Negating the mother & the maternal body in the Hebrew Bible

From Eve to Sarah, Rachel and Hannah

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study has been to examine and identify a negation of the mother and the maternal body within the Hebrew Bible. The starting point has been an understanding of a denial of feminine powers related to reproduction and women being primarily presented as vessels for paternity.

A selection of biblical narratives was made to elucidate this negation through the structure of the texts by using an interdisciplinary method which combines a feminist hermeneutic with Russian Formalism. Previous feminist theologies like that of Ilana Pardes, Phyllis Trible and Esther Fuchs have assisted in highlighting the presentations of the mother and her role in the texts. Formalism has allowed a rejection of authorial context and intent; the study is synchronic, i.e. focus is on the text and its internal structures.

Upon examination, the narratives have shown that the mother’s textual life span is chiefly limited to achieving maternity, but that as a mother she is in secondary position to the father, has no creative powers of her own, and lacks parental rights. The maternal body is entirely excluded from the Creation narratives, it is the sole reason for infertility, and it is rigidly controlled by the Father-God.

Search Words: feminist theology, biblical mothers, barrenness, creative power, patriarchy
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6. **Sources and Literature** ..........................................................................................
1. Introduction
This study is about the narrative presentations of the maternal body and maternity in the Hebrew Bible, as a woman, I have often felt mixed emotions about the role of its female characters as they are subjected to bothersome limitations. Ilana Pardes writes, “The biblical woman appears on stage only when she is marriageable, and her stay there is determined, generally speaking, by the impact of her maternal position on the status of her (favorite) son.”¹ Most women of the Hebrew Bible are mothers, their speech is typically directed towards childbearing or rearing, yet while the figure of the mother is central in terms of the biology procreation, the individual mother-figures present problematic visions of an underlying patriarchal hierarchy supported by a narrative ideology of the Father-God’s exclusive creative power over human life. Literary theorist Northrop Frye posits that there is a societal necessity of myth, but also that there is a social authority and coercion enabled by a unified mythology.² This topic was chosen due to the continued influence and social authority of these myths, an influence which necessitates the continued examination of them and the information they contribute with to the worldview of contemporary society.

1.1. Purpose and framing questions
The purpose of this study is to examine the narrative presentation and structural negation of mothers in the Hebrew Bible.

- How is the mother and the maternal body presented in the Creation narratives?
- How is the mother and the maternal body presented in the Hebrew Bible?
- How is the mother and the maternal body negated in the Hebrew Bible?

1.2. Material and Method
1.2.1. Material
The focus of the study is the Hebrew Bible; therefore the primary source has been the Jewish Study Bible with a translation of the Tanakh made by the Jewish Publication Society based upon traditional Hebrew texts. Additionally a version of the Torah, also using a JPS translation, has been used.

1.2.2. Method
This study has used an interdisciplinary method with a qualitative approach. A feminist hermeneutic has been combined with Russian Formalism and elements of intertextuality

¹ Pardes, 1992:75
² Frye, 1983:51
(the interdependent relationship between texts). The use of a feminist hermeneutic is here intended to suggest a sort of resistance reading, the interpretation will be focused on the way textual meaning is communicated to understand how it reflects the human actions and their cultural institutions as presented in the text; the resistance takes the shape of interpreting against a patriarchal tradition by placing female concerns in primary focus. A “feminist” hermeneutic is also intended to reflect the ideology of the previous research which the study leans on.

Formalism was chosen because the approach views authorial intent and context as negligible, looking to literature as the sum of stylistic devices; this study will therefore take a synchronic approach by not placing any emphasis on authorial sources or canonical processes in regards to the biblical narratives. This liberation from outside influences allows for a focus on the text as read by the layman, i.e. focusing on the form of the narratives negates the need for specialized knowledge, and enables a reading of what the text says by judging how it says it.

The literary synchronic approach is relatively young in the field of biblical interpretation but while its value to the field has been acknowledged, Formalism remains uncommon. The flaw of the method is its resistance to definitions; when describing the evolution of the Formal Method one of its originators, Boris Eichenbaum, wrote that:

A program is a handy thing for critics, but not at all characteristic of our method. Our scientific approach has had no such prefabricated program or doctrine, and has none. In our studies we value a theory only as a working hypothesis to help us discover and interpret facts and use them as the material of our research. We are not concerned with definitions […] nor do we build general theories […] We posit specific principles and adhere to them insofar as the material justifies them.  

This inherently untethered structure can present a problem, but by anchoring it in a feminist interpretation it will structure the general outline of this study through focus on text and technique. Specifically the terms fabula and syuzhet will help structure the narratives. Fabula signifies the story, the basic outline and chronological ordering of

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3 Vikström, 2005:109
4 Cuddon (ed.), 2014: 327-328
5 Amit, 2001:12-13
6 Eichenbaum, 2010:925
events. *Syuzhet* signifies the plot, i.e. the way the story is told, with all its specific details and organization.\(^7\)

1.3. Theory

This study operates under the theory that there is a structural negation of the mother and of the maternal body which denies and suppresses the mother’s role and feminine functions of reproduction. This structural negation involves making the male gender normative and the female gender a vessel for children, children created for man and by the Father-God.

The theory has been formed from readings of feminist interpretations of biblical texts dealing with the female condition; though there are many interpretations within this field, there is a general theme of struggling to grapple with the maternal role. Especially inspiring for the formulation of this theory have been the thoughts of Alice Fontaine and Esther Fuchs. The former clearly delineates the problem of femininity and reproduction in her piece “The Abusive Bible” wherein she tackles the disappearance of goddesses in the texts, the problematic image of God as patriarchal father and its deforming effects on ideas of the deity and its legitimatization of male power,\(^8\) she notes that:

> Powers that have to do with women’s ‘biological creativity’ are transferred wholesale to the father-god, who is now considered to be the one who opens and closes the womb […] The pragmatic effect has been a lessening of women’s visible role in the creation of life.\(^9\)

Equally important is Fuchs’ ideas about the presentation of mother-figures in the texts, she notes that the only context where woman directly communicates with Yahweh is procreative, but that in comparison to father-figures the mothers are severely limited, writing that:

> The parental role played by the father-figures constitutes only one aspect in the character, one that contributes to the depth and many-sidedness of this character. It does not eclipse his other qualities. […] the biblical mother-figures attain neither the human nor the literary complexity of their male counterparts. The patriarchal framework of the biblical story prevents the mother figure from becoming a full-fledged *human* role model, while its androcentric perspective confines her to a limited literary role, largely subordinated to the biblical male protagonists.\(^{10}\)

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\(^7\) Eichenbaum, 2010:923-924  
\(^8\) Fontaine, 2001: 103-104  
\(^9\) Fontaine, 2001: 105  
\(^{10}\) Fuchs, 1985: 136
Their presentations highlight the idea of the Father-God assuming creative power while the father-figure serves a complex parental role to which the mother is subordinated. With these aspects in mind the principle of the theory is the assumption that the negation of the mother and her body is both theological and narratological. These two aspects relate to form and content, relating to the divine as well as the human.

a) *Theological negation*: meaning that the communicated meaning of the divine negates the mother and the maternal body. This meaning is thematic and though it is supported by the structure of the narratives, it is not dependent on their specific forms but primarily how the forms promote certain content. This theological aspect enables the inclusion of narratives with variant forms, such as the Creation narratives, because the principle applied looks to the overarching themes which unite beyond the boundaries of form.

b) *Narratological negation*: meaning that the structure of the narratives negates the mother and maternal body. This aspect is primarily related to the form of the text and can be described as the method of communicating the theological negation, which it does through the structure which shapes the meaning of content.

Formalism typically collapses the distinction between content and form; here any kind of definite distinction between the two should therefore be understood as misleading and their separation is only meant to highlight strata of narrative functions. While the theological aspect is not reliant on the *consistent* form of all narratives, its content is still deeply intertwined with the form of the individual narratives and their thematic structures; and the narratological focus on form is inseparable from the content, because form informs the ideological structure which creates content. Thusly the theory is that the structural negation of the mother and the maternal body is stratified through both method of communication and through what is being communicated.

1.4. Areas of investigation
Due to the nominal limitation of maternal presence in the Creation narratives, these are examined as a separate unit, with an understanding that their positioning of the mother and the maternal body is formative for the narratives. The selection criteria for the Biblical mothers chosen for this study are; tension in the reproductive process between the mother and the father, or tension between the mother and the Father-God. Based on these criteria
the selected mothers are; Eve; Sarah; Rachel; Hannah. Some attention will also be paid to
Hagar, Leah and Peninnah, as well as the father-figures.

1.5. Disposition
Following a three-parted structure based upon the framing question the themes explored in
this study are; the mother and the maternal body in Creation; Eve as mother-figure; and
barren women. The research part of the study begins by explaining and highlighting the
biblical narratives related to each theme, this portion is structured through formalism, and
the biblical mothers are referred to as the subjects of the narrative due to the focus of this
study. Then it moves into previous research, primarily by feminist scholars, regarding the
selected biblical mothers. The analysis portion then attempts to extend the understanding
of the narratives by weaving them together with the research. The analysis is followed by a
discussion directly structured after the framing questions of the study; its goal is to show
where the research of this study agrees or disagrees with the work of the other scholars
discussed. The conclusion summarizes the work and its findings, tying it together with its
guiding theory.

1.6. Earlier Research
The research leaned upon for this study is primarily, but not exclusively, from feminist
perspectives. These sources have been chosen for their relevancy on the topic of
reproduction and motherhood, the selection includes; Countertraditions in the Bible (Ilana
Pardes); Sing, O Barren One (Mary Callaway); The literary characterization of mothers
and sexual politics in the Hebrew Bible (Esther Fuchs); Gaia and God (Rosemary Radford
Ruether); God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality and Genesis 22: The Sacrifice of Sarah
(Phyllis Trible).

The inclusion of Esther Fuchs, Mary Callaway and Rosemary Radford Ruether –
culturally cued readers who read the texts in their social and historical contexts –
contribute with diachronic (historical) sensibilities intended to enlighten and deepen the
synchronic understanding of the female literary form in general. Their readings are
sometimes focused on separate characters, but chiefly focus on the role of the woman, her
body, and her role as mother and the patriarchal structures which confine her.

Ilana Pardes inclusion is merited due to her resistance reading of traditional narratives, a
reading she has dubbed “countertraditions”, through which she highlights the narrative
structure around, and the perspectives of, female characters. Her focus is literary, placing
emphasis on linguistics, narratology and intertextuality. Her understanding of Eve’s role in Creation and as mother have been of particular value.

Phyllis Trible, whose hermeneutic focus is literary and linguistic, was included because her readings of the Creation narratives provide a necessary contrast to other feminist readings; she also contributes with a radical and deep insight into the Sarah-narrative.

Other scholars have been leaned on to a lesser extent, then mainly to contribute with understanding for a certain character or situation. In addition to the feminist scholars Joel B. Wolowelsky has been leaned on for his invaluable insights to the Rachel-narrative.

2. Investigation

2.1. The mother and the maternal body in Creation

*Subject:* Eve

*Secondary Subjects:* Adam, the Father-God.

*Fabula:* Creation of mankind occurs *ex nihilo* at the hand of the Father-God, a second narrative follows where man is crafted out of the earth and woman is created out of the man’s side, she is named by him.

*Syuzhet:* The creation of mankind appears initially in Genesis 1:27 where the focus is on creation in God’s image, not gender. The Father-God acts alone, without a consort, there is no maternal body or mother present in the creation. In the second narrative, the creation of the man (2:7) is separated from that of the woman (2:21-23). Man is crafted out of the earth from which he gets his name (ʼadamah) and the woman is crafted because the man needs a fitting companion, he is put to sleep by the Father-God and out of his rib woman is created. This creation is also steered by the Father-God, as he creates by hand using select materials, without a maternal consort or a need for a maternal body or its functions. Adam then names the new creation Woman (2:23) because she is made from man (man – ʼish, woman – ʼishah), and later her names her Eve (ḥawwa) meaning “mother of all living” (3:20). This is the second suggestion of a maternal presence in the Creation narratives, the introduction of a maternal figure occurs in 3:16 wherein Eve’s maternal role begins with the Father-God’s proclamation of the severe pain she will experience during childbirth, beyond these references the mother and maternal body are lacking from the Creation narratives.

2.2. The mother and the maternal body in the Hebrew Bible

2.2.1 *Eve as Mother-Figure*

*Subject:* Eve
Secondary Subject: the Father-God

Tertiary Subjects: Adam, Cain, Abel, Seth

Fabula: The birth of the primary couple’s children – Cain, Abel and Seth.

Syuzhet: Eve’s maternal role truly begins when she becomes a mother in Genesis 4:1 when she births and names Cain. The birth of Abel, Cain’s brother, follows in 4:2. In Genesis 4:25 Eve receives a replacement son for Abel who has been murdered by Cain.

2.2.2. Barren Women

Subjects: Sarah, Rachel, Hannah

Secondary Subjects: Hagar, Leah, Peninnah

Tertiary Subjects: Abraham, Jacob, Elkanah, Eli, the Father-God

Fabula: Barren woman despaired by the presence of a fertile rival, receives little understanding from her husband, her womb is opened by the Father-God, and a son is born.

Syuzhet Sarah: In her introduction Sarah is immediately presented as barren (Gen. 11:30), she later understands that the Father-God is keeping her barren and decides to use her maidservant, Hagar, as a surrogate (16:2). Hagar becomes Abraham’s concubine and conceives a child; she then looks down upon Sarah, who blames Abraham for this. He tells her to do with Hagar as she pleases; Sarah treats the maid so harshly that Hagar runs away and only comes back upon the Father-God’s insistence. When Hagar’s son is born, he is attributed to Abraham not Sarah, and even though it is Hagar who is told what to name the child, Abraham is credited with naming Ishmael (16:3-15). In Genesis 17 God promises Abraham that Sarah shall bear him as son to be named Isaac, Abraham laughs because they are so old (17:17), and when Sarah overhears the news she too laughs and is scolded by God (18:11-12). In Genesis 21 Sarah conceives and bears Isaac, her attitude towards Ishmael changes, she doesn’t want Isaac to share inheritance with the son of a slave and demands that Abraham throws them out. Though concerned Abraham, after reassurance from the Father-God, complies and Hagar and Ishmael are sent into the desert, Hagar is distraught by this and the peril her son is in, but they are saved by the Father-God (21:10-19). Sarah almost loses her own son in Genesis 22 (the Akedah) when God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to prove his loyalty. She dies in Genesis 23 separated from Abraham. She appears as a maternal symbol for Israel in Isaiah (51:1-3).

Syuzhet Rachel: Rachel is the beautiful and beloved wife of Jacob. He is also married to her older sister Leah who is less loved but fertile (Gen. 29:30-35). The barren
Rachel grows envious after her sister has birthed four sons, she demands children from Jacob, who rebukes her. He posits that it is not his but God’s place to decide over childbearing (30:1-2). Rachel uses her maidservant Billah as a surrogate, Billah conceives two sons by Jacob whom Rachel names (30:6-8). Leah then gives Jacob her maid Zilpah, and receives and names two sons (30:9-13). After this Leah’s son Reuben brings home mandrakes, Rachel makes a request for them and is rebuked by her sister, Rachel then promises that she’ll trade Jacob for the night in exchange for them; Leah agrees and tells their husband she has hired him for the night. Leah then conceives a fifth and sixth son and lastly a daughter (30:15-21). Rachel then finally conceives and bears Joseph; in her naming-speech of him she makes a request for another son (30:22-24). Before Rachel becomes pregnant again the whole family leaves the service of Laban (father of Rachel and Leah), who owns a pair of household idols that Rachel steals upon her departure (31:19). When Laban looks for the idols Jacob swears that anyone who is found with them will not remain alive, they are however not found because Rachel is sitting on them (31:32-35). Rachel later dies giving birth to her second son, naming him with her last breath, a name which Jacob changes (35:16-18). Rachel appears as a maternal symbol in the Book of Ruth (4:11) and in Jeremiah (31:15-22).

**Syuzhet Hannah:** Hannah is the infertile, but favorite, wife of Elkanah. Greatly distressed by her barrenness she is taunted by her fertile rival (the second wife Peninnah), and her husband shows little understanding for her distress (1 Sam 1:1-8). Hannah turns directly to the Father-God in passionate prayer; she is mistaken for a drunk by the high priest Eli who scolds her for her behavior. Hannah explains herself and Eli tells her to go in peace and blesses her wish to be granted (1:11-13). She is remembered by the Father-God, conceives and bears Samuel. After the child is weaned Hannah gives him to the priest Eli as promised (1:27-28), she then exults in the Lord and the triumph she has gained through him (2:1-5). She visits her son each year and Elkanah is blessed by Eli, wishing him more offspring by Hannah, the Lord notices and she bears three more sons and two daughters (2:20-21).

2.3. Negating the mother and the maternal body
2.3.1. *The mother and the maternal body in Creation*

The narratives of Creation entirely lack the biological process of conception, gestation and birth, the Father-God of the narrative works without a consort, creating grown humans out of materials like dust and bone. Literary theorist Phyllis Trible is untroubled by the lack of
maternity in Creation, she finds joy and equality in both narratives, and views woman as the zenith of creation. Rosemary Radford Ruether views that the myth less favorably, not just a suppression of the female power, but even a suppression of the memory of it, she writes that, “the story banishes entirely the birthing mother as the source of human life (...) Woman as mother is not only overthrown but disappears, a woman as wife is ‘created’ as a secondary being, adjunct to her husband.” Mary Callaway argues that the myth shows an attempt to create a new theological message demythologizing the feminine nature of giving birth by removing the presence of a goddess. For Callaway the name “Eve” is an indication that the woman once played a more significant role in the creation narrative. Ilana Pardes argues that Eve actually does not receive the name until after all has been created and already named by the Father-God and Adam; she argues that the naming along with the Creation narrative, serves as a reversal of sex roles where woman is: “denied her role as mother, as creatress, by both God and Adam.” For Mieke Bal the naming of Eve indicates her imprisonment in motherhood, even Trible, who finds joy in the Creation of woman, views the naming of Eve as problematic because it shows that unity between the primary couple has been ruptured. This second naming of woman follows the pattern of Adam naming the animals, thereby connecting Eve’s status with inferiority and subservience. The hierarchy of Creation, per Pardes, shows God as the Creator, Adam as God’s son and Eve as Adam’s daughter, the mother thusly has no real part in creation and woman is the child of man.

2.3.2. Eve as Mother-Figure
Eve’s role as a mother begins as she is told that she will bear children in severe pain (Gen. 3:16), she becomes a physical mother when she states, “I have a gained a male child with the help of the LORD” (Gen. 4:1) For Ilana Pardes this is a negation of Eve’s role as a challenger of male dominion and she favors a translation which renders the same phrase, “I have a created a man (equally/together) with the LORD,” in the Hebrew, “qaniti ‘ish ‘et YHWH.” This is interpreted as a boast and Eve’s rejection of the subordination of woman and motherhood subjected on her in Creation, she does this by taking pleasure in her own

11 Trible, 1978:99-105
12 Radford Ruether, 1994:179
13 Callaway, 1986:74
14 Pardes, 1992:40
15 Bal, 1987:78
16 Trible, 1978:133-134
17 Pardes, 1992:54
18 Pardes, 1992:49
creation and insisting upon her own generative powers, but not only that, by using *’ish* (man) instead of *yeled* (child), Pardes views Eve’s naming-speech as a response to Adam who made himself the normative body in Genesis 2:23 by saying that woman (*’ishah*) came from man (*’ish*). Eve turns this around in her speech, commenting on the displacement of the generative powers of the maternal body done by Adam, by positing that *she* has the creative powers to create him (man) with the Father-God.19 Pardes notes that this is temporary and that Eve is cowed in terms of creative powers and she learns to respect God as the Creator, not a co-creator, after her first son has committed fratricide and she is “provided with”, rather than gains, her third son – Seth (4:25). While Eve is humbled in terms of creative power in relation to the Father-God, Pardes notes that she still rejects Adam’s part in creation by treating the birth as a transaction between the Father-God and her alone.20

2.3.3. Barren women
The barren woman who miraculously bears a son occurs several times in the Hebrew Bible. Esther Fuchs views this as a presentation of the Father-God’s exclusive creative control over human life and of women’s powerlessness over their own fertility. For Fuchs, the underlying theme is a male need to control female reproductive powers; the narratives support a patriarchal ideology and create an institution of motherhood. This serves patriarchal purposes by devaluing the role of mothers and questioning the mother-figures natural ability to bear children, simultaneously it negates any other option beyond motherhood for female characters by denying them even the possibility of not desiring children. Fuchs further remarks that the Father-God only shows an interest in assisting the fertility of women who are married, i.e. where paternity is determined.21 Sarah, for Fuchs, is an example of a barren mother whose narrative stresses that children are blessed to father’s due to his superior qualities and despite the pettiness of their wife, and also stresses the mere instrumental role of the mother in conception by underlining the paternal authority of Abraham as the true recipient of the child.22 The Sarah-narrative also stresses the intimately linked motifs of motherhood and female rivalry; Fuchs views the relationship of Sarah and Hagar as a literary strategy which deftly negates sisterhood as an

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19 Pardes, 1992:48
20 Pardes, 1992:53-54
21 Fuchs, 1985: 129-135
22 Fuchs, 1985:120-122
alternative to the patriarchal system.\textsuperscript{23} Mother-figures often do not interact at all, nor is their perspective valued, J. Cheryl Exum points to their marginalized characterization primarily serving the interests of the male-figures, in particular the interests of their sons, “the future patriarchs.”\textsuperscript{24} Radford Ruether finds negation of the mother in the Sarah-narrative as well, but through the \textit{Akedah} (the Binding of Isaac) wherein God asks Abraham to kill his favorite son. Sarah is absent and “the right of the mother to her own children is so totally negated as to be absent as even a factor in the drama.”\textsuperscript{25} Trible takes a different issue with the \textit{Akedah}, for her it represents not a sacrifice of Isaac, but a sacrifice of Sarah by patriarch to patriarchy. She highlights three threads of the narrative;

1) That possessive language is used by the narrator to stress a paternal-filial connection between Abraham and Isaac, unlike Sarah however Abraham does not himself, through direct speech, use possessive language when referring to Isaac (e.g. “my son”).

2) That Sarah’s casting out of Hagar and Ishmael in Genesis 21:10 is a foreshadowing of the \textit{Akedah}, the two stories mirror each other according to Trible and Sarah’s absence from the \textit{Akedah} disallows a reconciliation between the two mothers as well as a healing of Sarah’s character, she is left as a resentful and egotistic woman whose last words are the banishment of Hagar and Ishmael.

3) That attachment is Sarah’s problem, not Abraham’s, the logic of the narrative supports that she is the one whose loyalty ought to be tested.\textsuperscript{26} Trible further points out the limitations put on maternal figures by patriarchy wherein they are cast out of the narratives without ceremony as soon as there is no direct need for them. Sarah is quickly dismissed after the \textit{Akedah} with a lean obituary which includes a suggestion of separation between her and Abraham.\textsuperscript{27} Sarah’s return as a maternal symbol after death is, however, viewed positively by Mary Callaway, who regards it as Sarah’s reinvention as the spiritual mother of Israel.\textsuperscript{28}

Rachel’s barrenness and maternity is dealt with in terms of character flaws. In “Rachel, a mother of Israel”, Joel B. Wolowelsky writes about the lack of \textit{hesed} (kindness) the Father-God grants Rachel, connecting this with her flaws as deceptive, self-centered, and self-assured in her quest for children. It is not until Rachel shows emotional growth

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Fuchs, 1985:131-132
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Exum, 2015:103-104
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Radford Ruether, 1994:179
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Trible, 1991:187-189
  \item \textsuperscript{27} Trible, 1991:190
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Callaway, 1986:58-62
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
that she earns *hesed* and is allowed children.  

Pardes focus is on Rachel as ambitious to the point of being threatening, and therefore necessitating her barrenness and early death as a criticism of characteristics which are male prerogatives. 

Esther Fuchs mentions the suggestion that Rachel’s early death may be a punishment for her disrespect towards the Father-God’s creative powers in Genesis 30:1, but focuses on how Rachel’s naming-speech of her last son is the *only* suggestion of a mother’s complaint and protest against the maternal role, she underlines the negation of this complaint because it is erased out of the Biblical record when Jacob changes his son’s name and the narratives support his choice over Rachel’s, i.e. the paternal voice trumps the maternal will.

Hannah’s character is by Fuchs hailed as a heroine who circumvents the literary constellation of patriarchal structures, becoming more than an auxiliary to a husband with an exaggerated sense of self-importance and a lack of understanding. 

Cynthia Ozick argues that Hannah’s narrative, through the husband, becomes a premature feminism where, in spite of the contextual emphasis on motherhood, the moral imagination of Elkanah presents recognition of a woman’s personhood and value even without children. 

Talmudic *Aggadah* (rabbinic narrative) suggests that Hannah was a prophetess, credits her as the inventor of a new name for the Father-God, and suggests that her prayer is a criticism of the Father-God’s failure to grant her children. 

Marcia Falk also argues that Hannah, who begins as an ordinary woman whose only desire is to become a mother, ends as a prophetess seeking a new world order. Falk highlights that Hannah legitimizes her own voice by praying directly to the Father-God at a time when sacrifice was *de rigeur* for public worship, and further remarks that Hannah’s brave response to the high priest is something that rabbis have regarded as a rightly raised question of who holds spiritual authority. She faults the rabbis however with silencing Hannah’s legacy by failing to give the women of Israel (Hannah’s daughters) a place in the institution of communal prayer. Beyond being the mother of Samuel, Hannah’s legacy, Falk suggests, shows that while the mortal men around her misunderstand Hannah, but the Father-God not only hears her but grants her request, legitimizing her voice. By not taking this seriously the rabbis have created a liturgy which addresses an exclusively male divinity and denies women their full

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29 Wolowelsky, 2015:14–16
30 Pardes, 1992:70–73
31 Fuchs, 1985:122, 132
32 Fuchs, 1985: 125-126
33 Ozick, 1994:89-90
34 Grintz, 2007:325
humanity by negating to express the language Hannah represents; the language of the heart.  

There is beyond all these things a continual negation of all these mothers through the patrilineal attribution of their children to the husbands, Carole Fontaine views this as the maternal body being turned into a commodity where the male sex usurps the symbolic roles in the production of life and turns the mother into a vessel for paternity. The negation of the mother as a vessel is supported by their limited textual life span, Fuchs and Pardes both agree that once the favorite son is born, or on his own, the mother is typically vanished off stage.

3. Analysis  
3.1. The mother and the maternal body in Creation
The first Creation narrative reads: “And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27) There is an ambivalence in this brevity, the structure of the sentence invokes a male pronoun twice in regard to what is being created in God's image (“man” and “him”), and thrice in regard to creator (“His”, “He”, “He”) before settling for a plural (“them”). The structural placement of equality indicates the prioritization of the God/Man connection and a stress of the normative status of the male gender. This normative status is supported when woman is created because the male needs a “fitting helper” (2:18), her creation lacks the autonomy of the male who was created for his own sake.

So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman and He brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This one at last is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman (‘ishah), for from man (‘ish) was she taken. (2:21-23)

There is a surgical and rather mechanical modus operandi of the Father-God; he creates as a builder would, by selecting appropriate materials and constructing externally, i.e. as noted by feminist scholars, foregoing the creative aspects with feminine attributes such as gestation and birth. The lack of these internal and organic functions negates the need for a

35 Falk, 1994:97-102  
36 Fontaine, 2001:107  
37 Fuchs, 1985:135, Pardes, 1992:75
female consort and enables a subversion narrative which allows for peaceful and pain-free “birthing process” of the primary human beings. Adam’s naming-speech is a part of the subversive aspects as it indicates the creative powers of the male rather than female body, “bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh” and “from man was the taken” is indicative of a parental-child bond, and usurps woman’s natural function. That he is the primary (normative) agent, is linguistically supported by the base morpheme “man” (‘ish), and the derivate form of woman (‘ishah), through the prefix “wo-”, or in Hebrew the suffix “-ah”. The naming-speech not only strengthens the suggestive parent-child but also puts man in the central position as subject in woman’s birth narrative. Eve is the object in her own creation and the maternal body is made entirely irrelevant.

The Creation narratives structure a contrast to the future creative role of the mother, the Father-God tells Eve that “I will make most severe you pangs in childbearing; in pain shall you bear children” (3:16). There is a problematic aspect of this motif in that it is inextricably linked with ideas of sin and punishment due to the structure of the narrative. The maternal body and its functions are entirely absent from the narrative until this point, its position in connection with Eve’s first transgression and banishment from Eden suggests that the woman’s status as birth-giver is an inferior and arduous process, even a cursed task, compared with the creation of the Father-God. In 3:20 woman receives her personal name, “The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.” Imprisoned into motherhood, or denied a participative role in creation, it is most notable in comparison to Adam’s lack of naming. His personal name derives from the material he was made from, ha’adam out of ’adamah, his gender name (‘ish) is created as he names the woman (‘ishah), effectively suggesting that he names himself. Eve holds no naming rights, is not named for the material she’s made from, but rather named to imply her future role in society as the mother which has until now been entirely lacking in the narrative.

3.2. Eve as Mother-Figure
The syuzhet of Eve’s motherhood includes a structured parallel in the narrative’s beginning and its end, significant to Eve’s maternal status. It starts, “Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have a gained a male child with the help of the LORD’” (Gen. 4:1) alternative transliterations suggests Eve saying, “I have created a man equally/together with the LORD”, though one reading is more bold, both of them record

38 Pardes, 1992:49
Eve placing herself at the center of the conception by asserting either her gain or creation with the Father-God, ignoring Adam in her statement. The narrative ends, “Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, meaning ‘God has provided me with another offspring in place of Abel,’ for Cain had killed him” (4:25) The parallel is found in the indication of primary subject through naming, i.e. “the man knew his wife Eve” versus “Adam knew his wife again.” Eve begins as subject in a speech where the woman, per Pardes, treats the Father-God as a sexual partner and, through her hubris, questions his position as the one and only Creator.\(^{39}\) The shift in 4:25 shows a demotion of Eve and a promotion of Adam to primary subject. Eve loses her name as well as her voice, going from a direct speech to an indirect naming. The second naming further shows a humbling which indicates Eve’s altered position; “God has provided me” as opposed to “I have gained” suggests that Seth is a gift from the Father-God, not a personal creation. The importance of this parallel is underlined by the birth of Eve’s second son which occurs in-between the two, “She then bore his brother Abel” (4:2). The brevity indicates its relative insignificance in contrast to the other two birth-scenes, neither Eve nor the Father-God is credited for the creation of Abel, nor does the narrative include a naming-speech further indicating its inessential status.

3.3. The Barren Women

The fabula of the three barren women is the same and it presents a thematic patterning which emphasizes the unifying elements lurking behind the slight variations in syuzhet. This thematic patterning primarily presents that:

1) The Father-God has absolute creative power; the maternal body is entirely dependent on him.

2) The opening of a woman’s womb is conditional; the barren woman carries some kind of personal blame or responsibility for her state.

In addition to these patterns the plot is supported by two interwoven literary techniques; the fertile rival and the unsupportive husband. The presence of a fertile rival is suggestive of two things:

1) Their presence ascertains the lack of male infertility. The lack of children from Sarah, Rachel and Hannah is not due to their husband’s potency but rather the fault of the woman herself, i.e. the rival is potency proof for the man.

\(^{39}\) Pardes, 1992:46
2) Their presence nullifies the option of sisterhood over patriarchy, it also serves to contribute to gender attributions which suggest that inter-female relationships are fraught with cruelty (Sarah and Hagar), envy, pettiness, bickering (Rachel and Leah), taunting (Hannah and Peninnah), and exploitation by the appropriation of another’s body (Sarah, Rachel and Leah). These disputes between dichotomously positioned mothers and non-mothers are not of much concern to the father-figures, limiting the amount of attention and depth of these perspectives get in the narrative.

This technique links with the unsupportive husband technique concerning the peripheral male characters whose positions in the narratives show a dismissive attitude towards the problems of the infertile wife. The unsupportive husband can be seen in three instances:

And Sarai said to Abram, ‘The wrong done me is your fault! I myself put my maid in your bosom; now that she sees that she is pregnant, I am lowered in her esteem. The LORD decide between you and me! Abram said to Sarai, ‘Your maid is in your hands. Deal with her as you think right.’ (Gen. 16:5-6)

When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or I shall die!’ Jacob was incensed at Rachel and said, ‘Can I take the place of God, who has denied you fruit of the womb? (Gen. 30:1-2)

Moreover, her rival, to make her miserable, would taunt her that the LORD had closed her womb. This happened year after year: Every time she went up to the House of the LORD, the other would taunt her, so that she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah said to her, ‘Hannah, why are you crying and why aren’t you eating? Why are you so sad? Am I not more devoted to you than ten sons? (1 Sam. 1:6-8)

In the case of Sarah and Abraham it is notable that, a) she blames Abraham for Hagar’s feelings, suggesting he may somehow be the cause of it, b) she invokes the Father-God, suggesting that divine judgement is necessary to do her justice in the situation, c) Abraham’s reaction is one of detachment, he seems little concerned with Sarah’s anger or whatever fate lies in store for Hagar. Altogether he is dismissive of the women’s troubled relationship over maternal rights, as if it doesn’t concern him.
In the case of Rachel and Jacob it is notable that Rachel’s despair is met with anger, this suggests that her direct speech lays blame on Jacob for her infertility, or rather for his passivity in the matter as he could have used his special relationship to the Father-God and prayed for her condition. But Jacob places the blame on Rachel by stating that God has denied her fruit of the womb. “Can I take the place of God?” he asks, suggesting the misdirection of her words, he is not the one with creative power. Thereby Jacob effectively distances himself from the entire situation, taking no responsibility for the infertility but placing sole responsibility for the matter on Rachel and her body.

In the case of Hannah there are three notable differences to the preceding narratives; a) she does not speak to her husband, he addresses her; b) she is actively and continuously tortured by her rival; c) she responds to her childlessness with sadness rather than anger. Elkanah’s speech is possibly indicative that he finds a value in Hannah as a person, regardless of her status as a mother, but in the context of Peninnah’s continuous taunting Elkanah seems at best clueless, and at worst indifferent, to Hannah’s experience. Not only does he not rebuke the rival for her harsh treatment (comparative to Abraham’s disinterest in inter-female disputes), but he creates a situation of utter dependency. Hannah’s social status and dignity rests upon being able to produce sons, Elkanah’s love is only serviceable to her if he lives, should she be widowed without any sons her status in society may suffer.

The narrative pattern presented through these techniques is one of paternal privilege; it causes the lack of urgency in the husbands, and tension between the barren and the fertile women. Abraham, Jacob and Elkanah can afford to treat their wives with aloofness or lack of understanding because they have already secured their paternal lineage through their lesser wives or consorts; likewise, the rivals have a secured social status and a vested interest in protecting the interests of their own children over the potential children of the barren woman. The narratives all show a lack of male involvement in inter-female relationships and disputes, suggestive of a lack of importance to these matters.

Beyond the techniques discussed above, there is also the thematic patterning of creative power and personal blame. The narratives are all widely understood to imply that the Father-God is the sole creator of human life through this reproductive control and miraculous births granted to long-time barren women, to investigate this, and the

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40 Pardes, 1992:73
41 Ozcik, 1994:89
42 Fuchs, 1985:119
personal responsibility the women holds, the narratives will now be analyzed in separate units, one for each mother.

3.3.1. **Sarah**
Sarah directly states that her infertility is caused by God, “And Sarai said to Abram, ‘Look the LORD has kept me from bearing. Consort with thy maid; perhaps I shall have a son through her’” (16:2). Sarah lacks power over her own fertility and thereby appropriates another’s body to gain a child. This suggests a practice wherein Ishmael ought to legally be credited to Sarah, yet he never is. Hagar looks down upon Sarah and Abraham, as seen, refuses to assist his wife in the matter. When Ishmael is born it is clear that no matter her original intention, Sarah is removed from the situation; “Hagar bore a son to Abram, and Abram gave the son that Hagar bore him the name Ishmael” (16:15). Hagar resists her marginalization as a surrogate and appears to claim a full maternal role for her son; Sarah has attempted to negate Hagar’s motherhood, but is negated from it herself. Hagar however, though she can stand her ground against Sarah, is negated in the sense that Abraham usurps the name-giving speech which ought to belong to her, the Father-God has told Hagar, “You shall call him Ishmael” (Gen 16:11), yet Abraham claims that right. The birth of Ishmael touches on the pattern of personal blame as it demonstrates that Abraham’s fertility and character is not in question, consequently indicating that Sarah’s is.

In Genesis 17 Abraham and Sarah are blessed and Abraham is told by the Father-God that “I will give you a son by her (...) Sarah your wife shall bear you a son and you shall name him Isaac” (17:15-19). Sarah is absent at this annunciation, she is not told she is to have a child, and only finds out later by eavesdropping during the second annunciation.

They said to him, ‘Where is your wife Sarah? And he replied, ‘There, in the tent.’ Then one said, ‘I will return to you next year and your wife Sarah shall have a son!’ (…) Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years, Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, ‘Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment – with my husband so old?’ Then the LORD said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am? Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? I will return to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son.’ Sarah lied, saying, ‘I did not laugh’, for she was frightened. But He replied, ‘You did laugh.’ (18:9-15)
Sarah’s absence in Genesis 17, and her indirect presence (inside the tent) in Genesis 18, demonstrates her secondary position, it is Abraham who is twice told about the forthcoming child, and Abraham who is told what to name the child (placing Sarah at a lower status than Hagar), his primary position suggests that he is, as Fuchs says, the true recipient of the child. Sarah’s inferior status (shown through absence and lack of naming-privileges) suggests that her primary role is as a vessel through which to gain a legitimate child, rather than as a mother-figure. The delay in her finding out reveals that Abraham has not shared the information with her, indicating his lack of urgency or interest in the matter. Sarah’s marginalization is a structured suggestion of personal blame. Notable is the change of her phrase “with my husband so old” to “old as I am” (italics added), wherein the Father-God places the onus of impossibility on her body rather than Abraham’s, a suggestion that part of Sarah’s personal blame is the very essence of her feminine body. For Fuchs the juxtaposition of Abraham and Sarah in the annunciation of Isaac’s coming birth shows that her fertility is due “her husband’s magnanimity and despite her pettiness.”

Taking her character into account Sarah’s transgressions can be counted threefold; cruelty towards the pregnant Hagar (16:6); laughing at the Father-God’s promise of fertility and lying about it (18:15); cruelty towards Hagar and Ishmael by having them banished (21:10).

The first two transgressions can be linked to her deferred pregnancy. She drives Hagar away but as the servant returns, Sarah is kept barren for over a decade while her rival’s child thrives, which can be seen as Ishmael is thirteen years old when Isaac is first announced (17:25), and though she is not the only one to laugh (Abraham does as well in 17:17) she is the only one who lies about it and immediately after doing so she is kept waiting from Genesis 18 to Genesis 21 before she conceives when, “The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken” (21:1).

Isaac’s conception emphasizes the trustworthiness of the Father-God more so than Sarah’s maternal role, it underlines that creative control is conditional upon the grace of Father-God. Sarah, rather than Abraham, is however momentarily elevated to a focal position as recipient. Isaac’s birth then follows a structure which stresses paternity; “Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age” (21:2); “Abraham gave his new born son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac” (21:3). Structurally Sarah comes in

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43 Fuchs, 1985:120
44 Fuchs, 1985:121
third place when she finally speaks, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children! Yet I have borne a son in his old age” (21:7, italics added).

Though Sarah stresses that she has borne the child, and again remarks on Abraham’s age rather than her own, the centrality of Abraham in her final triumph of maternity and his name-giving rights are examples of Sarah’s instrumental position as a chosen vessel, along with her suggested unworthiness which has already judged by her primary absence, her disbelief in the promise of fertility, and her cruel disposition.

As a mother Sarah’s flaws are strengthened, in Genesis 21:10 she tells Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael because she does not want Isaac to share his inheritance with the son of a slave. After assurance from the Father-God Abraham complies even though, “the matter distressed Abraham greatly, for it concerned a son of his” (21:11). Sarah’s actions risks the life of Abraham’s first born and indicates the attachment she has for Isaac and thusly, per Trible, earns her a natural position in the Akedah narrative which follows as Sarah’s loyalty to Isaac may be greater than her loyalty to the Father-God. In the Akedah (Genesis 22) Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son in a test of loyalty to the Father-God, and in contrast to his expressed concern for Ishmael, Abraham does not argue, not even when he is told to, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac (…) offer him there as a burn offering” (22:2). The patriarch silently complies, “Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac” (22:3); “Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and put it on his son Isaac” (22:6, italics added).

The structure of the narrative stresses the paternal superiority of Abraham; he is again the only parent addressed, the Father-God twice mentions Isaac “your son” and the narrator (not Abraham) uses the possessive term “his son Isaac” to indicate a paternal-filial bond. Though it is said that Isaac is the loved son Abraham’s lack of concern suggests otherwise. The structure of the narrative is better suited to Sarah’s perspective as she has already made her preference clear, yet Sarah is not present in the narrative, not even mentioned peripherally, a clear indication of her (and the mother’s) lack of parental rights. It also indicates her lack of personhood and relevance by following the same secondary status shown in the announcement of Isaac’s birth, her perspective is excluded from his potential death scene. The narrative does not engage in Sarah’s reaction to this would-be sacrifice of her son, nor does it clarify if she ever finds out about it, what follows the Akedah is Sarah’s death, “Sarah died in Kiriath-arba – now Hebron – in the land of

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45 Trible, 1991:189
46 Radford Ruether, 1994:179
Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah…” (23:2). This is relevant as the narrative of Genesis 22 details that Abraham, “then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba” (22:19). Trible underlines that Genesis 23:2 specifically states that Abraham “went” to Sarah,\(^{47}\) i.e. the structure of the narrative distinctly separates the parents of Isaac during and after his near sacrifice, suggesting that they were never reconciled after the event. There is here a structured silencing of the mother’s voice through narrative elimination.

Sarah is referred to as a maternal symbol in Second Isaiah, “Look back to Abraham your father and to Sarah who brought you forth. For he was only one when I called him. But I blessed him and made him many” (Isa 51:2). The image of Sarah is the gestation and birth attributes associated with femininity and previously excluded from the Creation narrative. Mary Callaway views this as Sarah’s reinvention into the spiritual mother of Israel, and as the narrative continues with references to Eden, “(he) will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD” (51:3), she views the Father-God’s action here as equivalent to a new Creation.\(^{48}\) In-narrative there is ostensibly a more open attitude here towards the maternal body, however it is structured according the androcentrism already seen; Abraham is the first subject and credited with paternity; Sarah the secondary subject, is not named according to her parental role (mother), her status is suggested; the symbolic father retains his elevated status as Sarah is vanished and the father-figure receives exclusive focus in terms of having a relationship with the Father-God (“I called him”, “I blessed him”), and in terms of children (“made him many”). The maternal role of Sarah is one of continuous negation into a lesser position in terms of both rights and power.

3.3.2. Rachel

Rachel like Sarah is not afraid to argue with her husband, but unlike Sarah she delays her acceptance of the Father-God’s creative powers, as seen above she blames her husband for her lack of children, not the Father-God. The structure of the narrative does not forget the exclusive powers of the primary creator, rather it connects Rachel’s status as Jacob’s favorite wife with her barrenness, by stating the notice that the Father-God takes of her sister, “Leah was unloved and He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren” (Gen. 29:31), because she is unloved Leah the Father-God grants Leah hesed and allows her to bear four sons. The implication which results from this is that because she is loved Rachel goes

\(^{47}\) Trible, 1991:190
\(^{48}\) Callaway, 1986:58-62
without children. Jacob’s preference for her is strong; the narrative speaks of his love three times (29:18, 20, 30) and implies his preference for sleeping with her when Leah has to “hire” him for the night (30:15). Rachel’s feelings towards Jacob are not stated, as her feelings are exclusively related to motherhood. When she remains childless she makes use of a surrogate, “She said, ‘Here is my maid Billah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children” (30:3). While patrilineality is maintained, “Billah conceived and bore Jacob a son” (30:5), it is Rachel who claims the right to the naming-speech.

And Rachel said, “God has vindicated me; indeed, He has heeded my plea and given me a son.” Therefore she named him Dan. Rachel’s maid Billah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. And Rachel said, “A fateful contest I waged with my sister; yes, and I have prevailed.” So she named him Naphtali. (30:6-8)

Rachel’s name-giving speeches are indicative of her personality. In 30:1 she omits the Father-God from her need for children, and by the birth of Dan and Naphtali, she treats the Father-God as a partner in the transaction of conception and places herself center stage, appearing to ignore Jacob when she boasts, “God has vindicated me” and “I have prevailed.” Not only is she claiming a victory over barrenness on uncertain grounds (her own infertility remains), but she also posits a birth-giving contest between herself and her sister, mother of four, and states herself the winner. This self-centeredness suggests Rachel’s focus to satisfy her own needs, her sense of entitlement as well as her self-assurance. These flaws are underlined when her sister Leah uses her own handmaid Zilpah as a surrogate.

And when Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son, Leah said, “What luck!” So she named him Gad. When Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son, Leah declared, “What fortune!” meaning, Women will deem me fortunate. So she named him Asher. (30:10-13)

Leah’s naming-speeches arguably serve as a dialogue with Rachel, suggesting through creative humility that children are treasured gifts, rather than objects of redemption. While both sisters claim the right of maternal naming-speeches, the sons are all born “to Jacob”, i.e. maternity is in secondary position of importance to paternity.

Rachel so far has shown herself to be impulsive, demanding and self-centered; these personal flaws are connected with her infertility by implication, Rachel must earn fertility.
The Father-God does not appear to Jacob and announce the birth of a son; rather the
narrative presents the only direct dialogue between two rivaling women when Rachel asks
for mandrakes Leah’s son Reuben has found and Leah scolds her.

“Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take away my
son’s mandrakes?” Rachel replied, “I promise, he shall lie with you tonight, in return for
your son’s mandrakes” (30:15).

The mandrakes can be interpreted as fruits of fertility which would naturally explain their
value, but they may also be interpreted as toys Rachel wants to cheer herself up with, either way her desire for them shows her inclination to satisfy her own needs. As toys, she is willing to take them from a child. As fruits of fertility, she is willing to trade her husband for them, regardless of his will. Wolowelsky suggests that the trade actually shows a
humbling towards her sister’s plight, i.e. that Rachel learns how to earn hesed from the
Father-God as she, though it must have grieved her, is silent when the trade benefits Leah
with three more children. Leah has two more sons (for a total of six) and a daughter
(30:17-21), not until she has stopped bearing does Rachel conceive,

Now God remembered Rachel; God heeded her and opened her womb. She conceived and
bore a son, and said, “God has taken away my disgrace.” So she named him Joseph, which
is to say, “May the LORD add another son for me.” (30:22-24)

The narrative pattern of the Father-God’s creative power (the opening and closing of
wombs) remain a constant, Rachel must earn his attentions, and while her first speech shows an echo of her previous self-centeredness by focusing on her own disgrace, she quickly self-corrects through the humbled naming-speech which indicates that she now fully understands to whom creative control belongs. At this point she omits mentioning her husband, whom she previously credited with said control (30:1).

Between the birth of her first and last son, Rachel steals her father’s household gods,
the teraphim (31:19). This is played out in a largely comical scene where she hides them from her father by putting them under her saddle bag and telling him that she can’t get up because she is on her period and playing on the male fear of the female body to cover up her crime (31:34). Her action is remarkable because on the surface it is outside the female

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49 Wolowelsky, 2015:13
50 Wolowelsky, 2015:16
realm of maternity. Pardes views the theft as an example of Rachel growing ambitious to the point of being threatening to her husband as the teraphim may be token symbols of leadership, and she suggests that it is possible that Jacob is aware of who the thief is when he utters, “But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive!” (31:32); the idols go unfound but Rachel, who asked for children lest she die, ends up dying in childbirth not too long thereafter. 51

Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor. When her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Have no fear, for it is another boy for you.” But as she breathed her last – for she was dying – she named him Ben-oni (son of my suffering), but his father called him Benjamin (son of my right hand). (35:16-18)

The midwife’s consolation to the dying Rachel in effect makes her death is clausal to the birth of another son, suggesting that the need to be a mother (of sons) surpasses even life itself. The naming-speech indicates some bitterness on the part of Rachel which for Fuchs is the only allusion to a mother’s complaint against her maternal role, she also notes that it is the first time Jacob rejects the name of one of his sons, effectively deleting the maternal anguish from the record as the narrative endorses the father’s choice over the mother’s. 52

Rachel’s narrative is wholly structured around the pursuit of children, it is a need that surpasses her status as favorite wife, it causes tensions between her and those around her, and her death can be linked both to her deception and ambition, as well as to her earlier failure to acknowledge the Father-God’s exclusive role in creation in 30:1, 53 in both cases the thematic patterning suggests that her death lays at the hands of her own actions.

Rachel becomes a symbolic mother in two other narratives; “Thus said the LORD: A cry is heard in Ramah, wailing, bitter weeping – Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone” (Jer. 31:15); and “May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel!” (Ruth 4:11). As a maternal symbol, Rachel becomes a role model; she weeps for the Israelites in exile, as a mother to them all, and she is again a mother upon whom Israel is built and a role model for Ruth. Notably, though it is her older sister’s son (Judah) who belongs to the patrilineal genealogy of the man addressed in Ruth 4:11

51 Pardes, 1992:70, 72  
52 Fuchs, 1985:132-33  
53 Fuchs, 1985:123
(Boaz), Rachel is named first, indicating that even as a maternal symbol she is more beloved, possibly due to her ardent desire to achieve maternity at any cost.

3.3.3. Hannah

Hannah’s narrative begins with marginalization in the introduction of a story where she is the protagonist, yet is primarily presented in connection with her husband, displaying a narrative structure where even as a background character the father is more extensively described than the mother.

And there was one man from Ramathaim Zophim, from Mt. Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah and the name of the second was Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. (1 Samuel 1:1-2)

Elkanah’s importance is indicated through the extensive genealogy, as an otherwise peripheral character, his introduction serves as a paternal anchor for the female subject. As Fuchs points out, the structure of barrenness narratives necessitates that there be no doubt as to the paternity of the coming child, the Father-God does not assist single women. Hannah’s primary position in the introduction indicates her status as the favorite wife; she is then structurally demoted to the second place when she is introduced as childless. Her position mirrors Rachel’s, a connection which intimates that Hannah’s position as the favorite wife may be the reason for her barrenness. This is not a connection explicitly made, as it is for Rachel, and as Hanna’s barrenness does not appear to be anchored to personal flaws, beyond being a woman and it may suggest that barrenness can be a device of principle meant to show that creative power belongs exclusively to the Father-God. Hannah, unlike her precursors, seems aware of this principle. She does not argue with her husband, nor bargain with her rival, or make use of a surrogate; instead she turns to the Father-God directly, and fertility follows a structural portrayal of personal prayer and priestly blessing.

And she made this vow: “O LORD of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant

54 Fuchs, 1985:129
Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the LORD for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.” (1 Sam. 1:11)

Hannah is the first, according to rabbinic narrative, to use the term “LORD of Hosts”, this may indicate that she is a prophetess and the possessor some kind of spiritual status. The subsequent three-time reference to herself as “your maidservant” is a structure which indicates that Hannah is putting forwards her own merits, suggesting that she is without the transgressions “for which women die in childbirth.”55 Hannah is then, in her own eyes, blameless in her situation, but claims direct responsibility to amend it. The conditional vow she makes to dedicate her son to the service of the Father-God makes the eventual conception fully transactional in nature, furthermore, the implication of this vow is that the need to birth a male child surpasses keeping the child, i.e. it emphasizes the use of the maternal body as a vessel above the role of the mother-figure in the child’s life.

Hannah’s act of turning directly to the Father-God is extraordinary, especially in comparison to the round about ways of Sarah and Rachel, it is so extraordinary that the narrative itself remarks on her behavior as the priest Eli mistakes her uncommon silent prayer for drunkenness and scolds her for it. Hannah explains her actions and her grief, Eli bids her to go in peace saying, “May the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him” (1:17). It is that Hannah has to explain herself, and that she has the courage to do so, which interpreters have viewed as a questioning of spiritual authority. However, it is not until after the priestly blessing of Eli that Hannah appears to feel like she’s been heard because then she stops being sad and later she conceives.

Elkanah knew his wife Hannah and the LORD remembered her. Hannah conceived and at the turn of the year bore a son. She named him Samuel, meaning “I asked the LORD for him” (1:19-20)

The scene beings with assertion of paternity (Elkanah’s) and creative control (the Father-God remembering her implies that he is the reason for her fertility), Hannah then takes a tertiary position in the creation of Samuel. Her naming-speech follows the transaction of conception between women and the Father-God as Hannah focuses on their relationship and entirely omits her husband from the equation. Hannah does however show humility by making herself instrumental in the transaction and declaring the son a gift from the Father-

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55 Grintz, 2007:325
God. This creative humility is repeated when she fulfills the condition of her gift and gives her son to Eli, saying, “It was this boy I prayed for; and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him” (1:27). She then prays again and perpetuates the exclusion of sisterhood as an option to patriarchy by positioning barren and fertile women in a dichotomous and competitive relationship.

My heart exults in the LORD; I have triumphed through the LORD. I gloat over my enemies, I rejoice in your deliverance (...) While the barren woman bears seven, the mother of many is forlorn. (1 Sam. 2:1-5c-d)

Hannah’s humility is limited to her relationships with males figures, while the fabula focuses on her triumph in birthing a remarkable son, the suggestion of the syuzhet is that Hannah’s enemies are Peninnah and the women like her (i.e. other fertile women). Hannah’s final narrative span involves her visiting her son at the temple where she receives a second blessing from Eli.

Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife; and say, ‘May the LORD grant you offspring by this woman in place of the loan she made to the LORD’ (...) For the LORD took note of Hannah; she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. (2:20-21)

Though peripheral to the plot, Elkanah is placed in the central position of the blessing being named and designated as the proprietor of Hannah who, nameless, is simply referred to as “his wife” or “this woman”. Hearkening back to Genesis 4:25, this section continues a narrative structure where individual children can be replaced, Hannah’s loss of Samuel grants her other children, just as Eve gains Seth as a replacement for Abel. This is suggestive of a lack of maternal ownership and emotionality, i.e. there is an expectation of fluidity to the maternal role which negates individual attachment.

4. Discussion
4.1. How is the mother and the maternal body presented in the Creation narratives?
The presentation of the mother and the maternal body in the Creation narratives shows a fabula in the creation of Eve (the female gender) which delineate her structural deferment to a secondary position in relation to two male dominants, Adam (the male gender) and the Father-God. Though Phyllis Trible offers a favorable interpretation concerning woman’s
role in Creation.\textsuperscript{56} I argue that the external creation of the Father-God and the irrelevant position of the mother and the banished functions of the maternal body (gestation and birth-giving) presents a theological communication which demythologizes the birthing mother as the source of human life. The belated maternal role afforded to Eve is then set in a structural context of transgression and punishment where the maternal body, in comparison to the creative process of the Father-God, is an inferior and painful process. The \textit{syuzhet} of Eve’s narrative also presents a structural stress on the male gender, e.g. through the centrality of Adam in woman’s birth narrative and his paternal authority to her. The personal name “Eve” indicates to literary focused scholars a definition of woman’s sexual role as mother. Following the narratology I argue that it supports the interpretations of Pardes, to whom this delayed, post-creation naming is a negation of the mother’s creative powers,\textsuperscript{57} as well as Bal to whom it indicates an imprisonment in motherhood.\textsuperscript{58} Their conclusions follow the inherent structure of the narrative; woman is denied her role as creator, “the mother of all living” is not the mother of anyone or anything at this point, and the narrative sets up the leitmotif for consequent narratives concerning female characters and the focus on the successes or failures of their maternal bodies, i.e. Eve’s narrative works to imprison not just her but most female characters in motherhood.

4.2. How is the mother and the maternal body presented in the Hebrew Bible?
The biological necessity of the maternal body returns its creative power in 4:1 and necessitates a structure of humbling in order to displace this power back into the hands of the Father-God. Through Eve as a mother-figure the presentation of the maternal body and motherhood shows an initial female pride which is troubling to the theological negation of the mother. My own transliteration of the phrase in Genesis 4:1 recorded in the \textit{Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia} reads:

\begin{center}
\textit{וַתּאָמְר} אֲת́יֵשׁ אִשׁ אַת́הָרְוָי (\textit{wattomer qaniti 'iš 'æt YHWH})
\end{center}

(and she said I have acquired/produced a man with YHWH)

\textit{qaniti} is hard to translate but whether Eve states that she has acquired or produced, it is interesting that she uses ”man”; \textit{יִשׁ} – 'iš (or 'ish); and ”with YHWH”, \textit{אַת́הָרְוָי} - 'æt \textit{YHWH}. These words lend credence to the interpretation that Eve claims creation of a \textit{man},

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Trible, 1978:99-105
\item \textsuperscript{57} Pardes, 1992:40
\item \textsuperscript{58} Bal, 1987:78
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
rather than a male child, together with the Father-God and not from him. The problem this statement poses can be seen narratologically, because the structure of the narrative consequently works to negate this power claimed by Eve. The birth of the second son is made so peripheral that there is no details or naming speech, and by the birth of the third son Eve has lost so much status that she is unnamed and disallowed direct speech as she is provided a son by the Father-God, rather than with him.

Pardes points out that Eve in Genesis 4:1 and 4:25 fails to acknowledge any creative role on the part of her husband in the births, and that this creates a motif wherein conception is a transaction between woman and the Father-God, a motif that appears in the Rachel- and Hannah-narratives as well. I argue that due to the comparative inferiority of woman’s creative process (painful vs. pain free), Eve’s inferior creation (Cain introduces fratricide and the reality of death), the fact that children are conceived on the Father-God’s schedule, as well as the absence of a feminized aspect to the divine (the masculinity of Father-God), this transactional relationship is not an equal one. The husbands’ instrumental role ought neither to be too rigidly stressed as the genealogy is counted through them and not the mothers. The mothers, no matter their attempts at creative claims through naming-speeches, gains children for their husbands at best, as seen Rachel is negated her privilege of naming as soon as it conflicts with the will of the father indicating that this is not a real right or privilege but simply a borrowed one, and Hannah is blessed with more children for and through her husband, not for herself. The Sarah-narrative actually displaces the transactional relationship onto Abraham; however it also further stresses his centrality in Isaac’s birth, creating a structure that devalues the mother and the maternal body out of a central position as narrative subjects even in birth.

When it comes to the barren women specifically I have found that the presentation of the maternal body and the mother all follow the same fabula, creating a uniform overarching structure of the narratives which focuses on: the theme of the Father-God’s exclusive control over the creation of human life; a transactional nature to conception; contentious relationship between women wherein fertility becomes a contest and maternity the source of a woman’s value in society; a lack of male concern regarding women’s problems and perspectives; a blaming of infertility solely on the maternal body; a centrality of paternity; and the ultimate goal of birthing sons.

The absolute need to become a mother is central in the texts; J. Cheryl Exum observes that the mothers’ primary focus and motivations are outside of themselves and

59 Pardes, 1992
centered on male figures and interests, chiefly on their sons, a.k.a. the future patriarchs. I argue here that this focus on the sons contributes to the devaluation of the mother because daughters are implicitly devalued as children, even though they are the “future matriarchs”. From the beginning, they are in a lesser position of value than males, negating their personhood by lack of interest and a structure of relevance related only to their role as mother-figures, not as persons. This portraits the mother as vessel for paternity, as seen in the exclusion of Sarah in the annunciations of Isaac and her lack of maternal rights in the Akedah.

Concerning the Akedah, Radford Ruether points to a lack of interest in the maternal perspective, I argue that as this narrative unit involves a second mother, Hagar, whose perspective is twice given narrative attention, the structure actually suggests a disinterest in the specific perspective of Sarah. This does not indicate a strong general interest in the mother’s perspective, but it should be acknowledge that the portrayal does not wholesale neglect it either.

Trible argues regarding Genesis 22 that its natural rhythm is to test Sarah’s loyalty and make way for a reconciliation between the two mothers whose children have been placed in danger and saved, i.e. Hagar and herself. This is a compelling idea, but I do not follow this line thought. I suggest that Sarah, not unlike Eve in her boastfulness, and Rachel with her ambitions, poses a threat to the patriarchal order through her intractable nature. Already in Genesis 16:5 she boldly states to Abraham, blaming him for Hagar’s behavior, “the LORD decide between you and me,” a statement which indicates a lack of respect for Abraham’s patriarchal authority, and asserts the Father-God as Sarah’s only judge. Yet the brashness with which she claims this suggest a demanding attitude even towards the divine patriarch, i.e. that she can order him to judge at her will. Sarah also twice tries to suggest that Abraham’s age is the hinder to their fertility, “with my husband so old” (18:12) and “I have borne a son in his old age” (21:7), the narrative places the blame back on her body, yet Sarah continues to be demanding by the two-time removal of Hagar and Ishmael. The argument here is that while the structure directly defers her to a secondary position, it indirectly acknowledges that Sarah does not appear to accept this position, she is not afraid to make demands of either her husband or the Father-God when it concerns her maternity, and she poses a threat through this denial of her own devaluation. The absence of Sarah in

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60 Exum, 2015:103-104
61 Fontaine, 2001:170
62 Radford Ruether, 1994:179
63 Trible, 1991:187-189
the Akedah is necessary to remove this threat of her maternal power and the real threat of the possible lack of maternal obedience to either a human or divine patriarch. I argue that passivity or compliance from a present Sarah is what would have violated the rhythm of the Akedah narrative, because the structural implication pre-Genesis 22 is that Sarah would fail the loyalty test and undermine the form and content of the patriarchal ideology. Because of this implication of maternal failure and potential disobedience, I also argue that the separation of Sarah and Abraham during and after the Akedah, is a structured removal of the mother made necessary not due to a lack of interest in the maternal perspective, but due to a fear of it.

The second threatening mother is Rachel, scholarly research into the syuzhet of her narrative shows a red thread which unites researchers with different focal points, such as Fuchs, Pardes, and Wolowelsky. Consistently the theme centers on Rachel’s questionable characteristics; her deceptive and ambitious nature shown by offending the Father-God’s creative powers; utilizing another’s body to wage a birth-giving contest; trading her husband; and stealing her father’s household idols to further her own ends. The Rachel-narrative, like the Sarah-narrative, presents a questioning of the maternal body through the moral failures of the mother. Wolowelsky shows that the structure of the narrative intimates that Rachel has to gain emotional growth before she can become a mother,\(^6\) I agree to a degree, because in comparison to Jacob – who is not required to grow to become a father – Rachel appears to be laboring under a kind of restraint which afflicts only her and not her sister. However, whatever growth can be found for Rachel appears temporary as she, after being awarded maternity, steals her father’s gods. Any growth or humbling seems restricted to the matter of creative control. Rachel, who has already posed a threat to Jacob and the patriarchal ideology (by her pointing out Jacob’s ineptness to further her fertility and her swapping him for a pair of mandrakes), becomes an even bigger threat when her ambitions grow outside of the realm of fertility and results in the theft of the idols. This not only brings Laban’s anger upon Jacob, but also demonstrates the mother’s lack of obedience to the will of the patriarch. I argue that what is given the appearance of an unwitting curse is actually a death sentence necessary to uphold the patriarchal structures where female ambition is strictly limited to concerns of maternity.

There is a mirroring of Sarah and Rachel through their return as maternal symbols. Both are hailed as mothers of Israel but Sarah, as in life, is firmly anchored to Abraham. While Callaway argues that there is a kind of new creation being presented in Isaiah 51:1-

\(^6\) Wolowelsky, 2015:14-16
I argue that the maternal role is little improved by this renewal, it is more or less a re-iteration of Creation, stressing the role of the father and the relationship between the Father-God and man. Sarah does represent the maternal body but is not granted the title of mother.

Rachel as a symbol is shown independently of Jacob, either as the grieving mother or a maternal role model along with her sister. This independence indicates the potential threat Rachel’s character previously posed, because it demonstrates a lack of need for a male counterpart or dominant. As a symbol, however, this becomes unthreatening as she lacks a voice and can be fitted into the needs of the patriarchal ideology.

Finally there is Hannah, who holds the status as the favorite wife of Elkanah, making it possible to suggest that, like Rachel, at least one of the transgressions keeping her barren is her favored status. When Hannah prays for a child there is, per aggadah, a triple denial of any supposed transgressions which causes death in childbirth. The indication being that, in accordance with readings of the Rachel-narrative, death in childbirth can be a punishment for the mother’s failings. For Marcia Falk Hannah acts socially and politically, changing the world order not just by legitimizing her own voice by utilizing silent prayer, but by showing that it can be granted by the Father-God, this falls in line with Fuchs appreciation of Hannah as a heroine who circumvents patriarchal structures. I will argue against their understanding without necessarily denying Hannah’s heroism. The structure of Hannah’s narrative shows her as the fulfillment of the women who came before her, a correction to their mistakes. She does not argue with her husband or the sister-wife who taunts her, she does not appropriate another’s body to gain children for herself, she fully accepts the creative control of the Father-God, she accepts the patriarchal structures which limits her by humbly addressing Eli, and she does not boast except to make a point out of her female enemies. As Fuchs argues, inter-female rivalry supports the patriarchal frames which limit the women to one purpose (motherhood) because it endorses the valuation of a woman through her maternal status, creates competition and negates the alternative of sisterhood. Though remarkable, I argue that Hannah’s act of silent prayer, language of the heart, does not advance the position of the mother. While Falk feels it legitimizes her voice by the Father-God granting her prayer, the structure shows a priestly blessing must come before the woman is heard. Hannah and

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65 Callaway, 1986:58-62
67 Fuchs, 1985:125-126
68 Fuchs, 1985:131-132
Elkanah are both blessed by Eli, and both times the blessing of the priest comes before the conception. This makes me argue that Hannah’s narrative does not suggest a questioning of the spiritual authority of the male priests, it enhances it. Any legacy beyond maternity for Hannah is suppressed by the form of the narrative because,

a) Hannah never loses focus on the main goal (the birth of Samuel), i.e. she stays within the allotted female realm of concerns (maternity),

b) Hannah shows humility to the patriarchal structures which confine her by respecting male authority and by never crediting herself with creative powers,

c) Hannah self-negates both her maternal body and motherhood (relinquishing creative power and parental rights), she fully surrenders to the narrative ideology of the Father-God’s complete power, as well as the ideology of bearing sons.

Hannah negates her rights to the child but remains devoted to him, yet the consequent blessing (for more children) for this devotion is awarded to Elkanah, showing a paternal focus and, as seen above, shows the authority of Eli as the Father-God does not take notice of Hannah until priestly blessing has been given. A note must be made about the circumvention of traditional structures found by Cynthia Ozcik in Elkanah’s possible recognition of Hannah’s personhood even without children, suggesting a narrative opening towards recognizing an intrinsic value in the woman even as a non-mother. I disagree with Ozcik as, structurally, the narrative does not agree with Elkanah, it firmly ignores his potential ideas of personhood and endorses Hannah’s maternal quest. In consequence Ozcik’s pre-feminism appears anachronistic.

In the end I argue that Hannah’s respectful piety creates a maternal symbolism fulfilling the image of the patriarchal ideal of the mother; in obedient serenity she achieves her goal and vanishes without a word of complaint.

All these narratives represent the commodification of the maternal body, meaning that the maternal body is the property of her husband, supported by the fact that the Father-God is only concerned with married women, i.e. instances where paternity is certain. For the Hebrew Bible then the Father-God has the creative control, the father’s identity is the anchor of the birth narratives, and the maternal body is the vessel which makes the birth possible.

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69 Ozcik, 1994:89-90
4.3. How is the mother and the maternal body negated in the Hebrew Bible? According to the theory there is a two-headed negation of mother and maternal body which works in layers. The theological negation of these narratives comes out of the shape of the institution, or prison, of motherhood. The mother as a sexual role is a belated creation (post female creation) which is not part of Creation itself, but separate from it. The content of the following narratives reinforce the idea of woman being limited to this role, it is the source of her value, but the mother and her body are consistently suppressed out of power, out of rights and out of inter-female support systems, through narratological negation which works with the theological negation in order to achieve two ends:

1) Asserting the dominance of the Father-God in terms of creation by devaluing maternal contributions to the process of creation.

2) Asserting the patriarchal ideology of paternal priority by devaluing the maternal figure and excluding her from a place of personal value.

The negation of Eve as mother-figure comes through her own motherless birth; her belated title as mother; the stripping of her creative powers; subjugating the female reproductive system into dependency on the Father-God; and subjugating this primary mother into a nameless and speechless entity who disappears from the narrative as soon as her last son has been born. The negation of the barren women comes through the above mentioned lack of power, rights and support. All of these mothers are negated through their disappearance; Eve effectively vanishes after Genesis 4:1 and vanishes completely after 4:25; Sarah and Rachel are silenced by death in connection with a denial of a maternal power turned threatening to patriarchal structures; and Hannah passes silently off stage once she has been granted replacement children; the mothers who return as maternal symbols do so wordlessly. The maternal symbols does grant the maternal figure a certain elevation of status, but this is only privilege of the figurative mother, i.e. the valuing of mother as image, rather than as a person. The theological and narratological negation works in a duplicitous manner, by elevating maternity as the primary objective of female characters and using them as cherished symbolic creators of the entire people, while simultaneously negating the individual mother by not only limiting her creative control, but by placing sole responsibility for lack of fertility on her, and by removing other life-options (not desiring motherhood), by negating maternal rights, by negating the value of all children she may carry (i.e. the devaluation of daughters), and by restricting the mother’s narrative life-span to birthing sons of significance to then pass out of the narrative.
5. Conclusion
The theory for this study was the presence of a structural negation of the mother and the maternal body denying and suppressing woman’s natural creative power of childbearing; a negation which involved a normative position for the male gender and a position for the female gender as a vessel for children, created for man and by the Father-God. In agreement with this theory, the fabula (story) of the narratives shows how the mother is a narrative dependent on two male dominants (the divine and human patriarchs), and the maternal (female) body is continuously placed in second position to the male body which appears normative. The syuzhet (plot) of maternity narratives show how females are largely defined by their reproductive capabilities, their characterizations are centered on their status as mothers even though they are continuously negated into a limited position in this role. While the narratives clarifies that creative power belongs to the Father-God, and the true recipient of the child is the father-figure, it also emphasizes a transaction of creation between the Father-God and the mother. In these cases it is the father-figure who appears instrumental to the creative process, but patrilineal descent and lack of maternal control somewhat diffuses this instrumentalism. Any male instrumentalism is further diffused by the absence of male infertility, indicating that barrenness is exclusively related to the maternal body, something which bars inter-female harmony through turning maternity competitive. The mother is secondary to male interests, and if she poses a potential threat to the patriarchal ideology she is removed from the narrative, there is ambivalence towards the mother shown through her more positive evaluation as a maternal symbol, a symbolism which raises the image of the maternal role to a more positive status. The positivity is somewhat diffused through the symbol’s lack of status in life, her lack of voice and lack of individuality, i.e. the maternal symbol is a positive image because the individual mother has been rendered harmless. The method of communication and what is communicated creates a web wherein the negation of the mother as figure, and body, is her doomed existence in a permanent secondary status to the Father-God, husband or son, serving male interests and disappearing once she no longer does.

5.1. Future Research
Further research into the role of the mother can be examined in other maternal narratives, such as the story of Tamar and the story of Ruth. More extensive research could beneficially shed light on the difference in status and portrayal between the mother- and
father-figures. Finally, research examining modern day appreciations and judgements on the maternal narratives would be beneficial to estimate the status of their continued influence on the mythology of contemporary society.
Sources and Literature

Sources


Electronic Sources


Literature


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