RISKY BUSINESS: UNDERSTANDING NON-ISRAELITE MOTHERS AS RISK-TAKING LEGACY MAKERS

By

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ABSTRACT

Of the thousands of characters in the Hebrew Bible, both named and unnamed, less than 15% are women, and an even smaller amount of those are given names—an estimated 170. Whilst the field of research on female biblical characters is naturally limited by the small amount of individuals to explore, feminist biblical scholarship often seeks to fill the gaps left by the original authors of the text. This might include exegetical approaches, such as my own, which provide women with fundamental—and yet often lacking in the original text—voices of representation. In this thesis, I focus on female characters who are mothers; as is so keenly promoted by the patriarchal society of which they find themselves a part, motherhood is an important role which provides social security. Each of these characters—Hagar, Lot's daughters and Tamar—can be said to be in an individually complicated position, where their decision to transcend their low social position leaves them with a choice to either remain at the mercy of the patriarch in their lives or commit an act which may either appear counter-intuitive or in some cases abhorrently immoral. Upon first inspection, the actions taken by each woman appear to far outweigh the immediate threat which they are under; however, in each case, the gravity of the negative circumstances that each character must feel that they are condemned to is illuminated by the drastic risk which they take. The birth of a child in each instance spares women from their situation and goes beyond promising a secure life, but promises them their legacy.

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C O N T E N T S

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis consists of my own original work only, except for where referenced in accordance with the University of Glasgow's guidelines. No aspect of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Lydia Kate Denton
2025

ABBREVIATIONS

ESV – English Standard Version

LXX – Septuagint

MT – Masoretic Text

NASV – New American Standard Version

NIV – New International Version

NKJV – New King James Version

NRSV – New Revised Standard Version

INTRODUCTION

During the writing of my undergraduate dissertation, I had a realisation: the biblical women whose stories most piqued my interest were almost all mothers. I was interested in the unconventional ways in which they came into motherhood, and I sought to understand why entire verses and chapters were committed to detailing their experiences, when typically, the female experience is so severely ignored in biblical texts. The journeys of these women were almost never straightforward, and I found myself compelled to investigate the presentation of each woman's story as having some distinctive quality which makes it necessary that they bear children, as well as the unique trials which they face on their individual paths to motherhood.

Upon research, this initial line of inquiry flourished, and I found myself investigating not only the pressure to bear children exerted upon women who exist within ancient patriarchal texts but also the circumstances which each of the women in my investigation found themselves in, which left them with no other reasonable alternative than to become a mother, by whatever means necessary. With this recognition, I reach the crux of my study into female agency and the requirement of women to become mothers for survival: in the case of each of my subjects, their means of reproduction directly involves risk-taking. As is the case with reproduction, we can consider each woman to be a *legacy-maker,* in the most basic sense of the term; however, with my study, the women concerned can be even further considered legacy-makers in that they have a broad impact. This impact may be felt by those who similarly exist inside the same stories (e.g. their fathers); more broadly by aiding the promotion of a positive perception of ancient Israel, the Davidic reign and the genealogy of Jesus in both ancient and contemporary eras; and finally, by inspiring individual women, mothers and those who long to be mothers outside of the texts, with their risk-taking and strength to advocate for not only their offspring but themselves too. All of this has amalgamated into one central question: Why do non-Israelite women in the Hebrew Bible risk their lives to bear children?

Throughout my discussion, I do not bring into question the broadly recognised and accepted definitions of both "Israelite" and subsequently "non-Israelite". Instead, I accept that these terms are used to describe members of ancient societies, which are understood to centre around modern-day southwest Asia. Geographically, ancient Israelite societies centred around the Levant; however, sociologically, Israelites are generally understood as a group of people who are engaged with God through His covenant, as described in the texts of the Hebrew Bible. Subsequently, categorising oneself as an Israelite is an identity marker which broadly determines an individual's spiritual beliefs and cultural behaviour. Whilst there remains to be some scholarly disputes around the size of societies which existed under these divisions, and whether the term "Israelite" can be used as a general term to identify those who were living in the Levant during a certain time period, Karel van der Toorn's chapter "Tribal Religion" usefully documents the period of

history in which the group which we now know to be "Israelites" emerged as a social group with common ideas.[1] With this basic and widely undisputed concept of who the Israelite people were, it still remains useful to broadly categorise this social section of people who had similar religious beliefs and were part of the covenant. The lack of historical corroboration is less problematic if we consider the Israelites to be a literary construction of a social group as described and defined in the biblical texts. This group reflects the probable concerns and interests of the authors of the texts which I discuss in this thesis.

The women whose stories I will focus on in this thesis are Hagar (Genesis 16 and 21), Lot's Daughters (Genesis 19) and Tamar (Genesis 38).[2] As part of my chapter on Tamar, I will extend my discussion to cover Rahab (Joshua 2) as her story has relevant similarities, which I will outline in greater depth later. It is worth noting that the stories of all three of my main characters are found in the Book of Genesis. The authorship and dating of Genesis are difficult to pinpoint with precision, as the composition of the text has a complex history. It is likely that the ancient text arrived at its final form in several stages; however, I am working with the final form itself and do not intend to draw any conclusions in my thesis regarding the earlier layers of the text. With this being said, the structure of my thesis follows the chronological order in which the chapters of Genesis are arranged in all major English translations of the Bible: Genesis 16 (and 21), Genesis 19, and Genesis 38.

I now turn to discussing the original purpose of the Book of Genesis, which is important to have some bearing of ahead of an investigation into its contents. Diana Edelman asks *who* the chapters of Genesis were written for, with her main line of enquiry branching into two possibilities: the book was written to reflect early Jewish traditions in the ancient world, to be enjoyed by the scribal elite; or, the book was written to reshape cultures through modelled behaviour, and therefore be enjoyed more widely across ancient communities.[3] The outcome of this question has important ramifications for my thesis as it adjusts how we view texts where the main plot regards the lives of women: either the presentation of women in biblical texts is a direct—although likely not wholly accurate—reflection of the lives of women, including societal pressures and typical familial structures; or, the societal pressures and familial structures which are detailed in the stories are deliberately developed and normalised to shape women's behaviour in the ancient world. Certainly, this question cannot be answered by my thesis alone; however, with recognition of this uncertainty we are able to approach the texts with caution. Regardless of which side of Edelman's hypothesis we consider to be more accurate, both exhibit an element of control over women's lives - with the first being confirmation that the horrors which exist inside the texts have some element of truth, and the

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[1] Karel van der Toorn, *Israelite Religion: From Tribal Beginnings to Scribal Legacy* (Yale University Press, 2025), 47.
[2] All biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV unless stated otherwise.
[3] Diana Edelman, "Genesis: A Composition for Constructing a Homeland of the Imagination for Elite Scribal Circles or for Educating the Illiterate?" in *Writing the Bible: Scribes, Scribalism and Script,* eds. Thomas Römer and Philip Davies (Acumen Publishing, 2013), 48.

latter being equally troubling where the authors of biblical texts sought to depict women being controlled in order to promote similar behaviour in their own communities. Personally, I consider each possibility to be equally conceivable, which is not illogical as the two prongs of Edelman's argument are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, we can argue that there are elements of both aspects of Edelman's considerations on why the texts were written, and this consequently focuses our concern for how women are not only portrayed in the text but were intended to have been received by the text's originally intended readers.

Existing scholarship on my primary characters rarely frames the women with a focus on them as mothers. Instead, in the case of Hagar, literature tends to focus on Hagar's relationships with other adults, particularly Sarah. This is especially the case in Jayme Reaves' reading, where the hostility between Sarah and Hagar is illuminated and the autonomy of Sarah as Hagar's main abuser is downplayed.[4] Further, Hagar's pregnancy is often presented as a by-product of Abraham's primary needs as the promised future father of Israel, particularly by Carol Delaney; however, Ekaterina Kozlova cuts against this norm, presenting Hagar with some empathy as a woman who is losing her child, which therefore brings Hagar's maternity to the fore.[5] Still, the selflessness of Hagar as a mother and her prior position as an enslaved woman which had directly forced her to bear a child remains an important topic of discussion which is rarely discussed in scholarship as the central focus. My reading of Hagar will primarily recognise her enslaved position within Sarah and Abraham's home as this leads to forced pregnancy and her consequential risk-taking as she refuses to accept domestic abuse.[6] Finally, Hagar's devotion to motherhood leads her to make decisions which risk her own life in favour of her son's long-term security following an encounter with an angel, ultimately sealing her position as more than just the mother of Abraham's son. The legacy of Hagar is conventional, in that the impact of her actions benefits her direct bloodline.[7] The religious impact of Hagar's legacy is found in her verbal engagement with God and opposition to the cruelty which Sarah treats her with. These details of Hagar's encounter with the divine elevate her status as a single woman and mother and will inevitably leave a legacy which can be empowering for others.

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[4] Jayme Reaves, "Sarah as victim and perpetrator: Whiteness, power, and memory in the matriarchal narrative," *Review and Expositor* 115, no. 4 (2018): 483-499, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637318806591.

[5] Carol Delaney, "Abraham and the Seeds of Patriarchy," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, 2nd edition, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 129-149, and Ekaternia Kozlova, *Maternal Grief in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 68.

[6] Throughout this thesis I will use post-covenantal names when referring to Abraham and Sarah, despite some parts of my discussion involving the two characters ahead of their name changes. I acknowledge that in Genesis 16 particularly, their names are Abram and Sarai; however, for the sake of continuity, I refer to them as Abraham and Sarah throughout.

[7] The ways in which each woman is considered a legacy-maker is independent to them and their stories. Whilst Hagar's legacy is conventional in that it is founded on developing her familial lineage, others' legacies may be merely textual, and some others have long-standing religious implications. This will be outlined at the outset in my introduction.

In the case of Lot's daughters, Lot is presented as the protagonist and main actor in the story in a majority of scholarly readings.[8] Johanna Stiebert provides a useful definition of first-degree incest and makes the articulate point that we must reconsider the story of Lot and his daughters away from our preconceptions of first-degree incest and how we consider heinous taboos today.[9] This readjustment allows me to approach the text without becoming obsessed with the encapsulating horror of incest and instead focus on the circumstances which lead Lot's daughters to act in the way in which they do. Kirsi Cobb's article on trauma theory illuminates the complex response which the young women are likely to have to their experiences and usefully allows me to build my argument on top of this understanding.[10] From here, I read Lot's daughters as victims of their circumstances and, in keeping with the rest of my thesis, risk-takers who, as a result of their societal conditioning, opt to reproduce with their own father because child-bearing is so highly-valued in their world. Their legacy is as two young women who act in their own interests in a male-dominated world and become the mothers of nations. Whilst their interests are most likely to have been shaped by this patriarchal society that they live in, the religious legacy is found in the genealogies of both David and Jesus, which I will discuss later in this thesis. Ultimately, Lot's daughters do succeed in their plan and achieve their goal of repopulating their community after not allowing the destruction of Sodom to forcibly surrender their promised futures of marriage and children.

Scholarly literature on Tamar often frames her as a trickster, and a number of scholars reason that Tamar's actions constitute prostitution.[11] Instead, I present Tamar's actions as survival sex which should be understood as "sex-work" as opposed to "prostitution" or the archaic term "harlotry". I will use Tamar as an example to discuss widowhood and explore the position she is placed which consequently motivates her to become impregnated by her father-in-law. Alongside the context of the rest of my thesis, I will continue my line of reasoning that Tamar is left so socially insecure by her father-in-law that her only reasonable option is to bear his children. This not only carries great risks but verges on being a taboo incestuous encounter, similar to those listed in Leviticus 18 and 20 and discussed in depth by Athalya Brenner.[12] I read Tamar as having few alternative options as I analyse the inflated risk which she takes—relative to her self-perceived situation—and use this as a means to measure her desperation associated with her economic

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[8] See Kirsi Cobb, "Did Lot Get His Just Desserts? Trauma, Revenge, and Re-enactment in Genesis 19.20-38," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 47, no. 2 (2022): 189-205, https://doi.org/10.1177/03090892221116921, and Ilona Rashkow, "Daughters and Fathers in Genesis… Or, What is Wrong with this Picture?" in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy,* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 22-36.

[9] Johanna Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible: Sex in the Family* (Bloomsbury, 2016), 144.

[10] Kirsi Cobb, "'Look at What They've Turned Us Into': Reading the Story of Lot's Daughters with Trauma Theory and *The Handmaid's Tale,*" *Open Theology* 7 (2021): 211, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0156.

[11] See Chi Wai Chan, "The Ultimate Trickster in the Story of Tamar from a Feminist Perspective," *Feminist Theology* 24, no. 1 (2015): 93-101, https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735015597827, and Phyllis Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," in *Semeia 46: Narrative Research on the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Miri Amihai, George Coats, and Anne Solomon (Jewish Theological Society, 1989), 119-137.

[12] Athalya Brenner, "On Incest," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy,* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 119-122.

position, making sure to draw attention to the absurdity that having a child fathered by her father-in-law is the only guaranteed method to ensure a secure future. Other scholarship, such as articles written by Chi Wai Chan and Melissa Jackson, focus on Tamar as a cunning trickster, bypassing the valuable discussion surrounding the central plotline that Tamar is placed in a position where she is required to have a child with her father-in-law through means of trickery.[13] This leaves a space in the existing body of literature associated with Tamar and Judah's story for my thesis and the important conclusions which I draw. Mainly, a perspective which is important to my discussion is that Tamar not only takes a risk but does so with no other reasonable option, and further, bearing Judah's children builds Tamar a legacy beyond reproduction but one of righteousness and importance in later Jewish and Christian texts.

As part of my chapter on Tamar, I will consider Rahab, as each of their stories bear some relevant similarities, of which I will detail in the chapter later on. Rahab is labelled unflinchingly in a majority of scholarship—such as in articles written by Judith Baskin and Ronald Charles—as a "harlot"; I will dispute this.[14] I will also acknowledge the broader implications of Rahab's inclusion in the Hebrew Bible and discuss how her story is of enough importance that it is reduplicated and remembered in later texts, even some of the Christian canon.[15] The legacy of Rahab is as a non-Israelite woman who aids the Israelite army and the ongoing bloodline of the Israelite people. Not only does Rahab have a religious legacy for Christians in the future but a social legacy for women, as she is not influenced by men or the wider societal norms of the time. The inclusion of Rahab in my thesis is as a result of Tamar and Rahab's detailed presence in the genealogy of Jesus and the similarities in how they use their bodies to secure their future. At the end of my thesis, I will provide a discussion of the women in the genealogy of Jesus and what this means for how we read the characters and the future of my research.

Throughout my discussions, I lean on feminist approaches which have been developed by scholars mainly in the 20th and 21st centuries. The nature of the scholarship which I use being so contemporary means that I occasionally have to make assumptions around the experiences of women in the ancient world, rather than being able to discuss with certainty the sociological environment that women existed in thousands of years ago. A number of the conclusions which I reach at the end of my thesis do not require a true understanding of the ancient world but instead an understanding of women and how societies are systematically built to subordinate them. With feminist approaches to the Bible, particularly those by Phyllis Trible and Athalya Brenner, I am able to approach the texts from my modern Western position whilst centring women's stories,

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[13] Chan, "The Ultimate Trickster," 93-101, and Melissa Jackson, "Lot's Daughters and Tamar as Tricksters and the Patriarchal Narratives as Feminist Theology," *JSOT* 98 (2002): 29-46, https://doi.org/10.1177/030908920202600402.
[14] Judith Baskin, "The Rabbinic Transformations of Rahab the Harlot," *Notre Dame English Journal* 11, no. 2 (1979): 141-157, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40062458, and Ronald Charles, "Rahab: A Righteous Whore in James," *Neotestamentica* 45, no. 2 (2011): 206-220, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43048806.
[15] Charles, 216.

in order to derive some important conclusions about female characters, without getting lost in trying to fill sociological gaps.[16] Ultimately, feminist approaches to biblical texts have exposed the patriarchal typology of recording the stories of men and their sons largely to the exclusion of accounts of motherhood. This indicates that the comparatively rare accounts of mothers—particularly mothers from outside the Israelite mainstream—have a special significance.

During my investigation I will analyse the Biblical Hebrew text, and also draw on other ancient texts such as Jewish Midrash. Midrash, according to the definition provided by Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch, is a body of texts which use exegesis to breathe new life into the text. According to their view, all which is written about in Midrash already exists within the original text, we are just deriving it out.[17] The texts which I reference and label as being midrash are not radical cases; however, I do acknowledge that there are a number of alternative texts which are, according to some individual perspectives, perhaps unduly categorised as Midrash. These are not texts that I will be using to support my research. Instead, the texts which I will include—such as Genesis Rabbah—provide an insight into how ancient Jewish texts were read and received, which is valuable when so much of my thesis examines the representation of female characters. Not only this, but Midrash also fills the gaps which have been left within the text, and provides important context which, without, would leave contemporary readers with a misunderstanding of some aspects of the Hebrew Bible. According to the definition of Shinan and Zakovitch, which I find to be convincing, there is no reason the dispute the legitimacy of the texts which I will use.

Throughout my thesis I will refer to "agency" and the options which women have at their disposal. Often, in the cases which I will consider, choices are severely limited and consequently lead a character to take risks or, at the very least, do things which they would not ordinarily do. Therefore, in a discussion about agency, I am taking an approach where I categorise this as "freedom to choose". Whilst women may not be physically restrained or explicitly deterred from making certain decisions, the implicit ways in which the patriarchy colours their experiences and restricts their options leaves them, often, with very little agency - freedom to choose their path.[18] With that being said, the easiest thing for women in these situations to do would be to completely renounce agency and continue living without any autonomy. So, whilst my argument hinges on the fact that women have severely reduced agency, it is often the case that women are

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[16] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Fortress Press, 1984) and see Athalya Brenner, *Feminist Companions to the Bible* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-2001).

[17] Avigdor Shinan and Yair Zakovitch, *From Gods to God: How the Bible Debunked, Suppressed, or Changed Ancient Myths and Legends* (Jewish Publication Society, 2012), 4.

[18] The term "patriarchy" refers to a social system where men, particularly fathers, have authority over women. This may be absolute or implicit. Whilst we cannot guarantee that our understanding of patriarchy and how it impacts society today is directly comparable with experiences in the ancient world, it remains important to acknowledge the rule of men in families and societies throughout history and how this may be a useful tool for understanding women's experiences in the ancient world. Seminally, an idea of a "patriarchal society" comes from Gerda Lerner's definition in Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 239.

stuck between two pillars, those being: (1) do not act, and continue to be manipulated by male figures, (2) act in a way which is severely in conflict with the norm/expectations of others. It is precisely here, in this second pillar, where we can consider women as taking risks, even if this seems to be a course of action which appears to be barely better than the alternative of accepting oppression.

Finally, I wish to outline my definition of risk-taking and, thereafter, the degrees of risk which I consider each woman to have taken. Risks, at their most basic, expose the subject to danger. To be considered a risk-taker is to have full awareness of the situation at hand and still subject oneself to an environment or action which has a high chance of either long-term or short-term adverse consequences. Similarly, however, the supposed reward of taking a risk may also come in the long or short-term, depending on the individual circumstances. For example, Hagar has to wait at least a decade for her reward and in the meantime she nearly loses Ishmael (Genesis 21). This may be said to have some bearing on the degree to which we consider an action to be risky. With that being said, in my analyses of each woman, there is some aspect of their plan which carries such high risk that the action may become fatal if miscalculated. These are: if Hagar returns to her abusers, the abuse could escalate and prove fatal, since Sarah's desire to dominate Hagar is tantamount to a total disregard for her life – and indeed Sarah later has her expelled from the household; if Lot is insufficiently inebriated he could become murderous at the use of his body by his daughters: he has already failed to protect his wife from death; if Tamar is identified by her father-in-law he could have her put to death for harlotry, as he attempts to do when he discovers her pregnancy – and he already holds her responsible for the deaths of his first two sons (Genesis 38:11); finally, if Rahab's rescue of the Israelite spies is discovered by the king of Jericho, she could be put to death for treason, because the king intends to put to death the spies she has hidden, and she is guilty by association. In my view, it is significant that none of these women take small risks and the texts at our disposal are sufficient to claim that each of the four women are risk-takers who will face serious consequences if their plans go wrong. Certainly, their risks are directly correspondent with a necessity to bear children.

In the writing of my thesis, I expect to encounter some natural limitations, the most apparent of which will be the constraint of word limit. Unfortunately, I am unable to survey all instances of risk-taking mothers in the Hebrew Bible; however, the benefit of this is that my thesis will be rich with detail on only my carefully selected characters. A further limitation to my research is the temporal distance between the curation of the texts which I discuss and the 21st century in which I am writing about them. This is a barrier for all contemporary researchers in the field of biblical studies; however, it must still be acknowledged that a number of questions are unable to be answered, and we are instead required to speculate about basic details such as the authorship and historical accuracy of texts. Whilst this is the case, the biblical texts provide abundant points of interest which ultimately are sufficient to derive meaningful conclusions about not only the lives of the literary women who I focus on but also provide a glimpse into understanding the position

of women within the communities that write and read such stories. Having well-informed prior knowledge of these possible limitations and how they will impact my thesis leaves me favourably situated to begin my enquiry, and enthusiastic about the additional conclusions which I may find myself positioned to derive as a result of these constraints. Developing a strong knowledge of the lives of ancient literary characters remains secondary to my specific enquiry into motherhood and its relationship with risk-taking and promotion of legacy-making, which is the main goal of my thesis. This approach to each of the individual texts allows me to offer my thesis as a distinctive body of work amongst the pre-existing literature on Hagar, Lot's daughters, Tamar, Rahab, maternal figures and, more broadly, women in the Hebrew Bible.

CHAPTER ONE
HAGAR: SLAVERY AND SURROGACY

The first character that I will turn my attention to is Hagar, a woman whose story is found in Genesis 16 and 21. Hagar's experiences in these chapters are unique as a result of her marginalised ethnicity, gender, and social status: three qualities which I begin by introducing alongside the helpful framework of intersectionality. Throughout this chapter I reference the Hebrew text and use translations not only to inform my own reading but also to understand the ways in which others read; particularly noting how our choice of words in translation can impact the representation of characters and consequent beliefs of readers today. I consider the entrance of Hagar into the text, the abuse she suffers and her meetings with God, and I explore Hagar's humanity beyond literary representation. The aim of this first chapter is to analyse how Hagar is a clear example of a woman who takes personal risks for the sake of her child and use this as evidence in my argument that women who take risks have been required to do so as a means of survival; with the consequence of this being the creation of a legacy for the principal female character, and in Hagar's case, her son, Ishmael.

1.1 The Unique Experience of Hagar (Genesis 16:1-6)

"She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar" (Genesis 16:1).[19] In this first introduction to the character of Hagar we learn of her ethnicity, gender and social status. All of these are marginalising qualities in various biblical texts, which I will address later in this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to say that in ancient Israelite society to be non-Israelite, female or a slave is individually marginalising and for Hagar, have the capability to be jointly damning.[20]

1.1.1 Considering Intersectionality

Although it is beyond doubt that Hagar is marginalised both comparatively to those around her in a literary context and in her reception by readers of the text, it is not enough to merely acknowledge her marginalisation. To say that both Hagar and other excluded individuals are marginalised, whilst they only share one common quality diminishes the severity of Hagar's experience and consequently levels the experience of all marginalised people, rendering the use of the term unclear.

To illustrate the importance of acknowledging independent levels of marginalisation, Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal work and coining of the term *intersectionality* allows us to employ a multi-axis approach when

[19] וְשָׂרַי֙ אֵ֣שֶׁת אַבְרָ֔ם לֹ֥א יָלְדָ֖ה לֹ֑ו וְלָ֣הּ שִׁפְחָ֗ה מִצְרִ֛ית וּשְׁמָ֥הּ הָגָֽר׃

[20] My identification of Hagar as non-Israelite in this context highlights that she is not part of God's covenant with Abraham. Therefore, she is not considered to be part of the social group who trace their ancestry to Abraham.

reclaiming the experiences of those who are multiply-burdened.[21] Rather than discussing the "female experience", the "non-Israelite experience", and the "enslaved experience", an intersectional reading allows us to acknowledge that although each quality is individually marginalising, it is only when jointly considered that we can gauge a deeper understanding of Hagar's experience. Although Hagar is an ancient literary character, it remains valuable to apply this contemporary framework to understand the nuances of oppression and stigmatisation, and ensure her experience is not misconstrued. With this, we are able to develop a full understanding of marginalisation in this literary context and the terms used in an investigation.

If we read without bearing intersectionality in mind, we may be mistaken in applying our understanding of how a woman or non-Israelite individual are marginalised as a result of their gender and ethnicity. It remains the case that Hagar is marginalised as a result of both her female gender and foreign ethnicity, therefore her experiences are likely to be of a different calibre to an individual who has been marginalised as a result of only one of these qualities.

1.1.2 Ethnicity

In Genesis 16:1, Hagar is primarily defined by her ethnicity as an Egyptian woman. In contemporary scholarship, such as in the book *Reimagining Hagar: Blackness and the Bible* by Nyasha Junior, this identification has been extended into recognising Hagar as African, and therefore a Black woman.[22] Of course, not all women from the North of Africa are, or identify themselves as being, ethnically Black. In fact, the colour of Hagar's skin remains unmentioned in the text; however, typically Black women from the US identify with Hagar's experience and shared African origins, prompting modern scholars to assume her ethnicity as being Black.[23] I similarly adopt this argument. In my view, it is useful to acknowledge similarities between Hagar and modern-day women in order to fully understand Hagar's experience and acknowledge her post-textual influence. In following Black scholars who read Hagar as a Black woman I bring recognition to the fact that she embodies some of their contemporary experiences, and this allows me to draw attention to the marginalising effects of ethnicity both in the biblical world and in today's world.

Hagar's nuanced character is only just being afforded consideration in recent literature, where scholars have begun to acknowledge and discuss her in light of her ethnicity as a Black woman.[24] For Junior, we read

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[21] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 8, no. 1 (1989): 140, https://philarchive.org/red/CREDITI.
[22] Nyasha Junior, *Reimagining Hagar: Blackness and Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 101.
[23] Junior, 106.
[24] Junior, 102.

Blackness into African characters as this acknowledges the connection between an African character and the heritage of those with African descent in the US.[25] Still, only recognising that Hagar is Black does not develop the conversation enough, and issues prevail in the damaging stereotypes which are encouraged or subsequently emerge from marking an enslaved woman as Black.[26] For modern readers, aware of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the enslavement of Hagar seems familiar, and the qualities of being Black and being African become entangled in a cycle of oppression and subordination. Yet, I maintain that it is necessary to identify Hagar as being Black, and with my reading, eventually reclaim her status and position as a role-model for modern readers.

In Trible's seminal work *Texts of Terror,* she identifies Hagar as a Black woman and writes that "all sorts of rejected women find their stories in her".[27] Whilst this is the case, Trible encourages us to recognise that connecting ancient Egyptian people with our contemporary understanding of Black people is "problematic", yet "cultural affinities are certain".[28] This summarises the position which I take, which is that we should, where possible, use scholarly literature to animate the feeling of Black women in the US that Hagar is a role model with comparable experiences by marking Hagar as a Black woman in antiquity, whilst doing so with caution so as not to perpetuate stereotypes.

Hagar is a geographical outsider, not from the same land as her masters, and therefore likely to subscribe to a different faith system.[29] These differences of faith are extended in Hagar's reception by readers: ancient readers of Genesis, as well as today's readers are likely to recall, with different feeling, the Hebrews' exiled time in Egypt detailed in the Book of Exodus. Hagar's very existence as an Egyptian woman embodies the oppressors of the Hebrew people later in the Biblical text which, for those familiar with the Book of Exodus, may justify her oppression by Sarah and Abraham earlier in the Biblical text. Hagar's treatment seems inevitable when read not only by those who are likely to be sympathetic with her Israelite oppressors, but also those who read Hagar as a foremother of contemporary African-American people. Katerina Koci usefully draws a distinction between our understanding of ethnicity today and argues that it is not realistic to map this directly on to the characters of the Bible.[30] With Koci's reading, we recognise the "racially non-thematised West Semite and Egyptian of ancient times" and our own highly racialised "white Victorian lady and a Black slave" tropes of today.[31] Whilst there are definite parallels between the experience of Hagar and contemporary Black individuals, it remains important to remember that being Black is only one quality

[25] Junior, 106.
[26] Junior, 102.
[27] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Fortress Press, 1984), 28.
[28] Trible, 28.
[29] The name Hagar is Hebrew, meaning "the resident alien". We can identify the name as being a masculine form and this misunderstanding further supports the notion that Hagar is a foreign name.
[30] Katerina Koci, "Putting on Sarah's Skin: Victim Identity in the Abrahamic Stories and Beyond," *Open Theology* 10 (2024): 2, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2024-0029.
[31] Koci, 1.

which is used to marginalise Hagar, and we should not concentrate our gaze in only one direction when there are other intersections of oppression which also present themselves.

1.1.3 Enslaved

Hagar is the maidservant of Sarah, therefore an enslaved person in the house of Abraham (Genesis 16:1).[32] Her history is not included in the text; however, we can deduce that her ethnicity and status as an outsider contributes to her extremely low social standing. If Hagar were an Israelite person, her treatment would be more that of an equal, considering that other women are not similarly enslaved in the text, e.g. Sarah who, although she does not have a vocal say in her marriage to Abraham in Genesis 20:12, is not treated as such a lesser human by Abraham, when compared with Hagar. In fact, Reaves explicitly notes that Sarah is the perpetrator of Hagar's abuse, and Hagar consequently sits firmly on the bottom rung of the social ladder.[33] This is a useful recognition as Israelites are the dominant ethnic group in Genesis chapters 16 and 21 and coded opposingly to Hagar and her supposed Black skin; this therefore allows us to read Sarah and Abraham as having white skin, in alignment with a majority of modern European and North American readers.

The Hebrew words שִׁפְחָה and אָמָה[34] are ambiguous in their meaning and English translations differ in precise wording and therefore connotations.[35] When considered broadly, including other instances of these words found in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. שִׁפְחָה in Genesis 29 or אָמָה in Exodus 21:7), we may decide that שִׁפְחָה is commonly used in reference to non-Israelite female slaves such as Bilhah and Zilpah (Genesis 29) and אָמָה is commonly used in reference to Israelite female slaves, such as those outlined in the Exodus writings on slavery (Exodus 21:7).[36] This distinction is flexible and merely hypothetical, as Hagar herself is an exception to this rule, since she is characterised at different points in Genesis 16 and 21 as being each of these feminine nouns. Strikingly, Hagar is described with the noun שִׁפְחָה prior to the birth of Ishmael, at a time when she firmly remains an outsider to the Israelite community. It is after the birth of Ishamel in the conclusion to Genesis 16 that this usage changes, and Hagar is instead tagged with the noun אָמָה, constructing her as a member of the Israelite community.[37]

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[32] וְשָׂרַי֙ אֵ֣שֶׁת אַבְרָ֔ם לֹ֥א יָלְדָ֖ה לֹ֑ו וְלָ֣הּ שִׁפְחָ֗ה מִצְרִ֛ית וּשְׁמָ֥הּ הָגָֽר׃

[33] Reaves, "Sarah as victim," 493.

[34] English pronunciations are "shiphchah" and "amah".

[35] Both of these words are exclusively gendered feminine. The Hebrew word for a male slave is עֶבֶד (pronounced "eved").

[36] Whilst this hypothesis remains unproven, it can be understood from Halakhic texts that there was a distinct difference in how Israelite and non-Israelites were and should have been treated. This is outlined in the Mishneh Torah, chapter Slaves. With this, we can be certain that slaves were both Israelite and non-Israelite, and in the Hebrew Bible, Hagar is identified using each noun at different times. Whilst her ethnicity does not change, the perception and conceptualisation of her position with Abraham's household does, and is intimately related to her ethnicity.

[37] The noun אָמָה is also perhaps only coincidentally related to the Hebrew noun אֵם meaning mother.

Both שִׁפְחָה and אָמָה are varyingly translated as "maidservant"/"bondwoman", "slave-girl"/"slave-woman", "servant"/"slave-woman" in the NKJV, NRSV and ESV respectively.[38] Each of these imply a certain degree with which Hagar submits to her mistress, but the NRSV translation of "slave-girl" stands out as connoting oppression and inhumane treatment, as well as explicitly feminising and infantilising Hagar: Hagar's oppressors are white slave-owners of a Black slave-girl.[39] Once again, this can be problematic as it promotes the suggestion that we can read the text as giving divine authority to racial enslavement, as noted by Reaves.[40] The translation "slave-girl" alludes to a shocking depiction of Hagar's experience when considered by modern-day readers in association with the context of more contemporary American slavery, whilst remaining a realistic depiction of her experience in antiquity. Whilst it is useful to acknowledge the benefits of constructing Hagar as Black as a result of the ongoing effects of the Trans-Atlantic slave-trade, it remains important in this case to remember the literary context of Hagar's treatment, and to not overshadow this with ideas about modern-day slavery which may easily become misconstrued as factual in an ancient text where they have no place.

1.1.4 Victim of Sexual Abuse

Hagar's role in the house of Abraham, that we as readers become privy to, is as a fertility slave. Chris de Wet helpfully points out that the fertile status of a female slave in antiquity enhances her utility and value.[41] Therefore, Hagar becomes an appropriate victim of sexual abuse in so far as her biology satisfies the requirements of bearing a child. Not only this, her ethnicity and the lack of empathy encouraged by the text's narrator for an enslaved person allows her sexual abuse to remain unquestioned. More recently, scholarship acknowledges that Hagar does experience what we today identify as sexual violence. The most prominent writer that I have encountered who advocates reading Hagar's story in this way is Trible, who seeks to tell Hagar's story, for once, not from the perspective of the oppressor, and therefore gives attention to the severity of Hagar's abuse.[42]

In Genesis 16:2, Sarah first makes the request that Abraham "have sex with my slave-girl".[43] This illustrates the decision as Sarah's to make and presents Hagar as having no autonomy in something as personal as her reproduction. Despite Sarah and Hagar both being women, they are not both subjected to the same explicit sexual violence, and it subsequently becomes Hagar's burden that she is fertile when Sarah is not. In

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[38] The differing translations either side of the oblique mark reflect translations in Genesis 16/Genesis 21.
[39] Later, in Genesis 21, the English noun used to translate Hagar's status in the NRSV is "slave-woman", suggesting that the maturity from girl to woman comes following the birth of Ishmael.
[40] Reaves, "Sarah as Victim," 489.
[41] Chris de Wet, "Fertility, Slavery, and Biblical Interpretation: John Chrysotom on the Story of Sarah and Hagar," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 53, no. 4 (2023): 251, https://doi.org/10.1177/01461079231210847.
[42] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 9.
[43] וַתֹּאמֶר שָׂרַי אֶל־אַבְרָם הִנֵּה־נָא עֲצָרַנִי יְהוָה מִלֶּדֶת בֹּא־נָא אֶל־שִׁפְחָתִי אוּלַי אִבָּנֶה מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרָי׃

Genesis 16:6, it is said that Sarah "dealt harshly" with Hagar, which is the catalyst for Hagar to flee. This, along with Sarah's suggestion that Abraham should rape Hagar, constructs Sarah as the main perpetrator of Hagar's abuse. This is made most explicitly clear when Abraham tells Sarah "your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please." (Genesis 16:6). Further, considering Sarah's ethnicity and position as a social insider, we could not expect that if circumstances were different Sarah would ever be subjected to such abuse. It is Hagar's status as an oppressed, enslaved, Black woman that makes her a victim that readers of the text are not encouraged to feel sympathy for.

Therefore, the central subject of Hagar's story—the bearing of Ishmael—arises as a result of the perfect storm of Hagar's personal qualities which are each independently important to acknowledge. However, when we take an intersectional approach we are consequently able to concede that it is Hagar's biological status as a woman, social status as a slave, and ethnic status as a geographical outsider with Black skin which jointly constitute her abhorrent treatment. In reading Hagar in this way, we have developed an understanding of the unique qualities which she possesses without neglecting the significance of each, whilst still encouraging a holistic discussion of her personal position and the overarching, intertwined systems which cooperatively subordinate her.

1.2 God's Promise to Hagar (Genesis 16:7-16)

In Genesis 16:7, Hagar is alone in the wilderness following an escape from the home of Sarah and Abraham. Hagar is pregnant and without any support, making her highly vulnerable in a land which she does not call home and in which she is a "resident alien", yet possibly a preferred scenario to the one of abuse from which she is fleeing.

1.2.1 The Meeting, The Angel, The Conversation

In Genesis 16:7 Hagar is found by "the angel of the LORD", before she is directly spoken to using her name and status as a slave-girl in Genesis 16:8.[44] This familiarity is settling, yet the omniscience of the angel comes to an end as she is asked where she has come from and where she is on her way to. Hagar responds that she is running away from her "mistress, Sarah" (Genesis 16:8).[45] Even with geographical distance between the two women, Trible writes that the metaphorical bonds remain, and Hagar maintains the hierarchy of the mistress/slave relationship with the language which she uses.[46] A discussion of these textual semantics usefully illustrates Hagar's story and gives an insight into her personal outlook on her position.

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[44] I have translated יהוה "the LORD" to remain in accordance with the translation found in the NRSV.
[45] וַיֹּאמַר הָגָר שִׁפְחַת שָׂרַי אֵי־מִזֶּה בָּאת וְאָנָה תֵלֵכִי וַתֹּאמֶר מִפְּנֵי שָׂרַי גְּבִרְתִּי אָנֹכִי בֹּרַחַת׃
[46] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 15.

Hagar is subsequently ordered to return to Sarah and Abraham's house and "submit" to Sarah (Genesis 16:9).

It is at this point that the angel encourages Hagar by promising that if she does return "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude" (Genesis 16:10). The first-person common-gender verb אַרְבֶּה, "I will multiply", leads Anna Beresford to speculate whether the angel of the LORD actually *is* or at least works to the same effect as God Himself.[47] The use of the definitive word "will"—in translation—extends into Genesis 16:11 with the demands "You… shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael". This reminds Hagar and the reader of the angel/the LORD's omniscience and after gaining Hagar's trust through knowing her name, the prediction of her future is likely to hold some convincing validity. Suddenly, going back to her abusers' home becomes a real considered possibility.

It is in this section of text that Ishmael is first named, even though this conversation takes place prior to his birth. The name יִשְׁמָעֵאל translates to "God will hear" as it is comprised of the verbal root "to hear" and God's name "el". This gives Ishmael a reassuring start to life: as the son of a woman afflicted by those who worship the Israelite God, the natural expectation might be that Ishmael is similarly unsupported by the Israelites and their God.[48] Perhaps it is as a result of his father being Abraham, the father of Israel, that Ishmael inherits protections from God. The experience of receiving a divine promise must have been convincingly legitimate to Hagar as she clearly trusts entirely that God will remain true with His promise. Emily Chase makes the convincing point that Hagar views the reward of securing her unborn son's future should she return to Abraham and Sarah so positively that she consequently endures a further (unspecified) amount of time experiencing abuse at their hands.[49] The delivery of Ishmael himself represents a further promise to Hagar, that from this point onwards "God hears" both her and her son, and this becomes more important in Genesis 21.

The angel of the LORD makes further predictions about the life of Ishmael in Genesis 16:12 and the contents and implications of this will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section of this chapter. In response to the angel's speech, Hagar names God אֵל רֳאִי, "El roi", "the God who sees" (Genesis 16:13). Again, the implications of God being named by Hagar will be discussed later in this chapter but for now it is sufficient to say that the name which Hagar gives to God reflects the interaction which they have had and the positive outcome that simply being recognised as a person in difficulty has had for Hagar. This is also

[47] Anna Beresford, "The woman who named God: encountering Hagar in a mental health facility," *Theology* 127, no. 4 (2024): 244, https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X241264149.
[48] Recognising God and His people as Israelite remains a contemporary identification, which is loaded with our understanding of the history of the Ancient Near East beyond the biblical texts. Still, it remains useful to associate the tribe of ancient people with the concept of the ancient deity that we recognise today.
[49] Emily Chase, "Promises, Blessings, and Curses: Hagar and the Wild Ass," *The Bible Translator* 50, no. 2 (1999): 214, https://doi.org/10.1177/026009439905000203.

the second anthropomorphic quality given to God in the space of three chapters— "God will **hear**" and "God who **sees**"— allowing the relationship which Hagar has begun with God to feel like something of this world, and not with an elusive divine being. The hope for Hagar and Ishmael to have a positive future is high.

It is with this hope that Hagar returns to Abraham and Sarah to have her child. It is predicted by mindful readers at this point in the text that Hagar's abuse will continue in the short term, but this seems to be a price which Hagar is willing to pay for the long-term safety of her son. In returning to her abusers, Hagar is presented as wholly believing in God's promise and it is precisely the content and implications of God's promise with Hagar which we will turn to discuss in more detail next.

1.2.2 The Promise

In Genesis 16:10 the angel of the LORD makes a promise to Hagar: a pregnant woman fleeing from her abusers. The very making of this promise is likely to strike readers as interesting as she is a woman of low status. Approaching this point in the text, Hagar is repeatedly named and discussed in reference to her ethnicity, particularly as she is non-Israelite. The God of the Israelites speaking directly with Hagar raises a further aspect to discuss: why is she selected for specific protection by her abusers' God, a being which she does not identify with or worship?

Following God's promise to multiply Hagar's descendants in Genesis 16:10 and the confirmation that her unborn child will be a boy, He makes a prophetic statement explicitly regarding the unborn son in Genesis 16:12:

> וְהוּא יִהְיֶה פֶּרֶא אָדָם יָדוֹ בַכֹּל וְיַד כֹּל בּוֹ וְעַל־פְּנֵי כָל־אֶחָיו יִשְׁכֹּן׃

> "He shall be a wild ass of a man, / with his hand against everyone, / and everyone's hand against him; / and he shall live at odds with all his kin." [50]

This translation appears to a modern-day reader to be providing a negative outlook, therefore doing little to help us understand why Hagar becomes so motivated to return to Sarah. The ESV, NIV and NASV all maintain this negative overall representation of the future Hagar's unborn son in their translations.[51]

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[50] English translation taken from NRSV.

[51] See Patrick Krayer, "God's Promise to Hagar in Genesis 16: Rethinking a Problematic Text," *The Bible Translator* 73, no. 1 (2022): 75-77, https://doi.org/10.1177/20516770211066937 for a useful illustration and comparison of Genesis 16:12 English translations.

The first line of this verse uses a metaphor to liken Ishmael's character with that of a wild animal (a donkey). A man who cannot be tamed, Ishmael is predicted to cause harm to others and receive harm in return. These first three lines remain unchanged in English translations, and it is only the final line which unlocks a hopeful prospect of a socially harmonious future. Alternatively, the NKJV strays from what has become tradition and labels Ishmael as only a "wild" man in the first line—redacting the word "ass" or "donkey"—and translates the final line as follows: "And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." This makes the NKJV the only English translation—of those which I have worked with—to represent Ishmael as having a somewhat positive, or at least not entirely negative, future. This better reflects the response of Hagar upon receiving such a proposition and perhaps unlocks a closer understanding of God's conversation with Hagar.

Expanding our discussion into non-English translations of this verse, we can consider the LXX and Vulgate translations. Neither of these texts compare Ishmael with any specific animal, such as a donkey. This opens up the connotations of the word "wild" to no longer indicate untamed animalistic actions but instead reflect the possibility that Ishmael will live in the wilderness of the desert and not in a busy, civilised town or city. With this possible reading, we understand how God's prophecy may be intended and received positively as Hagar is promised that her son will live within a civilisation different to her own experiences which have been characterised by abuse, thereby illuminating how God's promise has become such a major factor in Hagar's decision to return. Continuing on from this, the LXX and Vulgate—in English translation—final lines read as follows:

> "and before all his brothers he will dwell."[52]
>
> "and in the region of all his brothers he will pitch his tent."[53]

This gives a more positive reading of God's pronouncement and helps us to understand Hagar's subsequent positive reaction. Ishmael is no longer positioned as destined to be separate and opposing to others in his land—a connotation arguably deliberately implied by contemporary English translations—but as living harmoniously among his equals. For contemporary readers, embracing a negative translation of Ishmael's future, specifically when we acknowledge Ishmael as historically being considered the father of Arab groups separate to the Israelites, may explain damaging divides between these social groups and vilify those other than Israelites. An alternative angle of reading is important as it gives us an idea of the positive future which convinced Hagar to return to her abusers.

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[52] LXX translation taken from Krayer, 77.
[53] Vulgate translation taken from Krayer, 77.

In a different—yet still positive—reading, Chase proposes that the mild suggestion that her son will live a free life, whether that is at odds with his neighbours or not, is on its own enough to make Hagar return to her mistress.[54] Therefore, although we as readers in the 21st century read Genesis 16:12 as prophesying an overwhelmingly negative outlook for Ishmael's life to come, we must remember the context in which the promise is delivered. Hagar is an enslaved woman, fleeing from her masters. The promise that her son and consequent innumerable descendants will be free to live in whatever which way that they choose, should she return to a life of enslavement, may have been persuasive enough to encourage her to endure short-term abuse for the greater sake of the freedom of her children. Hagar is taking a selfless risk in returning, and in doing so we can understand that she received God's promise through placing her trust in Him, and with hope that Ishmael would not need to endure what she has. This is the first development of a future legacy founded by Hagar, where she and her descendants are able to exist freely in a community with one another.

The personal relationship which Hagar builds with God is demonstrated in Genesis 16:13 when Hagar names Him אֵל רָאִי. Hagar's naming of God reflects the way in which she has been made to feel. God has seen her struggle and acted upon it, promising eventual safety, security, and freedom for both her and her unborn son. Importantly, Hagar is the only person in biblical scripture to call God by a name decided by themselves. Beyond this, Hagar is the only woman to have been made a promise of this kind (promise of descendants unconnected with a male patriarch), and the first person in the canon to be visited by an angel. All of this elevates Hagar's place as an important biblical character: not only very obviously in the eyes of God, but also in her reception. Beresford reads Hagar's story in the 21st century, drawing explicit attention to the importance of the angel and God providing Hagar with a safe space to share her experiences, and consequently develops this to say how important it is for suffering individuals today to feel heard and seen.[55] This reading, with a keen focus on associating Hagar's story with contemporary experiences, provides a vital reminder that listening to one another can provide a lifeline. The naming of God following her acceptance of His promise signifies the binding of their covenant together and rather than altering Hagar's name as He did when entering into a covenant with Abraham and Sarah, for example, God honours her humanity and respects her birth name.[56]

The promise which God makes to Hagar is important to note in an analysis of Hagar's character as it allows us to understand the height of Hagar's status in the eyes of the deity, given that she is a woman who is visited by God. Since Hagar is the only individual to name God, this act ought to encourage readers to

[54] Chase, "Promises, Blessings, and Curses," 216.
[55] Beresford, "Encountering Hagar," 248.
[56] In Genesis 17 God changes the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah, in order to seal their destiny in light of the covenant.

respect her and acknowledge her significance. Hagar's decision to return to Sarah and Abraham's home following the delivery of the promise encourages us to read the verse in a positive light and subsequently see how confirmation that her son will one day live free of the bonds which have held her is so promising that returning to her abusers is the most appealing choice. Ultimately, the section of text surrounding God's promise to Hagar presents her as a human with desires and fears, and beyond this, a woman to be respected and acknowledged.

1.2.3 Risk

In choosing to place her faith in God's promise and return to the home of her abusers, Hagar exposes herself to the risks associated with this damaging environment. This is also a common decision made by women in the contemporary world, who often make multiple attempts to leave abusive partners before finally breaking free. In Hagar's case, she trusts a God not of her own people and clings to the hope that His promise may be true: the ideal outcome being that her experience of short-term abuse saves her son and secures his safe future.

In Genesis 16:15, we learn that Hagar has given birth to a child and "Abraham named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael". Abraham is the main actor in this verse and the major act of Hagar bearing and delivering the child is reduced to a subordinate clause. The abuse of Hagar is plainly evident in this verse as her body has been used for no more than to produce Abraham's progeny without any evidence of consent. Ishmael is described as Abraham's child, not Hagar's, and although his name was divinely pronounced, it is Abraham who ultimately names him. This is a rare circumstance in the Hebrew Bible, as Edward Bridge notes that it is predominantly women who name their children.[57] This may be a conscious literary technique which Bridge claims enhances the evidence for Abraham's identity as a patriarch, as to have a non-Israelite woman name the son of the father of Israel would not be deemed appropriate.[58] This proposal by Bridge is convincing and encourages us not only to recognise Abraham's status in the Bible but also gives a physical reminder of Hagar's outsider-status once she returns to Abraham's home and even after she has borne his child.

Abraham respects that the child shall be named Ishmael, which implies that Hagar has made Abraham and Sarah aware of at least that portion of her meeting with the angel of God upon her arrival back to their house. The full extent of what Hagar has shared, particularly whether she divulged the contents of the promise which was made, is unclear from the text. It is likely that a return to her masters' house with the

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[57] Edward Bridge, "A Mother's Influence: Mothers Naming Children in the Hebrew Bible," *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 389, http://dxdoi.org/10.1163/15685330-12341163.
[58] Bridge, 397.

news that she will have a child, and his name should be Ishmael, would have roused excitement, as Sarah's plan has worked. In Sarah and Abraham's eyes they have ensured Abraham will remain the father of the nation of Israel. Hagar has served Abraham in every way which has been asked of her, and now takes the risk of trusting God that her abuse will end soon. For Hagar, keeping her promise a secret and waiting in quiet hope for her own life to begin, safe with Ishmael, remains in her best interests despite the potential danger which she is exposing herself to in the meantime.

1.3 Into the Wilderness (Genesis 21:8-21)

Following Genesis 16, we have a four-chapter interlude before we are re-introduced to Hagar. The amount of time which has passed is not precisely known but we can make an estimation. At the birth of Ishmael, Abraham is said to be 86 years old, and in the following chapter, God is said to make a covenant with a 99-year-old Abraham (Genesis 17:2). It is here that Sarai and Abram's names are changed to be Sarah and Abraham, and the promise of fruitful nations filled with Abraham's descendants is made, only to be kept should Abraham ensure his male descendants are circumcised. Therefore, Abraham and Ishmael are circumcised ahead of the promised arrival of a newborn son, Isaac (Genesis 17:27).

The chapters of Genesis which follow—18, 19, and 20—are less informative on the subsequent life of Abraham. These chapters include messages on how followers of God ought to live their life well and include examples of individuals who have not and subsequently have been punished. It is not until Genesis 21 that we revisit Abraham and Sarah's home and learn of Hagar's continued mistreatment upon the birth of Isaac. We can estimate with information from Genesis 16 and 17 that this chapter comes 13 or 14 years after the birth of Ishmael.

1.3.1 Life in Sarah and Abraham's home

We re-enter Sarah and Abraham's home in Genesis 21 with the birth of Isaac. In Genesis 21:3, Abraham names Isaac and in Genesis 21:4, Abraham circumcises Isaac.[59] The five individuals live together in relative peace—in so far as we are not privy to what happens in this time with biblical texts alone, so it can be assumed that there takes place nothing of note, as far as the narrator is concerned—until Isaac reaches his age of weaning.

[59] Isaac's name, יִצְחָק, translates to "he laughs". This ought to be noted in Genesis 21:6 when Sarah claims that "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me". One possible reading of this is that Isaac is the first in a line of Abraham's blessed descendants, and all who live a similar life to Sarah and Abraham will equally experience a similar blessing.

Before this point, it is worth making some comments surrounding the relationship between Sarah and Hagar following the birth of both Ishmael and Isaac. To begin, both individuals are women, but their social positions are exceptionally different. Sarah is undoubtedly the main driving force for Hagar's abuse as she encourages Abraham to sleep with her, mistreats her so she flees, and is referred to by the angel of the LORD as a mistress she must return and submit to. Koci frames her discussion of the two women as each taking on archetypal roles: Sarah is free, whilst Hagar is a slave.[60] This is a useful reminder of Hagar's aforementioned characteristics: ethnicity and enslaved status, which separate the two women and allow Sarah to transcend to a position where she is able to subordinate Hagar. John Thompson takes the stance that Abraham and God are complicit in Hagar's abuse and allow the mistreatment ordered by Sarah to remain unquestioned.[61] This is a hard-line and uncompromising position which raises questions of whether Sarah is a supreme leader and without her orders Hagar perhaps would not be abused as she is. Broadly, recognising the extreme difference in the position and circumstances of each woman displays the required need for an intersectional approach as was outlined at the beginning of this chapter.

Along with the above being true, it remains the case that the ways in which the two women are written in the text present similarities. In Genesis 11:29-30 Sarah is introduced as the wife of Abraham, daughter of Haran, sister of Milcah and Iscah, and most significantly, a barren woman.[62] This introduction does not suggest any degree of agency; like Hagar, Sarah behaves as she is told to by the men surrounding her, with her character most drastically clouded by the negative reality of being a childless woman. When Hagar is first introduced it is as an "Egyptian slave-girl", owned by Sarah (Genesis 16:1). Neither woman, in the first instance, is independently acknowledged and Reaves makes the convincing case that Sarah, whilst a perpetrator of Hagar's abuse, equally remains a victim of the patriarchal society which she finds herself in.[63] Sarah is known most centrally as a woman who is unable to bear children and in providing her slave-girl to her husband, is surpassed in status and is looked upon "with contempt" by Hagar (Genesis 16:4). Hagar's respect for the hierarchy consequently diminishes and Jo Hackett notes that she is likely to regard Sarah as lesser following her own pregnancy.[64] This provides a reason for Hagar's regard for Sarah as contemptuous and with this we recognise that upon becoming pregnant and bearing Ishmael, Hagar's personal opinion of herself has heightened. Aaron Rosen claims that these distressing themes plague the Abrahamic narrative, and the warring of two women makes it difficult to reconcile the differences between

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[60] Koci, "Sarah's Skin," 2.
[61] John Thompson, *Writing the Wrongs: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (Oxford Academic Press, 2001), 20-21.
[62]: וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם וְנָחוֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים שֵׁם אֵשֶׁת־אַבְרָם שָׂרָי וְשֵׁם אֵשֶׁת־נָחוֹר מִלְכָּה בַּת־הָרָן אֲבִי־מִלְכָּה וַאֲבִי יִסְכָּה:
וַתְּהִי שָׂרַי עֲקָרָה אֵין לָהּ וָלָד:
[63] Reaves, "Sarah as victim," 485.
[64] Jo Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel,* ed. Peggy Day (Fortress Press, 1989), 12.

them and still acknowledge their similarities.[65] Rosen's statement perpetuates readings which characterise the women as simply jealous and competitive, which does little towards resolving the image of either woman as anything but jealous and in competition with one another.[66] Instead, a greater effort should be made to capture the reasons for this pitting of women against women in the first place, especially when neither of them are particularly winners.

To understand the relationship between Sarah and Hagar and their individual motivations to act, we must turn to Genesis 21:9:

> וַתֵּרֶא שָׂרָה אֶת־בֶּן־הָגָר הַמִּצְרִית אֲשֶׁר־יָלְדָה לְאַבְרָהָם מְצַחֵק׃

> "But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac."[67]

This verse appears harmless and does not sufficiently contextualise the following verse when Sarah demands that Abraham "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave-woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." (Genesis 21:10).[68] Translations of Genesis 21:9 are all somewhat regular until the final word: מְצַחֵק. The verbal root of this word is the same as the name of Isaac, which I have outlined previously as meaning "to laugh". However, in the case at hand, it is uncommon for English translations to take the word as meaning "playing *with Isaac*", but rather to laugh more generally, and by implication, to mock.[69] In any translation, the addition of Isaac into the frame is merely to add context through assumption given the non-coincidental related root of the verb and Isaac's name, and that the scene takes place at Isaac's weaning party. This addition is found in LXX but as the MT does not explicitly include Isaac, some English translations similarly do not name Isaac as being present.[70] The real uncertainty surrounding this section of text, if we take Isaac's presence as a given, surrounds the boy's activities, as we can deduct from Sarah's reaction that Ishmael could not have been simply playing with Isaac, he must have been seen—rightly or wrongly— to be laughing and/or mocking.

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[65] Aaron Rosen, "Hagar and Sarah in Art and Interfaith Dialog," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible,* ed. Susanne Scholz (Oxford University Press, 2020), 576.
[66] Rosen, 576.
[67] English translation taken from NRSV.
[68] This is the first instance of Hagar being the subject of the noun הָאָמָה, translated "slave-woman" in the NRSV. The English translation reflects the maturity of Hagar post-child-birth, and the Hebrew root retains links to another noun אֵם, meaning "mother".
[69] This is the common meaning of the piel of this verbal root.
[70] David Zucker, "Ishmael and Isaac: Parallel not Conflictual Lives," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 26, no. 1 (2012): 2, https://doi.org/10.1080/09018328.2012.704214.

Should the laughter have cruel undertones, Sarah's following actions may be in order to protect her son from living with a half-sibling who seeks to bully him. However, Sarah explicitly makes clear that the intention of her banishment of Hagar and Ishmael is to ensure Ishmael will not receive a portion of inheritance which, according to Savina Teubal's reading, Sarah believes, is rightfully Isaac's.[71] Teubal adds to this that if Sarah seeks to materially disinherit Ishmael from Abraham's wealth, entire banishment would not be necessary.[72] This provides the perspective to wonder whether it is possible that Sarah saw Hagar and Ishmael's presence as an unwanted cultural and religious influence which threatens the harmony of her purely Israelite family home. It is therefore possible that the boys *are* simply playing, laughing and generally getting along, which Sarah feels threatens her son's future as his father's chosen descendant, and this requires harsh action.[73] If this is the case then it casts the Israelite outlook against foreign influence as being extremely unforgiving, as the son of an Israelite man is considered too much of a threat to peaceful co-existence in a predominantly Israelite home. To banish Hagar and Ishmael presents Sarah as a callous and self-serving individual.

Abraham is made to cast out Hagar and his own son. In response to his distress at this prospect, God speaks to Abraham and encourages him to do as Sarah says, with the incentivising promise that "I will make a nation of him [Ishmael] also, because he is your offspring" (Genesis 21:13).[74] With that, Abraham prepares Hagar for her journey, providing her with bread, water and finally the child.[75] Yael Landman suggests that this passing of Ishmael to Hagar reaches beyond a physical description—especially given that teenage Ishmael would be too large for his mother to carry him—and reflects Abraham giving up his legal parental rights, providing Hagar full custody of their shared son.[76] This perspective adds depth to the story of Abraham sending his child away, as he initially appears to be somewhat considerate in that he provides them with food and water for their journey. However, if it is the case that he is surrendering his parental rights, this final act of kindness pales in comparison to the lifetime of care that he should provide his first-born child and almost seems adding insult to injury to offer a small amount of food and water. Therefore, under the direction of his wife, Sarah, we can read Abraham's provisions for Hagar and Ishamel as the most he can provide given his present circumstances and deliberately not providing too much, so as to maintain an emotional gap between himself and those who he is cutting off.

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[71] Savina Teubal, "Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis,* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 236.
[72] Teubel, 236.
[73] Blessing Onoriode Boloje, "Remembering Hagar and Her Son (Gen 21: 9–21): A Narrative Reading of Helpless Victims and Hopeful Survivors in the Wheel of Providence," *Religions* 14, no. 12 (2023): 4, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14121474.
[74] וְגַם אֶת־בֶּן־הָאָמָה לְגוֹי אֲשִׂימֶנּוּ כִּי זַרְעֲךָ הוּא׃
[75] See Il-Seung Chung, "Hagar and Ishmael in light of Abraham and Isaac: Reading Gen. 21:8-21 and Gen. 22:1-19 as a Dialogue," *The Expository Times* 128, no. 12 (2017): 577-578, https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524617702005 for a more comprehensive illustration of how Hagar and Ishmael's journey into the wilderness (Genesis 21:8-21) can be considered a parallel account of Abraham and Isaac's journey to Isaac's intended sacrifice (Genesis 22:1-19).
[76] Yael Landman, "A Mother Gets Custody: The Legal Background to Genesis 21:14-21," *Biblical Interpretation* 32 (2024): 342, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15685152-20241844.

1.3.2 Exposure to Risk

In Genesis 21:14 Hagar is said to have "wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba". Hagar has been disposed of by her abusers and Hemchand Gossai writes that in orchestrating this act we learn about what it is that Sarah required Hagar for: to provide a child, not primarily to fulfil God's promise to Abraham, but to personally "obtain children by her" (Genesis 16:2).[77] The selfish nature of her actions may not have been immediately clear in a stand-alone reading of Genesis 16, but with the further context of Hagar's banishment we understand Sarah as being a woman who feels threatened and keen to ensure that it is herself and her son who are built up, *not* Hagar and Ishmael. In Janice De-Whyte's chapter, she frames her discussion with an acknowledgement that Hagar is initially selected to be what we would contemporarily understand as a surrogate. [78] Sarah does not bond with Ishmael, and instead we see that when it becomes possible, Sarah immediately chooses to bear her own child. With the arrival of Isaac, Hagar must be removed from the frame entirely and now it is no longer Hagar's life alone at risk, but Ishmael's as well.

Recall in Genesis 16, Hagar is in the wilderness, and the angel of the LORD finds her within close proximity of a spring of water. Here in Genesis 21, the water provided by Abraham eventually runs out and Hagar is left surrounded by nothing other than dry vegetation, under which "she casts" (וַתַּשְׁלֵךְ) her child (Genesis 21:15).[79] Translations and commentaries reflect the lack of agreement over Hagar's actions here and how we ought to read them.

> "When the water in the skin was gone, she *cast* the child under one of the bushes."[80]
>
> "When the water in the skin was gone, she *put* the child under one of the bushes."[81]
>
> "When the water in the skin was used up, she *left* the boy under one of the bushes."[82]

Cheryl Exum writes that just as Abraham has cast Ishmael out and renounced responsibility for him Hagar is merely doing the same, which reflects Ishmael's lack of acceptance both by the Israelite circles of his

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[77] Hemchand Gossai, *Power and Marginality in the Abraham Narrative,* 2nd edition (Pickwick Publications, 2010), 4.
[78] Janice De-Whyte, "'I Will Be Built Up Through Her': Surrogacy and Adoption in the Hebrew Bible," in *Adoption in the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Ekaterina Kozlova and Cat Quine (T&T Clark, 2024), 38.
[79] The full phrase וַתַּשְׁלֵךְ translates to "she cast". This is a hif'il verbal stem, when constructed as השליך. Hif'il stems highlight instances within the text where the agent is actively causing the action, and this reflects how Hagar's actions directly impact Ishmael's outcome in this example.
[80] Translation taken from NRSV.
[81] Translation taken from ESV.
[82] Translation taken from NASV.

father and the Egyptian circles of his mother.[83] This is a common experience of mixed-ethnic individuals and Exum's recognition of this in the text is important as it appreciates the shared humanity of characters such as Ishmael in his ancient literary world and individuals today.[84] Kozlova encourages reading parallels between Abraham and Hagar's parenting as Abraham "sends" (שָׁלַח) Hagar away, Hagar then "casts" (שָׁלַךְ) Ishmael away.[85] We know that Abraham was hesitant to follow Sarah's orders, and although it is the bare minimum, we must acknowledge that he provided Hagar with food and water for her survival, a final act of care as he exposes her to the risks of wandering alone in the wilderness.

We must also remember the time in which this text was written and whether there is a case to be made that child abandonment is shocking only to contemporary readers and in antiquity was a legitimate option in times of crisis.[86] I, however, feel more sympathetic to Trible's position that Hagar is preparing a "deathbed" for her weak son who she believes will die soon.[87] Trible also notes the impersonal, ungendered language of "the child", rather than "her child" or "her boy".[88] Although Hagar's casting of her son can be read as a final act of care for him, this language instils some emotional distance between Hagar and Ishmael, as they both prepare for him to die.

It is at this point that Hagar speaks: "Do not let me look on the death of the child" (Genesis 21:16), pleading as she weeps.[89] Most basically, Hagar is asking here to be spared the sight of her son's death which she has come to accept is imminent. Whilst this speech may as easily be read as a request, Janzen and Noble suggest that Hagar is reciting a prayer that her son will not die.[90] Malul writes that "the final fate [of a child] was placed at the hands of higher powers" in antiquity and therefore it would make sense that Hagar is now relying on the intervention of a divine power. [91] Hagar positions herself "about the distance of a bowshot" away from Ishmael (Genesis 21:16)—arguably close enough to still hear the events of his death unfolding. This encourages the reading that Hagar remains invested in what betides Ishmael: she has cared for him as much as she is physically able and so engages in prayer for either a divine saviour or a passerby with the

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[83] Cheryl Exum, *Art as Biblical Commentary: Visual Criticism from Hagar the Wife of Abraham to Mary the Mother of Jesus* (Bloomsbury Plc, 2019), 95.

[84] This experience is termed "Racial Imposter Syndrome", first coined in 2017 in an episode of the podcast *Code Switch*. Since then, the term has gathered traction as a description of the feeling that an individual does not personally associate with the ethnic identity which others prescribe them.
Gene Demby and Shereen Marisol Meraji, hosts, *Code Switch,* podcast, "A Prescription for 'Racial Imposter Syndrome'," *NPR*, 7th June 2017, https://one.npr.org/?sharedMediaId=528816293:531824445.

[85] Kozlova, *Maternal Grief,* 56.

[86] Meir Malul, "Some Measures of Population Control in the Ancient Near East," in *Michael: Historical Epigraphical and Biblical Studies In Honor of Prof. Michael Heltzer*, eds. Yitzhak Avishur and Robert Deutsch (Archaeological Center Publications, 1999), 233, quoted in J. Gerald Janzen, and John Noble, "Did Hagar give Ishmael up for dead? Gen. 21. 14-21 re-visited," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 44, no. 4 (2020): 525, http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0309089219862822.

[87] Phyllis Trible, "Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of Blessing," in *Hagar, Sarah and Their Children: Jewish Christian, and Muslim Perspectives,* eds. Phyllis Trible and Letty Russell (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 48.

[88] Trible, *Texts of Terror,* 24.

[89] וַתֵּלֶךְ וַתֵּשֶׁב לָהּ מִנֶּגֶד הַרְחֵק כִּמְטַחֲוֵי קֶשֶׁת כִּי אָמְרָה אַל־אֶרְאֶה בְּמוֹת הַיָּלֶד וַתֵּשֶׁב מִנֶּגֶד וַתִּשָּׂא אֶת־קֹלָהּ וַתֵּבְךְּ׃

[90] Janzen and Noble, "Gen 21.14-21 re-visited," 520.

[91] Malul, "Population Control," 233.

means to care for him to find him in the shade.[92] Hagar loves her son, but not so much that her realistic judgement is clouded. She knows what may be best for him and does not detrimentally keep him in her care, although she weeps in pain as she risks his life.

1.3.3 The Future for Hagar and Ishmael

In Genesis 21:18, the promise made by God to Hagar is reiterated as God is said to "hear" the boy and therefore recalls the meaning of Ishmael's divine name. Hagar is called to reclaim responsibility for Ishmael and provide him with a drink to save his life. Ishmael represents the promise of a new life for Hagar, even if the journey to getting there is physically, emotionally and spiritually difficult. Hackett goes as far as to suggest that the protagonist of the Genesis 21 narrative is Ishmael, not Hagar.[93] Ishmael poses the greatest threat to Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac's harmony, and is the reason for his and Hagar's ultimate banishment. At the end of the narrative, we learn of Ishmael's future: living in the wilderness of Paran, becoming an expert archer and marrying a woman from Egypt (Genesis 21:21).[94]

Hagar is the only biblical woman to arrange a marital partner for her child, and this is more of a point to note when we consider Ishmael's gender. Landman writes that disregarding the unique circumstances of Hagar's case, it would have remained uncommon for a young man's parents to involve themselves with the marital business of their son, particularly given the slightly older age of a groom than a typical bride.[95] The absence of a father in Ishmael's life leaves Hagar in a legitimate legal position to take control of her son's marriage, and the selection of a woman from Egypt returns Ishmael to continue his maternal lineage. Hagar's story reaches full circle as she is no longer exposed to the risks associated with being enslaved in a foreign land as she instead settles with her family in her homeland.

1.4 Conclusion

The most simplistic reading of Hagar would lead us to label her as a victim of abuse, forced into pregnancy for the greater good of the Israelites and to bear Abraham's progeny. Ancient readers, aligned in values with Abraham and Sarah, are likely to disregard Hagar's autonomy in making personal decisions and instead support the dehumanisation of a Black woman who is taken advantage of, raped and enslaved. With this chapter I have particularly focused on Hagar as a woman who leans into motherhood despite having a traumatic history which could have understandably discouraged her from accepting her child. Hagar makes

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[92] Janzen and Noble, "Gen 21.14-21 re-visited," 527.
[93] Hackett, "Rehabilitating Hagar," 24.
[94] וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּמִדְבַּר פָּארָן וַתִּקַּח־לוֹ אִמּוֹ אִשָּׁה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם׃
[95] Landman, "Mother Gets Custody," 354.

a choice to return to her abusers' home and endure approximately 10 years living in a house where she has the status of an enslaved woman. We can read this as a selfless act, inspired as a response to the promise made by God regarding her son's future. In Genesis 16:8, Hagar becomes the first woman to be directly addressed by God in the biblical canon, and the first character to provide God with a given name, promoting a legacy where Hagar is remembered as a woman of importance and status. Despite Ishamel being unborn at the time of the promise, the guarantee of a future free from enslavement is considered to be worth the personal hardship for Hagar in the meantime. The risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse is high in Abraham's home and yet returning is a risk which Hagar is willing to take.

Hagar is later banished from Abraham's home where she is exposed to all of the risks associated with the wilderness. She submits to her environment and discards her child, before praying for his survival or that she may be spared from witnessing his death. With my reading, Hagar does not abandon him entirely but is forced into a position where she must act rationally and allow her son to be at the mercy of God, all whilst keeping a watchful and caring eye over him. Hagar's leaving of Ishmael requires courage and ultimately it is the admission of defeat which provokes God's saving address.

The risks which Hagar is forced to make as a result of being exposed by those who do not consider her wellbeing are driven by her unwavering maternal care. Hagar does not choose to be in situations which require her to make risky decisions, and neither is she likely to have more than one feasible choice. It typically goes unquestioned that Hagar returns to her abusers, wanders in the wilderness when she is cast out, and makes a life for herself and her son when they have no external support, and this is because there is no alternative for a woman whose desires primarily surround her son's wellbeing—so much so that she puts it before her own. My reading goes beyond noting this and acknowledges Hagar's humanity as a woman and selfless mother exposed to risk in an environment where her agency to make choices is limited. Ultimately, without a co-parent for her child, Hagar is left to raise Ishmael alone and in doing so contributes to the Abrahamic lineage. The resilience of Hagar as she maintains strength through oppression has not always been recognised but it is this which has centrally shaped the legacy which she is still remembered for today.

CHAPTER TWO
LOT'S DAUGHTERS: TABOO AND TRICKERY

In this next chapter I will turn my attention to Lot's daughters, two women whose story is found in Genesis 19. Lot and his family begin the narrative living in Sodom, a city doomed for divine destruction (Genesis 19:13), which claims the lives of Lot's wife and his daughters' fiancés. With the three of them believing that they are the only survivors, Lot's daughters plan to sleep with their father and continue their family's bloodline (Genesis 19:31). Typical readings of this act become preoccupied with discussing incest and whether such horrors in the modern day were more unexceptional to those living in the ancient near east. Instead, with this chapter I question what encourages two young women to sleep with their father and whether it is a matter of malicious choice or a desperate necessity which carries huge levels of risk. I also take some time to evaluate blame and whether we should attribute blame to any of the characters for the actions and outcomes which take place in the text. Alternative to this, I acknowledge that we could continue with the common, widely uncontested, thought that Lot's daughters are responsible for raping their passive father. With whichever reading, we must accept that blame and guilt are off the table of discussion, as the options available to both Lot and his daughters are severely limited as a result of their circumstances. Ultimately, I argue that Lot's daughters are survivors of trauma living in an incomparable situation, which provides grounds for a unique discussion on childbearing through means of incest and why it is arguably necessary for the two young women to carry their father's progeny. In the case of Lot's daughters, it is the safe delivery of their father's sons which protects them and continues their family's legacy.

2.1 Life in Sodom (Genesis 19:1-29)

Earlier in the biblical narrative, before the story of Lot and his family in Sodom, comes this statement: "Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD" (Genesis 13:13).[96] This contextualises the alleged depravity of those living in Sodom and, for those who have not read Genesis 19 in isolation, but instead along with other earlier chapters of Genesis, the story which ensues comes as no surprise.

2.1.1 A Note on Genealogy

We are first introduced to Lot in Genesis 11:27 as part of the genealogy of Terah, father of Abraham. Lot is the son of Haran, another of Terah's sons. This makes Lot genealogically related to Abraham; however, at no point in the text is Lot discussed from an angle which sees him part of Abraham's covenant with God. From the text we can understand that Terah and Abraham took parental care of Lot as they both outlived

[96] וְאַנְשֵׁי סְדֹם רָעִים וְחַטָּאִים לַיהוָה מְאֹד׃

Haran (Genesis 11:31). This involves taking him when they move to settle in Haran, the place where Terah dies.

Abraham and Sarah briefly settle in Egypt, taking Lot with them (Genesis 12). Once they are made to leave by the Pharoah they return to where they first settled, between Bethel and Ai (Genesis 13:3). By this point, Lot has been accumulating his own possessions, herds, and herders, which Abraham recognises could not thrive alongside his own. To avoid contention, Lot leaves Abraham and makes his way towards Sodom where he chooses to live. This geographical separation between Abraham and Lot takes Lot away from the blessed land which was promised to Abraham in the covenant (Genesis 15:19). Between Genesis 13 and 19 we do not learn much of Lot and his time in Sodom, only that Sodom and Gomorrah are briefly attacked by neighbouring regions, with goods taken and individuals taken captive (Genesis 14:12).

In Genesis 18, the narrative returns to discussing Sodom as the three men who visit Abraham not only promise him and Sarah a son but also disclose the LORD's intention to destroy cities with wicked residents, namely Sodom and Gomorrah. This reveals the LORD's almighty power and reminds readers, particularly those around the time of the texts early transmission, of the necessity to act righteously so as not to displease Him. Abraham manages to convince the LORD to not destroy Sodom if He finds ten righteous residents (Genesis 18:32). Following this, we come to the main narrative section concerning Lot and his family who, in residing in Sodom, become cultural outsiders to their genealogical roots of Abraham in Haran.

2.1.2 The Angels and the Angry Mob

The first verse of Genesis 19 introduces "The two angels" who "came to Sodom".[97] The definite article, "the", attached to the masculine noun, "angels", suggests that the angels are individuals that readers are already familiar with.[98] Nothing about the text gives any indication of whether they are considered by other characters to be divine or human beings, yet Lot's address of them as "my lords" in Genesis 19:2 implies respect and some degree of hierarchy. Michael Chris Ndele writes about the presentation of the visitors and addresses the question of whether the visitors in Genesis 19 are the same individuals that visit Abraham in Genesis 18.[99] Ndele ultimately decides that the visitors to both Abraham and Sodom are the same people/angels/beings as both chapters shares commonalities in their form, which suggests deliberate repetition in order to encourage remembrance of the visit in Genesis 18 when reading Genesis 19.[100] For

[97] וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סְדֹמָה בָּעֶרֶב וְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־סְדֹם וַיַּרְא־לוֹט וַיָּקָם לִקְרָאתָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַפַּיִם אָרְצָה׃

[98] הַמַּלְאָכִים translated here in the NRSV as "the angels" is translated in other biblical texts as "messengers" (Genesis 32) or "ambassadors" (Isiah 18:2).

[99] Michael Chris Ndele, "The Narrative Significance of the Role of Abraham in the Identity of the Visitors in Genesis 18-19," *OTE* 36, no. 3 (2023): 709, https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2023/v36n3a9.

[100] Ndele, 722.

contemporary readers who are not familiar with Genesis 18, this makes sense of their introduction as *the* angels and enlightens where readers may have been expected to find prior context.

Katherine Southwood's work goes beyond this small question and, rather than discussing the identity of the visitors, addresses how Lot treats his guests and what conclusions can be drawn regarding hospitality in the biblical text.[101] Lot is clearly presented as a hospitable host as he will not allow the angels to sleep in the town square, and instead urges them to stay under his roof, where he provides them with food (Genesis 19:3).[102] It is worth noting that Lot himself prepares a feast and bakes bread for his guests (Genesis 19:3), a domestic task usually reserved for women to complete: for example, Abraham orders Sarah to bake for their visitors in Genesis 18:6. With this in mind, Katherine Low suggests that this presents Lot as being a timid character, not quite fulfilling what would be expected of a "man of the house" in his community.[103] This foreshadows later events where Lot is made to engage in a passive feminine role by his daughters and I will explore this dichotomic idea of male/female and perpetrator/victim with relation to sexual abuse later in this chapter.

Lot sees the visitors to Sodom as his own guests, and in his treatment of them he does not show signs of unease at welcoming people that he does not know. According to Southwood, discussion of hospitality typically dichotomises a number of concepts, such as: "self and Other, inside and outside, kin and non-kin, home and away, private and public, as well as guest and host".[104] Southwood contextualises hospitality on a more modern and broader scale of international migration, where she concludes that typically those in receipt of hospitality become indebted to their hosts, and the majority of preconceptions surrounding refugees are pejorative.[105] Perhaps then, applying this to the text, we can understand that Lot's history travelling around from city to city leads him to understand the worth of kind hospitality and explains his inclination to provide in return. After all, there is nothing to say that the angels require a sympathetic host and yet Lot requires no encouragement to be that for them. Lyn Bechtel presents the idea that the visitors may be known to Lot, and their identity is lost only to modern readers of the text.[106] This forms a gap in our knowledge of the text which is unable to be reclaimed in the period in which I am writing.

In Genesis 19:5, Lot's house is surrounded by the men of the city. This is an example of the people of Sodom's wickedness, which the LORD had earlier detailed to Abraham (Genesis 18:20). The angry mob are

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[101] Katherine Southwood, "'This Man Has Come into My House': Hospitality in Genesis 19; 34; and Judges 19," *Biblical Interpretation* 26 (2018): 469, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02645P03.
[102] וַיִּפְצַר־בָּם מְאֹד וַיָּסֻרוּ אֵלָיו וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם מִשְׁתֶּה וּמַצּוֹת אָפָה וַיֹּאכֵלוּ׃
[103] Katherine Low, "The Sexual Abuse of Lot's Daughters: Reconceptualizing Kinship for the Sake of Our Daughters," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, no. 2 (2010): 45, https://doi.org/10.2979/fsr.2010.26.2.37.
[104] Southwood, "Hospitality in Genesis," 469.
[105] Southwood, 471.
[106] Lyn Bechtel, "A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19: 1-11," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis,* 2nd edition, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 114.

seeking to "know" ("and let us know": וְנֵדְעָה) the visitors to Lot's house, with the verb "to know" (יָדַע) being a common euphemism for sexual intercourse in biblical texts. For example, Adam "knows" his wife Eve in Genesis 4:1 and again in Genesis 4:25; in both verses she then conceives. George Athas points out that Lot interprets the situation as one where only his guests are threatened, and the mob do not mean to cause harm to Lot.[107] Interestingly, Lot seeks to protect the angels and not only does this place him in opposition to the men of the city, but he also willingly offers to hand over his daughters as an alternative, each who have "not known (יָדְעוּ) a man" (Genesis 19:8). The reuse of the root word יָדַע confirms the earlier supposed connotations of having sexual relations and makes it clear that Lot is offering his virgin daughters to a crowd of men to "do to them as you please" (Genesis 19:8). This not only very explicitly displays Lot's daughters as being firmly under his command to go and do whatever it is that he demands, but it also makes Lot just as wicked as the mob outside of his house as he offers his daughters to be raped rather than attempt to fully deescalate the situation and save himself and his family from possible harm. The reaction of the mob to Lot's bartering cannot have been foreseen, and Lot runs the very possible risk that they may continue their riot at other houses or the violence which they show towards his guests become more widespread across town. Nonetheless, it appears that Lot's main concern is to get the mob away from his door, and his daughters are collateral damage in his plan to secure his own safety. Midrash tends to encourage reading Lot as a selfish father, as Tanchuma, Vayera 12 reminds us that not only should a man of Lot's period protect his wife and children ahead of himself, but perhaps Lot has deliberately chosen to settle in Sodom, a notoriously wicked city, so that he might act in the same ways as its inhabitants.[108] If we hypothesise that this is the case, and that the messengers are the same group who visited Abraham in Genesis 18, there is a case to be made that Lot, with some insider knowledge from his uncle, is treating the angels with warm hospitality in an attempt to dismiss the claims of wickedness and subsequently protect Sodom.

The demand of the mob to sexually know the male visitors has been understood as an indication that the wickedness of Sodom is intimately related to homosexuality ("sodomy" in modern English), and therefore Sonia Waters suggests that to offer young women to the crowd would not fulfil the aim of the ambush.[109] This explains why, ultimately, the angry mob do not receive Lot's offer very well, and perhaps does enlighten the true desires of the crowd at his door. Lot clearly favours protecting his male guests over his disposable female progeny, which highlights the unstable and low-status of women in a patriarchal world and presents women as so severely unprotected that their own father would rather pacify a mob of men at his door than protect his own daughters from sexual violence. Athas makes the unconvincing argument that

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[107] George Athas, "Has Lot Lost the Plot? Detail Omission and a Reconsideration of Genesis 19," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 16, no. 5 (2016): 7, https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2016.v16.a5.

[108] "Normally, a man would prefer to undergo death for the sake of his daughter or his wife; indeed he would willingly kill or be killed for their sake, but this man was willing to allow his daughters to be abused by men." (Tanchuma, Vayera 12).

[109] Sonia Waters, "Reading Sodom through Sexual Violence Against Women," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 71, no. 3 (2017): 279, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964317698763.

Lot may be seeking to trick the mob, as his unmarried daughters are in fact not present in his house at the time, but instead he has more than two daughters, some of whom are already married.[110] This perspective remains unsupported in wider scholarship, only briefly mentioned by Miri Rozmarin and the claim remains unfounded; therefore, I continue to read Lot as having only two daughters, both unmarried, who he genuinely offers to the mob for rape.[111] The angry mob do not react with gratitude to Lot's offer and instead extend their hostility towards the angels to hostility towards Lot: "Now we will deal worse with you than with them" (Genesis 19:9).[112] Perhaps the crowd of men have no interest in knowing two young women instead of the visiting men or are simply not receptive to Lot's bartering. Regardless, Lot finds himself in a precarious position and must be saved by his visitors who render the angry mob blind (Genesis 19:11).

The visiting angels explain that Lot and his family must leave the city immediately, as they have been sent by the LORD to destroy the place on account of its inhabitants' wickedness (Genesis 19:13). Considered alongside the context of Abraham's earlier conversation with the LORD and following the departure of his visitors (Genesis 18), we might conclude that Sodom has been found lacking even ten righteous inhabitants, and so God is destroying the city. The opportunity provided to Lot to leave Sodom ahead of its destruction implies that Lot is righteous and does not deserve to be punished, despite his efforts to placate the mob involving inflicting violence upon his daughters. Nonetheless, the angels save Lot despite his moral ambiguity and he, along with his wife and daughters, leaves Sodom behind.

2.1.3 Lot's Wife

Lot's wife is nameless in the text and only known in relation to her husband. Karla Bohmbach finds that of around 3000 named individuals in the complete biblical canon, only around 170 are women, and 137 of those are granted personal names which are independent of others.[113] Lot's wife is therefore not a special case, yet her anonymity is still worthy of our attention as it makes her an incomplete character and places her in a secondary role to her husband. Of course, another example of nameless women presents itself immediately as Lot's daughters are similarly unnamed outside of their connection with their father. This identification provides evidence of Bohmbach's findings that not all female biblical characters have names and especially not names which are unrelated to their male counterpart or patriarch.

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[110] Athas, "Lost the Plot," 15.
[111] Miri Rozmarin, "Staying Alive: Matricide and the Ethical-Political Aspect of Mother-Daughter Relations," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 17, no. 4 (2016): 248, https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2016.1236540.
[112] וַיֹּאמְרוּ ו גֶּשׁ־הָלְאָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֶחָד בָּא־לָגוּר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שָׁפוֹט עַתָּה נָרַע לְךָ מֵהֶם וַיִּפְצְרוּ בָאִישׁ בְּלוֹט מְאֹד וַיִּגְּשׁוּ לִשְׁבֹּר הַדָּלֶת׃
[113] Karla Bohmbach, "Names and Naming in the Biblical World," in *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, The Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament*, eds. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross Kraemer (Houghton Mittlin, 2000), 34.

When the angry mob ask who is in his house, Lot fails to mention his wife, yet we can assume that she must have been there since she leaves with Lot in the morning. Low writes that this is not only a reflection of the male authors' easy dismissal of female characters but, perhaps more troublingly, reflects what Low identifies in the modern Western world as an often-fragmented relationship between women and their daughters who have suffered experiences of sexual violence.[114] At this point in the story, Lot's wife is present in the house but missing from the text, and is not provided a voice to represent her daughters interests.

Lot is warned that he and his family should flee and not look back (Genesis 19:17); however, Lot's wife turns to witness the destruction of her home, and in doing so is immediately consumed (Genesis 19:26). Lot's wife is the only one of the four fleeing who turns back, likely not to deliberately defy God's command, but to survey all that she stands to lose. Rozmarin reads Lot's wife as a grieving woman, and this is useful to realise the humanity in the family's experiences and appreciate what a traumatic event it must have been for all of them individually, rather than just Lot's wife.[115] Rozmarin adds that it is bearing witness to the destruction that seals her fate, as she cannot live to relay the scenes of such violent divine justice that she has observed.[116] In response to Rozmarin, Alison Stone claims that to observe an act of destruction is to participate in it, and therefore Lot's wife must be consumed by the devastation.[117] Both of these claims can be considered to be true at once, and it is clear in both the text and later commentaries that witnessing the destruction of Sodom is the catalyst for the death of Lot's wife.

Matricide is all too infrequently considered when surveying the story of Lot and yet we could say that the death of Lot's wife is the catalyst for the text's later distressing scenes. Her death is undoubtedly the main plot event which leads Lot's daughters to the point where they personally feel the weight of responsibility for continuing the human race. Matricide has undeniable consequences for mother-daughter relations and Rozmarin writes that these consequences develop in the case of Lot and his daughters into grounds for incest.[118] This is because, consequently, Lot's daughters live on without a female role model, and Stone goes as far as to say that the two daughters actually assume their mother's identity.[119] This is a severe view which writes Lot's wife out of the story entirely as she becomes replaceable. In a less severe reading, we can say that Lot's daughters naturally assume the responsibilities that were once their mother's given her absence. I will not afford any more time to Lot's wife, as the objective of this chapter is to focus on the risks taken by her daughters, which precludes any further discussion of her exclusion. Yet, it remains

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[114] Low, "Sexual Abuse," 42.
[115] Rozmarin, "Staying Alive," 249.
[116] Rozmarin, 249.
[117] Alison Stone, "Stealing Lot's Wife and Daughters From the Bible: A Response to Rozmarin's 'Staying Alive'," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 17, no. 4 (2016): 258, https://doi.org/10.1080/15240657.2016.1236541.
[118] Rozmarin, "Staying Alive," 244.
[119] Stone, "Stealing Lot's Wife," 259.

necessary to have examined her silence and passivity, in order to understand how she, as a disposable character, has been used to enable the story's distressing end and how her removal from the story centres Lot and allows for the events which follow.

2.2 Committing Incest (Genesis 19:30-38)

Lot and his two daughters escape Sodom, and in Genesis 19:28-29 God remembers Abraham amidst the destruction, and ensures Lot and his family survive as a result of their relation. Lot and his daughters settle in a cave, some place beyond Zoar. It is worth noting that in the text, Lot and his daughters go to live "in *the* cave" (בַּמְּעָרָה) as the Hebrew noun is marked by the definite article, which suggests that the specific cave may have been known to readers at the time. This recognition is lost for the modern reader and instead we are left to speculate upon the location of the events which unfold.

2.2.1 Alone in the Cave

The environment in which Lot chooses to settle with his daughters can be considered textually significant as caves are often a dark space, suitable to conceal what takes place inside. We can also survey the Hebrew word for cave (מְעָרָה), a feminine noun, outlined in Gesenius' 1846 lexicon as being derived from עוּר, meaning: "to dig, to bore". [120] With that being said, מְעָרָה is also etymologically similar to the Old Semitic root עָרַר which means "to be naked". Other Hebrew nouns closely related to that of "cave" are מעור meaning "nakedness", and ערוה meaning "genitals".[121] Consulting Gesenius' lexicon grounds my discussion and provides me with the basis to acknowledge that the literal translation of the Hebrew words which I am considering are not necessarily related to sexual actions or taboos and therefore it may not have been the author's intention to promote this connection. Still, these are all words with similarly sexual connotations and so if we acknowledge that this may have been a deliberately employed literary tactic, the cave becomes placed as an appropriately suggestive setting for Lot and his daughters' taboo activities. As well as this, the small, enclosed space that Lot and his daughters find themselves in recalls similarities to their position in 19:5, when their home is surrounded by men of the city. In both of these instances, Lot is trapped and without agency, despite his personal judgement that he may be able to both placate the crowd and later inform the next movements of his family beyond their living in a cave. Lot is therefore presented as a man

[120] Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. Translated by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Bagster, 1846).

[121] This is an example of the literary device "wordplay" where, whilst words are not directly related, the similarities in word formation are perhaps deliberately employed to encourage readers to connect themes and consider intentionally relevant alternative words. In this case: "cave" encourages considerations of bodily exposure and nakedness. For a more comprehensive overview of wordplay, including authors' intentions and further examples which support my own argument that wordplay is in effect in Genesis 19, see Isaac Kalimi, *Metathesis in the Hebrew Bible: Wordplay as a Literary and Exegetical Device* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2018).

who continually finds himself in the eye of a storm and tries to take control but ultimately fails and is left with no option but to flee from a crisis.[122]

The gendering of caves as feminine expands beyond linguistics as Rhiannon Graybill and Peter Sabo note that caves in Genesis narratives are typically symbolically female spaces, whilst caves in the Deuteronomic History are symbolically masculine.[123] Examples include the Cave of Machpelah (Genesis 23) where Sarah is buried, and the Cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22) where David and his male family members convene, and David formally becomes their leader. If the cave of Lot and his daughters is to follow these repeated tropes then the themes of femininity and concealment, alongside some degree of bodily exposure, can be expected from the remainder of this narrative. The cave in Genesis 19 becomes an appropriate space for Lot's daughters to take control of their sexuality and engage in forbidden activities.

In Genesis 19:31, the daughters express the belief that all the men in the world have been destroyed along with their betrothed in Sodom.[124] Low introduces kinship theory and suggests that Lot's daughters are likely to be aware of their obligation to provide progeny and extend the bloodline of their father.[125] Kinship, in this discussion, refers to the relationships between members of same-blood families. In this case, the eldest daughter of Lot recognises that they ought to "preserve offspring through our father" (Genesis 19:32), with the major motivating factor of this being continuation of their father's progeny and their own personal security. This is convincing as it allows us to get to the root of what has actively motivated Lot's daughters and therefore to what end they choose such drastic actions.

The setting, associated with vaginal and womblike imagery, and the circumstances which each of the individuals find themselves aware of and keen to resolve brings us to the climax of the story - a perfect storm for Lot and his daughters to engage in first-degree incest

2.2.2 First-Degree Incest

Incest of the first degree, according to a definition provided by Stiebert, is engaged in with one's primary relatives (parents, children, and full siblings).[126] Leviticus 18 and 20 each provide a number of sexual prohibitions, listing the relations whom an individual should not "uncover the nakedness" of.[127] Sexual

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[122] Lot's name, לוֹט, shares two consonants with the root word, מָלַט, also used multiple times in Genesis 19, and meaning "to escape"/"to flee". This encompasses Lot's actions and predesigns his character as one who escapes responsibility and flees his home, leaving others to suffer the consequences.

[123] Rhiannon Graybill and Peter Sabo, "Caves of the Hebrew Bible: A Speleology," *Biblical Interpretation* 26, no. 1 (2018): 3, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00261P01.

[124] וַתֹּאמֶר הַבְּכִירָה אֶל־הַצְּעִירָה אָבִינוּ זָקֵן וְאִישׁ אֵין בָּאָרֶץ לָבוֹא עָלֵינוּ כְּדֶרֶךְ כָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃

[125] Low, "Sexual Abuse," 44.

[126] Definition taken from Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest,* 1.

[127] See Brenner, "On Incest," 119-122 for a comprehensive overview of sexual prohibitions listed in Leviticus.

relations between a father and his daughter are not listed as prohibited in these texts and, whilst a lack of prohibition is not enough to claim that such acts were permissible, Stiebert writes that in modern Western contexts, despite remaining legally and socially impermissible, father-daughter incest is the most common form.[128] Whilst this is almost entirely incomparable with the ancient near east context in which the biblical narrative was written, it illustrates the lack of a determinate relationship between prohibition and reality. In his book *Totem and Taboo,* Sigmund Freud, writing in the Victorian era, accepts the reality of incestuous relationships whilst still condemning them as extensively and almost universally restricted.[129] Typically father/daughter incest involves sexual engagement with a very specific victim/perpetrator structure, as identified by Stiebert, yet the story of Lot's daughters subverts this, and it is the young women who seek to abuse their father; an uncommon scenario which I seek to understand the principal conditions of later in this chapter.[130]

The two daughters "lie" (שָׁכַב) with their father, a term used repeatedly in biblical narratives to indicate sexual relations.[131] Carol Smith analyses how the text is constructed and how not only the two halves—before fleeing Sodom, after fleeing Sodom—repeat one another in their themes and content, but also the repetition of each daughter lying with their father, one night after the other.[132] This reading helpfully reminds modern commentators that the texts were created with the intention of being read not only for liturgical purposes but also general enjoyment, and so whilst repetition provides the text with structure, it is also a useful device to build anticipation which ultimately excites and shocks.

The narrator emphasises Lot's ignorance after each occasion where a daughter gets him drunk to lie with him: "he did not know when she lay down or when she rose" (Genesis 19:33).[133] As I have previously mentioned, the euphemism "to know" (יָדַע) an individual is to have sexual relations with them: Lot "knows" his daughters without (literally) knowing it. Peter Sabo notes the irony in this.[134] The complete unawareness of Lot is entirely supposed, and whilst Sabo makes comments about the text's irony, Ilona Rashkow encourages a broader approach where we reconsider Lot's statements about his daughters to the townspeople (Genesis 19:8).[135] This is a point that I will return to, but for now it is at least worth noting

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[128] Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest*, 34.
[129] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo and Other Works [1913-1914].* Translated by James Strachey. (Vintage, 2001).
[130] Stiebert, *First-Degree Incest,* 33.
[131] Examples include Leviticus 15:24 and Deuteronomy 27:23 – both texts which condemn unfaithful sexual practices.
[132] Carol Smith, "Challenged by the Text: Interpreting Two Stories of Incest in the Hebrew Bible," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies,* eds. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 128.
[133] וַתַּשְׁקֶיןָ אֶת־אֲבִיהֶן יַיִן בַּלַּיְלָה הִוא וַתָּבֹא הַבְּכִירָה וַתִּשְׁכַּב אֶת־אָבִיהָ וְלֹא־יָדַע בְּשִׁכְבָהּ וּבְקוּמָהּ׃
[134] Peter Sabo, "Moabite women, Transjordanian women, and incest and exogamy: The gendered dimensions of boundaries in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45, no. 1 (2020): 96, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089219862807.
[135] Ilona Rashkow, "Daddy-Dearest and the 'Invisible Spirit of Wine'," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, 2nd edition, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 102.

that Lot is repressing his own desire to "know" his daughters in inviting the townspeople to "know" them first.

Successfully completing their plan on one occasion is courageous yet repeating this for a second night in a row borders upon fearless. The two women take extreme risks in sleeping with their father: perhaps they will not fall pregnant, or perhaps he will become aware of his surroundings at some point the act. The risk which Lot's daughters expose themselves to is huge and the consequences of their plan being discovered may be an existence more isolating and insecure than the one which they are already living. That being said, Bereshit Rabbah 51:8-9 discusses uncertainty over whether or not we should consider Lot to have been entirely unaware of his daughters actions and instead suggests that Lot is a complicit target. This perspective is rooted in the linguistic irregularity between the first and second instances of each daughter rising from lying with their father.

Genesis 19: 33 – וּבְקוּמָהּ
Genesis 19: 35 - וּבְקֻמָהּ

Both instances are formed of the same verbal root (קוּם) yet the latter includes a qof with qubbuts, and the former has a shuruq in the centre of the word.[136] The English translation remains the same, but in Bereshit Rabbah the speculative case is made that this difference in the Hebrew text developed by the Masoretes reflects a difference in Lot's awareness.[137] If this is true, this meaning has been lost in translation and makes sense of why modern English-speaking commentators have not engaged in any significant discussion surrounding the linguistic elements of this portion of text. This lack of engagement may reflect a widespread view that the textual variation is insignificant, and instead may be a trivial scribal error which has never had any significant meaning. Given that the brief discussion of this passage in one example of Midrash is the only place where it is argued that the linguistic differences in this portion of text are significant, I tend to side with other scholars and agree that nothing of relevance is intended in the linguistic discrepancies in Genesis 19, or at least we are unable to comment convincingly given a loss of understanding through years of transmission.

Irony continues to play a part in the word play associated with Genesis 19 as both daughters bear and give birth to sons, Moab and Ben-Ammi (Genesis 19:36-38). Moab (מוֹאָב) is translated literally as "from my

[136] The authorial text would have consisted only of consonants. The addition of vowels represents ancient reading traditions and so whilst not part of the original texts, it remains useful to analyse these linguistic additions in order to grasp an idea of how the text was intended to be read by the Jewish scribes who standardised the text, the Masoretes.
[137] ""They gave their father wine…[and when she arose [*uvkuma*]]" – there is a dot over the *vav* of *uvkuma*, [intimating] that when she lay he was not aware, but when she arose he was aware." (Bereshit Rabbah 51:8-9).

father", and Ben-Ammi (בן־עמי) translates literally as "son of my people" or "son of my own kin".[138] The text's narrator explicitly reflects the incestuous origins of each son where possible. Both go on to be the fathers of their own clans, the Moabites and the Ammonites, aggressors in the stories of Israel which follow. Therefore, whilst the actions of Lot's daughters are not explicitly condemned, the birth of Israel's enemies out of a heinous act of incest may be sufficient punishment and warning for readers. On the other hand, Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 1:4) and Na'amah the Ammonite (1 Kings 14:21) are born from these incestuous relations and are major players in the line of King David: Ruth as a great-grandparent of King David and Na'amah being the wife of his son, King Solomon, and the mother of his heir. For readers who are aware of this later context—relative to the order of the Biblical canon—this sheds positive light on the birth of Lot's sons, who are progeny of his daughters, and subverts our initial reaction to abhor the incestuous acts.

Lot's daughters make Lot drink wine, a further indication of the young women's calculation in their actions, and indicative of the worrying ease with which Lot becomes repeatedly inebriated. Rashkow identifies that a parent with an alcohol problem is commonly reported in cases of clinical incest, and this case of incest shares similar features.[139] The plying of their father with wine not only presents the young women as calculating, but as risk-takers as they understand that their father must be inebriated before they conduct their plan. If he was not, he would likely not agree to their plan and possibly renounce all of his responsibilities to his daughters. In Bereshit Rabbah 51:8-9, the appearance of wine in the cave is questioned and considered either unrealistic or as suggesting that the ploy took place sometime after the initial arrival into the cave, in order to arrange for enough wine to be collected. In this same Midrash, Joel 4:18 is reflected upon, as it is claimed that on some particular day, the mountains will drip with juice. In light of this, it is suggested that the incest between Lot and his daughters was intended to happen, and the divine appearance of wine deliberately enabled the action. The story of Lot and his daughters, when considered with the wider context which is available to us regarding the future of the children and the appearance of the wine, almost appears to be divinely encouraged, and the message which we can garner as being intended by the text is not satisfactorily either positive or negative. The neutral judgement passed in the text, when it would be deserved to illustrate Lot's daughters as guilty perpetrators of rape, reserves the possibility to reclaim their actions to be positive when considered in a wider context: for example, the legacy which each son goes on to realise.

It is undeniable that Lot's daughters are the perpetrators of incest with their father, yet the act is rarely discussed alongside other cases of rape in the Bible, and Lot is not usually considered to be a victim.[140] This may be as a result of the narrative's subversion of our usual conception of who is most likely to be a

[138] Sabo, "Gendered Dimensions," 95.
[139] Rashkow, "Daddy-Dearest," 82.
[140] Waters, "Sexual Violence," 275.

victim or perpetrator of sexual violence. Ellen De Doncker argues that this contemporary idea of women being victims of sexual abuse by men, and not the other way around, is derived from the idea that heterosexual men are "hardwired" to always be interested in sex with women, and therefore consent is not an issue.[141] Similarly, Sabo argues the passivity of Lot as a victim feminises him and the daughters assume a masculine role, according to our standard conception of rape.[142] This also relates to Low's previous idea that in the domestic setting prior to his rape, Lot maintains a passive, arguably feminine role.[143] Whilst these semantic labels are of interest as they enable us to pass comment if we consider gender to be a dichotomy with set stereotypes of behaviours on either side, the more valuable case to be made is that Lot is a victim. This stems from the undeniable fact that he finds himself without the consciousness or the environment to save himself from his daughters' victimisation.[144] With this view, gender and supposed gender roles provide grounds for a less important discussion when compared with the identification that Lot is sexually abused by his daughters; yet, this is a fate which he was happy to surrender his daughters to upon the arrival of the angry mob outside of his door (Genesis 19:5). Lot's passivity in his daughters' pursuit to continue his bloodline is noted in the text; however, the text has nothing to say regarding a condemnation of rape or first-degree incest. Ultimately, a central preaching point from the Genesis 19 narrative in many modern-day instances regards the Sodomites' behaviour, and the sins of those who engage in same-sex relations.[145] This reflects the lack of consideration given to Lot as a victim and the modern-day conception that women cannot really be sexual abusers of men. Instead, the proposed lesson to be learned from Genesis 19 and the central issue at hand is deemed to be sexual relations between two people of the same gender.

Jackson describes Lot's daughters as "female tricksters", a subcategory of women who demonstrate certain characteristics.[146] In order to support her argument, Jackson formalises the criteria of female tricksters in the Hebrew Bible provided by Ann Engar:

(1) women who understand the needs of their nation and family more so than any male counterpart;

(2) women with a greater understanding of God and His purpose than their male counterpart;

(3) women who are not sexually passive: they determine when and with whom they will have sex.[147]

In my view, Lot's daughters do have a greater understanding of the situation at hand than Lot, displayed in their motivation to extend their father's bloodline and secure the continuation of the wider human race. Yet,

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[141] Ellen De Doncker, "Incestual Duplication by Female Sex Offenders: Lot's Daughters (Genesis 19:30-38) as Challenge to Typologies and Violent Family-Systems," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Systems* 5, no. 1 (2023): 17, https://doi.org/10.17613/1jpxx-r6493.
[142] Sabo, "Gendered Dimensions," 95.
[143] Low, "Sexual Abuse," 45.
[144] Cobb, "Revenge and Re-enactment," 191.
[145] Waters, "Sexual Violence," 275.
[146] Jackson, "Patriarchal Narratives," 33.
[147] Jackson, 32, and Ann Engar, "Old Testament Women as Tricksters," *The Bucknell Review* 33, no. 2 (1990): 143, http://ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/old-testament-women-as-tricksters/docview/1289759440/se-2?accountid=14540.

it may be argued that they have less understanding of the broader situation, as they were not textually present during the visit from angels, and so it is possible that they have misunderstood the extent of the destruction that occurred. Still, the text makes clear that Lot is unaware of the plot at hand, making his daughters sexually active actors and Lot a passive target. God is not overly present in the text and there is not enough evidence to claim that Lot's daughters feel motivated to act in a way which pleases God or seeks to understand His involvement in their lives. Yet, we can appeal to an aforementioned contextual point in which the two children born out of incest go on to father nations which have some impact on the royal lineage of Israel. Despite the daughters not having the capacity to understand this promised future yet, with our full biblical context we can see that Lot's daughters directly influence the future of Israel with their actions. Perhaps this is precisely why the Leviticus texts refrain from prohibiting father-daughter incest, as it is exactly this form which develops David's genealogy: to forbid these activities would be hypocritical. This reveals to us a primary purpose of the writing and eventual distribution of not only the story of Lot and his daughters, but perhaps the Book of Genesis as a whole: setting a contextual scene for the later genealogy of King David, who is positively described as "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14).[148]

Satisfying two out of the three criteria prescribed by Engar, regarding the specific plot to commit incest, provides a legitimate claim for naming Lot's daughters as female tricksters, yet the connotations of trickery are widely pejorative and would therefore highlight the women's actions as immoral.[149] As the text does little to condemn the actions of Lot's daughters and does not explicitly criticise or pass judgement on the act, to label Lot's daughters as tricksters would shame them post-textually, an act which I see as having no reasonable benefit. Instead, it remains of more interest to understand the significant importance which Lot's daughters assume after securing their father's progeny, and how a socially conditioned obligation forces them to act in such a drastic manner. Reading with this aim should be favoured over continuing to saturate the collection of literature committed to studying and developing an understanding of the attitudes towards incest anywhere from the ancient near east to the modern day. Incest, broadly, is and always has been condemned. Instead, questions of blame, trauma, survival and above all, agency, is where my discussion will turn next.

2.3 Where does the blame lie?

It is Lot's daughters who conspire to get him drunk and have sex with him, motivated by a sense of duty to provide their father with progeny and continue the human race. Matthew Korpman seeks to understand the

[148] וְעַתָּה מַמְלַכְתְּךָ לֹא־תָקוּם בִּקֵּשׁ יְהוָה לוֹ אִישׁ כִּלְבָבוֹ וַיְצַוֵּהוּ יְהוָה לְנָגִיד עַל־עַמּוֹ כִּי לֹא שָׁמַרְתָּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר־צִוְּךָ יְהוָה׃

[149] Engar, 143.

eldest daughter's belief that her father is the last surviving man in the world, considering the angels' message that only cities within the plain would be destroyed (Genesis 19:17).[150] Because this misunderstood outlook on the situation motivates their behaviour, we cannot entirely believe that the daughters act either in good faith or after being provided with a full explanation of the situation at hand by their father. The biblical representation of the characters and the discussion of Genesis 19 in the Midrash which I have discussed all exonerate Lot's daughters of any blame and seek to present Lot in a negative light. Whilst this is true, neither do any of the ancient texts seek to praise the actions of Lot's daughters. Miller writes, amongst a broader discussion of the Leviticus texts and the missing prohibition of father/daughter sexual relations, that the two daughters have no choice but to get their father drunk, as otherwise he would not opt to have sex with them, since this would clash with his moral code.[151] With this leap in logic, James Miller believes that we can assume that father/daughter sexual relations are illegitimate and considered incest and taboo in Lot's literary world. With textual confirmation of this lacking, the indifference in the text with regards to considering either party to be wrong prompts us to shelve our modern perspectives and ask if this is a matter of blame; or, were the three protagonists each individual victims of their unfortunate circumstances with no one specific victim or perpetrator?

2.3.1 Survival Sex

Lot's daughters are likely to perceive their social position as extremely precarious as their city and home have been destroyed, along with the death of their mother and their fiancés. This leaves them living in hiding with their father. As neither daughter has been able to marry their betrothed, they each avoid widow status and remain under the authority of their father. Frank Frick provides a useful overview of the social positioning of widows in the Hebrew Bible and, as women without a prospective husband, we can consider that some of what is true for widows would be true for the daughters, e.g., the pressing need to (re)marry, lack of social support, and reliance on the father.[152] As they are unmarried and do not become formally widowed, the grief which is likely to be felt by Lot's daughters is unique, as the overwhelming feeling of what should have been and never became persists. This strong feeling of grief mobilises Lot's daughters to take a risk and reclaim the future which was promised to them. As the two daughters are now each without marital prospects and back under the authority of their father, Korpman further suggests that they may have been driven to action because of the difference in a fathers protection over daughters versus sons.[153] Lot has encouraged the rape of his own daughters in Genesis 19:8 and unfortunately they have no guarantee

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[150] Matthew Korpman, "Can anything good come from Sodom? A feminist and narrative critique of Lot's daughters in Gen. 19.30-38," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 3 (2019): 337, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089217727919.
[151] James Miller, "Sexual Offences in Genesis," *JSOT* 90 (2000): 43, https://doi.org/10.1177/030908920002509004.
[152] Frank Frick, "Widows in the Hebrew Bible: A Transactional Approach," in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy,* ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 139-151.
[153] Korpman, "Feminist and Narrative Critique," 341.

going forward that he will protect them from harm in the future, with Korpman adding that Lot likely knows that rape would lead to inevitable murder: as evidenced in the case of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19).[154] A recurring argument made in existing literature and in this chapter up until this point is that Lot's daughters sought sex with Lot selflessly to provide *him* with a continued bloodline. However, to provide Lot with male heirs would ensure they are protected by him, and his daughters will continue to benefit from the social security which comes with bearing his sons.

Continuing on from this, other stories in the Hebrew Bible provide evidence to support the assertion that being unmarried and childless is a predicament which renders women powerless and invisible in the Hebrew Bible. Examples include Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11) and Tamar (Genesis 38). Therefore, Lot's daughters may be acting to further their own interests, to bear children which would ensure their father's continued support of them now they have lost everything besides him. Jackson's article, which specifically presents a case for Lot's daughters being considered tricksters, becomes even more appealing in this light and we can appreciate the inventive way in which the women choose to act in their own self-interest, yet we must not soften the amount of risk which we associate with such drastic actions.[155] The necessity to act in these circumstances is fuelled by the patriarchal societies which have conditioned the belief that women gain significance and security in relation to their child-bearing.

Another possible reason for the actions of Lot's daughters is explored by Rashkow, as she writes about the shame associated with being wronged and how, particularly in the context of Genesis narratives, often the shamed party will shame the shamer, in order to feel triumphant: a concept to which I will return later.[156] Whilst my discussion does not help to support this notion of triumph and a feeling of success in raping their father, Rashkow interestingly adds that the original feeling of shame—for Lot's daughters in this case—is caused in part, or wholly, by a general feeling of inadequacy and a failure to live up to the standards set by parents.[157] This seems legitimate in the case of Lot and his daughters, as they have been left unable to leave their fathers home to be wed and have children: an ideal case of what each young woman *should* do.

The most troubling aspect of this story consequently becomes the disregard which Lot has for his daughters and how his extreme choice to surrender them for rape and possible murder breeds disrespect in return. Lot's daughters seek to make Lot the fool and in making him the victim of his own original proposal, his daughters outsmart the overbearing and insecure patriarchy along with their own father.

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[154] Korpman, 339.
[155] Jackson, "Patriarchal Narratives," 33.
[156] Rashkow, "Daughters and Fathers," 26.
[157] Rashkow, 26.

2.3.2 Trauma, Revenge, and Re-enactment

The events of Genesis 19:1-25 are traumatic for Lot's daughters. Their father offers them up for gang rape, their fiancés are left for dead, their mother dies, and their home is destroyed. Each of these incidents, when independently experienced, carries immeasurable amounts of pain and grief, but when encountered together, in the space of 25 verses, it is undeniable that the young women will continue to feel the effects long into their adulthood, if not for the rest of their lives. Cobb helpfully likens trauma to an open wound which never fully heals, as opposed to pain/suffering which is better compared with a closed wound.[158] The recognition that Lot's daughters are trauma victims allows us to assess their actions more precisely, and to explore what motivates them to act in the way that they do.

We must be reminded that in Genesis 19:8, Lot offers his daughters to the angry mob, encouraging them with the incentive that they "have not known a man", and upon his say-so they may "do to them as you please".[159] It is frequently observed in subsequent literature that Lot's daughters may have been acting out of revenge, doing to their father as he intended to have done to them. This idea is explored by Cobb, who reads the whole story of Lot and his daughters as one in which vengeance is the central theme.[160] Lot is the fool of the story, acting strangely in the company of guests, offering his daughters to an angry mob and finally being left homeless. His daughters deliver the final blow as he is easily inebriated and forced to support his new sons - products of incest. Undeniably, the roles reverse, and the original victims become perpetrators who do not passively succumb to their trauma and instead inflict calculated suffering upon their father.

In Cobb's earlier work, she suggests that the desire to become active agents and have their father become a passive victim is the main motivator of their actions; however, I suggest that given their position in a patriarchal society their available options are severely limited and they are instead resigned to take the risk of becoming impregnated by their father.[161] The two daughters feel the weight of necessity to provide children for two reasons: to continue the human race, and to continue the bloodline of their father. If we find it unconvincing that the two daughters believe they were living in a barren world in which the only suitable male was their father, we may struggle to comprehend why they choose to procreate with their father. It is therefore necessary to appeal to a further, more convincing motivator which is that by continuing their fathers bloodline and providing him with male heirs, they protect themselves and ensure lifelong security as the mothers of his children.

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[158] Cobb, "Revenge and Re-enactment," 192.
[159] הִנֵּה־נָ֣א לִ֤י שְׁתֵּי֙ בָּנ֣וֹת אֲשֶׁ֣ר לֹא־יָדְע֣וּ אִ֔ישׁ אוֹצִ֥יאָה־נָּ֖א אֹתָ֣ם אֲלֵיכֶ֑ם וַעֲשׂ֤וּ לָהֶן֙ כַּטּ֣וֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶ֔ם רַ֚ק לָאֲנָשִׁ֣ים הָאֵ֔ל אַל־תַּעֲשׂ֖וּ דָּבָ֑ר כִּי־עַל־כֵּ֥ן בָּ֖אוּ בְּצֵ֥ל קֹרָתִֽי׃
[160] Cobb, 190.
[161] Cobb, "Trauma Theory," 215.

With this perspective, we must concede that the circumstances in which the daughters find themselves do contribute to the necessity to procreate with their father. Undeniably, if it were not for the destruction of Sodom, the young women would not be required to rely on their father any longer and would move into their new husbands' homes. However, if we seek to understand the original cause of the punishment of Sodom, the question and its answer become circular: does the destruction of Sodom result from the wickedness of its inhabitants, Lot included? Lot becomes the perpetrator and the victim, with the daughters only being victims of their circumstances.

With this, a discussion of revenge becomes almost absurd as we recognise that Lot's daughters are never perpetrators and Lot is never a victim, since we read the re-enactment of their proposed rape, this time as initiators, as purely an extension of their experience of trauma. The continuing of their father's bloodline is a physical and permanent reminder of their original trauma, and an open wound which continues to sting. Lot's daughters retaliate, nonetheless it is the main motivation of their actions—not necessarily to harm their father in return—which makes it different from a standard definition of revenge. Ulrich Orth writes at length about the nature of revenge and of his four necessary conditions, all of which could be considered to be unfulfilled in the case of Lot and his daughters.[162] These are:

(1) an individual believes a severe harm has been done to them;
(2) the perpetrator is held responsible for this harm;
(3) the victim perceives the harm to be morally wrong;
(4) the victim desires to retaliate.

At no point in the text is it explicitly told that Lot's daughters are aware that their father has offered them to be raped, meaning that we are unable to identify condition (1) or (3), as the young women cannot hold a moral judgement on an action which they are unaware of. Condition (2) cannot be said to be true for Lot as he is not held directly responsible in the text or by the narrator and, in fact, there are no explicit repercussions for his actions. Concern for Lot's choice to offer his daughters to an angry mob has only surfaced in scholarly texts. Finally, as far as the text tells us, Lot's daughters do not seek to hurt their father, they seek to use him as a means to their own ends and therefore condition (4) also remains unfulfilled. Considering Lot's daughters' behaviour alongside this definition, it is the case that their actions cannot be considered revenge.

The secrecy of their plan and decision to inebriate their father reflects the taboo nature of first-degree incest, and yet taking the risk to committing such a crime is clearly the preferred option for the women as it is

[162] Ulrich Orth, "Does perpetrator punishment satisfy victims' feelings of revenge?" *Aggressive Behavior* 30 (2004): 63, http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ab.20003.

considered to protect them both indefinitely. Furthermore, following the destruction of the young women's land and people, it is not unimaginable that in such a desperate situation they would consider such a desperate course of action. We must also remember the time in which the text was written and acknowledge that we have no means of understanding the opinions and discourse surrounding acts of incest at that time. The lack of condemnation in Genesis 19 and the lack of explicit prohibition found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible raises the question of whether first-degree incest was not considered to be quite as heinous as it is in our contemporary Western societies.

Principally, Lot's daughters are victims of traumatic events, each tied back directly or indirectly to the immoral acts of their father. They are left in a difficult position where the requirement to bear children, particularly sons, to continue their fathers bloodline, is the central motivator of their consequent actions. Lot's daughters are failed by their patriarchal society and their father as they are treated as disposable material items to be traded and without worth in themselves.[163] This leads the young women to risk committing a crime out of desperation to secure a safe future. Whilst there is no "winner" in the events of the text, Lot becomes a punished party stemming from being the immoral perpetrator, who ends up failing his family and being branded a fool.

2.4 Conclusion

Most simplistically, the story of Lot and his daughters is a troubling case of first-degree incest which subverts our usual preconceptions of the identities of victims and perpetrators. However, a reading which takes account of the trauma experienced by the two young women at the centre of the story allows us to consider them as victims of their circumstances which, for the most part, are caused by the men who surround them in the patriarchal society in which they are living.

I have evaluated various scholarly arguments that Lot's daughters commit incest with their father maliciously, and I have discussed some varying positions on incest from antiquity when the Bible was written, up until today's modern Western societies. In doing so, I have provided some weight to the existing position that Lot's daughters are vilified female tricksters, yet ultimately decided that a negative reading of Lot's daughters would invalidate their actions and the consequences which the birth of their sons has for the future of Israel, and the legacy of Lot and his family.

[163] This idea of a "patriarchal society" comes from Gerda Lerner's definition in Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 239.

Following on from here, I have evaluated possible causes of Lot's daughters choosing to act in such a severe way and discussed whether we should consider attributing blame to any of the text's key actors for these actions. Typical readings avoid discussing the blameworthiness of both Lot and his daughters, yet a simple lack of condemnation is not enough to absolve them completely. In this chapter, I grappled with the concepts of blame and revenge in order to argue that Lot's daughters should be considered victims, and their father both a direct and indirect perpetrator of their trauma and its consequences. Without Sodom's wickedness—in which Lot may have participated—Lot's family would not be forced to leave, and his daughters would not be required to protect their social security by becoming pregnant by their father. Beyond this, residing in Sodom made Lot and his family subject to the punishment of God on the town. Despite being narrowly saved from this, Lot's wife was condemned to die, and Lot's descendants were products of incest. Therefore, they remained exempt from the full protection of God's covenant as they were no longer Israelites living in the blessed land.

Another central component of my discussion is Lot's daughters' risk-taking. The risk which Lot's daughters take in making their father drunk not once but twice, and trying to sleep with him undetected, carries great consequences should they be discovered at any point. The potential threat of expulsion by their father exposes the true desperation of the women to bear children: an expectation placed upon them by their father and community. Ultimately, upon becoming pregnant, their security is guaranteed as their father is required to take responsibility for them and his new progeny: forging a legacy as foremothers of the Ammonite and Moabite clans.

With this reading, we see Lot's daughters as victims with limited agency when it comes to forging their future, making them willing to consider such desperate measures. They are required to commit drastic acts, the horror of which transcends communities and ages, in order to protect themselves and guarantee some slight degree of security. Following all of this, Lot's daughters cannot be considered victors - yet their father can and should be branded the story's primary offender and fool. The focal point of the story, with my reading, is the desperation of two young women and their commitment to providing a legacy.

CHAPTER THREE
TAMAR AND RAHAB: SEX WORK AND SECRECY

This final chapter is primarily concerned with Genesis 38 and the story of Tamar. We first learn of Tamar when she is married to Er, the son of Judah, and then promised to Judah's remaining younger sons following Er's death and according to the custom of levirate marriage. In this chapter, I focus on the indecency of Judah to not provide Tamar with the appropriate protections that she requires as a widowed woman, and her subsequent choice to concoct a plan which will see her impregnated by her father-in-law. I will go on to explore the circumstances that Tamar finds herself in, and why we may consider it necessary that she take such an extreme risk, which upon initial inspection, appears to exceed what seems necessary under the present circumstances. I will evaluate Tamar's plan itself, dealing with issues of incest and Judah's identification of Tamar as a sex worker. From here, I will move my discussion onto another female character, this time found in the Book of Joshua: Rahab. Rahab is a sex worker who protects the men of Israel against the King of Jericho and ultimately reaps protection from the Israelite God. I will identify similarities between these two women as unlikely heroes deserving of our respect, who each use their bodies to resourcefully and fearlessly defy the men around them, ultimately resulting in the formation of legacies by which each are remembered; namely, both of these women are listed in Jesus' genealogy. This is a crucial point which ultimately becomes a highly important detail for not only the coherence of this chapter, but as a critical juncture for this thesis as a whole and potential future research.

3.1 Trapped by the Patriarchy (Genesis 38)

Tamar's story is found in Genesis 38, where her freedom is impinged upon by environmental patriarchal expectations. Patriarchy, in this context, is similar to the contemporary dictionary definition: social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line.[164] This understanding of patriarchy finds its roots in Gerda Lerner's 1986 book, *The Creation of Patriarchy,* where she proposes that patriarchy "means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general".[165] With this, Lerner remains careful when outlining that this does not mean that women are entirely powerless, or without rights, but instead, that male dominance is institutionalised to place pressure and demands upon women which implicitly shape their decision-making.[166]

[164]"Patriarchy," Merriam Webster, accessed 25th April 2025, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patriarchy.
[165] Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 239.
[166] Lerner, 239.

Patriarchy, when operating at its most severe, can be said to diminish the humanity of women because stringent demands, determined by men, invade all aspects of a woman's life. At the beginning of Tamar's story, and as a result of her experiences, this can be said to be the case. Consequently, Tamar is required to take matters into her own hands and develop a risky plan which will either reinstate her social security or commit her to a future even more repressive than her current reality.

3.1.1 Levirate Marriage

In Genesis 38:2, Judah, an Israelite man, marries the daughter of Shua, a Canaanite woman. In the three verses that follow, we learn that Judah and his wife have three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. Judah arranges for his eldest son to marry Tamar.[167] The practice of fathers arranging the marriages of their children is common in the Hebrew Bible, with another prominent example being Abraham's arranging of Isaac's marriage to Rebekah in Genesis 24. Importantly, Tamar is not explicitly categorised as "non-Israelite" in the original Hebrew text. However, her case remains useful to my discussion, as her ethnicity is undisclosed. It is of some interest to question why Tamar's ethnicity is not considered to be important to the text's original writers. Instead, this gap is filled in the later apocryphal text, The Book of Jubilees, where Tamar is identified as being from Aram (Jubilees 41:1). This may explain the later post-textual habit of scholars to portray Tamar as being foreign to ancient Israel and Judah's family.[168]

Judah's firstborn, Er, is considered wicked in the LORD's view and is consequently killed in Genesis 38:7. As Er and Tamar never had a child, Judah encourages his second-born son, Onan, to assume the role of his deceased brother and provide Tamar with a child. This follows the custom of levirate marriage in the ancient near east: if a man dies without progeny—particularly a male heir—his brother is required to marry his widow. LeAnn Flesher contextualises the story of Tamar and Judah's sons with a detailed excursus on levirate marriage.[169] This custom reflects the ownership of a woman by her husband's family, even following his death; yet, positively, widows are protected and provided personal financial and social security by their husband's family should he die before her, and without children.

Widows, in the world of the Hebrew Bible's writing, are typically unprotected in wider society and excluded from general participation. John Otwell writes about the meaning of the word "widow" in Hebrew: אַלְמָנָה,

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[167] וַיִּקַּח יְהוּדָה אִשָּׁה לְעֵר בְּכוֹרוֹ וּשְׁמָהּ תָּמָר׃

[168] See Ekaterina Kozlova, "What is in a Name? Rahab, the Canaanite, and the Rhetoric of Liberation in the Hebrew Bible," *Open Theology* 6 (2020): 576, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0106 and David Zucker and Moshe Reiss, "Righting and Rewriting Genesis 38: Tamar and Judah in the Pseudepigrapha," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 4 (2015): 196, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107915608592 who both, without question, consider Tamar to be Canaanite.

[169] LeAnn Flesher, "Tamar Says #MeToo: Reading Genesis 38 Through the Lens of Gender Justice," *Review and Expositor* 117, no. 2 (2020): 273, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637320927645.

pronounced in English as "almanah".[170] "Almanah" is etymologically related to the root אָלַם, with English translations of this word spanning from being "physically bound" to being "made to be silent".[171] This provides us with an understanding of the lack of autonomy which widowed women have, which Frick outlines further in his book chapter.[172] This allows us to develop a picture of the necessity for levirate marriage, as it prevents women being abandoned following the death of their husbands.

However, Onan avoids having a child with Tamar, as he is aware that any heir conceived would not be his own, but his brothers (Genesis 38:9). As this disobeys the custom which he has been required to fulfil, the LORD consequently kills Onan, just as He killed his older brother Er. Following the death of two of his sons, Judah acknowledges that he must provide his youngest son for Tamar to marry, but requests she wait until he has grown up (Genesis 38:11). In the meantime, Tamar is instructed to "remain a widow in your father's house" (Genesis 38:11). Flesher notes that despite returning to her father's house, Tamar remains under the legal and familial jurisdiction of Judah, leaving her unable to marry an alternative man of her own choice or her father's.[173] With this added understanding, we grasp an idea of the implied powerlessness of Tamar in her present position. Nehama Aschkenasy names Judah's clan as Tamar's "legitimate home" as she is left without a claim to her father's protection following her previous marriage.[174] This further reflects the bound nature of widowhood as Tamar is trapped, unable to integrate into regular society without a husband, and unable to secure herself a new husband to reap the benefits of marriage.

3.1.2 Trickery and Consequences

A woman in a challenging position, it might be said that Tamar chooses to take matters into her own hands. In Genesis 38:12, we learn that Judah's wife has died and following his period of mourning he and his friend, Hirah the Adullamite, go to Timnah to visit his sheepshearers. The author(s) of Bereshit Rabbah 74:5 state that in all instances where sheepshearing in mentioned in Genesis it makes a mark/impression.[175] Jeffrey Geoghegan comments on this and notes that in some instances, עוֹשֶׂה רֹשֶׁם can specifically mean "has a bad result".[176] The author(s) of this midrash, with a presumed extensive knowledge of biblical texts, present this hypothesis, likely to have been developed as a result of repeated instances where "bad results"

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[170] John Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Women in the Old Testament* (Westminster Press, 1977), 123.
[171] This is another example of wordplay, where along with the noun "widow" being etymologically related to other words such as "physically bound", the connotations of these other words are naturally insinuated as being descriptions of the women who are widowed.
[172] Frick, "Widows in the Hebrew Bible," 139-151.
[173] Flesher, "Gender Justice," 274.
[174] Nehama Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Wayne State University Press, 1988), 81.
[175] The text is בְּכָל מָקוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר גְּזִיזָה עוֹשֶׂה רֹשֶׁם.
[176] Jeffrey Geoghegan, "Israelite Sheepshearing and David's Rise to Power," *Biblica* 87, no. 1 (2006): 55, https://www.jstor.org/stable/42614646.

follow instances of sheepshearing.[177] Alternatively, the inclusion of sheepshearing in narratives may have been an ancient literary device, known to the original authors and readers as a damaging turning point in a story. If this is the case, the ancient understanding is lost to contemporary readers, yet still, with Judah and Tamar's entanglement beginning against the context of a trip to go sheepshearing, we know with the aid of Midrash that what unfolds next is likely to be negative.

Tamar learns from some undisclosed source that her newly-widowed father-in-law will be going up to Timnah and so she removes her own widow's clothes and veils herself (Genesis 38:13-14).[178] Clothes, in this instance, are an identity-marker for Tamar and they allow her to performatively alter her social position away from being a marked widow. Sarah Nicholson writes about gender performance in Genesis 38 and argues that Tamar is not legitimately what she acts to be, but is simply playing a role for so long as it serves her desired outcome.[179] This reading saves Tamar from being labelled as a prostitute, which is what Judah mistakenly believes her to be when he later sees her on the side of the road.[180] Tamar's reason for acting is explained in Genesis 38:14 - she had seen Judah's youngest son was grown up and yet she was still living as a widow. Tamar's response to this injustice is to trick her father-in-law into sleeping with her as if she were a sex worker. The two individuals agree that a kid from Judah's flock would make suitable payment, and Tamar asks that he provides his signet, cord and staff as a pledge in the meantime (Genesis 38:17-18). Despite presumably being items of material value, these items are also individually recognisable as belonging only to Judah. Once these details are agreed, Judah and Tamar have sex, with Tamar's identity as Judah's daughter-in-law remaining undetected.

Following this encounter, Tamar removes her veil and replaces it with her widow's garments (Genesis 38:19). The veil has not only provided Tamar with a physical concealment of her identity, but with the confidence to act in a way which subverts the expectations of widowhood. With this being said, a simple veil does not ensure complete anonymity, meaning that Tamar could easily be identified at any point during her plan, placing the weight of her plan's success in a simple veil covering her head and face. Should Tamar be identified by her father-in-law, we can expect that the consequences could have been fatal. Dressing and behaving as a sex worker following the clear instructions to live out of sight as a widow could lead Judah to entirely disown Tamar from his household, or in an even more drastic fashion—which I will discuss later—demand she be killed. The risk which Tamar takes, considering the possible consequences which she could face if a small aspect such as her veil was not favourably concealing her identity, is huge.

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[177] הָלַךְ לִגְזֹז אֶת צֹאנוֹ, בְּכָל מָקוֹם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר גְּזִיזָה עוֹשָׂה רִשָּׁם. (Bereshit Rabbah 74:5).

[178] וַתָּסַר בִּגְדֵי אַלְמְנוּתָהּ מֵעָלֶיהָ וַתְּכַס בַּצָּעִיף וַתִּתְעַלָּף וַתֵּשֶׁב בְּפֶתַח עֵינַיִם אֲשֶׁר עַל־דֶּרֶךְ תִּמְנָתָה כִּי רָאָתָה כִּי־גָדַל שֵׁלָה וְהִוא לֹא־נִתְּנָה לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃

[179] Sarah Nicholson, "Playing the Whore: Gender Performance and Basic Instinct in Genesis 38," in *Bodies In Question: Gender, Religion, Text*, eds. Yvonne Sherwood and Darlene Bird (Ashgate, 2005), 61.

[180] The two Hebrew words קְדֵשָׁה and זוֹנָה, both used in Genesis 38 to label Tamar's actions, are most commonly translated in English versions of the Bible as "prostitute". This is a translation which I reject, and I will instead use the term "sex work" in reference to Tamar's actions. This decision will be further expanded upon later on in this chapter.

Whilst we can identify Tamar's social position as precarious and understand why she chooses to take matters into her own hands, Nicholson questions whether the means of control which Tamar chooses to take and the risk which it consequently presents to her life, is relative to her situation.[181] Perhaps Tamar is in no immediate danger living as a widow in her father's house, yet it seems that direct exposure to danger is favoured over an insecure life without self-determination. Samuel Ross compares Tamar's position and engagement in sex work with contemporary examples of transgender individuals by drawing comparisons between precarity of social position, and the subsequent desperation to use sex as a "safety net".[182] This viewpoint carries legitimacy, still Tamar's example possesses an added layer in that in order to garner the sex which she needs for her survival, she relies on being able to successfully trick her target into misinterpreting her identity.

The trickery which Tamar engages in suggests to readers that Tamar is not only a woman so desperate that she will use unsafe means to reach her desired outcome, but also presents Tamar as being fearless and resourceful. Tamar is widely regarded in scholarship as a female trickster character of the Hebrew Bible, and is considered alongside others who fulfil the necessary criteria, such as Lot's daughters. Some of these conditions, as outlined in chapter two, are that initially, the trickster relies on others for their social security, until they subvert typical expectations of gender, sexuality, hierarchy, or age to deceive others in their own favour, as is the case with Tamar.[183] I will entirely assess whether Tamar should be considered a trickster according to Engar's formal criteria later in this chapter; however, for now, this basic understanding of a trickster can be considered to be useful as we are able to identify that a similar trope of subverting gender roles is reproduced in both the stories of Lot's daughter and Tamar.[184] In the case of Tamar specifically, she tricks her father-in-law to sleep with her in order to become pregnant, since she has been left without a husband; even though, "Shelah was grown up, yet she had not been given to him in marriage" (Genesis 38:14) and consequently she becomes a dominant sexual actor. Having children fathered by Judah places Tamar directly back into Judah's family, and would allow her to enjoy the protections that come along with that, which she has been without since the death of Onan.

Upon learning that Tamar is pregnant, Judah asks that she be brought out and "burned", having been advised that her pregnancy is as a result of "whoredom" (Genesis 38:24).[185] This confirms the grave danger which we had presumed Tamar had placed herself in, perhaps counter-intuitively, in order to secure her safety.

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[181] Nicholson, "Gender Performance," 58.
[182] Samuel Ross, "A Transgender Gaze at Genesis 38," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies* 1, no. 2 (2020): 31, https://doi.org/10.17613/an7y3-apx14.
[183] Jackson, "Patriarchal Narratives," 33.
[184] Engar, "Women as Tricksters," 143.
[185] וַיְהִי ׀ כְּמִשְׁלֹשׁ חֳדָשִׁים וַיֻּגַּד לִיהוּדָה לֵאמֹר זָנְתָה תָּמָר כַּלָּתֶךָ וְגַם הִנֵּה הָרָה לִזְנוּנִים וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוּדָה הוֹצִיאוּהָ וְתִשָּׂרֵף׃

Equally, this displays the stigma around sex-work and perceptions of sexually self-determining women in Judah's time.

3.2 Sex Work (Genesis 38:13-23)

Throughout Genesis 38, Tamar is described as both a קְדֵשָׁה and זוֹנָה - "qedeshah" and "zonah". It is the word זוֹנָה that is used in the first instance of Judah seeing Tamar (Genesis 38:15) and this is typically translated as "prostitute" - "Judah saw her, he thought her to be a prostitute" (ESV, NRSV, NIV). In an alternative instance, when Judah sends his friend to deliver the kid as payment for sex, Judah's friend Hirah the Adullamite refers to her as a קְדֵשָׁה, translated into English as a "cult"/"temple prostitute" in the ESV, NRSV and NIV (Genesis 38:21). Both of these terms are used in reference to the same woman, yet English translations cannot be said to bear interchangeable connotations, and this promotes the question of whether the differing usage is likely to have been deliberate. This may have been in order to reflect the speakers' background and conceptual understanding, or the reputation which the distinct use of each word may consequently bestow upon the subject.[186] For example, it is a man from outside of Israel, living in a foreign city, who chooses to use the alternative word קְדֵשָׁה. Perhaps this is carefully selected to reflect the speaker's desire to cater to the understanding of those who he is in conversation with, and therefore an instance of "code-switching". Code-switching, in this context, does not refer to an alternation between different languages in conversation where all other variables remain fixed, as a standard definition would suggest, particularly one that is outlined by Shana Poplack.[187] Instead, code-switching implies that Hirah, the speaker, has chosen to use an alternative word which he knows, as a result of his listener's personal geographical history, is likely to invoke an idea of the concept which he intends. This concept has been formalised less prevalently as "style-shifting", where a speaker's language remains the same but the features of their speech—formality, slang, register—alters depending upon the context in which they are speaking.[188] The use of the word זוֹנָה, to those living in Timnah, may lead them to wrongly direct Hirah as they have a misconceived idea of who he is describing. Alternatively, Hirah may have selected the use of the word קְדֵשָׁה in order to discourage any idea that his friend Judah would associate himself with a זוֹנָה as a result of the stigma associated with the term.

The Hebrew word זוֹנָה refers typically to a "common prostitute" and is used in reference not only to Tamar and other biblical women, but also in biblical books such as Leviticus (Leviticus 19:2) and Deuteronomy

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[186] This is reflected in the scarce use of "qedeshah"—three instances—in the Hebrew Bible when compared with ninety-three instances of "zonah".

[187] Shana Poplack, "Code switching: Linguistic," in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, eds. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Elsevier, 2001), 2062-2065.

[188] William Labov, "Field Methods of the Project on Linguistic Change and Variation," *Sociolinguistic Working Paper Number* 81 (1981): 2, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED250938.pdf.

(Deuteronomy 23:18) to warn against the dangers of involving oneself with those who engage in sex work. According to the Britannica definition, the alternative word קְדֵשָׁה refers to a woman with a special sacred status who plays some ritual role in temples alongside priests and midwives, the precise intricacies of which remain unclear.[189] As has been identified by scholars, the word itself has roots connected with the verb קָדַשׁ,"qadash", meaning "to be holy", heavily implying that the subject of the noun might have some attributes which are considered "holy" or alternatively they might act in a way which can be considered to be "sacred".[190] The etymology of the word itself therefore aligns with our very basic understanding of what the role of an individual engaged as a קְדֵשָׁה might have involved in ancient near eastern communities.

Scholarship which addresses this concept of קְדֵשָׁה in biblical texts and ancient Israel more broadly is scarce. When considering the specific case of Tamar, whose engagement in selling sex takes place only once, and not on temple grounds, Edward Lipiński claims that we cannot label her a "temple prostitute", as she does not fulfil the criteria.[191] This argument is convincing as it enlightens the fact that at no point in Tamar's story is it made plain that she seeks to engage in any ritual practices and, instead, Tamar trades sex for Judah's belongings only once and with an alternative motivation: Tamar has a genuine desire to become pregnant with Judah's child, not to sell her body for some other resource which she can further trade or use as a means of security. Despite the fact that Tamar's final goal is to become socially secure, arguably the motivation for a majority of individuals who engage in sex work, Tamar's situation is unique as social security is an objective which, in her view, will be achieved through bearing a child; therefore, the process required to enact her plan is to sell her body on one occasion and hope for impregnation by one particular man, her father-in-law.

Joan Westenholz claims that the idea of "temple prostitution" is likely to have originated in later misunderstandings of Canaanite religious practices. The term, meaning "holy one" is used in Hebrew for both men and women.[192] It is likely that the use of the term in the Hebrew Bible texts might not exactly mirror the original concept as understood in Canaanite contexts, but still, a conceptual connection with sacred temple practices remains for readers who are familiar with ancient texts. Westenholz goes on to suggest that the ancient authors intended to represent Tamar simply as a veiled, married woman with a specific Canaanite social role.[193] This position is also discussed by Michael Astour, who writes about the connection between veiled women—particularly those who are identified within texts as קְדֵשָׁה—and their

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[189] "Qedesha," Britannica, accessed 2nd May 2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/qedesha.
[190] David Glatt-Gilad, "Qedeshah," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion,* 2nd edition, ed. Adele Berlin (Oxford University Press, 2011), 596.
[191] Edward Lipiński, "Cult Prostitution and Passage Rites in the Biblical World," *The Biblical Annals* 60, no. 1 (2013): 26, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=660925.
[192] Joan Westenholz, "Tamar, Qĕdēšā, Qadištu, and Sacred Prostitution in Mesopotamia," *The Harvard Theological Review* 82, no. 3 (1989): 248, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1510077.
[193] Westenholz, 254.

marital status.[194] Both of these scholars suggest that women engaged as קְדֵשָׁה have high social status and therefore it is important to remember that our contemporary stereotypes around the English terms used above—"common prostitute" and "cult/temple prostitute"—do not necessarily reflect the perceptions that were intended with the words' usages in this ancient Israelite context. This understanding helps to destigmatise Tamar's actions and usefully encourages us to recall the wider context of Tamar's story in order to significantly reduce the impact that our contemporary viewpoints have on how we read her character.

Stephanie Lynn Budin advocates for a position which entirely opposes the concept of קְדֵשָׁה as a phenomenon in ancient Israel in her book *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity,* as she makes the claim that sacred prostitution is a literary construct, a position which she supports with the fact that archaeological evidence for "temple prostitution" being practiced in ancient Israel is lacking.[195] This is useful for my reading, as it highlights how the connection of these individuals with sexual services is baseless, and the phenomenon itself is likely to be highly fictionalised. Instead, the connection between קְדֵשָׁה and sexual services likely follows the English mistranslation of "temple *prostitute*" and a subsequent assumption that "prostitute" must be directly associated with our contemporary understanding of prostitution. A conceptual connection which I similarly seek to sever. Instead, it can be feasibly argued that the words קְדֵשָׁה and זוֹנָה should be considered almost synonymous, given that the conceptual difference remains undefined. With this conclusion, Budin's work to abandon an understanding of "temple prostitution" in ancient Israel is partly realised, as the conceptualisation becomes redundant if we consider it to be equivalent with the word זוֹנָה.[196] However, any extended discussion of the historicity of ancient Israelite "temple prostitution" in this chapter is outside the focus of my thesis.

The way that we translate these two words impacts our reading of Tamar's actions. Perhaps it is clear that both terms refer to the same action, but it remains the case that the usage of קְדֵשָׁה is unique and therefore there is a possibility that each is loaded differently. Although this can be considered true, it cannot be said that the connotations today are reflective of the connotations in antiquity. Therefore, to avoid implicating Tamar post-textually with unnecessary negative terms, I choose to translate both קְדֵשָׁה and זוֹנָה as "sex worker" in order to present her actions neutrally. The term "sex worker" was coined in 1978 by sex worker and activist Carol Leigh. Smith and Mac helpfully develop an understanding of "sex work", as they write that the term is used contemporarily to refer to a trading of sexual labour in return for a resource.[197] A consistent use of this term in translation of nouns used to label Tamar not only provides a consistency to

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[194] Michael Astour, "Tamar the Hierodule: An Essay in the Method of Vestigial Motifs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85, no. 2 (1966): 187, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3265124.
[195] Stephanie Lynn Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.
[196] Budin, *Sacred Prostitution,* 4.
[197] Molly Smith and Juno Mac, *Revolting Prostitutes: The Fight for Sex Workers' Rights* (Verso, 2018), 1.

my discussion but also frees Tamar from the negativity associated with the term "prostitution" and the confusion surrounding the details of temple prostitution. With these terms made clear, I turn to the story's portrayal of incest.

3.2.1 Incest

Not only does Tamar sleep with her father-in-law, but she tricks him in order to do so. As previously discussed, Engar outlines criteria which we can use to define a woman in the Hebrew Bible as a "trickster".[198] These are:

(1) women who understand the needs of their nation and family more so than any male counterpart;
(2) women who have a greater understanding of God and His purpose than their male counterparts;
(3) women who are not sexually passive, they determine when and with whom they will have sex with.[199]

Two aspects of this definition are present in Tamar's case, those being (1) and (3). No aspect of Tamar's plan integrates God and neither does the text discuss Tamar's relationship with God. However, Chan writes on the topic of female tricksters and argues that whilst we cannot claim that Tamar acted with a faith in God or a desire to please God any more than the men who surrounded her, neither can we claim that she was acting to further the line of Judah.[200] Instead, as is the view which I defend in this chapter, Tamar was acting out of a need to fulfil her own needs, in which the by-product is the heir of Judah.

Tamar recognises her need for social security and objects to the injustice of her being made to live as a widow, which subsequently encourages her to decide that she will have sex with her father-in-law. There is little evidence available that would allow us to make a judgement on whether Tamar's understanding of her situation is greater than her male counterpart, Judah, at this point in the narrative. However, later on, Judah claims that Tamar has been "more in the right than I" (Genesis 38:26), which suggests he may have knowingly acted in a way which was unjust and against levirate custom.[201] Further evidence of this is in Genesis 38:11, where Judah deliberately chooses not to marry Tamar to Shelah: "for he said: 'Lest he also die, like his brothers'.". In risking her life by tricking her father-in-law, Štefan Novotný suggests that Tamar claims what is her right and forces Judah to take responsibility for her.[202] This is a necessity for Tamar's social security, as Judah's prior decision to not allow Tamar to marry his youngest son has left her in an unprotected position. Judah's decision is widely considered in scholarship to be as a result of his fear that

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[198] Engar, "Women as Tricksters," 143.
[199] Criteria formalised by Jackson, "Patriarchal Narratives," 32.
[200] Chan, "The Ultimate Trickster," 95.
[201] וַיַּכֵּר יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר צָדְקָה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־עַל־כֵּן לֹא־נְתַתִּיהָ לְשֵׁלָה בְנִי וְלֹא־יָסַף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ׃
[202] Štefan Novotný, "Righteousness of Judah and Tamar: a problematic encounter," *Dialogo* 7, no. 1 (2020): 141, https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=918269.

his third son would also die, and this is supported by the aforementioned verse of the biblical narrative, Genesis 38:11. Judah banishes Tamar as she is considered a threat to Judah's only surviving son and, according to Aschkenasy, this is a cruel act which stands only to ensure his own blood-family does not become disgraced through maintaining close contact with Tamar.[203] With this reading, we see that Judah has a full understanding of the situation at hand and has acted with consideration for only himself. Therefore, without fulfilling the criteria for being regarded as a female trickster, Tamar's actions are read as making the most of her own ingenuity to make a situation where she is left unconsidered eventually favour her.

Sleeping with one's father-in-law, by modern standards, is certainly taboo; despite falling short of being legally judged "incest" today. In modern law, in-law relationships are not judged as being either incestuous or consequently illegal and it is explicitly noted that individuals must "know" some person to be their relation as a means of informing their consent.[204] Returning to the text, as mentioned in chapter two, and explicitly noted by Brenner, Leviticus 18 and 20 list prohibitions concerning sexual relations between family members.[205] Whilst sleeping with one's daughter is not prohibited, sleeping with one's daughter/father-in-law is listed, as "she is your son's wife; you shall not uncover her nakedness" (Leviticus 18:15).[206] The instructions for an eventuality where the son/husband dies, as is the case with Judah and Tamar, goes unmentioned, and so it is unclear whether it is considered incest for Judah to sleep with his widowed daughter-in-law.

Midrash and other Jewish texts shed light on this situation where the Bible neglects to discuss this grey area. Yevamot, found in the Mishnah, is best placed to fill these gaps as the text deals particularly with all aspects of levirate marriage. In Yevamot 34b:1, it is claimed that both Er and Onan engage in intercourse with Tamar in an "atypical manner".[207] The claim that both Er and Onan engage in atypical sexual practices maybe constitute a reason why both sons are displeasing to the LORD and subsequently killed. However, the implication of adopting such a reading is that Judah and Tamar have not committed incest as she has remained a virgin up until their encounter.

Beyond this, the biblical text only explicitly claims that Onan spills his seed during intercourse, as he is conscious that any child born from their relations would legally be an heir of his brother, not his own heir (Genesis 38:9). In the case of Er, Tamar's first husband, it is only said in the biblical text that he is killed

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[203] Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window,* 82.
[204] Sexual Offences Act, 1956, sec. 11.
[205] Brenner, "On Incest,"119-122.
[206] עֶרְוַת כַּלָּתְךָ לֹא תְגַלֶּה אֵשֶׁת בִּנְךָ הִוא לֹא תְגַלֶּה עֶרְוָתָהּ׃
[207] "The Gemara wonders about the proof from Tamar itself: But weren't there Er and Onan, her previous husbands, who presumably engaged in sexual intercourse with her? The Gemara responds: Er and Onan engaged in sexual intercourse in an atypical manner, i.e., anal intercourse, and therefore she was still a virgin" (Yevamot 34b:1).

by the LORD on account of his wickedness (Genesis 38:7). There is no textual reference to atypical sexual practices between Er and Tamar. An alternative reason for Er's life being cut short can subsequently be found in Midrash Tanchuma, Vayigash 9.[208] Here, it is claimed that in return for allowing his father, Jacob, to believe that his own son, Joseph, has been killed when in fact he has been sold into slavery (Genesis 37), Judah must also feel this pain, and it is *Judah* who is originally "wicked in the sight of the LORD" (Genesis 38:7). In the biblical text it is made clear that punishment of death is appropriate for a man who avoids intercourse, in the case of Onan, and so it would not be a huge leap to consider that the case for Judah's eldest son as well.

Here then, the story becomes one of two sons who avoid getting their wife pregnant and a father who refuses to provide protections for his daughter-in-law. The intact virginity of Tamar allows us to view the sexual act between father and daughter-in-law without the charge of incest introducing morality into the discussion, since the marriage of Tamar and any of Judah's sons is never consummated. To read the text as a story of incest, we misjudge Tamar's actions as wrongdoings. Judah is further absolved of any negative judgement because he is unaware of her identity: "When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a [sex worker], for she had covered her face." (Genesis 38:15). This allows us to develop a case against blaming Judah for committing incest with his daughter-in-law; however, he remains responsible for his actions.[209]

Judah's distaste for the very idea that he has slept with his daughter-in-law is revealed by the narrator as he "he did not lie with her again" (Genesis 38:26).[210] Alexander Abasili claims that with this, the narrator absolves Judah of any allegation that he did commit incest, as in his view, he slept with a sex worker.[211] However, with our modern perspective on incest being so uncompromising, it remains to be seen how we could condone or at least refrain from passing judgement, on the unsavoury sexual activity between Judah and Tamar. With that being said, it appears that incest between Judah and Tamar is not treated as a major theme to be concerned with, either in ancient Midrash or contemporary scholarship, as a result of the lack of familial closeness of the two actors and the unusual circumstances: trickery and non-consummation of marriage. Ultimately, we should consider Tamar's tricking of her father-in-law to be an act of desperation which is deserving of our consideration in so far as she risks her life and security to commit an act of incestuous survival sex. I will next turn to analysing the events that lead to incest being a desperate necessity.

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[208] לְפִי שֶׁהָיָה יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ סָבוּר שֶׁיְּהוּדָה הָרַג אֶת יוֹסֵף בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁהֵבִיאוּ לוֹ אֶת הַכְּתֹנֶת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיַּכִּירָהּ וַיֹּאמֶר כְּתֹנֶת בְּנִי חַיָּה רָעָה אֲכָלָתְהוּ

[209] Of note here is the ancient Greek Myth of *Oedipus, King of Thebes* who despite unknowingly killing his father and marrying his mother, remains disgusted upon learning that he has done so. So much so that he blinds himself.

[210] וַיִּכַּר יְהוּדָה וַיֹּאמֶר צָדְקָה מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־עַל־כֵּן לֹא־נְתַתִּיהָ לְשֵׁלָה בְנִי וְלֹא־יָסַף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ׃

[211] Alexander Abasili, "Genesis 38: The Search for Progeny and Heir," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 25, no. 2 (2011): 286, https://doi.org/10.1080/09018328.2011.608545.

3.2.2 Survival Sex

Prior to Judah's discovery of Tamar's plan, with her display of his cord, signet and staff in Genesis 38:25, we learn of Judah's demand that she should be brought out and burned for the pregnancy caused by her "whoredom". This provides us with an insight into the risk to which Tamar exposes herself in the case she is discovered at any point in her plan. Clearly, the security which bearing a child fathered by her father-in-law would provide her is far more desirable than her current reality as she is willing to risk her life to attain it; this provides an idea of quite how unpleasant her situation is living as a widow with her father. David Zucker and Moshe Reiss identify Judah's reaction that Tamar should be burned as extreme. The typical punishment for adultery at this time, according to Zucker and Reiss, would be stoning.[212] Interestingly, in the Book of Jubilees, sexual relations with one's daughter-in-law is identified as punishable by burning (Jubilees 41:26).[213] Jubilees, being written some time after Book of Genesis*,* could be said to be responding to the Tamar narrative, and therefore it is likely that the authors of Jubilees were aware of Tamar and Judah's story. Knowledge of this apocryphal text helps to develop our contemporary reading, as we are able to appreciate the foreshadowing present in the text following the harsh punishment proposed by Judah: Judah's punishment does not align with Tamar committing adultery but with his own sexual relations with his daughter-in-law.

A point which is worth raising is the gulf of difference between Tamar's female experience as a widow and Judah's male experience as a widower following the death of his wife in Genesis 38:12. Judah is granted a period of mourning, does not leave his home to return to his parents, and is in a position to support himself. This emphasises the idea that men are autonomous whilst women are commodities owned by men and therefore it is no coincidence that commentaries on widows in the Hebrew Bible, such as those by Otwell and Frick, focus so heavily of female experiences as it is their lives that change immeasurably once they no longer have a husband to support them.[214] Therefore, whilst living without social protection and with the pejorative label of "widow". Tamar's decision to become pregnant would provide her lasting security but only by the one man who knows he should already be supporting her. Cecilia Wassen identifies that in the end, when Tamar's plan becomes clear, the reader is still not explicitly encouraged to see Judah as the perpetrator who has left Tamar in a position where she is required to act with deception.[215] Instead, Judah

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[212] David Zucker and Reiss Moshe, "Righting and Rewriting Genesis 38: Tamar and Judah in the Pseudepigrapha," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 4 (2015): 196, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107915608592.

[213] The Book of Jubilees is an early Jewish text which seeks to clarify and, in some cases, entirely reorganise Pentateuchal laws. The book, having developed stature amongst rabbinic circles, remained a heavily referenced text during revising processes in the development of the Torah's legal material.

[214] See John Otwell, *And Sarah Laughed,* and Frank Frick, "Widows in the Hebrew Bible," 139-151 for extended discussions on the experience of female widows in ancient Israel.

[215] Cecilia Wassén, "The Story of Judah and Tamar in the Eyes of the Earliest Interpreters," *Literature and*

himself acknowledges that he has acted unrighteously in comparison with Tamar and therefore he himself shoulders blame, as opposed to actively being targeted for his punishable actions—or inaction as the case may be. Judah is by no means presented a victim, but equally it is rarely a topic of discussion in scholarship that he has mistreated Tamar to such a point of desperation.

Tamar's plan is specifically concocted to involve Judah because sex with any other man would see her killed—as above—on the grounds of adultery. Impregnation by her father-in-law holds the key to her survival as it ensures that she will be taken back into Judah's house given his new obligation of care. The plan is not without risk as Tamar places her faith in a veil which she wears over her head and under which she hopes to remain disguised. The changing of clothes allows Tamar to become who she wants to be, and to Judah she appears to be a sex worker (Genesis 38:15). Rather than selling sex in return for money, or even the kid which Judah promises her in Genesis 38:17, Tamar's only interest is in becoming pregnant. Nicholson notes that Tamar risks not becoming pregnant, because her plan involves a single encounter and because Tamar also cannot be sure that she is able to bear children.[216] This reading usefully fills the gaps left by the narrator of the text and imparts knowledge of the cruel reality that Tamar's plan could so easily go awry. The risks associated with Tamar's plan continue to mount not only because of the immediate danger of discovery, but the prolonged threat that she may be left to live in her father's house indefinitely if she does not become pregnant.

Therefore, Tamar's plan should be regarded as primarily a case of survival sex, where sex and providing Judah's progeny ensures her secure future. Abasili reads the text as a whole as primarily concerned with the search for offspring and this is displayed as all aspects of the story build up to one final passage where Tamar gives birth to twins, fathered by her father-in-law but considered the legitimate sons of Er.[217] The birth of these twins is unusual, as an arm appears from the birth canal and is tied with a crimson cord; however, the child entirely born first is the second of the twins. This appears atypical, yet John Makujina writes about the birth of twins in the Bible with the medical understanding of today and concedes that whilst rare, and a possibly fatal complication, the entanglement of twins in this way during birth is not entirely impossible.[218] Therefore, the text should not be considered an entire work of fiction based on proposed inaccuracies; however, neither is the text a work of historical work merely because the atypical birthing of twins is a physical possibility.

Theology 8, no. 4 (1994): 356, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23924702.
[216] Nicholson, "Playing the Whore," 59.
[217] Abasili, "Progeny and Heir," 286.
[218] John Makujina, "'Behold, there were twins in her womb' (Gen. 25:24-26; 38:27-30): Medical Science and the Twin Births in Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (2017): 51, https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.29427.

The text does not go into detail of how much support Judah provides Tamar with following the birth of their twins; however, with his admission that she has been "more right than I" in Genesis 38:26, readers may feel optimistic that Judah continues along this path of righteousness after Tamar has taught him this lesson. Looking at the original text, Judah is quoted as claiming that Tamar has been "more righteous" (צָדְקָה).[219] This verb comes from the Hebrew root צָדַק, associated with moral righteousness, "normal" in terms of what something should weigh or measure, the justness of a person, and finally, as identified by Christine Hayes, "guiltlessness or acquittal of a charge of wrongdoing".[220] This final definition is most applicable when it comes to the righteousness of Tamar, as in determining her being of good moral character, Judah establishes her as guiltless and Tamar is acquitted of the charge of harlotry.

Ultimately, Tamar's plan requires bravery which speaks for the desperation which she must feel to rewrite her position in society. Tamar's courage allows her to fulfil her ploy to resist the position which she has been placed in and promise her and her children a life where they are secure and valued.

3.3 Rahab (Joshua 2-6)

Rahab is a Canaanite woman living in Jericho who we first become aware of in Joshua 2, where she is immediately labelled a זוֹנָה, "zonah". Rahab's story is found within a broader text about Joshua, Moses' assistant, following Moses' death. Joshua is directed to succeed Moses and become Israel's military leader in Joshua 1. Joshua sends two spies to Jericho to assess their military strength and gather intelligence useful to conquer the land. It is here that they "entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there" (Joshua 2:1). Whilst the men spent the night with Rahab, it is not discussed within the text whether they used Rahab's services as a sex worker during their stay. One certainty is that Rahab does not bear a child or become a mother. Whilst this is true in the biblical text, a discussion of Rahab's presence within the text naturally moves my discussion beyond women who use their bodies to secure financial or social security, and towards a broader discussion of women who after in engaging in anomalous sexual practices secure a legacy for themselves which reaches further beyond just the text itself.

3.3.1 Concealing Spies

Two Israelite men find themselves in the home of a Canaanite woman.[221] The identification of Rahab as a sex worker and the broader implications of her home as a space to sleep is not further expanded upon in the

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[219] This adverbial phrase is in fact a superlative – translating to "more righteous than me".
[220] Christine Hayes, "The Midrashic Career of the Confession of Judah (Genesis XXXVIII 26), Part I: The Extra-Canonical Texts, Targums and Other Versions," *Vetus Testamentum* 45, no. 1 (1995): 65, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1535185.
[221] My identification of the spies as Israelites follows on from the biblical text in translation: "The king of Jericho was told, "Some men have come here tonight, Israelites, to spy out the country"" (Joshua 2:2).

text. Charles writes that the environment is unique as it leads readers to believe, as a result of the connotations of women labelled זוֹנָה, that the two men enjoy whatever service it is that Rahab is willing to provide.[222] However, Charles also notes that the Hebrew word זוֹנָה is sometimes reclaimed from its negative connotations, through an association with the root word זוּן, a verb "to feed" and used interchangeably with the duties of innkeeping/hosting.[223] Baskin affords attention to this idea, explaining that some rabbis sought to redeem Rahab from association with negative sexual promiscuity, and therefore chose to portray her as an innkeeper.[224] This may be a reflection of Rahab's good deeds, and evidence of a view held by rabbis that being righteous and a sexually promiscuous woman are mutually exclusive. Ekaterina Kozlova argues that in the ancient world, inns and brothels are identified as centres for military espionage. [225] This lessens the extent to which we regard Rahab's story as unique and makes sense of why two Israelite military men may be sleeping under her roof.

Alternatively, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*,* an Aramaic translation of the Torah, translates זוֹנָה as "innkeeper", rather than the more common translation at the time of "harlot" or later on, "prostitute".[226] This displays the interchangeable nature of translating "innkeeping" and "harlotry" at a time closer to when the text was written and indicates that the connotations of the two words were more similar then than they are today. Therefore, to translate Rahab as an innkeeper in order to afford her some virtue today would not serve the same effective purpose closer to the time of writing. Neither occupation is free of accusations of sexual promiscuity and therefore we must be committed to an image of Rahab as a sex worker in the biblical text.

It remains undetermined whether the two Israelite spies do sleep with Rahab. However, Rahab certainly provides them with a secure place to hide away from the King of Jericho and his army. When asked whether the men who had been seen going into Rahab's house were still there, she "took the two men and hid them. Then she said, 'True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from. And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them.'" (Joshua 2:4-5).[227] Rahab's motivation for concealing the spies remains unmentioned in the text; however, she is likely to be aware that a discovery of her plot would result in some harsh punishment from the King of Jericho. Therefore, we can propose that Rahab feels deeply compelled to help the men of Israel given she is willing to put her freedom or possibly even her life at risk.

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[222] Charles, "A Righteous Whore," 207.
[223] Charles, 207.
[224] Baskin, "Rabbinic Transformations," 147.
[225] Ekaterina Kozlova, "What is in a Name? Rahab, the Canaanite, and the Rhetoric of Liberation in the Hebrew Bible," *Open Theology* 6 (2020): 576, https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0106.
[226] Baskin, "Rabbinic Transformations," 150.
[227] וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה אֶת־שְׁנֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים וַתִּצְפְּנֶנּוּ וַתֹּאמֶר ו כֵּן בָּאוּ אֵלַי הָאֲנָשִׁים וְלֹא יָדַעְתִּי מֵאַיִן הֵמָּה׃
וַיְהִי הַשַּׁעַר לִסְגֹּור בַּחֹשֶׁךְ וְהָאֲנָשִׁים יָצָאוּ לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אָנָה הָלְכוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים רִדְפוּ מַהֵר אַחֲרֵיהֶם כִּי תַשִּׂיגוּם׃

3.3.2 God's Returned Protection

Rahab hides the two men on the roof whilst the pursuers leave Jericho to search for them (Joshua 2:6).[228] Rahab explains that news of the Israelite God has made its way to Jericho, making the fall of Jericho increasingly unavoidable in her eyes, as she acknowledges and believes in the strength of "The LORD, your God" (Joshua 2:11).[229] With my reading, it becomes clear that Rahab takes the risk to protect the spies to secure her own long-term future protection. Rahab is rewarded by the Israelite men as they leave her home: they promise that they will ensure Rahab's house and those inside it will be protected upon their hostile return to Jericho. Rahab ties a crimson cord in her window to signal her location, and the men leave.

The story of Rahab serves as a reminder of the supremacy of God to meaningfully extend His influence across all communities and protect those who recognise Him. Rahab, a woman who is not born into an Israelite community and engages in a profession which sees her stray from the Israelite ideal for women, still recognises the works of the LORD and is a positive influence across the text for the ancient Israelites. In choosing the side of the Israelites, Rahab becomes a traitor to her own people and willingly supports the bombardment of Jericho. This fact remains to be explored widely in scholarship, yet is a point which is central to my exploration of Rahab's character. Susanne Scholz suggests that Rahab ought to be considered a traitor given that she easily submits to those who seek to overrun her town; subsequently reading against the typical Christian view that she is a righteous convert.[230] Scholz likens the spies and wider Israelite population who intend to preside over Jericho as colonisers: a modern term and way of interpreting the text.[231] Relating Rahab's story to colonising should be approached with similar caution to discussing Hagar's case in light of modern day slavery. Both are useful to equip us with an understanding of these women's experiences, yet we should be careful not to over-interpret the original texts with our contemporary terminology, so as not to misinform our conclusions. The cooperation of Rahab with the spies may initially appear traitorous; however, considered alongside the promise that they will protect Rahab and her family, perhaps Rahab does what she needs to do to survive, taking little account of the repercussions outside of those in her inner circle. Still, the knowledge of the Israelite God which Rahab is considered to have and her continued path of righteousness detailed in Christian books—particularly in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25—indicates some favour for the enemies of her hometown. Therefore, the most plausible reading is that Rahab may have helped the spies to succeed in their mission, despite the fact that being a traitor and earning immediate protection of her life were by-products of this activity.

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[228] וְהַיא הֶעֱלָתם הַגָּגָה וַתִּטְמְנֵם בְּפִשְׁתֵּי הָעֵץ הָעֲרֻכוֹת לָהּ עַל־הַגָּג׃

[229] וַנִּשְׁמַע וַיִּמַּס לְבָבֵנוּ וְלֹא־קָמָה עוֹד רֽוּחַ בְּאִישׁ מִפְּנֵיכֶם כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת׃

[230] Susanne Scholz, "Convert, Prostitute, or Traitor? Rahab as the Anti-Matriarch in Contemporary Biblical Interpretations," in *In the Arms of Biblical Women*, ed. John T. Greene and Mishael M. Caspi (Gorgias Press LLC, 2013), 169.

[231] Scholz, 169.

Robert Alter makes a persuasive case about Rahab's speech in the text and shows how a number of her statements allude to other books of the Bible.[232] Most notably, in Joshua 2:9, Rahab explains "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you". This reflects Exodus 15:15-16: "All the inhabitants of Canaan melted away / Terror and dread fell upon them".[233] This chapter of Exodus, being the Song of Moses, praises the LORD for His strength in battle and escape from the armies of another nation, and the allusion to this in Rahab's own speech to the Israelite spies would be recognised by the text's Israelite audience at the time and present Rahab as a God-fearing woman despite being non-Israelite. For this reason, Rahab is heralded as a misguided woman who finds faith and fits into the common literary trope of a "hooker with a heart of gold".

Rahab's story is recalled in various texts following her appearance in the canon, as well as her story including aspects of other Biblical texts. This includes in Midrash Megillah 15a:7*,* where Rahab is named as one of the four most beautiful women in the world, along with Sarah, Abigail and Esther. Recognising Rahab in this way allows us to understand how ancient readers deemed Rahab a worthy convert despite her history as a sex worker, as she is held in high regard alongside other important female figures. Peter Hawkins writes about Rahab in literature outside of the Bible, taking account of various writers' recycling of her character, including Dante and John Chrysostom, with the former presenting Rahab with high praise: "the redeemed soul".[234] This overview of the recurrence of Rahab in texts outside of the Bible usefully presents Rahab as a key figure, whose importance extends beyond the book which she is initially found in. Rahab is also adopted into the Christian text, the New Testament, following her reception as an individual who ultimately aids the Israelite men and in doing so becomes a model woman of good faith (Hebrews 11:31). The praise directed towards Rahab in the New Testament extrapolates her continued faith in the Israelite God and demonstrates the favour which she finds in the eyes of the narrators of several Christian texts. I will finally go on to discuss the implications of this.

3.4 The Genealogy of Jesus

Tamar and Rahab are both named in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1). They are two of four women—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba—listed in an important genealogical line beginning with Abraham, mentioning King David, and ending with Jesus. It might be said that these four women are somewhat unlikely additions, when frankly women could remain redacted from the line entirely. This raises the question of why these women are selected, and whether there is anything that they have in common.

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[232] Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (Basic Books, 1992), 122.

[233] אָז נִבְהֲלוּ אַלּוּפֵי אֱדוֹם אֵילֵי מוֹאָב יֹאחֲזֵמוֹ רָעַד נָמֹגוּ כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי כְנָעַן׃
תִּפֹּל עֲלֵיהֶם אֵימָתָה וָפַחַד בִּגְדֹל זְרוֹעֲךָ יִדְמּוּ כָּאָבֶן עַד־יַעֲבֹר עַמְּךָ יְהוָה עַד־יַעֲבֹר עַם־זוּ קָנִיתָ׃

[234] Peter Hawkins, "Dante's Rahab," *MLN* 124, no. 5 (2009): S73, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40606225.

In Matthew 1:5, Rahab is said to have born a son, Boaz, to Salmon. In the text, Salmon's ethnicity and identity are not explored. However, the recurrence of Rahab's character in the New Testament and the focus on her having a child continues to highlight her importance within the text as a woman with the capacity to bear a child. Whilst it is unknown whether the father of her child is an Israelite man, Rahab remains originally a geographical outsider to the nation, even if she does make promises to, and become an ally of, the Israelite spies. Whether Rahab becomes culturally Israelite is not established, but the certainty with which we can identify her as non-Israelite in her initial story maintains the importance of including her in this discussion.

Irene Nowell presents the idea that the four named women serve as representatives of all women in Jesus' genealogy.[235] Whilst this is a likely case, it remains to be seen why these four women in particular are selected, and whether there is some similar thread between them all. Jane Schaberg identifies that Tamar, Rahab and Ruth are all women who "employ irregular means outside of marriage to preserve the safety of their households".[236] This identification supports the basis of my thesis as I seek to identify non-Israelite women as taking risks in order to support their families and ultimately become legacy makers. The legacy of these named women in particular is confirmed as they are recognised beyond the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament. Even more impressive than this, Rahab and Tamar, two women who are viewed with suspicion as they threaten the patriarchal society which they exist in because of their unorthodox actions, are recognised as integral players in the eventual birth of the Christian saviour, Jesus Christ.

3.5 Conclusion

The story of Tamar is one of determination born out of desperation. In this chapter I have evaluated Tamar's social position upon the death of her husband and shown how her father-in-law's refusal to abide by levirate marriage customs, demanding instead that she live as a widow, leaves Tamar in a precarious position where she is without social protection and does not enjoy the autonomy required to secure herself a new husband. The injustice which Judah treats Tamar with is emphasised in my reading, as I use existing scholarship to support the idea that Judah should have provided Tamar with the opportunity to marry his youngest son. Further to this, I have explored the position of widows in an ancient biblical setting and thereby demonstrated that Judah's decision to leave Tamar to live as a widow in her father's house is inexplicable and unashamedly cruel.

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[235] Irene Nowell, "Jesus' Great-Grandmothers: Matthew's Four and More," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2008): 2, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43726182.
[236] Jane Schaberg, "Feminist Interpretations of the Infancy Narrative of Matthew," *Journal of the Feminist Studies in Religion* 13, no.1 (1997): 39, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002297.

Tamar's choice to trick her father-in-law to sleep with her does not appear to carry huge consequences in its textual representation. However, within the context of other Jewish texts and an understanding of punishments and customs in antiquity, I have presented Tamar as taking a huge risk where, should she be discovered at any point, she could face fatal consequences. Tamar's disguise is effective as Judah does not recognise her and instead identifies her as a sex worker - a term which I have evaluated in detail in this chapter. Consequently, we understand Tamar's choice to sell her body for a commodity as survival sex, where she uses her ingenuity to trick her father-in-law and secure lifelong protection from him where he has otherwise failed. The one-time nature of Tamar's plan and the preparation which Tamar has afforded her plot allows us, as modern readers, to identify Tamar as engaging in sex work, rather than being labelled a recurrently trading prostitute or temple prostitute.

Despite Tamar making herself vulnerable by knowingly committing incest, this only makes the significance of her situation all the more obvious as it highlights her desperation to change her future. I have explored why Judah and Tamar's sexual relations are not incest of the first degree and offered reasons for why neither party should be considered guilty of the charge of incest - Judah is not aware that he is sleeping with his daughter-in-law, and Tamar is left without a reasonable alternative. To trick her father-in-law and obtain progeny through him is to secure her future and end her story with a legacy of personal righteousness and significantly, to continue Judah's lineage. A consequential discussion of the morality responsibility of incest is a by-product of its presence in the text, but instead I have chosen to focus this chapter on the circumstances which have led Tamar to act in the way that she does and what this reveals about her ill-treatment by others. This allowed me to engage in a discussion of survival sex and adequately explain the risks which women must take to secure their future.

I introduced Rahab into this chapter as another righteous woman who engages in sex work in Joshua 2. Rahab is consistently described as a prostitute in the text, as Joshua's spies spend the night with her in Jericho, yet her motivation for protecting the spies from the King remains undetermined outside of feeling persuaded by the LORD's power (Joshua 2: 9-11). With my reading, I have considered Rahab to be a non-Israelite woman who has an understanding of and an affinity to the Israelite God and consequently seeks to support the Israelite people. The benefit to this, relative to my work, is that she is ultimately a righteous woman who is comparable to Tamar's sex worker-trickster persona.

Not only is Rahab's occupation hugely risky in the ancient world but concealing spies from her own King carries huge consequences should she be discovered. I have argued that Rahab feels strongly moved by the works of the LORD, that she has heard of and protects His people, so consequently is favourably protected when the Israelite men take over Jericho. A key component of my reading is that Rahab serves as an example

to women that despite their family history or engagement in what are considered “unrighteous acts”, God will protect them. Ultimately, this is the legacy of Rahab beyond the text: a righteous woman who in return receives the protection and the respect of the Israelite people.

The discussion of Tamar and Rahab culminates in one final section where I have addressed the significance of the naming of both women in the genealogy of Jesus. Two women who engage in sex work are deemed to be noteworthy as they appear in an exclusive list which includes only four women in total. The risk-taking that these women take for their own survival is ultimately celebrated in the biblical text and not only do both women secure themselves lifelong social security, but they also go on to be remembered with a positive legacy long beyond each of their deaths. This goes some way towards celebrating women who engage in sex work and suggesting that sex work and righteousness are not mutually exclusive. This unearths fertile ground for further research, as the women that I have discussed do not only exist as static characters within the Hebrew Bible but develop textual afterlives both in the Christian canon and in paracanonical Jewish texts. I have explored the latter somewhat throughout this thesis; however, a further examination of the replication of the Hebrew Bible’s female characters in later Christian texts is an area for future study.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have analysed three female characters and proposed, with their stories as my evidence, that there is a consistent and prominent theme where non-Israelite women take risks to secure their future. As a secondary point to this, each of the women take risks which directly involve childbearing and therefore contribute to their legacy both within their families and more widely in the texts. Noticing this has allowed me to develop the core structure of my thesis and answer the main question which I have been considering: Why do non-Israelite women in the Hebrew Bible risk their lives to bear children?

These stories are examples of ancient literary texts and in my introduction at the beginning of this thesis I made it clear that certain questions about the texts may remain unanswered. The most crucial question, relative to the topic of my thesis, is "why were these stories written?" Considering the particular angle with which I have approached these texts, I may not have answered this question in its entirety, but I have gone some way towards understanding why these women's stories in particular were originally written and told. Certainly, these stories were not written to openly praise women, and it is not a coincidence that each of the women in my investigation is foreign to the land of ancient Israel. At the beginning of my thesis, I acknowledged that only Hagar, of the three women that I discussed, is explicitly named in the biblical text as non-Israelite. Of the other three women, I made the argument that with use of Midrashic texts and later context from other biblical texts, perhaps from the New Testament, there was a case to be made that these women were non-Israelite. I made the further case that the term "Israelite" is a widely accepted definition within scholarship, which is sufficient to group a society of people who worshipped the same God and had a shared identity. In presenting each woman as having an individually challenging route to motherhood where morals are ambiguous, Israel is exhibited as being comparatively superior to the nations around it. It is where I reclaim the actions of biblical women and read them as being human, that we are able to recognise that they are important within the texts, so as to pick up where the men within texts and the wider patriarchy let them down. In this thesis I have recognised and celebrated the strength of each woman when faced with adversity and therefore created a body of work which does not neglect the female experience but names women as legacy-makers, when they have not always been read that way previously.

I began my investigation with Hagar, the first in a standard chronological reading of the Bible. Hagar's story could have been written as a means to dissociate her son, Ishmael, from Abraham's Israelite lineage. However, with a tilt in perspective and a focus on aspects of the story which typically go unnoticed, my reading allows us to view Hagar as not only being thrust into motherhood unwillingly, but a woman who, under these circumstances, goes on to consider her maternal responsibilities above her own safety at times. Hagar is a victim of sexual abuse and returns to her abusers following a promise made by God that her unborn child will live freely, in contrast to her personal experience of slavery. This decision could have

fatal consequences for Hagar; however, she places her faith in God that her child's future will not be as negative as her current reality, and is thus encouraged to return to Sarah and Abraham. Still, it is this risky choice which she makes between wandering freely, yet alone, and placing her faith in God's promise which indicates that Hagar does not have the full capacity to act as a free agent to forge a life for herself and is instead required to rely on others for her security. Ultimately, bearing Abraham's progeny keeps her protected until she is eventually deemed a threat by Sarah and cast out into the wilderness. Hagar's continued strength and determination to build a life for herself and Ishmael leads her to take inevitable risks which eventually pay off, as at the end of her story she is in a position to establish a life away from abuse, where her son even marries an Egyptian woman, bringing her story full circle. This builds Hagar's conventional legacy as a strong matriarch of hers and Ishmael's bloodline, which consequently has implications for female readers: Hagar is textually presented as not only developing her social legacy, but also as theologically important as the first woman to name God. Analysing this story in my thesis has allowed me to read Hagar as a resilient woman who, despite having limited capacity in which she is able to act, makes decisions which all have some impact on the peaceful life which she eventually creates for herself and her son.

Next I examined the story of Lot's daughters, which is typically approached in other scholarly literature from the contemporary perspective that incest, under any circumstances, is abhorrent and inexplicable. With Lot and his daughters settling in the sinful city Sodom, and being secondary to the main genealogical line of Abraham, the initial disgust surrounding their story works to criticise Israel's neighbours Moab and Ammon. However, I contextualised the story with the opening scenes of Genesis 19, where Lot's home is surrounded by an angry mob, to whom he offers his young daughters to be gang raped, in an attempt to placate the men and protect his male guests. This context places the daughters in an atypical relationship to their father, who has shown no concern for their wellbeing and thus has failed as a father. Alongside this, I explored trauma theory and presented the argument that the decision made by Lot's daughters to concoct a plan which would see them impregnated by their unwilling father was in response to their trauma related to the aforementioned earlier scenes and the earlier loss of their mother. With this, I bring the conversation away from incest and instead of focusing on their actions, I question what leads to them being in a position where they are left to choose between existing alone in the world with only each other and their father, or to have sex with their father to repopulate the earth. With this perspective, the discussion of agency is reintroduced, and we can understand the difficult position which Lot's daughters are placed in, as their father has proven himself to be unreliable in a crisis and their ability to handle the situation is limited. The legacy of Lot and his daughters is not typically positive post-textually, given the story's unpalatable topics, but within the text they go on to bear progeny which repopulates their community following its annihilation. However, with my reading, Lot's daughters as victims of their environment who are led to choose drastic measures in order to repopulate the earth (or at least their territory). Their legacy is found in how they work

with self-interest in order to guarantee that their father continues to protect them in society, once he is also the father of their children and as directly impacting the bloodline of David and Jesus: making them not only two legacy-makers within the pages of the text but also for Christians today.

With my final chapter I primarily evaluate Tamar and her relationship with Judah, her father-in-law. Similarly to the case of Lot's daughters, Tamar's story is often shrouded with taboo as incest is a key theme of the story; however, despite the objective disgust which we associate with incest, my reading of Tamar's story instead assesses the disregard which Judah has for her social security following the death of his two sons, and the overall righteousness of Tamar's attempt to right the wrongs which have been done unto her. Again, the shocking nature of Tamar's choice to trick and have sex with her father-in-law works to illuminate our understanding Tamar as being forced into a position where her freedom to make decisions is severely limited and she is left with no other reasonable option outside of accepting her fate as a widow in her father's home. Ultimately, it is bearing Judah's child(ren) following a one-time, desperate act of sex-work which allows Tamar to re-enter society and enjoy the protections which come with having a husband, despite the death of her first two husbands, and Judah's failure to remarry her.

In my third chapter I incorporated a section devoted to Rahab's story. Rahab's story involves themes similar to Tamar's, such as deception and sex-work. However, this is not the only reason for her inclusion in my thesis. Both Tamar and Rahab are listed in Jesus' genealogy, and so before analysing this interesting inclusion, it was important to provide some context on Rahab and her story in Joshua 2. I read against the typical view of Rahab as a "hooker with a heart of gold" and instead choose to read Rahab as a sex worker who recognises that her own people will be annihilated by the military forces of the Israelite God, and makes the difficult choice to betray her people in order to save her immediate family. Rahab, importantly, does not bear a child; however, she promotes her own legacy as she negotiates with the spies to grant her and her family protection when the rest of her city is under siege in the future. For this, she is remembered in Christian texts as a righteous woman and more importantly, both Tamar and Rahab are listed in Jesus' genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew. The representation of only four women in Jesus' genealogy heightens the significance of both Tamar and Rahab being included and the replication of their story in religious texts builds their textual legacies. Clearly, the inclusion of each of their stories in the biblical canon is intended to have some positive impact on the overall image of ancient Israel. This is outside the scope of this thesis and, instead, I focus on presenting each woman as having an individually positive impact for themselves and their own families, free from the patriarchal constraints of ancient Israelite society.

As was explained at the beginning of this thesis, the strict word limit which I find myself working to has added some limitations to the breadth of analysis which I have been able to engage with. If I had a longer word count, I could have explored the stories of other women who combine risk with motherhood, such as

Bathsheba and Ruth. Both Bathsheba and Ruth are the other women in Matthew's genealogy and also women associated with minority ethnicity: Ruth is a Moabite and Bathsheba is the wife of a Hittite. An examination of these few factors, in more depth, may allow me to derive more specific conclusions regarding the status of non-Israelite women in ancient Israel. It is also worth noting that their ethnicity may be received differently in first century Judea than the Hebrew Bible, where my current research is focused. My thesis has already begun an expansion on this current field of research, as the closing stages of my third chapter covered the topic of female characters in the New Testament, particularly those whose stories we first find in the Hebrew Bible. My research has shown that attention to the material circumstances of women's decision-making about motherhood illuminates both the depth of their subjugation to the male social norms of the dominant culture, and the extent of their bravery in undergoing pregnancy and childbirth in extremely difficult circumstances. This bears exploring more widely. The original intended purpose of these texts as religious documents or cultural snapshots continues to interest me, and even if the original writers and readers understood these narratives as cautionary tales, it is clear with my reading that modern readers can take some inspiration from the characters, and we might hope that the same was true of women hearing these stories in the ancient world. Crucially, this thesis has provided a useful contextual background on mothers taking control—to the greatest extent of their capabilities—of their family's future, which usefully allows me to approach future works on the same women from this starting point.

Returning to the original question, it is imperative to clarify how each of the three primary characters in this thesis both risk their lives and use childbearing as a means of security. Hagar goes back to her house of slavery and eventually, once her services are no longer required, begins a new life with her son back in her home country, where she is more than just the mother of Abraham's son. Lot's daughters are living in a barren world where the taboo of incest remains so strong that they are required to get their father drunk before having sex with him. Still, they succeed, and their world continues as a result of their plan. Finally, Tamar's plan, should she be discovered, would likely result in her death at the hands of her father-in-law, but instead, bearing his child allows her to enjoy his protections and be considered righteous. Each of these individual perspectives on each story are contrary to prevalent views, yet it is with my reading of each woman as a mother who takes risks for the primary reason of survival, we are able to understand how circumstances are manufactured out of women's control, leaving the only option as one that is against some social norm. Reading these texts from an androcentric perspective warns of the dangers of women, particularly those foreign to ancient Israel. Instead of this, with my thesis, I have read women as initially living their lives as the men around them intend, until we provide fair recognition to their risk-taking and how they place themselves in harm's way for the good of their family – usually harms involving their personal safety. The ultimate conclusion of my thesis, and the statement which is rarely proclaimed in other scholarly literature, is that Hagar, Lot's daughters, Tamar and Rahab are legacy makers, in their own

individual respects. An acceptance of this, one can hope, will go a long way to furthering the appreciation of each woman and their individual trials to motherhood.

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