

## “Tie this bond of scarlet cord.” The color red and identity in the biblical stories of Rahab and Jezebel\*

*“Ata este cordón escarlata”. El color rojo y la identidad en los relatos bíblicos de Rajab y Jezabel*

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### Abstract

In biblical narrative, the foreign woman is one of the biggest threats for the identity of the People of Israel. In the stories of Rahab and Jezebel, we find two different ways to cope with feminine alterity: whilst Rahab has a place inside the community, Jezebel remains the absolute *other*. Two iconographic elements play a relevant role in the literary construction of both characters. On one hand, the window as the place of action from which women take part in the narrative and, on the other hand, the chromatic element that seems to seal the fate of these women: both the scarlet cord (יָרֵי) that saves Rahab during the conquest of Jericho (Josh 2:18, 21) and the blood (דָּם) that spatters on the walls when Jezebel is murdered (2 Kgs 9:33), seem to point out the life and death that await them.

The reading here proposed aims to relate both stories through an exploration of the use of the motif of the window and the color red and their possible meanings inside the inclusion and exclusion dynamics operating in the texts.

### Resumen

La mujer extranjera es, dentro de la narración bíblica, una de las mayores amenazas para el orden y la identidad del pueblo de Israel. En las figuras de Rahab y Jezabel encontramos dos maneras distintas de hacer frente a la alteridad femenina: mientras que Rahab tiene un lugar dentro de la comunidad, Jezabel permanece como lo absoluto *otro*. Dos motivos iconográficos juegan un papel relevante en la construcción literaria de ambos personajes. Por una parte, la presencia de la ventana como lugar de acción desde el que las mujeres participan en la narración y, por otra, el empleo de un detalle cromático que parece sellar sus destinos: tanto en el lazo escarlata (יָרֵי) que salva a Rahab durante la conquista de Jericó como en la sangre de Jezabel (דָּם) que salpica sobre los muros cuando es asesinada (2 Reyes 9,33), parecen señalar las sentencias de vida o de muerte que las aguarda.

La lectura que aquí se propone pretende poner en relación ambas historias a partir del uso de la ventana y del color rojo y su posible significado dentro de las dinámicas de inclusión y exclusión que operan dentro del texto.

**Keywords:** Hebrew Bible; Language of color; The red color; Space; Woman at the Window; Identity; Alterity; Foreign women.

**Palabras clave:** Biblia Hebrea; lenguaje del color; color rojo; espacio; mujer en la ventana; identidad; alteridad; mujeres extranjeras.

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## 1. Introduction

In his wonderful essay *La Ceguera*, J.L.Borges said that blind men dwell in a world of colors. He himself could still perceive some of them: yellow, blue, maybe green, white that sometimes was gray. But from the ones that had been taken away from him, red was the color he missed the most:

"En cuanto al rojo, ha desaparecido del todo, pero espero alguna vez mejorar y poder ver ese gran color, ese color que resplandece en la poesía y que tiene tan lindos nombres en muchos idiomas. Pensemos en scharlach, en alemán, en scarlet, en inglés, escarlata en español, écarlate, en francés. Palabras que parecen dignas de ese gran color."<sup>1</sup>

Language, vision, memory, everything is mixed in the words of the poet to compose the complex and rich process of the chromatic experience. The colors we see and that constitute the universe we live in are not only the answer to some biological and physiological processes but also have an emotional and symbolical background that makes an impact on all our social and cultural manifestations. Thus, they establish codes, metaphors and iconographies that contribute to the communication of meanings.

The Hebrew Bible constitutes the vehicle through which the ancient Israel not only builds, normativizes and transmits its own meanings, but also gives itself sense and project itself into History. Namely, through an elaborate literary tale of its own collective memory, the people of Israel lay down its religious and political foundations and defined itself as a community. Despite the complexity of the biblical corpus, given

1. Borges, 2001:141.

its vast chronology, its different points of view or its diverse literary genres, it shows a great sense of coherence.<sup>2</sup> The dialogue among its different parts and its symbolic cohesion is possible, as R. Alter points out, due to the use of certain recurrent symbols.<sup>3</sup> My working hypothesis is that chromatic and spatial elements play a part in this unifier worldview. In order to prove it, two stories of women are presented, both within the so-called Deuteronomistic History,<sup>4</sup> which not only do they have the foreign origin of their heroines in common but also the presence of the color red and the window as a place for female agency.

The approach proposed here is literary, based on the reading of some scenes in which the color red, in its various manifestations, and the window present themselves as relevant iconographic motifs, in order to propose a possible answer to the meaning that their presence may have within the stories of Rahab (Josh 2: 1-4; 6: 22-23,25) and Jezebel (1 Kgs 16: 29-34; 18: 1-46; 21: 1-29; 2 Kgs 9: 30-37).<sup>5</sup>

The issue of identity is an element frequently represented in the Hebrew Bible, to the extent that the book is the constitutive basis of Israel as a community. The term “ethnicity” serves here to define the identity of a group that is bound by some common elements and beliefs. Nevertheless, the conformation of the distinct ethnic groups also requires the existence of the difference of those who do not belong to the collectivity. In the case of ancient Israel, the grounds of its identity are the belief in a shared historical memory, the principle of divine election, and its special relation with a land that is seen as a gift from God.<sup>6</sup> It is through the knowledge of the identity of God that the community of Israel knows itself as the chosen People,<sup>7</sup> so the biblical text distinguishes between the Israelite status of “chosen,” in contrast with those ethnic groups that either have not been chosen or have been actually condemned by God.<sup>8</sup>

In this inside-out scheme, the foreign woman is one of the major threats to the order and identity of the people of Israel. The ideal separation between Israelite men and strange women is explicitly manifested in the prohibition of mixed marriages as reported in Exodus 34: 16 and Deuteronomy 7: 3-4. In these texts, the danger generally posed by mixed marriages lies in the possibility that they lead to idolatry. Moreover, although both types of marriage are condemned, the union between Israelite men and foreign women is the one that generates genuine anxieties within the Hebrew Bible. In a society where the sacred realm is preferably male, the foreign wife is seen as dangerous

2. Alter and Kermode, 1990: 31.

3. *Ibid.*: 31.

4. The Deuteronomistic History hypothesis postulates that the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings form a literary unit, and whose ideological background is provided by the book of Deuteronomy. It was first established by Martin Noth in his 1943 book *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*. For an update of the current status of the studies about the Deuteronomistic History, see Person, 2002.

5. All translations are from corresponding volumes of The Anchor Bible Commentary Series.

6. McKinlay, 2004:21.

7. Hendel, 2005: 8.

8. Kaminsky, 2011:18.

because she carries a different religion with her. The 'power' that is attributed to these women is both erotic and religious: in the most negative aspect of this power of hers, she is always able to drag her husband behind other gods.

However, the role of the wife is not the only one that strange women play in the Bible. Their faces are as varied as diverse are the ways in which the text manages their differences. Two paradigmatic cases appear at the beginning and near the end of the so-called Historical Books: that of Rahab, in Josh 2, and of Jezebel, in the books of Kings. As a story of the development of the people of Israel from its entry in Canaan to the exile, the Deuteronomistic History is an essential tool for the study of Israel's relationship with its "others."

The interest of the stories of Rahab and Jezebel lies in their allowing us to observe the malleability of the biblical discourse on alterity. The negotiation of their differences has, at the same time, points in common and huge divergences, showing in consequence a continuous reconstruction of the idea of identity and the way of dealing with others.

## 2. The woman at the window

The starting point of this analysis is, precisely, the coincidence on the staging of the defining moments of both accounts, when the two women appear at the window. The image of the woman at the window is a known iconographic motif in the art and literature of the Ancient Near East and the Mediterranean: we found her represented in ivory plaques for furniture founded in Samaria, Nimrud or Khorsabad.<sup>9</sup> In some texts, the goddess Ishtar is called Kilili, 'queen of the windows',<sup>10</sup> while in Cyprus, Aphrodite was revered as *parakypousa*, the one who leans over face forwards.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, the iconography of the woman at the window has been explained in relation with the cult of fertility,<sup>12</sup> female sexuality and the practice of prostitution.<sup>13</sup> From the beginning, the ongoing debate about its meaning has been grounded on the idea of "exhibition" that seems to emanate from her place at the window; thus, it has been understood that the woman at the window is showing off her embodied femininity and her beauty, in sum, an erotic allure that gives her the power to tempt men.<sup>14</sup>

Goddess or prostitute, the identity of the woman at the window is read through very specific parameters of gender and space. In one hand, her body is defined by male desire –as is always a sexed body available to male pleasure– and, in the other hand, the action of looking through the window seems to challenge the spatial restrictions that dominate

9. Aschkenasy, 1998: 13.

10. McCarter, 1984: 172.

11. Stol, 2016: 432.

12. Beach, 1993: 99

13. For instance, in the 'Stele from the Harbour' of Thasos, "the provision that no woman shall look out of the windows, immediately suggests prostitution and soliciting" (Graham, 1998:23).

14. Aschkenasy, p. 14; O'Connell, p. 237; Stol, p.432

the life of women in all the androcentric societies.<sup>15</sup> As all the feminisms have recognized, one of the most effective ways of domination/subordination is to limit women's mobility, both in identitarian and spatial terms.<sup>16</sup> This is possible because space is but a social construct that works in favor of the dominant gender and class,<sup>17</sup> as it determines the place that the "others" should occupy and inhabit. Thus, space and gender exist in a reciprocal relationship of mutual generation and reproduction: the social construction of space is set in the assignment of certain places to feminized bodies, while gender contributes to space when these bodies must be kept out of the places that do not belong to them.<sup>18</sup>

That being said, when we talk about the places usually left for women, we immediately think about the private space: that of the house, the daily chores, the reproduction, and maternity, while the public space belongs to men.<sup>19</sup> As a place of connection not only between the natural and supernatural worlds, as evidenced by the Mesopotamian examples, but also between the inside and the outside, the window becomes a border full of meanings and dangers where the uncertainty of encounters and the threats of penetration and transgression materialize.

### 3. Space and the Deuteronomistic History

While the female stories we find in the Deuteronomistic History are different from each other, we can spot similarities when we focus on the spatial conception the texts seem to suggest. Generally, women are represented inside perfectly defined familiar places: Rahab is pictured in her house (Josh 2: 1-24), Jael in her tent (Judg 4), Delilah in her bedroom (Judg 16:1-22), Hannah in the house of her husband Elkana or inside the temple (1 Sam 1), and Michal in her father's or David's house (1 Sam 8: 20-21; 19: 8-17; 2 Sam 6, 16: 20-23). The problem occurs when the woman decide –or is obliged to– leave her place and ventures out: when the daughter of Jephthah goes out to greet him, she is condemned to sacrifice (Judg 11: 29-40); when the concubine of Judg 19 is expelled out the host house, she is raped to death; when Bathsheba is bathing, exposed to David's gaze, she is also exposed to his desire and, therefore, to danger (2 Sam 11: 2-5), and the same occurs to Tamar when she leaves her father's house and falls in her brother's trap (2 Sam 13).

It is through fear to these threats that the text justifies and validates male control over women. By means of these literary strategies, the biblical author is able to present

15. By androcentric societies I mean those societies that are ruled by men, their institutions, ideologies, and world-view. For the society represented in the biblical text, see Fuchs, 2003: 11-33.

16. Massey, 1994: 179.

17. Jeffers, 2013: 78.

18. Davidson, 2013:113.

19. These categories of public and private space has been present in the feminist biblical studies, where it has been established that, as nowadays, the female limitation to the private sphere was not only a conceptual but also a physical reality (Hancock, 2012: 43)

a prescriptive interpretation of culture<sup>20</sup> that, in the case of women, results in an ideal representation of the way they should be and behave, as well as the place they should inhabit.

The presence of the window in the stories of Rahab and Jezebel operates within the conceptions of space and gender I have been outlining here and insists on the idea that the appropriate and safer place for women is the inside, both of the house and of the community. We will see that the window, as a place of intersection between the private and the public, will work as an opening through which women will be able to become subjects within the narrative. Finally, the consequences of their actions will be constructed around a spatial dynamic in which the window will mark the difference between living and dying.

#### 4. Rahab, Jezebel and the color red

A symbol, however, seems to go unnoticed. A red cord flutters in Rahab's window; a bloodstain remains on the walls of the palace where Jezebel showed herself to Jehu for the last time. Despite the fact that both tales have been put into relation thanks to the woman at the window motif,<sup>21</sup> their shared chromatic element remains absent from the studies about these stories.

In order to understand the use of color in the Bible is necessary, in the first place, to define the scope of the terms designating colors and their chromatic boundaries, a task that has been possible thanks to philology. The efforts from this academic field have been focused primarily on clarifying the process of development of basic color terms and their derivatives so as to specify their frames of reference. In general, most studies<sup>22</sup> conclude that three designations make up the triad of biblical primary colors: white, red and black.<sup>23</sup> White and red are the dominant colors and, out of these two, red is the main color preserved in the text.<sup>24</sup>

The Hebrew term דָּם is generally translated as "red," and its root, 'dm, is attested in other Semitic languages with an analogous chromatic range. For instance, the Akkadian term *adamu* can mean "blood" and "a red garment", treating both definitions as substantivations of a hypothetical adjective "red".<sup>25</sup> In Ugarit we find 'dm, 'to become red' or 'to put on red make up.' Its association with the color is clearer in those texts where the verb is related to the purple snails from which the 'Tyrian red' or 'Tyrian purple' is

20. Ester Fuchs (2003: 29) argues that biblical narratives have both literary-poetic and political value, precisely because of their prescriptive nature.

21. See, for instance, McKinlay, 2003:1-30.

22. See Guillamont, 1957: 339-348; Fronzaroli, 1969: 377-89; Brenner, 1982.

23. Brenner, 1982: 49.

24. *Ibid.*: 79.

25. Bulakh, 2006: 196.

extracted.<sup>26</sup> Is the case of Anat's ritual purification scene in the *Baal Cycle* (KTU 1.3 III 1), or that of Pughat, in the *Epic of Aqhat* (KTU 1.19 IV 42).

Regarding the different color shades אָדָם adopts within the biblical text, textual evidence seems to point to a vast chromatic scale including brown, (Num 19:2; Zech 1:8; 6:2), yellowish-brown (Gen 25: 30), blood red (Isa 63: 2; 2 Kgs 3:22), wine red (Prov 23:31) and pink (Song 5:10; Lam. 4:7).<sup>27</sup> Also, אָדָם is related by analogy with certain substances and objects that convey color properties such as blood, wine, and dyed textiles.<sup>28</sup> In the story of Rahab, the color red appears under the form of a dyed textile: a scarlet cord. The term יָנִי is the name of a specific hue within the אָדָם sector and refers to the pigment extracted from the cochineal which is used to dye fabrics in a crimson red.<sup>29</sup>

Although its etymology is uncertain, there are ancient cognates in Akkadian (*šintu(m)*, 'dyed fabric'; vb. *šanû*, 'rinsing,' 'soaking,' and 'dyed textile'), and in Ugaritic (*tn*, a word that refers to the substance extracted from the cochineal).<sup>30</sup> It happens forty-three times in the Hebrew Bible, both absolutely and along with תּוֹלַעַת. In this last instance, the combination of *šānī* with *tōla'at* specifies the type of insect from which the color is obtained.<sup>31</sup> Scarlet was associated with wealth and royalty, as occurs in 2 Sam 1, 24, where it is said that King Saul dressed women of Israel in scarlet;<sup>32</sup> the curtains of the Tabernacle (Exod 27:16) and the robe of the priest (Exod 28: 4-5).

Besides its relevance as a luxury item, its presence in purification ceremonies such as that of the leper, points to a symbolic usage based on its relation with the color of blood.<sup>33</sup>

In Isa 1:15-18 we find another association between scarlet, blood, and the concepts of purity and impurity. Here, the vision of the prophet shows the hands of the Judahites full of blood: no matter how much they make sacrifices, Yahweh commands them to wash themselves and to do right so as to stop their sufferings. Only then, «Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool»; if the children of Judah act obediently, Yahweh will clean their impurities and they will finally find peace in the land.

In a literary economy as that of the Bible, in which the only phenomena that are externalized are those strictly necessary for the development of the story,<sup>34</sup> the main cause of the presence of chromatic elements in the biblical texts is their allusive power.

26. *Ibid.*: 197.

27. Brenner, 1982: 80.

28. *Ibid.*: 168.

29. Beyse, 2006: 340.

30. Köhler, L., Baumgartner, W., *et al.* (eds.), HALOT, vol. 4. Šin-Taw, 1994, p.

31. *Ibid.*: 340.

32. The Masoretic Text reads *šny 'm 'dnym* as "crimson with luxuries". Although it is not sure that *'dnym* means "luxuries", it is probably that *'dn* refers to "provide richly" (McCarter, 1984: 72-3).

33. Köhler, *et al.*, 1999. Also Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman III, 1998: 158.

34. Auerbach, 2003: 11.

The symbolic richness of the color red seems to lie, as we have seen, in its relationship with blood that gives it its enormous versatility of meanings and uses.

## 5. Blood red

In the ancient world, the experience of color took place primarily through nature, so one of the main sources for the chromatic experience of red must have been blood.<sup>35</sup> Within the biblical text, blood is particularly present in ritual and cultural contexts, where it becomes a symbol of enormous relevance. Blood is a substance full of meanings due, above all, to its inherent referentiality;<sup>36</sup> source of life and sign of death, its ritual manipulation has been understood through principles of purification, consecration, atonement or threat.<sup>37</sup> Its range of signification, however, is not only theological.

Through the designation and limitation of access to spaces, actions, and cultural elements, the rites also set a hierarchy within human relationships.<sup>38</sup> Because of their ability to privilege some spaces and peoples, rites help to shape the reality of all the participants involved.<sup>39</sup>

On the one hand, blood manipulation indicates the identity of the officiant as mediator between God and his people, just as it happens to Moses in Exodus 24.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, the prerogative to receive the splashing of the blood, or attend to its spilling on the side of the altar, or to survive inside the houses painted with the blood of the sacrificial ram, also operates as a distinctive feature of the people of Israel. In all these ritual contexts, blood activates one of its meanings through its color; blood stains and through this stain, it remains as a visible sign of the activities and relationships that give cohesion to the group:

The blood splashed on the side of the altar is a tangible, visible reminder of the performance of the sacrifice. The marks of blood on the Stone altar would have remained visible for a lengthy period, serving as a vivid reminder of the sacred relationships that are expressed in the sacrificial ceremony.<sup>41</sup>

Color and vision thus serve to enrich the meaning of an experience that is, above all, social. It is precisely the power of blood to evoke a special identity structure and its relevance within the processes of groupal redefinition that operates inside the otherness discourse of the biblical text. By stating membership, blood red has also the potential to mark those who do not belong to the group, becoming one useful tool to define alterity.

35. Ryken, *et al*, 1998: 157.

36. Niditch, 2011: 641.

37. Hendel, 1989: 370-71.

38. This is the premise of Saul M. Olyan's book *Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical representations of Cult* (2000).

39. *Ibid.*: 4.

40. Gilders, 2004: 187.

41. *Ibid.*: 387.



## 6. Rahab (Josh 2: 1-4; 6: 22-23, 25)

The scene featuring Rahab takes place at the beginnings of the Israelite conquest of the land of Canaan. The narrative tells us that Joshua sent two spies to Jericho in order to reconnoiter the city and to enter the house of «a woman, a prostitute named Rahab» (v.1). A Canaanite, a woman and a prostitute, Rahab is the quitessential other.<sup>42</sup> However, and against all odds, the woman takes sides with the invaders. When the King of Jericho finds out the presence of the spies and sends soldiers to catch them, Rahab lies to protect the intruders.

In her determination to assist the Israelites, Rahab not only delivers a theological speech that states the success of the Israelite conquest of all the land and the sovereignty of Yahweh, but also let the spies escape the city from her window. The window, at the same time, is both a real and a metaphorical place where female intervention is possible: an intermediate space between the public and the private, the window allows her to take action and save the life of the Israelite men.

She only wants one thing in return: that the life of her household and hers be spared. The men promise Rahab that neither she nor her family will suffer any harm if they follow their instructions thoroughly:

“Tie this bond of scarlet cord in the window through which you have lowered us. And your father, your mother, your siblings –all of your father’s household- you shall gather round you in the house. Whoever goes out the doors of your house into the street has responsibility for his blood on his own head; we will be guiltless. As for anyone who is with you in the house, responsibility for his blood will be on our heads if a hand is laid upon him. But if you disclose this mission of ours, we will be guiltless with respect to your oath which you have made us swear” (Josh 2:17-20).

The only house safe from the devastation that befalls Jericho is the one marked with a red cord. The color of the ribbon is combined with the allusions to blood: the responsibility of its spilling will depend on the fulfilling of the indications dictated by the Israelite spies.

The resolution of the story of Rahab is collected in a few verses in Joshua 6:

To the two men who reconnoitered the land, Joshua had said: “Go into the harlot’s house and bring on the woman with all who belong to her, as you swore to her.” So the young spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and mother and brothers and all who belong to her. All her relatives they brought out, and they quartered them outside the camp of Israel (vv.22-23).

42. Fewell and Gunn, 1993: 119).

And the harlot Rahab, with her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua let live. She dwells in Israel to this very day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to reconnoiter Jericho (v.25).

This scene echoes another scenario well known in the History of Israel. The night of Passover, God warns Moses and Aaron about a new and deadly plague that will hit the Egyptians. In order to be safe from harm, the Israelites have to paint their houses with the blood of the sacrificial ram:

"Tell the entire Israelite congregation as follows on the tenth of this month that they shall take for themselves, each one, a lamb per house...they shall take from the blood and they shall swab it on both doorposts and on the lintel, on the houses in which they shall eat it.

The blood will mark the houses in which you are. When I see the blood, I will pass you by. So the Destroyer will not wreak havoc among you when I bring blows upon the land of Egypt" (Exod 12: 3; 13).

The idea of the necessity of staying inside the houses, congregated under the blood mark, appears again in the message transmitted by Moses to the rest of the people:

"You shall take a bunch of hyssop and you shall dip it in the blood that is in the threshold, and you shall dab the lintel and the two doorposts from the blood that is in the threshold. None of you, no one, shall step outside the entrance of his house until morning. YHWH will pass through to attack Egypt; He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts: and YHWH will protect the entrance and not let the Destroyer enter your houses to attack" (vv.22-23).

Those who remain inside their houses are safe, while on the outside the enemies of Israel face their death. To both Rahab and the Israelites, life –the chance of surviving- is linked to their being part of the group and it is materialized in the red sign exhibited on the thresholds of their houses.

Vision plays a key role since salvation is only possible through the recognition of the color by the executors of the divine will. Thus, in the same way that red is the color of the covenant between Yahweh and his people, it is also the color of the agreement between the foreign woman and the Israelites. New identity limits are established due to the mutual collaboration between the enemies: Rahab's abandonment of her ethnic peculiarity, evident from her betrayal of her own people, ensures her a place among the people of Israel, while the Israelites are willing to disobey the laws<sup>43</sup> that command them to destroy the Canaanites in return for protection and assistance.

43. Deuteronomy 20: 16-18 states that all the Canaanites must be annihilated.

The scarlet cord, therefore, is a sign and a reminder of a double transformation: Rahab will no longer be considered a foreigner within the group and the Israelites will no longer be strangers in a land that is theirs by divine decree.<sup>44</sup>

## 7. Jezebel (1 Kgs 16: 29-34; 18: 1-46; 21: 1-29; 2 Kgs 9: 30-37)

From the very beginning, Jezebel is a dangerous woman because she is strange and powerful. And although it is explicitly stated that she is the reason behind Ahab's apostasy, her faults are not limited, as in the case of other female figures,<sup>45</sup> to lead her husband astray. Jezebel not only keeps her foreign culture but also is actively involved in strengthening the worship of her homeland gods. Thus, she orders the killing of the Yahwistic prophets while those of Ashera and Baal eat at her table, and she even threatens the life of Elisha when she finds out that he killed his Baalic counterparts right after his victory in the competition of Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 19: 1-3). In addition to her religious otherness, Jezebel also embodies the monarchy in its most negative aspect by exerting her will absolutely over her subjects, as the episode of Naboth's Vineyard suggests (1 Kgs 19: 1-21)

Her attacks against Israel's identity boundaries condemn her to a gory death that seeks the total destruction of her persona and her memory. Jezebel looks out of the window in time to see the arrival of Jehu and greetings him: "Is all well, Zimri, his master's killer?" From her position at the window, she defies the legitimacy of the revolt led by Jehu and, in doing so, she refuses to submit to the God of Israel and to his power structures.

When Jehu hears her, he asks to all men loyal to him to throw her out:

He looked up toward the window and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked out toward him. He said, "Throw her down!" They threw her down and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses; he trampled her. He went in and ate and drank, and said, "Look after this cursed one; bury her. After all, she is a princess". They went to bury her, but they found nothing of her save the skull, the feet, and the palms of the hands. They returned and reported to him. He said, "It is the word of YHWH which he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite, 'Dogs shall devour the flesh of Jezebel in the plot of Jezreel, and the carcass of Jezebel shall be like dung on the field in the plot of Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say 'This is Jezabel'''" (vv.33-37).

The actions and expressions that compose the murder of Jezebel aim, first and foremost, to reinforce her strangeness through the symbolic association between the woman

44. Bear in mind that the successful conquest of the land begins right after this chapter (McKinlay, 2004: 44).

45. The origin of Solomon's apostasy lies in his harem of foreign wives, who are guilty of introducing him to the worship of their gods (1 Kgs 11: 1-13)

and the primeval monster that must be killed and the idol that needs to be desacralized.<sup>46</sup> Jehu<sup>47</sup> tramples Jezebel as Baal tramples Yam<sup>48</sup> and Yahweh tramples the sea monster Rahab;<sup>49</sup> Jezebel is cursed as cursed is the snake in the Garden of Eden;<sup>50</sup> and she is defiled when she is turned into dung as it happens to the temple of Baal when it is turned into latrines (2 Kgs 10: 26-27).<sup>51</sup>

Inevitably, her image at the window is also reminiscent of the sculptural representations of foreign goddesses<sup>52</sup> and her voice, like the voice of Baal<sup>53</sup> at Mount Carmel, is ineffective and leads to death. Finally, the fragmentation of her corpse echoes the image of another god, that of Dagon, who was defeated by the ark of Yahweh at the beginning of 1 Samuel, and whose head and palms were found on the ground.<sup>54</sup>

The splashing of Jezebel's blood when she is thrown out of the window occurs within this mythic-ritualistic scheme. On the one hand, the image of Jehu stained with Jezebel's blood resembles the near eastern iconography of the warrior dressed, painted, or stained red.<sup>55</sup>

In Isaiah 63: 1-6 we have a combination of the action of strampling and the presence of the color red:

Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson?

Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength?  
"It is I, proclaiming victory, mighty to save."

Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?

46. All references are from Treballe Barrera, 1995: 260.

47. Whilst the LXX vocalizes the verb as plural, and takes the subject to be the horses, the MT does it as singular, with Jehu as subject (Cogan and Tadmor, 1988: 112).

48. For instance, in the myth of the palace of Baal, in KTU 1.3 III 38-46, Baal says: «¿No aplasté yo al Amado de El, Yam, /no acabé con Nahar, el Dios grande?/ ¿No amordacé al Dragón,/cerré su boca? Aplasté a la Serpiente tortuosa./ al Tirano de siete cabezas./Aplasté al Amado de El, Arish,/ aniquilé al Novillo divino, Atik. / Aplasté a la Perra divina, Ishat./acabé con la hija de El, Dubub». (Del Olmo Lete, 1998: 71.).

49. Psalms 89: 10-12.

50. Cursing is a common ritual action that usually takes place before any battle. (Treballe Barrera, 1995: 253.).

51. The origin of the desecration is the impurity caused by dirt.

52. See supra *The woman at the window*

53. The Baal cycle explicitly speaks of an opening in the palace where the god Baal delivers its voice (KTU 1.4 VII 15-35). Insofar as he is the storm god, his 'voice' is nothing but lightning and thunder, elements through which he exerts his kingship. Since 1 Kings 18 gathers the confrontation between Yahweh and Baal through the competition between Elijah and the priests of Baal, and whose ultimate goal is the theophany of lightning, is likely to find ourselves here before another allusion. I thank Andrés Piquer Otero for the idea and the reference.

54. «After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then [they] took it, brought it to the house of Dagon, and set it up beside Dagon. When the Ashdodites arose, there was Dagon fallen on his face before the ark of Yahweh; so they raise up Dagon and put him back in his place. But when they arose the next morning, there was Dagon fallen on his face before the ark of Yahweh. Dagon's head and both his hands were broken off upon the threshold» (1 Sam 5: 1-5).

55. Ames, 2014: 83. In the myth of the building of the palace of Baal we find Anat fighting a gory battle against her enemies: "Se ató cabezas al dorso, / se ciñó las palmas a la cintura; /Las rodillas hundió en la sangre de los guerreros, /las pantorrillas en el mondongo de los combatientes" (KTU 1.3 II 11-14. In Del Olmo Lete, 1998: 68). In Nahum 2 we read about the soldiers of Yahweh: "The shields of the soldiers are red; the warriors are clad in scarlet" (Nah 2: 4).

“I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me.

I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath;  
their blood splattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.

It was for me the day of vengeance; the year for me to redeem had come.

I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm achieved salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me.

I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.”

In this case, the warrior is no other than Yahweh, stained red with the blood of His enemies. The red spot, acting as a reflection of blood, signals the victory of the warrior: symbolizes the success and the survival of the bearer of the splatters and the death of his opponents.

On the other hand, the verb *nHz*, used to talk about the splashing of blood, appears in the biblical texts almost exclusively in cultual contexts. Despite the various forms in which the blood is used in the different sacrificial rites –the splashing of the blood in the ‘ōlā and š<sup>e</sup>lāmîm sacrifices and the application of blood to the doorposts in the *p<sup>e</sup>sah-* they all have a common communicative purpose.<sup>56</sup> Through sacrifice, the people of Israel not only remember Yahweh and receive His blessings in return, but also establish religious and social bonds among them. As noted above, the red spot is a sign of covenant and membership that are possible through a special relationship between the people and the deity.

The blood of Jezebel points her as the paradigmatic foe that must be exterminated. All that lingers are fragments of her body, lying as filth on the ground, and her blood on the walls. The order she transgressed is restored over the abjection of her remains: the Israelite male embodied by Jehu recovers the authority needed to eradicate any trace of the religion promoted by the house of Ahab. The red spot lingers, then, as a reminder of everything the group wants to remove from within and of the sacrifice that takes place as a communal retribution for the offenses of Jezebel.<sup>57</sup>

## 8. Conclusions

The characters of Rahab and Jezebel appear in contexts of deep political and religious crisis that threaten the foundations of the community as known in the text. On the one hand, the story of Rahab takes place during the entrance of the Israelites in Canaan, a fact that marks the culmination of their wandering in the desert and the beginning of their conflict with the rest of the people of the land, aiming to define and distinguish themselves as the people of Yahweh. On the other hand, the presentation of the reign of

56. Hendel, 1989: 387.

57. Walsh, 2013:329.

Ahab and Jezebel insists in the wickedness of the Northern kings, whose deeds endanger the survival of the collectivity.

Both women are the visible face of the *other* that destabilizes, that reveals the vulnerability of the boundaries delimited by the biblical discourse; they share, above all, their double condition of women and foreigners that turn them, in light of biblical judgment on mixed marriages, in bearers of an inherent power to lead the hearts of Israelites astray. However, the resolution of both stories shows us the complexity of the boundaries that define the members of the community of Israel; because, although the alien origins of the women condemn them to remain outside the group, their survival ultimately depends on their involvement in favor of the Israelite cause and their recognition of Yahweh's power. That is, these stories present the identity boundaries as entities subjected to constant negotiations, allowing the community to understand and manage otherness in different ways.

Rahab's metamorphosis is a movement from the outside to the inside. She is first presented as a Canaanite prostitute, insisting on her subordination because of her gender and race. Her apparent vulnerability, however, is soon overcome by her ability to act and talk, choosing the side of the Israelites. Her attitude is praised as an act of faith whose reward is the inclusion of the foreign woman and her household within the people of Israel. Physically, she remains inside the domestic sphere, safe from the ethnic violence that takes place beyond her door. Like in the scene of the Passover night, this transformation is sealed with a red sign, symbol of the sacrificial blood that distinguishes those who are part of Yahweh's chosen people.

The path that Jezebel roams is the absolute opposite. Queen consort of Israel, her faithfulness to her Phoenician customs drives her to a cruel ending that seeks to erase all trace of her from within the community: when she is physically thrown outside the safety of her room towards her death, she is also being banned from the group. This is the reason why she is associated with elements and scenes that insist on her hostile and strange features, looking out of the window in the plenitude of her femininity and alterity. Her blood is then a reminder of her defeat and, like a trophy, is attached to the walls and the clothes of the warrior that have overpowered her, as it happens to the gods after finishing with their enemies.

The window and the color red mark in both stories two identity movements that are also vital. As a result of their interventions for or against the Israelites, the inclusion of the foreign woman within the group is synonym of life, while her exclusion always ends up in death. This is possible due, first, to the gender and spatial principles that limit and define the ways women (and especially foreign women) should behave and talk, as well as the punishments they should face when they do not conform to the norm. And, second, to the ability of the color red to reactivate the cultural memory, as the dialogue between the stories analyzed and other biblical and Near Eastern examples have proved. While the negativity of Jezebel is stressed through the association with images of the victory of the national god and the destruction of the enemy, the complicity of Rahab is

recognized through the evocation of contexts of the reactualization of groupal identity and cohesion.

Far from being incidental, the chromatic and spatial experiences have revealed complex principles, full of background and meaning. While the window functions as a gender and identity boundary that marks the real and the symbolic space where our female protagonists belong, the main purpose of the presence of color in these stories is to endure as a sign and a visible manifestation of the true anxiety that lies beneath these accounts.<sup>58</sup> In these cases the remembered past, traditions and symbols are collected and reused to solve the identity crisis posed by the relation with female alterity. The color red and the window thus become a means that communicates an inclusion-exclusion dynamic that makes the preservation of the biblical identity discourse possible in spite of the ambivalence of difference: through the domestication or the annihilation of the foreign woman, we have seen the ways in which the narratives are able to legitimate the Israelite sense of self and the power structures that support it.

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58. For Auerbach, (2003: 11), «Their aim [of the Biblical stories] is not to bewitch the senses, and if nevertheless they produce lively sensory effects, it is only because the moral, religious, and psychological phenomena which are the sole concern are made concrete in the visible matter of life.»

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