

The Untold Story of “Mrs Noah”¹: The Hebrew Bible, Gender and Media: An Intertextual Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

The Bible is notorious for its androcentric narratives of biblical protagonists. Women’s stories are either abbreviated or erased. Where and when they are mentioned, women are represented negatively as whores, adulteresses and wicked temptresses. Where they are represented as virtuous, virtuousness is synonymous with meekness and submissiveness, both of which reinforce patriarchal ideologies. In the narrative of Noah, we read about the godliness and righteousness of Noah, but we only hear about his wife in passing. Mrs Noah is not only unnamed; she is voiceless and only exists in the shadow of her famous husband. This paper attempts to re-construct, based on Proverbs 31:10-31, the story of Noah’s wife from an intertextual critical discourse analysis perspective, to show that issues of gender and the media have evolved from biblical times to the detriment of women. The paper argues that when read within the cultural context of ancient Israel, the untold story of Noah’s wife is that of a great woman.

Keywords: *Mrs Noah, reconstruction, narrative, intertextuality, critical discourse analysis.*

Introduction

The Hebrew Bible (the Christian Old Testament) from which the narrative about Noah is found, and in which Mrs Noah is only but a footnote (James 2005: 51), is known for its androcentric perspectives (Meyers 1998; Bird 1997). Carol Meyers argues that, because of its androcentric nature, the Bible focuses far more on men than women (1998: 251). Expressing similar sentiments, Phyllis Bird contends that the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament is the product of a patriarchal world of male authors and editors. Women in that world are represented through male eyes and for the purposes determined by male authors (Bird 1997: 53). Thus, in the traditional Israelite culture, women were subjected to the rule of men; women belonged in the home while the public sphere was male-oriented, male-controlled, and male-dominated (Bird

¹Mrs Noah is a title adopted from Carolyn Cutis James who used it to refer to Noah’s wife in the biblical story of Noah in the Book of Genesis. This is found in her book titled *Lost Women of the Bible: The Women we Thought we Knew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) pp. 47-63

1999). It is therefore not surprising that stories of women in the Bible were untold, unwritten and ultimately buried. Writing about women was never a priority in the biblical world; yet as readers concerned with what it meant to be a woman then and what it means today, it is compelling to read between the lines of those male narratives with an effort to discover and reconstruct the deleted or abbreviated female stories of the Bible.

Mrs Noah, whose untold story is of interest to us, is one of the many women in the Hebrew Bible who led quiet lowly lives under the shadow of their prominent husbands. As convincingly noted, by Carolyn James, despite Mrs Noah's "historic ordeal, we know next to nothing about her (2005: 48). By employing the use of Intertextual Critical Discourse Analysis as our theoretical and analytical framework, we seek to construct and or reconstruct the story of Mrs Noah. This may sound like a bizarre exercise for many, especially Bible believing individuals, for as observed by James, even feminists "determined to highlight every mention of women in the Bible, skip right past her as though she never existed" (James 2005:48). Being a biblical character, who is not only a woman but above all one only mentioned in passing, in what is otherwise a legendary epic that has continued to be told and retold throughout human history, evoked the writing of this paper. The paper will unfold as follows: a discussion of the approach to be used, namely Intertextual Critical Discourse Analysis; a summary of Genesis 6-9; an application of the approach to the story and conclusions.

Intertextual Critical Discourse Analysis:

We propose Intertextual Critical Discourse Analysis as the theoretical framework in our creative re-imagination of the life and experiences of Mrs Noah. This is a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach that brings together the approaches of Intertextuality and Critical Discourse Analysis, under the banner Intertextual Critical Discourse Analysis (ICDA). We are convinced that within the well-known story of Noah, there is the untold story of his wife whom we have named Mrs Noah, a title first used by James (2005). The story of Noah has rendered his wife invisible and voiceless. The proposed name, 'Mrs Noah' is itself problematic because even the manner she is referred to in the story, as "wife of Noah", or "Noah's wife" (see, Genesis 6: 18) still defines her in relation to her male counterpart, thus constructing her as her husband's appendage, with no autonomous identity of her own. Her existence, therefore, is without independence from her male associate. This is typical of patriarchal narratives which tend to position women as extensions of males. We therefore,

problematize the very title we assign the woman and only use it for ease of reference. Our view is that women deserve their own names, independent of their male counterparts, as did Mrs Noah and many nameless female characters in the Bible. We now expound on the theoretical tools used in the paper, starting with intertextuality.

Intertextuality

First applied almost exclusively to post-modernist literary criticism (Haberer 2007), intertextuality is now widely used in different disciplines that involve text analysis: from linguistics to literary criticism, and more recently in biblical studies. The term was coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, but can be traced back to her mentors who, even though they did not call it ‘intertextuality,’ had long theorized that texts are dialogical (Bakhtin 1975, 1981). In other words, a text is a patchwork of other texts with which it is in dialogue. Each new text necessarily borrows from other texts and re-contextualizes those other texts to create new meanings. According to Moyise,

No text is an island and [...] it cannot be understood in isolation. It can only be understood as part of a web or matrix of other texts, themselves only to be understood in the light of other texts. Each new text disturbs the fabric of existing texts as it jostles for a place in the canon of literature. Intertextuality suggests that the meaning of a text is not fixed but open to revision as new texts come along and reposition it (2002: 418)

Put differently, intertextuality is the history of a text (Halliday 2003 cited in Ahmadian and Yazdani 2013), as each text is influenced by other texts that have preceded it. It therefore combines different elements of those texts to (re)create a new text in a new context so that “every text is an intertext- an intersection of numberless other texts before it” (Abrams 1993: 285). Texts dialogue with each other through quotations, allusions, figures of speech and many other textual, historical and cultural elements. Knowledge of the elements that allow texts to dialogue is important in crafting new creative texts as well as in reading and making sense of existing ones. Both author and reader make use of this knowledge of the complex intertextual relations among texts to be able to create new texts or comprehend/analyze existing ones.

In order to reconstruct Mrs Noah we are informed by different types of intertextuality whose understanding will help us approach the story of (Mrs.) Noah in order to discern from it roles Mrs Noah played in Noah's epic journey of building the Ark and saving those that God had chosen. According to Ahmadian and Yazdani (2013), intertextuality must be understood broadly as intertextuality of the text/author, as well as the reader's intertextuality. Text/author intertextuality is concerned with analyzing the text and finding out elements of other texts that have influenced its creation, while reader intertextuality focuses on the reader's experiences of reading other texts and knowledge of those elements of culture or chains of texts that help him/her to understand, interpret, make meaning and discover meaning. According to Ahmadian and Yazdani;

...the former refers to text constructions and those elements of other texts which influence, implicitly or explicitly, the structure of that text and are hence parts of the nature of the text. These can be traced, identified, and classified via text analysis, understanding text units and their functions in the text, and text synthesis. The latter, intertextuality of reader, refers to the reader her/himself, her/his prior and conceptual knowledge, experiences of reading, and the influences s/he receives from previous reading experiences in reading the present text (2013: 157).

The model of intertextual analysis we employed in this paper considers elements of both types. We use our experiences of reading other biblical texts to make sense of the story of Noah. We further invoke author's intertextuality to use our knowledge of other biblical texts in reconstructing the story of Mrs Noah from ancient Israelite culture. The model of intertextual analysis that is particularly helpful here is by Ahmadian and Yazdani (2013: 160-161) which comprises two types: micro-intertextuality which includes allusion (explicit/implicit reference to another text, event, person, etc.), adaptation (taking one thing or idea and using it to recreate another), indication (suggesting concept/idea by indicating another thing related to it, and macro intertextuality which is quotation (directly or indirectly borrowing words or ideas from another text) .

Our intertextual analysis focuses on the latter question where we read the sketchy fragments of Mrs Noah's story in the light of the Woman of Courage of Proverbs 31:10-31 which is also found in the Hebrew Bible. The inter-textual reading endeavours to reconstruct Mrs Noah's story based on what could be safely termed an example of an ancient Israelite married woman's tale.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical discourse analysis is a theory/method of text analysis that focuses on the intersection of discourse and social experience (Fairclough 1995, 2001, 2010; Phillips & Jørgensen 2004; Patterson 2010). The core principle of CDA is that many aspects of our lived experience are socially constructed and mediated through language, to which they are dialectically related (Fairclough 2003). Language discourse is seen as not only serving certain ideological interests, but that it is in fact ideology (Fowler 1979). Through discourse certain messages, ideas, beliefs and practices are made to seem commonsensical, what we would like to term 'common-sense ideologies' following Fairclough (2001, 2003, Wodak 2001). In the case of Noah, we contend, ancient Israelite culture made it normal to talk about men and their property, with wives and children constructed as mere extensions of the men's property.

According to Phillips and Jørgensen, language (or discourse) is "a machine that generates and...constitutes the social world" (2004: 9). In this paper we are particularly interested in the representational function of language and how, in media texts, some social actors are included and /or excluded. Although the Bible is not a conventional media text, we still believe that those who were curating important events functioned much like today's news editors who must decide which stories are worth preserving and which ones can be left out. Such decisions are political and gendered. We are interested in the ideological effects of including /excluding certain social actors from history. According to Patterson, critical (discourse) approaches require the researcher to have "doubt" (Patterson 1997). It requires that we doubt the existence of 'truth' and to doubt the very object/idea under scrutiny (ibid: p. 425) and to see social reality as partly constructed through discursive practices, including media practices. In doubting, a researcher reflects on one's practices.

Intertextual Critical Discourse Analysis helps us to reconstruct the story because it allows us to analyze presence as well as absence in texts (what/who is included and what/who is excluded). A presence is everything that makes up the content of a text. An absence on the other hand is "something that *could* be present in ... [text] but is not, possibly for ideological reasons" (Baker & Ellece 2011:1, 2018). The immediate challenge that we face is how we can analyze something that is virtually non-existent such as Mrs Noah's full story. We suggest that this is possible by bringing "the outside of the text into the text" (Fairclough 2003: 17) by reading the text intertextually. Since intertextuality acknowledges that texts are constructed on

the building blocks of others (Tull 1999), we suggest that the reading of Mrs Noah's story must necessarily involve a recollection from other biblical texts, as well as echoes of ancient Israelite cultures in to appreciate how Mrs Noah (and her contemporaries) contributed to the socio-economic and cultural development of their societies. This will allow us to explore "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in [the narrative]" (Wodak 2001:2). In doubt about Mrs Noah's story, we are motivated by Carolyn James who observes that:

Genesis acknowledges her existence five times, never once by name, and never for anything she does or for any quality or contribution that distinguishes her from anyone else. Not everyone accepts the fact that, so little is known about her (2005: 51).

What can we possibly know about Mrs Noah? Putting the pieces together

Let us begin with the story in Gen 6-9, which reads:

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and walked faithfully with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth (Gen. 6: 13ff.). So, make yourself an ark out of cypress wood." So, God instructed Noah on how to build the ark and Noah did as instructed. When the building of the ark was completed, Noah, his sons, his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the flood. Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded. For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters rose, they lifted the ark high above the earth. Everything that moved on land perished. Only Noah and those in the ark with him survived. But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. So, Noah his wife, his sons and his sons' wives came out. Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth" (Gen. 9:1).

This is relevant in helping the reader to understand how the woman being used for the intertextual reading of Mrs Noah's story informs the reconstruction of her life story. We have already noted that Proverbs 31:10-31 is an example of the limited and unusual biblical texts in which a woman is the protagonist and is given such "manly descriptions that to some extent do not correspond to the nature of the biblical materials in general" (Kebaneilwe 2012). Below is a translation of Proverbs 31:10-31

Proverbs 31:10-31

A woman of courage²

A 'woman of courage' who can find? For her value is far more than corals
The heart of her lord trusts in her and he lacks no spoil.
She does him good and not evil, all the days of her life.
She seeks wool and flax and joyfully works with her palms
She is like a ship going around; she brings in food from afar
And she arises still in the night and gives prey to her house and a portion to her maidens
She considers a field and takes it; from the fruit of her palms she plants a vineyard
She girds her loins in strength, to strengthen her arms
She perceives that her gain is good; her lamp will not be quenched in the night
She stretches out her hands to the spindle-whorl, and her palms grasp the whirl of the spindle
Her palm she spreads out to the poor and her hands she stretches out to the needy
She will not fear from snow to her house, because all of her house is in scarlet clothing
Coverings she makes for herself, a garment of six purple
Her lord is being known in the gates, in his seat with the elders of the land
Linen garment she makes and sells and belts she gives to the traders
Strength and honour are her clothing and she laughs at the coming day
Her mouth she opens in wisdom and the law of kindness is on her tongue
She watches the ways of her house and does not eat bread of sluggishness
Her sons arise and call her blessed, her lord; and he praises her

²The translation has been adopted from Kebaneilwe 2012 "This Courageous woman: A Socio-rhetorical Womanist Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31". Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Murdoch, Perth, Australia.

Many daughters have done courage, but you ascend above all of them

Favour is deception and beauty is nothing; a woman who has fear of Yahweh she shall be
praised

Give to her from the fruit of her hands and let her deeds praise her at the gates

The woman in the poem is represented as a heroine: powerful, resourceful, industrious and self-sufficient (McCreesh 1985; Waltke 1999; Szlos 2000). The positive representation of a woman in Proverbs 31 above is not common in the Hebrew Bible is androcentric in its authorship, subject matter and perspective. The Hebrew term *hayil* (courage) denotes ‘military courage and prowess’ (cf. 1 Sam. 31:12, 2:4; 1 Chron. 10:12; 2 Chron. 26:11; Ps. 18:40). In all these examples and others, the term is used to describe men, as it is a military/war/battle field term. It is only in three instances in the entire Hebrew Bible that the term has a female subject, namely in Prov. 12:4; 31:10 and Ruth 3:11 (Kebaneilwe 2012; Waltke 2005 and Yoder 2003). However in the poem above, the female protagonist is a hunter, gatherer, lover, nurturer, minister, weaver, entrepreneur; is kind, charitable, soft spoken and commands the respect of her husband and sons. She also enjoys God’s favour, and possesses all the godly characteristics that make her husband the envy of other men. She and her achievements and character are foregrounded while those of her husband are back grounded.

Thus, we use the poem as our resource in intertextually re-imagining Mrs Noah as she (Mrs Noah) shares the same socio-cultural context of ancient Israel with the woman character in Proverbs 31. Much as the story of the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 positively constructs women, the woman is still subordinated to her husband who is referred to as *balah*, that is, her lord (vv. 11, 23 and 28) despite the fact that she does everything (provider, business woman, home-maker all combined) (Kebaneilwe 2012:113-114). The poem further suggests, albeit indirectly, that her husband is a passive figure in the affairs of his household as all the welfare of his family is left to his wife. He is only characterised as one who trusts (v.11), is known (v.23) and praises (v.28) his wife. McCreesh asserts that:

Everyone is served, helped, ministered to by the wife; her own household (vv. 12, 15, 21, 23, 27) and even the poor and the needy (v. 20).... Nowhere does the husband contribute to any of these (1985: 28).

In using the poem as our intertextual resource we show that even though women’s efforts were often ignored, omitted and left unwritten, it is obvious that women contributed to the socio-

economic life of ancient Israel. More importantly, it seems (at least from this poem), that the husband is riding on the wife's back and enjoys all the fruits of her labour because it's through her work and character that the man is a well-known and respected elder. From the poem we can deduce by way of intertexture, basic elements needed for our reconstruction of Mrs Noah's story. Reading the narratives on Noah, enables us to see Mrs Noah as the woman of courage at the centre of the poem.

Re-constructing a life story: Mrs Noah in a nutshell

Searching for Mrs Noah in Genesis 6-9, leaves the reader with more questions than answers. Who was this woman? What was her role and contribution in the epic story that seems to present only her husband, Noah, as the most important human being on earth? As painfully noted by James, "her full story remains a mystery, unknowable to us (2005: 49)" Nonetheless, reading the narrative using ICDA, seems relevant in our endeavour to creatively reconstruct Mrs Noah's story. We use the label Mrs. Noah problematically as she has no name of her own; being nameless obscures her identity and contributes to her erasure. The ideology of female erasure is also understood within a culture that was unapologetically patriarchal. We consciously give her the name in order to subvert her erasure through a reconstruction of her experience, an experience that can be extrapolated to all biblical women whose stories are omitted, twisted or derogated as evil, starting with the mother of all women, Eve.

Mrs Noah was an *eshet hayil* -a woman of courage

From an intertextual dialogue between the story of (Mrs) Noah and the poem of the woman of courage (Proverbs 31:10-31), we can boldly propose that Mrs Noah was a woman of courage i.e. an *eshet hayil* in Hebrew. We know this because of what we are told about her husband that "he was a faithful man who walked with God" (Gen 6: 9). For much like "her lord" *balah* (husband) of the woman of courage in the poem (Prov. 31: 11), Noah is a dignified man and from the poem we know that the man's dignity was in that culture closely associated with him having a woman of dignity and valour. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to presume that in ancient Israelite culture if a man was married to a bad woman, she would impact negatively on her husband's social status as stated in Prov. 12:4 thus: A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones.

ICDA allows us to infer from Proverbs 31 that Mrs Noah was indeed a woman of many noble qualities. As we stand back for a moment and refuse to accept the reading otherwise constructed for us by the male writers of Noah's story, whose only intention is for us to see Noah and not his wife, we can see Mrs Noah's amazing strengths. In Prov. 31, a woman of courage "*eshet hayil*" is described as one not easy to find (v. 10) and that her value is far greater than that of "corals" (v. 11). When we read that the entire world turned against God except Noah and by implication his wife and children, the conclusion is that she was a great woman of virtue: obedient, submissive, trusted and one who gave her husband no reason to worry. The fact that she and her sons accompanied Noah into the ark suggests that she was a godly woman and of great character like the woman of Prov. 31. That is, unlike all the women in her time, she ministered to her husband in his journey with God, ultimately enabling him to remain faithful to God while all the other men and women failed to please God.

In Genesis 6: 17-18 we read

I am going to bring a flood on the earth. It will destroy all life under the sky. It will destroy every living creature that breathes. Everything on earth will die. But I will make a covenant with you. You will enter the ark. Your sons and your wife and your sons' wives will enter it with you (New International Readers' Version).

The above excerpt indicates that though unimportant to the writers of the text, Mrs Noah fared much like her husband in the legendary epic. There is no way that she would have made it to the ark without having been just as 'holy' as her husband. Moreover, her sons would not have made it to the ark had she not been an exceptional mother in her nurturing skills given that their father was busy with God's work leaving all their upbringing to her. Like the Prov. 31 woman, Mrs Noah must have served, helped and ministered to all her household: her sons and her husband.

Mrs Noah: wife, mother, home builder and Noah's Pillar

We are told Noah had three sons named Shem, Ham and Japheth. What is strange, however, is the omission of any mention that the sons were borne by Mrs Noah or that they were born to both Noah and his wife. Therefore, in the absence of such details, the writer suggests that children, in particular sons, were a sign of a man's success and/or greatness. The absence of an explicit link between sons and their mother in the story, points to a culture in which a woman is a vessel that carries a man's children, not her own. Nonetheless, an intertextual point of view,

we can see beyond the absence of this link. Mrs Noah as an *eshet hayil* like the one of Proverbs 31, was a successful woman and especially a great wife who birthed sons for her husband. We might not have been intended to know anything about her parenting skills, as asserted by James, but in ancient Israel, a woman's worth was measured by her ability to bear sons and Mrs Noah bore three (James 2005: 53). Noah's family, according to the story, is without doubt Mrs Noah's own, and without her reproductive success the story would have been different, and Noah's status would not have been the same. Previous studies have indicated that in the Old Testament, a woman's ability to bear children and importantly, sons, determined her husband's status in community as well as his survival (James 2005:53). A man whose wife could not bear sons, was at the risk of being scrapped off his genealogical history; he risked being forgotten and hence the practice of levirate marriage (cf. Ruth 3-4).³For a man, having many sons "translated into greater economic strength and political power. They (sons) also perpetuated his name and estate for another generation" (James 2005: 53). We know from ancient Israel that a sonless marriage was considered a failure. For example, Sarah and Abraham struggled and even tried taking their destiny into their own hands by using Hagar to bear them a son (Gen 16). The writer of that story intended the readership to see Sarah's failures not only as a barren wife, but also as an example of a faithless woman who, like her ancestor Eve, led her husband to unbelief and sin.

Furthermore, the story of Rachel and Leah in Gen. 30:1-24, provides a good illustration of the importance of a woman's reproductive success in the determination of her worth. Without telling the reader about Mrs Noah's worth and success resulting from her giving Noah three sons, the writer has failed her and other women. He is overtly biased in favour of the male character, Noah. As resistant readers we refuse to accept the skewed male perspective in the narrative. The cursory reference to Mrs Noah in the tale of her husband, read intertextually against the Proverbs 31 woman, shows that she was capable of the same kind of heroism, considering that she had to be a great source of support for her husband, if not the sole breadwinner during the grand ark project. Like the woman of Proverbs, she was, in our view, a great heroine as mother, wife, entrepreneur, housekeeper and woman of faith.

By telling the reader that Noah was a great man of faith, who not only walked with God but was eventually tasked with the building of an ark, we are tempted to re-imagine Mrs Noah's

³Ruth was a childless widow who was determined to secure a name for her deceased husband by seeking a close relative of her late husband, Boaz, and marrying him so that she could bear a son who would perpetuate her deceased husband's name in the land. This was done through levirate marriage.

unimaginable faith in her husband's God, her emotional and physical strength as well as her wisdom. From other Old Testament stories, we gather that no matter how gigantic a man's faith in God was, if his wife did not share the same, she could easily sway him away. We do not need to look far for Eve (Genesis 3) is notoriously remembered as having set the stage for all women to be stereotypically constructed as temptresses and sources of all evil who turn their men away from God. In our view this demonstrates the fear of women's sexuality and justification for their suppression or erasure from public life. We must note however, that even the Adam and Eve narrative was meant to preserve and perpetuate the patriarchal legacy of the Bible. We also know that even King Ahab's "broken halleluiah" was because of his wife Jezebel (1 Kings 16) who is well remembered for turning her husband, away from the Israelite God to the worship of idols (1 and 2 Kings).

It follows that Mrs Noah, like her husband, must have professed the same faith and walked with God supporting her husband and standing with him when the entire world turned their back against God, and inciting the greatest natural disaster of all time, "Noah's flood" (Gen. 7). Mrs Noah was a great woman of God and a great warrior of faith without whom Noah would probably have failed like everyone else during his time. She was Noah's anchor, but the writers never cared to cover her story in any significant detail, perhaps because her work did not matter or worse, her husband got credit for it. To know her, one must first resist the position constructed for her by the biased writer and look further than ever imagined by the journalists and other curators of life as it unfolded then.

From the Prov. 31 woman, it is almost certain that Mrs Noah was both emotionally and physically strong. For Noah to have been involved in preaching and teaching people all over the place about God and about his impending wrath, he must have needed a strong wife to see him through all the frustrations. Not only that, his physical/material needs and those of his entire household, must have been all left to Mrs Noah just like the woman of Proverbs 31 was doing, including providing for her family, a traditionally masculine role. Like the *balah* (lord/husband) of Prov. 31, Noah must have trusted his wife with his being (heart) and "lacked no spoil" (Prov. 31: 11). She must have done him good and not evil for him to be counted amongst the heroes of his time. This is supported by Prov. 31:11-12 and 23;

The heart of her Lord trusts in her and he lacks no spoil. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life (v. 12). Her lord is known in the gates as he takes his seat with the elders ...

Like the husband of the woman of Prov. 31, Noah is shown to be completely engaged with matters outside his home, in the public sphere. Whatever else was needed for his survival and for that of his family was left in the management of his wife. She could not have been a weak person for she raised her three sons while their father was busy with his pastoral calling as a minister of God's word. We know, despite the omission by the writer, that Mrs Noah raised worthy sons who married wives and who because of her godly teaching at home, managed to go into the ark with their father. We can intertextually draw from the book of Proverbs, especially Prov. 31 what contributions a good wife and mother of the time made towards the welfare of her family as summed up in v. 27; she watches the ways of her house and does not eat the bread of sluggishness.

We need to ask ourselves what would have happened if Mrs Noah was not a hardworking and resourceful woman. Noah would most likely not have succeeded in doing what God wanted him to do for he would have been engaged in providing for his family. Therefore, Mrs Noah deserves recognition for her contribution to the ark project and her general contribution to her community.

In Prov. 31, the sons rise to praise their mother for her great deeds for the entire house and their father joins in the praise. Unfortunately, with Mrs Noah such details have been omitted, for the focus was on the man and his achievements.

What now? [Do contemporary Mrs. Noahs fare any better in today's media?]

The treatment of Mrs Noah by biblical scribes reminds us (today's women) of our own unwritten stories, unappreciated efforts and unrecognized struggles. Research shows that unfavourable media coverage is a concern for women across the world (Bauer 2010:61). Writing as Batswana women, the story reminds us of our own women whose stories we have never heard because only their men mattered to the historians and writers of their time. For instance, the story of the three famous Batswana chiefs, namely, Khama III, Bathoen I and Sebele I (all men) who are credited for having brought about Botswana's independence (Makgala 2008: 89) excludes the stories of the women in their lives. So we ask 'where were their wives?' While the three patriarchs are well known for what they did for the country, their wives and their mothers are hardly mentioned. One would want to believe that they had good women who were carers, nurturers and pillars for the men and their families, held fort while their politically powerful husbands took care of matters of the nation. But such women were not important enough to the historians then or now as their stories remain unknown to this day.

Put differently, the jobs they did in the home while their husbands were busy on ‘more important’ matters, were not considered that important or worthy of preserving for posterity. The said chiefs’ legacies have continued beyond their graves as they have been memorialized in monuments that are now a tourist attraction in Botswana’s main city of Gaborone. Not only that, they are further memorialised in the Botswana’s one hundred pula note. Like Mrs Noah, the wives of the three chiefs existed only in the shadows of their prominent husbands. Previous studies further show that negative and unfavourable representation of women by the media in Botswana, has contributed to the ultimate side-lining of women in important factors of society. For instance, Botswana is still behind in terms of women participation in politics. As observed by Bauer;

Unfavourable media coverage also keep women from standing for political office in Botswana. In addition to the ordinary lack of coverage, misrepresentation of women’s words, focus on women’s appearance rather than their comments and speculation about their personal lives, there has been significant vicious cartooning that has driven at least one woman party activist out of politics in Botswana. The so-called The Letshabo affair (2010: 61).

The media plays an important role in either sustaining or changing existing gender relations by the way they portray men and women (Phili and Ellece 2013: 240). In the biblical text, a woman’s story was never a priority to the writers because the culture was androcentric and hence media of the time simply perpetuated the existing patriarchal cultural values.

But this is not to say that Tswana women were not capable of bravery and great feats; history books contain some tales of exceptional women whose bravery and military prowess rivalled that of some of the best leaders of the Tswana. Rapoo (2013) examined the portrayal of Botswana women in cultural imaginary and transnational representational forms and shows how women were constructed in stereotypical misogynistic images. One of the examples she uses is that of Queen of Batlokwa people, Queen Mantatisi who was hailed as “the most fascinating African female conqueror of all time” (Becker 1968, cited in Rapoo 2013). What is interesting about this female Tswana leader was not only her military prowess, but the fact that she had captured the imaginations of those historians who were unused to such female bravery that some labelled her an “honorary man” (Rapoo 2013: 8, following Eldredge 1993).

Rapoo summarises the construction of Mantatisi’s achievements, especially her ability to go against tradition and resist her family’s attempts to take the throne away from her:

The popular narrative, however, is significant in circulating a memory of women such as her, who challenged the prejudices against female leaders in pre-colonial Africa. As a military leader with political power, Mantatisi sought not only to establish her own kingdom and to secure the enthronement of her son, but to also subvert the tradition of ascribing women the stereotypical role of royal wives, whose lives were circumscribed by [ideologies] of domesticity (p. 8)

In a way, this woman's story echoes stories of other women who are constrained by cultural ideologies that relegate women to the domestic sphere where their lives begin and end silently and inconspicuously, but also those who, against all odds, are able to do the incredible, whether they are recognised or not, much like the woman of Proverbs or Mrs Noah, whose story we imagine in this paper.

Conclusion

The representation of women in the Old Testament, especially Mrs Noah's untold story teaches us to rethink our own stories (the stories of our mothers, and our grandmothers). Just like Mrs Noah, our mothers and grandmothers' names and legacies have been buried with them, with only the male names and their legacies (male children) that survive well after they are gone. ICDA enables us to rethink the stories from our past with the aim of highlighting the bravery, wisdom and courage of women that hitherto have been placed erasure. This ensures that the memories of males are passed on from generation to another because their surnames ensure the automatic preservation of their life histories. It will not be an exaggeration therefore, to conclude that from biblical times to this day, the media have colluded with patriarchal cultures to the detriment of women. As demonstrated by the discussions throughout this paper, Mrs Noah's story as well as Botswana women's stories never really mattered to the curators of life in both societies. Such a state of affairs can be attributed to the patriarchal ideologies that have characterised both biblical societies and indigenous cultures of Botswana.

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