 appeared not to be the result of Moses' own merit but rather the preference of Yahweh. In these verses it was argued that Yahweh broke his own rules of engagement with the other prophets/leaders: he communed with Miriam and Aaron in a manner that was not a 'dream' or a 'riddle' and thus the very fact that Yahweh could choose to speak directly to them without mediation was argued to reveal that behind Yahweh's mode of leadership lay not Moses' superior qualities but Yahweh's preference. Moreover, in Numbers 11-12 Yahweh had shown himself able to share his spirit with leaders apart from Moses (Numbers 11:26; 12:2), which thus further questioned Moses' status as the singular servant of the Lord. Indeed, even Moses himself did not seem to view

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[8] Notice that Miriam's name appears first in v. 1 and the verbal form of דבר is used is the 3rd feminine singular.

his unique status as something to be desired, but he positively encouraged other forms of leadership (Numbers 11:11-15, 29). In fact, it was his request that other leaders were to be appointed to share in the 'burden of the people'; however, this was subsequently denied by Yahweh (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25).[9] Moreover, when the issue of collective leadership was raised again in Miriam and Aaron's request in Numbers 12:2, in light of the previous narrative context we argued that Moses might have been in favour of this request, an option which was taken away by Yahweh's sudden appearance and his declaration of preference for his chosen servant (Numbers 12:7). We thus claimed that in the overall framework of the narrative Moses should be observed not as opposed to, but in favour of, collective leadership; yet, he was to retain his singular stance due to Yahweh's decision.

Secondly, we noted that for our purposes it was most intriguing that Moses' displeasure as regards his singular status was in part expressed through the use of a feminine analogy. In this metaphor Moses described himself in the role of a nurse, who had been charged by the 'mother' (Yahweh) to carry the people to the Promised Land (v. 12). Although some had argued that to understand Yahweh as a mother of the Hebrews was to push the imagery too far, we concluded that since in the text it was implied that Yahweh had both conceived (הרה) and given birth (ילד) to his people, to comprehend Yahweh in maternal terms became unavoidable.

Therefore, if we understood that Yahweh could be seen as a maternal figure towards the Hebrews (Numbers 11:12), the implications of this relationship needed to be studied further. In v. 12 Moses stated that he could not carry the people to the Promised Land and, accordingly, in vv. 13-14 this responsibility was understood in terms of Moses' inability to provide meat or to lead the people on his own. We could consequently suggest that attending to the welfare as well as attaining to the

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[9] Although 70 elders were initiated into an office of leadership through a prophetic experience, their status seems to have remained inferior to that of Moses (Numbers 11:24-25).

leadership of the community were observed by Moses as maternal prerogatives, since it was Yahweh as the mother who was criticised for his lack of attending to these issues (v. 12). Indeed, rather than address these matters, Yahweh had decided to deal 'badly' with his servant and delegated his responsibilities to Moses, who observed Yahweh's treatment of him as 'evil' and admitted his inability to effectively perform the duties required (vv. 11-15).

If comprehended in such manner, it appeared that Moses could be observed as in agreement with the Hebrews regarding their discomfort (Numbers 11:4-6). We suggested that the division the text made between the instigators of the rebellion (the people) and those seduced to follow their cause (Moses) was hence a dubious one, since no particular difference between the parties could be observed. We also claimed that the division made between Miriam (the instigator) and Aaron (the seduced) in Numbers 12 was likewise uncertain, since the text appeared to indicate that Aaron in Numbers 12:1-2, like Moses in Numbers 11:11-15, had been in agreement with the instigator's plea (cf. Numbers 12:11).

Therefore, if Miriam's affliction could no longer be assigned to her role as the instigator of the complaint, we suggested that the cause of her punishment was to be found elsewhere, namely in the challenge her various portrayals in the narrative presented to male hegemony. Firstly, we argued that in Numbers 12:1-2 Miriam raised concerns pertaining to issues regarding the community at large (foreign marriages) as well as leadership, which could be observed to be in accordance with the maternal prerogatives as presented by Moses in Numbers 11:12. This reading gained additional support from a statement made by Aaron in Numbers 12:12, where Miriam was described as a child dead to the mother (Yahweh) and also dead because of the mother (Yahweh). Such a portrayal of the relationship between Yahweh and Miriam affirmed Yahweh's status as the mother as well as his/her unjust treatment of his children. Indeed, as Aaron perceived the situation, Miriam's illness existed

only because of Yahweh's negligent conduct towards his people rather than due to Miriam's rebellion.

By raising issues of community welfare as well as leadership, it was also argued that Miriam had resumed a somewhat maternal role towards the Hebrews, a function that Moses had earlier detested (Numbers 11:15) and Yahweh had rejected (Numbers 11:12). In accordance with the declaration of Yahweh's identity as an exasperated father (Numbers 12:14), Yahweh's perceived mode of operation with the people was indeed better suited to his role as the paterfamilias than that of a mother: rather than provide meat for the people, Yahweh had supplied food that would kill them (Numbers 11:18-20, 31-34); rather than present Moses with aid in leadership, Moses' singular authority had been retained (vv. 24-25). However, we also noted that Yahweh's mode of conduct as the father could not completely eradicate his portrayal as the mother (Numbers 11:12). During the course of the overall narrative it had been demonstrated that Yahweh was capable to act in accordance with his 'maternal' prerogatives: he had shared some of his spirit with leaders apart from Moses (Numbers 11:26-30; 12:2) and provided nourishment, although deadly (Numbers 11:31-34). It thus became apparent that within the context of Numbers 11-12, Yahweh could be perceived as both a mother and a father, which questioned the pre-eminence of the portrayed paternal hegemony.

Secondly, we argued that the instability within Yahweh's mode of fatherly domination was made explicit at the exact moment of its re-establishment in Numbers 12:14. In other words, in this verse the pre-eminence of the father was suggested to be dependent upon his dominion over a 'wilful daughter', which implied that the father's position could become compromised if the woman in the story did not retain her 'proper place' as assigned by the father. We claimed that within the family unit the position of the father could become compromised by the misconduct of his children (Leviticus 18:8; 20:11; Deuteronomy 22:13-21, 28-29, 27:20) and, accordingly, in Numbers 12:15

we had no indication of Miriam's submission to Mosaic authority upon her return to the camp. That is, although Miriam was punished (Numbers 12:14), her lack of voice at the end of Numbers 12 could also be indicative of her challenge to paternal authority, which requires the cooperation of all of its members.

The instability of paternal control could also be observed in the various metaphors used to describe Miriam's status in Numbers 12:1-16. As was stated earlier, Miriam could be portrayed either as a maternal figure (vv. 1-2), a dead child (v. 12) or a wilful daughter (v. 14); however, it was suggested that the authority of the original paterfamilias could only be retained if Miriam remained as the 'daughter' or 'child', whereas her description as a 'wilful' daughter or a maternal figure moved her outside of, or at the very least challenged the fatherly domination of, her family of origin. These metaphors could accordingly be argued to destabilise the notion of Yahweh's unique authority and point towards the volatility of Yahweh's established hegemony.

The feminine similes as demonstrated above were argued to be illustrative of the manner female influence in Numbers 11-12 challenged patriarchal domination. Indeed, it was claimed that the various feminine analogies in Numbers 11-12 portrayed an image of a woman, which was perceived as multiple (child/daughter/mother) yet clearly defined in conjunction with the rule of the father. In this passage, we noted, the woman could thus be described as reinscribing her own expression into the story whilst remaining within the limits of logocentric understanding.

The character of Miriam, as she has been illustrated in our research, has come to signify that which disturbs patriarchal supremacy in the texts in which she appears, functioning 'as a powerful force

below the surface of the text'[10] as noted by Brueggemann. Indeed, she has been portrayed as the one who questions the need for Yahweh's intervention and Moses' election in the exodus proper (Exodus 2:1-10), destablises the supremacy of the role of her brother in matters of the cult (Exodus 15:19-20) and even disrupts the paternal hegemony as presented by Yahweh in Numbers 12. Furthermore, in the overall framework of her story she could be observed to challenge the distinction between religious offices as demonstrated in Numbers 12:1-16, since within Exodus-Numbers she can legitimately be presented as a cultic leader (Exodus 15:20-21) and a prophetess (Exodus 15:20; Numbers 12:2, 6). Moreover, in Exodus 15:20-21 she is described as a prophetess whilst performing a cultic function! However, a feminist-deconstructive reading of the character that is Miriam is ultimately an endeavour that goes beyond the scope of the present research. Such a project could contain, for example, an investigation into other passages that mention Miriam (Numbers 20:1; 26:59; Deuteronomy 24:8-9; 1 Chronicles 6:3; Micah 6:4) as well as an analysis of the effect of race for our comprehension of her function in Numbers 12:1-16, an issue already addressed in some feminist/womanist readings. In addition, because our research has emphasised our comprehension of Miriam, there are numerous other deconstructive elements in the texts studied that have been neglected and thus could benefit from future research, such as a more in-depth look at the function of Aaron in Numbers 12:1-16 and a study of the presentation of social structures in Exodus 14-15. That which such ventures could lead to is the discovery of, to refer to Derrida, all 'the other others'[11] that is, a glimpse into the interconnected world of the subject with its 'other', the oppressor with the oppressed, the foreigner with the native, and the priest with the prophet, a participation in the never-ending dance of displacement which is inscribed within the very system of logocentric thought.

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[10] Brueggemann, 'Miriam,' p.133.
[11] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p.69.

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