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A Feminist Perspective on Trauma Studies in the Hebrew Bible: The Unnamed Jephthah's Daughter (Jdg 11:29–40)

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Abstract: Since the beginning of the 21st century, studies on "cultural trauma" have pushed Hebrew Bible exegesis in new directions. Although its initial focus was on the period of the Babylonian exile (6th century BC), after 25 years of research, this novel framework has shown its fruitfulness when reading a range of literature: poetic and prophetic literature, as well as narratives of sexual violence. Trauma studies also engage an inspiring dialogue with other disciplines that are already well established in biblical exegesis, such as feminist scholarship. The aim of this article is twofold: on the one hand, we will introduce the concept of "cultural trauma" and the main features that characterise the narratives responding to cultural trauma. On the other hand, we will present the main contributions of this frame of reference to recent Hebrew Bible research and the concrete contributions to a text as disturbing as the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11:29–40.

Keywords: trauma studies; feminist exegesis; Jephthah's daughter; Judges 11:29–40

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the term "trauma" has become an academic buzzword that is not used in an unambiguous way (Garber 2015; Frechette and Boase 2016; Janzen 2019; Emanuel 2021). As early as 1995, the sociologist Kai Erikson noted that "The term itself, however, is used in so many different ways and has found a place in so many different vocabularies that it is hard to know how to make of it" (Erikson 1995, p. 455). It is therefore appropriate to begin our article by reviewing the origins of the academic use of the term, in order to distinguish cultural trauma—of interest for our work—from other forms of trauma, as well as to briefly present the three main hermeneutical lines for biblical exegesis: psychology, sociology, and literary and cultural studies. In particular, the article is inspired by the literary analysis of what Alexander calls the "master narrative" of cultural trauma (Alexander 2004, 2012), which attempts to construct a sense of coherence and causality of the events experienced. However, we will see that in the case of Jdg 11:29–42, we face serious difficulties that, according to some authors, intentionally produce an ambiguous meaning (Marcus 1986; Bledstein 1993; Lanoir 2005; Navarro 2013; Talbot 2022).

What follows is a short overview of ways in which trauma research has renewed Hebrew Bible exegesis. In the words of Frechette and Boase (2016, p. 2), "[t]rauma hermeneutics is used to understand texts in their historical contexts and as a means of exploring the appropriation of texts, in contexts both past and present". More than a new hermeneutic, however, trauma studies is a new frame of reference: a "lens" that enables us to take a closer look at the peculiarities of biblical texts emerging in traumatic contexts.

Least but not last, we offer a literary analysis of the peculiarities of the narrative of the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter (Jdg 11:29–40) from the perspective of trauma studies,

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as mentioned above. We find Graybill's novel analysis particularly thought-provoking; she uses the adjectives "fuzzy, messy and icky" (Graybill 2021, pp. 11–16) to describe rape narratives. Although it is not a rape narrative, we will argue that Jdg 11:29–40—as a narrative of sexual violence inflicted on a teenage girl—can also be described as "fuzzy, messy and icky". We conclude with some final reflections on the ambiguity of a text as disturbing as the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter.

2. The Concept of 'Cultural Trauma' and Narratives of Trauma

2.1. Academic Research on Cultural Trauma

The term "trauma" comes from the Greek noun τραῦμα, meaning a "wound" inflicted on the human body in a violent manner (Jones 2009, p. 12; Becker 2014, p. 17; Garber 2015, p. 28; Caruth 2016, p. 3). However, its use in contemporary scholarship refers to a different kind of "wound" that has been studied in psychology since the 19th century.[1] The French psychologist and neurologist Pierre Janet (1859–1947) was one of the first to offer a definition of psychological trauma in 1894, a definition that he would qualify years later (1919).[2] However, the concept was formalised only after the Freudian theory of the unconscious, which explains the importance of Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis in the first articulations of the term. Freud devoted several works to the war neurosis or traumatic neurosis suffered by soldiers returning from the First World War. The last of these was his most important text, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud 1990). In this book, Freud argues that trauma is the reaction of the organism to a frightening event (*Schreck*) for which the individuals are unprepared. It comes so suddenly that the ego is unable to fully assimilate the event and relives the experience through nightmares and flashbacks, or through conscious or unconscious actions that form compulsive behaviour preceded by anxiety attacks (Freud 1990).

In addition to this psychological explanation of individual trauma, which continues to this day in various schools of thought, in the 1970s and 1980s the social and human sciences began to study trauma, no longer as an exclusively personal experience, but also as a collective one. This led to a new concept of "historical", "social" or "cultural" trauma. Much of this thinking emerged from trying to understand the Second World War, in particular the Shoah or Jewish Holocaust. In 1967, German sociologists Alexander and Margaret Mitscherlich published *The Inability to Mourn* (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 1975), using Freudian principles to analyse Germany's inability to come to terms with its defeat in World War II and to acknowledge its responsibility for the Jewish Holocaust. In their view, German society showed an inability to mourn and thus missed the opportunity to rebuild its national identity in a new geopolitical context.

In 1976, Erikson first coined the concept of "social" or "collective" trauma,[3] which is different from other categories of trauma in that it is experienced not by a single person, but by a community over several generations.[4] Erikson describes it as "a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality" (Erikson 1995, p. 187). Smelser agrees with Erikson when he states that a social trauma is an experience that disrupts the life of a society and affects its structures. This is true for pandemic, famine, war, etc. (Smelser 2004, p. 37).

However, in Alexander's view, trauma should not be naively identified with events that are naturally occurring. He points out that "For traumas to emerge at the level of the collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises" (Alexander 2004, p. 10). In other words, we must not confuse the events with the cultural representations of them. Only in some cases does a particular community decide to perceive the suffering it is undergoing as a threat to its identity, to who it is and where it wants to go.

Cultural trauma is therefore an a posteriori attribution, a social construct that is part of a past that is re-created by a particular group that, based on its own world view, experiences certain events as traumatic and not others (Alexander 2012, pp. 6–8). Today, the focus of reflection on cultural trauma in the humanities and social sciences is not so strong on the analysis of the traumatic event, but rather on the impact of the event on collectives and culture (Cooke 2022, p. 29). The approach branches out along three main lines, which depend on three different hermeneutics. These hermeneutics coexist and converge in different ways[5]: (1) sociology, (2) literary and cultural studies, frequently influenced by psychoanalysis, and (3) ethics.

First, the sociological approach seeks to adapt historiographical, anthropological, and sociological models to understand the specificity of borderline events that inflict suffering and disrupt society (Lifton 1968; Erikson 1995; Eyerman 2001, 2012; Alexander 2002, 2004, 2012, 2016; Smelser 2004; Eyerman et al. 2011). To quote Alexander (2016, p. 193): "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrific event that indelibly marks the collective consciousness, forever altering memories and fundamentally and irrevocably altering future identity".[6] Some research focuses on processes that lead to social fragmentation, others on processes that (re)construct community identity.

Second, the human sciences, especially literary criticism (Laub and Felman 1992; Caruth 2016; White 2020), propose to pay attention to the narratives,[7] the languages that explain the traumatic experience, the bewilderment, and the suffering of the victims. According to this research, traumatic experiences are characterised by resisting existing categories and conventions. White (2020, p. 71) writes:

> "Moreover, these kinds of events do not lend themselves to explanation in terms of the categories underwritten by traditional humanistic historiography, which features the activity of human agents conceived to be in some way fully conscious and morally responsible for their actions and capable of discriminating clearly between the causes of historical events and their effects over the long as well the short run in relatively commonsensical way . . ."

Third, the ethical approach focuses on the socio-political aspects of trauma, for example, describing how a particular collective suffers or resists violence and mourns, contributing to victim reparations, etc. (Das 1995; LaCapra 2001). LaCapra analyses the relationship between historiography and collective trauma. He argues that (LaCapra 2001, p. 161) "all myths of origin include something like a founding trauma, through which the people pass and emerge strengthened; at least they have stood the test of this founding trauma".

2.2. Narratives That Elaborate Cultural Trauma

Cathy Caruth notes that trauma is a "history that literally has no place" (Caruth 2016, p. 153), a "speechless terror" (Caruth 2016, p. 172). Paradoxically, the unspeakable of traumatic experience resists being uttered. Yet, at the same time, it demands to be expressed: "trauma creates feelings that cannot be expressed, but yet demand to be expressed because trauma reoccurs in the memory constantly" (Cooke 2022, p. 36). The result is a narrative, often referred to as "survivor literature" or "trauma literature" (Frechette and Boase 2016, p. 11; Emanuel 2021, p. 13). This can encode and respond to the traumatic experience and the effects of collective trauma, thus enabling recovery and resilience. The group adopts a particular narrative, which Alexander calls "a new master narrative of social suffering" (Alexander 2004, p. 17, cf. 2002). This includes "storytelling of all kinds" (Eyerman et al. 2011, p. xiii): poetry, more or less linear narratives, ritual practices, etc. As Alexander points out, representation of trauma depends on constructing a compelling framework of cultural classification. In one sense, this is simply telling a new story. Yet this storytelling

is a complex symbolic process that is highly contested, and sometimes highly polarizing (Alexander 2004, p. 12).

Alexander is concerned with construction of traumatic narratives that occur in different institutional and social environments, including religion, art, law, and government (Alexander 2012, pp. 17–25). The events experienced challenge the validity of the group's worldview, and the group needs to offer a narrative that makes sense of the trauma (Alexander 2012, p. 16), either by reinforcing, reframing or replacing essential aspects of the worldview that affect the group's cultural and religious identity (Smelser 2004, pp. 48–50). The master narrative organises the chaotic or disjointed data of reality into a coherent plot with a beginning, a middle, and a final resolution. It thus provides the coherence and causality necessary for an understanding of what has happened, offering a sense of order, agency, resilience, etc.

According to Alexander, the master narrative of cultural trauma must answer the following four questions:

1. The nature of the pain. Trauma begins with a claim to have suffered some kind of overwhelming and destructive harm. The narrative describes the nature of the suffering experienced. Alexander proposes the following question (Alexander 2004, p. 13): "What actually happened—to the particular group and to the wider collectivity of which it is a part?".
2. The nature of the victim. The trauma narrative is a recognition of the group that has been the subject of severe suffering. Alexander suggests that the master narrative should answer the following questions (Alexander 2004, p. 13): "What group of persons was affected by this traumatizing pain? Were they particular individuals or groups, or "the people" in general? Did a singular and delimited group receive the brunt of the pain, or were several groups involved?".
3. The relationship of the trauma victim to the wider public. The trauma narrative appeals to a wider audience for identification with the victim group, which demands redress in the emotional, institutional, and symbolic spheres (Alexander 2002, p. 93). According to Becker, sharing the experience is an attempt to "relieve" the situation, to make it more bearable (Becker 1998, p. 14): "narrative is the primary expressive form for the mediation of disruption [because through it] we gain access to embodied distress". Alexander asks (Alexander 2004, p. 14): "To what extent do the members of the audience for trauma representations experience an identity with the immediately victimized group?".
4. Attribution of responsibility. Finally, the master narrative identifies the agents who are responsible for the cause of the suffering. To quote Alexander (2004, p. 15): "Who actually injured the victim? Who caused the trauma? This issue is always a matter of symbolic and social construction". Similarly, Eyerman states: "cultural trauma is a historically bound and produced narrative in which the positions of the perpetrator and victim are central" (Eyerman 2012, p. 575). Elsewhere, Alexander suggests that the elaboration of cultural trauma enables social groups, even civilisations, to recognise the existence and sources of human suffering and to take moral responsibility for it. As a result, the members of the society define their relations of solidarity in ways that enable and even compel them to share in the suffering of others (Alexander 2016, p. 193).

These narratives allow for the articulation of one's cultural identity by processing communal trauma through an internal logic that links historical experience to present suffering. As a form of collective memory, cultural trauma interprets past events that the group has determined to be significant, and in doing so seeks to redefine the identity of the group (Alexander 2012, p. 9). However, through the re-enactment of the past, a society

repeats its concerns in the present and reflects its understanding of the world as it is or should be. The past justifies the present, or rather an idealised present that is shaped by the group's view of the world. If the past is desirable, it is because the ideals of the here and now are projected back onto the past.

Once the master narrative is accepted, it underpins the identity of the group (Eyerman 2001, pp. 1–2) and meets its particular needs by confronting and replacing the assumptions and harmful beliefs that the traumatic experience has generated (Eyerman 2001, pp. 5–10). As far as the group is concerned, telling the story means telling what really happened.

3. Biblical Exegesis and Trauma Studies

3.1. A Renewed Frame of Reference

Several authors have highlighted the relevance of trauma studies in biblical exegesis since the beginning of the 21st century (Rambo 2010, p. 4; Becker 2014, pp. 23–26; O'Connor 2014, pp. 210–22; Smith-Christopher 2014, pp. 224–27; Stulman 2014, pp. 177–92, 2020, pp. 65–83; Frechette and Boase 2016, pp. 1–23; Janzen 2019; Emanuel 2021; Fry 2023, pp. 19–39). Stulman, for example, ponders the following (Stulman 2014, p. 180):

> "How would reading the Hebrew Bible through the lens of trauma subvert ordinary interpretive strategies? What would the Tanakh look like, for instance, if it were broached as literature of disaster and survival? How might traumatic violence have informed theological or symbolic construction, i.e., dominant and competing images of the deity, the text's meta-narrative, its contested testimonies, and its myriad expressions of distress, pathos, dislocation, and hope? And how might the integration of trauma and biblical scholarship alter normative author/text-centered reading practices, such as source, form, redaction, and historical critical criticism?".[8]

In particular, trauma studies allow Hebrew Bible exegesis to be renewed for at least two reasons:

First, it is a novel frame of reference. However, it is not alien to biblical scholarship. As Becker puts it (Becker 2014, p. 19),

> "It is worthwhile keeping in mind the various reasons why theology and the humanities are indispensably involved in the studies of traumatology—we may even say that traumatology in medicine as well as in cultural studies can hardly escape from either historical or religious quests, since it always moves back and forth to the field of history in order to analyze how far the construction of our common past or 'history' is actually affected by the traumatic experience and its memorization, and to what extent the production of 'cultural artifacts'—especially literature, arts and music—in fact results from the transformation of an individual's or a group's traumatic experience".

As Garber writes (Garber 2015, p. 25), "[t]he use of trauma theory does not constitute a method of interpretation but a frame of reference that, when coupled with diverse forms of biblical criticism, can yield interesting results in the study of the biblical literature and the communities that produced it". Cooke prefers to speak of a "lens" (Cooke 2022, p. 18, n. 1): "a 'biblical trauma lens' means approaching the biblical text with a knowledge of trauma theory and its set of questions, and to utilize these theories and questions to interpret the Bible". When biblical scholars apply this "frame of reference" or "lens" to the study of biblical texts that emerged from traumatic contexts, they also make use of the results of historical–critical approaches, literary analysis, etc. However, they pay particular attention to historical realities and take particular account of textual features that reflect the psychological, social, and cultural impact of traumatic events on individuals and cultures,

as well as on society as a whole (cf. Carr 2010, 2011b, 2014, O'Connor 2014), both "in what is said in a straightforward manner, but also in the unsaid" (Groenewald 2018, p. 95).

Second, a fruitful interdisciplinary approach is possible through the literary dimension of cultural trauma. According to Caruth (2016, p. 116), the concept of trauma, as "its theoretical formulation and its use as a critical framework for interpretation", has been in use since the last decade of the twentieth century in a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including biblical exegesis and theology (cf. Rambo 2010, pp. 3–5; Stulman 2014, p. 179). Trauma studies allow us to read the Hebrew Bible as a master narrative of cultural trauma in ancient Israel. It analyses the processes of literary production as cultural and religious strategies for coping with traumatic experiences and their consequences for the collective.

According to Frechette and Boase (2016, p. 4), the study of trauma as applied to the exegesis of the Bible is currently based on three hermeneutics that are in dialogue with each other: psychology, sociology, and literary and cultural studies. Of particular importance, as demonstrated by the recent publications cited below, are the gender perspective, deconolonial studies and, more recently, queer studies and masculinity studies.

3.2. The Most Iconic Texts in Trauma Studies

The "use of trauma theory in the field of biblical studies is still in its infancy" (Janzen 2012, p. 238), although the last three decades saw a multiplication of works applying the trauma perspective. To date, the texts in the Hebrew Bible that received the most attention are as follows:[9]

> Deuteronomistic historiography: Sociological insights into the effects of trauma in ancient Israel enabled biblical scholars in the late 1990s and early 2000s to study the fragmentation of communal identity in exile and, conversely, the mechanisms that might have forged new identities. Indeed, in colonised and dispersed Jewish communities, exile is one of the main driving forces behind the creation and preservation of biblical traditions over several generations. From this perspective, Deuteronomistic historiography is a narrative created by the group that suffered the Babylonian exile in order to explain and make sense of the trauma experienced. It transforms the past into a familiar story of struggle and heroic resistance that can contribute to solidarity and social cohesion in the present (Janzen 2012, 2018; Ammann 2018, 2022, 2024; Markl 2022).
>
> The poetic literature: The Book of Lamentations and some Psalter lamentations were analysed using the trauma framework. In the first case, Lamentations has been seen as a literature of survival (Linafelt 2000; O'Connor 2002; Mandolfo 2007; Yansen 2019) that includes a reflection on theodicy (Boase 2008; Rom-Shiloni 2021). In the second case, scholars emphasised that the poetic language of the Psalter describes physical symptoms that allude to traumatic experiences of various kinds, but without describing them precisely. This makes it easier for the reader to identify with the poet and make associations with his or her own experiences (Móricz 2021).
>
> Prophetic literature: Several exegetes (Carr 2011a; Stulman and Kim 2010, pp. 6–7; Smith-Christopher 2014, pp. 227–30; Stulman 2014, pp. 180–90; Groenewald 2018) studied the effects of traumatic experiences on individuals and collectives. The first prophet to come to the attention of exegetes was Ezekiel (Daschke 1999; Smith-Christopher 2002; Garber 2004; Kelle 2009; Bowen 2010; Poser 2012, 2016; Kelle 2013; Emanuel 2021; Crouch 2022), whose book is interpreted as a response to the Babylonian exile. The figure of the prophet corresponds to that of a traumatised person who expresses himself through strange symbolic actions and

visions that result from the disturbing memory of the fall of Jerusalem. Second, several works analyse the way the book of Jeremiah expresses grief (O'Connor 2008) and the prophet's search for meaning in traumatic experience (Stulman 2005; Maier 2020, 2022; Claassens 2021a). Others (O'Connor 2011; Claassens 2013b; Graybill 2016) study his masculinity, undermined by the violence he suffered and expressed in the so-called "confessions" of the book. Third, Jonah is also seen as a traumatised prophet (Fischer 2015; Boase and Agnew 2016). Some interpret this short post-exilic book as a way of overcoming the trauma caused by the various colonising empires throughout the history of ancient Israel (Claassens 2021b, 2023).

Narrating sexualised violence: As Brad E. Kelle notes (Kelle 2020, p. 145), "much of the violence described and promoted in the Bible is gendered violence in which women are threatened with or portrayed as suffering physical harm as some sort of actual or metaphorical divine judgment or as a result of the people's failure or defeat". In the last two decades, feminist exegesis of narratives of sexual violence suffered by women, whether in ordinary life or in the context of war, has gained importance. In line with Van der Kolk's (2014, p. 2) observations, particular attention has been paid to the physical manifestations of trauma. This is the case of the Levite's concubine (Jdg 19) (Fry 2023, pp. 45–62), the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13) (Müllner 1997; Scholz 2010, pp. 38–42; Claassens 2016, pp. 177–92). The violated bodies of women as a personification of the city of Jerusalem devastated by armies has also been analysed in the prophets Isaiah (Is 47), Jeremiah (Jer 13), and Ezekiel (Ezek 16; 23). These prophets combine war violence with sexual violence (Yee 2003; Maier 2008; 2019; Frechette 2016; Poser 2019; Schroer 2019; Claassens 2020).

4. The Unnamed Daughter of Jephthah (Jdg 11:29–40): A Literary Feminist Reading from the Perspective of Trauma Studies

From a double perspective, the narrative that we are going to analyse below can be considered as a trauma narrative. On the one hand, it recounts the patriarchal violence inflicted on a teenage girl. Although this is not a rape, in our opinion it can be qualified as a sexual trauma, as we will justify below. On the other hand, the individual trauma suffered by Jephthah's daughter is the starting point of a collective female tradition that should be seen as a kind of cultural trauma. We can consider this, with Alexander, as a "master narrative of social suffering" (Alexander 2004, p. 17, cf. 2002). This master narrative is itself formulated on two levels: literary and ritual. At the literary level, Jdg 11:29–40 remembers an unnamed teenage girl through a narrative that is characterised by ambiguous language and a confusing narrative intrigue, both of which create in the reader a sense of not having understood what has really happened. This story shares characteristics with the rape narratives analysed by Graybill, who describes narratives that portray sexual trauma of rape as "fuzzy, messy and icky" (Graybill 2021, pp. 11–16). At the ritual level, Judges 11:39–40 is an etiological legend of a female ritual. Whether it was a real or a fictional memorial, ancient Israel included into its founding texts the memory of a group of young, marriageable Israelite women who resisted the patriarchal violence that was inflicted on their bodies and destinies.

4.1. A "Text of Terror": Jdg 11:29–40

The plot of Jdg 10:6–12:7 focuses on the figure of Jephthah and repeats, with slight variations, the characteristic Deuteronomistic cycle that organises the narratives of the twelve judges, alternating between faithfulness and unfaithfulness (see Jdg 2:11–23) (Navarro et al. 2017, pp. 110, 117; Duarte 2017, pp. 96–97):

1. Israel is unfaithful to the covenant with Yahweh and worships the Baals (Jdg 2:11–13).

2. Yahweh sends a hostile people against Israel (Jdg 2:14–15).
3. Israel repents and turns back to Yahweh.
4. Yahweh is moved by the cry of his people. He raises up a judge, a liberating leader, who delivers the people from the danger of the enemy (Jdg 2:16–18).
5. But after the death of the judge, Israel falls back into the unfaithfulness of their fathers (Jdg 2:19). So, the Canaanites remain in the midst of Israel (Jdg 2:20–23).

However, Jephthah's vow (vv. 30–31) and his daughter's action (vv. 36–39) destabilise the typical Deuteronomistic scheme of apostasy–punishment–conversion–reconciliation by contrasting the two paradoxical outcomes of Jephthah's victory over the Ammonites, the enemies of the Israelite tribes: Israel's salvation and his daughter's downfall (Sjöberg 2006, p. 37).

In the list of the twelve judges or redeemers of Israel, Jephthah is the eighth. The son of a prostitute, he was driven out of Gilead by his half-brothers and became a mercenary in the land of Tob. His reputation as a great warrior spread and the Israelites asked for his help. He led a campaign against the Ammonites, who were threatening the territory of the tribes of Israel. To ensure victory, he swears a vow to Yahweh, a common practice in ancient Israel (cf. Gen 28,20–22; Num 21,2; 1 Sam 1,11): "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering" (Jdg 11,30b–31). However, this time the fulfilment of the vow is a tragedy, for the first recipient of the victorious Jephthah is his only daughter. In lamenting her fate, Jephthah implies that the vow is irrevocable. His daughter willingly accepts her tragic end, but not before asking her father for two months to mourn her fate with her companions. The section ends with a brief reference to the annual commemoration of Jephthah's daughter by the "daughters of Israel".

The subplot of Jdg 11:29–40 has no bearing on the main plot of the deliverance from the danger of the Ammonites, which is why a number of exegetes consider it to be a dispensable narrative (Lanoir 2005, p. 154).[10] However, the scene recounting a traumatic event in the life of an adolescent girl is the most elaborate in the narrative cycle (Jdg 10:6–12:7). It contains several redactional notes that draw the reader's attention to the family ties between father and daughter and to the topic of the preservation of remembrance.

In her classic work *Texts of Terror. Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Trible 1984, pp. 93–116), Trible rightly includes the story of Jephthah's daughter (Jdg 11:29–40) among the "texts of terror", a term that refers to women's trauma stories in the Hebrew Bible. This account of the physical and symbolic violence inflicted on an unnamed adolescent girl in the form of a ritual sacrifice has been analysed in feminist readings. Let us mention the most obvious aspects of women's status within the patriarchal society of ancient Israel that appear in the text:

1. Women are conceived in terms of male property, so the narrative explains the family drama in terms of the loss of honour of the father, who blames the daughter for his shame in v. 35: "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow". Awkwardly, Jephthah laments the seemingly inevitable fate of both his daughter and himself in a victimising speech (Navarro 2013, p. 56): "At the beginning of the first clause in Hebrew, the Hiphil infinitive absolute (*hakrēa* ʿ) stresses the devastating deed of the daughter; at the beginning of the second clause, the independent pronoun *you* further accents her as the cause of the calamity; and between these two clauses a wordplay on the verb *bring low* and the noun *calamity* underscores again the censure placed on her" (Trible 1984, p. 105).

2. Patriarchal violence dominates the scene. As Case notes (Case 2024, p. 40), "Masculinity studies of ancient Israel often recognize 'violence' or 'fighting' as a primary aspect of the hegemonic masculinity depicted by the Hebrew Bible [. . .] the killing of women tends to focus on individual cases, not groups of women. The text gives individual attention to the deaths of the daughter of Jephthah (Judg 11) or the Levite's wife (Judg 19) in Judges or the death of Queen Athaliah (2 Kgs 11:16) in Kings, and these deaths spark reaction within the text and, ideally, with the reader".
3. Public space belongs to men, private to women. The episode alternates between Jephthah's space, the political–military, and his daughter's space, the domestic sphere (Trible 1984, p. 110; Navarro 2013, p. 55). It is precisely at the moment of the daughter's entry into the public space for the reception of her father that the tragedy takes place (Navarro 2013, p. 57).
4. The value of a woman is determined by her reproductive capacity (Navarro 2013, p. 58). According to Lanoir, Jephthah's daughter's sacrifice is the counterpart of a theme running through the Hebrew Bible, that of the barren woman who eventually procreates (Lanoir 2005, p. 165). Women without children are not only unsatisfied people who do not fulfil their primary social function. They are also vulnerable beings because they have no one to defend them: "[t]hey can be eliminated without fear of reprisal" (Exum 2016, p. 14).

In this patriarchal context, the father's use of physical violence against the sacrificial daughter is clear. Applying Bal's observations to our text, "to speak with Shoshana Felman: Beth [and Jephthah's daughter] is *the scandal of the speaking body*" (Bal 1999, p. 329). The narrative pays particular attention to the bodies of the protagonists. This is consistent with the fact that trauma manifests itself physically and is inscribed in the human body, as Van der Kolk (2014) notes. Jephthah's first reaction to the arrival of his daughter (v. 35) is a cry of anguish accompanied by an easily understandable gesture: he falls to his knees, a symptom of his helplessness, and tears his clothes in mourning. However, it is undoubtedly the body of the daughter that the text focuses on. Already in v. 34 the narrator presents her dancing and playing of instruments in celebration of her father's victorious homecoming, a typically female activity in the Hebrew Bible[11] (cf. the performance of Miriam and other women in Ex 15:1–21; the daughters of Shiloh in Jdg 21:21; the women of Israel in 1 Sam 18:6–5): "Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah, and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing".

A significant role in the narrative is played by the daughter's emotions. In particular, her crying or wailing has given rise to the most varied interpretations.[12] Talbot's proposal is interesting from the perspective of trauma studies. She defines Jephthah's daughter as a "transitioning child" (Talbot 2022, p. 146) and interprets her reactions as those of a post-menarchal girl whose bleeding body provokes fear, discomfort, pain, embarrassment, confusion, misery, and worry: "She is not off in the distant future, mourning her perpetual childlessness, her perpetual unmarried state, or her perpetual lack of sexual experience [. . .] In my translation, Bat-Yiphtach laments 'my bleeding body' [Jdg 11:37] and the narrator reports, from a cultic perspective, that she laments her impurity" (Talbot 2022, pp. 147–48). This suggestion adds interesting undertones to the character of the daughter, taking into account the cultural aspects of menarche and menstruation in ancient Israel. However, we believe that her lament is directly related to her traumatic experience, her impending death.

In vv. 37–39, the text focuses on her sexuality. The Hebrew expression *al-bĕtûlay* (v.37) indicates both the girl's age and her marital status: she is a sexually available, nubile woman in a state of transition dangerous to the patriarchal system, because she is passing from the tutelage and protection of her father to that of her husband (Bal 1988, pp. 46–51; 1999, pp. 321–23; Day 1989, pp. 59–60; Lanoir 2005, p. 161; Navarro 2013, p. 59; Exum

2016, p. 21; Ackerman 2022, pp. 247–48). The literal text says that "she had not known a man" (v. 39), a description that goes beyond referring to her supposed virginity.[13] This vital stage places her in a particularly vulnerable position, as we can see in other biblical trauma accounts of sexual violence (Gen 19; Jdg 1; 11; 19; 21). Many of them feature adolescent virgins in the Book of Judges (Bal 1999, pp. 328–29; Lanoir 2005, p. 161; Sjöberg 2006, pp. 61–62; Navarro 2013, p. 61). On the other hand, it could well be seen as an act of sexual violence against the girl to prevent her from procreating and enjoying her sexuality: "the women [Jephthah's daughter and Michal] are denied not just motherhood, the patriarchal mark of female fulfilment, but also the pleasure of sex" (Exum 2016, p. 15).

The symbolic violence, on the other hand, is evident in the anonymity of her character. According to Exum, Jephthah's daughter has no name because she is an idealised model of a daughter, typical of the patriarchal system, a victim subjected to her father's will (Exum 2016, p. 16). This is why, together with other authors, she suggests that she be named in order to counteract symbolic violence: *bat*, "daughter", for Bal (1988, 1999),[14] Exum (2016), and Talbot (2022); *re'ah*, "compañera [fellow]", for Navarro (2013).

Up to this point it would seem to be justified to classify Jdg 11:29–40 as an account of a traumatic episode, the murder of a teenage girl. However, it is the way in which this episode is narrated in order to exacerbate a cultural trauma that we are really interested in analysing below. If we take the text at face value, we have to agree with Fuchs when she suggests that "[l]iterary strategies [in the book of Judges] work [. . .] in the interests of patriarchal ideology, the ideology of male supremacy" (Fuchs 1993, p. 130, cf. Exum 1993, p. 137).[15] However, if we read the story as a narrative of trauma from a feminist point of view, the patriarchal figure and his authority are challenged by the tragic end of his daughter (cf. Bledstein 1993, pp. 37, 46–47; Navarro 2013, p. 57; Talbot 2022, pp. 154–55).[16] The sacrifice takes male dominance to the extreme and underlines the folly of a patriarchal culture of "men playing God" (Bledstein 1993, pp. 34–54). Its counterpart is the group of "friends", the "daughters of Israel", who, as we shall see, have the last word in the story.

4.2. A "Fuzzy, Messy, and Icky" Narrative

Graybill's work *Texts after Terror* (Graybill 2021) is of particular interest for the analysis of our text. The author plays with the title of Trible's classic work *Texts of Terror* (Trible 1984) as an homage to her and as an indication that her interest is in the effects of traumatic experience: "After trauma, after pain, after terror, we are still touched by it, even after it seems to end" (Graybill 2021, p. 173). In her first chapter, Graybill takes a critical look at the concept of "consent" that dominates biblical exegesis of rape narratives. She argues that these narratives can be "fuzzy, messy and icky" (Graybill 2021, pp. 11–16), thus blurring the dichotomy of consent = non-rape vs. non-consent = rape. First, "fuzzy" names the ambiguity and confusion that often surround traumatic experiences of sexual violence, which are not always easy to categorise. Second, for both the protagonists of the story and the communities that receive such texts, the aftermath of sexual violence is "messy". The attempt to clarify the ambiguous event often results in a chaotic account. It does not follow correct grammatical rules, nor does it have an orderly, coherent, or consistent narrative thread. In the end, confusion and disorder make for a "icky", disgusting, creepy narrative. Sexual violence does not always conform to a clear distinction between evil perpetrators and innocent victims.

Although it is not a rape narrative, we argue that Jdg 11:29–40—as a narrative of sexual violence inflicted on a teenage girl—is a trauma narrative that can also be described as a fuzzy narrative, since Jephthah's daughter suffers a terrible fate, but the multiple ambiguities in the text hinder us from understanding precisely what happens to her. It is also a messy narrative, characterised by multiple grammatical and semantic deviations

and incongruities. Finally, it is an icky narrative, in that the multiple exchanges of agency between father and daughter make it difficult to attribute responsibility and present the daughter as a victim who is complicit in her tragic fate.

4.2.1. The Ambiguity of the Narrative

Several authors highlight the ambiguity of the text, which is open to multiple interpretations (Marcus 1986; Bledstein 1993; Lanoir 2005; Navarro 2013; Talbot 2022). Marcus cautiously suggests that Jdg 11:29–40 may be a narrative that has been constructed in a deliberately ambiguous way: "It has been posited above that these problems[17] may not have been entirely accidental, but could possibly represent ambiguities consciously devised by the narrator. He chose his words so that they would be open to a number of interpretations" (Marcus 1986, p. 52; cf. p. 11). Marcus devotes much of his analysis to the identification of "anomalous" grammatical constructions that produce ambiguity and ambivalence (Marcus 1986, pp. 9–11, 18–25, 34), as well as ambiguous terms (pp. 31.35–37 et passim). Lanoir suggests that the text makes use of irony not only on the grammatical and semantic levels, but also in the incongruities and misunderstandings of the plot (Lanoir 2005, pp. 155–58).

One of the main ambiguities concerns the oath in verses 30b–31. On the one hand, Jephthah presents his vow as irrevocable, despite the existence of compensation mechanisms in ancient Israel (Lev 27:1–8) (Lanoir 2005, p. 157; cf. Navarro 2013, p. 54). On the other hand, the short and laconic description in v. 39 deviates from the promise–fulfilment narrative pattern characteristic of the Hebrew Bible, in which the promise and its fulfilment are repeated verbatim to confirm its resolution, by stating "[a]t the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to the vow he had made". Some authors suggest that this is why the narrative spares us the horrific description of his death (Trible 1984, p. 130). This is in line with Caruth's claim that trauma would be a "speechless terror" (Caruth 2016, p. 172). However, this deviation, in turn, raises the question of what this end is made up of. Although Jdg 11 explicitly speaks of an *ʿôlāh*, a "burnt offering", "[t]he reader or listener is not meant to know what the original intent really was" (Marcus 1986, p. 18; cf. pp. 13–18, 50–52). Bible scholars are divided between those who consider that the vow assumes a human ritual sacrifice, which makes the murder of the daughter a socially acceptable ritual act (Burney 1970, pp. 319–20; Trible 1984, pp. 93–116; Bal 1999, p. 320; Exum 2016, p. 2; Sjöberg 2006, pp. 37, 61–64; Navarro 2013, pp. 53–54), and those who think that the Hebrew term should be interpreted in a metaphorical sense (Burney 1970, pp. 319–20; Trible 1984, pp. 93–116; Bal 1999, p. 320; Exum 2016, p. 2; Sjöberg 2006, pp. 37, 61–64; Navarro 2013, p. 2; Exum 2016, p. 2; Sjöberg 2006, pp. 37, 61–62; Navarro 2013, pp. 53–54), stating that Jephthah decides to consecrate his daughter to Yahweh by leading a celibate life (Reis 2002, pp. 279–82).[18]

We believe that the Hebrew term leaves no doubt. Whether or not the narrative refers to human sacrifice as a verifiable custom of ancient Israel, Jephthah's vow indicates that the daughter dies. Be that as it may, the ultimate fate of the father and the daughter is the same: the daughter will die and have no descendants, and the father will have no descendants and die (Jdg 12:7): "his family line comes to an end when he is forced to take his daughter's life" (Exum 2016, p. 5; cf. Marcus 1986, pp. 29, 31–32; Exum 1992, pp. 45–69; 1993, pp. 131–44; Sjöberg 2006, p. 65; Navarro 2013, p. 55). From an anthropological view, Jephthah is defending his honour by keeping his vow, which is paradoxically destroying his masculinity, the bedrock of his honour, which is his offspring (Sjöberg 2006, p. 61).

If correct, recipients of the Deuteronomistic story would read/hear the story of Jephthah's daughter in light of the Deuteronomistic prohibition of human sacrifice (2 Kgs 16:3; 17:17; 21:6). The cultural trauma recounted in Judges 11:29–40 would be the result of the valuation that runs through Deuteronomistic history, where the premonarchical period is

said to be a violent and anomic time when "all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25; cf. Ruth 1:1). From the point of view of the Deuteronomistic editors, Jephthah is an example of the terrible consequences of pronouncing a rash vow (Römer 1998), a further example that adds to the theological critique of the work: the Babylonian exile would be the inevitable consequence of the disobedience of the people who had failed to observe the precepts of the covenant for centuries (Janzen 2012, 2018; Ammann 2018, 2022, 2024; Markl 2022). If we refine the analysis further, we might point to a cultural trauma in relation to Mizpah, a site that is associated in the book of Judges with other narratives of extreme violence against young women. The brutal rape and murder of the Levite's concubine (Jdg 19) leads to the assembly of Mizpah (Jdg 20), where the tribes take an oath not to give their daughters to the Benjamites. This decision in turn results in the abduction of the women of Jabesh-Gilead and the girls of Shiloh (Jdg 21).

A second important example of ambiguity in the narrative plot has implications for the memorial in verses 39–40.[19] This is a crucial question from the perspective of trauma studies, as it has implications for the ultimate meaning of the ritual that is itself a master narrative of trauma, and for the collectivity of the "daughters of Israel" who perform the ritual.

The Hebrew verb used in v. 40, *letannôt*, is usually translated as "to mourn", which interprets the ritual of the young women accompanying Jephthah's daughter in a funerary sense, as if they were mourners lamenting the tragic fate of their friend (Boling 1975, p. 207). Trible (1984, p. 106) and Bal (1988, p. 66) rightly criticise this translation and consider that it better fits the sense of "retelling", "reciting", "singing" to celebrate, or "commemorate" (Day 1989, p. 67 n. 4; Ackerman 2022, p. 247; Navarro 2013, p. 60).[20] The girls evoke the symbolic death of their childhood, "her transition to physical maturity" (Day 1989, p. 58), and, consequently, that the time of marriage has come (Niditch 2008, p. 134; Bal 1999, p. 322; Claassens 2013a, p. 610; Ackerman 2022, pp. 247–48). If true, the narrative validates a rite of passage into maturity for Hebrew pre-adolescent girls. According to Exum (2016, p. 15), we can only speculate on the possibility that this female ritual celebrated something else: female eroticism or sexuality, the ability to give birth . . . (cf. Navarro 2013, pp. 58–59). Beavis, however, believes that this ritual commemorates the daughter's sacrifice, in line with ancient Greek sacrificial rituals (Beavis 2004, pp. 20–22; cf. Frymer-Kensky 2002, pp. 113–15).[21]

We do not have any historical, archaeological, or literary evidence to confirm the details of the memorial. However, in our view Jdg 11:29–40 is one of the very few examples of an exclusively female ritual recorded in the Hebrew Bible. The tragic premature death of an adolescent is commemorated, and her death became an important rite of passage to adulthood in the life of every Hebrew woman. Bal goes further when considering that *tannah* points to a female counterculture throughout the entire Book of Judges (Bal 1988, p. 67). Suggesting a female counterculture might be somewhat excessive, but in fact, the most interesting aspect is the development of a new subject formerly unknown: "the daughters of Israel" (Lanoir 2005, p. 159; Navarro 2013, p. 60). Unlike Jephthah, who is a socially isolated outsider, the daughter has friends with whom she will spend two months away from her father. Far from being perceived as a constraint of the patriarchal system, this female segregation becomes a space of sisterhood and female memory, which can be interpreted as a space of resistance in the midst of an androcentric society (Bal 1988, pp. 50, 68; Weems 1988, pp. 58–60; Claassens 2013a, pp. 613–14).

If the collective called "the daughters of Israel" in Jdg 11 were the creators or transmitters of this literary tradition and memorial, we can point to a cultural trauma that arose in female circles as a response to the patriarchal violence exemplified by the arbitrary authority of Jephthah's father (Bledstein 1993; Lanoir 2005; Claassens 2013a). The "daughters

of Israel" do not forget, and Jephthah's daughter achieves immortality through her fellow travellers (Trible 1984, pp. 106–7; Bal 1988, p. 68; Lanoir 2005, p. 160; Claassens 2013a, p. 611; Navarro 2013, p. 58; Exum 2016, p. 11): "It is ironically, her, not her father that Israel, through the doing of her daughters, must remember" (Bal 1999, p. 330).

4.2.2. The Problem of Agency in the Story

From the point of view of trauma studies, agency is central to trauma narratives. One of the questions that any master narrative must answer, as we saw in Section 2.2, is that of attribution of responsibility (Eyerman 2012, p. 575; Alexander 2016, p. 193). For Koci, the problem of agency is the most important issue discussed: "The most interesting issue, however, and the one that appears most promising for further investigation, is that of accountability: whom to blame and for what" (Koci 2021, p. 341).[22] According to the Deuteronomistic narrative, Jephthah is the protagonist, having liberated Israel. As Exum (2016, pp. 1–2) notes,

> "The 'stories' of these two women [Jephthah's daughter and Michal] are parts of men's stories, part of the 'larger story' that we take as *the* story. David Clines has argued that there is no 'Michal story', that focusing upon a minor character in a story results in a distorted, or at least skewed reading of the whole. He is right, of course, that there is no 'Michal story', nor is there a 'Jephthah's daughter's story', and for feminist criticism of biblical narrative that is precisely the problem. But one can nonetheless discern the submerged strains of Michal's voice and Jephthah's daughter's voice, and the challenge for feminist criticism is to construct a version of their stories from that voice".

A first noticeable fact is the way in which the narrator refers to her in v. 34 with a frequency of synonymous terms that underline the uniqueness of the daughter: "she only (*raq*) was a (*yeḥîdāh*)"[23] and "he had no son or daughter except her". Some biblical scholars interpret the daughter as the reverse of Isaac, giving her the same status as a male child, given the parallels with Gen 22[24] (Trible 1984, p. 104[25]; Bal 1988, pp. 109–13; Lanoir 2005, pp. 166–67; Sjöberg 2006, pp. 45, 65; Doerfler 2020, pp. 103–43). However, just as important as the similarities are the differences: here, Yahweh remains silent and does not prevent the adolescent girl from dying.

Many feminist commentators have argued that the daughter is the real protagonist. According to them, this is the origin of an annual ritual performed by women, which shifts the focus of attention from the father to the daughter (Fuchs 1993, pp. 117, 126–27; Sjöberg 2006, p. 43; Navarro 2013, p. 58; Talbot 2022, p. 154). Most scholars regard Genesis 11:29–40 as an etiological legend (Trible 1984; Day 1989, p. 58; Ackerman 2022, pp. 247–48; Talbot 2022, p. 146), possibly based on Canaanite fertility rituals, or on the worship of Tammuz, Baal, Osiris, etc. (Marcus 1986, p. 36; Lanoir 2005, pp. 159–60; Navarro 2013, p. 60). This interpretation is consistent with the Hebrew term *ḥōq*. Often translated as "custom", it can also mean "tradition". The problem is that there is no record of such a ritual actually taking place in ancient Israel (Marcus 1986, p. 36; Reis 2002, p. 287; Exum 2016, p. 15).

On the other hand, the story is confused by the unfolding interplay of agencies in which, depending on the exegete, ultimate responsibility rests with Jephthah or his daughter. Trible (1984, pp. 93–109) sees the daughter as an innocent victim and places the blame exclusively on Jephthah, whom he sees as "unfaithful" and "arrogant", while Fuchs notes that "[s]he is responsible for her death just as much as her father is, if not more, for after all Jephthah is not shown to instruct her to come out of the house to greet him" (Fuchs 1989, p. 121).[26]

Jephthah accuses his daughter of "humiliating" him, thus muddying the agency: the daughter goes from being Jephthah's sacrificial victim to the person responsible for his

physical and symbolic downfall (Reis 2002, p. 285; Sjöberg 2006, pp. 61, 67). On the other hand, the daughter is obedient in v. 36, where she repeats verbatim the words of her father in the previous verse: "For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow". Her response is surprising because she is willing to accept the inevitable; she renounces her life, attends to her father's needs, and insists on fulfilling the vow to Yahweh by taking on the sacrificial system that condemns her to death (Exum 2016, p. 18). Exum suggests translating the end of v. 39: "she became an example in Israel" instead of: "it became a custom in Israel" (Exum 2016, p. 16), which makes Jephthah's daughter a model of submission to paternal authority that glorifies patriarchal ideology.

At the same time, the daughter engages in some movements of assertiveness that feminist biblical scholars describe as "resistance" (Claassens 2013a, pp. 616–19): in v. 36 she takes the lead in trying to negotiate a postponement with the father's permission to allow her to live with her fellow mourners for two more months (v. 37). Jephthah agrees in a gesture that demonstrates both the daughter's agency and his own failure (Sjöberg 2006, p. 61). There is no reversal of the father's decision, only a postponement: at the end of the appointed time, she will return, as she had promised: "she returned to her father, who did with her according to the vow he had made" (v. 39). Fuchs interprets this gesture as "her own free Will" (Fuchs 1989, p. 43). Although it can be seen as a form of collaboration, it seems somewhat excessive to speak of freedom (Sjöberg 2006, p. 68), as her actions remain within the permissible limits of patriarchal culture (Niditch 2008, p. 135; Exum 2016, p. 18).

Talbot offers a partial solution by seeing the daughter as a transitional child—see above—which explains her ambiguous agency: "biblical scholars assessing children's agency for child-oriented interpretations might consider children's ability to engage in transforming relationships with their bodies, their parents, and religious traditions, especially when scholars' concern is with biblical texts that are used to justify and sustain practices that limit children's capacity for voice, choice, and meaning-making" (Talbot 2022, p. 199). Obedient, she accepts social expectations and conventions, submits to parental authority, and remains silent (Talbot 2022, pp. 186–89).

We agree with Exum when she says that "[w]e must recognize that guilt and innocence are not clear-cut" (Exum 2016, p. 18; cf. Navarro 2013, p. 59). The marginalisation and eventual silencing of Jephthah's daughter could be interpreted from a trauma studies perspective as inviting us to seek her out in the silences of the text. Ultimately, the text confines the daughter's voice and actions within patriarchal boundaries; while the author seems to promote a model of submissive daughterhood, she resists these boundaries through the ritualised remembrance of the "daughters of Israel" (Bal 1988, pp. 45–68, 96–113, 119–22, 161–168 et passim).

5. Final Remarks

The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter at the time of the judges is part of the memory of ancient Israel as a significant event that was worthy of being written down in Jdg 11:29–40. This subplot, which is unnecessary to tell the story of the victory over the Ammonites, is an aetiological account that can be interpreted as a foundational cultural trauma, a master narrative of one of the few female rituals recorded in the Hebrew Bible, of which we know nothing. The traumatic experience, real or imagined, of Jephthah's daughter became a cultural trauma whose ultimate meaning escapes us. Was it a critique of the pre-monarchical period as a time of violence, when "all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Jdg 21:25)? In an androcentric world like ancient Israel, was it trying to denounce a violent and unpredictable male authority that led to the death of women?

It is a challenge to fit so many absences, ambiguities, and unanswered questions into such a short text: Why did Jephthah make the vow he did? Was Jephthah aware of the

custom of the women's greeting of the victorious warrior? Why did Jephthah not exchange the vow for a sum of money after the news that he would lose his daughter? Was his daughter aware of the vow? Was she complicit in her own death, and why did she not flee far from her father, alone or with her friends? What was it that the "daughters of Israel" were celebrating in this ritual? Was the daughter's death the end of the matter, and why was the mother absent? Why was there no intervention on the part of Yahweh in defence of the adolescent victim?

The analysis of the story of Jephthah's daughter through the intersection of the literature studies, gender perspective, and trauma studies allow us to highlight these ambiguities and silences in the text that have given rise to very different interpretations, especially concerning the two cores of the narrative plot: Jephthah's vow and the memorial of the 'daughters of Israel'. Moreover, it avoids the reinforcement of patriarchal stereotypes that re-victimise women, in this case a teenage girl (Navarro 2013, p. 64): "Praising the victim can, however, be as dangerous as blaming the victim" (Exum 2016, p. 18).

This trauma narrative does not answer Alexander's (2004, pp. 13–15) questions clearly, but in a fuzzy, messy, icky way (Graybill 2021, pp. 11–16): the text links the nature of the pain to the truncated sexuality of an adolescent, but describes her end in such a way that we cannot confirm her death. Jdg 11:29–40 identifies the victim, Jephthah's daughter, but the attribution of responsibility is so confused as to blur the lines between victim and perpetrator; the story appeals to its wider audience through the friends who hold an annual memorial, but we do not know what the ultimate meaning of the memorial was. Perhaps this text demands a polyvalent interpretation, so that, as Caruth contends, Judges 11:29–40 becomes "the possibility of a speech that is not simply the vehicle of understanding, but also the locus of what cannot yet be understood" (Caruth 1995, p. 155).

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Notes

1 Becker (2014, p. 18) notes that classical Greco-Latin authors "were already making use of this terminology in various, partly metaphorical ways", although contemporary trauma studies are the direct result of modern psychology.

2 Janet (1919) systematically described the dissociative mechanisms developed by the person who has had a traumatic experience and distinguished nine concepts: psychological automatism, consciousness—not always characterised by unity or identity—the subconscious, narrowing of the "field of consciousness", dissociation—e.g., sleepwalking—, amnesia, suggestibility, fixed ideas and emotions—extreme fear, anger—.

3 Other authors prefer the equivalent term "cultural trauma" (Eyerman 2001, 2012; Eyerman et al. 2011; Alexander 2002, 2004, 2012).

4 Historical trauma is distinguished from other categories of trauma, such as: (1) post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a diagnosis applied to individuals; (2) community trauma, which refers to a group experience that may not be intergenerational; (3) intergenerational family trauma, when a traumatic event affects several generations of the same family unit, but is not shared by a broader social group. For a detailed account, see Cooke (2022, pp. 21–4.29–36; cf. Emanuel 2021, pp. 4–7).

5 See Frechette and Boase (2016, pp. 1–23), and Emanuel (2021, pp. 1–51) for a detailed account.

6 Original text in Spanish: "Un trauma cultural se produce cuando los miembros de una colectividad sienten que han sido sometidos a un acontecimiento horrendo que deja marcas indelebles en la conciencia colectiva, marcando sus memorias para siempre y cambiando su identidad futura de manera fundamental e irrevocable".

7 Recently, these narratives are labelled as "survivor literature" or "trauma literature" (Garber 2015, p. 26; Cooke 2022, pp. 37–43).

8 Similarly, Smith-Christopher affirms the importance of trauma studies for redactional criticism from a transgenerational trauma perspective (Smith-Christopher 2014, pp. 234–38).

[9] Other biblical texts that have been studied to a lesser extent from the perspective of trauma studies are: Genesis 1–11, the Joseph narrative (Gen 37–50), Deutero-Isaiah (Is 40–55), Hosea, Job, Qoheleth, the deuterocanonical books, etc. See Garber (2015, pp. 35–38).

[10] Römer (1998, pp. 29, 31) sees Jdg 11:29–40 as a post-Deuteronomistic addition that seeks to establish a kind of "tensión" between the gift of the spirit and Jephthah's vow.

[11] Biblical texts (Meyers 1988, pp. 116–19; Hamori 2015, pp. 64–65) seem to indicate that victory songs and playing the tōp—a percussion instrument—were honours bestowed on women (cf. Ex 15:1–21; Judg 11:34; 5:1; 1 Sm 18:6f). Singing, dancing and playing an instrument were highly valued artistic gifts in the worship of ancient Israel (Burns 1987, p. 39; Fischer 2002, pp. 95–104; Niditch 2008, p. 134; Lederman-Daniely 2016, p. 22) and in ecstatic prophecy (cf. 1 Sm 10,5–13; 19,18–24; 1 Cr 25) (Gafney 2008, pp. 68–98; Grabbe 2013, pp. 24–25).

[12] For an in-depth presentation of the different interpretations of the reason for the tears of Jephthah's daughter, see Talbot (2022, pp. 31–34).

[13] Exum, however, is of the opinion that the text presupposes the virginity of the daughter: "As sacrificial victim, Jephthah's daughter must be a virgin for reasons of sacrificial purity" (Exum 2016, p. 14; cf. Navarro 2013, p. 62). In the light of Greco-Latin texts, Marcus attaches importance to the virginity of the daughter (Marcus 1986, pp. 31, 33; cf. Day 1989, pp. 61–67; Römer 1998, pp. 33–36; Lanoir 2005, pp. 167–69; Navarro 2013, pp. 61–62).

[14] "Naming the victims is an act of insubordination to the text" (Bal 1999, p. 319).

[15] Against Fuchs y Exum, see Koci (2021, p. 339).

[16] The patriarchal imaginary is also challenged by Lanoir's proposal to read the text in an ironic key (Lanoir 2005, pp. 155–58).

[17] By "these problems", Marcus means the following: "(1) Whether the original text intent of the vow was the sacrifice of a human being or an animal. (2) The structure of the vow shows lack of congruence between the condition and the promise. (3) The wording of the vow is anomalous, and leads one to believe that some textual dislocation has taken place. (4) What the meaning is of the daughter's request to go to the hills for two months with her friends to bewail her virginity. (5) Whether the phrase *wehî' lō' yāde'āh îš* "she did not know a man" is to be taken as circumstantial or consequential. (6) Whether the phrase *watehî ḥōq beyisrā'ēl* "it became a custom in Israel" or "she became an example in Israel". (7) What the nature is of the annual festival: one of mourning or of celebration" (Marcus 1986, p. 52).

[18] Others (Boling 1975, pp. 208–9; Ackerman 2022, p. 246) believe that Jephthah had an animal sacrifice in mind. Niditch (2008, p. 133) emphasises the ambiguity of v. 30. For a detailed exposition of the sacrificial victim of Jephthah's vow, see Marcus (1986, pp. 16–18, 38–49).

[19] See Marcus' presentation on the possible meanings of the Hebrew term *ḥōq* (Marcus 1986, p. 34).

[20] Sjöberg, for his part, stresses the ritual-cultural sense of the verb, saying: "That the same verb is used for the remembrance of the daughter as well as for the celebration of the victories of Yhwh indicates something about the magnitude of the ritual. Jephthah's daughter is not simply pitied. She is commemorated by an official decree" (Sjöberg 2006, pp. 66, 68).

[21] Talbot details the various proposals that have been put forward in recent criticism to explain what this ritual consisted of (Talbot 2022, pp. 34–39).

[22] For a detailed account of the various hypotheses concerning Jephthah's daughter agency, cf. Talbot (2022, pp. 177–83).

[23] In contrast, Marcus (1986, p. 28) interprets the Hebrew term *yeḥîdāh* as "preferred", "favourite", not "only one".

[24] "Abraham, [. . .] take your son, your only one (yĕḥîdĕkā), whom you love, Isaac [. . .] and offer him as a burnt offering. . ." (Gen. 22:2; cf. 22:12, 16). Marcus (1986, pp. 38–40) and Lanoir (2005, pp. 166–67) analyse in detail the similarities and the differences between the two stories.

[25] Trible spends several pages juxtaposing Abraham and Jephthah to blame the latter for killing his daughter: "His words diverge from the compassion of Abraham, who evasively yet faithfully assured Isaac, 'God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son' (Gen. 22:8). Unlike the father Abraham, Jephthah fails to evoke the freedom of the deity to avert disaster. [. . .] Although his daughter has served him devotedly with music and dance, Jephthah bewails the calamity that she brings upon him" (Trible 1984, p. 105).

[26] Reis, who sees this as a commitment to celibacy rather than a sacrifice, claims that Jephthah's daughter knew of her father's publicly announced vow and deliberately met him in the street, thus ensuring that she would lead a life of chastity (Reis 2002, pp. 279, 282).

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