

# **Family and Identity in the book of Judges**

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## **Summary**

The importance of the family in ancient Near Eastern society is so frequently recognized that it has become a truism. It is therefore surprising that in a work of identity-making such as the Bible, the influence of family on the texts' formation has been under studied. Such an omission may be because the discussion on family in the Bible has largely concentrated upon reconstructing day-to-day life as background to our reading. Scholars have not seen family loyalty as an essential component in the narratives' meaningfulness.

In my dissertation, I examine family and identity in the Book of Judges. I argue that the family is the dominant locus of identity for people throughout the first millennium BCE and that Judges' social communication depends upon acknowledging this dynamic. The meaning of the local folklore gathered together in Judges relies upon an appreciation of the values held by the society from which it comes and distinguishes this core material from the editorial framework. This perspectival dichotomy also raises questions about the book's redactional methodology.

Identity is revealed through socio-relational dynamics; hence, my thesis takes a social-scientific approach to the texts. Following an introduction, the first chapter discusses family and identity with particular reference to the localized structures of first-millennium BCE Palestine. The next four chapters present texts from Judges in which I employ four socio-anthropological theories. I begin with the tale of Jael and Sisera in Judg 4 and 5, to which I apply the concept of social space. I then compare the stories of Abimelech in Judg 9 and Jephthah in Judg 11 in light of ascribed social status. The wedding of Samson in Judg 14 forms the third study for which endogamy and the socio-economic autonomy of the household are relevant theories and I end by discussing hospitality and social distance in the eventful journey of the Levite in Judg 19. I conclude that the 'nationalizing' of these folktales by the editorial frame must nevertheless respect their familial perspective to maximize the success of Israel's identity-making.



## Contents

Preface	7
Introduction	9
1. Family and Identity	23
2. Sisera and Jael	43
3. Abimelech and Jephthah	64
4. Samson and the Timnites	88
5. The Levite and Gibeah	112
Conclusions	141
Bibliography	151



## **Preface**

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Degree Committee of the Faculty of Divinity.



## Introduction

Where does Jael think she is from? How important is Gilead to Jephthah's identity? Does Samson accept or resist the culture of the Philistines? The book of Judges contains many people with diverse heritages who engage with other societies on different social levels. Their rich characterization makes for a vivid narrative. But their cultural diversity produces ambiguities in the text that obscure the modern reader's understanding. Jael's behaviour towards Sisera is difficult to understand considering who she is said to be, the wife of Heber, an ally. Abimelech claims rule of Shechem through his mother, even though first, his father is the line that gives succession and secondly, he is illegitimate anyway. Samson is destined to deliver Israel yet seems to pay no attention to Israelite cultural mores. And the Levite from Ephraim fails to see eye-to-eye with the Benjaminites of Gibeah, even though he chooses their town over another because of their shared Israelite heritage. It seems as if the question of identity in these texts runs deeper than being numbered among the sons of Israel.

In this study, I am going to examine family and identity in Judges. At first sight, this biblical book depicts Israel operating as a tribal society, with clans and families lower down the social pyramid. Through its stories of conquest, foreign oppression and deliverance, the book alludes to the different demands tribal membership of Israel makes upon its characters' allegiance. Yet a closer look reveals the text's lack of interest in the details of Israel's social hierarchy. Instead, Judges refers to the influence of familial patrimony and the settlement affiliation of its people as much as it does to tribal obligations. In fact, tensions between these different aspects of identity are apparent in the interactions.

My hypothesis is that in the realm of character portrayal, the protagonists in Judges prioritize their family over other affiliations and that their stories should be interpreted from this perspective. In other words, the proposal suggests that an essential ingredient in the narrative formation of Israel is family identity and hence the concept of Israel rests upon understanding the importance of family. Family affiliation is a meaningful dynamic for Judges' first audience because it reflects their social reality. Hence, we might imagine that in the telling of Judg 4 its audience wills for Jael to conquer Sisera not to save Israel but to protect her household. In Judg 9, the audience understand that Abimelech's claim is legitimate because they recognize the local social structures. In reaction to Judg 19, its first audience are repulsed by the failure to honour the family, under siege from more distant, hostile relationships. It is this perspective I aim to bring to a study of the texts.

Not only for Judges' first audience, the centrality of family was the social reality for the period the book is set. From the late second millennium BCE, all the way into the Common Era and

recognizable even to the present day, a person's settlement and family—two highly interrelated social groupings—occupied first place in self-understanding and loyalty. Palestine's topographical diversity required different subsistence responses resulting in a weak sense of regional or national unity. Beyond superficial standardizations imposed by imperial conquest, identity was localized with little respect for wider regional affiliations. Israelite identity must build upon the prior familial structures. Judges' narrative ploy is to strengthen an identity for the reader on this larger scale. But, because the family remains at the forefront of a person's identity through the periods of the book's formation into migration and exile, the ploy's success comes from the integration of these two perspectives.

Thus far I have mentioned identity, affiliation, loyalty and self-understanding interchangeably as concepts that shape society and social interaction. For clarity, throughout this thesis I mean no more by the term 'identity' than as the conceptual means by which I situate myself among others. In other words, identity is *that which shapes how I perceive and how I behave towards other people*. Who is 'us' and who is 'the Other' and in what context? On this definition, 'identity' can be extensive (national, ethnic) and limited (settlement, family).<sup>1</sup> These two contextual poles will be important for my analysis and I will discuss this in more detail in chapter one. But a remark to which I will often return in illustration of this relational definition of identity is that of sociologist C. A. O. Nieuwenhjuze (1971, 389) who speaks of the 'extended family in the traditional Middle East' as 'the unit where a person is secure and where he can expect loyalty and afford to be loyal in his turn'. For my purposes in this thesis, identity is no more and no less than the locus of such solidarity.

In this way, I will show that loyalty to one's family directs the social interactions found in the biblical text which asks new questions about the text's meaning for the reader. Interpretations of the Bible have often puzzled over why the people in its stories behave in the way they do, sometimes shrugging their shoulders at the question (e.g. Soggin 1987, 78; Sasson 2014, 274). Yet, this question is central if we wish to understand why people have and continue to look to these texts for edification. Since relationships shape behaviour (what is appropriate, where it is appropriate and when), ascertaining the relational understanding with which the characters are portrayed will help us interpret their actions. In order to resolve some of the ambiguities in the Judges' stories, I want better to appreciate how they depict the characters' identity.

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<sup>1</sup> I am not so interested in the definitional differences between ethnicity and nationality, an important discussion though this undoubtedly is. My use of the term 'national' to speak of 'Israelite' identity is merely to refer to the more extensive network of identity relations this constitutes in distinction from the more limited 'family' network. This is appropriate since the concepts of nation, race and ethnicity in the modern era have particular implications, anachronistic in discussion of the first millennium BCE.

## **A preliminary survey of scholarship**

Open any book on the social world of the Bible and you will be told how important the family is. It is society's 'basic social unit'. This is so frequently recognized in the sociology of the Ancient and Middle East that it has become a truism (e.g. Sahlins 1968; Nieuwenhuijze 1971; Peristiany 1976; Stager 1985; King and Stager 2001; Dutcher-Walls 2009; Allen 2009; Jackson 2011; Meyers 2013). It is therefore surprising that the family's role in identity construction in the Bible has been under studied. This is all the more surprising if we consider that many scholars have understood the Bible to be an exercise in identity making (Thompson 1992, 419; Kratz 2015, 107). They have perceived the identity that was built, but more reflection is needed on how such identity-making was achieved and sustained even until the present day. Taking into account the foundation upon which Israel's identity was built will allow us to see how identity was transformed to make the concept of Israel the dominant self-understanding.

This omission may be because scholarship on the Bible's social world has largely concentrated upon reconstructing the day-to-day life of the people about whom the Bible speaks (King and Stager 2001; Borowski 2003; Meyers 2013). The research is not often applied to an interpretation of the biblical stories. Victor H. Matthews (2015, 71) for instance relies upon the biblical hierarchy of family, clan and tribe 'presumed in the narratives' to build a picture of Israel's social world. But he does not mention texts where these identities are ambiguous or seem in conflict.<sup>2</sup> Paula McNutt (1999, 78) acknowledges conflicting 'regional and supraregional identities based on different allegiances' in Israel's society, but she does not address how this helps us interpret biblical texts. Both these studies assume that there is an Israelite society to be reconstructed. But this assumption is questioned for example by Thomas L. Thompson (2016, 223), who points out that the 'Southern Levant' has 'neither integrity nor any implicit unity of its own'. On his view, the tribal and national identities the Bible puts forward are ideological, but he does not go on to interpret the biblical texts in the light of this conclusion. In response to the historical debate about the existence of Israel, work on ethnicity and the Bible has tried to find identity markers that distinguish cultural groups (e.g. Brett 1996a; Killebrew 2005, and recently, Southwood 2012, 2017). But this research rarely asks how membership of one's family—the basic social unit—may influence ethnicity. As Niels Peter Lemche (1998, 19-20) points out, self-identity is a core aspect that shapes ethnicity just as much as ethnicity shapes identity. Robert A. Di Vito (1999) has considered personal identity in the Bible in dialogue with Hellenistic philosophy. The influence of the family he takes to be fundamental to Old Testament anthropology (221-5). But again, his purpose is not to interpret

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<sup>2</sup> While this is true for his work on the Bible's cultural world, Matthews does ask cultural questions of the text in his commentary on Judges and Ruth (2004) and articles on Judg 4 (1991) and 19 (1992), and his research I employ in my own exegesis.

the texts. So, while there is a scholarly interest in the biblical family and issues of identity these are not used as a heuristic tool.

Scholarly interest in family and identity is not limited to the biblical texts. The place of the household in society and its attendant tensions has also been noticed in texts from the Classical World. Deborah Lyons (2012) for example considers the influence of gender on the success of family interactions in Homer and the plays of Euripides. Gabriel Herman (1987) contrasts the dynamic of individual relationships in Homeric epic with the increasing civic influence on social obligations caused by the rise of the city state (also McInerney 2010). There is competition between *polis* and household as the focus of society, a tension examined by Richard Seaford (1994) in respect of reciprocal obligation. The Classical World seems to have modelled the city-state's social dynamics on those of the household with mixed results (Mitchell 1997). Such modelling produces a tension between duties to the family and those to the city-state, which echoes the localized resistance to wider affiliations that I argue is the reality in ancient Palestine. The comparison is not exact because the ancient Greek household formed a small unit within the city-state, while the 'extended' family in Palestine is almost as extensive as the rural settlements it occupied. Nevertheless, I make brief reference to this research to illustrate some points I make in the biblical exegesis. Across the ancient world, as of course even today, questions of identity remain relevant and as such are reflected in a society's literature. It must be said however that like scholarship on the social world of the Bible, classicists are usually interested in reconstructing day-to-day life from the textual evidence and are satisfied with this picture without using their results to interpret the dynamics of identity-building in the stories.

Turning to the interpretation of texts, exegetical work on the book of Judges can be broadly divided into diachronic approaches—source, historical and redaction criticism—and synchronic approaches that investigate literary features, structural questions and the canonical or theological implications of the book (Yee 2007). The diachronic approach is interested in the book's formation and editing, its sources and the relationship of these sources to those of other books of the biblical corpora. Chief among the theories behind the editing of Judges is, of course, Martin Noth's (1943) Deuteronomistic History, the idea that there is a common ideology shaping the books of Joshua to Kings. While this theory has taken many forms in the academy's reception, the concept of an ideological crucible behind the making of the Former Prophets remains influential.

Another significant theory of sources for Judges is the 'Book of Saviours' from Wolfgang Richter (1963, 1964). This is the suggestion that there is an ancient collection of folklore forming the core to Judges. Much of the scholarship has sought to understand how this underlying layer has been redacted in line with Deuteronomist ideology (Boling 1975; Knauf

2000; Römer and Pury 2000), an assumption that has been taken into archaeological research (Finkelstein 2017b). The presence of the Deuteronomist behind these texts continues to dominate critical analyses (e.g. O'Brien 1994; Römer 1998; Janzen 2005), although some diachronic work has retained Richter but eschewed Noth in favour of a more detailed theory of redaction with as many as six different editorial stages (Guillaume 2004).

My work does not seek primarily to contribute to this scholarship. My interest is in the analysis of certain texts through the lens of identity and the family. However, insights from diachronic analysis do provide support for some of my arguments. Above all, the idea of a core to Judges and its elaboration along ideological lines to forge an identity are key ideas upon which my research builds.<sup>3</sup> As recent scholarship has emphasized, the idea of a unified Israel is a relatively late idea, while in contrast, family identity is a foundational concept.<sup>4</sup> The consolidation of identity on this larger scale accounts for the juxtaposition of local and global perspectives in Judges (cf. 8:27). Through the geopolitical developments of the first millennium BCE, continuity in the experience that family forms the basic social unit means that from its core to the final redaction, Judges must take the family seriously to succeed as a socially authoritative text.

Scholars have also turned to literary or synchronic approaches which are interested in the book of Judges as it stands. This work asks questions regarding the book's composition and structure, its narrative techniques and the theology behind the canonical form (e.g. the recent commentaries from Niditch 2008; Butler 2009; Sasson 2014). For instance, Barry G. Webb (1987) and Lillian R. Klein (1988) argue for the success of the final form as a literary unity. Yairah Amit (1999) returns to the belief that Judges is an edited work, but with the purpose of understanding how literary unity was achieved. And briefer analyses have sought to appreciate the structure of the book with its cycle of oppression and deliverance, a structure that breaks down in the last chapters (Gooding 1982; Greenspahn 1986; Exum 1990; Oeste 2011).

An extensive survey of literary approaches to Judges has been recently made by David J. H. Beldman (2017, 10-51) who looks to make his own contribution to understanding the book's structure from the perspective of its final chapters. But, like with a purely diachronic analysis, my exegesis does not seek at first to contribute to compositional or structural questions either. Beginning with the final form of the text, awareness of the cultural history behind its formation reveals a perspectival distinction between core material and editorial framework. Such a methodology raises both diachronic and synchronic questions. My analysis focuses on the individual passages in turn and I am not at this point concerned with the relationships between

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<sup>3</sup> I discuss the provenance and dating of Judges—core to final form—below.

<sup>4</sup> On the development of the concept of 'Israel' as people and nation see Williamson (1989), Weingart (2014).

my chosen stories.<sup>5</sup> This is a further question which could build upon my exegetical results. Rather than looking to understand the literary composition, mine is a sociological perspective on character interaction, which involves beginning with each narrative scene on its own terms, while alert to the primacy of family loyalty as a social context for the stories.

### **Towards a social scientific approach**

The conclusion that the Palestinian region was culturally diverse, where social organization privileged the family, raises familiar questions about an historical Israel. What was its ethnic make-up? What was its civil administration and the scope and authority of its kingship? How autonomous were its settlements? What role did territorial and tribal claims have in society? And this fragmented picture also asks many questions about the writing of the Bible. Whose identity was consolidated and when? Do different texts reflect different local identities and settlement concerns? What does this say about the texts' provenance or their redaction? I am not going to address all these questions directly in this study. My hypothesis about the importance of family is drawn from a close reading of the text of Judges. My reading takes a sociological perspective, drawing upon archaeological data about the family and theories of social interaction in pre-industrial societies. In this way, my approach benefits from both synchronic and diachronic evaluations.

John H. Elliot (2014, 36-38) distinguishes 'Social History,' which is descriptive of the context and social or cultural world of the Bible, from 'Social Scientific Criticism,' which is analytical of the text. My work is limited here to the interpretation of selected texts from the book of Judges with the aim of better understanding the stories. I hope, however, that a primarily exegetical study will provide insights that will contribute to further research in both Social History and Social Scientific Criticism of the Bible. In taking the latter approach, I have assumed that texts such as Judges become authoritative because they are meaningful for the lives of their readers. Elliot (2014, 37) argues that biblical writings,

have social as well as literary and theological aims. They are a means of social communication and social interaction with the goal of prompting social action on the part of target audiences.

Asking how the texts' characters engage socially is surely essential to understanding these 'social aims'.

Elliot's description of the Bible as social communication speaks of 'target audiences'. This immediately raises the problem of the provenance of the text of Judges, broached above in my

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<sup>5</sup> Except for similarities between Abimelech (Judg 9) and Jephthah (Judg 11). The structural implications of which however I do not pursue here.

mention of the growth of Israelite identity and the survey of scholarship. If we assume, unlike Thompson (1992, 388-9), that Judges was intended to be read, for whom was it written and when? Accepting that the book was not written all at one time by one person, what are the likely stages of its formation? Israel Finkelstein's remark that, 'the Bible can be described as a product of Assyrian imperialism' (2013, 162; also Knauf 2000, 389) is based on a number of factors. First, the lack of 'meaningful writing' in the region before 800 BCE (also Thompson 1991, 77); secondly, the relative prosperity granted to the emerging kingdom of Judah following the fall of Israel to Assyria in 722; thirdly in the wake of this conquest, the impetus to consolidate identity in resistance to an imposed imperial homogenization; fourthly, the migration south of displaced Israelites providing a further incentive for identity making (Gertz et al. 2012, 137). The height of the kingdom of Judah (7<sup>th</sup> century BCE) encouraged a perspective on religion that privileged one God and one central place of worship, a view encapsulated in the first commandment and elaborated by the book of Deuteronomy, the foundation of Noth's Deuteronomistic History. This perspective strengthened identity and directed the editing of heroic tales for a book of Judges (Kratz 2015, 87).

Although the project of Bible writing may have begun in Judah, celebrated folklore from the northern kingdom provided source material for the biblical writers. I have mentioned Richter's 'Book of Saviours' and Diana Edelman (1996, 32) agrees that Judges is 'based on some sort of collection of hero stories stemming from the northern state of Israel and not from the author's native Judah'. The completely northern setting for Judg 3-12 gives evidence for this Israelite core (Römer and Pury 2000) and Israel Finkelstein (2017b, 432) even dates this compilation to the 'first half of the eighth century' asserting of the stories that 'there is no logic in dating them after the demise of the Northern Kingdom'.

The decline and fall of Judah in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE gave further stimuli for Judges' redaction. In the wider historiography of the Deuteronomistic History, failure to adhere to the first commandment is given as the reason for the Babylonian conquest and the exile. The Deuteronomists now explain the need for Judges' local heroes in terms of a continued apostasy of the people from Yhwh, the one God.<sup>6</sup> Further editing of Judges may well have continued during and after the exile (Gertz et al. 2012, 356), possibly even to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Much of the debate surrounding the formation of Judges in this late stage circles around the different views of monarchy in its texts (Gertz et al. 2012, 363) and contrasting depictions of Benjamin (the north) as bad and Judah as good (Brettler 1989; Guillaume 2004; Wong 2005). The identity constructed in response to imperialism must now confront a less glorified reality

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Smith (2014) explores the literary commemoration of warrior culture in the late second millennium, after which he notes its decline. This he attributes in part to the rise of Yahwism as the warrior god.

in the Persian province of Yehud. In the decades after the rebuilding of the Temple (c.516-500 BCE) the good of a monarchic tradition is an ongoing debate.

This history of editing is important for my hypothesis and I touch on the redactional layers in relation to the specific texts I examine. While, I do not intend to give a literary history of the book, for the question of the book's social communication historical context matters (Thompson 1991, 68). And for the final form of Judges we must acknowledge that we are very likely speaking of the Persian period. But this also means that its 'target audiences' come from a population with a centuries-long history of displacement, migration and exile, some of whom are still living in diaspora and for whom the family remains fundamentally important.

In asking social scientific questions of Judges we are looking upon an extensive landscape. On the horizon of our gaze is the folkloric core, its stories impossible to date (although see Smith 2014, 35). These are ascribed a 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE setting by Judges' later Deuteronomistic frame. In the foreground of the view is a fifth-century scene of diaspora and imperial control, influenced by the succession of empires that appear in the middle ground. The unifying theme across this historiographical vista is the question of identity. Before the first millennium, topographical diversity had strengthened a local sense of self; in the course of the Iron Age the region begins to reinforce an identity against looming imperial powers; and in the wake of conquest, the people strive to preserve their identity under an empire and as part of a diaspora. At times our focus may be on the horizon and the core, other times our gaze is drawn to the foreground and the final edition. But for a sociological reading of the book of Judges we must stay on the belvedere and take in the full scene. Judges is a rugged landscape in a long struggle for self-understanding and it is by the impact of the whole scene that its stories speak to its readers.

### **Methodology: reading behaviour**

Especially in a communally-minded society such as that of the Middle East (Di Vito 1999, 221), identity is revealed through relationships. How I understand myself is entwined with how I treat others. Therefore, in order to analyse how the characters of Judges understand their relationships, a method of recognizing the dynamics at work when they interact is needed. We can spot the kind of relationship people have by their behaviour. I act differently when talking to my mother compared to a new professor in the faculty to which I have just been introduced. Awareness of the possible inferences that may be drawn from contextualized behaviour permits a reading of Judges focused upon relationships and motive or intention. The answer to 'who does Jael think she is?' is part of the answer to 'why does she act in such a way?' or 'why does she make such a decision?' In order to foster this awareness, I will employ some theories of social interaction developed by anthropologists in relation to specific areas of social life. Some

such as the contributions in Gilmore (1987) or Dutcher-Walls (2009) discuss pre-industrial societies. Other work looks at social interaction in modern societies, for instance that of the sociologists Pierre Bourdieu (1989) or Tim Cresswell (1996). These approaches will allow me to recognise the social dynamics in Judges, argue that family is the primary means of self-understanding for these characters and so, interpret the texts.

The first major theory I employ is the concept of social space. This is the idea that *where* an interaction occurs shapes the dynamic and the appropriateness of behaviour, helping us to understand how social roles are formed and where and when they apply (Wilson 1980; Cresswell 1996). James Flanagan (1999) and Victor Matthews (2003) have drawn attention to the social spaces operative in biblical texts. This awareness alerts us to the significance of spatial details in a biblical story and its potential influence on behavioural expectations. Social space also raises the issue of social roles and in particular I will consider gender roles in a household, a differentiation which can further influence how spaces are understood and also how their boundaries are preserved. In other words, the clearly differentiated gender roles in a family help to construct social spaces (Dubisch 1986b; Meyers 2013). Hence as the basic unit of society, the role someone holds in respect of family has a tremendous influence on normative behaviour. Nevertheless, in employing these theories we must be aware that *normal* behaviour often departs from a society's *normative* expectations (Meyers 1999, 35).

A second theory concerns how status is acquired in a society: it is achieved or ascribed (Linton 1936; Foladare 1969)? Is it what you know or who you know that advances you? For this I will employ anthropological research on the complex chiefdom (Earle 1978; Maisels 1990; Gibson 2012). This type of social organization is one where rank is ascribed by means of lineage and is distinguishable from societies where rank is achieved (Wright 1984, 1986; Creamer and Haas 1985). Chiefdoms are found from as long ago as 5,000 BCE in Iran to Native American society today (cf. Miller 2012, 12) which makes research on this societal structure a relevant interpretative tool for the composite text of Judges. Robert D. Miller (2012) has argued that the settlement patterns for twelfth- and eleventh-century BCE Palestine were consonant with a complex chiefdom and Katie M. Heffelfinger (2009) has followed him in applying this anthropology to the bible. Understanding how certain power claims can be typical of chiefdom politics will shed light on a few Judges' texts. If the complex chiefdom model is applicable to ancient Palestine it would also confirm that status comes from one's family, supporting my argument for its primacy in identity. Calling this form of social organization a *model* is important, however, because this approach is a tool for reflecting on the biblical text not an attempt to reconstruct lived experience.

The third anthropological idea explores the threat presented by exogamy and the ideal of the self-sufficient household. This idea is best articulated in research on the classical world (Herman 1987; Lyons 2012) but Frank S. Frick (1989) has found socio-economic autonomy applicable to life in ancient Israel (also King and Stager 2001). When two families are bound together by marriage, there are all sorts of implications for family economy, not least, the revision of social roles and the realignment of social distances. For this reason, marriage to an outsider threatens to break down the distinctions so important for identity. Indeed, the danger of apostasy emphasized by the Deuteronomistic History is frequently presented in this way, a fear of ‘religious imperilment’ that helps to shape the biblical prohibition on marriage to those outside of Israel (cf. Frevel 2011, 8-9). Again, family appears at identity’s centre. Nevertheless, given the family’s core socio-economic ideal of autonomy, any movement beyond its structures is threatening. Awareness of these dynamics alerts us to the variety of perspectives on what constitutes prohibited marriage, bringing an interpretative depth to biblical texts that raise the exogamy issue. Yet, Israel’s acceptance of fictive kinship (McNutt 1999, 76) means that the analyst must be cautious of assuming what constitutes outsider marriage and from who’s perspective.

The final major theory I will employ concerns the institution of hospitality as articulated by Julian Pitt-Rivers (1977). Pitt-Rivers’s sociology of hospitality has been applied to biblical texts in Judges among others (Matthews 1991, 1992; Hobbs 1993, 2001) but often these applications do not investigate whether the particular relationships that the text presents its audience are suitable to enjoin Pitt-Rivers’s hospitality protocols. In particular the analyses do not take account of the instability of identity loyalties that I suggest are present nor do they recognize that hospitality only operates towards outsiders. Careful examination of the social interactions offered by the stories will allow a clearer understanding of hospitality’s place in their drama. In conjunction with this hospitality theory I will also take the language of ‘social distance’ from Marshall Sahlins (1972). This idea simply says that some behaviour is inappropriate towards people from whom I have a greater social distance (see also Douglas 1972). Just as with the *where* of social space, also *who* engages in an interaction shapes its social dynamic. As the closest social distance—I introduce the phrase ‘social proximity’—the nearness of family members permits a security and loyalty not found at greater social distances (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 389) which opens interesting avenues on interpreting Judge’s stories. We will see how the family’s contribution to our social self is paramount.

The figures in Judges are often identified by their family and settlement as well as their tribe or clan. While the detailed characterization in Judges has led to ambiguities, it also provides the means for resolving them. The social information added to the behaviour recounted in the stories permit us to spot the relationships, surmise how the characters see themselves and access

the socio-cultural significance of the folklore. While each passage that I have chosen to analyse has raised different sociological questions, the shared feature is the distinction of perspectives in these texts between the local and the global; the family perspective and the national, Israelite one.

The social aspects that draw attention to this perspectival divergence influence broadly three areas of community life. First, the physical or topographical: whether interactions are at the tent's threshold, the *rəḥôb* or within a foreign settlement or territory shapes how we behave. The concepts of social space and social distance are used in this context. Secondly, the dynamic of social roles: the role or status we have in society effects what behaviour is appropriate, both on our part and on the part of others. In Judges, however, particular social and family relationships create ambiguity in this regard, for example the *gēr*, the *ḥotan* or the *pīlegeš*. Likewise, our gender shapes (or confounds) behavioural expectations. Thirdly, there is identity within the community. Despite only minimal explanation of how Israel's social structures operate, Judges brings the settlement, the tribe and a tribal confederation into relationship. While we might ask how these groups relate in a character's identity, this latter complex emerges literarily as the texts' identity-making confronts the raw experience of a diaspora enculturating into imperial surroundings and the remembered ancestry of a diverse people.

I have said that my analysis will not be concerned with literary compositional techniques. At the same time, I must distinguish between the perspectives of the editor and the folklore. It is primarily the heroes' way of seeing the world that I seek to expose by reading their behaviour. Susan Niditch (2008, 8-13) speaks of three 'voices' coming through the text of Judges. Hers is a helpful contribution because her three voices align with the folkloric core, the ideological crucible and the final form, around which I too build my hypothesis. Nevertheless, I would reduce Niditch's three 'voices' to two perspectives. Her analysis remains at the interpretative level of editorial purpose. I am not so interested in narrative voices but in the insight of character interaction to interpret the stories (after all, actions speak louder than words). It is their portrayal that locates the characters' identity in the family and to be effective social communication this experience must resonate with the tales' audience. The further literary question is to what purpose. My first interest is in if it is possible to interpret the local stories outwith their editorial framing. This study's initial focus is on how the characters are portrayed to elucidate the folklore's meaning. This enables a further step in asking how the editors have used this folklore and these portrayals.

### **How the argument will proceed**

I have turned to sociological theories in order to raise our awareness of how behaviour is shaped by identity. This places the family squarely at the centre of the reading, elucidating the text of

Judges. By reading the text with an awareness of social interaction I will offer new interpretations of four texts, all of which support my hypothesis. My work will proceed in the following way. In the first chapter I discuss family and identity with particular reference to the Palestinian region in the first millennium BCE. I argue for the likelihood of localized social structures for the region's population. A discussion of the concept of ethnicity shows how groups build identity and reveals the role of other groups in marking distinctions. I present the family in the Ancient Near East with its structure and dynamic, closely related to the means of production and settlement patterns. I also discuss how we might understand the tribal society given the lack of interest in detailing Israel's social organization in the biblical text. Finally, I introduce the implications of social interaction for reading Judges.

Having prepared the sociological groundwork, I then present four texts from Judges read with attentiveness to social structures. I will demonstrate how the preference for family is found at the heart of the texts' underlying traditions, helping us to understand their message. The first text is Judg 4 which recounts the interaction between Jael and Sisera. I also refer to Judg 5 which depicts the same encounter yet gives slightly different information. I propose the question *why* does Jael conquer Sisera? Both the social space concept and family gender roles will help answer this question and unravel what seems to be an ambiguous confrontation. The second set of texts is Judg 9 and 11 telling the stories of Abimelech and Jephthah respectively. Their stories have not often been interpreted together, despite their similarities. The issue that I propose arises from these texts is the validity of ascribed status with reference to lineage. In other words, leadership is a product of family identity. The men claim leadership based on their family's social standing but must negotiate the problem of illegitimacy. The third text is the account of Samson's wedding in Judg 14. By his marriage to a Timnite, Samson unites two families from two different settlements. I do not think we should consider this union to be 'exogamous' and hence suspect, but rather as a marriage that highlights the issue of cultural illiteracy. The final text is Judg 19. An anonymous family, united across tribal boundaries, seeks hospitality in Gibeah of Benjamin because the inhabitants are also Israelites. I suggest that the dissolution of hospitality customs seen in the story must be understood in terms of a shift in social distance, upon which the operation of hospitality customs depend. The privileged nature of family membership in contrast to tribal or national affiliation is revealed in this devastating interaction.

Each chapter on the texts of Judges follows the same pattern. After introducing the passage, in a first reading I look some of the issues tackled by scholarship. We will see how problems of social behaviour, family and identity have rarely been treated. These surveys lead to a particular set of questions about each text that demands a preliminary evaluation of the relevant sociological discussions. The characters' engagement with each other reflects one or more of

the social aspects that I have outlined, and the implications of topography, physical space or social roles in this light will be discussed to conclude this analysis. I then return to the text with this awareness in a close reading, following the implications of the detailed social information in each characterization and employing the sociological theories. This third part of the exegetical chapters gives, first, a new interpretation of a story as social communication and demonstrates, secondly, how the characterization in Judges is identity making with the family at its root. The intersection of these results I then discuss in my concluding remarks along with some thoughts about how the local and global perspectives have been juxtaposed in the text.

Finally, I must make an important point here about scope. First, my goal in drawing attention to the text's editorial history is to establish its twofold perspective, local and global. I recognize, however, that the discussion of the identity-forming edit could form a topic in itself and in this limited space some questions have gone unanswered, including the undoubted merit of holistic or canonical readings of the text's final form. Secondly, apart from distinguishing the national ideology that shaped Judges' editorial perspective, namely a unified Israel under the one God, Yhwh, I do not discuss the theological implications of my exegesis. My work is not really biblical theology. The book of Judges raises many important issues such as the moral dimension of the stories, Israelite religion and law that I do not discuss. This is mainly because my focus must be limited; the theology of my results is one avenue for further work. However, it is also because I think that the goal behind the writing of Judges, and all biblical texts, is a social one and is about human experience speaking to human experience. This is not to say a social goal is not a theological goal. I believe this is the manner and framework of theology. But as such it is subsequent upon understanding human ideas and we must do one thing at a time.

### **Stylistic notes**

A few technical notes on the pages that follow. Much of my thesis concerns the fluidity of the term 'Israel' and the use to which this gentilic concept is put to reinforce identity at a national level. For this reason, I will refer to the geographical region as 'Palestine' or the 'Southern Levant' to avoid ambiguity when speaking of Israel and the Israelites as an identity. In this regard, even the terms 'nation' and 'national' may be anachronistic and by my use of 'nationalist' I do not intend to conjure images of post-Romantic socio-political enthusiasm. I employ these cognates merely to distinguish from the designative terminology of 'regional' or 'local,' a distinction important for my argument. This is in keeping with my interest in a relational definition of identity. Since the majority of historical references occurring in the argument are Before the Common Era, unless marked otherwise all dates are BCE. Finally, as students of the Hebrew Bible it is my view that we should continue to show respect to the divine

name in our academic endeavours. Hence, I will use the form Yhwh, even in citing scholarship that does not.

## 1. Family and Identity

When I lived in Rome in an international community I learnt very quickly not to describe Poland as *Eastern* Europe. It is *Central* Europe I was politely but firmly corrected. Before that I was not aware that there was a region of ‘Central Europe’. In another interaction, a Frenchman asked me if I was from England proper or ‘England-Scotland, England-Wales’ as he put it. Being from ‘England proper’ I found this amusing, but it might not have been so funny for Scots or Welsh.

These encounters reveal how a group’s view of itself can differ from how others see them. In sociological terms, an *emic* perspective—the insider view—is not necessarily the same as an *etic* one. Distinctions important for those inside the group are not recognized by outsiders. On the other hand, ignorance of distinctions by outsiders serves to reinforce them for insiders. Group identity is influenced by others’ group identity. The Frenchman had no investment in a distinction between Scotland, England or Wales just as I had no investment in distinguishing Central from Eastern Europe, because it made no difference to how we saw ourselves. Yet the fact our outsider groups did not know the distinctions strengthened them for the insider. It was essential that our *faux pas* be corrected by those for whom the distinction mattered.

We can also think of examples on a more local scale. The North of England has its pride against the South. While within this region, Lancashire and Yorkshire must be distinguished. The areas we come from have identity markers, right down to rival towns that as an outsider it is important not to confuse. I remember an old lady in the Cotswolds town of Upper Slaughter extolling the virtues of her fellow inhabitants. She confided, ‘we are very hospitable here... not like those in Lower Slaughter!’

If we transport this contrast into the world of Judges, you might think that the most important identity that the people cherish is to be an Israelite. But the narrative portrayal of interactions and social priorities at the heart of the stories suggests otherwise. It is the editors’ literary project to grow the larger scale identity of Israel in the consciousness of the reader. But like my Polish interlocutor’s view of ‘Eastern Europe,’ the people of the stories see themselves differently from how the later redactors see them.

I contend that the primary source of identity behind the text of Judges is not Israel but the family, commonly observed as the basic unit of Middle Eastern society. Here we should understand the family as a number of related married couples and their children who live in proximity under the authority of an elder male. Living together is a feature of this social organization and thus to speak of village life is to speak of the family. This society as a whole is organized into groups of families, lineages and tribes united through kinship, an organizing

principle that creates a multi-layered identity. There are ‘units of higher and lower order’ (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 382 n. 1). Scholars have found this type of society reflected in the Bible (at least for the final form) where the ‘house of the father’ forms the bottom of a social pyramid with the clan, the tribe and finally ‘all Israel’ above.<sup>7</sup> In his work on personal identity, Robert Di Vito (1999, 221) writes that, ‘the ancient Israelite stands at the center of ever-widening circles of relation defined by kinship, beginning with the “family.”’

Layers of familial, regional and national identity form a familiar hierarchy in human social organization. At the same time there exists a tension of values between the local and the global. Whether from Central Europe, England-proper or Upper Slaughter we are all European. But the triviality of this fact highlights that we are far more shaped by the local. Large-scale definitions matter much less. Maintaining group distinctions is also about resisting reduction to a meaningless globalism. Wales or Scotland’s horror at being referred to as England is related to the threat that their identity will be absorbed. This is felt particularly when an administrative body includes different ethnic groups within a civil boundary. As Mark Brett (1996b, 3) remarks, ‘a major social question has arisen of whether civic nationalism can encompass the diversity of multiculturalism’. The customs and values under which we live may clash with the identity we cherish – particularly if those customs and values are imposed by an external force. The imposition of homogeneity by a foreign culture is resisted by those indigenous to a region. The Middle East has known centuries of imperial occupation resisted by local cultures (Khoury and Kostiner 1990). And this is the recurring story in the region before the Common Era too, when Palestine was the stomping ground for a succession of empires (Van de Mieroop 2007). Smaller groups resist absorption into larger ones, lest their culture and identity disappear. In ancient Near Eastern society, the basic unit of family becomes primary because it is the common denominator to which allegiance and loyalty is reduced.

In this chapter I shall explore the family as it has been understood in the ancient Near East and the tensions that arise in relation to larger social groupings. This will allow us to understand what is meant by family, identity and society before proceeding to interpret the biblical texts in these terms. I will begin with work on the archaeology of the Levant that suggests a more fractured landscape than the well-drawn territorial claims of tribal Israel found in the Bible. From this I will argue that the population’s sense of identity was localized for most of the region’s early history. This raises the question of how identity is built and maintained, of ethnicity and how to define who is with us and who against. Here we meet again the distinction between emic and etic perspectives. Who *I* think I am may differ from how another sees me, which may account for there being two or more names for places and social groups. Then, I

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. Josh 7:16-18; Judg 6:15; 1 Sam 10:20-21 (see King and Stager 2001, 36-38, Matthews 2015, 71).

will discuss the anthropological literature on the family, showing its primacy in society and how it resists absorption into larger identity levels. The literature on Israel as a tribal society I will also introduce here. I will then be able to show why the sharp ethnic and territorial boundaries painted in the biblical text in fact reveal a preference for family ties. Finally, I will explain how these issues are prominent in the book of Judges and how they are equally relevant for the Early Iron setting of the book, the subsequent periods when the book was formed and, importantly, the era when the final form was received and cherished as an authoritative text.

### **A fractured landscape**

Rather than the integrated picture of the region we are given by the Bible, scholars of the early history of Israel have found rather that the Southern Levant was socially and topographically diverse with no inherent coherence. Geographical and environmental diversity requires different subsistence strategies and modes of living, so the region's different zones have different social and ecological histories.<sup>8</sup> Nomads, semi-nomads and sedentary populations brought their different ways of life to bear upon the environmental situations they faced. Different ways of living demand different social structures as Miller (2012, 82) accepts, 'not all of Israel was of the same type of society simultaneously'.<sup>9</sup> We should expect the impact of this fractured landscape upon identity to be a weakened loyalty to the higher units of social organization (if they exist) and a tendency towards a localized understanding of the self. It follows from this decentralized picture that social structures are shaped by local settlement patterns and not a larger administrative region (Thompson 1992, 318). This society looked to local patrons to administer and rule, 'centred around small burghs,' a system attested in the 'Excretion Texts and the Amarna tablets' (Thompson 2016, 223-4).<sup>10</sup> Hence the people of second millennium Palestine and even later would have thought of themselves as inhabitants of the Jezreel Valley or the city of Shechem and not as members of a wider geo-polity such as Israel, notwithstanding the accuracy of this attribution.

At times in the history of Palestine, the region did experience conceptual unity, but always by means of external forces. In the Late Bronze Age (c.1500-1150), the region was on the margins of the ancient world with politics dominated by Egypt to its south. Across the ancient Near East too, the powers of Anatolia to the north, Mesopotamia to the east and Mycenae in the west were also players in this scene. Reinhard Kratz (2015, 5) calls Palestine a 'transit country' on the fringes of empires who controlled its history. In the Late Bronze, regional unity in Palestine was imposed through the dominance of Egypt, in whose etic terms only it was judged to have

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<sup>8</sup> Thompson (2016, 224) counts 'thirty or so geographic sub-regions of Western Palestine'.

<sup>9</sup> A hint from the Bible of how the region was considered to be different areas is found in Deut 1:7.

<sup>10</sup> The Amarna letters from the 14<sup>th</sup> Century were written to Egypt by local chiefs from inside the Levant and illustrate the fractured political landscape with which the empire struggled to cope.

a unified population. Precisely for this reason, imposed uniformity at the higher units of social organization would be resisted. For instance, the success of the *'apiru*, known from the Amarna letters—bandits living on the fringes of society (Thompson 1992, 211)—indicates a weakening of Egypt's social grip during the Late Bronze. Social upheaval and economic stress led to the decline of social structures, subsequently exacerbated by a long period of drought in the 12<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> centuries that altered the ecology. The end of the Late Bronze Age was a time of *de-urbanization*, when settlement patterns changed as people adapted to the environmental situation, a development experienced differently in each of Palestine's sub-regions (Thompson 1992, 220). A decline in population produced smaller settlements and dispersion into more viable agricultural units in marginal areas, perhaps explaining the increase in settlements in the central highlands. This would not produce, however, the internal conditions for a greater integrity to the landscape nor was it likely to encourage a sense of identity for the whole region.

Hutton (2009) calls this development of the early Iron Age (c.1150-1000) *ruralisation*, by which he means the withdrawal from urban centres to engage in pastoralism and agriculture as complementary methods of subsistence in response to economic and social decline (also Finkelstein 1990, 685). The necessity of such multitasking for survival is not surprising if we accept the lack of environmental integrity to the region. It also reveals the underlying diversity of local population centres once the control of a ruling power is withdrawn. Thompson (1992, 157) sees Iron I as a transitional period, which saw 'cycles of land use' as settlements rose and fell (also Kratz 2015, 22).

Iron I ruralisation only stabilized in the *re-urbanization* of Iron II (c.1000-720) resembling the urbanization of the Late Bronze, but with smaller and more centrally administrated cities. At this time, some coherence for the north of the region seems to be in place in the form of the 'House of Omri' known from the ninth-century Moabite Mesha inscription. This administration rules an entity the biblical text calls Israel. The kingdom is unusual in the region at this time, however, and despite its coherence ruled over a 'variegated population' (Finkelstein 2013, 162), especially after its expansion into the Transjordan (Hutton 2009, 62; Finkelstein, Koch, and Lipschits 2011, 153-4).<sup>11</sup> The limited extent of the kingdom's settlements, with social structures formed from ways of life associated with the ecology of each locality, means that Israel is unlikely to have encouraged a deep sense of nationality among its population (Clements 1989, 4). Even the idea of the 'nation' may be anachronistic here (see Lemche 1998, Kim 2007, 169). Thompson (1992, 317) thinks we should speak of 'indigenous structures of competing city states' rather than a 'centralized political power of an essentially alien nature' (also Gertz et al. 2012, 115; Van de Mierop 2007, 224). If there was any growth in Israel's group identity, it

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<sup>11</sup> Finkelstein (2013, 162) calls the late ninth-century consolidation of the kingdom of Israel 'unique in the history of the southern Levant'.

was interrupted by the kingdom's fall to Assyria in 722. In fact, a lack of group identity undermined Israel's resistance to Assyria's imperial unity. The conquest brought uniformity and stability (Thompson 2016, 224-5), but as centuries before with Egypt, the stability was fragile. Occupation also brings cultural diversity and social conflict, threats to personal identity which provoke a reassertion of boundaries and efforts to resist assimilation (McNutt 1999, 34; Southwood 2012, 31). Such a reaction would not have encouraged social unity in the new Assyrian province of Samaria (Gertz et al. 2012, 135).

On the other hand, the kingdom of Judah that emerged in the wake of Israel's collapse showed a taste for social unity, helped by its small size and relative uniformity. Judah appears in the historical record in the late eighth/early seventh century as a vassal of Assyria, but for that reason experienced prosperity and an apparent strengthening of group identity, possibly in reaction to the arrival of migrants from the fallen Israel (Gertz et al. 2012, 137). As Assyria weakened, the fate of this small entity (which with its centre in Jerusalem could be included among Thompson's 'city states') continued to be in the hands of the larger empires. First, Egyptian claims in the region kept Judah as a vassal, limiting its development. Then when Egypt was driven from the region by Babylon at the end of the seventh century, Nebuchadnezzar II claimed Judah for himself. The desire for autonomy endured in Judah however and, taking advantage of Babylon's continuing struggle with Egypt, King Jehoiakim rebelled against the empire. The brunt of Babylon's eventual reprisal against Judah in 597 fell on the next generation as the empire for a brief period imposed control on its vassal's administration by conquering Jerusalem and choosing its own king (Grabbe 2007, 208-9). Unfortunately, Judah's puppet ruler also proved to be rebellious and Nebuchadnezzar brought this city-state to an end and deported its inhabitants (Van de Mieroop 2007, 276). Judah's population experienced both exile to and migration from other parts of the empire. These conditions create social conflict and stimulate resistance to cultural homogenization.

The early history of Palestine reveals a fractured social landscape which weakened a sense of belonging to higher units of social organization. Large-scale uniformity was imposed by conquest and occupation. When some indigenous social coherence was achieved, this was put to an end by the same imperial threat. Palestine's conceptual unity is therefore an etic concept over which the emic perspective—localized affiliation—naturally holds sway. Preference for an identity, however, is not mutually exclusive from acknowledging other identity levels. A person may know well that they are an Israelite, or that the region they call home is known as Canaan. My point is that, like recent thoughts about Europe, this fact may not be influential in a person's self-understanding. They may concede the etic attribution, but an emic perspective unsurprisingly dominates.

I observed that in the wake of external threats local identity is reinforced. If we agree that the Bible is an exercise in identity-making (Thompson 1992, 353), then these significant events in the history of the Near East produced the conditions for its writing.<sup>12</sup> We might characterize the inspiration for this project as — ‘you don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone’. When there is no Israel or Judah, when you are in exile and living among foreigners, the identity you neglected comes to the fore (cf. Ps 137:1). As the biblical texts continued to take shape the question of identity was ongoing.<sup>13</sup> Successive empires—Persia, the Ptolemaic and Seleucid, Rome—controlled territory that contained many different types of people, including those who viewed the region of Israel and Judah as their patrimony but whose sense of this identity was weak. This is the historiographical landscape shaping the Bible’s social communication. If the Bible was written in reaction to a *lack* of identity, its final form was preserved and cherished because the identity it had come to shape risked disappearing once more.

### **Ethnicity, identity and the Bible**

I have argued that the ecological and topological diversity of the Levant produced different subsistence strategies and hence encouraged localized social structures. Unity at higher social levels was the result of imperial geo-politics and generally resisted. Until now I have spoken of identity and self-understanding and how it may be multi-layered in relation to the different social units of a society. I will now introduce the issue of ethnicity, a conceptual category that may be considered fundamental for identity across social levels. But identity is a shaper of ethnicity too. Ethnicity as a concept has many features that help us understand how identity informs social organization and vice versa.

If we turn first to the question of Israel, at one time Thompson accepted that the region’s ‘fluctuations’ are ‘variations in the fortune of what has clearly been a single population holding together a complex but common cultural and chronological thread through time’ (Thompson 1992, 185). Can we describe this ‘single population’ with its ‘common cultural thread’ as an ethnicity? More recently Thompson (2016, 225) thinks no, and is sceptical that there is any ‘coherence in the population of the Southern Levant’ or of speaking of ‘ancient Palestine in any “national” ethnic or analogous way’ (also Edelman 1996; Lemche 1998, 20). Even Ann Killebrew (2005, 13), who is generally more hopeful of distinguishing ethnicities, acknowledges the ‘mixed population’ in second-millennium Palestine, arguing that a group

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<sup>12</sup> Gottwald (2014, 66) describes the biblical texts as a palimpsest where traditions are ‘cumulative’ and compiled from ‘much earlier events and processes’.

<sup>13</sup> Katherine Southwood (2012) has addressed the issue of identity in restoration in the fifth-century book of Ezra, while fourth-century texts such as Esther or Tobit address the threat to identity among foreigners in diaspora.

identity for ancient Israel was a ‘gradual emergence’ from a ‘mixed multitude’ over the course of the first millennium (2005, 149; also Bloch-Smith 2003).

It is not my intention here to argue for or against the existence of an ancient Israelite ethnicity.<sup>14</sup> Rather, I am interested in the mechanisms by which ethnic groups are formed and how they self-identify. Then I can explain how we can recognize that family is preferred as an identifier in the texts of Judges. Fundamental to the debate is the appreciation that ethnicity is primarily a self-understanding that is recognized against other self-understandings. It is an emic feature expecting etic appreciation. In other words, while ethnicity may be a contributing factor to a person’s identity, identity is contributing factor to ethnicity. I suggest that in the ancient Palestinian context we consider ‘group identity’ and ‘ethnicity’ to be practically synonymous. An ethnic group ‘consists of the persons who think of themselves as members of this group, in contrast to other individuals who are not reckoned to be members and who do not reckon themselves to belong to this group’ (Lemche 1998, 20). Hence, a primary factor in the emergence of group identity/ethnicity is recognizing (or creating) those boundaries and markers that distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them’. But in this way, we need different ethnicities and groups in order to recognize ourselves; we need the Other and this involves interacting with the Other. For this reason, the ethnic groups between whom the clearest boundaries are drawn are those that have frequent interaction: territorial neighbours or even those who live among each other. This is the ‘proximate other’ (Brett 1996b, 10; Southwood 2012, 31) and it is those closest to us who threaten our identity the most.

While the “other” may be perceived as being either LIKE-US or NOT-LIKE-US, he is, in fact, most problematic when he is TOO-MUCH-LIKE-US, or when he claims to BE-US (Smith 1985, 47).

So, broadly stated the emergence of identity is most commonly found in definition against peoples whom we do not want to be like us: the ‘negation of collective other/s’ (Edelman 1996, 25). Or positively stated, ethnicity recognizes who is like me and who will understand me because of the expectation of shared social or cultural values. It is a means of social cohesion and security, achieved by raising the drawbridge against those who are different and suspicious. Importantly, definition against the Other can occur at each social stratum of our multi-layered identities. As Killebrew (2005, 9) observes, the formation of ethnicity ‘can take place on many levels between various groups of people’.

If identity is defined against the Other and yet there are many layers to our identity, recognizing the Other who shapes me must be context based. I mentioned a distinction between factual

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<sup>14</sup> A decision in this debate is not essential for my argument, although as I have argued, the archaeological research supports diversity rather than homogeneity for much of the Late Bronze to Iron II period. As I will discuss, however, the question is how we understand ethnicity.

statements about a group and the importance of these facts in the group's self-understanding. Take the distinction between 'British' and 'European'. The latter may be a true statement about someone who was born in Yorkshire, but it may not be a major element in her self-understanding. Until very recently, the use of 'European' to describe someone from Britain was more likely to come from someone outside of Britain: 'European' is (potentially) an etic label. This is the prospective contrast between our view of ourselves and the Other's view of us (Southwood 2012, 19). In a different context, the self and the Other may realign at a different level of social organization. Someone from Lancashire and someone from Yorkshire may share a sense of Englishness. Yet, despite a shared identity at a higher order, in social discourse at this lower level they could be the defining Other for each...other. We can also think of examples at the level of rival towns in a county (remember Upper and Lower Slaughter) and even neighbourhoods of a town, none of which identification erases the higher levels. Context determines which level rises to the surface (McNutt 1999, 34).

My argument that Judges shows an identity-preference for the family follows this logic. I do not exclude the existence of higher order social units. 'Israel' is mentioned frequently in Judges as are its tribes and clans, even if these appear as imprecise terms. I am arguing that, should these higher orders exist, the sense of identity at this level is weak due to the fractured landscape of the Levant, its history of occupation and the migration of its population. All these factors contribute to the cultural background that formed the book of Judges producing its memorial landscape. My exegesis will show that the core material forming the narratives of Judges (and consequently, the overall narrative itself) is better understood if self-understanding is predominantly at a lower order. In these stories, the family is the primary context for recognizing the Other.

I have illustrated how ethnicity is created both by self-acknowledgement and definition against the Other, whose very proximity can constitute a threat to identity and result in the drawing of distinct boundaries. Those who are very distant to us do not threaten our identity; it is those who are near us and like us that we ensure are distinguished from us. Yet ethnicity seems to need some form of acknowledgement from both emic and etic perspectives (Edelman 1996, 25; Prato 2016, 211). Hence, the threat to identity from the proximate Other is felt precisely because of the challenge in drawing distinct boundaries that obtain in both our mind and that of the Other at the same time and on the same contextual level (Brett 1996b, 10). Let us look a little further at this complexity in order to understand why recognition of the Other is so important and yet why such a task faces such definitional challenges.

**‘To see ourselves as others see us!’<sup>15</sup>**

I began this chapter with the distinction between a group’s view of itself and the way others see them, which I recommended be borne in mind when studying apparently ethnic descriptions. Here I can give some examples of this perspectival distinction relevant for the biblical texts. Fourteenth-century Egypt’s conception of the region of Canaan must be distinguished from that of the peoples within this region who have been subordinated to imperial administration. Late Bronze epigraphical witnesses to Canaan attest to a known geopolitical region, south of Ugarit and to the north of the Cisjordanian littoral (cf. Rainey 1996; Na’aman 1999).<sup>16</sup> However, these witnesses are imperial communications, none of them written by the illiterate peoples of the region. We should not assume that the population of Palestine held the same ‘national’ concepts as the empires that gave it its stability. Considering the fragmented society made up of many vassals that formed Egyptian Palestine (Grabbe 2007, 42-3), it is likely that ‘Canaan,’ correct a designation as it may have been, was not the primary way the people there understood themselves (Sparks 1998, 104; Killebrew 2005, 93).

Late Bronze Egyptian epigraphy has another example. Looking at the Merneptah Stela of the late thirteenth century, Kenton Sparks (1998, 106) asks whether the name ‘Israel’ with the determinative for ‘people’ should be considered a name created by Egypt (like ‘Shasu’) or whether Israel was the name the people gave themselves. In other words, is ‘Israel’ an *exonym* or an *endonym*?<sup>17</sup> And yet, a label that begins as an exonym (even as an insult, such as ‘Christian’ [cf. Pervo 2008, 295]) may come to be claimed as an endonym. We may come to agree with the way others see us. It is my view that both Canaan and Israel are labels that, like Europe, do not occupy a great deal of space in the original population’s identity. Yet, in the course of its history, the term ‘Israel’ becomes more significant and with it ‘Canaan’ as the Other.<sup>18</sup>

The same awareness must be applied to the biblical text. A close look at Judg 1, for example, reveals two perspectives on Canaan, a local and a global. In the course of the military campaign, several different settlements with named local patrons are taken. While grouped under the title ‘Canaanites’, they are from different parts of the region following different leaders. We find ‘the Canaanites inhabitants of the hill county’ (Judg 1:9); ‘the Canaanites inhabitants of Hebron’ (v10) and so on. Canaanite diversity continues in the report of the partial conquests

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<sup>15</sup> From Robert Burns, 1786. *To a Louse: on seeing one on a Lady’s Bonnet, at Church*.

<sup>16</sup> Eric Cline (2014, 15) finds Canaan to be as extensive as ‘modern-day Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan’.

<sup>17</sup> Sparks’s view is that, since it is a West Semitic theophoric name and not Egyptian, ‘Israel’ is an endonym and hence ‘represented a sociocultural unit that shared some common sense of identity’ (1998, 107). In his view, defined against the Other, Israel may be distinguished from its neighbours in Canaan who are listed on the Merneptah Stela. For Sparks this is evidence of a group identity for Israel in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>18</sup> Gertz et al. (2012, 63) describe the Israel/Canaan opposition as an ‘interpretative pattern [...] by which the Old Testament brings to expression a theological distance to its own previous background, language and ethnicity’.

that conclude the chapter. The most frequent label for the different groups is not ‘Canaanite,’ but *yôšbê*... ‘inhabitants of... [a named settlement]’ (cf. 1:9, 10, 11, 17, 19, 21, 27(x3), 30(x2), 31(x2), 33(x2)). The term ‘Canaanites,’ on the other hand, is occasionally used as a supplementary generic label for what are local settlements. This is indicated by the synonymy the syntax implies in vv27, 30, 31 and 33 to indicate the residents of several different settlements, with the additional clarification ‘Canaanites *inhabitants of the land*’ occurring in the last two examples. Judges’ detailed geographic information thus identifies on two social levels: one applicable to local settlements, the other summarily describing the entire region.

Recognizing these two social levels is an example of how Judges’ integration of heroic tales has preserved two perspectives: that of the folklore and that of the editors. Susan Niditch (2008, 8-13) speaks of *three* ‘voices’ to explain this ‘reworking’ of ancient stories: the epic-bardic voice which describes the folklore; the theologian, who interprets the stories in terms of Yhwh’s providence; the humanist voice, who collates and preserves tradition. Distinguishing these viewpoints is helpful, but I would reduce her analysis to my *two* perspectives, local and global. In my view, the contrast of higher order social units in the texts is an editorial one and this framework’s task is to encourage the book’s audience to see the world from the editors’ global or better ‘national’ perspective rather than from the local perspective of the folktales.

However, this juxtaposition of local and global social levels raises questions about identity. At the highest unit of society Israel appears in distinction from other peoples—Canaanites, Moabites, et al—whom the book of Judges declares oppress them. Yet frequently, the stories’ characters are introduced with reference to their family and settlement as well as their tribe, opening a window upon the underlying local traditions. We should ask which referents seem to be accepted by the folkloristic characters themselves. How does each tradition see the Other and what is the reader to understand by these group designations? Awareness of emic and etic perspectives encourages us to ask these questions of the characters in Judges and to distinguish between the editorial picture and the local folkloristic view. This will be my project and, because recognising the Other is context based, I will raise these questions with respect to each text I examine.

I have drawn attention to a few of the issues around which the debate about ethnicity, the Other and Israel have turned. If ethnicity is ‘a mental construct connected to self-consciousness and the way we relate with others’ (Prato 2016, 211), then identifying both who we are and who is *not* us—the Other—is essential for reifying an ethnic identity. Yet, ‘us’ and ‘them’ are perspectives on identity that obtain at many levels and in different contexts. Who we consider ourselves to be depends upon who is considered to be the Other in a given situation.

While the work of Sparks (1998), and Killebrew (2005) and the contributions in the volumes of Neusner, Frerichs, and McCracken-Flesher (1985), and Brett (1996a) discuss the question of ethnicity in the Bible, the necessary distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is usually limited to the higher social level, the group identity of the society or nation (e.g. Brett 1996b, 10; Southwood 2012, 34). This is why the debate about Israelite ethnicity rouses scepticism because of the observed cultural diversity of peoples within the region (Killebrew 2005, 12). However, this is to ask identity questions of the biblical texts from their editorial perspective, which is precisely the goal of the editing. Considering the book of Judges in particular, the local perspective found in its heroic tales will have its own conception of who is Other. In reading these stories, I think that we shall find similar ‘us’ and ‘them’ distinctions existing between settlements and families that foregrounds lower order identity in questions relating to social values and behavioural norms. We should not be surprised at this preference if we accept that the ecological diversity of Palestine encourages fragmentation at this lower social order. To support my contention, I must explain the function and centrality of the family as a basic social unit and its tendency to resist homogenization.

### **The family in ancient and contemporary Near Eastern society<sup>19</sup>**

The fractured social landscape of the Levant discouraged a countrywide sense of nationality or identity. But is it not only regional diversity that promotes decentralization. Lower order units of society such as the family resist absorption into higher ones. We can look at this first from a modern point of view. We are familiar with a multicultural society and the questions this raises for establishing a shared understanding of citizenship.<sup>20</sup> Cultures and groups refuse to be absorbed into ‘homogenizing visions of national (or international) culture’ (Brett 1996b, 4-5), primarily I suspect, because these ‘visions’ are largely meaningless (also Kim 2007, 169-70). On the contrary, civil authorities and institutions today preserve and even privilege distinctive groups in support of equality and diversity. Attempts to suppress diverse cultures only serves to reinforce them as I have argued with respect to the imposition of unity by imperial forces in ancient Palestine. Indeed, the Amarna letters attest to the problems of social control in the region that Egypt faced in exercising its remote governance. This is because even until relatively recently, the difficulty of communication between an executive seat of power and outlying settlements would have inhibited any real legislative oversight.<sup>21</sup> Out in the

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<sup>19</sup> The continuity between social structures of the first millennium BCE and that of the recent Middle East has been noted in work on Israel (Lemche 1985, xv). Carol Meyers (2013, 32-4) for instance is positive about using ethnographic data from societies such as Iran, Palestine and the Mediterranean Aegean area, Cyprus and Sicily to ‘fill in many of the gaps that are inevitably present in the data about ancient ones’.

<sup>20</sup> A conflict between civic responsibilities and individuality was a problem for the Classical world too. Gabriel Herman (1987, 2) laments that ‘the community tamed the hero, and transformed him into a citizen’.

<sup>21</sup> This is not only an ancient phenomenon. Think of the ‘Great progress’ to York from London made by Henry VIII in 1541 CE after the 1536 ‘Pilgrimage of Grace’ uprising in order to assert some control so far from his court.

countryside, people are happy to rule themselves through local custom (Meyers 2013, 23; Boer 2015, 102).

The Middle Eastern family is a particular case of resistance to homogenization. I began with the truism that the family is this society's basic social unit. This simply means in the words of Patricia Dutcher-Walls (2009, 1) that 'much else in society is structured around it'. But this is an economic mechanism as much as a social one. In the Middle East, the family is not only 'nuclear'—parents and children—but refers to an extended network of relationships constituted by marriage and descendants including several generations. A strongly related network brings security and the protection and furtherance of financial concerns, what Frank S. Frick (1989, 87) calls 'the social arrangements for the exploitation of economic resources'. A network constituted by family or lineage also safeguards the inalienability of revenue and property. Each lineage seeks some form of autonomy or self-sufficiency to maintain their agricultural life and protect what is theirs (Meyers 2013, 47; Boer 2015, 78).<sup>22</sup> Philip King and Lawrence Stager (2001, 38) describe the 'biblical family' as 'endogamous, patrilineal, patriarchal, patrilocal, joint, and polygynous,' which are all features that reinforce the socio-economic autonomy of the family (also Sheckman 2014). The close-knit network of the extended family creates a clear hierarchy with narrowly defined social roles ensuring labourers for, investment in and protection of income and property (Di Vito 1999, 223). This is why different subsistence strategies call for separate units of social organization.

Two points follow from this summary. First, in the rural economy of the Middle East, membership of family and settlement has a highly significant overlap (Frick 1989, 90). Secondly, the search for autonomy creates a suspicion of other social units, which means other families. Despite Middle Eastern society having higher and lower social orders, 'kinship has one kind of manifestation within the family and another outside' (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 382). Suspicion of other families in certain contexts casts them as the Other, a feature noticed by John K. Campbell (1965, 142) who calls the family 'a social isolate facing the majority of the community on terms of hostility and distrust' (also Frick 1989, 90). Heather McKay (2009, 28) observes the implications of this relationship when she looks at Gen 27 and 2 Sam 13. 'Lying to outsiders is acceptable and even, at times, praiseworthy,' she remarks, but 'to go so far as to deceive or betray members of one's own family is treated as utterly heinous and contemptible' (also Rowe 2011, 68, 119). Put in broader terms, the appropriate behaviour rendered to family members differs from less noble behaviour tolerated towards those held at a greater 'social distance' (Sahlins 1972, 191-6). For example, Marshall Sahlins (1968, 74) notices how in

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And far from London, the Percys of Northumberland were effective rulers in the north east of England even to the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>22</sup> The relationship between the *ὄικος* (household) and *αὐταρκεία* (the ideal of self-sufficiency) is also a feature of Ancient Greek society (cf. Lyons 2012, 47).

transactions, the terms ‘are governed by the relation of the parties to it. Different relationships, different terms’ (also Mitchell 1997, 14-5). Such double standards obviously weaken a national sense of justice and undermine the moral evaluation of behaviour across social units of higher order (Davies 1987, 25). The localization of social and cultural values provides further evidence that the family is a predominant locus of identity in ancient and contemporary Near Eastern society. In the majority of day-to-day contexts, the Other are other families.

Given the close-knit unit that is the family and its self-sufficient goals, it is surprising that societies such as these tolerate fictive kinship. In other words, the concept of kin is not primarily biological but is an ‘organizing principle’ (McNutt 1999, 76), which allows relationships to be formed by agreement (cf. Judg 17:10).<sup>23</sup> In the alignment of family and settlement, this means that proximate dwellers enjoy familial status (Boer 2015, 74-5).<sup>24</sup> Fictive kinship fits in with my description of ethnicity as a self-understanding recognized against other self-understandings. The family is not a biological datum, but an identity against which other identities are contrasted.

I have discussed the relationship of family members to those outside the family. But how do individual persons view themselves within the social unit? I alluded to the influence the family has on the individual when speaking of the different standards by which those inside and those outside the family are judged. In his work on personal identity, Robert Di Vito compares modern concepts of personhood with those drawn from the Bible. He describes the relationship between person and family in the Bible as one of dependence: ‘individual Israelites were embedded in the family and were dependent upon it for their identity;’ and one of precedence, ‘strict subordination of individual goals to those of the extended lineal group is designed to ensure the continuity and survival of the family,’ (1999, 223; also McNutt 1999, 70). The dependent relationship means that individual behaviour and morality are shaped by family membership. Di Vito (1999, 225) even goes so far as to deny that there are ‘selves’ whose actions are evaluable outside of the family.

Only the socially “embedded” self, identified by membership in a “father’s house,” is a morally intelligible agent. “Personal morality” apart from that bestowed by the social roles and practices of the group does not exist.

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<sup>23</sup> ‘The “clan” is too large to prove that all are related by blood’ (King and Stager 2001, 39).

<sup>24</sup> Aligning social groups with settlement dynamics must also accommodate the concept of the *gēr* or sojourner. Despite fictive kinship, such a person has not been accepted into the settlement as kin which indicates continuing suspicion. They are held at a greater social distance (Siu 1952, Spencer 1992). They are grafted on to their current settlement while remaining an outsider (Judg 19:16) (Spina 1983, 322). This emphasises how closely identity is linked to the lower order social unit. Not simply anyone can be accepted into the settlement, even if they ostensibly share a higher group identity—the settlement being highly related to family.

Di Vito does not claim that individuals in this society are not moral agents with personal choice or freedom. It is rather that ‘the community provides the *raison d’être* for individual action and concrete behaviour’ (1999, 225; also Meyers 2013, 119). This also means that a person’s individuality and identity is shaped by their social role: ‘the real “self” is the public “self”; and one is one’s social role and one’s status’ (Di Vito 1999, 232). Di Vito’s analysis of biblical personal identity is echoed by scholarship on the more recent Middle East (e.g. Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 384-5). In the Middle Eastern tribal society, the existence of defined social roles reduces potential ambiguity concerning the expected values and customs that shape behaviour. Individuals refer to the family, not just to understand their place in the world, but also as ‘the unit where a person is secure and where he can expect loyalty and afford to be loyal in his turn’ (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 389). This is what I mean by identity. The effect of social roles on behaviour I examine further when I discuss selected Judges’ texts. I raise the concept here to strengthen the claim that *who* a person is influences behaviour and that this *who* is primarily defined by the family.

An especially clear example is found in the different roles assigned to men and women. In the agrarian life of the ancient and contemporary Near East, roles and responsibilities are shaped by the different tasks needed for a household’s smooth running and female roles had just as much socio-economic impact as male ones (Meyers 1999, 2013).<sup>25</sup> A common categorisation of gender-differentiated roles is that male activity belongs to the public or outside sphere while female activity the household sphere (Dubisch 1986b, 10-11).<sup>26</sup> In a rural setting, this means that the male role is found in the fields while the female is in the processing of food, textile production and rearing children. As a custodian of the household, the wife immediately has significant control over the basic social unit. Although Carol Meyers (2013, 123) rejects a sharp gender dichotomy because private and public spheres intersect in the economy, perhaps a reason why the contrast has been drawn is that while the household aspires to self-sufficiency it must rely on and interact with a larger social group. It is the very intersection of these spheres that creates the dichotomy.

To give an example, the joining of outsider and insider in marriage was essential for the reproduction of the family despite the preference for autonomy (Lyons 2012, 47-8). To be wife, a woman must be brought into the household from *outside* and yet it is she who shoulders the

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<sup>25</sup> This is why the production and trading of textiles from the house economy is a valued part of the good wife’s role in Prov 31. Her products negotiate the social boundary, increasing prosperity and renown for the household in the public sphere (Prov 31:18, 22-24, 31). The two activities mentioned in an example of a Roman wife’s epitaph were ‘she kept the house and worked in wool’ (cited in Finley 1968, 130, also Rogers 1975, 733, 742).

<sup>26</sup> This dichotomy has been read as evidence of male dominance over female (Michaelson and Goldschmidt 1971). But, further investigation has warned against so simplistic a conclusion and revealed the power structures available to women through their central role in the household (Rogers 1975, Dubisch 1986a, Freidl 1986, Matthews 1994).

role of ‘trusty guardian of things inside’ having been assumed into a new social unit.<sup>27</sup> This tension informs the customs of patrilineality (descent through the father’s line), patrilocality (the wife is brought into her husband’s household) and endogamy (marriage within a group) claimed for the biblical family. These customs safeguard a household’s patrimony (Matthews 1994, 8). Reliance on the wider community weakens a family’s autonomy and so at times would feel like dealing with the Other (see Rosenfeld 1968, 1976).

Despite this suspicion, while from *inside* the society endogamy was traditionally viewed as the most common form of marriage alliance, anthropologists have argued that the practice of exogamy in Middle Eastern society was in fact widespread (e.g. Lehmann 2004, 143). The emic impression that endogamy was the norm would have arisen from the importance placed upon patrimony and the suspicion held towards other families in the rural economy. But, immediately apparent is the etic perspective of the anthropological argument. It may be better not to see here a contrast between belief and fact. Recognizing who is within and without the group is an essentially emic decision.<sup>28</sup> Given the concept of fictive kinship, families and settlements may regard their marriages as endogamous despite any definition an anthropologist comes up with (see Prato 2016). This warns us not to assume the extent and meaning of social relationships for people, particularly in a culture that both elevates kinship and eschews its definition by biology as a limitation. A more secure way of establishing who is related is by reading behaviour, the approach I am taking to the texts of Judges.

The extended family structure makes for the most successful and efficient manner of living in the rural ancient Near East (also Matthews 2015, 55). Its structure means that this social unit aspires to autonomy and is suspicious of other families, which leads to resisting absorption into higher social units. We also saw the significance of social roles for both the shaping of the family economy and its contribution to an individual’s self-understanding. Given the topographical diversity of Palestine, the family’s primacy in social organization and thus in shaping the identity and behavioural expectations of the individual becomes evident.

Despite a greatly extended view of kinship, the population of Ancient Palestine was more than a single family and interaction with this larger society was essential for social production. In turn, the variety of relationships formed through interaction structured society. While at times non-family may have felt like the Other, other times different social groups needed to join forces (Boer 2015, 74). This could be in response to intense agricultural periods or times of famine (Meyers 2013, 57, 110). Or it could be in the face of threats from a shared Other at a higher order, which as I have argued realigns the social units. When the Philistines attack, for

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<sup>27</sup> Demosthenes 57.122. See Foxhall (1989, 37), Rogers (1975, 733-5, 738).

<sup>28</sup> Decisions such as these may still have societal structures and rules, for example the principles of guest-friendship in the Classical world (see Herman 1987, Seaford 1994).

example, suspicion of the ‘Joneses’ next-door temporarily evaporates. This is what I mean by a context based recognition of the Other. But, just as a new ‘them’ appears in a certain context so, in response does a new ‘us’. This leads us neatly to consider the higher social strata of the clan and tribe.

### **Tribal society and the Bible**

Up to this point I have spoken of the ‘extended’ nature of the family as a social unit but without specifying how ‘extensive’ these relationships are. This is because the point at which the family with its several generations becomes a higher social unit cannot be sharply defined, another reason why we should be cautious of etic models. The imprecision is exacerbated by these societies’ tolerance of fictive kinship. Are we helped to understand the society by the biblical descriptions? Here, the tribe seems to be a prominent segment of Israelite society. But the number and definition of this social group varies, particularly in Judges (Matthews 2015, 74), and it is referred to in the texts by two different terms used equivocally (cf. Num 18:2; 36:3 and Josh 13:29). The close association of social group and settlement means that some names in the text are used to refer to a person, a settlement, a territory and a tribe.<sup>29</sup> Below the tribe in the social hierarchy, it appears as if an extended family network, the *mišpāḥā* or ‘clan,’ incorporates smaller units or households referred to by the term *bēt ’āb* in reference to the authority of an elder male. Except that the Bible uses these terms equivocally as well (cf. Gen 24:38, 40). When does a *bēt ’āb* become a *mišpāḥā*? It is not clear from the Bible if there is a strong distinction. In fact, there is only one occasion that the range of groups in the social pyramid are mentioned together, the commonly cited Josh 7:14.<sup>30</sup> Essentially, the Bible does not explain Israel’s social organization, it provides merely a sketch.

Attempts to flesh out the social organization of tribal Israel illustrates the Bible’s lack of precision. Drawing on the same data, three major sociological studies emphasise different groups in Israel’s pyramid. C. H. J. de Geus (1976), focuses on the *mišpāḥā*, Norman Gottwald (1979) prefers the tribe and Niels Peter Lemche (1985) chooses the *bēt ’āb* or as he prefers ‘lineage’ as the basis of social organization. Actually, Lemche (1985, 248-70) hedges his bets somewhat, collapsing the lower order units—the *mišpāḥā* and *bēt ’āb*—under the umbrella concept of lineage. Given the biblical data, however, I think this is the best approach even if it

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<sup>29</sup> E.g. ‘Gilead,’ Judg 5:17; 10:17; 11:1-2 cf. Ottosson (1992) and Finkelstein, Koch, and Lipschits (2011). Also ‘Dan’ is a person, a settlement and a tribe, e.g. Judg 18:29; 20:1.

<sup>30</sup> Even the biblical pyramid’s parade example in Josh 7:14-18 can be accused of equivocation. While *battīm* from the chosen *mišpāḥā* are to approach in v14, in v17 it is rather the *gəbārīm* from the *mišpāḥā* who approach. The same situation is found in the other cited example of the pyramid, 1 Sam 10:20-21. Apart from the individual Saul, son of Kish, we have only *mišpāḥôt* and *šibṭīm* as social units above him. The only place in Judges where the terms *mišpāḥā* and *bēt ’āb* occur together they are in apposition (9:1). And in Numbers where these terms abound (e.g. Num 1-4), *mišpāḥā* and *bēt ’āb* are also used in apposition and seem comparable. They do not refer to a hierarchy of social groups.

equivocates over the meaning of *mišpāḥâ* and *bêt 'āb* and leaves the tribe a more nebulous concept still (see Martin 1989, 104-5). The Bible is not precise about social structures, leaving the reader to wonder just how important clear definitions were for the narratives and the significance of the social levels for the Israelite identity.

Do we get a clearer idea of social distinctions from the archaeology? Not really, although I might be able to suggest why social levels are not well defined from the model of agrarian life I used to examine the socio-economic centrality of the family. McNutt (1999, 66) is typical in proposing that the grouping of houses in Iron I settlements ‘perhaps represent the extended family mentioned in biblical texts, and the entire village, with perhaps a dozen of these clusters of buildings, may have comprised the biblical *mišpāḥâ* or “kinship group”’. As we have seen, however, this assumes more precision than the texts admit. I think there is a lack of precision because the prominence of a group in the social consciousness is context based. Recalling my suggestion that contextualizing the Other produces a contextualized self, this means that social units are revealed in the situation to which they respond (McNutt 1999, 77; King and Stager 2001, 39). In the life of the settlement, socio-economic demands create relationship networks. Remember that the kinship group is unlikely to be biological. Instead, the composition of household and clan is fundamentally related to socio-economic pressures and dwelling proximity. Sometimes a whole settlement or more than one settlement might farm together during particular harvest seasons or may be mobilized as working groups to help struggling families.<sup>31</sup> At other times a situation would require concentrating on the immediate household. In the agrarian life found in the first millennium, social groups arise from shared concerns in common living spaces. There is a lack of interest in precise definitions because groups gather and disperse through context (Fried 1967, 133; Boer 2015, 97). If there is a distinction between *mišpāḥâ* and *bêt 'āb*, it may simply be found in the use to which familial relationships are put (cf. Steinberg 2007, 52-3).

Turning to the tribe, this higher order unit is also revealed in response to certain situations. For example, a number of settlements may combine to face crises together or to repel threats (Meyers 2013, 141-2). The facility of such gatherings must also be related to living proximity, but here we are speaking of regional groups of settlements. I would suggest that tribal identity operates in the same way as regional identity and is inextricably entwined with territory. Even if the biblical tribal territories represent an aspiration rather than a definite memory, the assumption that these texts are socially communicative entails an appreciation of Palestinian regions by the reader and the associated territorial identity felt by their populations.

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<sup>31</sup> Gottwald’s (1979) description of the *mišpāḥâ* as a ‘protective association of households’ is often repeated (e.g. Meyers 2013, 142; Boer 2015, 87).

We are familiar with this fractured landscape. By far, the most frequently mentioned territorial tribes in the Bible are Manasseh, Ephraim, Benjamin and Judah.<sup>32</sup> Their biblically defined territories align with the four geographic sub-regions of the Cisjordanian central hill country ‘that usually form the modern research boundaries of most archaeological surveys’ (Killebrew 2005, 159; also Finkelstein 1991, 20; Lehmann 2004, 157). Natural boundaries such as the Jezreel Valley, the Judean hills or the plateau between Ramallah and Jerusalem, group settlements into regional patterns. This is the conceptual hook on which biblical identity making hangs the higher order unit of tribe in a unified projection of Israel. From the four most important regions—henceforth tribes, other territorial traditions in these peoples’ memorial landscape, for instance those from Transjordan, are literarily extrapolated. Perhaps unsurprisingly, land and social organization are conceptually entwined.<sup>33</sup>

But simply because a family, settlement or tribe is recognisable in its operation in certain cases does not mean they enjoy an equivalent social distance.<sup>34</sup> Units of lower and higher order interact on a scale ‘more or less solidary and sociable—more in the inner spheres of home and community, progressively less as one proceeds toward the intertribal outer darkness’ (Sahlins 1968, 81). This is why the family is the basic social unit, the most prominent group in the social consciousness and has the greatest influence on identity. It is my view that social units of higher order are only recognised when necessary.<sup>35</sup> Because identity is multi-layered, socio-economic and even martial demands would at times produce conflicting allegiances. Accepting its preference for autonomy and the settlement proximity of the basic familial unit, conflicting responsibilities with respect to these different levels would be resolved towards the lower unit which enjoys the closest social (and physical) distance. In other words, one’s tribe is one of those facts about someone that is not primary in their self-understanding, but only has significance in particular contexts. This would be why there appears to be no evidence for a ‘tribal league’ beyond the biblical stories (Lemche 1985 et. al.). Without the context of the Other as other tribes, tribal identity becomes less prominent and more immediate local concerns re-emerge, reducing to the basic social unit and the default Other – other families.

Within the array of social identity levels an individual can claim, the preference for family can be shown from the inheritance traditions embedded in the biblical text. The allocation of territories described in Joshua needs to take account of settlement claims even when their

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<sup>32</sup> Levi is mentioned more frequently but this tribe does not have a territory ascribed to it. Of the geographic tribes, each of these four are mentioned more than twice as often as any other.

<sup>33</sup> Lemche’s (1998, 18) caution is well taken, however, that ethnic borders—identifying the Other—is rarely *only* geographical, but linguistic, occupational and mental, including shared memory and myths of origin.

<sup>34</sup> ‘The relationship between individual person and family does not feature as fully symmetrical to that between family and lineage, lineage and tribe, or town quarter and city’ (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 381).

<sup>35</sup> One anthropological definition of ‘tribe’ is a ‘culturally similar’ yet decentralized group whose ‘composite units are largely independent of one another economically [...] characterized by intensified interactions between member units and decreased interaction with outside groups’ (Creamer and Haas 1985, 739).

location falls outside the natural boundaries used as tribal borders.<sup>36</sup> Despite these boundaries marking geographic regions, certain settlements come to identify with a tribe other than that of the region in which they are located. Why would such a memory need be accommodating in Israel's story unless a prior family/settlement identity was maintained over the tribal identity subsequently aligned with topographic regions? Family identity is primary because it runs deeper.

The Bible places the people of Israel at the top of the social pyramid, entwined with the claim to a land. I have shown why this social level is the most nebulous from the fragmented topography, contextualized identity, opposition to homogenization and the socio-economic centrality of lower order social units. Above, I claimed that resolving the question of Israelite ethnicity was not necessary for my argument. Nevertheless, the issue is not irrelevant to identity according to Judges, a book that presents Israel in contrast to other ethnicities.<sup>37</sup> I argued that ethnicity was an emic feature expecting etic appreciation. The Bible sets out to be Israel's story and by that very fact unifies memories and presents an identity for acceptance. This follows a development in the experience of the people of Palestine from a localized identity to a growing identification with the region in response to its collapse. This in part caused and in part was shaped by the writing of the biblical texts. But while appreciation of the full landscape behind Judges is necessary, this means that the concept of 'Israel' as the highest order unit in the text is fluid. It is as well to heed Naomi Steinberg's (2007, 49) advice that, 'the reader must continually ask what size group is being referred to when the name "Israel" appears in a text in Judges'. I suggest this fluidity derives from the minimal importance Israelite identity has in the Judges stories at their point of origin as northern folklore. You can refer to Naphtali and Zebulun as 'the Israelites' (Judg 4:6, 10, 23) because at a certain focal point in the landscape 'Israel' is regarded as a large-scale label for a variegated population. The further away from the family we get, the more we rely on the literary creativity of the Bible to fashion the Israelite identity.

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<sup>36</sup> For example, the border between Manasseh and Ephraim has settlements identified with either tribe in each other's territories (Josh 16:9; 17:8-11). These tribal territories correspond to northern Samaria—between the Jezreel Valley and Shechem, and southern Samaria—between Shechem and Ramallah, respectively (Finkelstein 1991, 20) and this may also explain why Manasseh and Ephraim are the two 'half-tribes' of Joseph (e.g. Josh 16:4; 17:14-18). Issues of 'social porosity' (Herzfeld 2001, 138) and tribal borders arise in certain Judges narratives, which I explain further in my exegesis.

<sup>37</sup> Other ethnicities referred to in Judges may be equally nebulous. Thompson (1992, 310) regards the term 'Canaanite' to be as inappropriate as 'Israelite' (also Gertz et al. 2012, 63) and even Killebrew (2005, 93-4) thinks Canaanite indicates a multi-ethnic group. This aligns with the epigraphic evidence that 'Canaan' is an etic label for a varied region.

## Family and identity in the book of Judges

To speak of ‘tribal Israel,’ then, is to speak of a contextualized social organization literarily conceived from traditional and *familial* claims, the foundation of the historiographical landscape behind Israel’s story. Biblical narratives are above all concerned with stories. When the stories speak of large-scale cooperation (e.g. Judg 6:34-5), social units of higher order are described and reinforce a unified identity at the higher order by encouraging the memory of sub-regional and regional alliances. But when the stories describe their characters’ actions, patrimony, settlement and family shape decision making. At the root of this society is the family and it was ever thus.

What are the implications of these results for the text of Judges? If we accept that Judges is an elaboration of a core of ancient hero tales with the purpose of building an identity, these stories must have been retained because of their sociocultural significance.<sup>38</sup> In other words, the stories had the potential to inspire a diverse and migrating people to see themselves as sharers of a heritage. Central to this heritage and resonant for their contemporary situation is their family identity. In the biblical corpora, Kratz (2015, 87, 96) considers Judges to be the ‘binder’. A foundation legend (Gen – Josh) has been linked to monarchic annals associated with the two kingdoms (Sam – Kgs) by a collection of ancient folklore (Judg). To be a successful binder, Judges must accommodate the whole historiographical landscape from its setting in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to the social situation of the 5<sup>th</sup> century when Judges reaches its final form. In this way, the book is called to integrate two perspectives. First, the constructed identity in the form of Israel, subject of the foundation legend and the regnal accounts of Samuel and Kings, must find continuity in the binder. Secondly, authenticity with respect to the source material, added to the ongoing experience of an identity threatened with homogeneity, requires that the family and settlement remain the centre of the stories and not be absorbed into an anonymous nationalism, even if this ‘nation’ is Israel.

My argument has been that the social conditions behind the source material, the production and the redaction of the book of Judges privilege the family as the primary source of identity. The goal of my exegesis is to acknowledge these conditions when interpreting the stories. It is my view that, because this lower order is the primary identifier throughout the first millennium, in order to be socially communicative, biblical stories must continue to take familial patrimony seriously as something which shapes behaviour and memory.

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<sup>38</sup> That important cultural *traditions* predate biblical *texts* is argued by Smith (2014) in relation to warrior culture such as commemorated in literature from Ugarit and represented in Judg 5. He argues that ‘the Ugaritic texts help to indicate the antiquity of these ideas and ideals even if the biblical texts examined are not all of high antiquity’ (35).

## 2. Sisera and Jael

Why does Jael kill Sisera? The biblical text is not specific. But maybe this is part of the drama of the story. What increases the drama is that Jael's behaviour is not only about *why*, but *whether*: whether she ought to kill Sisera; whether she will. The tale weaves a social dynamic that leads admirers of the ancient legend both to will for Jael to strike the blow and yet worry she may not do it. Like all classic literature, the folktale can even provoke a debate about whether killing Sisera is the right thing to do. Jael is faced with an ambiguous social dynamic that complicates what behaviour is appropriate. For the audience's part, we may want her to kill Sisera, but are uncertain whether this is the right choice. Resolving the dilemma both for her and for us is what makes Jael a hero.

Literature, particularly heroic texts, tell their stories within and to a society whose values dictate what is honourable, shameful and dutiful. Jael's social values are shaped within a close-knit and local familial network and Sisera's intrusion into this setting upsets the social structures. From bemusing, his presence becomes threatening because his relationship to Jael is unclear. Does Sisera belong to 'us' or is he the Other and what might be the context by which Jael can recognize this?

Arguing that social units of higher order are revealed in response to necessity, I mentioned that extreme circumstances create strange bedfellows. In the face of a greater threat, rivalry with one's neighbours is set aside. But in the case of Judg 4, the aftermath of war only serves to increase the social ambiguity. In an apparent alliance with Jael's absent husband Heber, Sisera may be friend. But as defeated fugitive from a people related to Jael he may be foe. The choice facing Jael as she contemplates Sisera lying under her rug impresses itself upon her after he has entered her tent. Sisera may have come for refuge but he brings the war right into Jael's household with his victor Barak on his heels. In the struggle between us and the Other, the choice is always 'us'. But who is the Other? Do we see ourselves as others see us? In the specific context constructed by the story, neither Jael nor Sisera's emic perspective is available to the other, which thwarts their attempts to recognize loyalties and thus determine expected behaviour. They cannot distinguish who is to be relied upon and who is to be feared, hence Jael takes decisive action.

Ancient admirers of the folklore would understand this social dynamic and how it produces the drama by setting the hero a test of duty. But to those without a cultural connection with the traditions, in the composite texts of Judg 4 and 5 Jael's motivations seem elusive. The prose's editorial frame would have us believe she acts because of Yhwh's design. By setting the folklore in this framework, the rise of local heroes such as Deborah or Jael is explained in terms

of national disobedience to a national God (4:1-3) who in turn proves to be the architect of the heroes' triumph and the nation's salvation (v23-4) (Boling 1975, 99-100; Amit 1987; Finkelstein 2017a, 28-9). Not only is a unified Israel conceived by the frame, but also a united enemy in Jabin, 'King of Canaan' (4:2, 23-4), an area which in fact 'was never a single political entity' (Niditch 2008, 64; also Sasson 2012, 341, 2014, 272). The text's redaction has reimagined the 'us' as Israel and 'the Other' as Canaan, overlaid upon the folkloric milieu of local familial patrimony.

The same ideology may be found in Judg 5 where poetic invocation of Yhwh as victor also belongs to an editorial framework (Soggin 1987, 94-5; Fewell and Gunn 1990, 400-1). Mark Smith (2014, 247) describes 5:2-13 as a 'commentary' on vv14-30, in order to 'assert a national identity' (232). He distinguishes 'traditional material' such as vv4-5 and 'most of the core' vv14-30 from the poem's compositional process which suggests, 'an effort on the part of the composer to assert the reality of Israel as a pantribal entity, with Yhwh as its divine patron' (232). This reinterpretation of folklore unites local regions 'under the banner of deity, people, and country' (247). Yet, the Song of Deborah preserves the underlying stories so important to localities, settlements and families (also Sparks 1998, 112). As Susan Niditch (2008, 66) observes, 'implicit is a world of small independent chieftains or sheikhs who pledge loyalty to one or another overlord'.

Nationalist edits giving causality to Yhwh do not really answer the question of why Jael kills Sisera, although Yairah Amit (1987) argues that the text's ambiguity in this regard emphasises Yhwh's will behind proceedings. A theological reading does not stop the reader from questioning Jael's behaviour. In fact, in a redaction that seeks to respect what is a Galilean hero story (see Richter 1963, 62; Frankel 1992; Sasson 2014, 258) it is not the intention to erase Jael's motives.<sup>39</sup> Part of the identity-making exercise of Judges is that readers are encouraged to celebrate their heroes and so embed them in national beliefs and Jael's reasons are part of this folklore. Precisely because it belongs to celebrated traditions, however, Jael's motivation is not spelled out beyond the frame's ideological explanation. As Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn (1990, 394) remark, 'although we've watched what Jael does we are not told why she does it'. That Jael's behaviour is not explained does not seem to bother Sasson (2014, 274) who seems unconcerned with the question: '[Jael's] motivation for murdering Sisera can be endlessly debated' (also Soggin 1987, 78). While John H. Stek (1986, 71) is laconic: 'her motives remain hidden'.

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<sup>39</sup> In reference to Judg 4, Trent Butler (2009, 82) reflects that 'none of the stories of the judges are tied into an editorial straitjacket'. This, I would argue, is because the social implications of the local legends must be preserved for successful identity-making.

Yet socially communicative texts draw upon what people know about their society to tell their stories. If the editor ‘could assume his audience knew the traditions’ (Butler 2009, 108), he could assume Jael’s social concerns were perspicacious for them too. To understand them, the tradition gives us details of Jael and Sisera’s relationships and the roles they occupy guiding the reader to interpret their interaction accordingly. The answer to why Jael kills Sisera is found in the workings of a society that views family as its primary focus. In other words, asking ‘who does Jael think she is?’ opens a window onto what motivates her. The world constructed by the text gives us Jael’s reasons: she fights first for her family.

In my analysis, I am going to concentrate on Judg 4:17-22, which Soggin (1987, 77) calls ‘the earliest part of the narrative’ and so is perhaps most representative of the folkloric core (cf. also Finkelstein 2017a, 30). Setting aside this pericope excludes the editorial frame (vv1-3, 23-24) and the account of the battle (vv4-16), which will focus my exegesis upon Jael and Sisera’s part in the local hero tradition. I include v17 because it contains important details concerning their relationship and I think it belongs structurally to this scene.<sup>40</sup> With respect to Judg 5, Robert Boling (1975, 98) thought that exegesis of Judg 4 was impossible ‘without frequent reference to the Song of Deborah’. Judg 5 is certainly another witness to the heroic traditions concerning Jael and Sisera although, Finkelstein (2017b, 434) has recently argued that ‘the original heroic, oral material behind Judges 4-5 represents two different traditions’ (also Finkelstein 2017a, 34).

I am not going to focus upon the Song of Deborah in my reading of Sisera and Jael, but I will briefly review the relationship between the prose and poetry. This will preface a survey of the literature’s response to the question of Jael’s behaviour in killing Sisera in Judg 4-5. I do not think that scholarship has paid enough heed to the particular relationship between these two characters and how such a social dynamic shapes the encounter at the tent of Jael. To address this issue, we must consider the concept of social space in general and what follows from this analysis, the operation of the gendered social role of a woman as she safeguards her household. Then I will bring these two ideas from socio-anthropology to bear upon the tradition lying behind Judg 4:17-22 and try to answer the lingering question: why does Jael kill Sisera?

## **Jael in the literature**

### **Poetic prose or prosaic poetry?**

The relationship between Judg 4 and 5 is much discussed in scholarship not least because the question bears upon the history of Israel and its origins. The debate primarily focuses on the

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<sup>40</sup> This pericope is delimited at the beginning by a ‘parenthetical’ disjunctive-waw clause (*IBHS* §39.2.3c), refocusing the action upon the fate of Sisera in his flight from the battle rout described in v15.

date of the poem, to which the prose account is subsequently related (although see Amit 1987, 103-4). It is a common belief that Judg 5 contains one of the oldest texts in the Bible (e.g. Boling 1975, 98; Gray 1986, 261; Coogan 2006, 219; Niditch 2008, 76), although Jack Sasson (2012, 335) reminds us that there have long been those who have demurred from this conclusion.<sup>41</sup> And Smith (2014, 247) suggests early Iron II for the ‘current written form’.

A typical reason given for the Song’s ancient origin is its paratactic style (Hauser 1980), which is taken as suggesting a spontaneous oral response to an event (Bal 1987, 1; Webb 2012, 199). On this view the prose account of Judg 4 naturally comes later, taken to be a more considered appraisal of the battle (Gerleman 1951, 180) and ‘dependent on the earlier poetic version’ (Butler 2009, 134; also Halpern 1983, 400). A limitation of this approach is that the antiquity of Judg 5 is based upon an assumption that it gives proximate, even contemporary access to history.<sup>42</sup> On this view, Judg 4 too would present some account of history albeit dependent upon the poem. This opinion is held unapologetically by Trent Butler (2009, 130), but as Sasson (2012, 336) notes it ‘relies on reciprocal verisimilitude, with history and poetry buttressing each other’.

Alberto Soggin (1987, 81) rejects associating ‘aesthetic categories with a possible dating, because this is far too subjective’ and taking a different tack, accepts that the poem’s language reflects an Iron II date between the tenth and eighth century (Soggin 1987, 80, 93, following Garbini 1978). Approaches based upon linguistic comparison have also proved subjective however (Globe 1974, 509; Sasson 2012, 337; Smith 2014, 231), something Soggin (1987, 94) himself goes on to acknowledge.

Israel Finkelstein (2017a) has recently made a quite different analysis of the relationship between Judg 4 and 5. He argues from archaeological data that because the ‘theaters of operation’ are different for these texts (34), they represent two different oral traditions that were merged by a pre-Deuteronomistic, North Israelite author of the Song in the first half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century (39). He also thinks that both traditions ‘represent memories of stormy events in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE’ (38). On his reading, then, it is the *subsequent* composition of the Song that conflates the prose with the poetry.

While evidence for the poem’s age remains inconclusive, an early date remains the scholarly preference (Sparks 1998, 110). Nonetheless, in summarizing the possibilities Sasson (2014, 315) has recently concluded,

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<sup>41</sup> As an example of those who date the poem late, Sasson (2012, 335) cites a remark from Maurice Vernes taken from George Moore (1895). He also mentions Richter (1963) and de Vaux (1971) as ‘those who do not consider the Poem a Victory Song, so likely a later pastiche’ (Sasson 2012, 338).

<sup>42</sup> John Gray (1986, 261) thinks the battle between Barak and Sisera was c.1150, while John F. A. Sawyer (1981) refers to a solar eclipse on 30 September 1131 which he argues must have been witnessed by the Song’s author (see also Coogan 2006, 219).

My own sympathy is with the judgement that, as far as biblical literature is concerned, priority of inspiration is irrelevant [...] at best we can assign individual units before or after the exile, always with the proviso that material from either side of the divide may have been shuffled during centuries of manipulation.

I too sympathize with this assessment. I am interested in the composite nature of the accounts as revelatory of the different identity levels to which they appeal and the world the texts have constructed in this light. That a local hero tradition has been pressed into nationalized service is the important chronology in my approach hence, a judgement on the dating of Judg 4 and 5 is unnecessary for my study. Nevertheless, a further result of investigating these compositions in the development of an Israelite identity might well be suggestions for dating the texts.<sup>43</sup> Leaving the question of these texts' relationship aside, we shall now look at how scholars have understood the behaviour of Jael as part of the folklore.

### **Gender, eroticism and hospitality**

Not many scholars have placed Jael's motives at the centre of their exegesis. Mentioning 5:24, Boling (1975, 100) is happy that Jael is a 'covenant loyalist' and so acts in defence of God's law. Barry Webb (2012, 193) too feels that this is enough of an explanation and that Jael's 'unorthodox' heroic status serves to underline Deborah's prediction (4:9). Butler (2009, 108) also sees Jael's actions as part of a bigger picture in what is a parody of a battle story about the 'reversal of gender roles, loss of honor and betrayal of treaties'. These themes, along with cultural expectations of hospitality, reoccur in the exegesis on Judg 4 and 5.

Led by the prominent roles given to women in the story, common to the majority of readings is the importance of gender. Mieke Bal (1988, 231) finds this the dominant theme in the whole of Judges, in particular the murder of daughters. Under Bal's 'countercoherent' scheme of 'displacement' (198), Jael appears as the 'avenging mother' in retaliation for the death of the nameless woman in Judg 19 (211-6). I do not think her construction of a 'non-chronology' helps us uncover the social dynamic or Jael's motivations, neither from the point of view of the traditional hero story nor the redaction.

The story's gender theme has also been read as part of a traditional trope where a woman sympathetic to the cause hides fugitives (Josh 2; 2 Sam 17:17-20). Rather than a colluder, however, Jael is the 'iron fist in the velvet glove' (Niditch 2008, 66). Her gender is thought to emphasize the shamefully complete conquest of Sisera. The scene 'reverses the balance of authority between the sexes' (Sasson 2014, 266). Sisera is emasculated in his defeat (Bal 1987).

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<sup>43</sup> The implications of exegesis can suggest a particular intertextuality. Sasson's (2012, 350) analysis that Judg 5 arranges the tribes by descent from matriarchs for example, goes on to suggest for him that 'traditions about Jacob, his wives, and the personal tribulations that they experienced were available when the Poem was constructed'.

Along with Barak he is ‘subservient to women’ and they prove to be ‘unmanly men’ (Zucker and Reiss 2015, 36). As evidence of gender role reversal, I think this latter view is problematic because it implies a deference to the role of women in this society that I do not think is accurate (see Meyers 2013; also Mazar 1965, 302 n. 27). Nevertheless, the shame attached to a man being overcome by a woman is a recurring motif in Judges (4:9; 9:54; 16:18-9). And the appeal to shame as an incentive has also been applied to Jael who must address the situation that she is alone with a man in her tent and ‘vindicate her honour from suspicion’ (Gray 1986, 259).<sup>44</sup>

Another aspect of the sexes that exegesis ancient and modern has emphasized is the erotic, although I concur with Sasson (2012, 342-3) that this is often overdone. An idea that sex is subconsciously linked to death is brought to bear upon Judg 4-5 by Niditch (1989, 45) for whom Jael is ‘heroic and liminal, a warrior and seducer, alluring and dangerous, nurturing and bloodthirsty’ (also Conway 2016). The defeated warrior’s shame is depicted in epic poetry as a ‘despoiled’ or ‘ravaged woman’ (Niditch 1989, 50). This is another way in which the reversal of gender is understood. Much has been made in the Song of the erotic connotations of the warrior sinking to his knees between Jael’s feet (Bal 1988, 228; Niditch 2008, 81). Alexander Globe (1975, 364-6) however, thinks that the principal imagery here is rather of subjugation and defeat, chiefly in a military context, notwithstanding elements of the defeated (male) warrior as a despoiled woman. A further side to this sexualized reading is the depiction of Jael as a deadly mother to Sisera. This reading is preferred by Sasson (2012, 343-4) who also connects the episode with heroic poetry in the Gilgamesh Epic.

Another popular theme that scholarship has found in the Jael/Sisera encounter is hospitality and refuge (e.g. Stek 1986, 71). Is Jael offering refuge to an enemy or hospitality to a friend? Is she constrained by custom to provide sanctuary? Or is it a clever subterfuge for her slaughter? This theme also raises the question of Jael’s loyalty, which Soggin (1987, 77-8) describes as ‘twofold: towards the Canaanites and towards Israel’ and in which Jael makes a choice for what is ‘her real duty’. Jael’s social quandary remains a common interpretation of the position in which she finds herself. She is provoked into action due to an untenable position, caught between relationships. She must choose between her husband’s ally or the approaching victorious army and ‘her desire for survival drives her to wield the authority of violence’ (Fewell and Gunn 1990, 396).

Victor H. Matthews (1991) takes the refuge theme as the centre of his exegesis. Following the schema of Julian Pitt-Rivers (1968), he suggests that a contravention of hospitality conventions provokes the slaughter. Sisera should not have sought refuge in a woman’s tent, nor should a

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<sup>44</sup> The dishonour theme is tied up with that of hospitality customs (see Matthews 1991, 16) to which I will come shortly.

solitary Jael have shown him welcome. Gender and social custom are certainly underlying issues; however, I do not think the protocols Matthews identifies apply in quite the way he describes. The ambiguity of Sisera and Jael's relationship means that the protocols gain no social traction to be successful. John Gray (1986, 259) recognizes that Jael is 'caught between the horns of a dilemma'. While an apt description, I do not think that the motivations that present Jael with her dilemma are as singular as social shame or gender politics. Certainly, the ambiguous dynamic is explicable in terms of the network of relationships within which Jael and Sisera are embedded, including their gender roles. But it is not enough to which to attribute Jael's murderous reaction and we are still no nearer to her own reasons. My view is that the particular relationship between Sisera and Jael and the social roles in which the particular encounter places them creates the situation whereby Jael chooses to act.

The fundamental point is that this episode is not simply about hospitality, politics and gender. It is not simply about the encounter of any man and woman in exemplar. It is about a *particular* man and woman and their *sometimes*-interlocking social identities; hence the folktale's significance and cultural relevance. Why Jael kills Sisera is in a large part due to who Jael and Sisera are. And, I argue it is also about *where* they are that shapes their behaviour, which certainly has to do with gender, hospitality and political loyalty. In other words, it is significant for their behaviour that this scene takes place in the tent of Jael, wife of Heber and that Sisera has fled to it under the assumption that there he has an ally (v17).<sup>45</sup> I take the same critical approach to the text as Matthews but I argue that there are further ways in which Sisera and Jael are related that frustrate the application of social conventions. I will spend more time with Matthews in my analysis, but first, in order to draw out the significance of who and where we shall look at two ideas from socio-anthropology—first, the concept of social space; secondly, the female role in the household—before applying them to the particulars of the story.

## **Social space and social roles**

### **Social space**

If I hold a loud conversation in a library I rightly should be told to be quiet. Maintaining silence at a football match on the other hand is an odd way to spend an afternoon. Where we are affects which behaviour is appropriate. The promotion of social order relies upon defining and enforcing appropriate behaviour (Douglas 1972, 70; Bourdieu 1989, 14), an appropriateness which, contingent upon the space within which behaviour is found, requires the establishment and maintenance of boundaries as part of a society's structures (Douglas 2003, 115). A society

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<sup>45</sup> This is indicated by the causal subordinate clause of v17b (*IBHS* §38.4a).

is always associated with a space or collection of spaces (Cresswell 1996, 11). In this way, social structures are shaped by physical places in view of the behaviour (or even the people) expected within a place. Through its use by and in society, a physical space takes on a character that suggests what is fitting for that space. Thus, we can conceptualize a ‘social space’ arising from this connection (Wilson 1980, 139).

The social structures that bring order to societal behaviour delimit this social space with social boundaries, just as a place is delimited by physical boundaries. At this intersection of perspectives, the physical delimitation of the space often coincides with that of the social, so that the threshold of a concrete place becomes significant as the margin where different social values demand negotiation (Berking 1999, 39; Cresswell 1996, 149). Such a conception of space in society underlies why we can speak of objects, persons or behaviour being ‘out of place’ or of people being ‘put in a difficult position’ such as Jael on the horns of her dilemma. The exuberant shouting appropriate at the football is *out of place* in the library. Conversely, certain places become the appropriate location for particular social activities. In the Hebrew Bible, the city gate is the place for judgement (Deut 21:19; 22:15, 24; Ruth 4:1-2; Prov 31:23, 31), while the threshing floor is a place for community interaction (2 Sam 6:6; 24:18-24).<sup>46</sup>

A third aspect that colours the combination of social and physical space is that of the identity or social role of people found in the space. *Who* someone is combined with *where* someone is shapes the overall social space and hence, what behaviour is expected from each person within it (Cresswell 1996, 3). While there is an intersection of the physical and social in conceptually locating the boundaries that social order requires, this conceptualisation must also take into account the role expected of a particular actor in relation to the space. It is not simply that a *place* requires certain behaviour, but that certain *roles* in certain *places* require certain behaviour. When in my colleague’s office, it is not expected that I rifle through the drawers of his or her desk. Nevertheless, opening drawers in an office is not *per se* spatially inappropriate behaviour, unlike shouting in a library. Thus, behavioural appropriateness can be connected to identity in relation to space. *Who* someone is forms part of the social structure: roles indicate a relationship to or *location* within society. The language is familiar; we speak of people occupying different *positions* in society (Bourdieu 1989, 17). Again, the concept of a ‘social space’ emerges.

From this analysis, we can see a relational dimension to the liminal interaction of social and physical. Precisely as *social* space these structures hang upon the relational interaction of people within society. But, if the location of social values is personal encounter within a space and such a space and its boundaries only become apparent through interaction (Bourdieu 1989,

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<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of biblical social spaces see Matthews (2003, 13).

16), how should we understand the abiding connection of social values and expectations with physical spaces? The coincidence of the physical with the social may be a means of concretely establishing a threshold beyond the instance of interaction, aiding the maintenance of society's boundaries (Douglas 2003, 140). For this reason, the perception of a space's significance in the social structure is precisely that of a group, of the society and not an individual (Wilson 1980, 139; Dubisch 1986b, 27). Who someone is in a space is embedded in his or her relationship both to that space and to the society perceiving the space, hence the creation of a social role, further *situating* the person (Matthews 2006, 49). As James Flanagan (1999, 29) explains, 'social space is not a thing but a set of relations that are produced through praxis'.

A clear example of identity shaping behavioural expectations is the differentiation of gender appropriate space (Michaelson and Goldschmidt 1971; Rogers 1975, 727-56). The café or square, for instance, in a traditional Mediterranean village is the appropriate space for men, while women are seen as being 'out of place' there (Rogers 1975, 739; Dubisch 1986b, 11; Freidl 1986, 43-4; Pavlides and Hesser 1986, 68). Conversely, the prominence of women in the household make their influence in that space significant. In these examples, space and gender intersect as co-authors of the social structure that dictates behaviour. We can speak of a *gendered* space. It is not simply that there is *behaviour* appropriate to the village square or the household, but also that the socially gendered role appropriate to the place is the only role through which such behaviour is suitable. This leads us to consider just such a role that appears in the story of Jael: a woman in her household.

### **The role of women in the household**

I have previously discussed the socio-economic centrality of the family and how gender-differentiated roles—male activity: public/outside, female activity: private/inside—constitute a division of labour that accords considerable influence to women in this familial society (Meyers 1999, 40). A wife is 'to uphold the rights and honor of her husband's household to ensure its survival' and she protects it even from 'physical endangerment' (Matthews 1994, 8). The basic social unit of which women are custodians is where the values of status and honour centre (Peristiany 1965a, 1968, 1976). I also noted how a sharp gender dichotomy may be inappropriate because of the intersection of public and private in an economy that aspires to autonomy while being constrained to interact with others (see Meyers 2013, 123, also Hanish 2012). The influence of the private on the public (Bowser and Patton 2004) renders the intersection of these spheres, at the threshold of the house, a transitional margin where women exercise a great deal of power (Dubisch 1986a). In this way, hospitality—the bringing of a guest across the threshold—touches the female sphere of influence (Hobbs 1993, 94).

There are biblical examples of this type of social dynamic. In the ode to the ‘competent wife’ (*’ēšet-ḥayil*) that concludes the book of Proverbs (31:10-31), the central virtue she exhibits is the successful execution of her responsibility as custodian (see esp. Prov 31:15, 21, 27). As well as this general administration of the home, her role includes the making and selling of textiles (vv13, 19, 22), trading from the home economy (v18, 24) and agricultural management (v16). In the Psalms, a measure of a man’s blessedness is that his wife is ‘like a fruitful vine in the *innermost part of your house*’ (Ps 128:3). And the wife’s social role as host is reflected in the narrative of 2 Kgs 4:8-17, a scene concerning the welcome of an outsider into the home. Here, the ‘great woman’ (*’išā gədôlâ*) of Shunem acts as host to Elisha, in what seems to be a wife’s responsibility as household manager. We also find this picture in Proverbs in which Wisdom is portrayed as a generous hostess (Prov 9:1-6).<sup>47</sup>

If the marginality of the house’s threshold constitutes the transition between public—the place of business—and private—the social space of identity—it is an important interface for the well-being of the family. Perhaps also why it is fitting that the wife stands at the boundary is that she embodies this liminality: an outsider brought inside through marriage. Jael’s place as household custodian means she stands at the boundary, the opening to her tent, making her the first point of contact to control Sisera’s interaction and safeguard her patrimony (4:18).<sup>48</sup>

For these reasons, I do not think we can agree with Matthews (1991, 14) that the ‘independent action’ of Jael in offering hospitality is ‘a breach of custom,’ for which 2 Kgs 4:8-17 and Prov 9:1-6 offer biblical counter-examples. Rather than being a ‘violation of the hospitality code for a woman to offer hospitality’ (Matthews 1991, 16), it is a female role to manage the threat-neutralization that hospitality conventions are there to achieve. The problem with Jael’s invitation is rather that it is not clear that the conventions should apply in the case of Sisera. Under the protocols to which Matthews appeals, hospitality becomes of most use when applied to the stranger, from whose potential danger the conventions protect. Is Sisera a stranger to Jael? Would such protocols be followed in wartime when the niceties of social customs are often abandoned? It would seem Sisera is not a stranger if he flees to her tent deliberately because of the ‘peace’ between his and Jael’s networks (Judg 4:17). In which case, the law of

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<sup>47</sup> For further examples and discussion see Hobbs (1993, 95, 2001, 24), Matthews (1994).

<sup>48</sup> Mary Douglas (2003) has argued that transgression of boundaries is often characterized as pollution or impurity. As custodian, the wife is responsible for controlling pollution by maintaining household boundaries, physical and social (Dubisch 1986a, 196, also 197-201). The idea of the house as an appropriate space for women may follow from the identification of this task with her role in society at large: maintenance of the boundary requires remaining within the boundary (Lyons 2012, 47). Nevertheless, the crossing of a boundary need not be a transgression if it is properly handled (Dubisch 1986a, 203, also 207-8), a mechanism which recalls the protocols of hospitality which neutralize the threat of the stranger (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 15-6). This is also the wife’s role to manage (Hobbs 1993, 2001). As overseers of the transitional margin between public and private, we might describe the task of women as the clarification of ambiguous (so, threatening) social situations.

hospitality described as ‘the problem of how to deal with strangers’ (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 13) carries less weight (also Malina 1986, 181).

Having briefly considered these two anthropological ideas, we can now return to the tradition of Jael and Sisera with fresh eyes. The story itself gives us some important social details in Judg 4:11 and 17 that help the reader to situate the social space subsequently recounted and see what is at stake when the fleeing warrior comes to Jael’s tent.

### Why does Jael kill Sisera?

#### Jael’s family

In my discussion of family and identity I explained the significance of kinship in units of social organization that resist homogenization. In the first place, kinship designates who is in the group, defining the social roles and the social space. Secondly, personal identity is drawn from one’s place in and relationship to the community, to the group identity. This is how I defined identity—situating oneself among others. Hence, identity shapes behavioural expectations: to whom loyalty is due and from whom loyalty is expected (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 389; also Zeid 1965, 249).

When we apply these sociological theories to a reading of Judg 4:17-22, we can note first how the pericope itself emphasizes kinship information. As the scene’s location is carefully stated, we learn that it is the ‘tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite’ *’ōhel yā ’ēl ’ēšet heber haqqēnī* (Judg 4:17a).<sup>49</sup> The narrative momentum is paused at v17 inviting us to pay attention to a statement about Jael that underlines her role both in her society and in the story. Jael is identified with her family. Next, embedded in this identification is an identity claimed for Sisera. Judg 4:17b relates Sisera’s decision to flee to Jael’s tent to the ‘peace between Jabin, King of Hazor and the household (*bêt*) of Heber the Kenite’.<sup>50</sup> Her husband’s politics immediately suggests that Jael and Sisera enjoy a relatively close ‘social distance’ (Sahlins 1968, 74, 1972, 191-6), which would prepare us to expect a cordial exchange if an earlier detail had not complicated the picture. At a previous point in the narrative, preceding the introduction of Jael’s character is a note regarding the family she now belongs to by marriage. ‘Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the sons of Hobab, father-in-law of Moses’ (4:11). Beyond the detail that Heber’s tent is not pitched among his kindred, there is a hint here of the shared patrimony the Kenites enjoy with Israel, referenced at the beginning of Judges (1:16).<sup>51</sup> Taken

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<sup>49</sup> This space is not specified in the Song but is implied by its paratactic style (Judg 5:24).

<sup>50</sup> *’šālōm* indicates more than the absence of conflict pure and simple: it is a positive relationship of friendship or quite simply an alliance’ (Soggin 1987, 66).

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin Mazar (1965, 301) and Marlene Mondriaan (2011, 422) suggest that the Kenites pitched their tents where the work (metallurgy is the common supposition) took them. In which case the ‘separation’ (*niprād*) of

in conjunction with the link between Heber and Jabin of Canaan, this relationship blurs the lines separating ‘us’ from ‘them’. Nevertheless, ‘peace’ is not kinship. Despite their ambiguities, the story’s social dynamics prime the reader for the big reveal of Jael’s loyalties.

We should spend some time clarifying the various positions these social units occupy in society as constructed by the text. In the overall editorial frame to the book of Judges Hobab is presented as an important figure whose descendants are related both to Judah and the Kenites (1:16).<sup>52</sup> While a tribal nation is an underlying assumption of the book’s framework, it is interesting that in the final composition, the Kenite social group is placed on a par with the single tribe of Judah. In Judg 4 and the telling of Jael’s story, the familial setting of Heber’s household is presented as, to use Benjamin Mazar’s terms (1965, 300), ‘one branch’ of the ‘clan’ of Hobab the Kenite. This presentation situates Heber’s ‘tent’ (Judg 4:11) as a social unit of lower order. The impact of v11 on the story is to indicate that we are speaking of the family of Jael and the concerns of this social unit of lower order in relation to the war and its aftermath in the person of Sisera. In a composite work at the service of pan-Israelite identity building, local, familial interests have risen to the story’s surface with details of a family’s migration. In the light of v11, v17 reveals the layers to Jael’s identity which mean that a convivial welcome for Sisera is not a forgone conclusion. Jael’s house is estranged from her kin among Judah, but does that make them (or in the nationalist edit, the ‘Israelites’) the Other? Does the peace make Sisera ‘us’?

This uncertainty should not surprise us in light of Paula McNutt’s (1994, 113-4) analysis that the Kenites’ dual alliance as presented in Judg 4 depicts them as a *marginal social group*. In this she draws upon Victor Turner’s distinction between the ‘outsider’ (in our terms ‘the Other’) and the marginal, ‘who are simultaneously members (by ascription, optation, self-definition, or achievement) of two or more groups whose social definitions and cultural norms are distinct from, and often even opposed to, one another’ (Turner 1974, 233). Liminality is not only applied to the Kenites, of course. In the case of Israelite identity too, there is a ‘sense of marginality and contingency inherent in the tradition’ (Machinist 1994, 54). Pertinently, McNutt (1994, 111) connects the Kenites’ marginality with the tension between the aspiration for socio-economic autonomy and the need for a larger society.

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Heber’s household from the main group need indicate nothing more than expediency. Judg 4:11 is to explain the presence of Heber in Galilee when the geographical origin of the Kenites ‘is normally identified as southeast of Judah on the border with Edom’ (McNutt 1994, 114) with which the link between the Kenites and Judah made in the frame of Judges (1:16) agrees.

<sup>52</sup> Num 10:29-32 tells us the story. Moses convinces his father-in-law to accompany the Israelites to the Promised Land by offering him and his household the same “good” that will come to Israel (vv29, 32). While not an Israelite, Hobab (and the Kenites) nevertheless assume a kinship status with the Israelites through Moses and receive a share in the land.

There is, in fact, a clear incongruence between notions and actions with regard to such marginal groups—between the ambivalent attitudes directed toward them and a reliance on them for the production of economic and cultural necessities.

Of course, social reliance works both ways. Just as Israelites might be suspicious of, yet reliant upon the Kenites, so the Kenites, although marginal, are reliant on others. In fact, it is their marginality that makes them ‘particularly dependent on relationships of this kind’ (Soggin 1987, 77).

In our story, Sisera’s and Jael’s social networks seem to overlap, which suggests they have a particular relationship (Mazar 1965, 301). But this overlap also introduces an ambiguity surrounding group identity. If group identity is unclear, then the expected values and customs are unclear, which is dangerous in a society where family is favoured and the Other suspicious. If Jael is not among the Other because her social group plays both sides, she may also find difficulty in being ‘us’ with anyone at a social unit of a higher order than her family, particularly in view of the family’s migration away even from the main Kenite social group (Mazar 1965, 301; Sasson 2014, 274).<sup>53</sup> I suggest that the dilemma Jael faces is caused by the uncertainty surrounding her *place* in respect of Sisera which creates an unstable social space.

Part of the issue is that identities are not always stable because they take on different meanings within certain relationships and in varying circumstances. This is because recognition of the Other—by whom we may self-identify—is context based. As Jonathan Z. Smith (1985, 10) notes, ‘the relation to the “other” is a matter of shifting temporality and relative modes of relationship’. But spotting the context and so recognising the Other is difficult for a marginal social group on the threshold between ‘them’ and ‘us’. Mark Brett (1996b, 10) explains,

the most problematic social transactions occur precisely at the boundary, between “us” and those who are “like us.” Binary divisions simplify the complexities of “proximate otherness;” otherness is a matter of relative rather than absolute difference.

But when the basis for assessing even the ‘relative difference’ is unclear, the already despised ‘proximate otherness’ becomes the dangerous *approximate* otherness.

Thus, the story places Jael at another social threshold. On the one hand the lineage into which she has come by marriage, while not Israelite, is nevertheless given an inheritance with Judah by the promise of Moses. On the other, her family has now migrated away from this inheritance, geographically and socially. Hostility between Canaan and Israel seems not to compromise the household of Heber, such is the social marginality of the Kenites. And yet, this marginality is tested by the war, for Sisera feels so much of a positive relationship with the household of

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Gen 13:9 for a similar story of a family’s separation.

Heber that he flees to their tents. The narrative deliberately paints this ambiguous social picture for the reader. There is thus great uncertainty surrounding the status of the household's boundaries and the inheritance over which Jael has custodianship. Such a tension falls heavy upon Jael when Sisera flees to her tent (Soggin 1987, 77-8).<sup>54</sup>

Heber never appears as an actor in the narrative or the poem. It is his wife, Jael, who must deal with any social expectations in receiving Sisera. While not inappropriate, the absence of the household's master places more emphasis upon this role as guardian of the threshold (Zucker and Reiss 2015, 33). She stands at the margin of a household with a varied history. Stressing a wife's social role is in keeping with the female-centred narrative, but it also focuses the attention of the reader upon the dynamic between Sisera, under the pressure of flight from the enemy and Jael at the threshold of her tent. The ambiguity of Heber the Kenite's social alliances added to the uncertainty that comes with war lends the encounter a particular significance. How well can Jael perform what is expected of her in these dangerous times? Is she to uphold the honour of Heber's most recent alliance, or that of the household's heritage? The social space is unclear just when Jael needs it to be secure. *Who* is Jael's family and *where* do the social boundaries lie? The narrative tension 'hangs on the struggle Jael faces in choosing which allegiance to honor at the present moment' (Butler 2009, 100).

I have already noted the additional doubt regarding the terms on which Sisera is to be received at the household. The narrative has carefully and subtly juxtaposed the Mosaic link (v11) with the claim for 'peace' between Heber and Jabin (v17). Hospitality protocols seem not to be applicable. Sisera is not a stranger, requiring a social transformation. Would it be useful to conceive of the encounter rather in terms of the 'right of refuge' also found in some nomadic Near Eastern societies (Zeid 1965, 254)? If this institution is applicable to the situation, the *bêt* of Heber is honour bound to grant Sisera asylum. Yet, this model too is inadequate. If this were the case the care taken to outline the marginal social background of Heber would be superfluous since the right of refuge can be demanded of anyone, even enemies. Further, why would Sisera hide himself further from discovery once he had attained a recognised place of sanctuary (cf. 4:18-20)?

If we are seeking motivation for Jael's actions, because of the boundaries she guards her behaviour depends upon *who* Sisera is in this social space. Her dilemma is that she does not know, and her story takes care to present us with the dilemma from the first verse (v17). Not

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<sup>54</sup> Jael is also described as 'wife of Heber the Kenite' in the poem (5:24) but the background given in 4:11 is not mentioned. The selective nature of detail is to be expected given the poem's style. Nevertheless, the effect is that the social ambiguities surrounding the encounter are not prominent in the poem. But if we allow that the cultural memory represented in Judg 4 is the same that gave rise to Judg 5, the initial identification of Jael with Heber the Kenite (5:24) would refer hearers of the poem to her marginal status in order to infer the situation. Her behaviour in turning welcome into violence (vv25-6) would be viewed by the song's audience in this light.

only do she and her household stand on the margins of the public sphere, but also the private sphere she protects is confronted with a visitor who is difficult to situate in terms of its threshold. The certainty amid this confusion is that Sisera is non-family within the family boundary and always remains a potential threat, because potentially the Other. Since the story is set in a war, even more uncertainty is created.

While the prose composition has allowed the local folktale close to the narrative surface, the Song of Deborah on the other hand puts this tradition more at the service of the ideology (Soggin 1987, 99). Although reference to Jael's household is made none of the details are present. The compositional purpose of the song to praise the deeds of Yhwh is less concerned to justify Jael's behaviour: Yhwh is the victor. Nevertheless, it is felt important to reference Heber the Kenite (5:24) in order to appreciate the underlying traditions and recall the legendary Jael to the minds of the song's audience (Smith 2014, 250). This reference is enough since those whose folklore it is are familiar with the story's social issues. Jael's (and so, Yhwh's) triumph is all the greater against this backdrop of social marginality and tenuous relationships.

If we turn now to consider the account of Sisera and Jael's meeting in the light of these cultural points, we should notice that the characters' actions illustrate first, their accepted social proximity but second, their actual doubt about the identity of the other. When we apply the implications of v17 (against the background of v11) to a reading of Judg 4:18-22, we shall see that in the end Jael kills Sisera because he is not family.

### **Pinning Sisera down: Jael's identity resolution**

With the scene set, Jael's story begins with a fleeing warrior looming into view. She immediately reacts to the appearance of Sisera by exiting her tent to meet him (4:18a).<sup>55</sup> In crossing the threshold of the tent before he can, she controls the boundary. And yet, her reaction is to invite Sisera deliberately to cross, with a threefold invitation concluding with reassurance: 'do not fear' (v18b). This reaction accords with her gender role both in interaction with a man not of her family and as custodian of her household. The situation of war surrounds the scene with an urgency. In this light, Jael sees the most successful way she can safeguard her household is to domesticate Sisera and not to attempt to repel him (Dubisch 1986a, 203-4). There is no mileage for her in engaging in conflict at the tent's threshold, particularly in the apparent absence of her husband. With this invitation Jael relies upon the method appropriate to her social role, safely managing the boundary breach by reinforcing protective social structures, fragile in these volatile circumstances.

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<sup>55</sup> The initial *wayyiqtol* (18a) shows her action is in response to the verb *ns* in 17a.

The honorific ‘my lord’ shows some deference on the part of Jael to Sisera but need only be the simplest politeness; a familiar manner of referring to someone with respect (Gen 18:3, 12; Judg 6:13, 15; 1 Sam 1:15, 26). There is no indication whether Sisera is known or unknown to Jael by this greeting, but she seems to have situated him as someone to be received with honour, and thus *with the appropriate behaviour* in the social space. Honorifics can also be used to draw attention to inappropriate behaviour. Underlining someone’s status in the face of their shameful action serves as a stark reminder of what behaviour is due from them in the situation (cf. 2 Sam 13:12) (Matthews 1994, 12). If this is Jael’s tactic here, then this too contributes to re-establishing the social boundaries that should obtain. And if Sisera is overstepping the mark by seeking shelter from her as Matthews (1991, 15) argues, Jael in response is controlling his relationship to the social space. He is to be respectful and behave accordingly, recognising the social debt that is her due should he accept her welcome (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 27).

Nevertheless, as a liminal figure in relation to social units larger than her family Jael sits somewhere between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This means that protective social norms are not guaranteed to be shared or honoured towards non-family. Although he chooses to flee to her tent we have no idea what sort of welcome Sisera was expecting at the margins. Jael’s invitation challenges him to acknowledge the social space she offers and respond appropriately. I will describe this as a ‘guest situation’ to avoid confusion with ‘hospitality’ and its protocols, less evidently reliable in this case. We might say that Jael renders the situation that of a reputable friend receiving a guest, instead of a fugitive fleeing war to society’s margins. The invitation with the honorific establishes a particular social distance which expects a specific reaction from Sisera. By aligning the boundaries in this way, Jael takes control and attempts to render Sisera’s crossing of her threshold less threatening by creating a social space.

Her attitude is comparable to any Lady of the House feigning welcome in the face of an undesired or inconvenient arrival for the sake of social propriety. In Jael’s case, however, the stakes are higher. To identify a space (that is, to establish what is appropriate in relation to that space) as a means of control is to heighten the significance and symbolism of the space, making its boundaries fragile by drawing attention to them as points of resistance (Cresswell 1996, 163; also Abu-Lughod 1990). If Jael had allowed Sisera some control of their interaction, the consequence of choosing her tent as his escape route may have been less significant. As it is, rather than reducing the threat the assertion of the social space stimulates the tense situation.

Jael’s encouragement to change direction *towards* somewhere (*sr + ’el*, v18b) has ambiguous connotations in the Bible. On the one hand, it evokes offers of traditional hospitality and its

protocols, despite their unsuitability in this case.<sup>56</sup> On the other, the construction almost always appears in an uncomfortable or hostile guest situation (Gen 19:2-3; Judg 19:11-12).<sup>57</sup> Perhaps Jael's last exhortation not to fear is to reassure Sisera that her reading of the social situation is for the best. Still, in the light of the emphasis placed upon 'her tent' by her reconfiguration of the boundaries, the situation remains unpredictable even while they grasp at the norms by which to act.

Sisera's acceptance of the invitation (v18c) is also an, at least preliminary, acceptance of the reconfigured social space. Contrary to Matthews' (1991, 15) suggestion, it is not Sisera's neglect of social protocol pushing him across the margin of Jael's household. Maybe it is under the pressure of war, but Sisera conforms to the constructed social space being offered and crosses the threshold in the role of 'guest'. His movement is expressed as turning aside 'to *her*'. The prepositional phrase is in parallel with Jael's call to 'turn aside to *me*' earlier in the verse, while the seemingly redundant 'into the tent' underlines the crossing of the boundary. The syntactical emphasis upon Sisera's entry into Jael's household supports the reading that it is her invitation shaping the dynamic between them. Yet, her invitation and his acceptance does not erase the fact that Sisera and Jael are neither 'us' nor clearly 'them' for each other in this context, making it difficult to recognise the social distance. They do not share an emic perspective on their identity. In her attempt to control this ambiguous situation, Jael draws attention to the potential danger by imposing a social structure that may not fit.

Jael's next action is unexpected, covering Sisera with a 'rug' (v18d).<sup>58</sup> A simple interpretation is that Jael is hiding the fugitive (cf. 2 Sam 17:17-20) (see Niditch 2008, 63). But under this scenario, Sisera would have reached the sanctuary the social boundaries protect simply by entering the tent and the rigmarole of creating a guest situation would be unnecessary.<sup>59</sup> There is a symbolic force to the rug though. The furnishings of a household, under the woman's custodianship as a worker of textiles (Prov 31:13, 19, 22, 24), communicate the honour and wealth of a family to the public sphere: the wife's industry publicises the private (Dubisch 1986b, 20). So textiles become associated with women as produced by them and belonging to

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<sup>56</sup> Apart from here, this rare construction is used for travellers in need of food and shelter as they journey outside of their local region, namely, the precise situation under which the ritual traditions of hospitality are applied: Gen 19:2-3; Judg 19:11-12; 2 Kgs 4:11 (see Bal 1987, 61).

<sup>57</sup> In contrast, a fruitful instance of traditional hospitality is Abraham's invitation to the three men at Mamre in Gen 18:2-8. Like Jael, Abraham crosses his tent threshold to meet his visitors but unlike Jael (and Lot in Gen 19:1-3), Abraham does not use the verb *sr* in his invitation and the men are not invited into the tent. There is a special social space created that negotiates the social boundaries but not the physical ones, notwithstanding the fact that this hospitality does not include overnight shelter. This instance of hospitality, properly so called as a neutralisation of the threat a traveller represents, is simplified by keeping the stranger outside the household boundary. Sisera, in contrast, is not a stranger and is drawn across the threshold.

<sup>58</sup> The hapax legomenon *šmikâ* has been variously rendered in other versions all pointing to a general meaning of 'covering' (see Soggin 1987, 67).

<sup>59</sup> 'During the period the fugitive spends in any *beit* he enjoys complete immunity and his pursuers refrain from harming him' (Zeid 1965, 254).

their sphere of influence (Lyons 2012, 25-6). Jael's domestication of Sisera by covering him with a rug, which she may even have made, carries this symbolism but confuses the original guest situation. In conjunction with her offer of milk in place of water (4:19; 5:25), some scholars have seen Jael's behaviour here as maternal (Alter 1985, 48; Bal 1988, 213, Niditch 2008, 66; Sasson 2012, 343), which would also send conflicting signals in the circumstances. Whatever message we draw from this peculiar occurrence, confusion surrounds the particular social expectations. It seems that both Jael and Sisera are unsure of how to behave. With him under a rug, the situation verges upon the awkward.<sup>60</sup>

Nonetheless, Sisera's request for a drink (v19) suggests he feels a certain relief from the pursuing danger such that he can afford to pause to catch his breath. In fact, Sisera feels welcome enough to rely upon Jael's protection (v20). His appeal for Jael to look out for and turn away potential adversaries shows that he is neither a fugitive claiming a 'right of refuge' nor a recipient of hospitality whose host would ensure protection (Matthews 1991, 19). It is unlikely that Sisera recognises any such protocols, present or by their absence. Simply, he is fleeing from war and has been received as a friend. Plenty of scholars have noted the irony in his request for Jael to say, 'there is no man,' from the point of view of his imminent demise (Butler 2009, 106) or the subversion of gender roles read in the woman's triumph (Bal 1987, 92). Yet, I think the irony here is rather that he commands her to guard the boundary of her own household against the danger of a man crossing it. Sisera is the one threatening danger by his 'otherness' in the midst of Jael's house.

Despite the threat, Jael has succeeded in fashioning a social space in which Sisera feels comfortable enough to ask something from her. They are trying to act as 'us,' connected by a small social distance and not as strangers.<sup>61</sup> But *acting* as 'us' does not mean they understand themselves to be of the same social group or even appreciate each other's identity, values and loyalties. In the background to the pause in combat there is an unease: neither character is sure how the other will behave. In this way, I cannot agree with Sasson (2012, 343) that 'Jael has [Sisera] figured out' (also Niditch 2008, 66). The opposite is the case. In anthropological terms, they feel their lack of access to each other's emic identification.

The unpredictability must increase the anxiety of both participants in the encounter. As a non-combatant woman who appears to be alone in the tent, Jael's only recourse for the protection of the physical space is to ensure protection of the social space. Jael's response to unclear social

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<sup>60</sup> In contrast, the Song of Deborah does not mention the invitation. The context of Sisera's being in Jael's presence is left unspoken; even the detail of his entering her tent can only be inferred from the description of who Jael is (5:24). Instead, the entire focus is upon two of Jael's actions: the offer of milk in place of water (v25) and the violent triumph over the enemy that Sisera represents (vv26-7).

<sup>61</sup> Under the law of hospitality, to request something from a host impugns the honour of the household as the suggestion is that the host has not followed the social obligations to provide for the stranger (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 27; Bal 1987, 61).

expectations while assertive, shows fear, fear for her family, of whom Sisera is not a part and to whom, in the end, she owes no greater loyalty. On the part of Sisera fleeing his enemy, the supposition that Jael will ensure his safety is weakened by this lack of identity with Jael's family and the instability of the social space surrounding the physical space he sought for protection.

In such a context, it is only a matter of time before the situation finds its resolution. Jael is provoked to act definitively in favour of her household and its inheritance, deciding *who* she is. The story foregrounds her choice as part of a decisive switch in narrative momentum. In contrast to the request of Sisera to protect him, 'Jael the wife of Heber takes the tent peg' (4:21). This reminder of Jael's identity is as much her recognition as it is ours. The role of ally is now incompatible with the role of protector of her household's integrity.<sup>62</sup> But not a household at 'peace' with Jabin, but the household of the Kenites, sons of Hobab, father-in-law of Moses who have an inheritance with Israel.<sup>63</sup> We see from her actions the priority of family. It is difficult to say if this indicates duplicitousness or calculation of the part of Jael. It seems like a step taken to resolve the developing threat of the situation, which would suggest it is reactive rather than planned. She seizes the opportunity, given the courage of necessity by the immediate threat.

Sisera is unconscious and still under the rug when Jael approaches 'in secret' not to rouse him (v21).<sup>64</sup> Was this the reason she mothered him with milk and bedding, to induce him to sleep (Boling 1975, 97-8)? I do not think Jael is granted this foresight in what is a developing situation. It also does not fit with the poem which privileges the detail of the milk but finds Sisera standing when struck and falling between Jael's feet (5:26-7): a seized opportunity rather than a careful plan.

In whatever way the opportunity presents itself, Jael thrusts the peg into Sisera's head. The finality of her violence is expressed by a single blow using *tq'* (4:21) giving a sense of devastating completeness, comparable to the blow of Ehud (where the same verb is used, Judg 3:21), which leaves the weapon in the body of the slain (Webb 2012, 185).<sup>65</sup> *Tq'* is interesting also because idiomatically it is a term for 'pitching a tent', namely thrusting pegs into the ground (Gen 31:25).<sup>66</sup> With the same action, Jael protects her tent from the threshold's breach. While the verb's extended meaning of 'thrust in a weapon' (cf. Judg 3:21; 2 Sam 18:14) is

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<sup>62</sup> 'At the literary level, Jael supplants Heber' (Chisholm 2009, 176).

<sup>63</sup> 'Jael's loyalty turns out to be other than her husband's' (Niditch 2008, 66).

<sup>64</sup> This contemporaneity is indicated by the 'vav of situation with retrospective pronoun' found later in the verse (Fuller and Choi 2017, §49.a).

<sup>65</sup> The impulsiveness of the violence is also suggested in the poem in 5:26. The line's rhythm imitates the sudden hammer blows that 'recreate the spontaneous energy and conviction behind Jael's grisly deed' (Globe 1975, 363). The poem uses four verbs to emphasise the finality and energy behind the violence and, in keeping with the picture of an upright Sisera, are verbs giving a sense of striking blows.

<sup>66</sup> *ns'* is the opposite idiom: 'to set out on a journey' or pull *up* pegs from the ground.

understood from the contextualization of the peg's target—Sisera's head—nevertheless, the peg eventually finds the ground, returning us to the meaning 'pitch a tent'. The symbolism of an established patrimony is clear (Isa 22:23). But, more than simply symbolic of securing one's household, Jael's slaughter of Sisera by the tent peg in fact achieves this goal, which is the message of the hero story. Nesting on the whole folktale has been the question: why does Jael kill Sisera? What does she get out of it? This is what Jael gets out of it: her identity. She literally strikes a blow for kinship over politics. She is not subject to a homogenizing colonialism, represented by Sisera. She is Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite.

### Concluding remarks

We might now consider some ways in which the folktale lends itself to building an Israelite identity. In its editorial setting, Jael's familial concerns take on wider connotations. Along with pitching a tent, the description of the peg 'descending into the *land*' (*wattiṣnah bā'āreṣ*) (v21) gives an echo of Israel's claim in Canaan, an echo fully sounded in the concluding frame (v23-4). Jael's actions are in fulfilment of her role to protect the boundary of her household, which in the ideological reframing also means securing its heritage: inheritance among Israel (cf. Judg 1:16). The climactic act has a symbolism that first, illustrates what Jael receives in return for risking the welcome she has made to Sisera, but secondly, opens out this local hero story to apply its social ramifications to a nation. Webb (2012, 185 n. 17) notes such a parallel also exists in the story of Ehud, centering once more upon the semantically rich verb *tq*'.

This same verb links Ehud's private initiative with its national consequences: he thrusts (*tq*' ) his dagger into Eglon, and then blows (*tq*' ) his trumpet on Mount Ephraim.

Recalling that a woman's work publicises the private, it is also fitting in the story of Jael that her own private thrusting (*tq*' ) of a weapon is used to illustrate the public implications that protecting her household has for Israelite identity making.

Nationalist implications might be found in the scene summing up the story (4:22), drawn out by the concluding editorial frame (vv23-4). By means of the tableau shown to Barak the final state of Sisera is reiterated also to the reader. The threat of the Other has been neutralized and all that are left are family. The final word is given to the tent peg sticking out of Sisera's skull, again emphasizing both Jael's household and now, opened up by the concluding frame to the wider context, the image of Israel's re-establishment of its presence in the land. It is a microcosm of the subjection of Canaan at the hands of Yhwh with Israel claiming its inheritance, a resonance also noticed by Niditch (1989, 52).

What the author fears most he turns outward against his enemy. Jael has identification power for the early Israelite audience, for in a sense Israel is Jael; she becomes an archetype or symbol for the marginal's victory over the establishment.

I would argue that Jael's archetypal potential is what has been recognised by the editorial work of Judges. At the same time the final form of the text acknowledges the local hero story while putting it to a new use: to rally these peoples to an appreciation of their shared heritage in the national identity of Israel, whose triumph is due in the end to their God.

### 3. Abimelech and Jephthah

A commonly heard complaint, usually from someone who has been passed over for advancement or failed to land a job, is that ‘it’s not *what* you know, it’s *who* you know’. Friends of mine who run a theatre company have heard this saying taken a step further. Their experience has been that in show business it is neither what you know, nor who you know, but *who knows you* that gets you work. Familiarity breeds not contempt but preferential treatment. It is to familiarity that Abimelech appeals when claiming rule over Shechem (Judg 9:1-2). A restored familiarity is the carrot dangled in front of the exiled Jephthah by the elders of Gilead to entice him to fight (11:6-8). Being in relation with people, being one of ‘us,’ seems to be more than half the battle in getting ahead.

We have frequently noticed this dynamic of preference in our glance at ancient Near Eastern society. Family autonomy means members of the extended household are favoured and other social units are held at a distance, deserving of suspicion. But in cases when a higher order of social unit is recognized, such as administration of a major settlement (Judg 9:6) or fighting against the Ammonites (11:6), the lower order dynamic faces a conflict of interest. Who is to lead this larger group when households have a strong preference for self-sufficiency? How socially distant can a leader be before he or she becomes unable to command?

Scholarship on Abimelech and Jephthah’s stories commonly ask about the nature and extent of their authority (e.g. Willis 1997; Assis 2005; Irwin 2012). Yet, scholars have not seen this question in terms of a tension between lower and higher units of social order. In taking this approach, I contend that this tension is an operative part of the particular form of localized authority that Abimelech and Jephthah exercise. Their authority is a product of family identity but while legitimate, this authority is also contestable because it is held over a higher order.

A reason why scholarship on these leaders has not noticed such a dynamic is that their stories are not often read together, despite common features. Abimelech and Jephthah both come from an ignominious background, seek administrative rule and kill members of their family. In consequence of which, both die without leaving a legacy.<sup>67</sup> But while Lillian Klein (1988, 83) emphasises the common background of these characters who have ‘similar conditions of birth and society’ in her brief analysis, she is dismissive of the ‘patterned introductory material’ from the two passages and goes on rather to contrast the different narrative purposes to which these details are put. Cheryl Exum (1990, 420) observes rather the parallel at the end of their stories,

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<sup>67</sup> Another shared detail that is not frequently mentioned is that they both have ties to the tribe of Manasseh through different family allegiances: Abimelech is from northern Cisjordan, while Jephthah is a Transjordanian Manassite from the family (or land) of Gilead.

that by killing potential heirs both men destroy their lineage. However, there are different motivations and contexts for Abimelech's and Jephthah's behaviour in slaying family members (Assis 2005, 237). And this seems to be the difficulty: for every similarity between these men there is a difference, perhaps the reason that more often the texts have been interpreted in isolation or in relation to other stories in Judges. Abimelech's tale is taken to be an epilogue to his father Gideon/Jerubbaal's cycle (Bluedorn 2001; Matthews 2004; Endris 2008). While that of Jephthah has been read in comparison with other 'minor' judges whose details appear before (10:1-5) and after (12:8-15) his story (Mullen 1982).

Another reason that these men are not compared is that scholars are led by the biblical text's editorial framework within which Abimelech and Jephthah are contrasted. Abimelech is cast as a departure from a judge (9:56-57), while despite sacrificing his daughter Jephthah is included among them (12:7). I think that the framework contrasts these leaders because Abimelech cannot be used for its nationalizing agenda, while Jephthah has potential as a national hero. The framework's influence on interpretation is such that even though Jephthah's story comes in the wake of Abimelech's, the latter's 'disaster' (Butler 2009, 251) is commonly seen as the beginning of a decline (Webb 2012, 34; Irwin 2012, 444-5); a trajectory of social disintegration along the Judges' narrative (e.g. Exum 1990; Oeste 2011). I think however that comparing Abimelech and Jephthah's folktales without the frame allows us to explain their leadership as effective on its own terms. This will in turn let us understand their place in the national narrative.

I propose to read these legends together because the same model of social organization best describes the type of leadership Abimelech and Jephthah hold. The complex chiefdom is an administration that oversees a small collection of settlements (a town's *bānôt*, cf. Judg 1:27; 11:26) and its social model has been applied to the landscape of 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century Palestine by Robert Miller (2012). Following Miller's suggestion does not constrain us to accept this period as a 'time of the judges,' however, because the chiefdom is a society that exists in many places and ages up to the present day (see e.g. Gibson 2012).<sup>68</sup>

Chiefs in this structure are drawn from a *class* of people. In other words, eligibility for leadership is based upon who your family is (Earle 1978, 2; Maisels 1990, 9). Within a chiefdom, leaders emerge 'in the face of population growth and increased social complexity' (Creamer and Haas 1985, 740). These are contexts that generate higher order social units. The hierarchy of a ruling class attempts to neutralize the problem of social distance, but we can immediately see the conflict of interest for a familial dynamic of preference. Classes of families

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<sup>68</sup> Katie Heffelfinger (2009) has also followed Miller in making this application to Judg 8-9 but I think that the leadership of both Abimelech and Jephthah may be understood within the model of such a social organization.

provide leaders for higher social units whose lower units tend towards autonomy (Boer 2015, 107). Thus, it is not surprising to find that competition and opposition within the ruling class is characteristic of the chiefdom (Wright 1984, 42; Gibson 2012, 272). This is a form of society that cycles between centralized and decentralized stages as chiefs rise and fall (Miller 2012, 11-2). Appeal to family for eligibility means that legitimacy and the question of succession are significant social issues—and points of contention—for chiefdoms.

This leads me to suggest that in these stories leadership may be understood as a product of family identity. It is this what makes Abimelech's claim to rule reasonable and yet contestable and what makes the Gileadites' restoration of Jephthah's status possible. The sagas of Abimelech and Jephthah draw dramatic momentum from the effects of leadership as the consequence of family. As if in summary of the issues, Gaal son of Ebed asks, 'who is Abimelech and who Shechem that we should serve him?' (9:28; cf. 11:7). Indeed, Abimelech's claim to privileged kinship status is tenuous: his mother is a *pîlegeš* (8:31). Jephthah's mother, a *zônâ* is even further from legitimacy (11:1). The fragility of their leadership and how they negotiate the consequences of confronting the structures is what creates the drama. While in these stories authority flows from identity and identity from family, family status is not enough, and our protagonists must negotiate structures in which rivalry among those with the social status to lead is a fundamental part of the dynamic. My suggestion is that if we recognize that family is influential for leadership eligibility we will see the same social structures operative behind the drama in both these leaders' stories.

Taking each tale in turn, I will begin by looking at their literary setting and editorial framing, before making a few points about previous scholarly readings. This review will raise some issues regarding Abimelech and Jephthah's accession and leadership with respect to their identity within society. To address these questions, next I shall introduce some of the anthropological literature on complex chiefdoms including the work of Miller and also make some topographical remarks so that the social landscape for these stories can form a suitable background for applying this societal model. This analysis will then provide the means to explain the operation of leadership in Judg 9 and 10:17-11:11 as a local concern that, because of different outcomes, comes to be used by the nationalizing frame in contrasting ways.

Before proceeding to the initial reading of each tale, let me review some points of contact between Abimelech and Jephthah. First, both tales foreground these men's origin, emphasizing kinship, loyalty and legitimacy (Steinberg 2007, 57). Secondly, family bestows *eligibility* to rule but this needs recognition by a granting authority. Hence thirdly, both men negotiate for leadership indicating that their eligibility is not incontestable. Negotiation and conflict follow

from the juxtaposition in the chiefdom system of familial and societal identity claims. First, let us look at the stories in their literary setting.

### Local politics and national interests

Like the story of Jael, the legends of Abimelech and Jephthah expect their audience to recognize the underlying dynamic for effective social communication. The applicability of the complex chiefdom model assumes the fragmented and local nature both of Palestine's social structures and the stories these cultures produce. Yet, when the local history is embedded in a Judges narrative concerned with a greater national unity, the reader is deftly steered away from appreciating the regionalized nature of its social organization, which nevertheless remains the operating cultural system for the hero story. To see this story clearly, we must try if possible to discern what is the older core source and what is framework.

#### Abimelech

Abimelech's identification as 'son of Jerubbaal' (9:1) refers us to the editorial scene-setting in 8:34-5 in which the 'sons of Israel did not remember Yhwh their God' and 'did not show *hesed* to the house of Jerubbaal'. By connecting apostasy to the national God with disloyalty to the house of Jerubbaal, the editors imbue Abimelech's story with their national perspective through this transitional frame. The link with the story of Gideon is provided by some editorial remarks that give this judge the name Jerubbaal (6:32; 7:1; 8:29, 35).<sup>69</sup> This links the story in Judg 6-8 with the one in Judg 9 in which Abimelech's father is only called Jerubbaal. Gideon's story, prior in the narrative sequence, is brought to bear upon that of Abimelech to which it can be read as a sequel (Webb 2012, 268). With Gideon cast as a national leader (8:22, 28, 33), administrative succession becomes a linking institution for these folktales in the framework (Sasson 2014, 376, 385). And by mentioning the behaviour of Israel as a prologue, the composite text expands the relevance of Abimelech's local story.<sup>70</sup>

However, once we enter Abimelech's story itself, it departs from the editorial frame. In contrast to Judg 6-8, the national God Yhwh is not named in chapter 9 and no mention is made of the

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<sup>69</sup> As in the preceding judges' tales, Gideon's story contains a number of nationalist edits. It is the 'sons of Israel' who ask him to 'rule over them' (8:22) and he counters that the national God, Yhwh is this unified nation's legitimate ruler (v23). Again, a unified enemy in Midian is the Other against the 'us' of Israel (v28a) and Gideon, while not accepting rule, appears to be the one whose presence secures the land's 'quiet for forty years' (*wattišqot hā'āreš 'arbā'im šānā*) (v28b), a familiar formula from Judges' editorial frames. These national elements are reiterated in the editorial comments of vv33-35 which establishes a reference point for the ensuing folktale.

<sup>70</sup> We can note that it is through family ties that the narrative frame connects a tale from Ophrah (v32) with one from Shechem (9:1). The transition between the tales (8:29-35) is concerned with the household of Gideon/Jerubbaal (v29): he has seventy sons by 'many wives' (v30) and Abimelech by a *pīlegeš* of Shechem (v31).

‘sons of Israel’.<sup>71</sup> Abimelech does not have an eye to the nation but only claims rule of Shechem. This claim is based upon his local identity: descent from Jerubbaal and also his mother, a Shechemite *pīlegeš* (9:3) and it is the settlement’s ‘owners’ (*ba’ālim*) not the deity who are the granting authority (9:6). In being granted rule Abimelech is not described as a judge but is ‘made king (*mlk* H) by the memorial oak *which is in Shechem*’ (*’āšer biškem*).<sup>72</sup> Considering the lack of these and other features of the book’s framework, Karin Schöpflin (2004, 4) concludes that ‘it is clearly a digression from the scheme of Judges’ and Cheryl Exum (1990, 419) calls it ‘a disastrous interlude’. Irwin (2012, 444-5) thinks that Abimelech’s story marks a turning point in the book’s narrative cycle for the judges who follow him also fail to conform to its framework.

Despite some ‘clear traces’ of different sources (Schöpflin 2004, 4; also Finkelstein 2016a), the Shechemite legend in Judg 9 reads as ‘one extended narrative’ (Butler 2009, 234) such that attempts to separate the sources (e.g. Fritz 1982) lose the narrative thread without picking up any others (Sasson 2014, 386). Because of this, Finkelstein (2017b, 435) puzzles over ‘whether ch. 9, with its many layers, hides a tale of a savior, which was distorted beyond recognition by the later additions’. The tale’s themes do not seem to have needed or do not lend themselves easily to ideological editing, maybe because there is no unified ‘Other’ at the higher social level to compare with Israel. Instead the local story relies upon the link to Gideon for its nationalist reference point (Judg 8:22).

Scholars have read Abimelech’s legend allegorically for the most part, but there are resonances with historical data that are worth bearing in mind for access to the complex realities which make his tale socially communicative. Hanoah Reviv (1966) compares Abimelech’s government of Shechem with that of Labaya, who is known from the fourteenth century BCE Amarna letters (also Miller 2012, 120).<sup>73</sup> And I have earlier noted Thomas L. Thompson’s (2016, 223) use of this epigraphy as evidence for the decentralization of Palestine in which Shechem would form a regional (not a national) centre. It is commonly noted that Shechem occupies a strategic position both militarily and commercially, situated on a main thoroughfare in the region at the east end of a narrow mountain pass between Mt Ebal and Mt Gerizim. Remains of four LB ‘tower temples’ have been discovered at the site (cf. 9:46-49, 50-55) the

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<sup>71</sup> In fact, there are only two occurrences of the proper noun *yisrā’ēl*. First, in an editorial comment expanding Abimelech’s leadership of Shechem to the nation (9:22) (Gray 1986, 305) and secondly, in 9:55, which speaks of the ‘men of Israel’ (Fritz 1982, 143).

<sup>72</sup> While Gideon is also never referred to as a judge, the formula of the land’s forty years rest until his death (v28b) conforms to the book’s editorial framework (cf. 5:31b).

<sup>73</sup> Finkelstein (2013, 160) lists Abimelech along with Labaya as evidence of strongmen whose territorial authority was quite localized, although he is cautious in this 2013 monograph about drawing evidence from Judg 9 in view of the distance between the setting for the story and the writing of the story itself. In a fuller treatment of Abimelech (2016a, 74), however, Finkelstein is happy that the ‘*apiru*’ ambiance, with a strongman dwelling in a mountain fortress, testifies to the antiquity of the tale’.

destruction of which have been dated to 1150-1100 BCE (Zertal 1992, 1187; Stager 2003), while the plain of Askar to the east provides a topographical correlation with the battlefield in Judg 9:42-44. Excavation of Shechem shows evidence of destruction and resettlement between 1125 and 975 BCE (Finkelstein 2016a, 74), leading Lawrence Toombs (1992, 1184) to remark that ‘the heaps of debris covering the Iron I city are silent witnesses to the completeness of Abimelech’s vengeance’.

Influenced by the frame that compares him to Gideon (8:33-35), most scholars do not interpret Abimelech’s leadership positively. He is seen to exemplify why kingship is the wrong choice for Israel with a ‘complex, ambivalent, and self-critical portrait of the monarchy’ (Niditch 2008, 114). Eliyahu Assis understands the leadership of Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah to be unsuccessful because they are motivated by their desire ‘to protect their personal status’ (Assis 2005, 3). This is how Assis interprets Jotham’s words as ‘a censure of Abimelech’s egocentric personality, his unsuitability for the office of king, and the egotistical motives of the citizens of Shechem in making him king’ (Assis 2005, 153). The ‘disastrous experiment with kingship’ (Webb 2012, 268) commonly attracts the notion of retribution as its theme (Boogaart 1985; Schöpflin 2004, 21; Assis 2005) and scholars point out the references to vengeance (9:23-25) and divine punishment (vv56-57) looking back to Abimelech’s slaughter of his seventy brothers ‘the sons of Jerubbaal’ (vv4-5). While this provides a broad theological understanding of the tale, distinguishing themes of self-interest and retribution does not fully explain why the social setting produces the particular actions and decision-making that we find in the story.<sup>74</sup> Neither do these themes explain why the issue of identity is so recurrent (cf. 9:28). In other words, there is more to his particular form of failure in leadership than Abimelech’s self-interest or his subjects’ ‘egotistical motives’ and revenge.

Another reading of the failure of leadership in this story is in terms of the ever-popular theme found in Judges of anti-northern polemics (e.g. Brettler 1989). Boling (1975, 185) finds this conclusion ‘difficult to avoid,’ because this and other Judges stories ‘devalue possible competitors to the Jerusalem Temple’. This idea has recently been applied to Judg 9 by Brian Irwin (2012) who distinguishes anti-Saulide from anti-northern-monarchy polemic. In other words, kingship is acceptable, northern kingdom kingship is not. In his view, the Abimelech narrative addresses the illegitimacy of the northern kingdom, a question which ‘extended even into the postexilic era, when the conflict pitted the returned Judean exiles against the occupants

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<sup>74</sup> Focusing on the theme of ‘retribution,’ Thomas A. Boogaart’s (1985, 47-50) parallels between 9:1-6 and 9:25-41 are unconvincing. Abimelech meets his kinsmen in Shechem (9:1b-3a), Gaal is accompanied by his (9:26a). It is not clear that the seventy sons are *yet* the rulers of Shechem (9:2-3) while Gaal conspires against an incumbent (9:26-41) (Schöpflin 2004, 7). Finally assuming the house of Jerubbaal to be the ‘rightful rulers’ of Shechem, Boogaart (1985, 51) overstates the situation drawn by the text (cf. Reviv 1966). The only parallel of Boogaart’s that is ultimately incontestable is that some men come to Shechem (9:1a; 9:26a)!

of Samaria' (Irwin 2012, 447). Support for this polemic Irwin finds in intertextual connections between Abimelech and accounts of Jeroboam I in 1 Kgs 12 and especially 2 Chron 13.<sup>75</sup> Yet, as we have noticed there are few nationalist redactions in Abimelech's story which is about a local ruler of Shechem (Gray 1986, 305). Despite the vocabulary (Judg 9:6), I do not think *kingship* is quite the sort of leadership that is being described in this story, at least not in the wider centralized form that we see in the books of Kings.<sup>76</sup> The social communication of Abimelech's tale operates with a different dynamic (Boling 1975, 183).

In his commentary on Judges and Ruth, Victor H. Matthews (2004, 101-2) comes close to the dynamic of preference when pointing out that social currency is a factor in the Abimelech story. For his Shechemite relatives there is political influence to be gained by listening to Abimelech (9:1-3). Matthews (2004, 103) understands Abimelech's approach to Shechem as seeking gain against his lower socio-economic status. He is the son of a *pīlegeš* and this is thought not to guarantee him inheritance rights (Steinberg 2007, 59; Sasson 2014, 376). Certainly, the political animosity which develops is not helped by the tension his fragile eligibility claim produces (9:23, 28). I think, however, that Abimelech's claim is a legitimate one even if he must negotiate for it.<sup>77</sup>

This brief review has outlined the local nature of the story of Abimelech and Shechem as juxtaposed within a nationalizing frame. Leaning upon this frame, scholars have read polemics against kinship in Israel and/or divine retribution as the main issues at stake in the tale. Yet this analysis does not tell us why the particular gears of local politics—eligibility through mother and father; counter-claims from seventy sons of Jerubbaal (9:2); the presence of rivals (v26) and an 'officer of the city' (v30)—grind as they do. Nor does it explain why so many toponyms seem to be involved (vv5, 6, 20, 31, 41, 46-49, 50).

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<sup>75</sup> Karin Schöpflin (2004, 20) also finds a connection between Abimelech and Jeroboam I which is based more broadly on the coincidence of Shechem as the seat of rule and the Deuteronomistic perspective against the north she assumes for the narrative. While Israel Finkelstein (2016a, 76) sees the 'personification of Jeroboam I' in Abimelech as a later polemical layer.

<sup>76</sup> The major points of connection Irwin (2012, 449) makes that an *Ephraimite* establishes a *monarchy* in *Shechem* (original emphasis) cannot be sustained. Abimelech administrates Shechem, but he does not reign from there (9:30-31, 41). He does not establish but assumes or succeeds to his role. But most fundamental is that Abimelech is not an Ephraimite as Irwin asserts, but a Manassite. Abiezer, claimed as ancestor of Abimelech (8:29-32) is a descendent of Manasseh (Josh 17:2; 1 Chron 7:18), as also is the eponymous Shechem. It may be conceded that Shechem is on the border of Ephraim and Manasseh, but to claim Ephraimite lineage for Abimelech needs argument. The straightforward accumulation of biblical reports is that Abimelech is from the tribe of Manasseh, which contributes to understanding his claim to Shechemite authority (see Matthews 2004, 97).

<sup>77</sup> Socio-economic status may also be alluded to in Jotham's fable. Refusing what are economically important trees as leader allows for their continued service to society in contrast to the unfruitful bramble which is only useful for burning (Schöpflin 2004, 14-5). On this reading, Abimelech seems to be criticised as much for being socio-economically harmful as precipitating divine punishment and the downfall of Shechem.

## Jephthah

Susan Niditch (2008, 130) summarizes the dynamic in Jephthah's tale as one of 'kinship, gender, leadership and group unity/disunity'. The familiar editorial frame sets the scene (Judg 10:6-9), introducing the Ammonites as the enemy of Israel (Gray 1986, 312). Departing however from the framework of apostasy, oppression and salvation (cf. 2:11-15), here Yhwh delays to deliver his people once they repent (10:10-16) creating a gap in leadership (Boling 1975, 193, Webb 2012, 308). The action is focused upon the Transjordanian region with the sons of Ammon encamped in Gilead and the sons of Israel mustered in Mizpah (v17). In the midst of Yhwh's hesitancy, the 'officers of Gilead' ask among themselves who will lead Gilead against Ammon (v18) constructing a secular, socio-political situation.<sup>78</sup> The people find themselves without leadership and 'no likely candidate appears' (Butler 2009, 267; also Webb 2012, 310). This is the scene onto which the life of Jephthah opens.

Jephthah's appearance in the narrative is at a different syntactical level.<sup>79</sup> It is a flashback giving the background of his ignominious origin and expulsion from Gilead (11:1-3). We are then returned to the previous narrative level in 11:4 with the reiteration of the Ammonite oppression. Jephthah can now step in as the object of the Gileadite search for a commander referenced in 10:18. The elders first ask Jephthah to be *qāšîn* (11:6) which is queried by Jephthah (v7). The elders next offer him the role of *ro 'š* (v8). Having agreed to become leader after this negotiation (vv4-11), Jephthah tries diplomacy with Ammon (vv12-28), before engaging them in battle (vv29-33). But his victory forces him to fulfil a vow to sacrifice his daughter (vv34-40). Jephthah ends his career suppressing the interregional hostility of Ephraim (12:1-6), an episode that opens a window onto the region's social fragmentation. Nevertheless, the concluding editorial frame extends Jephthah's influence from command of Gilead to the whole nation observing that 'he judged Israel for six years' (v7).

Jephthah's legend draws on family history to propel the drama. Jephthah is the son of a *zônâ* (11:1), regarded as illegitimate and thus excluded from the household (vv2-3).<sup>80</sup> The dynamic of preference is developed in his negotiation with the Gileadite elders who, evidently regarding

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<sup>78</sup> Matthews (2004, 116) calls the leadership search a 'tactical mistake' since the Gileadites choose Jephthah themselves without recourse to Yhwh (cf. 1:1-2). Assis sees this omission as the result of God's refusal to help Israel (10:13). Yhwh is not going to get involved, which leaves the Gileadites 'to solve the problem without divine assistance' showing that God 'despairs of the judge system as a whole' (Assis 2005, 187). He concludes that Jephthah's account 'anticipates the next period in the life of the people, the monarchic period,' implicit in the appointment of Jephthah as 'one man over everyone' (188-9). Butler (2009, 267-8) also sees Jephthah's appointment as a matter of human politics, but without inferring a monarchic typology. Webb (2012, 309) too contrasts 11:18 with the Israelites' piety in 1:1 and Yhwh's appearance in 6:11-14 concluding that 'this time, it seems, Israel will have to work out its own salvation'. And Block (1999, 351) calls the episode a 'purely secular moment'.

<sup>79</sup> Indicated by a 'parenthetical' disjunctive-waw clause (*IBHS* §39.2.3c). Assis (2005, 191) thinks that this syntax 'is to set Jephthah the Gileadite against "all the inhabitants of Gilead" at the end of the previous verse'.

<sup>80</sup> Playing down a similarity with Abimelech's descent from a *pīlegeš*, Robert Boling (1975, 199) calls Jephthah's origin story a 'conscious contrast to Gideon and Abimelech'.

him leadership material, call on him to fight the Ammonites (11:7-11). In a recent analysis, these latter verses have been attributed to a redactor because of an apparent emphasis on divine providence (Finkelstein 2016b, 2, 6).<sup>81</sup> Accepting this view would mean Deuteronomists have introduced a dramatic dynamic of family and class advantage into what would otherwise be a fairly uninteresting anecdote. Particularly for any reader unfamiliar with the local culture, without the biblical redactions it is unclear why the marginal Jephthah might accept the elders' proposal, or why his social reintegration is desirable before he can become leader. Despite conceding that an 'old oral tale [...] is difficult and probably impossible to fully reconstruct,' Israel Finkelstein's (2016b, 8) attempt so to do reduces the story to a terse report of an exile's return home. In fact, Finkelstein (2016b, 7) must make his own additions 'in order to make the story coherent'. In Jephthah's case, dissecting his story flattens the social dynamic and dissolves the otherwise irretrievable original tale. Nevertheless, we can note that there are editorial flourishes in this passage. The familiar unified 'sons of Israel' are pitted against the unified 'Other' the 'sons of Ammon' (10:17-18; 11:4-5) (Sasson 2014, 419) and, conceding Finkelstein's point, possibly the mention of Yhwh is secondary (11:9-11). References to the deity seem to be a narrative afterthought to the political process.

The subsequent scene of military campaign (11:12-33) does not directly address the issue of Jephthah's family status. It is enough to mention that Elizabeth Bloch-Smith (2015, 310-11) does concern herself with this account and its redactions, a process for which she suggests three purposes: a) the desire to preserve traditions, b) justify contemporary territorial claims in the Transjordan and (in Jack Sasson's (2010, 363) words) c) 'bolster self-images,' namely, the nationalizing process with which we are familiar. Of course, a preface (10:17-11:11) explaining the legitimacy of the leader who brought them territory and unity would only support these narrative goals. The story of Jephthah's daughter (11:34-40) also stands alone from the rest of the tale (Römer 1998; although see Janzen 2005) and I do not think its addition transforms the politics of Jephthah's leadership. Rather it serves to highlight how family status does not guarantee a legacy.<sup>82</sup>

Interpretations considering Jephthah's legitimacy and the type of authority he assumes again put the theme of leadership at the forefront of the story. Matthews (2004, 117) focuses his

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<sup>81</sup> Actually, Yhwh is only mentioned in vv9-11 and if a redaction is identified on the assumption that 'the old tales belong to the genre of heroic stories; there are no divine acts in them' (Finkelstein 2016b, 2), surely the dialogue in vv7-8 may be retained (see Sasson 2014, 422-3).

<sup>82</sup> Butler (2009, 278-9) thinks that the story of the vow confirms Jephthah's 'lack of qualifications to be a deliverer for God's people'. By losing his only offspring Jephthah also loses a lineage, which Matthews (2004, 117) implies is why he became leader in the first place. Yet the career of Jephthah continues after his daughter's sacrifice. It seems extreme to call this career a failure, even if it is markedly shorter than judges such as Othniel or Gideon. In fact, Soggin (1987, 208), calls Jephthah the 'antithesis to Abimelech' for while the latter steals power and is killed by a woman, the former is legitimately offered authority and lives to complete his career. This raises the question why Jephthah then follows Abimelech within a trajectory of social decline.

reading on Jephthah's legitimacy, 'born to a woman outside the community and therefore [...] a son outside the normal inheritance pattern'.<sup>83</sup> Yet the exact nature of Jephthah's social exclusion and hence his reintegration is unclear; the line between familial status and political currency seems to be a fine one. Is his story about household patrimony or is it about conflict within the class system from which leaders are picked?<sup>84</sup> Matthews (2004, 119) reads this dynamic as a family issue.

This exiled, disinherited son of a prostitute is to have his clan rights restored and is to become the highest-ranking leader over all the clans of Gilead.

But as Soggin (1987, 204, 208) already noted, this seems to overstate the information available from the account. While Soggin (1987, 207) thinks that Jephthah's 'illegitimate birth made him suspect' (a reason why he is excluded from his family), it is a 'basically political act, which involved the responsible elements of the community'. In this way, his restoration too is a political act, which is to be distinguished from intervention in a 'family dispute'. The interpretative difference seems to be in the influence that membership of a family is thought to bear upon assuming the role of 'head over all the inhabitants of Gilead' (11:8). In other words, is Jephthah's leadership a matter of succession? For the tragic irony of killing his only offspring to work (Exum 1990, 420), not to mention his expulsion in the first place, the prospect of a dynasty seems expected by the narrative, a reason this account has been thought to foreshadow the monarchy (Assis 2005, 189). On the other hand, this is difficult to infer from the exchange in 11:4-11 (Hutton 2009, 318). The sacrifice of a daughter is tragic enough without irony.

By including insalubrious background material, the heroic tale leads its audience to ask what effect Jephthah's disinheritance and expulsion from his family will have upon his eligibility for leadership. Jephthah needs to be a Gileadite in order to lead, otherwise the background found in 11:1-3 and the action of the elders in v5 are narratively superfluous, verses Finkelstein (2016b, 8) assigns to the earliest, original 'Old Jephthah tale'. A Gileadite commander appears to need to have an inheritance in Gilead. Timothy Willis (1997, 35), uses this argument to explain why the elders of Gilead first offer him the position of *qāṣîn* (11:6): Jephthah is ineligible to be *ro 'š* without status in the clan (v8). Kenneth Craig (1998) also understands the dialogue between the elders of Gilead and Jephthah to be a negotiation around his eligibility for leadership. But is it also about the extent of his authority? Is it purely military or does it have a civil function? Craig (1998, 79, 81) draws a distinction between the two terms: *qāṣîn*

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<sup>83</sup> Matthews (2004, 117) applies the effect of this illegitimacy to the whole narrative, understanding these details to foreshadow 'potential failure' for Jephthah and so guide the reader to expect some tragedy, evidently the sacrifice of his daughter (11:34-40).

<sup>84</sup> A critical solution to this lack of clarity is to see 11:2 as different source from vv4-11 (Soggin 1987, 204). On the other hand, Webb (2012, 311 n.33) distinguishes narrative function from source to reconcile the two perspectives.

‘General’ which ‘will last only as long as the battle itself’ and *ro ’š* which is ‘for political office and assures a term lasting indefinitely’. But while Boling (1975, 198) and Soggin (1987, 208) follow this suggestion, I think this precise distinction make these terms bear too much interpretative weight.

The key issues that this sketch reveals are the essentially political nature of Jephthah’s accession, his eligibility in respect of his family and the nature of his authority in view of the two terms used by the elders. A further question is how these two aspects—family and politics—combine in the Gileadite social organization. Again, we find that reading his story from its national and theological point of view (10:10-16, 17-18; 11:4-5, 9-11; 12:7) does not address the dynamics of Gilead’s local government.

Bringing these sketches together, it is difficult to say what type of authority is typical of a judge, but it may be that the background to these heroes is a type of leadership class. Making reference to Abimelech and Shechem, Finkelstein (2013, 160) speaks of a ‘continuous rise of territorial entities in this region that were governed by strongmen’ in early first millennium Palestine. The theme of election of the insignificant by Yhwh who ‘raises them up’ (*wayyāqem*) (cf. Judg 2:16) owes a lot to the editorial frame and even considered as hero stories, the rags-to-riches trope popular in folklore commonly conceals an heir who is nevertheless legitimate.<sup>85</sup> The traditions of the judges are woven around the cultural memory of the strongmen that governed the settlements and are meaningful because they speak of this local identity.

Despite these internal points of contact, the legends of the strongmen Abimelech and Jephthah have been used differently by the narrative scheme. Abimelech is a divergence and is never called a judge, while Jephthah is counted among the judges by his story’s editorial frame (Judg 12:7), although as Exum (1990, 422) notes ‘he is not “raised up” by Yhwh’.<sup>86</sup> Still, both stories appeal to volition or performance (9:3-4; 11:1a) as well as ascribed status (9:2; 11:1b) in making the case for these men’s leadership. A way of describing their position is to say that elite status may be necessary, but it is not sufficient to lead. Abimelech and Jephthah must still be chosen. In order to explain how these leadership dynamics might be part of a socio-political organization we must now turn to anthropological work on hierarchical societies, in particular that of the complex chiefdom.

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<sup>85</sup> Think of the legend of King Arthur; the legitimate son of Uther Pendragon who nevertheless must rise to fulfil his destiny by pulling a sword from a stone.

<sup>86</sup> In the common view that Judges’ narrative trajectory is one of decline, the hero stories show less and less conformity with the editorial framework in Abimelech’s wake (Exum 1990, 419-21, Oestle 2011, 304-5).

## Ascribed and achieved rank: who you know and who knows you

From our survey, we can say that leadership in both the stories of Abimelech and Jephthah is something claimed in virtue of family, but which is nevertheless contestable: contestable both in terms of eligibility and in the nature of their authority. These elements invite us to look more closely at the model suggested by Robert D. Miller for ancient Palestine. The complex chiefdom and the systematically fragile nature of its rule provides categories for thinking about the conflicting dynamics of preference discernible in this folklore. At this point it is as well to reiterate Colin Renfrew's (1974, 72) point, one made also by Miller (2012, 5), that in using sociological models the question 'is not 'is it true,' but 'is it useful?''

For millennia, the idea that certain groups of people are innately superior or (echoing Judges' editorial perspective) divinely ordained has resulted in social hierarchies with economic and political consequences. Put in anthropological terms, certain types of status are *ascribed* rather than *achieved*. That is, rather than gaining status through 'performance or effort or volition' (achieved) it is granted in virtue of nature or identity (ascribed) in an 'accident of birth' (Foladare 1969, 53).<sup>87</sup>

Societies that favour ascribed status for their economic and political structures restrict certain duties to ranks or classes of people. For example, the duty of governance has usually been the responsibility of an upper class while labour belongs to the lower classes. A class system in which different duties are uniquely assigned is useful for societies reliant on local custom for governance. Such societies depend upon the 'social evaluation of honour' to encourage adherence to the norms (Peristiany 1965b, 9; also Boer 2015, 107); an honour which nevertheless shows different values across different social ranks. In this way, what constitutes honourable behaviour relates to social position and social distance (Sahlins 1968, 74, 1972, 191-6): the type of relationship 'radically affects the forms of approved behaviour' (Campbell 1965, 150; also Zeid 1965, 246; Herman 1987, 31-5; Mitchell 1997, 1-3). Hence, class or family identity also shapes what is valuable and honourable (Davies 1987, 23-4), a point I have made in reference to household autonomy (see Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 389; Frick 1989, 90; Steinberg 2007, 52).

Viewed from the perspective of ancient Palestine's local and patriarchal socio-economic organization, the biblical terms 'owners' (*ba'ālīm*) (Judg 9:2-3, 6), 'officers' (*šārīm*) (10:18)

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<sup>87</sup> A Victorian example is Cecil F. Alexander's famous hymn 'All things bright and beautiful,' first published in 1848, with the following verse, admittedly absent from more recent hymnals.

The rich man in his castle,  
the poor man at his gate,  
God made them high and lowly,  
and ordered their estate.

and ‘elders’ (*zəqēnīm*) (11:5, 7-11)—important characters in these hero stories—would refer to a social elite. As Roland Boer (2015, 81) regrets, ‘all too often subsistence survival is no festival of equality’. Assuming that ascribed status is operative in these Judges’ stories, by claiming and accepting leadership respectively Abimelech and Jephthah are acknowledging that they are part of the social elite. They accept that they are eligible for the ascribed status their leadership requires (Sasson 2014, 419).

Yet, simple membership of a social elite is not enough to guarantee a chiefship. The social features of both achieved and ascribed status in leadership are rarely exclusive. In reference to ‘prestate societies’ Feinman and Neitzel (1984, 61) observe that, ‘leadership roles are largely inherited, yet the succession of the new chief is subject to the approval of his constituents on the basis of his personal qualifications’. Here is the contestable eligibility found in Abimelech and Jephthah; here is the tension between family preference and social groups of a higher order. This dual dynamic is found in the social organization of the chiefdom to which we now turn.

### **The complex chiefdom**

We have seen how a fragmented social landscape inhibited centralized rule for Palestine. The socio-economic centrality of the family, attendant suspicion of other units (Campbell 1965, 142) and a simple administrative difficulty in exercising wide-ranging legislative oversight meant that people tended towards governance by custom (Fried 1967, 145-6; Meyers 2013, 23; Boer 2015, 104).<sup>88</sup> These factors suggest that we might expect local systems of government based upon kinship (McNutt 1999, 77). In what has been called ‘kinship politics taken as far as it can go’ (Maisels 1990, 9) the restriction of leadership to a class of families is a distinctive feature of chiefdom organization (Wright 1984, 42), a social structure found in all corners of the world and from the ancient to contemporary period.<sup>89</sup> Significantly when bringing this model of society to bear upon biblical texts, in anthropology the chiefdom is frequently contrasted with another common type of society: the tribe (Creamer and Haas 1985; Miller 2012, 6).

Within anthropology, a tribal society is recognizable from features familiar in Palestine’s decentralized landscape. Although ‘culturally similar people’ (Creamer and Haas 1985, 739), in this type of society units of lower order (settlements or households) are economically independent with decentralized subsistence production. Decentralization does not preclude a social hierarchy, but there are no structural leadership roles that make decisions on behalf of

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<sup>88</sup> Adding a more recent example to that given in chapter one of Henry VIII’s Great progress in 1541 CE, this form of locally organized and honour sanctioned society emerged in the second-half of the nineteenth century CE as settlers moved west across North America, a comparison also made by Matthews (2004, 12).

<sup>89</sup> Miller (2012, 12) draws examples from 5,000 BCE Iran and 3,600-3,000 BCE Egypt through to pre-Colombian Panama in the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century CE and contemporary Native American tribes.

the group. Chiefdoms on the other hand are a more centralized form of society. In contrast to tribes, leaders of chiefdoms have decision-making powers for the group, yet their control is limited. Chiefs must negotiate within the social organization because subsistence production and resources ‘remain in the hands of the populace’ (Creamer and Haas 1985, 740; also Fried 1967, 141). In other words, social units of a higher order are more robust in the chiefdom than among tribes, but chiefs must be granted their power from the lower units.

Successful leadership in a chiefdom is thus dependent on the continued recognition by the population of the *legitimacy* of the chief’s authority (Creamer and Haas 1985, 740 original emphasis).

We could say that chiefdoms *agree* to be more centralized, with the composite groups ceding decision-making to a chief or to a bureaucracy in more complex forms of the society (Haas 1982, 75). In addition to eligibility through rank, a chief must exhibit qualities to justify the particular choice for him. In this way, both ascribed and achieved status are aspects of the leadership process. Indeed, Miller (2012, 7) describes a society that appeals exclusively to either aspect as being on a rare extreme of a continuum. The continual process of ceding leadership may also be understood in terms of the context based recognition of social units of higher order for which I have argued. An agreement in favour of limited centralization rests upon the context in which decision-making across society becomes necessary.

In its complex form a chiefdom has three layers: the chief; a number of localized sub-chiefs (the ruling class) and the populace. While described as a centralized society, chiefdoms are nevertheless locally circumscribed: a ‘regionally centralized organization of local communities’ (Earle 1978, 2). Its typical settlement pattern—a main population centre surrounded by smaller satellite centres—Miller (2012) explains is common to 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century Palestine (also McNutt 1999, 67; Matthews 2015, 54) and could well describe a settlement with its *bānôt* (cf. Judg 11:26). As a subsistence economy, the territorial reach of such chiefdoms is limited by their capacity for producing goods and services.<sup>90</sup> Hence the chiefdoms’ centralization should not be thought of as resembling the wider administrative homogeneity of a nation, which continues to be inhibited by Palestine’s fragmented landscape. Even the chiefdom’s more restricted centralization is fragile, dependent upon the subsistence socio-economy of the lower social unit: the household.

This sustained emphasis upon a chief’s legitimacy results in ‘status rivalry’ and conflict (Gibson 2012, 272), which appears to be a standard feature of chiefdom politics.

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<sup>90</sup> ‘Commonly, the most efficient territory size for a single paramount’s domain would be one with a radius of about a half day of travel from the regional center’ (Miller 2012, 12).

Chieftains, whether they are in Polynesia or medieval Ireland, come across as avaricious, boastful, arrogant, ambitious, and ruthless aggrandizing agents who will stoop to anything to undermine or kill rivals, even if they are blood kinsmen. (Gibson 2012, 272)

Nevertheless, the combative nature of the politics has the effect of consolidating the social elite 'into a region-wide chiefly or noble class' (Wright 1984, 69). In this way, family identity both legitimates and restricts a chief's power.

The position (office) of the chief is due to his location in the kinship network and ultimately he is subordinate to it and its values, for he has no major source of power that he can operate outwith kinship relations. Indeed, chiefs often have to compete for followers, and they certainly cannot 'command' subjects. (Maisels 1990, 9; also Fried 1967, 133)

Hence a chiefdom's leadership structure is both fragile and resilient (Wright 1984, 69). It is liable to break down and yet continues to re-emerge in a 'cycle' (Miller 2012, 9).<sup>91</sup> Units of higher and lower order must tackle the conflicts of interest between self-sufficient household, ruling class and overall administrative rule. Since the means of production is controlled by the economically self-sufficient population centres, the limits of a territory's productivity also limit a chief's power: he loses influence when he can no longer distribute luxuries (Haas 1982, 74; Heffelfinger 2009, 284). The constant challenge to legitimacy provokes a cycle through 'centralized' stages when the chief maintains control and 'decentralized' stages without an outright leader when members of the ruling class challenge and depose the chief (Haas 1982, 113; Wright 1984, 42). Transferred to the biblical context, such political structures would mean that Abimelech and Jephthah's position is never secure.

This analysis of the complex chiefdom has revealed a society in which both ascribed and achieved forms of rank are at work in its leadership politics. Leaders are drawn from a class but must be chosen. It is also a political system in which leaders must justify their authority or risk being deposed. I think that we can see this political interplay in Judg 9 and 11. But just before turning to read these texts in this way, we need first to ask if the social landscape behind them is a suitable context in which to model the chiefdom structure. And so, I will have a look at these stories' topographical details.

### **Topographical considerations**

We might spend some time with the topography of Judg 9 and 11 to establish their potential for finding a chiefdom society. Beginning with Shechem, Miller (2012, 119-21) shows that this

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<sup>91</sup> The tension inherent in this system is shown by its tendency towards simplification, whether by a chief alienating the surrounding 'decision-making bureaucracy' (Creamer and Haas 1985, 740) or this social elite rebelling against their overlord.

site had nine sub-centres as satellites to the main settlement, a pattern typical of a chiefdom. We might think in this context of the biblical toponyms Ophrah (9:5), Beth-Millo (vv6, 20), Tormah (v31 in the MT), Arumah (v41), Migdol-Shechem (vv46-49) and Thebez (v50). On this view, Jerubbaal from Ophrah and his sons form the ruling class of a satellite to Shechem.<sup>92</sup> Studying the government of Shechem, Reviv (1966, 253) notes that Labaya, a governor of the settlement under Egyptian king Amenhotep III (1388-1351), was also from an outlying satellite. From this Reviv (1966, 254) concludes that Shechem submitted to ‘rulers from abroad, whose military power was composed of aliens’. Yet understood as a chiefdom, Shechem would not be in the thrall of foreigners but precisely its own ruling class, an elite who is eligible to lead. The social distance implied by Reviv’s language obscures the evident proximity of the rulers who administrate Shechem (cf. Sasson 2014, 377, 397).<sup>93</sup>

The chiefdom model is harder to map onto Judg 11 for we do not obviously find a central settlement with outliers in this story. It appears rather that the major toponyms are Transjordanian territories, an area to which Miller does not apply his model. Further frustrating the search for the type of social organization Jephthah governs, Gilead has three referents in the Bible, a region, a settlement and a person.<sup>94</sup> Although mentioned with some frequency the region of Gilead is not clearly defined, particularly to its north. Increasing the confusion are biblical references to a ‘land of Gilead’ that encompasses but a quarter of the region at its greatest extent (cf. Num 32:1; Josh 13:25).<sup>95</sup>

Gilead the settlement is mentioned in Num 32:39-40; Hos 6:8 and 12:12 and in Assyrian descriptions of Tiglath-pileser III’s conquests, locating it ‘in the lower plateau south of the Jabbok and north of es-Salt’ (Finkelstein, Koch, and Lipschits 2011, 138): that is, in the smaller ‘land of Gilead’ to the north west of Ammon. The extent and nature of this settlement is not directly inferable from its references, but a follow-up to the report of its conquest may give us

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<sup>92</sup> Shechem (or Tell Balāṭah) is a major site with ‘B-, C-, and D-level centers’ (Miller 2012, 34). Miller identifies Arumah the apparent residence of Abimelech (9:41) with Khirbet el-Urma, which is a B-level centre for Tell Balāṭah.

<sup>93</sup> Miller (2012, 120-1) brings material indications of Tell Balāṭah’s decentralization in 1125 BCE alongside the story of Abimelech. Judg 9:28 offers a witness to Abimelech’s subordination to a Shechemite chief whom he overthrows. However, Miller cautions that the parallels are not exact and that tensions in the text produce inconsistencies that make it difficult to retrieve an historical account because some details ‘reflect matters of a much later time than 1125’.

<sup>94</sup> Machir, son of Manasseh (Num 26:29; 36:1) is said to be the ‘father of Gilead’ (Josh 17:1) but also that his descendants ‘took Gilead’ (Num 32:39) and that he was ‘given Gilead’ by Moses (Num 32:40; Deut 3:15) (cf. Ottosson 1992, 1021).

<sup>95</sup> ‘Il n’y a sans doute pas, dans la Bible, de terme géographique qui soit plus imprécis que celui de Galaad’ (Vaux 1941, 27). Bordered by the desert on the east and the Jordan on the west, Gilead’s northern limit is vague but reaches at least to the Yarmuk (2 Kgs 10:33). The southern boundary may extend even to Heshbon, north of the ‘land of *mishor*’ (Deut 3:8-10; Josh 13:9, 16-17) and the territory of Moab. The river Jabbok divides it with Gad and Reuben taking ‘half of the Gilead’ south of the Jabbok, while half of Manasseh claim the territory to the north (Deut 3:12-13; Josh 12:2-5). A final geographical nuance is introduced by Num 32:1 which mentions a ‘land of Jazer’ along with a ‘land of Gilead’ in the territory of Reuben and Gad (Vaux 1941, 28). This further division is arguable from natural topographical boundaries (Finkelstein, Koch, and Lipschits 2011, 132-3).

a clue. Num 32:41 relates how Jair, son of Manasseh ‘went and captured *their* villages’ (*hālak wayyilkōd ’et-ḥawwōtēhem*). There are no stated referents for the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronominal suffix in v41, which means we must cast our eye back to v40 wherein the settlement of Gilead is treated. Could Num 32:41 be referring to the satellites of Gilead? Certainly, in syntactic parallel the next verse relates how Nobah ‘went and captured Kenath and its *bānōt*’ (*hālak wayyilkōd ’et-kānāt wə ’et-bānōtēhā*) (32:42), ‘daughter’ sites of a main settlement. And in the build-up to Jephthah’s tale, ‘Jair the Gileadite’ is said to have thirty sons with thirty towns ‘which are in the land of Gilead’ (Judg 10:3-4; cf. Num 32:41, also Josh 13:30; 1 Kgs 4:13; 1 Chron 2:22) (see Budd 1984, 345).

Another reference that may help us to uncover the settlement’s social organization is the mention of Gilead as Jephthah’s father (11:1). M. Patrick Graham (1992) suggests that names are used by metonymy to indicate either descendants or land (cf. Judg 5:17; 10:18). Boling (1975, 197) applies this idea to Judg 11:1 arguing that the phrase ‘Gilead begot Jephthah’ means that a reference to the land has replaced an unknown father. In a similar move, Finkelstein, Koch, and Lipschits (2011, 138) assume that the original ‘land of Gilead’ south of the Jabbok draws its name from the settlement found within it. This ‘core territory’ in turn gave its name to a wider area extending to Heshbon in the south and north from the river Jabbok to the river Yarmuk (2011, 150) an expansion attributed to a 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century Omride period of conquest (see also Finkelstein 2013, 162).<sup>96</sup>

We have noticed how ancient Near Eastern settlements are socially constituted primarily around the extended family, with kinship an ‘organizing principle’ which ‘defines social, political, and economic relations’ (McNutt 1999, 77). Drawing these strands together, it is not a huge leap to suggest that the ancestral eponym ‘Gilead’ has converged with the name of the town. In this way, descent from an ancestor Gilead is *inferred* from origin in the town of Gilead; a name that in turn is lent to the settlement’s immediate area. Boling’s suggestion that the land has replaced a father is along the right lines, not because the father is unknown, but because land and father converge in the genealogy (also Finkelstein 2016b, 6). We can note Gibson’s (2012, 10) point that new chiefs are written into genealogies to legitimate the administration (also Miller 2012, 13). Family/settlement identity is prior to regional or tribal designation and comes to extend its reference from the local to the global over the centuries. From this process and the vague reference to satellite settlements for Gilead in Num 32 we can conjecture that Gilead’s ‘core

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<sup>96</sup> A similar extension of reference is also seen with Tob, the land to where Jephthah flees (Judg 11:3). Discussing the epithet ‘land of Tob’ (cf. also ‘land of Gilead’), Finkelstein (2016b, 13) remarks that ‘the usage of “land”, typical of Transjordanian regions in the Bible, in the Mesha Inscription and in the 1 Maccabees story, probably indicates that Tob was a town on the desert fringe’. This inference can only be because the settlement reference has been extended to the surrounding area in the lack of other prominent settlements, exemplifying the metonymic use of a settlement toponym to indicate a region.

territory’ began as a settlement system, which in view of its ruling class and the search for an eligible leader depicted in Judg 10:17-11:11 seems to have some characteristics of a chiefdom. Having examined the various division of political roles in hierarchical societies and the specifics of tribal cultures and complex chiefdoms, a number of points of contact are noticeable with Abimelech and Jephthah’s tales. In them we can discern ruling classes from whom leaders come and by whom authority is bestowed. We see a number of legitimate challengers for this authority and the stories are about situations producing the conditions for leaders to rise and fall. We can see that the elements of leadership noticed as features of Abimelech and Jephthah’s stories—a role claimed in virtue of family, but which is nevertheless contestable—may be understood within a chiefdom-like form of social organization. For this reason, I suggest that the complex chiefdom is a ‘useful’ model (Renfrew 1974, 72) for interpreting the texts of Judg 9 and 10:17-11:11.

### **The rise and fall of Abimelech**

Turning anew to the texts, when Abimelech comes to Shechem the settlement system is in need of a leader from its ruling class (Judg 9:1). If we see this as a decentralized stage in the chiefdom cycle (cf. Heffelfinger 2009, 288), then we can also see how Abimelech’s arguable claim is nevertheless legitimately brought to bear upon the power vacuum as an eligible candidate for chief. As the main site, it is expedient for Abimelech to begin from Shechem. But precisely because it is an elite class of people, there are likely to be other leadership candidates and we find them most obviously in the seventy sons of Jerubbaal by his primary wife (8:30). Their potential challenge Abimelech himself acknowledges (9:2) (Schöpflin 2004, 7) and he knows that he must provide more than his name to convince the social elite—which would include his half-brothers—that he can rule. Abimelech presents his case to the people by attempting to decrease the social distance, neutralizing the tension between higher and lower units. He is not only from the chiefdom’s ruling class by his father, but he is also family to the *ba’ālīm* of Shechem through his mother: ‘remember, I am your bones and flesh’ (*ûzakarTEM kî-’aşmēkem ûbsarkem ’ānî*) (v2).

Remembering the legitimization process by which new chiefs are written into the genealogy of a settlement (Gibson 2012, 10), Abimelech’s appeal to both sides of his family is a (successful) attempt to write himself into the story of Shechem. As Jonathan Haas (1982, 75) remarks, ‘ideological manipulation is the primary mechanism used in gaining the obedience of the population in chiefdoms’. Political manipulation, however, risks consequences. Webb (2012, 270) reads Abimelech’s approach as warning of a ‘power struggle,’ which would be a typical scenario during a chiefdom’s decentralized period (Gibson 2012, 272). We can expect that

Abimelech's perhaps more legitimate brothers were already planning to mount challenges of their own. Abimelech's plot to rule Shechem pre-empts that of his brothers and he proceeds in what is a typical manner for chiefdom politics by slaughtering his rivals (9:5).

In this way, we can see that Abimelech's rise based upon politicking and bloodshed is not unexpected. Indeed, this seems to be entirely in keeping with a chiefdom's hierarchy where 'leaders can lead, but followers may not follow' (Fried 1967, 133). While his violence, corruption and treachery might make us think that Abimelech's accession is a 'disastrous interlude' (Exum 1990, 419), in fact his behaviour appears to be a standard course of action when challenging for a chiefdom. For this reason, the legend of Abimelech is not making a censorious point by its depiction of his leadership campaign, nor indeed of his actions to crush rebellion (vv34-52). Notwithstanding moral repulsion at his fratricide, Abimelech's action is not an 'illegal, murderous coup' (Niditch 2008, 114) at the level of the core hero tale. It is the editorial frame (8:33-35; 9:55-57) that gives Judg 9 this veneer. In this way I do not agree with Schöpflin (2004, 7) that 'fratricide makes Abimelech a usurper'. Chiefs manipulate the people, bully and eliminate rivals. I suppose this is one of the ways in which a conceded legitimacy is maintained. The 'heart' of Shechem's social elite 'inclining towards Abimelech' (v3) describes their preference for him as candidate; his removal of competitors extends this preference to the whole chiefdom.

Despite the combative nature of the politics, the level of ascribed status may be a stumbling block for Abimelech whose mother has been described as a *pīlegeš* (8:31). Although an elusive term (Stone 2007; Shectman 2014), it is possible that the secondary status of a *pīlegeš* and her children is because she comes to a man's household without a dowry (Sasson 2014, 376). Hence she is simply 'a woman whose continued presence within the family was not dependent on economic arrangements' (Steinberg 2007, 52).<sup>97</sup> The fact that Abimelech's mother lives in Shechem and his father in Ophrah may be an economic decision (Steinberg 2007, 59) which renders his status lower than his father's other children because he falls outside the socio-economic structure of patrilineal descent.<sup>98</sup>

Where does his lower status leave Abimelech as a member of the ruling class? Sasson (2014, 376) appeals to examples from the Ancient Near East to show that secondary status is not a barrier to assuming rule, citing the instance of 'Urḫi-Tešub of Ḫatti'. In Sasson's (2014, 377) view, Abimelech's name 'my father is king' (Judg 8:31) is evidence that legitimacy is bestowed 'by a father who wished this son of a secondary wife to be accorded elite status'. This may be

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<sup>97</sup> Stone (2007, 194), compares Abimelech's status in Judg 9 with that of the offspring of Abraham's *pīlagšim* in Gen 25:6, concluding that their secondary status is 'in comparison with other children of the same father'.

<sup>98</sup> Abimelech may thus be seeking entry into such a system through his matrilineal claim for leadership of Shechem (9:1-2), although this would be unique in the biblical corpus. That such systems of social organization are possible see Miller (2012, 7).

drawing too much from a deity name, but Sasson's point allows that Abimelech's status need not be a barrier to leadership eligibility albeit through a distinctly contestable claim. This perspective explains both why the powers in Shechem acknowledge Jerubbaal's (and thus Abimelech's) authority (9:2) and also how Gaal can question it (9:26). The rebellion of the owners of Shechem (9:23) is also understandable in such a situation and as an argument for a better candidate, this political process elucidates the point of Jotham's fable as the trees seek a tree to 'sway over them' (9:9, 11, 13), but settle for the economically useless bramble (v14). Faced with these rivals, Abimelech's violent response to the threat of deposition is unsurprising (vv34-52).

Looking at the fable (9:7-15), we should understand this and Jotham's speech denouncing Shechem and their choice (vv16-20) as an argument contesting Abimelech's accession *in particular* and not one condemning the ruling institution (as Soggin 1987, 177; Niditch 2008, 114). In a complex chiefdom economic production is in the hands of the populace and a chief's administration of these goods must include luxuries for the people in order to maintain influence (Fried 1967, 141; Haas 1982, 74). Jotham's argument may be that Abimelech will not provide these luxuries because doubts over his legitimacy threatens a chiefdom's socio-economic integrity (Creamer and Haas 1985, 740; also Matthews 2015, 79). Hence his parable contrasts economically productive trees that provide sumptuary items with the useless bramble. Jotham is not a critic of the ruling system, but a rival claimant; distinguished out of the seventy sons of Jerubbaal by his survival (9:5) but not by his ambition. He is not said to reject the claim to power at Shechem (v2). Rather, his condemnation of the Shechemites is that by choosing a son of secondary status (and not him) they have been disloyal to Jerubbaal (vv17-18). Jotham's speech thus appears as a that of man who has been cheated out of power and curses those who have displaced him.

Typical of the manner of chiefdoms, after three years the ruling class tire of their chief (v22, 23b, 25) and seek to depose Abimelech. Again relating to the economic influence of the people in tension with the chief's administration of sumptuary goods, setting up ambushes (*mā'ārbîm*) to inhibit this administration (v25) would be an effective way of eroding a chief's power (Heffelfinger 2009, 289). Glancing through the rest of the story, the actions of certain figures are now clarified. Gaal son of Ebed is looked to as a new contender (v26), who like Jotham challenges Abimelech's legitimacy (v28) and presents his own candidacy for chief: 'who will give this people into my hand?' (v29) (Fritz 1982, 130). The challenge again begins in the main settlement, Shechem, made possible because Abimelech is in one of the satellites (v31). Figures such as Zebul 'ruler of the city' (*śar-hā'îr*) (v30) and the *ba'ālîm* of Migdol-Shechem (v46) are members of the social elite who respectively support (cf. 9:41) and oppose (cf. 9:46-47) the chiefship of Abimelech. In order to ensure that leadership continues to be granted to him, he

attempts to intimidate the settlements within his chiefdom (vv30-52). His shameful end (vv53-54) without a lineage to succeed him brings a new decentralized stage in the society's history, read as poetic retribution by the editorial frame (vv55-57) (cf. Boogaart 1985). From the national perspective of Judges' compilers, Abimelech's version of leadership exemplifies Israel's national decline.

### Jephthah's social restoration

Jephthah's situation is less clearly that of a complex chiefdom and the model may be more 'useful' than 'true'. The Gileadite elders' pursuit of him as an eligible chief is somewhat desperate, a point made by the narrative which emphasises Jephthah's inferior status among his own people as the son of a prostitute (11:1-3). It seems we are to compare the motherhood of *zônâ* (v1) with that of the *'iššâ* in v2.<sup>99</sup> Jephthah is declared to be illegitimate and is excluded from his family (v2). No wonder he is incredulous when the elders come to make him commander (v7). But while misgivings regarding the integrity of kinship status might undermine a chief's authority (Maisels 1990, 9), nevertheless, it appears that his prowess as a *gibbôr ḥayil* (v1) in conjunction with family connections overcomes Jephthah's illegitimacy. I mentioned how a social system of either exclusively ascribed or achieved rank is rare (Miller 2012, 7). While his ascribed status is a politically expedient even dubious manoeuvre in the lack of anyone else (10:18), it appears to be in keeping with the perpetually fractious nature of chiefdom authority that appeals to family rank no matter how questionable.

In this way, Jephthah's story can be interpreted against the background of ranked leadership eligibility to explain the nature and extent of his authority and why he is a judge and Abimelech is not. A situation has emerged in the region of Gilead that requires the consolidation of lower order social units: the threat of the Ammonites (10:17; 11:6-7). This newly-recognized higher group needs a leader that, in the unfolding of the story, seems to require a certain heritage – he needs to be a Gileadite (10:18; 11:5). Into this situation Jephthah's military prowess and ambiguous origins are inserted (11:1-3), priming the audience for a tale about an unexpected hero arising to lead. The story then returns to the timeline of 10:17-18 with a recapitulation of the conflict in 11:4, the context that rouses the Gileadite elders—a social elite—to seek Jephthah out (vv5-6) (Willis 1997, 41).

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<sup>99</sup> A number of suggestions have been made regarding the exact status of the *zônâ*, including a divorced woman, a concubine, a woman from another tribe or a gentile (see Assis 2005, 192 n. 28). Jephthah's brothers describe her as an *'iššâ 'āheret* 'another woman' (v2) maybe indicating 'intrusion from beyond the tribe' (Sasson 2014, 420) or intrusion from beyond the settlement system in the chiefdom context. The action of his brothers in driving Jephthah out (*wayəgoršū 'et-yiptāḥ*) (v2) strikes a blow for the autonomy of the household, protecting it from exogamous influence (Lyons 2012, 47).

Jephthah's incredulity and initial reluctance is in keeping with the familiar drama of a hidden hero persuaded to embrace his destiny (v7). But it is the manner both of his selection and refusal that is significant. It is his family identity that locates him in relation to the Gileadite higher social group encamped against the Ammonites. On the one hand, his diverse heritage sees him rejected from the lower order unit of the household. On the other, at a higher order Jephthah's family identity is viewed as an advantage. Such a tension is not unexpected in the dynamics of chiefdom leadership. A ranked class provides chiefs, but its individuals must manoeuvre to be granted the honour. Jephthah's qualities as a *gibbôr hayil* (v1) make him a frontrunner. But, like Jotham's protest against half-brother Abimelech, Jephthah's mother being 'another woman' is ammunition for lesser rivals (v2).

We might be able to clear up the issue surrounding the elders' approach to Jephthah first to be *qāṣîn* and then to become *ro'š*. While a chief's authority is continually granted to him by the populace (or perhaps better the ruling class), whilst commanding this authority he controls a wide range of social activities as Creamer and Haas (1985, 740) explain.

In assuming the mantle of leadership in the political sphere of decision-making, the chief also assumes authority in the realm of religion, warfare, communal labor projects, internal exchange, and external trade.

Viewed through the chiefdom model, the two titles offered to Jephthah would seem to be synonymous at least with regard to the extent of his authority. This is all the more apparent in view of the context based recognition of higher order social groupings; contexts such as Creamer and Haas list (also Meyers 2013, 51). 'Head over all the inhabitants of Gilead' (11:8) need mean no more (and no less) than being 'commander so that we may fight against the sons of Ammon' (11:6), because it is the context that calls for a chiefdom's functional unity over household autonomy.

What restores Jephthah as a viable leader over his brothers (or anyone else) is his military prowess, exemplified by his patronage of a group of mercenaries (11:3), another commonality with Abimelech (9:4) and his opponents (9:25).<sup>100</sup> Sasson (2014, 422) draws upon ancient Near Eastern epigraphy to describe this trope: 'men with little future create it elsewhere by collecting equally dislocated riffraff. Normally, established leaders avoid them; but in unsettled times, chutzpah yielded them standing'. I would argue that 'normally' units of higher order requiring

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<sup>100</sup> Patronage is a reciprocal relationship in which control of resources is ceded to a figure in return for economic support, protection or simply group belonging. However, more is gained by the patron than the client in what is an 'unequal distribution of power and goods' (Simkins 1999, 127). While a patron occupies much the same authoritative position as the household patriarch, patronage 'goes well beyond him' (Boer 2015, 106). Because its structures are not confined to family, there is 'more potential to undercut such patterns of kinship' in a move for greater authority (Boer 2015, 107-8; see further Simkins 1999), underlining the benefit of a strong family allegiance. Boer (2015, 108) uses the biblical example of David in 1 Sam 22:2, but we must remember Simkins's (1999, 128) caveat that 'patronage is essentially an etic category in relation to ancient Israel'.

leaders fall into abeyance, while it is precisely ‘unsettled times’ that demand the recognition of wider group cohesion. It is in these times that the elders of Gilead ‘turn back’ to Jephthah (11:8), providing an opportunity for the editors’ of Judges to emphasise the hand of Yhwh in this hero’s rise (vv9-11). Jephthah’s authority is primarily martial, held over the higher order group cohered against the Ammonites; his judgeship of *Israel* is an editorial projection. Unlike Abimelech who eliminates his rivals, Jephthah overcomes his rivals’ attempt to displace him in a story of heroic destiny. This is perfect as a preface to Gileadite achievements in the Transjordan (vv12-33), material ripe for use in an evocation of national pride (see Bloch-Smith 2015). Surely this can only be because ‘the spirit of Yhwh came upon Jephthah’ (v29)? While Abimelech cannot be judge material, for the authors of the book of Judges Jephthah’s story allows this attribution (12:7). But it all starts from Jephthah’s family identity as an eligible ranked leader because of his descent from Gilead.

### **Concluding remarks**

Applying a fragile social dynamic of preference through the lens of chiefdom societies, I have shown how the primary local identifier of family feeds into social units of higher order that are recognized in context. The primacy of family causes tension when a larger group requires a more structured leadership. In a chiefdom, this tension is negotiated through ascribed rank – certain families constitute an elite from which leaders can be drawn. However, such a system never entirely frees itself from the tension creating a conflictual and fractious form of governance vulnerable to breakdown. In the biblical texts, I have compared the leadership of Abimelech and Jephthah because both their situations demand the recognition of higher order social groups producing a tension with their family affiliation.

How do these legends sit in the overall compilation that is the book of Judges? The story of Abimelech’s rise to power, the conspiracy against him and his failed attempt to restore control appear as typical stages in a chiefdom’s social organization. While his legend must be retained as a meaningful part of Shechem’s cultural heritage, the problem for the editors of Judges is that such a clear example of localized politicking does not lend itself easily as source material for an account of ancient Israel’s national heroes. Hence Abimelech is presented as treacherous, a usurper and a pretender to an authority that belongs properly only to Yhwh (8:33-35; 9:23-24, 55-57). Jephthah on the other hand is like Jael in having the potential to draw people together into the Israelite national narrative. While his story may also be understood along the lines of the chiefdom model, in contrast to Abimelech Jephthah rises above the normal bloody politics. Jephthah’s legend is one of a hero embracing his destiny despite the fractious social dynamic. Having acceded to leadership his continuing deeds provide material consonant with

the book of Judges' editorial goals, endorsing him as loyal to Yhwh (11:9-11, 29) and a judge of Israel (12:7). And even the sacrifice of his daughter is (awkwardly) couched in terms of this loyalty (11:30-31, 36).<sup>101</sup>

The twofold perspective that Judges combines—cherishing local folklore and building a national identity—results in some of their heroes being recast. Abimelech is a significant figure in Shechem's history, but his story must be placed as contrary to the nationalizing agenda under Yhwh. His is a disaster in leadership whose overthrow is employed to demonstrate that the national God is the only leader of one people, Israel. The Gileadite Jephthah and his regional concerns proves to have potential as a national talisman nonetheless, into whose story conquest and piety are integrated, leading to him being celebrated as Israel's judge. Yet neither these leaders' feet of clay nor their shady family situations can be sanitized. To maintain socio-cultural relevance, we—and importantly these stories' heroes—must not forget where they came from; because it is not what, but who you know.

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<sup>101</sup> The sacrifice of his daughter is a challenge to Jephthah's heroism and may well be a late addition (Römer 1998). But just as local traditions are retained because of their sociocultural significance, Jephthah's full story must find a place in the book of Judges in order to speak to the people whose legend it is to bring them into a shared heritage of Israel.

#### 4. Samson and the Timnites

Samson's parents could tell him why his marriage to a woman from Timnah failed: 'the uncircumcised Philistines' (Judg 14:3). Samson's collected legends cast the Philistines as the oppressors (13:1) and the story of his courtship as the end of Yhwh's search for 'an occasion' against them (14:4). But like Jael's slaughter of Sisera, the theological reading does not stop us asking why Samson ignores cultural taboos. His own reasons are simple, 'she is right in my eyes' (14:3, 7), yet in vindication of his parents' concern his choice ends with death and violence. Marriage with the enemy seems too superficial an explanation. Despite their scepticism, Samson's mother and father *do* take him to get the woman as wife (v5). And at the wedding banquet, Samson and the Philistines seem to start off enjoying themselves (vv10-11) before Samson's riddle game turns sour. In the terms we have been discussing, by involving its hero in a cross-cultural marriage the story sets before its audience different attitudes towards the process of maintaining group identity and contrasting approaches to prioritizing social levels.

Ambivalence is a feature of the whole saga and scholarship has agonized over Samson. He does not seem to fit any paradigm: judge, hero, tragi-comic fool. In the words of one study Samson has 'many faces' (Exum 2014). He is a 'social bandit' (Niditch 2008, 3-4) and his stories paint a picture of an unpredictable figure; a 'feckless and easy-going character' engaged in 'erotic adventures' (Soggin 1987, 236-7). His status as a consecrated Nazirite proves difficult to align with his morality (Blenkinsopp 1963; Reiss 2014) and casting him as a judge seems to stretch the role's limits (Butler 2009, 358-59). Samson is a 'hero who does not belong' (Gillmayr-Bucher 2014, 36); he is 'betwixt and between' straddling borders (Wilson 2014, 44); his whole saga is a 'virtual riddle' (Greenstein 1981, 247; also Webb 2012, 346). This one might say *lack* of a perspectival grip on Samson's identity has steered exegetes to consider that his very significance lies in his *liminality*. As Gregory Mobley (2006, 28) puts it in his comparative analysis of some of folklore's liminal heroes, 'Samson is defined by contradiction, alienation and hybridity'.

But while this popular reading sheds light on many important characteristics of Samson's tales, exegetes have been content to leave Samson at the margins, respecting rather than resolving an identity which is 'always in between' (Gillmayr-Bucher 2014, 39). In other words, Samson's apparent liminality is seen as the solution not the problem in understanding his stories. I think that we can retrieve Samson from the margins if we recognize that he is simply not interested in the social categories he escapes. In our terms, he does not recognize a context in which a wider group loyalty beyond family is generated. This is what makes him hard to place. He does

not care about our identity categories, or more precisely, the Samson of the folklore does not care about the categories—Israel, Philistia—that the familiar editorial elements encourage us to draw from the story.

Samson's attitude is evident in the frequent 'border-crossing' (Weitzman 2002, 170) that in part produces the impression of liminality. Rather than delivering Israel from oppressors Samson's exploits show an unapologetic mingling with other groups. He lives among the Philistines, attempts marriage with them, uses their prostitutes and falls in love with them, all the while engaged in conflict and struggle with them. In the end, his death coincides with theirs. Neither Samson nor the Philistines seem to understand themselves as saviour or oppressors of Israel respectively (Schipper 2003, 346).<sup>102</sup> Samson seems unfazed by cross-cultural interaction (despite the often-destructive results) and acts autonomously and spontaneously, not as the representative of a larger social unit about which he is unconcerned. It is difficult to see how his actions relate to Israel. As Cheryl Exum (2014, 20) notices, Samson 'does not hate Philistines because they are Philistines, or even because they rule over Israel, but rather strikes out at them in response to injustices some of them have done to him'.

We might even ask how distinctive in Samson's stories are the categories of Israel and Philistia? The proper noun *yisrā'el* only occurs five times in the entire Samson saga, either within the familiar editorial frame (13:1; 15:20; 16:31) or as an editorial aside (13:5; 14:4) and boundaries between large-scale social groups seem not to be too well drawn in Samson's mind (Weitzman 2002, 160). In the story of his wedding, the noun *pəlištīm* only occurs within the introductory four verses (14:1-4), before the focus turns to the settlement, Timnah (v5). Even this reference disappears, with only an allusion to the 'men of the city' at the story's conclusion (v18). Without references to the nations, Samson's marriage can only be read at the level of interacting families.

Nevertheless, the process of marriage in the ancient Near East is a balance between safeguarding patrimony and reaching outside the household. Because the family is society's basic social unit, the dynamics of marriage—inheritance, economic production, social reproduction—impacts the local community. While looking beyond this community for a spouse introduces an extra element of anxiety about patrimony (Boer 2015, 78), the ideal of autonomy must nevertheless confront the process of bringing a wife in from outside (Lyons 2012, 49). Different views on how best to maintain this balance mean that what constitutes a good or ill-advised match for a local community is not set. We see this in the biblical text: Samson's parents take the point of view that it is better to marry close to home (14:3), a view

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<sup>102</sup> The claim that 'the Philistines are rulers over us' is found on the lips of 'the three thousand men of Judah' (15:11), which is their perspective on the relationship. We do not know what the Philistines think (see Jobling and Rose 1996, 402). Concerning the 'men of Judah,' we can also note a regional, rather than national viewpoint.

not shared by Samson (v2). But, the fact that his parents arrange the wedding anyway (v5) suggests that their view is not definitive. The story's social interest is precisely the issue of maintaining the balance between autonomy and social interaction. And this may well involve some exchanges being lost in cultural translation. I think that the riddle game serves as an illustrator of this issue. With many approaches to the question of household autonomy, the tale warns us that the process of marriage and group distinction cannot be reduced to 'Philistines bad/Israelites good' as the editors encourage (Jobling and Rose 1996, 402; Kim 2007, 172).

For these reasons, I do not think that Samson's wedding should be read as an ill-advised exogamous marriage gone wrong. I suggest that, setting aside its nationalist framing, the story be read at the level of the family allowing us to ask the exogamy question afresh. On this reading, Judg 14 relates the story of a marriage arranged between settlements; a possible (if fraught) situation in view of the need to look outside the household for a wife. At least with regard to this folktale, Samson does not thus appear as a liminal figure but as rooted in his family.

To support my contention, this inquiry has three major parts. First, I shall distinguish the localized hero story from the editorial frame before considering what leads scholarship to see Samson as liminal, particularly in view of his wedding to a Timnite. This survey will challenge assumptions about the nature of Samson's marriage and the significance of attendant cultural rituals such as the famous riddle. Thus, secondly, in order to address these issues, I shall review some sociological observations on marriage and the cultural import of ritual riddle telling. The social landscape painted by Judg 14 will then bring this analysis into focus. Finally, in light of this work we will be able to return to the story of Samson's marriage with fresh eyes.

## **Samson in the literature**

### **The folktale within the frame**

It has long been noted that the Samson cycle (Judg 13-16) is not to be seen as part of the collection of northern hero tales but as having a different source (Noth 1943; Richter 1963). One scholar has argued that its source is the legends of Heracles (Margalith 1986, 1987), while another suggests that the cycle is from Bethel under the Babylonians (Guillaume 2004, 144-97). Still others, while noting its independence from the northern heroic collection demur from a decision about its origin, even whether it is pre or post-Deuteronomistic (Römer and Pury 2000, 121). Whatever its provenance, Judg 13-16, is still set within the familiar editorial framework (13:1; 15:20; 16:31), with a few editorial flourishes as the stories unfold (e.g. 14:4;

15:11). In these stories, it is the turn of the Philistines to be the oppressing nation; the Other that serves to reify Israel at this identity level.

Yet, we have learnt to be alert to this nationalist perspective. Focussing upon Judg 14 and the first of Samson's adventures after the tale of his birth, notice that such editorial remarks are scant. Not only does the proper noun *yisrā'el* only occur once (v4), but its identity counterpart *pālīštīm* disappears from the story after v4 as well, reappearing only when a new scene in Samson's story is underway in 15:3. Like in the story of Jael, Samson's actions are given a theological rationale (v4). But this does not stop us asking why the marriage went ahead and the motivations for Samson and the Timnites' behaviour.<sup>103</sup> With its repeated references to 'the Philistines'—brought together with 'Israel' in the familiar framing aside 'at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel' (*bā'ēt hahî' pālīštīm mošlīm bəyisrā'el*)—Judg 14:1-4 appears as a highly edited introduction to the tale of Samson's wedding in order to underline the higher social order contrast.<sup>104</sup> Given this introduction, Samson's wedding is now all-Israel's concern as a marriage with the enemy.

Framing his wedding thus, however, makes it difficult to reconcile Samson's behaviour, who appears so untroubled by the oppression of the Philistines as to seek to marry one of them, with the action of a judge 'raised up' to deliver Israel 'from the hand of their plunderers' (2:16, 18; cf. 13:5). This is a problem that frequently shapes the interpretation of many of Samson's adventures (e.g. Greenstein 1981, 237; Exum 1983, 30-31), arising from a framework in which Samson is primarily understood as Israel's hero against the Philistines (13:5); a nation reified against another nation. In this setting, the motives behind a marriage between ethnic enemies are eminently questionable and the friction caused by Samson's riddle wager attributed to this ill-advised match. Yet despite the theological rationale, in the aftermath of the failed union it seems as if no one is better off. When his stories are read in conjunction with the frame, we certainly get the impression that Samson 'does not meet the expectations raised in the text' (Gillmayr-Bucher 2014, 39).

It appears then, that Samson's stories presented a challenge for those who must incorporate them into the book's identity-making scheme. I have argued in earlier chapters that the folktales' protagonists prioritize family rather than ethnic allegiances, reflecting the decentralized social organization of northern hero tales. It is the editors who reframe these tales as struggles between nations. But because the separate tradition of Samson contains a variety of stories, some which reflect cooperation and cross-settlement movement and others where

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<sup>103</sup> The theological rationale is not elaborated in the Samson wedding tradition. Twice in Judg 14 the text mentions the *rūah* Yhwh rushing upon Samson (*wattišlah 'ālāyw rūah Yhwh*) (14:6,19). These phenomena provoke Samson into acts of violence, but with only a tangential relation to his wedding.

<sup>104</sup> This pattern is also observable in Judg 13, in which both *yisrā'el* and *pālīštīm* only occur together and only in the usual editorial refrains (13:1, 5).

conflict erupts with Samson as an individual instead of mustered armies of Israelite tribes, the frame must work harder to depict Samson as Israel's champion. By dropping in references to the Philistines, the editors evoke memories of this more distinctive people who had settled on the South Levantine coast from across the seas (Stone 1995, 7).<sup>105</sup>

David Jobling and Catherine Rose (1996) have investigated the 'stereotyping' of Philistines in the Bible. They notice that 'the biblical Philistines almost always appear as a *group*' and that 'in the Samson cycle, the only individualized Philistines are his bride-to-be (14:15-17), her father (15:1-2), and Delilah' (397). I would suggest that this 'individualization' follows from a tradition that is less interested in their portrayal as Philistines and more interested in them as Timnites, Gazites and 'a woman in the valley of Sorek' (16:4), namely, a tradition that is interested in them in terms of their local identities.<sup>106</sup> The editorial veneer of Philistine allegiance is an instant way of casting a villain. As Jobling and Rose (1996, 402) conclude 'in the Bible, then, the Philistines are a focus of anxiety which needs to be resolved through fantasy'.

Removed from this contextualization, Samson's interactions remain at the level of family. This is the interest of his stories, but when read in light of Israelite/Philistine opposition he is pushed to the margins by attempts to understand him. Set in the Judges narrative with the Philistines cast as oppressors, Samson's forays into their settlements seem suspicious needing the explanation that this is the purpose of God. But if it is a local affair between two families, the interactions should provoke a different analytical response. Samson and the Philistine's ambiguous relationship is problematized to reinforce their cultural and ethnic contrast and to provide room for the salvific actions of Yhwh on behalf of his people Israel (Exum 2014, 15). The ingenious way in which the editors have responded to the challenge of Samson, nevertheless leaves its liminal impression in inconsistencies between the concerns of the editorial frame and that of the underlying hero story. This is the response of the editors of Judges, but how have scholars responded to the challenge of Samson?

### **Exegesis at the margins: Samson's liminality**

In reaction to the inconsistencies between frame and folktale, scholarship has embraced the liminality of Samson. Niditch is one of those content to leave Samson at the margins in justification of his unpredictability. His is a world of contrasts, she explains (1990, 609) in

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<sup>105</sup> Although a 'Levantalization' of Philistine culture away from their Aegean roots can be observed during the course of the Iron Age, the distinctive nature of this culture compared with those around it endured. As Bryan Stone (1995, 25) puts it, 'despite nearly six centuries of intercultural interaction and acculturation in the Iron Age Levant, the Philistines maintained a distinct, archaeologically identifiable, cultural, ethnic, and political identity' (also Finkelstein 1995; Killebrew 2005).

<sup>106</sup> Scholars often note that Delilah is not described as a Philistine (Weitzman 2002, 161; Reiss 2014, 141 n. 27).

which Samson is set against ‘oppressive authority’ as a ‘powerful statement of hope and vindication’ (624). Reading Judg 14, she contends that Samson’s wedding rituals with the ‘riddling contest’ are a ‘means of defining opposing groups’ with the purpose of ‘community and union’ (Niditch 2008, 156). I am not sure that the riddle does have this bonding purpose in Samson’s wedding and Niditch never really gives us a reason why such a process fails. For Niditch, the idea that in Samson ‘the judge meets the “social bandit” and the “epic hero”’ (2008, 160) (in Exum’s words, his ‘many faces’) seems explanation enough (also Reiss 2014, 145).

The coincidence of many faces in Samson leads Exum (2014) to a multifaceted liminal figure (also Wilson 2014). But I wonder how distinctive are the categories that Samson fails to inhabit. From a literary perspective, Samson’s occupation of many folkloric tropes seems to me to be simply the appeal of a hero in classic stories. Heroes are never one dimensional if they are to be popular (Webb 2012, 347). No one likes a worthy do-gooder! I do not know what more Exum is saying in her summary than that Samson is richly characterized.

In light of my contention that an Israelite/Philistine opposition is overstated, I am also not convinced by Steve Weitzman’s (2002) understanding of the Shephelah as a liminal region with ‘ethnic hybridization’. This seems an etic perspective on what is in fact a lack of interest in ethnic differentiation because family differentiation has already preceded it. On Weitzman’s reading, Samson generates ‘category confusion’ by his constant border-crossing that ‘collapses the boundary between Israelite and Philistine’ (Weitzman 2002, 170; also Mobley 2006, 30-31). First, the Shephelah might well be a ‘liminal zone’ (Weitzman 2002, 160), but for that reason we should not assume that identities are malleable. On the contrary, they resist homogenization. Secondly, with reference to Judg 14, Weitzman (2002, 170) thinks that ‘Samson’s riddle exposes an intellectual shortcoming in the Philistines, an inability to sort out the category confluences that confront them in the shephelah’. I have the opposite impression. Samson is the one who ‘conflates categories’ or better, he does not care about them. But the real interest of Judg 14 is that Samson’s perspective is understandable. Because the stable identities of the region are at a lower order, recognition of higher orders is not uniform. The Timnites are different, but how different and on what social level? The ambiguity flows from the fact that differences between people obtain at various levels in different people’s eyes on different occasions. Juxtaposed with the frame, this produces an impression of ‘liminality’. Part of Samson’s appeal is to see him tackle ambiguous situations generated by the lack of uniformity in recognizing different orders of social organization.

I have also described this ambiguous situation in terms of ‘otherness’, specifically the context based recognition of the Other. Susanne Gillmayr-Bucher (2014, 33) thinks that Samson is the Other but deepens this dichotomy, regretting that ‘his otherness is neither clearly defined nor

are the relations between the different aspects of his otherness evident'. But who is the 'us' for whom Samson is Other: the audience of the folktale? Not the readers of Judges' final form if the editors have anything to do with it: Samson is their champion. It seems rather that the lack of clarity regarding Samson's otherness—like his liminality—is the result of 'otherness' being context based. To apply one level of otherness across the board is to make the same mistake as Samson. While Gillmayr-Bucher acknowledges the different perspectives to otherness in her essay, much like Exum's separation of his 'many faces' Gillmayr-Bucher does not explore the possibility that different levels of otherness are simultaneously potential in a person and realisable through context. For her, the multiple possibilities of Samson's otherness 'ensnares' him. But I think this is to read him in the light of the editorial nationalist agenda, which understands only one way of being Other—non-Israelites (Kim 2007, 172). Taken on its own terms, I do not think that the saga challenges images of cultural borders (Gillmayr-Bucher 2014, 50) so much as it plays upon the issues involved in recognizing the contexts in which cultural borders obtain.

A further consequence of reading his saga in the light of the Judges' nationalist framework is that Samson becomes *disadvantaged* by his liminality. On this reading, misfortunes and tragedies that come his way are attributed to his poor decision making (Crenshaw 1974, 484) and his behaviour seems 'crude' (Greenstein 1981, 240). He is a 'loser' (Guillaume 2004, 145) and has been pejoratively characterized as a man stuck in adolescence (Wilson 2014). While the frame serves to anchor Samson's adventures it runs the risk of cutting Samson himself adrift because the editorial perspective overrides the nuances of his motivations and what might be at stake in his interactions.

Taking genre seriously apart from the biblical setting, Mobley (2006, 31) attempts to rehabilitate Samson from the perspective of folkloric tropes.

It takes us into the realm of outlaw ballads and of stories about liminal characters and misfits whose outlandish deeds and over-aggressiveness inadvertently solve problems for their societies and earn them a lovable notoriety.

As Mobley reads the folklore, Samson's liminality is not a weakness. This is an appealing proposal giving us a context in which to read the legends of an unpredictable wild man. However, I am not sure that 'wild man' is quite the stock folk character Samson represents, nor that Samson 'solves problems' for his society, inadvertently or not.<sup>107</sup> And we are still to explain this hero's liminality if it is to be more than simply resistance to categorization. Samson is still at the margins.

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<sup>107</sup> Mobley (2006, 21) acknowledges the differences between Samson and the medieval wild man who 'cannot talk, he cannot worship, and he is often insane' (20).

Another consequence of the frame's exegetical influence is simply to read Samson's wedding with disapproval (Crenshaw 1979, 80-1; Niditch 1990, 619; Webb 2012, 360, 365). Indeed, the mixed-marriage prohibition is a motif that runs through various strands of the bible's identity narrative at the service of defining the nation: 'a framework for the history of Israel' (Frevel and Conczorowski 2011, 41-2). We see this framework expressed in Judg 3:5-6 to which the preamble to Samson's marriage (14:1-4) draws our attention.<sup>108</sup> But should Samson's marriage be understood as contravening this biblical theme? Indeed, Christian Frevel and Benedikt Conczorowski (2011, 42 n. 69) explicitly exclude Samson's exogamous marriages from criticism, 'since those relationships are not evaluated according to the aforementioned framework'. And marriage to foreign women has been tolerated in other biblical strands (most evidently in Ruth, but see Crenshaw 1974, 471; Butler 2009, 332). Rather than conscious approval, it is Samson's lack of awareness of marriage expectations that appears at issue. Unlike Ruth, he seems uninterested in wider social implications, seeing his identity solely in terms of his family of which he wishes to make this Timnite a part (14:2). We need to look more closely at the variety of marriage systems to understand how Samson upholds or contravenes cultural values before reading Judg 14 in the light of the biblical mixed-marriage theme.

Deferring an interpretation of the wedding story *in toto*, much of the literature reads Judg 14 in terms of Samson's riddle: it is an 'integral part of the legend' (Margalith 1986, 225). Indeed Schipper (2003, 343) pleads that 'the reader must examine how the narrative and its themes and motifs affect the riddle and vice versa'. This emphasis has drawn in vv8-9 as a solution (or red herring) to the riddle and guided the interpretation of the wedding customs Samson experiences in Timnah (vv10-20). The riddle has been thought to be instrumental in shaping Samson and the Timnites' acrimonious relationship (Weitzman 2002, 165-66). And the popular connection to Greek literature made of Samson's tales (Soggin 1987, 243; Margalith 1987; Weitzman 2002; Reiss 2014) has also guided how his riddle game and wedding are understood (Yadin 2002).<sup>109</sup> Working on the assumption that it is suitable for the wedding context, studies have been devoted to providing innovative solutions or explaining the riddle's function in the light of folkloric comparisons (Porter 1962; Nel 1985; Margalith 1986; Camp and Fontaine 1990; Yadin 2002; Schipper 2003, 341).<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Exum (2014, 15) notices how the reader is steered towards the view that all three of Samson's women are Philistine, and hence, foreign: 'readers are encouraged to make this assumption, to fill gaps with stereotypes and to read according to convention'.

<sup>109</sup> Soggin (1987, 241) goes so far as to call Samson's wedding feast—*mišteh*—a 'symposium,' that is, a Greek drinking party. On the other hand, Webb (2012, 371 n. 66) references the seven-day feast (*mišteh*) of Persian King Ahasuerus in Esth 1:5.

<sup>110</sup> Azzan Yadin (2002, 418-22), for instance, compares Samson's riddle with a Greek *skolion* competition of improvised song, arguing that the poetic response in v18 resembles this type of competitive word exchange. But *skolia*, while indeed banquet entertainment, take the form of a competition of sung lyric verses that required completion with an immediate reply from another participant singing the song's next line (Griffith 1990, 192-3).

All such approaches are predicated upon the assumption that Samson's riddle belongs in this context. For these scholars, the exegetical problem comes: either with the failure of the riddle's cohesive strategy; or with the riddle's content and meaning; or the meaning in turn of the poetic rejoinder the Timnites make (14:18). Niditch (2008, 157) is typical in stating that Samson's riddle 'appropriately accompanies the wedding situation'. But I do not think that either his companions or Samson see the situation in this way. I think that the riddle is inappropriate for the situation and that its dramatic purpose in the story is instead to illustrate how marriage may need to negotiate social illiteracy.

For this reason, I argue that the meaning of the actual riddles told during Samson's wedding is not the story's main issue, despite the recurrent scholarly focus. I think that these riddles' significance is to illustrate some of the issues that ancient Near Eastern marriage raises, namely, the compromise of household autonomy, family patrimony and territory (the latter permitting the tale to be opened out to a nationalist perspective). It is the behaviour surrounding the riddle-telling that is illuminating, not the riddle itself. In this way, its *solution* is secondary to the folklore's narrative goal. For my purposes, the problem of the riddle's solution should be bracketed in the discussion in order not to confuse a reading of the wedding's social situation.

I am taking this deliberate approach to ensure that there is room to see which interpretations follow from which textual layer; in other words, to be careful to avoid making assumptions about what the biblical text says. This is why the perspective of the editorial frame has been carefully isolated. We have seen how various readings of Samson let themselves be guided by the larger biblical setting. While this method allows the narrative qualities of the whole literary cycle to surface, my goal is to expose as far as possible the literary interests of the core sources. Without an attentive holistic reading, sometimes the Bible's formative ideology encourages us to 'fill gaps with stereotypes' (Exum 2014, 15).<sup>111</sup> As a final remark on this risk, I think it is noteworthy that Niditch (1990, 624), Exum (2014, 26-27) and Weitzman (2002, 172) have all read Samson's story as metonymic of that of Israel (also Greenstein 1981, 249; Webb 1987, 158; Emmrich 2001, 70; Wilson 2014, 58). Evidently the Bible's identity narrative is still effective.

To summarize this review, I have suggested that the juxtaposition of editorial purpose and folkloric drama produces inconsistencies that render Samson a marginal figure, a reading embraced rather than resolved by scholarship. Without the editorial references to nations,

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Samson gives the Timnites the seven days of the feast to search for the correct response to the *hīdā*, making this an unsatisfactory comparison.

<sup>111</sup> Susan Ackerman (2000) brings out the implications of appropriating stories to build an identity narrative by asking in her paper, 'what if Judges had been written by a Philistine?' In this way she can compare Jael with Delilah (see also Crenshaw 1974, 501). Changing the framing perspective recasts who are the heroes and who are villains or as Wharton (1973, 53) neatly describes the contextual impact of 'folk memory,' 'Israelites and Philistines laugh at different places when they hear this story' (see also Jobling and Rose 1996).

however, Judg 14 tells a story of two settlements, two families (and a lion) and their union through a wedding. How distant these groups are and whether the marriage is endogamous or exogamous and from whose perspective, must be discerned from how the tale unfolds. But on a first reading, the story seems to speak of a cross-settlement match whose undoubted tension is produced through social illiteracy rather than the flouting of taboos. This questions the notion that its purpose is an ‘obvious polemic against the intermarriage of Israelite and Philistine’ (Crenshaw 1974, 480). Should we even see this story as an example of the biblically prohibited ‘mixed-marriage’ (cf. Frevel and Conczorowski 2011, 42), or is this an editorial and indeed etic perspective on a story which has been placed within a framework interested in distinguishing an identity (Frevel 2011, 3; Prato 2016, 210)?

I have also suggested that the social illiteracy possible in a marriage beyond the household is literarily highlighted by (but not limited to) Samson’s riddle game. The narrative interest may be because the riddle is an unfamiliar custom for the folktale’s audience. Or the drama may come because Samson’s riddle is inappropriate in this context and thus we cringe at the foreseeable embarrassing (or worse) consequences. It is the tradition’s perennial appeal that both responses are possible. Samson’s liminality emerges from this juxtaposition of social values, which is problematic not because it is a ‘mixed-marriage,’ but because Samson is not aware of the clash. Marginality is not present here as a trait of a stock folk character but is the result of an obtuseness to possible community differences.

In the next section, a closer look at marriage sociology in general, folklore’s genre of riddles and the relationship between them will illustrate how Samson’s lack of interest in levels of social organization beyond his own family pushes the Timnites away. A review of the topography suggested by Judg 14 will prepare for a return to this text.

### **Unions and feasts: the social implications of marriage**

#### **‘Let no man put asunder’**

A wedding is fraught no matter whom you marry (just think of the banquet seating plan!). By uniting two people you are uniting two families (Hiebert 1989, 131; Meyers 2013, 145), which may not be appreciated by all the members who are so bound. Recall that the socio-economic centrality of the family is marked by this lower order social unit’s suspicion towards those outside and its aspiration to self-sufficiency. Drawing on Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (late 8<sup>th</sup> century), Deborah Lyons (2012, 48) describes the ideal of *autarkeia*: ‘anything not produced at home is not only unnecessary, but deeply suspect’. This aspiration, however, must be tempered by the necessity of external interaction, transaction and cooperation, including a fundamental

aspect of family production – marriage (Guenther 2005, 388; Steinberg 2007, 52). As Lyons (2012, 52) dryly remarks, ‘a wife is something a man can’t make for himself at home’.

We considered the role of women in the household when we looked at the story of Jael (Judg 4:17-22). A wife is the household’s custodian and stands at the threshold to negotiate the interface between private and public, between us and the Other (Matthews 1994, 8). I suggested that this role was consonant with the liminality of a wife herself who must be brought in from outside (cf. Meyers 2013, 123). But this practice not only affects the household into which the woman comes. While the woman transfers her ‘affiliation—her primary male bond—from her father’s family to her husband’s’ (Sectman 2014, 168), the father also transfers a role to the husband—that of custodianship—making marriage a ‘rearrangement of social structure’ (Rowe 2011, 150). It is a union of two families via a ‘process of exchange’ (Sectman 2014, 168; also Lyons 2012, 22).<sup>112</sup> But in illustration of a family’s desire to remain autonomous, this is indeed a *process* for the wife may be ‘only gradually accepted into her husband’s family’ (Rowe 2011, 154). Pnina Galpaz-Feller (2006, 62) describes the social import of the process.

In ancient society, marriage and the establishment of a family are regarded as much too important to be left to the decision and determination of young people. The fact that a young couple is meant to spend their lives together and to raise children together is a minor concern in comparison to the establishment of a covenant between two families.

This, she observes, is because marriage changes the relationships not just of the bride and groom but also of each member of the family and with new relationships come new rights and obligations.<sup>113</sup> Ancient Near Eastern marriage has been thoroughly investigated by Hennie J. Marsman (2003, 106).

A marriage arrangement made between two families was considered to be binding. Part of the arrangement was the setting of a price for the marriage deposit [...] considered to be a caution, binding the groom(’s family) [*sic*] to his commitment. In this biblical Israel does not seem to have differed from its neighbours. Once marriage deposit and gifts were exchanged, the young couple were inchoately married. Still, a marriage could be dissolved at this stage, but that would have its financial consequences.

Hence, Allan Guenther (2005, 388) claims that ‘marriage was as much a distribution of wealth as it was an instrument of personal and political alliances’.

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<sup>112</sup> Galpaz-Feller (2006, 75) compares Samson’s story with ‘other stories in which the seeing of a woman leads to taking her’. She notes that ‘every instance of seeing entails exchange: Abraham is compensated for Sarah (Gen 12:16); Shechem offers an economic arrangement to Dinah’s brothers (Gen 34:9-10); Jacob works seven more years for Rachel (Gen 29:20); David makes a deal with Joab (2 Sam 11:14-15); and Samson presents a wedding banquet and carries out the bargain with the companions (Jud. 14:12-13)’.

<sup>113</sup> ‘While the act of marriage is expressed in a ritual or ceremony, it invariably also transfers goods, rights, and people; with the end of marriages marked by the relocation of these’ (Mody 2015, 601).

We see thus that production is a major purpose of marriage (Frick 1989, 90; Steinberg 2007, 52) along with the safeguarding and enriching of familial patrimony including territory (King and Stager 2001, 48). Stepping outside the familial and cultural sphere for a marriage beyond the group increases the risk that these arrangements are not honoured. This is another cause of the suspicion we have frequently noted towards the Other; an anxiety that is as much between households and settlements as wider ethnic distinctions. Nevertheless, this does not mean such matches did not happen. Jonathan Rowe (2011, 148) notes with respect to David that he ‘married the daughters of local notables to strengthen ties with nearby population centres’ (cf. 2 Sam 3:2-6). Precisely as a distribution of wealth and instrument of political alliances, marriage across a greater social distance may have also increased the prestige involved in the exchange because of the risk involved (Rowe 2011, 153).

This brief survey of some of the implications of a wedding exposes contrasting tendencies. On the one hand, marriage is an exemplar of the social coherer: ‘it provides the means of binding men together’ (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 480). On the other, realigning a social structure takes a risk: people don’t always want to be bound together. This tension is sometimes resolved by confining who it is we marry to those of a similar kin group or culture in an attempt to stabilize the relocation of social distances (Southwood 2012, 66). Yet, because social distances and what it means to stabilize them differ from various perspectives, endogamy (as socio-anthropology calls it) is not a precise term (Frevel 2011, 4-6; Southwood 2012, 68-9).<sup>114</sup> Christian Frevel (2011, 5) attempts a definition.

As a first step one should understand [endogamy] as a positive rule describing a group’s or sub-group’s idea of adequate marriage depending on its idea of self-identity.

Still, his emphasis on a ‘group’s idea of self-identity’ serves to highlight how emic and etic observations regarding who can get married may vary.

To approach an emic definition of ‘adequate marriage,’ societies create social, legal and religious institutions. The idea of a ‘social institution’ is described by Bernard Jackson (2011, 222) as a set of ‘behaviour patterns, of some degree of normativity (perhaps ‘customary’), understood by people in society as frameworks for understanding and regulating distinct areas of social life’. These may be distinguished from legal institutions, although he notes, ‘the same institution may be both social and legal, understood and enforced differently by different groups in different contexts’ (222).

This differentiation is precisely what Jackson finds concerning marriage in the biblical texts, where the social institutions of the narratives ‘deviate from the legal institution, as reflected in

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<sup>114</sup> Even marriage itself seems difficult to define across times and cultures (see Southwood 2017, 60).

the laws' (243). Jackson finds the root of these deviations to be that they 'all involve negotiations between Hebrew families and non-Hebrews,' which the narratives record 'unproblematically'.<sup>115</sup> Jackson thinks this is evidence that 'the Bible itself attests to knowledge of foreign marital practices' (243). But this seems to view the social evidence from the perspective of the laws, which have only later come to shape what is 'foreign' through their identity making. As Carol Meyers (1999, 35) reminds us, 'there is normally a disjunction between societal ideas or ideology (as expressed in laws, for example, or in normative narratives) and social behaviour'. I think that what Jackson's observations show us is that legal prohibitions of marriage with non-Israelites (e.g. Exod 34:16; Deut 7:3) should not be assumed for biblical traditions before distinguishing what may be an editorially imposed theme.

This is also a fair warning if we consider the variety of the identity perspectives behind the biblical texts and the corollary, the variety of views about in-groups for marriage (Southwood 2012, 65). Introducing some essays on mixed-marriage, Frevel (2011, 8-9) draws three threads through the biblical corpora which build up the 'anti-exogamous argument'. He notes that the legal prohibition on marriage outside Israel (Exod 34:15-16; Deut 7:1-4) is in light of 'religious imperilment' of 'the worship of Yhwh' (cf. Judg 3:5-6) and hence part of a 'Deuteronomistic view on history' (cf. Kratz 2015, 87). This comes to be combined with a claim to 'purity' in Ezra 9-10 'and thus constructs an exclusive ideal of the community as holy and pure'. Yet, the first of these 'three main lines' is what Frevel describes as 'the authority of the ancestors of Israel' based upon the adventures of Isaac and Jacob in Gen 27-28. He explains,

Identity depends on belonging to the patriarchal family. The rejected wives are denoted as "Hittite" or "Canaanite." But what makes them a problem for the community is not explicated further. They simply are the surrounding peoples who are not of Abrahamic descent (Frevel 2011, 8).

I suggest we understand the 'problem for the community' as the suspicion of others ('the surrounding peoples') in face of the desire for autonomy. But as we have also seen, this suspicion may be overcome for economic and socio-political reasons; or it may simply not be felt in a particular context.

Katherine Southwood (2012, 71) warns that, 'since marriage systems take a range of forms, it is not always clear what constitutes "intermarriage"'. I have argued that recognizing members of a group and importantly who is not a member is an essentially emic decision (cf. Lemche 1998, 20; Prato 2016, 211). And since ancient Near Eastern societies do not restrict kinship to biology, the inclusion or exclusion of someone from a group is not primarily a matter of blood

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<sup>115</sup> Jackson's (2011, 228, 230) examples are Joseph (Gen 41:45), Moses (Exod 2:21) and Ahab (1 Kgs 16:31), while Samson is included as an example of divorce (Judg 14:19-20; 15:1-2). I am not sure why he thinks Ahab's marriage is 'recorded unproblematically'.

but a principle of organization ‘to define social, political, and economic relations, which are always open to revision, thus representing a fluid mixture of genuine and fictitious kinship connections’ (McNutt 1999, 77; cf. Southwood 2017, 64-66). It follows then that, ‘on an emic level, exogamy and endogamy are not uniformly interpreted’ (Southwood 2012, 65). Who is inside or outside, acceptable or a stranger is largely a matter of social opinion (Southwood 2011, 47-9). Because of this somewhat inclusive perspective, what constitutes endogamy or exogamy is an ongoing social issue.

As a brief summary, this review of ancient Near Eastern marriage and its appearance in some biblical texts has shown that a strict definition of exogamous marriage is unavailable. The biblical concept of mixed-marriage within clear national boundaries owes much to the Israelite/Other distinction, recognized as a ‘literary construct’ (Kratz 2015, 17, also Gertz et al. 2012, 63). In the absence of this construct, when we read that Samson goes down to Timnah we should not be on the lookout for polemics and problems simply as such. The only way to understand how marriage is understood in Judg 14 is from the social context drawn from reading the text.

## **Riddles**

This is not to say that there are no risks involved in realigning social structures. Societies surround marriage with rituals to increase the chances that cohesion results and animosity is avoided. One of the rituals that might be employed is an ice-breaking game such as the telling of riddles (Niditch 1990, 618; Slotkin 1990, 154; Oakley and Sinos 1993, 23). Considered as part of the folklore genre, the example in Judg 14 has been called ‘paradigmatic of traditional riddles as a whole’ (Hamnett 1967, 384). The mystery it constitutes derives from the ‘capacity of the riddle for multiple solutions’ (Ben-Amos 1976, 249), in confrontation with the fact that ‘only one solution “counts” as correct’ (Hamnett 1967, 384). The riddle is a juxtaposition of transparency and obscurity through its implied simultaneous possibilities, yet surfacing in one mode in each particular ‘riddle occasion’ (cf. Burns 1976). Such a genre of folklore is taken to work precisely through a riddle’s ability to contain within itself the solution, while obscuring it. In the words of Dan Ben-Amos (1976, 249),

Inherent in the riddle is a deliberate ambiguity which is designed to reveal and conceal its subject at one and the same time.

This negotiation of meaning in the riddle is dependent upon the subjective perspective of those telling and those receiving the riddle: respectively, the riddler and the riddlee. This dynamic takes the form of a cultural custodianship of riddles allowing shared cultural knowledge to be the secure means of solving the saying. As Ben-Amos (1976, 250) remarks:

There is a discoverable order within the perception of riddles and solutions offered, even though some of the solutions are not accepted in particular situations. While it is possible to abstract a formal logic from the riddle itself, the logic of riddles is, rather, rooted in the language, thought and experience of particular societies.

In this case, cultural difference would be an obstacle and the teller of the riddle (the riddler) takes the controlling role.

Success in untangling the true meaning of the riddle-sentence from the knots of verbal deceit depends upon the confirmation of the solution by the riddle poser. However, his acceptance of the answers is often whimsical and manipulative (Ben-Amos 1976, 249).

In this scenario, ambiguity is used to assert superiority and gain control. This is even suggested as a defining characteristic of the riddle in order to ‘model’ the ‘serious and even formal interrogation of subordinates by superordinates’ (Roberts and Forman 1971, 509). But in light of this observation, the potential this wordplay has to neutralize conflict becomes far from certain. On the one hand a riddle contest is thought to promote social bonds between players (Hamnett 1967, 381). On the other, the potential for hostility present through the conflict or ‘social disparity’ provoked by riddles, is argued as definitive (Ben-Amos 1976, 249-50; Sutton-Smith 1976, 111; Pepicello and Green 1984, 124). If Samson is attempting an ice-breaking game (Judg 14:12-14), this is a serious undertaking.

### **Weddings, riddles and folklore**

Drawing these two themes together, if riddle games are meant to stimulate social cohesion it would seem to be a great idea to play such a game at a wedding to reduce the anxiety that surrounds uniting two families across settlements and across cultures. With reference to Samson, scholars have noted or assumed the suitability of riddle entertainment for a wedding with reference to folkloristics (Crenshaw 1974, 494; Wharton 1973, 55; Greenstein 1981, 242). But the relationship of weddings to riddles and riddle occasions is more complex than the literature on Judges suggests. It is far from guaranteed that the result of a riddle competition would be a ‘safe acting out of animosities’.

In riddling we are allowed, even required, to be rude [...] In essence, riddling thrives on rending the social and communicative bonds between participants (Pepicello and Green 1984, 125; also Ben-Amos 1976, 249).

Pepicello and Green (1984, 124-5) have been taken to mean that such ‘rending’ leads to *remaking* these communicative bonds (Camp and Fontaine 1990, 134; Niditch 2008, 157). We ritually disintegrate in order to integrate. But if Pepicello and Green have been understood correctly, we have a risky strategy. It is not a given that the opposing groups that are meant to

be safely united by these means would be willing to undertake this process. Simply because the socially tense riddle is *employed* to produce some sort of integration-inducing conflict does not neutralise the possibility for manipulation and control that the dynamic also implies. Such communicative bonds would be inherently enigmatic because of the possibilities for meaning simultaneously implied. Thus, the potential for anger and violence is given a lot of space by this type of contest, regardless of the ‘ludic quality’ of the situation (Camp and Fontaine 1990, 135).

Thomas A. Burns (1976, 143-5) categorizes riddles into ‘six occasions’. Although he speaks of ‘courting’ in which riddles are exchanged between ‘potential marriage partners’ or ‘the suitor encounters and must answer the riddles of the bride’s parents,’ the wedding context that is assumed to be appropriate is not one of these categories. What is more, even if we accept the likelihood that riddles are told at weddings, correlation of occasion between cultures does not mean correlation of ‘the rules for which specific educational, ritual, greeting, courtship, expressive and leisure-time riddling are regarded as appropriate’ (Burns 1976, 145). Burns describes the ‘prerequisites for the leisure-time riddle act’.

An appropriate event may be one where riddle acts combine with other expressive acts like songs or tales to form either a social or a performance event. In any case, the suggestion of a riddle act will be positively received only when occasional and event conditions are appropriate or where there is a willingness to generate these conditions (Burns 1976, 156).

Much depends upon the specific context as to whether the riddle is a) a good idea at the wedding in the first place and b) successful in breaking the ice between anxious affines. We will only discover the social context for Samson’s wedding by paying attention to the text.

### **Topographical considerations**

Just before turning our attention to the text of Judg 14, we can briefly note the story’s topographical setting and its implications. Recalling the kinship ‘fluidity’ that we noticed within ancient Near Eastern families (McNutt 1999, 77), the social landscape across which alliances such as marriage are made deserves some attention. Frevel (2011, 5) mentions the anthropological category of ‘local endogamy (marriage within a certain geographical range, for instance, village endogamy)’ which however he does not apply further to his discussion. Looking at ‘territorial differentiations’ in early Iron Age Palestine, Gunnar Lehmann (2004) connects villages together in marriage alliances to form a picture of settlement patterns. While he describes these connections as exogamous, in my discussion of the family in ancient and middle Eastern society I remarked how, in the light of fictive kinship, families and settlements may regard their cross-settlement marriages as endogamous despite anthropological attempts

to define them. As Paul McNutt (1999, 69) remarks, ‘what appear to be isolated communities are always linked in some way to communities elsewhere. Because of the interdependent, complex and ever-changing ways of life in this region, social groups have not always fallen readily into neat classificatory niches’ (also Meyers 1999, 36; Killebrew 2005, 184). In this way, Lehmann’s (2004, 143) assessment betrays his etic viewpoint, for his view that despite the impression of endogamy, exogamy was in fact the norm in Iron Age highland villages applies external categories to the situation. These rural marriage alliances may reflect so-called ‘local endogamy’ or at least a context in which inter-settlement suspicion may not be felt.

In view of this cross-settlement movement, we should note the social locus of Timnah. Apart from Judg 14, this settlement is only mentioned as the setting for Tamar’s interaction with Judah in Gen 38:12-19 but it is listed in Josh 19:43 along with Zorah and Eshtaol (cf. Judg 13:25) as in the territory of Dan.<sup>116</sup> Timnah’s relationship with Zorah (Samson’s home town, Judg 13:2) seems to be at least proximate, perhaps requiring limited social realignment in marriage despite a looming presence of Philistines. While we must still be cautious of the editorial perspective to which Josh 19 contributes, the claim for Timnah as Danite speaks of a social proximity with Zorah in the cultural memory that increases the relevance of the ‘local endogamy’ concept. These settlements may even be old rivals among the area’s folkloristic themes.

In this analysis I have shown that we need to be cautious not to assume that the story of Samson’s wedding expects routine disapproval from its folkloric audience. Cross-settlement weddings may not be impossibly exogamous, and this may be an etic label anyway. The telling of riddles is also not evidently an appropriate part of marriage rituals and its ice-breaking role also contains the potential for hostility. With this information in mind, only by closely reading the text will we discover how the marriage is understood in these communities and how the riddle is received.

Part of the reason that etic and editorial perspectives dominate readings of biblical narratives is the extremely limited access we have to the values and views that shape the stories’ core traditions. As social communication, the primary way these texts offer their perspectives is through careful reading of the behaviour of the characters. I have already prepared the way for this reading with a sketch of the social landscape in which the tale unfolds. Now, armed with this information, we can read the legend of Samson’s wedding anew.

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<sup>116</sup> We can note that in Josh 19:40, as with all six tribes in this chapter, the sons of Dan receive their lot ‘according to their families’ (*lamišpəḥōtām*).

## The legend of Samson's (local) wedding

Returning to the biblical text we are now in a position to read the dynamics for what they are, rather than in the way the nationalist references lead us. In this interpretation, I will argue that the drama related in Judg 14 is not caused by the *fact* of a cross-settlement wedding, but by Samson's bad handling of a particular negotiation of community difference through his imprudent use of a riddle game. The settlements involved in the story, Timnah and (by inference) Zorah, are socially proximate with a memory of a Danite connection elsewhere in the biblical tradition (Josh 19:40-3) suggesting a limited realignment of the social structure. Nevertheless, the settlements exhibit their own approaches to marriage ritual customs, unsurprising when we consider the fragmented and localized society of the region. Both Samson and the Timnites must play a social game of reading the inter-settlement context, a context that the folktale uses to create its drama. An impression of liminality is created by setting a story of Samson's social illiteracy within an editorial frame that at the same time a) presents Samson as a judge and b) disapproves of 'mixed-marriage' as 'imperilling' the worship of Yhwh (Judg 14:3-4, cf. 3:5-6).

### So, who disapproves of the marriage?

Despite my contention that there is no underlying polemic against Samson's marriage, the story begins with disapproval of the match (14:3). Surrounded by editorial elements, the complaint of his parents against the 'uncircumcised Philistines' appears to be a rather heavy-handed narrative 'telegraphing' of the drama about to ensue at the service of the identity contrast. But it could also reflect a concern with marriage outside the family within the core tradition. In light of the gradual process of a woman's incorporation into her husband's family, her loyalties tend towards her patrikin as she continues to look to her own family for protection and support. Rowe (2011, 158) concludes that this diluted assimilation explains, 'why the preferred partner for a man in many Middle Eastern societies is his Father's Brother's Daughter (FBD), because there is a coincidence of interests'. We can see this preference in Judg 14:3. Samson's parents first offer the best solution, a woman 'from among the daughters of your brothers' (cf. FBD), before conceding a less ideal but acceptable alternative, 'or from all of my [your] people'.<sup>117</sup> A conflict of interests is reduced by keeping it in the family. What goes on to shape the tale is that by proceeding with Samson's preference (v5)—a cross-settlement marriage to an unknown family—his parents open their family to a potential loss of autonomy, even if the match is not so distant to be considered 'imperilling' for religion and culture.

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<sup>117</sup> 'My people' is the reading the MT, while the suggested 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular suffix is found in the Greek Lucianic recension and Syriac version.

If not a ‘mixed-marriage,’ where does the risk lie? As we have seen, the potential for tension is because both families involved in a wedding have interests they wish to safeguard, which is felt more insistently if the families are not already linked (or already one family). There can even be customary differences between socially proximate communities which increase tension. Jackson (2011, 224) draws attention to ‘the ‘variability’ of custom in reference to Gen 29:26. Laban claims that marrying-off a younger daughter before the eldest ‘is not done in our place’ (*lō’-yē’āseh kēn bimqômēnū*). Since social institutions are ‘frameworks’ for society ‘understood differently, by different groups in different contexts’ (Jackson 2011, 222) we should not be surprised that even related settlements have different customs.

This is relevant when we look at the unusual turn of events in Judg 14. Samson seems to have expected the Timnite woman to come into his household (v2). Yet despite his initial plan for his father and mother to ‘take her for me as my wife’ (*qəḥû-’ôtāh lî lə’iššā*),<sup>118</sup> he never takes her back to Zorah, ever distracted by the lion on his way so to do (vv5, 8). Instead, he ends up celebrating the wedding rituals in her settlement (v10) according to her customs (v11). His lack of concern about binding families across settlements introduces a fragility to the marriage by this highly unusual step away from patrilocality, weakening the other pillars of the ancient Near Eastern family (cf. King and Stager 2001, 36-38, 54-57). Samson seems to be entering the social world of Timnah. For the folklore, this process is the story’s interest: a hero’s negotiation of strange marriage rituals with old rivals would be a popular tale. It is only in light of the editorial frame that Samson’s lack of success in Timnah’s society gives the impression that he is a ‘hero who does not belong’ (Gillmayr-Bucher 2014, 36).

### **Customary differences and an ice-breaking game**

The account of his wedding begins with its preparation which immediately reveals the social differences between the Timnite community and Samson (14:10).<sup>119</sup> It is noteworthy that Samson’s preparation of a ‘feast’ requires explanation by the narrator, ‘because that’s what young men do’ (*kî kēn ya’ăšû habbaḥûrîm*) (v10) (see McCree 1926, 125), which draws the reader in two directions. First it alerts us to a customary situation, while at the same time warning us that we may not be familiar with these customs. The story’s audience are not to expect Samson’s behaviour to be predictable from the given information.

This verse also serves to introduce the wedding scene as something that is the domain of *baḥûrîm*. Other contexts in which this term is used give the impression of boisterous and

<sup>118</sup> The verb *lqh* is used four times in this context. In the parallel Greek social setting Lyons (2012, 22) observes ‘when a man marries a woman, he does so in the active voice, while the same transaction places a woman in the middle voice’.

<sup>119</sup> The reappearance of the directional verb *yrd*, which also begins the two previous pericopes (14:1, 5) marks v10 as the beginning of this passage.

raunchy youths (cf. Ezek 23:6, 12, 23) further contributing to the sense of social unpredictability. But the awkwardness does not end there. Galpaz-Feller (2006, 92) suggests that the throwing of a wedding feast habitually constitutes ‘an act that serves as payment so that marriage will take effect’. But, seeing that he is engaged in organising a feast for them, it is still the Timnites who need to take action by bringing Samson the ‘companions’ (*mērē’im*) such a feast requires (Selms 1950, 71).<sup>120</sup> I think this is the best explanation for the temporal clause (14:11). If Samson has wandered away from patrilocality, the Timnites could well be surprised by him calling for a ‘customary’ *mišteh* with them. The success to which Samson has taken on what appear to be unfamiliar customs is mixed if the Timnites must be so proactive in completing the preparations.

It is at this lusty and socially unpredictable feast that Samson poses his famous riddle ‘from the eater came out the eaten; from the strong came out sweetness’ (Judg 14:14). The Timnites who have given him wife and wedding companions are challenged to put some more on the table. The social debt he owes seems to be ignored by Samson who asks for more. But has he judged his response well? Commentators have read Samson’s riddle as a classic attempt at ice-breaking (e.g. Niditch 2008, 156), turning to the study of folklore to support their readings (Camp and Fontaine 1990). But the huge diversity in riddling traditions that folkloristics reveals (different processes, nature and consequences of riddles across societies) makes a generalized application to Judg 14 unhelpful.<sup>121</sup> I think it is quite possible that Samson’s introduction of the riddle is surprising for the companions. He has already displayed patchy knowledge of Timnite wedding customs, why would he be socially adept now? Just because for Samson a wedding is a fine time for a riddle does not mean it is so for the Timnites: we have already seen some community variation in wedding customs. And even if a riddle is customary in both settlements, Samson’s particular *manner* of riddling seems inappropriate or simply unintelligible. In folkloristic terms, I do not think that the ‘social construct’ for the ‘riddle occasion’ has been satisfactorily established (cf. Burns 1976, 142).

Unfortunately, this inappropriateness opens the door for a more serious reaction. I explained how shared cultural knowledge is necessary to solve a riddle. In this way, Samson emphasises what is *not* shared between the families instead of what binds them. Further, the aggression shown by the riddle is worsened when we remember how a riddle may be used to assert superiority and gain control (Bynum 1978, 45; Camp and Fontaine 1990, 135). Samson’s riddle is thus unexpected, inappropriate and aggressive, underlining these families’ differences and

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<sup>120</sup> The common suggestion that these companions are in fact bodyguards for the Timnites’ protection (Greengus 1966, 68; Crenshaw 1974, 481; Galpaz-Feller 2006, 99-100) confirms a sense of apprehension surrounding Samson’s approach to another’s social world.

<sup>121</sup> Camp and Fontaine (1990, 134) must grasp at several of Burns’s six ‘riddle occasions’ (1976, 143-5) to try to cover the occasion in Judg 14.

giving Samson an air of superiority. From the context of 14:10-11, I do not think there can be a ‘willingness to generate the conditions’ for a riddle act (Burns 1976, 156). Samson’s move is rather a dangerous faux pas.<sup>122</sup>

### The consequences of social illiteracy

We can see the problem Samson causes by the Timnites’ hesitancy in response to the wager: we should not assume that they agree to Samson’s competition. In the uneasy social situation, I think their syntax shows that they are considering what to do. They suggest Samson tells his riddle: ‘so we may hear it’ (v13). The indirect volitive used by the Timnites to progress the situation suggests a cautious probing for a clearer idea of what they must deal with, not a straightforward acceptance of the wager.<sup>123</sup> In this way, they want to base their response upon the nature of Samson’s suggestion, something with which they are unfamiliar and of which they are cautious. The fact they seem to involve themselves in the game nonetheless shows the social confusion to which Samson’s provocative behaviour has brought them and explains their subsequent furious response when they have a chance to reflect on what is happening. The ‘control’ Samson invokes by his challenge is unappreciated.

Indeed, their fury is such that, failing to come close to a response to his riddle, the ‘young men’ (*baḥūrīm*) threaten his wife with incineration if she does not ‘entice’ (*pth D*) the answer from Samson. In the climax to their complaint, their rhetorical question ‘have you invited us here to dispossess us?’ (*haləyāršēnū qarā’tem lānū*) (14:15) reveals the familiar suspicion of those outside the household. Through his perceived aggression, Samson has exemplified the danger marriage represents to family interests, to patrimony and territory. Now the Timnites think, ‘is this why Samson ignored patrilocality and entered our world?’<sup>124</sup>

This explains the Timnites’ desperation in v15 compared with the terms of the competition in vv12-13. The lengths to which they go in order to find out the riddle’s response is out of proportion to the debt they might incur by accepting the challenge. While Samson puts sixty items of clothing down on his side of the wager, the Timnites are only required to provide sixty items between all thirty of them (vv12-13). They threaten their own people with death, claiming that Samson’s challenge will dispossess them (v15) for two garments each! This is because the

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<sup>122</sup> In his comparative study of oral narratives, Bynum (1978, 45) connects Judg 14 with several stories of the Awalamba from central Africa. He writes: ‘Samson’s use of the lion and the impossible bees in his riddle does in one sense establish a connection between them and his marriage. Samson the exogamous bridegroom uses the bees to subordinate his new affinal relatives (as does the Lamba father-in-law), but they exploit their consanguineous kinswoman to turn the bridegroom’s trick with the bees to their own advantage’.

<sup>123</sup> See Joüon §116b.

<sup>124</sup> This implication of *yrš* here seems to be acknowledged by J. Alberto Soggin (1987, 242) but without further exploration: ‘among other things, the verb means ‘drive out’, ‘deprive of one’s own possession’, and as such is characteristic of the Israelite conquest of Palestine’. From the other side’s perspective, we can note again Josh 19:47 which mentions that Dan’s inheritance ‘went out from them’ (*wayyēšē’ gəbūl-bənē-dān mēhem*).

deeper issue of inheritance and patrimony eclipses the triviality of any financial loss incurred by the wager. Samson's social inappropriateness has exposed for the Timnites the erosion of autonomy that marriage can bring. More fundamentally, for social difference to be overcome it cannot be swept under the carpet but must be negotiated. This question of recognizing their differences becomes insistent and, more than ever aware that Samson is not one of them, Timnah closes ranks.

Their reaction also shows how Samson's wife's family is implicated in his actions. We have seen the conflict of interests that marriage presents when a woman's loyalties tend towards her patrikin rather than her husband at the outset of her marriage. When there is a choice to be made, as here, the woman would be expected to choose for her family (Rowe 2011, 157), which we would think would align her with the Timnites. However, the Timnites—or at least the boisterous *baḥûrîm*—feel a death threat against her family is needed (v15) for her to act in the settlement's favour. Notice that in the rhetorical question that follows the threat (have you called us here to dispossess us?) the 'you' is plural, directing the accusation both at Samson and his wife. Hence, the Timnites insinuate that Samson's cross-cultural marriage has become the opportunity for claiming their patrimony, explaining why the Timnites' threat is addressed to their own. This is a response to betrayal. What can the woman's motivations be in the face of this accusation from her people? If her 'nagging' is born out of an anxiety not to be judged a traitor, her entreaty to Samson becomes an attempt to neutralize his provocative challenge.

In this way, like that of Jael Samson's local story comes to have a wider impact. In the end the 'men of the city' confront Samson (14:18) because his desire to marry a Timnite now appears as a threat (Galpaz-Feller 2006, 116). The family occasion has turned into a settlement-wide matter. Conceived in this way, the whole settlement's rejoinder to the riddle forms a defensive counter to the threat and severs their ties with Zorah. For after he has violently payed his debt, Samson returns to his family alone (*wayya 'al bêṯ 'ābîhû*) and his wife is given to another (v19-20). Could Samson have handled it better, or is his story meant as an object-lesson? I think it is enough to say that an ambiguous social setting with a controversial, yet not impossible marriage is ripe for drama and as such makes it perfect for an entertaining piece of folklore.

### **Concluding remarks**

The folklore behind Judges originates from a fragmented region which was home to a 'mixed multitude' (Killebrew 2005, 149; also Finkelstein 2013, 162), when boundaries were not firmly drawn and cultural distinctions required a conscious effort to maintain (Stone 1995, 23). In this context the desire for patrimonial autonomy would be extremely strong and yet conversely it would also open possibilities for alliances across settlements and families (Lehmann 2004)

precisely because identity resides at a level that requires reaching outside of it. This may be why relationships are ‘are always open to revision’ (McNutt 1999, 77). If family is the primary locus of self-understanding, this nevertheless cannot inhibit marriage which must get over its suspicion of others in order to flourish (Lyons 2012, 47-8). But on the other hand, is this not why the proximate Other is so dangerous? It is obvious how this dynamic would create preferences for the appropriate marriage partners and with them different views regarding how far is too far outside the family.

We have seen these preferences presented in Judg 14. When considering the authority of Abimelech and Jephthah, I asked, how socially distant is too socially distant for leadership? In the same way, the story of Samson’s wedding asks how socially distant is too socially distant for marriage? Beginning with a slightly controversial descent to Timnah for a wife, Samson’s behaviour and the Timnites’ response is a dramatic example of why marriage in the ancient Near East is such a tricky business. In this setting, the legend raises the issue of when (and whether) community differences should inhibit or allow a marriage and like good literature, it offers its audience the stimulus for continued reflection.

This issue also provides a conceptual hook whereby the story of Samson’s wedding can serve to reinforce the nationalist agenda. Although the core tradition is concerned with two culturally different settlements engaging in marriage negotiations, the higher order social units of Israel and Philistia provided by the editing present Samson’s marriage as suspiciously contrary to the ‘anti-exogamous argument’ set forth by the ‘Deuteronomistic view on history’ (Frevel 2011, 8-9). But this has the effect that Samson comes across as a suspicious figure in the narrative’s final form. The disintegrating trajectory of the Judges narrative goes some way to accommodating this perspective, but at the service of unity it steers the original tales away from their heroic interest. Niditch (2008, 3) compares Samson’s social banditry with Robin Hood. Just as this folk hero through his in fact illegal activities (robbing the rich to give to the poor) raises the issue of social inequality and corruption, so Samson’s unusual approach to social boundaries challenges the tale’s audience to consider what is at stake when we marry.

Finally, while comparisons with Heracles have had a mixed reception in the academy (cf. Margalith 1987; contra Mobley 2006, 7-12), I think a similarity with Greek heroes is possible in one regard. The classicist Gabriel Herman (1987, 2) when discussing the increasing structuring influence of the *polis* on society regrets that ‘the community tamed the hero, and transformed him into a citizen’. In the same way, as the editorial frame seeks to increase awareness of a more far-reaching and structured social organization, the hero stories in the book of Judges are conformed to a nationalizing agenda. But Samson is not a citizen and he resists the attempts of higher social units—ethnicities, cultures, nations—to absorb him. This gives

him the appearance of a liminal hero, but it is rather the unfolding nationalist agenda which has pushed him to the margins.

## 5. The Levite and Gibeah

The *dramatis personae* in the horrific tale of Judg 19 are drawn in some detail: a Levite sojourning in Ephraim, a *pîlegeš* from Judah, the ‘sons of Belial’. But because of their rich characterization, we can forget that all of these people are anonymous. We are told the origin of the characters, their social roles and relationships but not their names. As we proceed further into a dreadful story of deadly abuse, the characters’ anonymity adds to the darkly strange atmosphere, but it also has the effect of emphasising the information that we do receive: their tribal allegiances, their roles within society and the social distances between them. If we wish to suggest why it is that the men of Gibeah commit the ‘outrage’ for example, or why the Levite and his host let them do so (19:25) the text offers us these details in response.

A common explanation of the characters’ behaviour in Judg 19 is to appeal to the book’s narrative trajectory of social disintegration (Niditch 1982; Lasine 1984; Delany 1993). The framework’s cycle of apostasy, oppression and liberation ‘has exhausted itself’ (Exum 1990, 413) ending in scenes of evil that need no provocation from foreign nations. The pan-Israelite ideal has crumbled. But from an editorial perspective, the disappearance of other nations as the foil for national heroes pushes the fragmented landscape of territorial competition to the fore. At the conclusion of Judges, a society ‘marked by tribes and clans attempting to work together while still protecting their individual traditions, loyalties, and places of worship’ (Butler 2009, 373) is on full display and presents a different perspective on social structures from the preceding northern folklore. This picture of sub-national tribal organization, resonant with that painted in Numbers and Joshua, is unsurprising if, as many scholars think, Judg 19-21 is a late text (cf. Blenkinsopp 2006; also Guillaume 2004; Liverani 2004). Presented in these chapters with domestic issues rather than foreign policy I do not think we should be surprised to find friction between tribes and settlements.<sup>125</sup> What is more interesting is how this antagonistic dynamic produces the Gibeah Outrage.

Looking at the encounters in Judg 19, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin garner the most interest in light of their significance in the rest of Israel’s narrative as respectively the tribes of David and Saul. This association is hard to avoid when we consider that the settlements mentioned, Bethlehem and Gibeah, are these leaders’ home towns. Identifying the birthplace of Israel’s first king as a place of depravity is not very flattering and hence, a common reading of the story’s purpose is as a polemic against Saul in favour of the Davidic monarchy (Amit 2000,

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<sup>125</sup> For this reason, I wonder how much the impression of social disintegration in Judges is due to an editorial framework that has (successfully?) built a higher order view of social unity. Viewed without such a lens, is not the tribe vs tribe and settlement against settlement dynamic rather the dominant mode of social interaction in the fractured landscape of the Levant in the first millennium? In which case, the fact that tribes and settlements regard each other with suspicion is not in itself an indication of social breakdown.

178-88). Noticing that Bethlehem provides a counter example of generosity only supports this interpretation.

However, there are two other tribes mentioned in the story, Levi and Ephraim, whose representatives have significant parts to play but are often untidily pulled into the exegesis. For instance, Cynthia Edenburg (2016, 17) remarks that ‘the characterization of the concubine’s husband as a Levite is surprising, since no hint of the sacral surrounds his person,’ an emphasis influenced perhaps by her comparison of Judg 19 with chs 17-18. Further implications of Levitical identity, however, such as the absence of a tribal territory are left unexplored. With respect to the Levite’s marriage, Butler (2009, 418) brings in Ephraim to partner Judah as images respectively of the northern and southern kingdoms (cf. Cazelles 1992). This ties Ephraim into the polemic thought to be behind the story, but it does not account for the Levitical status of the husband said to be a sojourner in Mt Ephraim’s remote parts. Is Ephraim the marriage partner to Judah or Levi? For that matter, is the hosting of a Levite sojourning in Ephraim by an Ephraimite sojourning in Benjamin no more significant than ‘the motif of the one helpful man’ who throws Gibeah’s wickedness into sharp relief (Niditch 2008, 192; also Webb 2012, 464)? As a story focused on national upheaval, the prominence of these tribal designations suggests that they all have a part to play in understanding the story and treating Levi and Ephraim as redactional references (e.g. Schulz 2016, 23) still leaves these issues unaddressed.

Beyond what simply appears from the text, the comparison between the reception in Bethlehem and Gibeah is usually made on the basis of adherence to or violation of the primary expectations of hospitality (Matthews 1992; Amit 2000, 183). I think, however, that while the Gibeah scene may be understood as hospitality, that at Bethlehem should not be understood in this way. In my view, the contrast between the scenes is between the different social distances the protagonists occupy while visiting the respective settlements (cf. Sahlins 1972, 196).<sup>126</sup> The operative dynamic of the scene in Bethlehem is domestic and does not admit of hospitality because the familial structures provide the social cohesion for successful interaction. The scene in Gibeah on the other hand can be evaluated as hospitality and yet the interaction fails to neutralize the threat of a stranger that its protocols are designed to achieve.

The method that hospitality employs to neutralize a stranger is to bind her temporarily into the community (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 15; Oeste 2011, 310). For this to happen both sides must surrender something: the host offers a temporary place in the household; the guest offers conformity to this temporary domestic role. Hospitality involves an exchange and for this

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<sup>126</sup> A contrast of this sort has been noticed by Mary Douglas (1972, 66) when she investigated the social codes embedded in meals. She observes, ‘drinks are for strangers, acquaintances, workmen and family. Meals are for family, close friends, honored guests. The grand operator of the system is the line between intimacy and distance’.

reason the interaction has been considered by sociologists as a form of giving (Berking 1999, 82). The investment involved in this mutual surrender is considerable in view of the suspicion of the Other and ideal of autonomy that we have seen from settlements and households. But if hospitality is to be understood as a gift, I think it is worth reflecting upon these underlying sociological dynamics for the exegesis of Judg 19. By showing how much is at stake when the stranger arrives in Gibeah I can also explain what drives these men's behaviour.

We must also recognise that in this way the unfolding of the tragedy within the hospitality dynamic is due also to the relationships between the characters, which activates both their tribal backgrounds and their social roles. The Levite's wife is called a *pīlegeš*, while he is hosted by his *ḥōtēn*, but how do these roles inform each other and the customs by which the Levite is treated in Bethlehem and Gibeah? The narrative gives us the *who* and *where* that we have already seen fundamentally shapes social interactions. From this perspective, tribal allegiances and social roles otherwise overlooked in reading this narrative re-emerge as important details intended to direct us through the story. These roles are what reveals that the contrast between the scenes is one of social distance and not hospitality's success and failure.

It may be that the purpose of the story is polemical (Brettler 1989) and/or that it has been placed at the close of Judges to underline Israel's social downward spiral (Niditch 1982) and/or that it has been redacted in conjunction with Judg 1:1-2:5 to mark off an independent account of Israel's pre-monarchic era (Edenburg 2016). Yet, beyond these analyses it is interesting to ask why the wickedness of Gibeah takes the form it does and why the various characters, rich in detail but anonymous, are given the roles and allegiances that they hold. Let us take a closer look at this chapter from Judges, the issues it raises and some attempts by the scholarship to understand them.

### **The Gibeah Outrage in the literature**

Any analysis of Judg 19 is steered by its structure which offers us two scenes with two cities from two tribes and two households. The story describes two acts of welcome. In the first scene, a Levite resident in Ephraim travels south to Judah because his *pīlegeš* has returned to her father in Bethlehem and he goes after her 'to bring her back' (Judg 19:1-3). In the second, the same Levite and his family return to Ephraim, travelling through Benjamin, where they seek shelter in Gibeah and are hosted, not by the natives, but by an 'old man,' a sojourner from Ephraim (vv15-21). The theme of travel connects the scenes, as does the need for lodging, setting up a parallel pattern of 'journeying, arriving, staying, and leaving' (Webb 2012, 454). The parallel does not extend to the success of the 'staying,' however, for while the Levite's reception in Judah overflows with generosity (vv4-9), that in Benjamin is a contrast of hostility in which the

Levite's *pīlegeš* is abused all night (vv22-27). The narrative's structural diptych thus invites the reader to compare the scenes, the different tribes of Judah and Benjamin where the scenes take place and the different outcomes that these tribes' respective welcomes produce.

### **Hospitality, polemics and society's disintegration**

If we review how the literature has tackled Judg 19, we will notice that scholars commonly accept the invitation to compare its scenes in a threefold interpretative movement. First, scholars base a comparison on the long recognized folkloric theme of hospitality (Niditch 1982; Matthews 1992). Secondly, the consequent contrast between Benjamin and Judah lends grist to the mill of reading an anti-Saulide/pro-Davidic polemic behind the texts (Amit 1999, 341-50; also Brettler 1989; Sweeney 1997; Wong 2005; Blenkinsopp 2006). Third, in addition to polemic the failure of hospitality by Benjamin in this chapter is read as illustrative of the social breakdown towards which the book has been heading (Butler 2009, 416) and as such, a lens through which to understand the erupting intertribal conflicts (Judg 20-21) (Boling 1975, 277; also Edenburg 2016; Beldman 2017).<sup>127</sup>

Briefly developing this latter structural question, I mentioned that the book's concluding social breakdown pushes Palestine's fractured landscape into view with a conception of tribal structures that differs from the preceding core material. Framed by the warning that 'there is no king in Israel' (19:1; 21:25), the 'erosion of Israelite society' (Oeste 2011, 295) that scholarship has traced through the book hits rock bottom with the Gibeah Outrage that unsurprisingly spills into intertribal conflict. I would argue, however, that rather than evidence of society's breakdown these consequences reveal how fragmented at its root (namely, family) an 'Israelite' society really is. In this way, Judges' concluding chapters can be read as a social critique, leaving space for the reader to decide if national unity makes a better society (cf. Southwood 2017, 223-28). But returning to Gibeah, we can still ask why Israel's more diverse landscape results in such an outrage.

This larger picture ought to direct us back to the details that carefully align the story's characters with particular localities. Social critiques notwithstanding, the reality of a fragmented territorialism in Palestine raises important questions about the interaction between the characters in Judg 19 that are not addressed by holding to the structural diptych in every detail. For example, drawing a simple contrast between Benjamin and Judah obscures the relevance of Levi and Ephraim (unless we slot them into the polemic (cf. Guillaume 2004, 207-8)). I have shown the effect that social roles and social spaces have upon peoples' behaviour and drawn

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<sup>127</sup> Although David Beldman (2017, 143) argues for a 'dischronology' to the end of the book that challenges the notion of Israel's steady decline. He prefers to see Israel's moral breakdown as a recurring feature in the Judges' cycle.

attention to the localized territoriality defined by the natural boundaries of Palestine's four geographic sub-regions to which the tribal designations of Ephraim, Benjamin and Judah allude (cf. Finkelstein 1991, 20; Lehmann 2004, 157). Against this landscape, what does the interaction of all these tribes add to the story?

Another key question is how far social relationships shape the narrative diptych. The first scene centres upon three people united by a *pīlegeš* marriage. We should expect the obligations, customs and values this enjoins to shape the dynamic (Herzfeld 1987). The second scene opposes two sets of strangers, including both a *gēr* and natives of a settlement. We should expect that the evident social distance in this scene would direct the interaction on a different course from that of the first. A final question is raised by the transition between the scenes that emphasises the oncoming darkness and the travellers' need for shelter (Judg 19:10-20). How safe is wandering outside city walls at dusk and equally, what impression is given by those who do so (cf. Morschauer 2003, 465-66)? I will now briefly review some interpretations of the narrative concentrating on the questions left exposed when the interpretations are led by the diptych structure.

### **Exegesis in light of the narrative diptych**

In the absence of other nations as a foil, Judg 19-21 has shrugged off the typical editorial framing of apostasy, oppression and deliverance (Webb 2012, 419). In its place is a new refrain 'in those days there was no king in Israel' (19:1; 21:25), that links the story of Gibeah to that of Micah's image which precedes it in the book (Judg 17-18) (Edenburg 2016, 284-301). In view of the new frame, the lack of other nations which threaten Israel and of judges to deliver them, it has been recognized that these two narratives come from different sources from the familiar core of northern hero tales (Soggin 1987, 5; also Römer and Pury 2000; Knauf 2000). The question of provenance and of how this material came to be part of the current form of Judges has occupied a great deal of scholarship (see Butler 2009, 371-2), but Cynthia Edenburg (2016) gives quite a convincing account of the archaeological data, linguistic features and biblical intertexts that make a postexilic provenance for the Gibeah Outrage a comfortable fit (also Guillaume 2004; Liverani 2004, 191; Southwood 2017).<sup>128</sup> A late date for Judg 19-21 also aligns with its perspective on tribal structures in keeping with the organizational details in Numbers and Joshua.

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<sup>128</sup> Barry Webb is reluctant to set Judg 19 any later than the early seventh century, when the anti-Benjaminite rhetoric renders the story suitable 'to support the Davidic monarchy as an institution, and the reforms of Hezekiah and/or Josiah in particular' (2012, 420). Robert Boling (1975, 31, 35) is happy with the exilic sixth century for the material as a 'final or Deuteronomistic edition'.

The fact that Judg 19 may be a late composition does not harm my thesis, for as I have argued the perennial importance of family as an identifier is why these elements remain in the older tales as they have been redacted into the Persian period. There is still an evidently localized setting for the narrative (Guillaume 2004, 203) which raises the same issues of identity and questions the extent of community solidarity.<sup>129</sup> Set within what is still the same nationalist framework, the specific rivalries and social critiques of the underlying material become arguments for greater unity and against the decentralization of society. As, Edenburg (2016, 321) concludes, ‘behind the bizarre and gruesome narrative cast in the distant past lies a political polemic that deals with the threat of factitiousness and the dissolution of the unity of an ideal postexilic “Israel”’.<sup>130</sup>

Acceptance that the ‘bizarre and gruesome narrative’ reflects disintegration and fragmentation, however, returns us to the social details that gain more and more prominence under this analysis. Given the decentralized environment, we should all the more consider the impact of the fourfold tribal interaction and the social terms on which they connect, namely as wayfarers, sojourners and *pilegeš*, that the narrative takes care to mention. For example, in view of these details does the undoubtedly *social* institution of hospitality need modification when applied to the different panels of the narrative diptych? More than simply aligning with the text’s social milieu, in this way, my thesis in favour of family values uncovers deeper issues in the story’s fragmented landscape that deserve attention.

The most common attempts to interpret the horror of Judg 19 is in terms of hospitality and its specific conventions (Blenkinsopp 2006, 640; Niditch 2008, 190; Butler 2009, 421). One approach in this regard is the longstanding comparison with Gen 19. Stuart Lasine contrasts Judg 19 with the Lot story as a deliberate inversion of its values: the Levite is contrasted with Lot’s angelic guests, while the old host ‘inverts Lot’s hospitality into inhospitality’ (Lasine 1984, 37). In Lasine’s analysis, Judg 19 serves to ‘underscore the confusion of a period when there is no king’ (50). Yet, if this is a story ‘intended to reveal the ludicrous and topsy-turvy nature of this world’ (37) I am still unclear why an inverted comparison with Gen 19 is the best way to achieve this literary goal, nor why it should be a Levite and an old man from Ephraim who are respectively parodies of angels and Lot. Lasine also asserts rather than argues for the

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<sup>129</sup> By its warning that without a king (and hence without a centralized, national administration) depravity reigns in its stead, the new frame (Judg 19:1; 21:25) could be understood to restate the editorial perspective of the main Judges framework (2:11-23). In this perspective, the polemic against Benjamin now appears as a polemic against any fracturing of the pan-Israelite ideal (Butler 2009, 472). Placed at the close of Judges, these stories of depravity serve to exemplify the alternative to the nationalist vision that the editors are setting out.

<sup>130</sup> Edenburg’s comparison with the story of Micah leads her to suggest that the core of Judg 19-21 was purposely ‘devised for its context between Judg 17-18 and 1 Sam 1’ (Edenburg 2016, 333), an ‘editorial tactic’ directing the reader towards suspicion of Benjamin in the light of the postexilic reconstruction of the cult at Jerusalem (328-9). Beyond this polemic, however, Edenburg recognizes a ‘secondary redaction’ to these chapters ‘distinguished by an expansionist tendency’ (76) that ‘worked to establish a new framework for the narratives [...] by means of mutual ties between the Gibeah story and the new prologue to Judges’ (319) (see also Beldman 2017, 84-107).

dependence of Judges on the passage in Genesis rather than the reverse as for instance Susan Niditch (1982) contends.

Using the same sociological approach to hospitality as he applied to Judg 4, Victor H. Matthews makes a similar assessment that failed hospitality illustrates social breakdown in the absence of a king (Matthews 1992, 10-11; also Niditch 1982). His application of the work of Julian Pitt-Rivers (1968) is more helpful in Judg 19 than in the story of Jael and gives a more detailed account than Lasine of the parallels with Genesis in terms of the ‘hospitality code’. However, his analysis suffers again from not recognizing that the application of the hospitality code is dependent upon who is engaged in it and where the dynamic occurs. Hence, I feel that the emphasis on the tribes and social roles attributed to these anonymous characters are not explained.

Because the Levite enjoys a lavish welcome in Bethlehem of Judah, while he and his entourage suffer extreme hostility in Gibeah of Benjamin, many scholars have read the story as a polemic against Benjamin (Brettler 1989, 413; Sweeney 1997; Amit 1999, 341-50; Butler 2009, 471-2; Webb 2012, 420). In light of the story’s postexilic origin, Benjamin’s negative portrayal has even been read in favour of the sole legitimacy of a cult at Jerusalem (Guillaume 2004, 203). Mention of Bethlehem as the home of the *pīlegeš* aligns the woman with David (1 Sam 16:1) (Amit 2000, 181), just as Gibeah is aligned with Saul (1 Sam 10:26). Edenburg (2016, 112) is typical in wondering if the two scenes ‘might hint at an analogy between the two kings who are related to these cities’. However, considering the moral ambiguity of all the men’s actions in the scene in Gibeah this neat distinction obscures the failings of the Levite who hands his wife over to a mob and the Ephraimite sojourner who offers women up for assault (19:24-25). How have we reached this exchange of brutality? Once again, the conclusion that the behaviour from the two cities of Bethlehem and Gibeah analogically promotes David and condemns Saul, ought also to account for the involvement of Levi and Ephraim and the deeper contrast between social groups and distances found between the scenes.

### **Towards an alternative reading**

We have seen how scholars have focussed upon the narrative diptych’s main points to establish an interpretative contrast. But the story’s details raise questions about what the diptych offers for comparison and how. Although the paralleled locations are Judah and Benjamin, the main character who visits both these tribes is a Levite who sojourns in Ephraim, bringing these four tribes into contact. Further, the way that they are brought into contact also seems to have significance. The Levite is a *gēr* in Ephraim whose Judahite wife is referred to as a *pīlegeš* (19:1); the ‘old man’ who offers hospitality in Gibeah is an Ephraimite *gēr* (v16) and the Benjaminites mark their relationship to Levi, Judah and Ephraim by hostility (v22). The

narrative thus builds a network of relationships upon which to mount the diptych, which by its tribal reference points alludes to topographical and territorial issues. While the characters remain anonymous, these social connections ought to shape our reading of the action. Finally, the transition between the diptych's panels has a contribution to make to any interpretation. Closing the door on the warmth of Bethlehem's hearth (v10), the family wanders the highways and byways as darkness falls exposing them to deserted streets in Gibeah (v14-15). Perhaps an apprehensive reaction to their appearance from the natives is understandable (Morschauser 2003, 467; also MacDonald 2012, 183)?

My brief review of the literature broadly outlined an interpretative mould into which scholarship commonly places Judg 19. By so doing I have exposed some questions that we are left asking when we look more closely at the details that the narrative offers. I think that the fourfold tribal network effects the balance of the narrative diptych and that the carefully stated social roles and connections between the characters create a difference of dynamic between the scenes such that a comparison based on hospitality conventions is not the most illuminating method of interpretation. I propose to revisit the research of Pitt-Rivers (1968) in conjunction with work on hospitality as a gift to try to understand what these aspects contribute to the story's meaning.

In light of these remaining issues, while I must agree that the visit of the Levite to Bethlehem is successful and that to Gibeah is not, I do not think that a simple contrast in these terms is the best comparison. Taking seriously the details we are offered by the story, I think we must also contrast the social spaces at Bethlehem and Gibeah, which has the effect of diluting the hospitality parallels but raising the issue of *who* is involved and *where* these interactions occur. The comparative spectrum is not the relative success of hospitality, but 'the line between intimacy and distance' (Douglas 1972, 66). The success of the Bethlehem visit in my view speaks of the primacy of family and the household over the social distance of tribal relationships, a distance that fashions the disaster of Gibeah. To explain we must look carefully at the hospitality institution, at strategies for social cohesion and at the concept of social distance. This will lead us to ask after the meaning of the tribes and social roles for the characters' behaviour, before returning us to the text with appropriate heuristic tools.

### **The gift and hospitality, social landscapes and social roles**

The key questions that I raised by attending to the personal information provided by Judg 19, were first, how hospitality may be altered by the social distance between interlocutors and secondly, how this social distance is shaped in relation to the territorial commitments to which the tribal allegiances allude. Before asking these questions of the text it is necessary to

understand such dynamics more generally and the implications of bringing the four tribes of Levi, Ephraim, Judah and Benjamin into contact in light of the topographical and social landscape.

Turning again to Pitt-Rivers, I think that the import of his research for Judg 19 has been a little misdirected by overlooking the further sociological characterization of hospitality as a gift. I will first look at the gift as a paradoxical social interaction before discussing the particular institution of hospitality. Drawing on the wider biblical corpora, I will next build a picture of the social landscape implied by the tribal designations. Finally, the dynamics introduced by the different roles the characters are said to hold in respect of each other will be evaluated. From this I can offer a suggestion of the likely social distances between the characters that will help interpret Judg 19 when we turn to the text.

### **Exchange as a social coherer: the paradox of the gift**

While much has been made in biblical exegesis of the codes under which hospitality operates (Matthews 1991, 1992; Hobbs 1993, 2001), the idea of this dynamic as a gift is not often recognized. When this aspect is acknowledged, the influence of ‘social distance’ upon hospitality’s conventions becomes evident (Sahlins 1972). I think it is worth remembering that hospitality is used under its protocols to neutralize threats arising from the unknown that a stranger in the household represents. Hospitality is thus a social coherer and it is in this vein that it has been articulated in sociology as a form of exchange or gift: a ‘complete miniature of the anthropology of giving’ (Berking 1999, 82). This strategy directs us to evaluate how giving might make for peace and the risks involved in it before turning anew to the hospitality institution.

With his neat quip that ‘if friends make gifts, gifts make friends’ Marshall Sahlins (1972, 186) describes both the value and the paradox of exchange. When we give a gift, we declare that there is a relationship of family, of alliance or at least of peace between us and the receiver (Godbout and Caillé 1998, 143). This relationship is socially cohesive because of the obligation the receiver owes in return to the giver: the friend is similarly the debtor (Gouldner 1960, 175). Recognizing this indebtedness, Jacques Derrida (1992) believes that the true gift is an impossible paradox. Yet it is part of this social game that the obligation to reciprocate is not acknowledged, which accommodates the paradox and maintains the gift’s graciousness, saving it from reduction to a commercial transaction (Caillé 2001, 34). This *fictive* graciousness is required for cohesion, for if we admit that obligation is involved the façade creating the gift evaporates revealing a transaction and a debt (Bourdieu 1990, 98-9, 107, 113).

However, precisely because we deny the reality of indebtedness in order to see the graciousness of the gift, there is no response when faced with a failure to counter-gift. Hence to give a gift is also to issue a challenge, absorbing the risk that creating a debt by the gift constitutes (Mauss 1990, 82). But while Marcel Mauss celebrates this dynamic of obligation as a social coherer, Pierre Bourdieu sees rather the potential for aggression. This is reflected in the ways these gift theorists describe the social interaction. For Mauss (1990, 3), ignoring the obligation involved in giving is a ‘polite fiction;’ for Bourdieu (1990, 126) such ‘misrecognition’ is ‘symbolic violence’. Exchange may be a means of social cohesion, but considering the vicissitudes of human motivation, the society that requires such mechanisms to forestall violence is a precarious one (Sahlins 1972, 182). Yet Mauss would respond that it is the total investment required from the gift—that giver and receiver risk it all—that ensures cohesion, solidarity and peace (Mauss 1990, 81).

One of the variables in the process of exchange is the type of relationship between those engaged in the interaction. We have seen how behavioural mores vary in relation to the social distance between protagonists: the closer the distance, the greater the expectation of integrity and loyalty (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 389; Davies 1987, 23-4; McKay 2009, 28). Sahlins (1968, 74) noticed this partiality in relation to gifts and produced a ‘reciprocity continuum’ showing how ‘the span of social distance between those who exchange conditions the mode of exchange’ (Sahlins 1972, 196). In the simple illustration of Nieuwenhuijze (1971, 400): ‘I meet a complete stranger and find out subsequently that he and I descend from the same ancestor; our mutual perception is entirely different before and after’. Or to use a contemporary illustration, gifts exchanged between heads of state carry symbolic weight and an expectation of reciprocity to maintain social (diplomatic) balance; gifts given to one’s mother easily defer any expectation of return. The closer the relationship the less the burden of gift obligations is felt. Thus, *who* gives a gift is significant and conversely how people behave with gifts reveals their relationship. The significance of defining social distances and the different values that accompany them lies in the fundamental goal of security. Those we regard as close to us are also those on whom we rely, hence the family as ‘the unit where a person is secure’ (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 389). As we have seen, this is why so much rests on marriage in its role as a social coherer: it is an exchange that redefines our social distances (Galpaz-Feller 2006, 62). This is another example of how certain exchanges lay everything on the line. We must now see if it is the same for hospitality.

## **Hospitality**

Recalling the connection made by Helmuth Berking (1999, 82), the ‘anthropology of giving’ outlined above provides a perspective from which to understand what is at stake by accepting a stranger into the community. The relationship between guest and host enjoins the demands of

reciprocity. What is offered is a fictive familial status; what is reciprocated is behaviour consonant with family or community norms, thereby safeguarding guest and host from the unknown that their lack of relationship represents. This complementarity places each participant in the interaction in a defined role carrying certain protocols which intermit the obligations of the other. The guest is a particular paradox in attributing a defined societal role to a stranger who is drawn into the family dynamic. The stranger is 'out of place', in both the physical and social space. In order to receive a welcome, the stranger must become friend—this is the threat-neutralizing mechanism—but thereby also a debtor retaining a tension in this fictive relationship. If hospitality is an 'offer of temporary family status' (Oeste 2011, 310) nevertheless, the stranger does not thereby achieve kinship.

The status of guest therefore stands midway between that of hostile stranger and that of community member. He is incorporated practically rather than morally (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 15).

By adherence to socially determined roles, both stranger and host are protected against the lack of society they concurrently and mutually hold. Nevertheless, the potential host must risk investment in the unknown to safeguard what she holds dear, while at the same time, the potential guest risks it all when asking for shelter. A clear example of this total investment is elaborated by Pitt-Rivers, who remarks on the challenge or 'ordeal' that often accompanies the transformation of outsider into community-accepted presence. There is a 'desire to measure oneself against the stranger' (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 14) who has appeared in the community's midst. Through combat or duel the stranger can be evaluated and her potential threat can come to be known. In its most explicit form, the right to execute the defeated stranger safeguards the challenge from manipulation: here is the total investment. It is in this life and death dynamic that hospitality becomes operative.

Under such conditions his vanquisher would, in fact, have been literally responsible for his presence there, having preferred not to exert his theoretical right to kill him. The struggle, condemnation and pardon at the hands of his victor follow a well-known sequence of social death and rebirth into a changed status (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 17).

This 'sequence' serves to create an 'artificial kinship' (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 17) which allows inclusion in the community. The challenge or conflict has been played out in the reciprocity of honour.

The dynamic of albeit artificial kinship invites a complementary parallel between hospitality and the social exchange that is marriage. Both are about an outsider brought into an intimate space; a risk that is taken to preserve and benefit society. Both seek to transform the relationships offered in order to neutralize the threat of violence. However, this comparison

also highlights a contrast. In the marriage exchange, the social transformation *endures*. The stranger is brought into the family and given a permanent role or position in this important unit of the social structure. And yet, for all the transformation, a wife also remains part of the family from which she came (Zeid 1965, 257; Weiner 1992, 151; Rowe 2011, 154; Meyers 2013, 142). What creates solidarity and stability is that two families are joined together (Niditch 2008, 191). Marriage creates a network of insiders, a *social proximity* allied across an otherwise fragmented social landscape.

For hospitality, the social transformation is different. While the transformation of the *who* in respect of the *where* is a fundamental operative characteristic of hospitality, the host's investment in the stranger is to keep her at arm's length. No network is the goal here; guests remain outsiders. Hospitality is a type of gift that deliberately seeks to control the instance of transaction. It seeks to conform the exchange to be functional as a risk-neutralizing social process. For the exchange to take place, the stranger is transformed into the friend by means of the exchange itself. But in contrast to marriage, such a transformation is illusory. The stranger remains an unknown, surrounded by protocols that choose to regard her as known. It is the 'polite fiction' of the gift (Mauss 1990, 3). Or is Bourdieu's language of 'symbolic violence' more applicable? For should the stranger be truly incorporated, she gains rights in the community through which the risk of manipulation becomes too great to bear (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 24). The transience of hospitality is a means of protection against the continuing threat of the unknown stranger. This threat is particularly dangerous for societies closely structured upon familial hierarchy and the social roles inherent in its relationships (Liverani 2004, 180). Such a situation distinguishes hospitality from marriage so much that the protocols granting hospitality become inapplicable to family members. It appears hospitality, properly so called, cannot be shown to family (Hobbs 2001, 29).

Bearing in mind the operation of hospitality's polite fiction in contrast to the relational reality of marriage, a further paradox that hospitality suffers is the *limits* of its power to control the *who* and the *where*. It seems it is not just any 'stranger' that can be neutralized by choosing to 'misrecognize' (Bourdieu 1990, 126) her unknownness. Protocols rely upon agents acknowledging them, or even more fundamentally, knowing about them. This requires some common ground; some social overlap concerning what is appropriate. There needs to be a common acceptance of honourable and shameful behaviour.

To fulfil the role of guest he must at least understand the conventions which relate to hospitality and which define the behaviour expected of him (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 16).

T. Raymond Hobbs emphasises that this phenomenon 'enhances the cohesion of the immediate group' and is only advanced to members of the society: 'the true "foreigner" is a permanent

threat' (Hobbs 2001, 28). Thus, the protection of the household envisaged by hospitality protocols is nevertheless protection against a member of the society.

Hospitality is a strictly functional institution in a society that does not see itself as homogeneous, but as diverse within the same territory, built up of friends and enemies, or at least acquaintances and strangers (Liverani 2004, 179).

Liverani's point underlines how complex hospitality is since despite the disparity between guest and host it requires a mutual cultural knowledge of protocols; it requires the stranger to be *known* in some sense.

Turning to the Classical world again, this paradox is perfectly exemplified in the limits of hospitality expressed by the Greeks. *Xenoi* are 'known strangers,' those with shared values and customs that allow for the misrecognition of their unknownness in terms of assumed and agreed protocols. *Barbaroi* are not known and so are un-neutralizable by hospitality (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 16; Mitchell 1997, 14). There is a limit to the misrecognition that is possible, to the fiction or violence to reality that the protocols can bear, just as at the other end there is a limit to the *familiarity* of the guest for the protocols to operate. Nieuwenhuijze (1971, 287) explains such limitations as a process to 'safeguard the integrity of both host and guest'. Viewed another way, if the paradox of the gift is tested too far we risk acknowledging it exists and under such exposure, the gift disappears (Bourdieu 1990, 98-9; cf. Derrida 1992, 24). Hospitality thus walks a fine line between known and unknown, between fictional kinfolk and inaccessible stranger.

[The guest] remains potentially anything: valiant or worthless, well born, well connected, wealthy or the contrary, and since his assertions regarding himself cannot be checked, he is above all not to be trusted (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 16).

What has become clear from this analysis is that the social distance between interlocutors influences not only the form of hospitality but even whether hospitality is an applicable custom. Family are *not* shown hospitality according to the protocols outlined by Pitt-Rivers, in which case it appears that Judg 19:4-9 should not be read according to them either. I will confirm this by looking at the story's social landscapes and its characters' social roles.

### **Social landscapes**

With the issues that hospitality raises before us, we must now reflect upon the who and where of the scenes in Judg 19 to confirm how best to read them. The judiciously referenced toponyms direct us to consider the wider context of the biblical world and its geo-political and social landscape. Levi, Ephraim, Benjamin and Judah constitute reference points for the social spaces

operative in the exchanges, a picture supplemented by the social roles the characters are said to hold and which we shall consider after the tribes.

### Levi

With its more developed tribal landscape, we assigned Judg 19 to the later strands of biblical tradition (cf. Blenkinsopp 2006). These later traditions include the allocation of tribal territories, for instance that of Levitical cities (see Hutton 2011). As a tribe without a territorial inheritance (Num 18:24; Josh 13:14) Levites were nevertheless given settlements in which to dwell (Num 35:1-8). Taking Ephraim as the territorial reference point (Judg 19:1), we might refer to Josh 21:20-22 which lists the four cities allotted to Levites from this tribe: Shechem and Kibzaim in the far north of Ephraim bordering Manasseh, and Gezer and Beth-horon which border Benjamin to the south-east. Interestingly, the city of Gezer, one of Ephraim's Levitical donations (Josh 21:21), appears instead to be occupied by the Canaanites (Josh 16:10; cf. Judg 1:30).

### Ephraim

In the book of Joshua a causal association seems to be made between the inheritance of the two tribes of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, and the lack of a portion for Levi (Josh 14:3-4) (see Butler 2006, 172). In the allotment of territories in the account of Josh 16:4-17:18 Manasseh and Ephraim complain that 'the hills are not enough for us' (*lō'-yimmāṣē' lānū hāhār*) (Josh 17:16; cf. Judg 1:27). But Joshua refuses to extend their territory, counselling them to persevere in driving out the Canaanites (vv17-18). Given the tradition that these foreigners occupied the Levitical Gezer, if we connect all the dots, Joshua advises Ephraim to clear the way for Levi! The border between Ephraim and Manasseh appears to be porous,<sup>131</sup> with a frontier or buffer zone in which settlements affiliated to both tribes can be found (Josh 16:9; 17:8-10) (cf. Butler 2006, 191). The settlements assigned to Levi from Ephraim—two in the north and two in the south—are very close to its borders, which in the north seem already to be colonized by Manassites. Levites are thus settled in an already liminal zone.<sup>132</sup>

### Benjamin

Benjamin claims an inheritance that lies between Ephraim and Judah but appears to be squeezed by these tribes' claims. We can refer to Josh 18:11-20 for an attempt to draw Benjamin's boundaries, but this text only serves to stress the ambiguity of the frontier. Rather, it is the list of settlements that follows which identifies who (and where) are Benjaminites (18:21-28).

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<sup>131</sup> Herzfeld (2001, 138) speaks of a social 'porosity' when competing loyalties to one's background or family interlock.

<sup>132</sup> The possibility that the Levitical city lists are a late composition (Lee-Sak 2017) aligns with a post-exilic date for Judg 19, in which case the territorial significance of a Levite in the story would be a contemporary inference.

Comparing these traditions with Judges however, provides evidence for its disputed borders, producing the same frontier zone we found to the north of Ephraim. Along Benjamin's southern border, Judah lays claim to Jerusalem in Josh 15:63 but cannot dislodge the Jebusites. Yet, in Josh 18:28 'Jebus (that is Jerusalem)' is listed as a city of Benjamin. This agrees with Judg 1:21 which notes that it is Benjamin who has failed to drive out the Jebusites (cf. Butler 2009, 472-3). A similar dispute is found to the north of this region. Bethel is listed as part of Benjamin in Josh 18:22, while Judg 1:22 gives the city to 'the house of Joseph,' namely Ephraim.<sup>133</sup> Joshua and Judges claim different traditions, which suggests these areas were only fluidly associated with biblical tribes.<sup>134</sup> We can see how settlements resist alignment with the tribal interests of the society's narrative (Niditch 2008, 190). Instead, borders emerge as frontier zones and Benjamin appears as a squeezed territory.<sup>135</sup>

## Judah

The tribe of Judah, pushed to the forefront by Judges (1:1-2, 8; 3:7-11; 20:18), is also prominent when it comes to the tribal allotments in Joshua (15:1-12) which 'represents not the order of birth of the sons of Jacob but the order of political priority for the ultimate editor of the biblical narrative, whose major concern is with Judah' (Butler 2006, 188). Judah's significance is read either in reference to the Davidic dynasty or in terms of the southern kingdom. Certainly, the tribe corresponds with Ephraim as the two major topographical regions of the central hill country of Palestine, metonymically used to refer to the southern and northern kingdoms respectively in prophetic literature (e.g. Isa 11:13; Hos 5:12-14; 6:4; Zech 9:13). Evidently, as we have seen with its disputed borders, this latter perspective has squeezed Benjamin as a territory out of the picture.

Notwithstanding its careful delineation of tribal territories, we can see how the later biblical tradition contains resonances of a society structured around settlements (Thompson 1992, 317-18). The socio-political borders that the texts draw cannot escape fluidity even if geographic natural boundaries such as the Jezreel Valley, the Judean hills or the plateau between Ramallah and Jerusalem group settlements into patterns (Finkelstein 1991, 20; Lehmann 2004, 157; Killebrew 2005, 159). Judges even abandons the task of drawing territorial borders: the book

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<sup>133</sup> Butler (2006, 206) notes that in Josh 18:11-28 'both Bethel and Jerusalem, the major cult sites of Israel and Judah, respectively, are attributed to Benjamin'.

<sup>134</sup> Research into settlement patterns suggests that the networks of associated population centres spill across the biblically drawn boundaries (cf. Miller 2012). Lehmann (2004, 165) argues that in the Late Bronze Age, Jerusalem must be included in an intermarriage group with Bethel and Beth-Horon, which would breach the boundaries of the claimed territories of all three of Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim.

<sup>135</sup> The whole of Benjamin may be such a frontier zone. Discussing Bethel, Harold Brodsky (1992, 711) considers the physical and climactic boundary 'between the southerly plateau of Judah and the more verdant Ephraim hills'. He argues that the physical features give more than one possibility for a border: 'one can say that the physical frontier actually lies within a zone—a zone which includes the city of Bethel'. This geographical observation suggests that Ephraim and Judah are topographically distinct areas sharing a border, in which case the overlaid political territory of Benjamin would be this physical frontier zone.

simply lists the settlements that the tribes claim (Judg 1:17-33). This gives a picture of isolated sites whose connection is conceptual. But an impact of such distinct territorial entities (Finkelstein 2013, 160) is the absence of social order outside the city walls (Meyers 2013, 23). Isolated within border zones with pressure on their territorial claims, the area between the settlements may have been a no-man's land through which people hurried (cf. Judg 5:6) (Liverani 2004, 191).<sup>136</sup>

My thesis is that this wider territorial porosity is due to priority being given to a lower order of social unit for group identity. If the settlement and family are the source of prosperity, identity and security as I have argued, then social units of a higher order such as the tribe (let alone a unified Israel) are of less interest to people, even into the Persian period (recall Edenburg 2016, 321). This is so because the family remains the primary context for recognizing the Other; a context in which other settlements and families are viewed with suspicion no matter their tribe or ethnic status. This social prioritizing explains why there are different traditions for a settlement's wider allegiance or why tribes appear to claim settlements within the territory of other tribes (Josh 17:6, 11): family patrimony comes first. For this reason, the antagonism of Gibeah towards strangers (and sojourners) (Judg 19:22-27) is not unexpected, even if the particular form the hostility takes is perverse (MacDonald 2012, 184). Reading the topographical indicators shows that while the second scene maintains its contrast with the first (19:4-9), it is on quite different terms from those of hospitality's protocols. We shall now turn to the social roles that the characters are given to confirm this idea.

### **Social roles**

As our reflection upon the tribal allegiances claimed for our story's characters illustrates, one's identity (the *who* of social interaction) is entwined with *where*. And the narrative offers further details shaping the interaction of these tribes in the persons of the characters (cf. Bal 1999, 325). In place of their names, the characters are referred to by their relationship to each other and their status or role in society.

#### The *gēr*

John Spencer (1992, 103) states that, 'the sojourner has no familial or tribal affiliation with those among whom he or she is traveling or living'. This term occurs overwhelmingly in the legal context of the Torah (for a detailed study see Ramírez Kidd 1999). We can note that it has two primary referents: a) an Israelite living among foreigners, by which image the time in Egypt

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<sup>136</sup> The remarks of Nieuwenhuijze (1971, 397) on the use of land by more recent tribal societies are worth stating. 'Note that in all of this no territoriality in the Western sense is involved. The tribe, and any other concerned, will count on its using certain tracts of land at a certain time for its passage; and it will be ready to fight its way through if it has to. Note also that from this tribal viewpoint national boundaries mean nothing whatsoever'.

is remembered or b) a non-Israelite living among the sons of Israel. Considering both referents, Spencer (1992, 103) goes on to admit, ‘this distinction becomes confused when the claim is made that the Levites are *gērîm* (sojourners) among the Israelites’. *HALOT* (I 201) acknowledges the injunctions to defend the *gēr* (e.g. Exod 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:33-34) with its rendering ‘protected citizen, stranger’. On the other hand, Frank Anthony Spina (1983, 322-3) argues for a connotation of ‘social unrest or conflict’ for the *gēr* leading to his preferred translation, ‘immigrant’. Paul C. P. Siu (1952, 34) distinguishes between the sojourner and the ‘marginal man’. The latter stands at the crossroads between two cultures in a ‘bicultural complex’ while the sojourner ‘clings to the cultural heritage of his own ethnic group [...] hindering his assimilation to the society in which he resides’. Nevertheless, ‘in many instances, the sojourner has something in common with the marginal man’. We might say that although resident, sojourners are held at a certain social distance, grafted on to their current settlement while remaining an outsider (cf. Judg 19:16).<sup>137</sup>

### The *pîlegeš*

The type of relationship to which the term *pîlegeš* refers is commonly understood to be of subordinate status to a normal *’iššâ* (Plautz 1963, 9; Stone 2014, 178) and so it is rendered ‘secondary wife’ by *DCH* (VI 681). The relationship is subordinate in comparison with another marriage relationship and thus we should expect there also to be a primary wife (*’iššâ*) in the family.<sup>138</sup> However, scholarship bemoans the lack of clarity surrounding the status of such a woman (cf. Shectman 2014, 171). Indeed, Ken Stone (2007, 193) remarks that ‘in spite of the attention given to [the term], much uncertainty remains’. Werner Plautz (1963) argues that while *pîlegeš* indicates a lower social status it is nevertheless a real institution of marriage with all its customs and rules. Yet, if the duties of a man towards his secondary wife hold as for a primary wife, Plautz’s conclusion presents a further mystery regarding the nature of the lower status (Plautz 1963, 10-11). Beyond ‘some sort of sexual relationship to male characters’ (Stone 2007, 193), the precise social status, role and loyalties of the *pîlegeš* are unclear from the biblical texts (Bal 1999, 324). Perhaps we could use Sahlins’s terms again and simply conclude that a *pîlegeš* is more socially distant than a primary wife.

### The *ḥōtēn* and *ḥātān*

<sup>137</sup> Pitt-Rivers (1968, 16) explains the challenge with full societal incorporation ‘It is a matter of local pride that each community would set up its standards for itself rather than accept those which are dictated by foreigners. In this sense, every community aspires to autonomy. Therefore the status achieved in one is not directly transferable to another, nor is the status ascribed by one society necessarily recognised in another’.

<sup>138</sup> Looking at the mid-twentieth century Middle East, Nieuwenhuijze (1971, 386) explains that ‘the family father together with his wife or – rare luxury – wives (concubines are even more exceptional) shares the home with his male and unmarried female children and the wives and children of his sons’.

We have seen how the family in the ancient Near East is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal (King and Stager 2001, 31). Nevertheless, the woman retains a connection to the family she has left, which may be significant enough to cause a dilemma over where loyalty is owed. Jonathan Rowe (2011, 149) argues that the legislation of Num 30 ‘points to the ongoing influence of a father in the life of a married woman’ and argues that allegiance to her natal family remains a major part of a wife’s identity with attendant economic and social consequences (Rowe 2011, 150-158; also Steinberg 2007, 59). This is a further illustration of why exogamous marriage is undesirable and is another reason for the tension surrounding marriage in general. Recalling the distance at which a *pīlegeš* may be held from the family, this type of wife’s natal loyalties may even be dominant (Stone 2007, 198). Noting the identity of Hebrew root behind the terms, Rowe suggests that the *ḥōtēn* (father-in-law) and the *ḥātān* (son-in law/bridegroom) belong to the same kinship classification.

The most likely explanation for their being classificatory kin is their obligation to protect the same woman, and possibly the duty of the father-in-law to protect the son-in-law (Rowe 2011, 150).

This is conceivable considering the common Hebrew terminology of ‘giving’ (by the woman’s father) and ‘taking’ (by the groom) to describe the marriage alliance (Guenther 2005, 388; cf. Stone 2014, 175-77; Shectman 2014, 168). Such an exchange may thus be understood as a transfer of protective responsibilities (King and Stager 2001, 50), although it is evident how the different men’s exercise of this role might come into conflict.

The review of these social roles has indicated their potential ambiguity without a context in which to view their operation. We must now draw all these insights together—the meaning of hospitality, the text’s social landscape and the characters’ relational roles—and turn to the context in which they operate, the story of the Gibeah Outrage.

## **The Gibeah Outrage**

### **Setting the scenes**

The tale in Judg 19 sets its scenes with a juxtaposition of precision and anonymity. The lack of names throws attention onto the characters’ origin and status. We are first introduced to a Levite, which sets this man outside the normal affiliations to the political landscape created by the tribal system. The apposed description of him as a *gēr* in Ephraim (Judg 19:1b) is suggestive of the tradition of Levitical towns (Num 35:1-8) and implies a detached relationship to the

surrounding population wherein he resides.<sup>139</sup> The Levite's home town is not stated, instead the story uses 'remote parts' (*yārēkâ*), an expression that is unique to Judg 19 (vv1, 18). His Levitical status taken in conjunction with his alien residency in 'remote parts' gives the impression of distance from the other characters and maybe also for the readers of the text. He seems deliberately held at arm's length. The Levite, from a tribe without an inheritance in the tradition, is also without a settlement.

The Levite's wife is from Bethlehem in Judah (Judg 19:1c). This second toponym augments the social landscape within which the Levite and his entourage travel, connecting Ephraim and Judah as the two termini of the characters' journeys with echoes of the divided kingdoms.<sup>140</sup> The expression *yārēkâ* suggests the *other* side of Ephraim from Bethlehem for the Levite's home, implying a significant expedition lies between the sites.<sup>141</sup> The term *pīlegeš* to qualify 'iššâ (Judg 19:1c) alerts us to a peculiar marital position. I cannot find any other instance in the HB of a man whose *pīlegeš* is the *only* wife he has. The use of this term implies that the Levite has at least one other wife, a principal 'iššâ who in keeping with her social role presumably has remained in the household in the remote parts of Ephraim. Perhaps this scenario is why the man waits four months before seeking out his absent *pīlegeš*, or even why she left in the first place (19:2).

The existence of a primary wife would seem a clear inference were it not that in the story the woman is not consistently referred to as *pīlegeš* but also as 'iššâ in relation to her husband (e.g. Judg 19:1). Since no mention is made of a principal 'iššâ, the ambiguity of the woman's status is unresolved. The marital situation is further complicated by the return of the *pīlegeš* to her father in Bethlehem (19:2).<sup>142</sup> This man is referred to as the Levite's *hōtēn*, but in respect of a *pīlegeš* it is not clear what duties or loyalties this role enjoins. Nevertheless, for the scene in

<sup>139</sup> Twice in Judges, Ephraimites complain that they are overlooked when war booty in the form of Transjordanian land is at stake (Judg 8:1-2; 12:1). Butler (2009, 472) finds here a polemic, 'the troublesome tribe constantly demanding leadership roles'. It may be significant that their brother 'half-tribe' *does* have Transjordanian land (Josh 13:8, 29-31; 18:7), for this covetousness seems to begin when they and Manasseh are first allotted their territory in Josh 16:4-17:18. A man with no inheritance would seem especially suspicious to this avaricious tribe. Levitical status makes you socially ambiguous anyway, marginally connected to social structures (cf. Judg 17-18). But in Ephraim it makes you a *freeloader*, provocative in virtue of your status.

<sup>140</sup> The marriage relationship established in 19:1-2 is referenced by Henri Cazelles (1992, 712-3) to support a more general association of the Ephraimites with Bethlehem in Judah, drawn from the latter settlement's apposition with ('*eprātâ*) in Mic 5:1. He suggests that the Ephraimites moved south to Bethlehem, referring to the origin of David as related in 1 Sam 17:12. Butler on the other hand understands the Levite's marriage to reflect the struggle of the divided kingdoms, 'between the Davidic monarchy of Rehoboam and Ephraimite monarchy of Jeroboam' (Butler 2009, 418). This relies on the hills of Ephraim being an operative *where* in the marriage exchange.

<sup>141</sup> In relation to Bethlehem, the detail 'remote parts' implies a location in northern Ephraim for the Levite's home. If we follow Josh 21:21-22, this identifies Shechem or Kibzaim on the Manassite border. Edenburg (2016, 80) considers his home to be Bethel, because Gibeah is 'exactly halfway on the route between Bethlehem and Bethel'. But, the proximity of these three settlements makes little sense of the expression 'remote parts'.

<sup>142</sup> Mieke Bal (1999, 324-7) sees the situation as a *virilocal* claim in a *patrilocal* world. While the man wishes his wife to live with him, as a *pīlegeš* the expectation is that she—and he—live with her father. Bal's suggestion for understanding the dynamics of the familial relationship explains the back and forth between settlements and draws attention to family loyalties. But such a use of *pīlegeš* is otherwise unattested and it is unlikely that patrilocal refers to the absorption of a man into the extended family of his wife (King and Stager 2001, 38).

19:3-9 it is clear by his generosity in creating a domestic social space that the *hōtēn* embraces the protective familial role towards daughter *and* towards his *hātān* (Webb 2012, 457).<sup>143</sup>

A fourth tribe, Benjamin, is the setting for the second scene (19:14). This tribe's territory lies between Ephraim to the north and Judah to the south (Josh 18:11), squeezed between them as a frontier territory. The description that Gibeah lies on the 'northern fringes of Benjaminite territory' (Arnold 1992, 1008) marks this settlement as a frontier town abutting Ephraim.<sup>144</sup> Benjamin appears as a transit region between the 'remote parts of Mt Ephraim' and Bethlehem, through which the Levite and his household must pass to reach the settlements connected with their family. Already risky, travel is made even more precarious by the marginalities that meet in Levi and Benjamin.

The distinction of Jebusite *nokrī* from the Israelites of Gibeah marks the difference between those who are unknown and yet belong to Israel and those who are completely outside this network (19:11-13). Such a distinction permits an analogue with the Greek perspective that there are *xenoi* with whom one can engage and *barbaroi* who lie outside the networks of possibility.<sup>145</sup> In contrast to the strange *nokrī*, the strangers of Gibeah are cast as Israelites who are presumed to share the same cultural values as the travellers, being twice identified as Benjaminites (vv13-16). We might expect them to act like *xenoi* with a duty to respond to the needs of the (known) stranger whom they encounter. Yet in view of the disputed zones tribal borders appear to be, mutual identification at the higher social order of 'Israel' would be inhibited by the greater social distance between individuals at this level (Sahlins 1968, 81). For Gibeah, the appropriate response to the appearance of strangers is suspicion.

This is illustrated by the socially distant status of the *gēr* in this story. In addition to the Levite, the old man whom they encounter in Gibeah of Benjamin is a sojourner, this time *from* Ephraim (19:16). Both are Israelites who live among other tribes of Israel and not among foreigners. While the Levitical status of the first man may provide an explanation for this term's use, the characterization of the second as a sojourner from Ephraim living among Benjaminites suggests a significant social distance between the regions, noteworthy in a story which distinguishes between types of stranger.

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<sup>143</sup> Notwithstanding Rowe's (2011) interesting analysis, we might note that while *hōtēn* is used 21 times in the HB, it only refers to two people: the father of the Levite's *pīlegeš* (Judg 19:4, 7, 9) and Moses's father-in-law who is mentioned 18 times. Biblical examples of how this role functions are in short supply.

<sup>144</sup> Referring to the events found in Judg 20, Patrick Arnold (1992, 1008) mentions Ephraim's role in attacking Gibeah as reflective of 'historical intertribal conflicts between Benjamin and Ephraim early in Israel's history'. The repetition of Gibeah's Benjaminite tribal affiliation in Judg 19:14, 16 (cf. also 1 Sam 13:2 and 2 Sam 23:9) may have an air of protestation.

<sup>145</sup> We should note that the LXX rarely uses the terms *xenos* or *barbaros* and renders the *nokrī* of Jebus (19:12) as *allotrioi* 'others'. Nevertheless, *allotrios* carries the same connotations of hostility (LEH 28) found with *nokrī* (HALOT II 700) and the only other time this term is used in the LXX of Judges is to describe 'foreign gods' in 10:16. 'Otherness' is the sense behind the description of Jebus.

A further term for the Levite may add to the meaning of *gēr*. In 19:17 the Levite is described as *hā'ōrēah* 'the wayfarer' in v17. This recalls the only other verse in Judges using this term, which is in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:6). In the song, a time of unrest is indicated by the image of wayfarers in danger as they traverse the landscape between settlements. A similar image is found in Isa 33:8 using the same term, *'ōrēah*. It would seem to be the wayfarers who are under threat in unsettled times. Notably for our narrative, however, the term's use in Jeremiah (9:1; 14:8) has a negative nuance which sees its status as rootless and without a people or identity. Jer 14:8 also sets *gēr* and *'ōrēah* in parallel. Taking this connotation, the *'ōrēah* becomes a vagrant that represents a threat roaming the hills. This nuance can also be read into the admittedly difficult verse Judg 5:6. Bringing these possibilities of meaning together, the inference can be drawn that the family's appearance in Gibeah is remarkable considering the threatening landscape that lies outside the settlement's walls (consider the proximity of the *nokrî* in Jebus) and this makes them suspicious.

The use of *'ōrēah* to describe the Levite emphasises what has been built up since the narrative's beginning: the danger of the man's anonymity. Whether he and his family represent a threat depends upon perspective; a perspective shaped by the social landscape at the background of the story. But without knowing with whom we are dealing (who is a *xenos* or a *barbaros*) it is impossible for a perspective to come into focus. Noticing that the single occurrence of *'ōrēah* to describe the Levite comes at the point when the old man in Gibeah faces him, our attention is drawn to the fragile social situation felt by the characters in the text. Recalling the disputed territory that Benjamin seems to be, the ambiguous status of their host as an Ephraimite sojourner intensifies this fragility. If we remember that Jer 14:8 sets *gēr* and *'ōrēah* in parallel, Judg 19:17-21 is an interaction between two socially 'marginal men' (Siu 1952, 34) in a frontier territory neither call their own.

### **Two contrasting scenes**

Having completed the scene setting, we can return to the narrative's invitation to compare the two scenes of Judg 19:3-9 and vv14-21 which have frequently been taken to describe two instances of hospitality, one successful the other tragically disastrous. Yet, having taken care to examine the dynamic of such interactions and the social landscape the story itself offers us I propose that the contrast between the scenes is in their social distance. In the former scene, the characters are socially proximate; in the latter, they are socially distant. In which case using Sahlins's terms (1972, 196) the 'modes of exchange' do not take the same form and hence while the scene at Gibeah describes hospitality, the scene at Bethlehem does not.

The proximate span of the first mode of exchange allows its success. However, the second mode is more complex. As we have seen, hospitality operates to create a *fictive* social proximity in

order to safeguard the reality of social distance. But this requires first, guest and host to invest fully in the exchange and secondly, the social distance be not too extreme. In Gibeah potential guest and host fail to establish the social distance between them. This undermines the hospitality process because the type of strangers the Levite's family is to Gibeah is not clarified; are they *xenoi* or *barbaroi*? There is a limit to the social distance hospitality can neutralize, a limit exceeded in Gibeah because of the instability. In fact, from the ethnographic model that Sahlins (1968, vii-viii) gives, it would seem that a tribal confederation such as Israel would be too large for an experience of social proximity. In other words, Israel is too large to accommodate a *xenos* relationship on these terms alone. Just because both parties are 'Israelite' does not guarantee that they are *xenoi*; it does not guarantee that they are known unknowns. When testing the cohesion of Israelite solidarity beyond the extended family or settlement, in Judg 19 at least the social structure is found wanting.

### **A family gathering: Judg 19:3-9**

As we have seen, the protocols that motivate and regulate hospitality are fairly narrowly applicable: some 'guests' do not admit of this social institution. The visit of family is one of these excluded situations, primarily because the protection against the unknown that the hospitality institution affords is unnecessary. In a critique of Phyllis Trible (1984), Koala Jones-Warsaw (1993, 180) begins to approach the problem of categorizing the visit of the Levite to his *hōtēn*, when she focuses on the *pīlegeš*.

The context does not support her assumption that the young woman should have been entitled to hospitality. Hospitality is something extended to guests, whose presence is brief. The young woman who had been living with her father for four months was, therefore, not a guest and was not entitled to hospitality in that situation.

While in fact Jones-Warsaw goes on to distinguish between the Levite and the young woman, I propose that there is no distinction in this regard. He too is 'not entitled to hospitality in that situation'. This is what the family alliance formed by marriage exchange means (Rowe 2011, 152). Because the Levite and the *hōtēn* constitute family, the gift is easier to misrecognise as demanding reciprocity—and thus protocols—because the social distance is minimal. Thus, the prospect of return which might colour the interaction is very much in the background. The father of the woman might expect to be received well when he in turn visits his daughter in the remote parts of the hills of Ephraim, but this neither motivates nor shapes the current situation. This analysis invites us to read vv3-9 in a different way. While the woman's return to her natal kin (v2) would also return the role of protector to her father (Rowe 2011, 157), any potential for conflict with her husband is here overridden by acceptance of 'the duty of the father-in-law

to protect the son-in-law' (Rowe 2011, 150). Notice how the father of the young woman (*'ābî hanna'ārâ*) 'rejoiced to meet him' (*wayyišmaḥ liqrā'tô*) (v3). The language the father-in-law uses speaks of 'strengthening the heart' (*s'd lēb*) and 'making merry' (*yṭb*). The dynamic is pleasant and familial which dissolves any need for social niceties, so less significance should be attached to the father 'urging' (*pšr*) the Levite to stay (v7), neither as 'male bonding' (Trible 1984, 68) nor as a sinister method of social control (Jones-Warsaw 1993, 181; Bal 1999, 327). The *ḥōtēn* recognizes his familial role. The decision of the Levite to 'linger' (*mhh*) (v8) is thus a response to family expectations. And, in a situation that is all too recognizable, indulgence triumphs over prudence and the man finds himself heading onto the highways and byways rather later than is sensible (v10-11).

Because of the established kinship ties, the potential social pressure of the gift is not strongly operative, encouraging cohesion and social benefit. In Sahlins's continuum, whatever the specifics of the arrangement between the man, the *pīlegeš* and *ḥōtēn*, the kinship acknowledged by the father-in-law eclipses the socially distant 'intertribal outer darkness,' between Ephraim (and Levi) and Judah (Niditch 2008, 191). Instead the scene depicts a household understood on its own terms—the 'inner spheres of home and community' (Sahlins 1968, 81). Taken in conjunction with the scene setting in 19:1-2, the family dynamic found in vv3-9 carries even more narrative weight because the social landscape is otherwise obscure and the characters unrooted. We can note that following the biographical introduction the characters' tribal affiliations are not mentioned again, only their family relationships.

### **Who will welcome a stranger? Judg 19:14-21**

Butler (2009, 422) with reference to the literature expresses the common belief that the Gibeahites 'prove totally inhospitable' to their fellow Israelites. The assessment that the problem in Gibeah is bad hospitality is reasonable, but I think it can be explained with more precision, taking account of the behaviour of the old man and the Levite. The interaction is between strangers, for which reason the gift requires convention to misrecognise its reciprocal operation as hostility-neutralizer. The social distance demands a more balanced or 'demonstrable' reciprocity in 'some renunciation of hostile intent' (Sahlins 1972, 220). Unlike the familial visit of vv3-9, the attempt at hospitality here enjoins social pressure to fulfil the obligations that subdue conflict (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 25). Thus, it is particularly important for a stranger to know the customs. Yet the paradox is that, by definition, hospitality involves transactors who are socially distant. In 19:14-21 we find a situation that stretches this paradox even further because the transactors fail to establish their social distance. In fact, the paradox is tested too far and exposes itself and the gift disappears in hostility.

The failure to establish the *who* of the gift begins with the assertion of the Levite that Gibeah is to be preferred over Jebus because the inhabitants are Israelites (19:12). This sets up a narrative straw man for the behaviour of Gibeah to knock down, which would illustrate the disintegration of Israelite society and Gibeah's depravity. Yet the fault is not so clearly Benjaminite. At their first appearance from the highway are the strangers immediately identifiable as Israelite? We should not expect instantaneous recognition. On the contrary, without further evaluation the marginality of the wayfarer presents him as the threat the gift functions to neutralize. Here we encounter the wisdom behind the desire to evaluate strangers 'against the standards of the community' (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 14) which shapes the initial interaction of hospitality. But the question posed by the narrative is: how far does 'the community' extend?

We can begin to see the reason why Gibeah ignores the travellers. It cannot be that no-one has noticed three people and their donkeys heading through the town. Rather, the streets are deserted because an *'ōrēah* has appeared in the town's *rəḥōb*. We await the initial encounter of evaluation, which Pitt-Rivers (1968, 17) surmises should be undertaken by a community's 'self-appointed champion' who is likely 'to be the chief or the strongest man within it, or at least one who claims to be so' (see also Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 287). The sub-scene of 19:14-15 thus portrays a moment of tension in expectation of hospitality's commencement by evaluation. What paints the city's behaviour as inhospitable is the hesitation in beginning this process, but given the frontier nature of Benjaminite territory, the settlement may be wary of fraternizing with strangers, notwithstanding a claim to be Israelite.

In v15 the narrator states 'and there was no-one to gather them into the household' (*wə'ēn 'iš mə'assēp- 'ōtām habbaytā*), a phrase echoed later in the Levite's own words (v18). At the same time as describing the hiatus in hospitality this statement draws attention to the total investment the gift demands if it is to be an effective replacement of hostility. Here the contrast between the socially proximate scene in 19:3-9 becomes pertinent. While the Levite has been 'gathered into a household' by marriage, he does not find such a risk taken in Gibeah. The authorial condemnation of the Benjaminites is that they do not recognise the 'household' that is Israel. Yet, as disputed territory, they might respond that their neighbouring tribes have not respected the autonomy of Benjamin.

From this perspective, the old man who confronts them is caught in a difficult situation, unwittingly taking on the role of the community's champion (vv16-17), inappropriate considering his Ephraimite status (Pitt-Rivers 1968, 24). The hesitation of Gibeah has created a space into which the old man—the sojourner—reluctantly steps. This explains why he leads the encounter with questions (contra Matthews 1992, 8). Before offering hospitality, the old

man needs to establish what type of stranger the Levite is: ‘where are you going and whence have you come?’ (v17). In other words: what type of stranger are you? do you understand what hospitality requires of you? The old man’s attempt at evaluation illustrates the lack of uniformity in acknowledging Israel’s ‘segmentary hierarchy’ (Sahlins 1968, 81) of clan, tribe and nation.

But the Levite is not prudent enough to fulfil his part in establishing the social space and responds with equivocation. Although he identified Gibeah as an appropriate place to spend the night because its inhabitants were Israelites, he does not seek to diffuse the threat his appearance from the highway represents with clarity about his own origins. While he reveals that he is travelling from Judah to Ephraim, he hides his liminal social position there as Levite and sojourner.<sup>146</sup> What is more, he chooses to withhold this information when he comes to talk to a genuine Ephraimite (19:17-18).<sup>147</sup> Such equivocation keeps the potential host at arm’s length, something the protocols of hospitality are designed to do. The paradox of hospitality, however, is that one must invest in order to remain detached. The guest and host must first become proximate to maintain their distance.

The Levite’s protestation that ‘there is no *lack* of anything’ (*’ên maḥsôr kol-dābār*) (v19), confirms his desire to remain socially distant, because he *does* lack incorporation into the community. The response of the old man that what the Levite lacks is ‘upon me’ (*’ālāy*) (v20) indicates he understands his role. But there is no evidence of the total investment Mauss (1990, 6, 81) insists is necessary in these societies for the gift to produce its effect of social coherence. The old man is thrust into this role and the Levite is not allowing the operation of the gift to take effect.

Briefly turning to a contemporary illustration, Lévi-Strauss illustrates such resistance with reference to two strangers in a small restaurant who perforce share one table and thus must form a group without a guide for integration.

The French custom is to ignore people whose names, occupations and rank are unknown. But in the little restaurant, such people find themselves in a quite close relationship for one to one-and-a-half hours, and temporarily united by a similar preoccupation. A conflict exists, not very keen to be sure, but real enough and sufficient to create a state of tension between the norm of privacy and the fact of community (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 59).

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<sup>146</sup> Alberto Soggin (1987, 284) on the other hand, thinks that the identification of the man as a Levite (19:1) is ‘unimportant for the purpose of the narrative’ and even suggests deleting it (also Butler 2009, 417, Edenburg 2016, 17).

<sup>147</sup> Recalling Judg 12:5-6, within the world of the text it seems as though Ephraimites are distinguishable from other tribes by their accent. In this case, the Levite may recognise the origin of the *gēr* in Gibeah. It may also be the case that this Ephraimite can tell that the Levite’s claim to be from the remote parts of the hills of Ephraim is equivocation.

Returning to the biblical world, in parallel with the tension of Judg 19:14-15, I suggest such a state of tension can be applied to the sub-scene in vv17-19. When exchange faces situations without clear ‘rules,’ the instinct is to resort to hostility. The paradox of the gift as social coherer is that the corollary is the social challenge that it represents threatening hostility.<sup>148</sup>

There is a link, a continuity, between hostile relations and the provision of reciprocal prestations. Exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 67).

Here in this inchoate hospitality situation, the Levite’s unrootedness and the old man’s reluctance to engage in reciprocity creates an unstable vacillation between social distances. The subsequent welcome of the Levite into the house of the old man (v21) has not satisfactorily neutralized the threat of the unknown. Pitt-Rivers (1968, 25) argues that ‘the law of hospitality is founded on ambivalence’. But as I have noted, there is a limit: the gift’s laws require parameters. We have a reluctant host, a sojourner and a reluctant guest, a wayfarer who declines community incorporation. You must invest in the reciprocity – that is the risk and yet the operation of the gift. The situation in Gibeah stretches the paradoxes of hospitality too far. It becomes impossible to misrecognise the gift, so it disappears. In which case, the hostility the gift sought to suppress must reappear.

### **The challenge of Gibeah: Judg 19:22**

With the disappearance of the gift, all that is left is the social challenge that has been initiated. I suggest this is how to understand the behaviour of men of Gibeah, the *bānê-bālîya‘al* (19:22). As Pitt-Rivers (1968, 29) concludes,

Any infringement of the code of hospitality destroys the structure of roles, since it implies an incorporation which has not in fact taken place; failure to return honour or avoid disrespect entitles the person slighted in this way to relinquish his role and revert to the hostility it suppressed. The sacred quality in the relationship is not removed, but polluted. Once they are no longer host and guest they are enemies, not strangers. Enemies *do* compete and it requires at least a tacit test of strength to determine which is the better man who will remain in possession of the field while the other takes his distance.

Crudely, the men signify the representative claim to strength required by those who challenge newcomers to the community, but it must be said that by explaining the action of the *bānê-bālîya‘al* in this way I am not justifying it. Following the settlement’s reluctance to begin hospitality (v15), the manner in which the residual challenge unfolds confirms the picture of

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<sup>148</sup> Mauss (1990, 6) referring to the agonistic giving of the ‘tribes of the American Northwest’ remarks on the ‘principle of rivalry and hostility that prevails in all these practices’.

Gibeah's wickedness and maybe society's degeneration. The city's reaction, motivated by the lack of misrecognition the failure of the gift provokes, comes to take the form of a *depraved* challenge or 'test of strength'. This is what identifies the city as wicked (Liverani 2004, 184).

In exposing this dynamic I might suggest a meaning to the expression 'so that we may know him' (*wānēdā'enû*) used by the men of Gibeah. In reference to this expression's occurrence in the similar story from Gen 19, Scott Morschauser (2003, 471-4) deflects readings away from sexual assault and onto a city's legal and security measures against those arriving from outside the city walls (also Pirson 2012). Certainly, the request 'to know' aligns with the threat the unknown stranger presents and the mechanism of hospitality that chooses to regard the stranger as known through protocol. On the other hand, in Judg 19 the context and accompanying vocabulary indicates that *yd'* means something more offensive, even sexual and suggests a wicked action (Boling 1975, 276; Webb 2012, 466-7). Recognition of the gift dynamic allows both suggested senses of *yd'* to stand. The motivation for the challenge to know the stranger is the failed hospitality, yet the depravity of Gibeah shapes this challenge into sexual assault. The choice of the euphemistic *yd'* allows this depth.

### **Reversion to elementary structures: Judg 19:23-28**

As well as provoking the structures of the gift to disappear, the pressure on the gift's paradoxes produce a return to exchange basics. In addition to weak morality, the old man's suggestion that the sons of Belial assault his virgin daughter and the *pīlegeš* of the Levite (vv23-24) is not just shaped in response to the reversion to hostility but also by another form of reciprocity that fills the vacuum left by the failed hospitality. The men resort to the fundamental exchange identified by Lévi-Strauss (1969), that of women, in order to restore the balance the disruption of which created the challenge and the animosity. This is the explanation—but not the justification—for the old man's suggestion. The sons of Belial on the other hand refuse to consider this an appropriate substitute for the imbalance and indebtedness the unresolved presence of the stranger has created. Women are exchanged for women and the Gibeahites see this imbalance rather as the opportunity for wickedness.<sup>149</sup>

This leaves the behaviour of the Levite. The residue of what Lévi-Strauss sees as basic to the structures of society prompts the Levite's 'callousness and obliviousness' (Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992, 44). This callousness may trace back to his wife's more socially distant status as a *pīlegeš*, in which case society has truly disintegrated if the bonds of family are not respected. In surrendering his own wife to the mob (v25), the Levite exchanges her for a cessation of

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<sup>149</sup> 'Like exogamy, the prohibition of incest is a rule of reciprocity, for I will give up my daughter or my sister only on condition that my neighbour does the same' (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 62)

hostility (cf. Meyers 2013, 145). The fact that he seems not to expect to receive his wife back (v27) supports this reading.

Thus a continuous transition exists from war to exchange, and from exchange to intermarriage, and the exchange of brides is merely the conclusion to an uninterrupted process of reciprocal gifts, which effects the transition from hostility to alliance, from anxiety to confidence, and from fear to friendship (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 68).

The hostility does seem to be neutralized, but only after the outrage has run its course. The wickedness of the sons of Belial means that the final acceptance of the woman in return for peace results in her grievous abuse.

### **Concluding remarks**

From Pitt-Rivers, to Sahlins, to Lévi-Strauss, the dynamic of human interaction found in this story has proven to stumble under first, awkwardness and then more terribly, manipulation. It is not a new interpretation to suggest that the Gibeahites have committed an outrage. Rather, my method of reading the interactions in terms of modes of exchange takes account of the particular way in which their wickedness materializes. Further, it also explains the questionable behaviour of the other two men, who treat women as a bargaining tool. Still, in order for the gift to function, everything must be on the line. In light of this reading of Judg 19, the conclusion of Mauss that the gift is a ‘total social fact’ comes to have a specific resonance.

There is no middle way: one trusts completely, or one mistrusts completely; one lays down one’s arms and gives up magic, or one gives everything, from fleeting acts of hospitality to one’s daughter and one’s goods (Mauss 1990, 81).

Giving one’s daughter lies at the root of the stories of Judg 19-21, where the distances between tribal allegiances warp the gift’s peace-making properties. What is experienced in Gibeah are the consequences of the total investment that the gift requires when the transactors are deprived and the social structures insular. The gift cannot withstand manipulation even if it must take this risk to function.

I have avoided yet more arguments related to polemics or Judges’ narrative trajectory in order to simply ask why the interactions in Judg 19 unfold in the way they do. All four tribes mentioned in the story function to situate the characters in relation to each other on a socio-political level. These competing allegiances set the tale in a landscape of territorial uncertainty within which settlements and family constitute the secure locus of social proximity and identity. The polemics may still be behind the text and the trajectory of social disintegration, but what is clear in Judg 19 is that the only place this Levite enjoys refuge is within his family, ‘the unit

where a person is secure and where he can expect loyalty and afford to be loyal in his turn' (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 389).

Yet even this expectation appears to be coloured by the deterioration of social structures. The lack of clarity surrounding the status of a *pīlegeš* ran the risk of pushing her out to a greater social distance. While the Levite benefits from his *ḥōtēn*'s recognition of their social proximity, for his own part he chooses to push his wife further outside and into the hands of abusive strangers. We have thus another contrast between Bethlehem and Gibeah and further confirmation of the social breakdown. I have argued that as the basic social unit, family enjoins a loyalty and security in contrast to relationships outside this network. The corollary of this is that in the words of Heather McKay (2009, 28) 'to go so far as to deceive or betray members of one's own family is treated as utterly heinous and contemptible'. It is not the 'motif of the one helpful man' (Niditch 2008, 192) that provides the foil for the events in Gibeah, but the respect for family shown by the father of a dubiously wedded woman.

## Conclusions

In this necessarily selective survey of the stories in the book of Judges we have encountered a wide variety of rich characterizations, geo-political machinations and socio-behavioural connotations. This demanded an equally wide variety of social scientific responses in order to read the material in its depth. Yet, from this socio-cultural diversity a commonality emerged. At the root of Judges' material, we found a localized perspective in which tight-knit social structures and local values held more influence than membership of tribe and nation. This local perspective I have argued was unsurprising considering the fractured social and topographical landscape of ancient Palestine. The concern to paint a more unified and national picture belonged rather to a subsequent editorial recasting of the core heroic stories encouraged by means of the book's framework. Such recasting was nuanced enough to allow the original tales' shape to be preserved and their cultural contribution to surface alongside the nationalizing agenda.

Although I discussed this juxtaposition of the local and global in the Judges texts, my focus in the exegetical chapters was the lower order social structures of the core folklore. Now in these concluding remarks, I will turn our attention briefly to this perspectival conjunction. When we consider the editorial goal of Israelite identity-building (Thompson 1992, 353; Kratz 2015, 107) a question that follows is why both these perspectives on the hero stories are simultaneously offered to the reader of Judges. In other words, why are stories like those of Abimelech or Samson so evidently concerned with local structures if the goal is to claim these heroes for all Israel?

In order to reflect on this question, we should recognize that the nationalist viewpoint is not only found in Judges but can be traced through many texts of the Bible. I mentioned how Frevel (2011, 9) assigned the mixed-marriage prohibition to a 'Deuteronomistic view on history'. In the course of this study, however, I fought shy of referring to the editorial work as *Deuteronomistic*. This was not to deny the merits of such a theory but was rather to intermit the wider questions that the theory raises in order to focus on what the text of Judges says. In this way, the idea that Judges represents an ideological elaboration of folklore could be confirmed from reading texts, topography, socio-anthropology and archaeology. At this concluding stage, however, it is worth glancing at the larger context that the Deuteronomistic History theory implies in order to understand specifically what the composition of Judges is trying to contribute to Israel and so begin to answer the question of its local and global juxtaposed narrative perspectives.

In discussing the Hebrew Bible's formation, Kratz (2015, 87) called the book of Judges the 'binder'. In his summary, a series of foundation legends (Gen-Josh) has been joined to monarchic annals drawn from Palestine's two kingdoms (Sam-Kgs) by a collection of the region's folklore to create a 'single overarching historical narrative, a sacred history' (Kratz 2015, 82) that generates an Israelite identity (cf. Finkelstein 2013, 163). The unifying thread running through this precisely *sacred* history is the exclusive worship of one God (the first commandment) 'as a conceptual connection' (Kratz 2015, 96; also Frevel 2011, 9).

Precisely as a narrative that seeks to consolidate a more widely shared identity, however, the conceptual connection between such diversely composite texts needs to do more than impose its unifying ideology upon its people. It must convince that this unity lies at the root of their diverse identity perspectives and *does not erase them*. This imperative is because identities—particularly minority, local identities—fiercely resist absorption into what would necessarily be a less specific, less devotedly held self-understanding. Hence, in order to be a successful binder Judges must harness the unifying potential of its core of defining socio-cultural memories at the same time as it maintains the legends' authentic and localized social significance.<sup>150</sup>

Thus, in taking its place in the trajectory of the Dtr History the book of Judges must integrate two perspectives: a) the major subject of the history, the people of Israel, must continue to be the subject of Judges and hence the stories must read as contributing to this overall narrative; b) the local legends must be authentically retained and not dissolved into nationalized anonymity. This latter requisite draws attention to Thompson's (1991, 79) point that the legends were retained because they found 'echo and meaning in the lives of their possessors' although he shrugs his shoulders at how interested a general populace was in these writings, even questioning whether they were intended for public consumption (Thompson 1992, 388). Yet, if we recognize with Finkelstein (2013, 163) that born out of a small kingdom an Israelite identity has endured for millennia, the success of these writings in encouraging a national identity suggests that they were publically consumed in some form and found meaningful in this regard.

Acknowledging this socio-cultural significance then, I think that first, the national identity sought by the Dtr History's compilation of cultural memories was thought to be generated in reference to these memories and so secondly, that the memories were chosen because of their potential for others to find echo and meaning in them, inspiring Killebrew's (2005, 149) 'mixed-multitude' or Finkelstein's (2013, 162) 'variegated population' to see themselves as sharers of a heritage.

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<sup>150</sup> This latter process of preservation Thompson (1991, 76-77) contrasts with history as 'pedantic, antiquarian efforts of curiosity' with the goal of 'arranging a cultural heritage that is greater than both the compiler and any single historiographical explanation'.

In order to draw out the twofold identity perspective, I began my work showing how local social values based around family take preference over the wider and less strongly felt social units of higher order (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 382 n. 1). We also saw how the ecological and topographical diversity of ancient Palestine encouraged these localized social structures. The higher order identity found in the biblical texts was given conceptual purchase by events of imperial conquest, exile and migration, displacing the region's peoples and producing the context for generating a social consciousness at the higher order. In contrast to those among whom they were exiled who did not view the region of Israel and Judah as their patrimony, those who could call this heritage their own felt such an identity surface, a sentiment echoed in Ps 137:1, 'by the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept while we remembered Zion'. In this milieu, the circulating cultural memories of Israel gained a new significance for forging a unified sense of belonging. Nevertheless, we should expect that this emerging ethnic sense (cf. Lemche 1998, 20) did not weaken devotion to family, which we saw remains the dominant locus of self-understanding even today (cf. Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 381-89). Returning our focus to Judges, let us review the texts we have studied before briefly concluding by assessing the book's perspectival juxtaposition in light of the identity-making goal.

### **Sisera and Jael**

Choosing to focus upon the account in Judg 4, I asked the question why does Jael kill Sisera? This question exposed the story's editorial framing because the frame seeks to give a simple answer in line with its ideological narrative: it is Yhwh's will to save Israel. The frame privileges a higher order perspective, setting Israel as the counterpart to Canaan and couching their conflict in these theological terms under the familiar framework (4:1-3). In this broad context, the reason for Jael's action is also theological: the national God, Yhwh, is the saviour, who triumphs by 'the hand of a woman' (4:9 cf. vv23-24). But this conclusion flattens the tale's drama. It is not enough to attribute Jael's actions to the divine if we want to appreciate the details of the story. A theological reading does not satisfy and as the story unfolds we still want to know what Jael will do and why (even if we are happy that Yhwh's will lies behind everything). This encouraged us to look for another answer and this came from setting aside the frame and paying attention to the characters' behaviour in light of their relationships. The drama resided in the local structures which told us that she fights first for her family.

In seeking to confirm that local structures direct the story's drama, I recommended that Jael and Sisera be approached in particular and not generalized as exemplars of social issues, whether hospitality, politics or gender. This meant acknowledging that their relationship and the shaping of their identities as such influence any interaction Jael and Sisera have. In order to explain this, I referred to the concept of *social space*. Then I explained the implications of the

female role in the household, a relevant social space in relation to Judg 4 because the interaction takes place at Jael's tent. This returned us to a text that is concerned to give significant details about Jael's relationship to her family (4:11) and her relationship to Sisera (v17). The overlap of these social networks introduced an ambiguity when Jael confronted Sisera that made recognition of identity uncertain outside her household. In the categories that I introduced, Jael's dilemma now appears that she does not know who Sisera is in the social space. For this reason, the drama of the folktale comes from anticipating how Jael will resolve her dilemma. Hence, we learn that her motivation for killing Sisera is to grasp the identity she treasures most and strike a blow for her family.

In the light of this local dynamic, the process of its appropriation to increase an ethnic consciousness is clearer. Returning to the perspectives as juxtaposed we see how Jael's familial concerns take on wider connotations. Now drawn as an episode in a conflict between nations who would settle the land, the issue of national patrimony frames Jael's story, aligning itself with her devotion to family patrimony. Her weapon, the tent peg, *thrust* (*tq'*) into Sisera's head (v21a) allows a conceptual connection to the image of establishing a household through this verb's idiomatic use to mean 'pitch a tent'. In its ideological reframing, the peg's concluding descent into the land (*bā'āreš*) (v21b) refers to Israel's securing its heritage, which the story's closing frame confirms (vv23-24).

I mentioned how Niditch (1989, 52) remarked that Jael represents Israel. I think that this representation is not simply a reader's interpretation of the story, but is a connection shaped by the editorial work in recognizing the folkloristic Jael's archetypal potential. She is claimed as a national talisman with only a gentle nudge from the frame needed to direct our attention to this implication. A folktale of local heroes has been acknowledged to have a cultural significance suitable for forging Israel's social consciousness and is taken up for this purpose. At the same time, trampling its dynamic with pan-Israelite theological rewrites would flatten the tale, undoing all its potential for engaging memories of a shared heritage. By cherishing the tale instead, its devotion to the household can be made to resonate with the household that is Israel and provoke such a devotion too.

### **Abimelech and Jephthah**

Both Abimelech and Jephthah's stories bring the higher and lower order perspectives together in the search for a leader. Part of the local dynamic that preserves the family's dominance as an identifier is its suspicion of other families. Judg 9 and 11 represent contexts in which a higher order social consciousness is required and hence leadership of these larger groups must negotiate this suspicion. I suggested that the model that best describes the politics is that of a complex chiefdom that combines ascribed rank with achievement eligibility. This social model

negotiates yet does not entirely diffuse the tension between lower and higher order social units. Applying this model shows how Abimelech and Jephthah's stories are about the familiar political manoeuvrings of local government.

I noted, however, that despite their commonalities scholarship rarely compares these stories, a fact that I think reveals a technique of the editorial process. Abimelech and Jephthah are not compared because their stories engage different responses from Judges' editors. This has distinguished them in the book's overall narrative making them appear to have little thematically or structurally in common.<sup>151</sup> We can distil this point into a simple question: why is Jephthah a judge and Abimelech is not?

Abimelech's story contains typical features of a chiefdom's social structure. The terms of his claim to power and the elimination of his rivals (9:1-6); his loss of the popular 'vote' (vv23b, 25), a fissure of power into which further rivals manoeuvre (v26-29); his move to restore control and his eventual loss of power and his life (vv53-54) all follow the chiefdom's cycle between centralized and decentralized stages. The wide range of toponyms over which he holds sway also fits the settlement pattern of a chiefdom. Recognizing this model allowed a neat reading of the story of Abimelech's rise and fall. But a deeper editorial point was raised by holding this story up to the model, namely, the fact that all these features are typical of a chiefdom. The dramatic scenes of Judges 9 are unremarkable for chiefdom politics which is bloody and ruthless. In this light, the remarks condemning Abimelech for his behaviour and the theological rationales given for his downfall (8:33-35; 9:23-24, 55-57) seem rather to be editorial telegraphing than part of the local tale's social communication. As a typically ruthless chief, Abimelech is not material for a local hero/national judge in Israel's identity-making schema and is presented as a disaster. But if this is the process, then suitability to become a national talisman is not the only criteria by which stories of Palestine's local figures have been retained.

Jephthah seems to be such a talisman, for he is numbered among the judges (12:7). His story of leadership is one of response to a demand for a higher order social group, the threat of conflict (10:17-18), which requires a qualified commander. In addition to the ascribed status of Gileadite, Jephthah proves to be the ideal candidate because of his military prowess (11:1). The story of Jephthah's rise follows a familiar drama in which the real but hidden hero answers the call of destiny. This is a tale that lends itself to being read as a response to the will of Yhwh for Israel (11:9-11). It is also a perfect introduction to the celebration of Transjordanian patrimony (vv12-33), another suitable tale for evoking national pride.<sup>152</sup> In contrast to Abimelech,

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<sup>151</sup> An exception is Assis (2005) who compares Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah as leaders.

<sup>152</sup> The three purposes Bloch-Smith (2015, 310-11) suggests for the account of this military campaign—preservation of traditions; justification of territorial claims; confirmation of an identity—can also be read within my twofold perspective theory.

Jephthah's success as a commander and consolidation of Israel's Transjordanian claim against the Ammonites makes him good material to be called a judge.

Complicating the matter, however, is the tradition that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter (vv34-40) a tragic tale that challenges Jephthah's heroism. Yet even this is awkwardly explained by the editors as loyalty to Yhwh (vv30-31, 36) indicating their desire to understand Jephthah as a hero/judge. This way of dealing with what is an unsavoury aspect of Jephthah's career instead of simply suppressing it highlights the same issue as that raised by Abimelech story. If the editorial selection and redaction of these tales is with the goal of awakening a common sense of ethnic heritage, then the preservation of traditions that are challenging or impossible to bend to this task must be because their omission would damage it more than their inclusion.

Abimelech is a significant if possibly controversial figure in Shechem's cultural heritage, such that he must be included in the account of Israel's heroes. But as contrary to the unifying ideology his story appears as a counter-example of the solidarity under Yhwh the editors seek to encourage. Jephthah on the other hand is almost perfect as an example of which Israel can be proud, yet his daughter's sacrifice is part of the tradition. The uncomfortable presence of both these elements exemplifies the juxtaposition of local and national perspectives employed by the editors of Judges to ensure that the sense of Israel is stimulated and not rejected.

### **Samson and the Timnites**

I chose to look at just one of the traditions about Samson, his wedding to a Timnite (Judg 14). This tale raised one or two social issues that also exposed the local structures embedded in a nationalizing framework. Reading the tale without the frame I argued that its interest was in how societies negotiate the balance between family autonomy and marriage, a necessary institution of social production that forces families to look outside of themselves despite their suspicion of the Other (see Lyons 2012, 52). This led to some observations about the anthropology of marriage, including the noted lack of uniformity in recognizing the boundaries that define exogamy or endogamy. This agreed with the remarks I made at the beginning of this study concerning the primarily emic nature of kinship decisions, including ethnicity (Prato 2016, 211).

In this way, I argued that the tale was not about exogamy and its deleterious effects—this was the editorial perspective on Samson's wedding. We saw instead that Judg 14 contained a story that resonated with the familiar struggles of social life and the preservation of household autonomy. I cautioned against assuming the expected response to the folklore to be routine disapproval, a presumption often made by exegesis read under the influence of the Judges framework. I also suggested that this presumption has produced scholarship's preoccupation

with Samson as a liminal figure. Rather than offering Samson's 'hybridity' (Mobley 2006, 28) as a solution, his apparent liminality can be resolved if we recognize that as the figure of the folklore he is not interested in the editorially encouraged categories that render him liminal. As with the other heroes we have seen, Samson is rooted in his family.

Samson's liminality may be resolved at the level of the core material, but how should we evaluate this feature as a consequence of the integrated local and national perspectives? Samson's tales prove unwieldy sources to manage in this regard with the results of the ideological reframing mixed. I noted that his stories come from a source apart from the folkloristic northern hero collection. Samson's role in his folktales is more autonomous than preceding protagonists and his adversaries the Philistines are not held at arm's length but are at points marriage partners (14:2), associates (14:11) and opponents (15:3-17). The problematization of the Israelite/Philistine relationship is the same editorial technique we have seen of reifying a counterpart Other to draw out the national sense of a unified Israel. But Samson's cycle of tales offers a variety of responses to such an Other—collaboration, commerce and conflict (the latter notably as an individual not a leader such as Jephthah)—that unsettles his recasting as an all-Israelite hero. This unevenness is what gives Samson his liminal façade. Once more we are left with the question of why this perspectival dichotomy is not limited at the service of stimulating devotion to a unified cultural vision of loyalty to Yhwh. Samson seems too important (and perhaps too well known) to omit from the collection or doctor his history for this purpose. But as a hero, he also must be claimed for Yhwh and all-Israel for the benefit of a united identity. In which case the dual perspective must be retained, even if it sits less comfortably with Samson than with the preceding northern hero tales.

### **The Levite and Gibeah**

As a framework intended to bolster the sense of a unified Israel, Judges' editorial emphasis upon the occupying nations as Israel's Other provides a conceptual counterpart to encourage belonging at this higher social order. At the book's epilogue, however, these nations do not feature, and the recurrent editorial frame is revised to focus upon a hitherto unified Israel's lack of social cohesion (cf. 17:6; 21:25). This divergence suggested that like the Samson cycle the epilogue's source is not the northern hero tales and we saw that a postexilic setting for Judg 17-21 was a likely deduction.

Concentrating on Judg 19 out of the epilogue, I looked at how its detailed characterization might direct an interpretation of this gruesome story. I found a way forward by recognizing once again how social relationships produce a priority of values and shape what behaviour is appropriate in a given situation. Examining the territorial and socio-political implications of the four tribal designations and recognizing the contrast of social settings between a father-in-law's hearth

and the deserted streets of a cold, strange town, I argued that the difference between this story's two scenes is in their modes of exchange and not their success in showing hospitality. This reading enabled an explanation for the Gibeah Outrage that went beyond an appeal to underlying polemics or the social breakdown highlighted by the new frame. The meaning of all four tribal characterizations was accommodated as was the behaviour not only of Gibeah's 'sons of Belial' (19:22) but also the weakness of the old man and the callous obliviousness of the Levite (cf. Peristiany and Pitt-Rivers 1992, 44).

Although the familiar frame has disappeared, the same juxtaposition of local and nationalist perspectives is discernible. The family again appears as the identity preference and the place where a person is secure (Nieuwenhuijze 1971, 389) and the social spaces are households and settlements. In light of the territorial details, we see that tribes and cities are more autonomous and that society's organization seems to have a limited structural reach. With regard to the editorial perspective, I mentioned the common observation that Judges' literary structure is on a trajectory of disintegration which explains the disappearance of unity and ethnic solidarity (Judg 20). Rather than shaping the story of Gibeah into a source of national pride (an impossible task!), its depravity provides an object-lesson in favour of a centralized, national administration to which the epilogue's frame draws attention (cf. 19:1). The inclusion of such a horror story in this collection of ancient heroes must serve the purpose of identity-making even if it is as a counter-example to the pan-tribal ideal.

### **Structural considerations**

In light of this review, we might briefly consider how my explanation of Judges' identity-making by a perspectival dichotomy raises avenues for investigating the book's structure. Judges' downward trajectory of social disintegration culminating in tribal civil war is thought to begin with Abimelech (Irwin 2012, 444-5), although the rot may have set in before then (Webb 2012, 34). The gradual departure from the judge prototype (cf. 2:18; 3:7-11) has been read in Judges literary structure as tracing a social breakdown in Israelite society. This may be true at the overarching narrative level, but I propose that there might be another way of understanding the book's narrative spiral. I tentatively introduce it here for further thought.

Following Kratz (2015) I explained the task that the editors of Judges set themselves: to collate traditions from across the Cis- and Transjordanian regions and present them as a single 'binder' within a narrative of identity-forging that reaches back to a foundation and forward to a monarchy for the unification of the whole land. I have argued that this considerable task required the preservation of significant cultural memories in conjunction with a representation that coheres these memories into a shared heritage. This conjunction faced a problem when the significant memory challenged the cohesive project.

What if this problem was alleviated by means of Judges' disintegrating narrative trajectory? Judges' compilers were faced with a variety of traditions. We have come across stories of family pride (Judg 4), internal settlement politics (Judg 9) and small-town spats over marrying someone from the wrong side of the tracks (Judg 14) that have been put to the service of building an Israelite identity. Those heroes ripe for this task were promoted to the beginning of the book. Those whose tale was more complicated were placed later in its structure as the editorial frame struggled more and more to accommodate them, until a new frame contrasting the story with the identity was introduced. Of course, this suggestion needs further consideration and the most I am saying here without such further attention to the text is that a narrative framework that 'deconstructs itself' (Exum 1990, 412) would make room for the editorial consolidation of varied material.

### **Family and Identity in the book of Judges**

In the course of this work we have seen how family was the dominant allegiance for self-understanding in ancient Palestine supported by the region's ecological and topographical diversity and its limited social structures. As a collection of hero stories from a variety of times and places, the book of Judges contains cultural memories that reflect this social landscape. This was the way I approached my selective survey. Recognizing the localized nature of each story's social structures I chose to read them as folktales that communicate the values and customs of tight-knit groups and not simply as familiar parts of a national narrative whole. This produced detailed readings that shed new light upon the heroes' choices and the social communication and cultural meaning of each folktale.

This methodology also emphasised the editorial framework of Judges and its different perspective on the folklore. Claimed for Israel (or eschewed by her), these local heroes were nationalized in order to forge a sense of belonging at a wider social level. And yet, the limited and local concerns of each tale remain discernible, producing a perspectival dichotomy. I think that success in the identity-making endeavour required appreciating the local tales so that their potential for stirring cultural loyalty was maximized. In this way we can see that the book's juxtaposition of local and national perspectives serves to maximize its success in forging a unified culture in contribution to the Bible's national narrative.

If we accept that Judges and the Bible's Primary history is, among other things, an exercise in identity-making, this narrative has obviously been successful in its project. However, what enables the deepest appreciation both of this project and of the cultural richness of Palestine's peoples is recognizing that at the root of everyone's identity is the family—society's basic social unit: and family comes first.



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