

Revisiting The Character of Potiphar's Wife: A Narrative Criticism of Genesis 39

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Abstract

The character of Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:6-18 narrative has been interpreted partially and portrayed negatively as an adulterous or immoral woman while Joseph has been described as a righteous hero. This view of Potiphar's wife could be used to portray women unfairly on sexual matters. However, the other side of both Potiphar's wife and Joseph has been given less attention by many interpreters. This paper argues that a close reading of Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative creates an in-depth and holistic understanding of the character of Potiphar's wife who is at the margins of condemnation as an immoral woman, adulterous or a seducer. In attempting to reconstruct socially the image of Potiphar's wife, this paper used Narrative Criticism approach to exegesis of Genesis 39:6-18 with specific reference to Robert Alter's Convention of Characterization in revealing the other side of Potiphar's wife. This paper characterizes Potiphar's wife as a daring and brave woman. As a woman who had been neglected by her husband (Potiphar), she devised a way to reclaim attention and also to access resources (power) in the household that had been taken away from her. This paper reveals that deceptiveness was not largely a negative characteristic rather a technique used by women such as Potiphar's wife in the Ancient Near East world to contest the oppressive patriarchal systems. Further, this paper argues that Potiphar's wife was an honest and trustworthy woman whom her husband could not suspect her testimony against Joseph. Finally, she was just an active accomplice of propagating the garment motif theme in the Jacob's cycle.

Keywords: *Narrative, Narrative Criticism, Characterization, Exegesis, Conventions and Robert Alter Convention of Characterization*

Introduction

Genesis Chapter 39: 6-18 narrative portrays blame game on sexual issues. It is important to note that this narrative has generated many interpretations. Potiphar's wife has been interpreted as a woman with bad character; an adulterous woman while Joseph is portrayed as a righteous hero (good character). This interpretation has contributed to a biased and negative view on women in regard to sexual matters such as adultery, rape or incest. Some scholars such as Longman (2005, p. 149) have argued that Joseph is portrayed as the 'image of the wise man' described in Proverbs 5-7 while Potiphar's wife is blamed for 'seducing' the innocent Joseph and portrayed as a woman with 'loose morals or immoral'.

To emphasize on the biased interpretation portrayed in Genesis 39: 6-18, Niditch (1992, p. 25) laments that it is unfortunate that "women who were aggressive, independent and sexually demanding did not prosper in the Hebrew scriptures". Women in Genesis are "markers and creators of transitions and transformation". She further points out that "in some sense their narrative roles parallel social positions and attitudes towards women in male dominated cultures in which women are marginal in terms of economic and political authority". She asserts that women do succeed however in 'behind scenes' and they are portrayed to do so through questionable ways like trickery. Niditch further argues that the tale of Potiphar's wife suggests a culture whereby powerful women were regarded with suspicion as peculiar and evil.

In the entire book of Genesis, several stories on blame placed on women can be traced. Genesis 3 narrative portrays the woman (Eve) as the seducer. As Meyers (2000, p. 55) claims that, her image does not only represent sin or the secondary natural nature of a woman. It represents a seducer; a misconception that Eve tempted or seduced Adam. Also, the blame of the fall is projected on both the serpent and the woman (Eve). Another narrative is in Genesis 19:30; Lot was so drunk and out of his right mind leading him to committing incest with his daughters. Daughters of Lot are portrayed as seducers by the narrative and blamed for the act while their Father (Lot) is not accused at all.

Other Old Testament narratives or sayings that portray and place the blame on a woman include; the story of Bathsheba and David in 2 Samuel 11, She (Bathsheba) is blamed for tempting King David by bathing openly where she could be seen from the Kings' palace (Meyers, 2000, p. 57). While in Proverbs chapter 7, Stol (2016, p. 239-40) states that a young man is seduced by an adulterous woman, thus this passage is often used to warn men against the advances by women.

Whereas in the Ancient Near East (ANE), the general thought was that a woman is the initiator of any act of infidelity; this notion is still propagated to date. Stol (2016, p. 236) points out that “literature of Ancient Near East (ANE) have a tendency to place the blame always on women for being masterminds of adultery or of any sort of extra-marital affairs”.

For centuries, issues of relationship between men and women have been addressed unjustly especially in regard to sexual affairs. In patriarchal societies, women are often portrayed as the initiators or the prime suspects of the specific sexual issue(s) whether in extra-marital affairs (adultery), rape or incest. In Africa, and among the *Lumba* community of Sierra Leon, “women who were the victims of rape were blame for inviting men through their actions or by their movements” (Oduyoye and Kanyoro, 2005, p. 149). In Kenya for instance, Wangamati (2018, p. 3) claims that the male are socialized to be adventurous and aggressive while the female are expected to be chaste, domesticated and compliant. She points out that on incidents of sexual abuse such as rape, the victim (mostly) female are blamed for the action and at times making reference to biblical texts such as Genesis 39:6-18.

Thus from the above insights, the character of Potiphar’s wife has been portrayed as wicked woman. The task of this paper is a close reading of Genesis 39: 6-18 with a strict adherence to the principles of Narrative Criticism in reference to Robert Alter Convention of Characterization in revealing and capturing the other side of Potiphar’s wife and Potiphar. The paper aims at addressing the gender relations on matters of sexuality. To attain this, this paper begins by overall assessment of the approaches to Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative and images portraying Potiphar’s wife. Next, a Narrative Criticism approach to the text in reference to Robert Alter Convention of Characterization in addressing the character of Potiphar’s wife. The conclusion of this paper offers a synthesis of Genesis 39:6-18 in relation to the image of Potiphar’s wife as revealed in the text.

Approaches to Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative

Aycook (1992, p. 478) claims that the narrative in Genesis 39: 6-18 is related to the whole text of Genesis and this predicament expresses the fundamental motifs which echo throughout the book of Genesis. He goes on to point out some links in Genesis and also concentrated on identifying themes in this narrative while relating it with the common Pentateuch perspective on women and men, their infrastructural arrangements of the Ancient Hebrew Society and the faithfulness of man to God.

Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative is also interpreted from the feminist perspective. The feminist interpreters such as Bach (1993, p. 124) named the nameless woman in Genesis 39:6-18 as *Mut-em-enet* meaning “to confer a measure of individuality”. She points out elements of double standard in the biblical narratives by referring to the story of Abigail been praised in 1 Samuel 25 narrative while condemning *Mut-em-enet*. She asserts that both women happen to have obstacle husbands (Nabal and Potiphar) who are in the way of a match with a more desirable man (David or Joseph). However, she claims that due to patriarchal ideology, Abigail’s pursuit of David is deemed as proper while *Mut-em-enet* deemed as nothing but improper.

McKinlays (1995, p. 74) demonstrates that biblical narratives are never just a narrative in isolation they do also convey ideological connotations. She points out that Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative is intended to prejudices Potiphar’s wife towards the readers. First, Potiphar’s wife is a non-Hebrew in a text that favors Hebrews as people of God. Secondly she is in a patriarchal world that sets a hurdle for the Hebrew hero who was singled out by Yahweh. Both Adamo (2013, p. 240) and McKinlays (1995, p. 74) claim that Potiphar’s wife is an agent of transformation whose actions contributed to the advancement of both the nation of Israel and Joseph.

McKay (1999, p. 224-8) applied social sciences reading to Genesis 39 namely Management Theory and Social Anthropology to convey new insights to the interpretation of Genesis 39. On the Management Theory approach, McKay claims that Potiphar was a senior manager who delegated the running of the household to his wife. The appointment of Joseph destabilized the power relations at Potiphar’s household. This is echoed by scholars such as McKenzie and Kaltener (2013, p. 29) who argue that introduction of a Hebrew into the Potiphar’s household was the basis of the crisis. While on the Social Anthropology approach, McKay (1999, p. 220-4) uses Max’s understanding of “low grade violent events; where all those who used coercive or appealing violence needed a particular resource or facility”. Therefore, applying pressure to the withholders of the resource or the facility and at times appealing to the audience for help or intervention.

Mattox (2003, p. 232) states that some traditional interpretations render Potiphar’s wife nothing less than demonic. For instance, they observed that Joseph’s beauty reported in Genesis 39:6 as following directly after his promotion to be in-charge of Potiphar’s household. Mattox further claims that Joseph was guilty of ‘preening’; when his status changed he

probably improved his physical appearance in order to be more attractive to the Potiphar's household.

Zucker (2011, p. 5) suggests that the act or character of Potiphar's wife was triggered by the fact that her husband (Potiphar) was a eunuch. He argues that given Potiphar's state would mean that he was incapable of having children. Unfortunately, the available candidate was Joseph yet she found him (Joseph) withholding it from her. Longman (2005, p.151) echoing Zucker's view states that Potiphar was a eunuch and this could be the main reason why he bought a handsome slave and made him to be in charge of everything.

Mattox (2003, p.232) agrees with 4th century church father - Jerome's sentiments on the sexual status of Potiphar; which depicted Potiphar as not only a eunuch but also a husband who neglected his wife. Potiphar was not paying attention to his wife's needs since he was concerned with food alone and neglecting his other duties. There is nothing wrong with Potiphar's enjoyment of food. However the implication of the texts is that he had no interest or concern for his own wife.

Further, Mattox (2003, p. 232) mentions the two possible grounds for Potiphar's wife's actions alluded by the Church Father (Jerome). First, is that she wished to have children and the second, is that she wished to enjoy the normal marital sexual intimacy which her husband was incapable of because of his sexual status as a eunuch.

Also, McKay (1999,p. 218) agrees with Zucker (2011,p.6) that Potiphar's being a eunuch would mean that he was incapable of having children thus triggering her (Potiphar's wife) character towards Joseph. Potiphar's wife is named by McKay (1999, p.222) as *Rahpitop*¹ who was desperately in need of a child yet her husband was incapable of delivering a 'fertile sperm'. Thus, the person available and who could meet her need of having a child was Joseph.

Pirson (2004, p. 258) connects the narrative of Genesis 39 to the larger design involving female characters elsewhere in the biblical book of Genesis, he links the two back to back narratives of Genesis 39 and 38. Pirson state that Tamar in Genesis 38 uses extreme measures to have a child when her husband died and left her childless; he argues that it might be the same need that motivated Potiphar's wife actions.

¹ Reverse of the name Potiphar

Also, Thompson (2016, p. 213) compares the two back to back narratives of Genesis 38 and 39. His focus was not to justify or condemn Tamar or Potiphar's wife but to point out examples of ways in which the female characters are depicted throughout the biblical narrative. He claims that in most biblical narratives, women are 'generally shadowed' characters and cited only in transitory as somebody's spouse or daughter or sister. Thompson in addition states that, these women or female figures in ancient cultures had a key role to play and that is to 'bear children'. He further notes that most of these women were nameless and their identity was tagged with their societal role (mother, wife, sister or daughter).

Adamo (2013, p. 230) redeems Potiphar's wife by identifying the presence of Africa and Africans in the bible whose contribution has been for centuries 'played down or ignored'. He agrees that there is outright prejudice and ignorance as a result of denied and unrecognized contributions of African heritage and identity. Adamo, further claims that 'othered' women, more so African women, have suffered from prejudice and stereotyping which has justified their brutal treatment in Africa.

Images portraying Potiphar's wife

There are several images that have been used to portray Potiphar's wife. She has been imaged as a 'tempter, a wicked woman and a seducer'. Thompson (2016, p. 212) states that this narrative (Genesis 39: 6-18) aims at demonstrating Joseph's strong moral character and also setting up the stage for him to rise in power while Potiphar's wife is portrayed as a temptation for Joseph to evade. She is also depicted as a woman with 'alleged behavior' as Zucker (2011, p. 3) claims that many readers easily dismiss Potiphar's wife as a foreign woman who is a scheming and seductive figure. Zucker also mentions some of names the contemporary scholars use to describe her in flattering terms such as 'a seducer, self-serving, spiteful and hypocritical' or as 'the stereotypical, sexual potent and evil woman'.

Further, Potiphar's wife is illustrated as a 'dangerous neglected woman' who is revenging as a result of her sexual dissatisfaction. Aycook (1992, p. 480) compares the narrative in Genesis 39:6-8 with the day time *Soap Opera* which was characterized with evident patterns of revenge by a neglected wife, who 'seeks her sexual refuge in an available and unconnected male'. She is also portrayed as an 'Adulterous Woman', Gunkel (1997, p. 407) in his commentary of Genesis Chapter 39 gives Genesis 39: 7-20a a title 'The love and hatred of the Egyptian woman'. However, he also claims that the notion of a wife wanting to seduce a young man is also frequent in Hebrew and Egyptian proverbs.

Robert Alters' Convention of Characterization

Narrative Criticism analyses biblical texts focusing on literary analysis rather than historical context. Alter (1981, p. 95) claims that biblical narratives give minute details or analysis about a particular character(s) such as physical appearance, gestures, dressing and outfits. The key features in Robert Alters' Convention of Characterization identified in Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative include; characterization by *a scale of means in ascending order*. Alter (198, p. 100) argues this scale of means has three parts namely: the lower end of the means of scale is characterized by revealing characters via the appearance. The middle category of the scale, involves direct speech either by the character or by others about the character. While at the top end of the scale, it is characterized by the narrator's reliable explicit statement of the characters emotions namely feelings, intends and desires. Also, characterization by *observation*: Alter (1981, p. 105) argues that characters in biblical narratives are revealed through report of actions of the character by the narrator or the appearance of the character in the narrative. Another is characterization by *direct or indirect characterization*: Alter (1981, p. 110-11) claims that readers may get data about a particular character(s) through comments by one character on another character. Also, characterization *by using narrator's language of manipulation*; Alter (1981, p. 100), states that narrators use language as a medium of manipulation in biblical narratives.

In addition, characterization by *selective interpretation*: Alter (1981, p. 96) claims that biblical narratives are frequently intentionally silent on the different important characters or about the same characters at different stages of the narrative or on their different characteristics of their thoughts, feelings and behavior. Finally, characterization by *narrators' drastic selectivity*: according to Alter (1981, p. 109-11) biblical narrators' drastic selectivity is evident on the biblical narrative junctures where the Hebrew bible narrators decide to treat the reader with the information of what God thinks of a certain character or deed (s).

Robert Alters' Convection of Characterization is useful in attempting to re-construct the image of Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39: 6-18 in the exegesis of the characters in the same text. This model gives the best format in analyzing the different characterization of character in the biblical narratives such as Genesis 39: 6-18, the narrative of Potiphar's wife and Joseph. Amit (2001, p. 74) supports this by stating that literary characterization generally in the bible or other literature is achieved by a variety of means that are usually labeled as

‘direct’ or ‘indirect’. Osborne (1991, p. 158-9) claims that the biblical narrator uses a number of techniques to portray the characters and to lead the readers to a proper understanding of their roles through description.

Narrative Criticism of Genesis 39: 6-18

This section deals with the exegesis of Genesis 39: 6-18 using Narrative Criticism in reference to Robert Alter’s Convention of Characterization.

Genre of Genesis 39: 6-18

A close reading of Genesis 39: 6-18 reveals that the text is largely presented as a narrative. Some of the important elements of a narrative are evident in this text namely plot, characters and narrator. Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative is located in the larger book of Genesis 37-50, the story of Joseph. However, the question of the genre of Joseph’s story has proven to be a matter of scholarly debate. Scholars such as Levinson (2016, p. 22) claim that debate has been to ascertain whether Genesis 39 narrative is an oral saga, fairy tale or a novella. Thompson (2016, p. 210) and Redford (2014, p. 16) view Genesis 39 as fiction and names the narrative as “a novella or short story”. Petramalo (2007, p. 104) claims that this narrative calls this group the Hebrew waw consecutive tense category. In relation to the rest of the chapter of Genesis 39, this text is between the arrival of Joseph to Egypt and Joseph in Prison.

Narrative plot structure of Genesis 39: 6-18

Alter (1981, p. 60) refers to narrative plot as type-scenes and claims that there are five recurring narrative episodes attached to the careers of the biblical heroes. These include the annunciation of birth, betrothment epiphany, initiation or death. Gunn and Fewell (1993, p. 10), agreeing with Alter states that it is “the organizing force or principle through which narrative meaning is communicated”. Narrative plot consists of events that are deliberately and systematically organized to develop a particular theme. In addition, Chemorion (2008, p. 128) states that “events in a narrative plot are usually arranged in such a way that the reader can track the themes that are advanced in the narrative”. The plot of Genesis 39: 6c-18 narrative is characterized by both the implied author and implied audience.

Some scholars, for example Vogt (2009, p. 198) subdivides the plot Genesis 39: 6-18 into two scenes namely scene 3(vv. 6-10) and Scene 4(vv. 11-18) while Petramalo (2007, p. 105) outlined Genesis 39: 6-18 into one section (Joseph at Potiphar’s house). This paper structures this episode (Gen.39: 6-18) into three scenes namely; vv. 6-7(introduction) - neglected Potiphar’s wife, vv. 8-15(Peak) - Potiphar’s wife defending her position and finally, vv. 16-18 (Conclusion) - Potiphar’s wife in the garment motif.

Analysis of characters in Genesis 39: 6-18

This section focuses on the characterization of the narrators in Genesis 39: 6-18

narrative. The main characters include; יסף (yosep-Joseph) and אשת אדניו (eset adonayw-masters’ wife) while minor characters are פטפאר (potipar –Potiphar), Israelites deity יהוה (Yahweh -God) and עבד (abdeka-servants).The analysis is focusing on the main characters mentioned in the episode using some of the features of Robert Alters’

Conventions of Characterization.

Analysis of scene 1 –Genesis 39: 6-7; Neglected Potiphar’s wife.

<p>וַיַּעַזֵב כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ בְּיַד-יוֹסֵף וְלֹא-יָרַע אֹתוֹ מֵאֹמֶתָה כִּי אִם-הִלָּחֵם אֲשֶׁר-הוּא אוֹכֵל</p>	<p>⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and having him he had no concern for anything but the food which he ate.</p>
<p>וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתִּשָּׂא אִשְׁת־אֲדֹנָיו אֶת-עֵינֶיהָ אֶל-יוֹסֵף וַתֹּאמֶר שְׁכַבְהָ עִמָּי:</p>	<p>⁷ And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph, and said, "Lie with me."</p>

This scene 1 (vv. 6-7) is the introduction of Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative. The narrator introduces another main character אשת אדניו (eset adonayw - master’s wife) after giving description about Joseph’s physical appearance in v. 6c. Communication in this scene is characterized by both indirect and direct speech in vv. 6 and 7 respectively.

In verse 6b, the phrase ת ממה כ ם הלחם שר הא כל (itto meumah ki im hallehem aser hu okel-had no concern for anything but the food which he ate), the narrator uses observation characterization which reveals the character of Potiphar as an uncaring and unconcerned

husband. The narrator is revealing that Potiphar concentrated only on food after purchasing Joseph and making him to be in-charge. It may be argued that Potiphar neglected his wife having entrusted כָּל (*kol*) everything he owned to Joseph's care; apart from his food. Hamilton (1995, p. 461) argues that may be the reasons for Potiphar not delegating his food, perhaps is because of a general Egyptian concern that non-Egyptian were not aware of how to prepare food or because of virtual separation during meal times. Pirson (2004, p. 254), notes that Potiphar's wife was a frustrated and neglected woman who desired someone who was attentive to her. Joseph, being in-charge and present, could be the right candidate. Thus, the revealed character of Potiphar as an uncaring and unconcerned husband, who neglected his wife, triggered Potiphar's wife towards Joseph for attention.

The narrator uses the scale of order characterization; the lower category in revealing the physical appearance of the new member of Potiphar's households (Joseph) in v. 6c as וַיִּבֶה מְרֵאָה (yepe toar wipeh mareh - was handsome and good-looking). However the text is not explicit on the details of the physical appearance of Joseph. The narrator also introduces another main character in this episode using selective interpretation characterization. The character is deliberately introduced as אִשְׁתֵּי אֲדֹנָיו (*eset adonayw – master's wife*), who is nameless. It was not unusual for biblical narrators to be silent about a woman's identity.

There is no explicit information given about her unlike the other two characters (Potiphar and Joseph). The narrator, immediately after introducing the nameless character, notes that she עִינָהּ אֵת (eset adonayw et eneyha – casted her eyes on him). Pirson (2004, p. 256) claims that Potiphar was the first person to appreciate Joseph's good looks (casting eyes on him); purchased Joseph as a slave and leaving everything under his care. This suggests that Potiphar's wife is affirming what her husband (Potiphar) noticed in Joseph and was neither a wicked nor immoral woman but a submissive woman who propagates her husbands' agenda.

Also, the narrator uses observation characterization in the phrase v. 7 עִמִּי שִׁכְבָּה (*sikba immi- lie with me*) to portray Potiphar's wife as a 'daring and brave woman'. She had to devise a way of reclaiming back her position and authority in Potiphar's household, which was withdrawn from her and given to a 'stranger'. Potiphar's wife was not comfortable with the sudden change of management in the household. As Gravette (2008, p. 135), argues, "Hebrew bible does not necessarily present deceptiveness as a negative trait rather it functions as a normal way for women in a patriarchal society to act". Women devised ways to gain access to resources, justice and other things that are not readily available for them.

Analysis of scene 2-Genesis 39: 8-15: Potiphar's wife defending her position

<p>8 וַיִּמָּאן וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲדֹנָיו תָּן אֲדֹנִי לֹא-יִרְדַּע אֹתִי מִחַבְבֹּת וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יִשְׁלֹו נָתַן בְּיָדִי:</p>	<p>8 But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Lo, having me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand;</p>
<p>9 אֵינְנִי גָדוֹל בְּבַיִת הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא-חָשַׁד מִמֶּנִּי מֵאוֹמָה כִּי אִם-יִחַד בְּאִשְׁרֵי אֶתְ-אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאִיךָ אֲעֲשֶׂה תְרַעַה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָטָאתִי לָאֱלֹהִים:</p>	<p>9 he is not greater in this house than I am; nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife; how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"</p>
<p>10 וַיְהִי כִּדְבַרָּהּ אֶל-יוֹסֵף יוֹם וָיוֹם וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׁכַב אֲצֶלָהּ לְהִיּוֹת עִמָּה:</p>	<p>10 And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie with her or to be with her.</p>
<p>11 וַיְהִי כִּהְיוֹם הַזֶּה נִכְבַּח הַבַּיִתָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת מְלֹאכְתּוֹ וְאִין אִישׁ מֵאֲנָשֵׁי הַבַּיִת שָׁם בְּבַיִת:</p>	<p>11 But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house,</p>
<p>12 וַתִּחַפְּשֶׁהוּ בְּבִגְדוֹ לֵאמֹר שִׁכְבָה עִמִּי וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיֵּנָס וַיֵּצֵא חֲחוּצָה:</p>	<p>12 she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me." But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and got out of the house.</p>
<p>13 וַיְהִי כִּרְאוֹתָהּ כִּי-עָזַב בְּגָדוֹ בְּיָדָהּ וַיֵּנָס חֲחוּצָה:</p>	<p>13 And when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled out of the house,</p>
<p>14 וַתִּקְרָא לְאֲנָשֵׁי בֵיתָהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֹא-רְאוּ הֵבִיא לְנִי אִישׁ עִבְרִי לְצַחֵק בְּנִי בָּא אֵלַי לְשָׁכַב עִמִּי וְאִקְרָא בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל:</p>	<p>14 she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice;</p>
<p>15 וַיְהִי כִשְׁמָעוֹ כִּי-תְרִימְתִי קוֹלִי וְאִקְרָא וַיַּעֲזֹב בְּגָדוֹ אֲצִלִּי וַיֵּנָס וַיֵּצֵא חֲחוּצָה:</p>	<p>15 and when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me, and fled and got out of the house."</p>

Scene 2 (vv. 8-15) is the peak of Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative. The main characters in this episode include אשת אדניו (*eset adonayw* - master's wife) and יסף (*yosep*-Joseph) while the

minor characters are פּוֹטִיפָר (*potipar* –Potiphar), Israelites' deity יהוה (*Yahweh* -God). The venue of this narrative is inside Potiphar's house. This scene is also characterized with direct and indirect characterization, and dialogue between Potiphar's wife and Joseph.

The narrator uses selective interpretation characterization in revealing the character of Joseph as a schemer. Joseph went to the house לעשת מלאכה (*la asot melaketo* -to do his work) and deliberately ensured (in v. 11) that on that particular time none of the servants were present in the house. He is mentioned to be attending to his duties although these duties are neither clear nor detailed, perhaps Potiphar entrusted him. Hamilton (1995, p. 464) argues that Joseph as the administrator was responsible for checking and overseeing all of Potiphar's household. He claims that this statement לעשת מלאכה (*la asot melaketo* -to do his work) was an euphemism for 'satisfy his desires' thus giving a different perspective on Joseph's character as a schemer and not Potiphar's wife. This affirms Alter's (1985, p. 100) view that biblical personages are always portrayed in paradox. Joseph is a schemer who was aware that Potiphar's wife had been neglected and so tried to take advantage of her situation.

The phrase כ עזב בנהג ברה (*kiazab bigdo buyadah*-left his garment in her hand) in v.13 is the 'motif garment' echoed in the narratives of Jacob. The narrator uses drastic selectivity characterization to reveal the character of Potiphar's wife as a reliable woman who actively participates in the significant 'motif garment'. Adamo (2013, p. 229) and Mathew's (2019, p. 28) claim that the importance of garments in Genesis. 37-39 is prominent. Adamo (2013, p. 230) argues that garments played a key role in the development of narratives as "markers of status".

On expounding this, Hamilton (1995, p. 465) asserts that Potiphar's wife holding on Joseph's garment foreshadowed the garment motif in chapter 45: 22 that he (Joseph) gave to his brothers' שמל (*simla-cloak*) for them to take home in 41: 14. Therefore, Potiphar's wife became an agent for advancing the 'garment motif' which is very substantial in the life of Joseph and Jacob. As a neglected wife, Potiphar's wife is using the garment to reclaim the attention towards her husband Potiphar and his house system that had neglected her. This shows that Potiphar's wife was a risk-taker who chose to fight back the system that was unfair or oppressive to her.

Analysis of scene 3- Genesis 39: 16-18: Potiphar's wife in the garment motif.

16 16 ותנח בגדו אצלה עד-בוא אדניו אל-ביתו: Then she laid up his garment by her until
--

	his master came home,
<p>וַתְּדַבֵּר אֵלָיו כְּדִבְרֵים הָאֵלֶּה לֵאמֹר בְּאִזְלֵי הָעֶבֶד הָעֶבְרִי אֲשֶׁר־הֵבֵאתָ לְנֹי לְצַחֵק בִּי:</p>	<p>¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me;</p>
<p>וַיְהִי כִּהְרִימוּ קוֹלִי וַאֲקָרָא וַיֵּעֻזַב בְּנִדְוֹ אֶצְלִי וַיָּנֶס הַחוּצָה:</p>	<p>¹⁸ but as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment with me, and fled out of the house."</p>

This scene 3 (vv. 16-18) is the conclusion of Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative. The characters in this episode include אִשֶׁת אֲדֹנָי (eset adonayw-master's wife), פּוֹטִפָּר (potipar-Potiphar), and יוֹסֵף (yosep-Joseph). The venue of this narrative is still inside Potiphar's house.

In vv. 8 and 9, the narrator uses observation characterization revealing the character of Potiphar as a master who had no concern about anything in the house and that he had delegated everything to Joseph. This may suggest that Potiphar had neglected his wife and was not caring about her needs. While in v. 17 the narrator uses manipulative language characterization in portraying Potiphar's wife as a woman who is full of hatred when she refers to Joseph as עֶבֶר עֶבֶד (ebed ibri -Hebrew slave).

Also, the narrator uses observation characterization in this phrase to portray Potiphar's wife as a trusted wife or woman. This is evident because Potiphar did not question his wife's testimony. The fact that Potiphar did not question her is unmistakable that she is a trustworthy woman and he (Potiphar) had no reason of suspecting his wife. As affirmed by scholars such as Hamilton (1995, p. 471) who claim that Potiphar's immediately accepting his wife's story is a sign that he was totally convinced of his spouse's accusation and that Joseph was an untrustworthy servant.

Synthesis of Genesis 39: 6-18 in relation to Potiphar's wife image

The exegesis of Genesis 39: 6-18 above has demonstrated that Potiphar's wife was neither an 'immoral woman' per excellence as portrayed in the narrative but a character nor an individual used by God in the bible to advance the story of Joseph in Egypt and to manifest his power. However, she was a neglected woman and her husband (Potiphar) who was not paying attention to his wife's needs. Potiphar was concerned with food alone and neglected his other duties. There is nothing wrong with Potiphar's enjoyment of food, but the implication of the texts is that he had no interest or concern for his own wife. As a way of engraving her presence, she devised a way out through Joseph; using a garment as a communicative agent and also sexuality in ancient societies was used as a weapon for of power.

Potiphar was a crafty man; he brought a handsome and well-built slave to grant him authority over everything he owned with an intention of Joseph becoming a surrogate father. Adultery was viewed as "a serious sin in the Old Testament" (Cole, 1959, p. 318) although severally in the OT, mistresses allowed their slave girls to be surrogate mothers. On this, Pirson (2004, p. 259), claims that the testimony in (Gen. 39: 17-18) seemed to be a signal that Joseph was purchased by Potiphar with an intention of him (Joseph) becoming a surrogate father.

Potiphar's wife was a daring and brave woman. Her husband (Potiphar) initiated a sudden change that destabilizes the power relationship at Potiphar's households. Potiphar's wife was left powerless after all the household leadership and overseeing was handed over to Joseph as narrated by him (Joseph). She had to devise a way of regaining her power back. As McKay (1999, p. 228) asserts, power relationship distress emerged at the household when Potiphar immediately Joseph as his deputy. McKenzie and Kaltener (2013, p. 29) echo this issue of destabilizing power in Potiphar's household by stating that the introduction of a Hebrew into their households was the root source of the crisis. Her brave and courageous character should be modeled by those struggling to face challenging systems. It should then be understood that women who are most of the time portrayed as 'wicked or evil' are those challenging the systems such as Potiphar's wife.

Potiphar's wife was an active participant and advanced the 'garment motif' of the Jacob's cycle in Genesis 37-39. She used the garment to caption herself at Potiphar's household where she was neglected.

Her action was the only option for her to get attention from the parties or system that had neglected her at Potiphar's household. Adamo (2013, p. 230) confirms this in noting that

women in the Hebrew bible such as Tamar and Potiphar's wife used garments as communicative devices or as a means of self-inscription in a system that had neglected them.

Potiphar's wife was an honest and trusted woman since her husband Potiphar did not doubt her when she complained about Joseph's misconduct at their household. Her trustworthy and honest character is echoed by scholars such as Hamilton (1995, p. 471) who argues that Potiphar immediately accepted the statements made by his wife since he had no reason of suspecting his candid and truthful wife.

Conclusion

Genesis 39: 6-18 narrative is significant in our societies today in addressing matters related to sexual issues. It is evident that sexual matters such as rape, incest or adultery are addressed with biasness more so when the victims are female. In most cases women are portrayed as the initiators of the evil act and condemned like Potiphar's wife, followed by action taken against them while others get away freely and are not condemned by the society. Robert Alters' Convention of Characterization model is key in addressing issues related to sexual conduct.

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