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Men and the Menstruation Dynamic

Anthropology, History, and Body without Organs

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In the semi-commune “Little Home,” studied by participant-observation method in 1993 (Meir-Dviri 2009, 2013, 2016), the communal house is conceptualized as a female body subject to fluctuations between purity and menstrual impurity. During its periods of “purity,” the house embodies an ideal, stable, gendered-division of territory and authority. In contrast, during “menstruation,” the borders of the body, the territory, and the self-dissolve and interpersonal relationships become distorted. The Little Home residents hence degenerate into a chaotic lifestyle symbolizing social atrophy and death.

Changes in the commune’s purity state were orchestrated by the head of the commune (from here on: Father) in ritual processes which activated structures of identity thief, exchange (symbolic or not) of partners, and resurrection. In this article, I want to examine these processes from the viewpoint of Jewish mysticism, kabbalah, then I want to disconnect this structure from the context of “Little Home,” from Judaism, from the micro-analysis of participant observation, and present it on the large screen of macrohistory. In what follows I will first review relevant Jewish mysticism, introduce and analyze “Little Home” and its ritual processes, and then

I will try to locate traces of this structure in history. In the discussion, I will ask about the seeming similarity of this fertility structure to Deleuze’s concept of “Body without Organs.”

Menstruation in Kabbalistic Thought

While impurity in the Bible was a part of the ritual laws restricting access to the Temple and to the family of the high priest (Meacham 1999), misogynous attitudes toward menstruation developed in the first millennium (Koren 2009) and were exacerbated during the period of kabbalah which developed in the Middle Ages, at around the 13th century. According to the kabbalistic view, the human landscape reflects processes occurring in the divine body. Medieval Jewish mysticism regarded God as an androgynous being from whom emanates a hierarchy of ten masculine and feminine *sefirot* (spheres). Between them flows water that accumulates in the *sefira* known as *yesod* – which represents the divine phallus, which ejaculates them into the sea of the lowest *sefira*, the *shekhina* (Koren 1999: 166 f., 152, n. 6).

The highest *sefira* – *bina* – and the lowest – the *shekhina* – are female in nature, the first being associated with the matriarch Leah, the second with her sister Rachel. While *bina* represents passive, fecund, and eternal femininity, the *shekhina* is mercurial, not always fertile, menstrual, and predisposed to adultery (Koren 1999: 153). The *shekhina*, the last *sefira*, nourishes the non-divine world. A problematic dimension also exists, namely, the *shekhina* is linked not only to the divine and non-divine world but also to evil, the Sitra Ahra. In this respect, it contains the possibility of an independent status – of dissociation from the world of the *sefirot* (Tishby 1989: 371–375). The *shekhina* also menstruates (Koren 2009). At the time of her menstrual cycle, God’s masculine aspects separate from His feminine ones, causing the divine phallus to cease watering and the sea of the *shekhina* to fill up with the evil who dominate her during that time, Sitra Ahra’s slimy effluence (see the image of *miqveh* – Koren 1999: 165–168). The menstrual cycle is thus responsible for causing the human world to degenerate and Israel to be exiled. Human beings, however, who are connected to the world of the *sefirot* via the *shekhina*, can influence cosmological processes and restore the *shekhina* to her husband’s bosom, thereby uniting God’s body so that He can banish the Sitra Ahra – by maintaining the laws of purity.

The kabbalists posit an analogy between the female fertility cycle and the *shekhina*’s menstrual cycle. On the basis of this analogy, the kabbalists

conducted their relations with their wives. Only at midnight of the Sabbath, when God unites with the *shekhina*, does the kabbalist have sexual intercourse with his wife (Wolfson 1997), the two being sprinkled and blessed by the *shekhina*. This act enables them to produce good offspring.

Modern-day kabbalah reflects New Age psychology. According to the dominant faction in Israel (Rabbi Ashlag, based on The Holy Ar"i of the 16th century), as explained by Rabi Laitman, Rabbi Ashlag's student and the present leader of Beney Baroch, the kabbalistic movement, the 10 *Sefirot* which are in the process of repair, *exists within every person*.

Adam Ha-Rishon (the first) is the unity of 600,000 souls which, when broken, fall down and constitute the individualistic, egoistic material world. Redemption will come in return for spiritual unity. God created all sort of desires with intention to lay bare egoistic intentions. The egoistic intentions need to be changed to altruistic ones – a *desire to receive in order to give to others*: as a child eats in order to make the mother happy. The process of change is fraught with ups and downs: every *sefira* has inner and outer parts. The outer (*ach"p*), which is associated with women and gentiles, is filled with more egoistic desires, while the inner part (*go"a*) – with more altruistic ones. As a person gets closer to God, he climbs from the high part of his present *sefira* to the low part of the higher *sefira*, which is full of *new, stronger* material desires. As the spirituality of an individual increases, so does the strength of his materialism – ascending and descending cyclically. This dynamic between man and God is also the dynamic between people, student, and Rabbi. During this fluctuation movement, which also comprises the learning process, the rabbi sends his *acha"p* (the part that is more materialistic) down to the *go"a* (the spiritual part of his student). The student, then, is able to build 10 *sefirot* and start to move higher and higher (Laitman 2006: 122).

A woman can spiritually develop through kabbalah learning with the Rabbi or her husband, but not through teaching by another man. The spiritual movements of the Father in Little Home, I argue, is carried out through a ladder of sorts descending from his *ach"p* materialistic desires to the Mother's *go"a* spirituality. The change from un-repair desire to repair desire is done by ritual management of menstruation (understood as adultery, learning with foreigner) and virginity.

What is virginity in the Little Home?

The Leader of Little Home, the Father, is a member of a little group of friends; some of them are current leaders of communes and some them are former leaders. Now, what is a group according kabbalah?

“Group,” says Rabbi Laitman, “is a spiritual concept and it is always connected to the rabbi” (2006: 125). And what happens when a group member is “sinking” – that is, in a state of a spiritual downfall? “You could fall and nothing will be left from your previous spiritual state, *but the group will continue to exist and also your part in it will continue to exist* ... how will you be able to get help from it, the moment you need it? This is [possible] only if you are able to nullify your Self and devote yourself completely to the group's opinion ... Only then will the group stamp its seal on you, and you will become like it, i.e. as you created it” (emphasis added). The Father's spiritual standing, I argue, is retained in his group through the image of a virgin girl.

Every male soul that descends into this world has a spouse, a female soul. She is the right partner with whom you can complete a quick spiritual correction process. But the female counterpart of the male soul does not always descend into the world together with him and, therefore, is not necessarily the one who, in a woman's physical body, he marries. Furthermore, although usually male souls, not female, are able to transfigure, sometimes a female soul-twin is sent back into a material body to marry her true spouse and help him successfully accomplish the mission of his transfiguration – to become close to God. In Little Home, a young girl appeared within structural time to replace (symbolically) the (symbolically) impure Mother.

The Father once told me: “When my son will understand that all women are one woman, he will be Little Home's leader.” An example of this universal woman is Feiga Ashlag, the second wife and widow of Rabbi Baruch Ashlag, the forefather of the kabbalistic movement Beney Baruch. The questions that their husband could not answer, the women of the Ashlag group subsequently directed to Feiga, the Rabbi's wife, and she then posed them to her husband, the Rabbi. She received spirituality from him in order to give it back to other women. We can imagine that in this way the very spirituality of the sexual bond between Feiga and Rabbi Ashlag was balancing the spiritual-sexual relationship of all other couples. The procedure by which women ask the Rabbi is an indication of their desire to learn from the higher spiritual authority of the Rabbi, but it may hide the possibility that in some couples the husbands was less spiritual than the wives and could not answer their questions. When Feiga Ashlag and all the rest of the group experienced a decline in spirituality, the Rabbi died. It is not important whether the spiritual decline started within the group or in her – they, I argue, are her “fertility.” There is a “good fertility” and “bad fertility,” the

first exists when her relationship with her husband, Rabbi Ashlag, is spiritually balanced, that is when the spiritual hierarchy is clear – she is below her husband and above the other women in the group (who are under the authority of their husbands). “Bad” fertility is a kind of abortion (Ashlag 2005).

In her “down”-state, she stopped listening to his spiritual teachings since spirituality no longer interested her. In other words, the entire hierarchy collapsed: Feiga’s identity was not differentiated from the other women of the group; Rabbi Ashlag’s identity was no different from other men, and adultery became possible, in fact more than possible. When the hierarchy collapsed, some of the women may have thought that they were spirituality greater than their husbands. If the women did not ask Rabbi Ashlag spiritual questions, maybe they knew the answers better than him? It is not only that Rabbi Ashlag was undifferentiated from the rest of the men, but the identity of male and female became unclear. Adultery is not necessarily a physical act. Adultery may be committed by teaching kabbalah to the wrong person: it is important to understand that, regarding Little Home at least, if a man teaches a woman that is not his wife, the act is presumed adultery, since learning between husband and wife is the connection between the *sefirot* of *yesod* (foundation), God’s phallus, and the feminine *shekhina*.

Feiga’s decline was ended with Rabbi Ashlag’s death. This Feiga was Rabbi Ashlag’s second wife. The name of his first wife was Feiga too, and spiritual decline was connected to her death: Rabbi Ashlag’s first wife was ill and could not function at all (physically low spiritually). His student, Rabbi Laitman, brought him his own female student as an aide to the ill wife. After the ill wife died, the aide becomes the Rabbi’s second wife. The death of Rabbi Ashlag, as well as the death of his first wife, and her exchange with the second, is natural events. But is there a possibility to manage such cycles of up-down, of death and resurrection? Little Home, I argue, is exactly the case.

Description of the Semi-Commune

The semi-commune is run by a husband and wife – whom I shall refer to here as the Father and Mother – and their biological daughters and operates within a network of couples who extend hospitality to one another. In addition to the hosting of friends (“brothers”), the family has also opened its doors to at-risk youth (“sons” and “daughters”). From time to time, groups of girls, aged around seventeen, banded together and resided in Little Home under

the supervision of the Mother for an approximately three-month period. Casual visitors and volunteers also form part of the semi-commune.

The context of Little Home is unstable, the interpersonal relations are similarly unstable, fluctuating between intimate friendship and hostility, today’s friends being tomorrow’s enemies, and that is true also for the couple in charge. The most prevalent form of marital relations being serial marriages. Amongst the adults a clear proclivity towards young girls – especially seventeen-year-olds – also exists. The current Mother, for example, was a young girl in a previous commune run by the Father. Several years after this study, she was replaced by one of the girls for whom she was responsible.

Brotherhood

When Ram announced his relationships with Pirchia, he said excitedly to Father, his “brothers”: “Soon a woman will come here. Our third brother’s wife, he who is deceased.” He explained beforehand, when he told me about Pirchia, that in Judaism, levirate marriage (*yibbom*) is a positive commandment (*mitzvah*). When Pirchia arrived, Father spoke with her about reincarnation. A levirate marriage is a marriage of a widow to her dead husband’s brother, who died without children. The soul of the deceased is reincarnated into the child that is born. What is adultery, i.e., sexual relations between a man and his brother’s wife, becomes a *mitzvah*. “In Little Home, it is an incestuous affair between friends.” If friends can make incest legitimate via levirate marriage, they can also perform illegitimate incest. But how does one become a friend in the form of a “brother”? By building a house. In the world of Little Home, only men are permitted to build houses. The “brothers” are those who help one another construct their homes. When the men erect a house, the person to whom it belongs provides them with victuals – i.e., hosts them. When the house is already standing, whenever the “brothers” come for a visit, the construction/repair work repeats itself symbolically. A house is a woman, metaphorically. The collective construction turns the particular woman of the house, the wife of the host, into an universal woman of fraternal brotherhood, the guarantors of her purity. Every visit of a “brother” is an act of symbolic building (repair) and a promise of loyalty. The universal woman, however, does menstruate from time to time, since the very effort to maintain the men’s loyalty points toward the possibility of disloyalty. Your “brother” is the guard of your wife’s purity, as well as your wife’s potential thief.

What is the meaning of adultery, of stealing brother's wife? The rules governing levirate marriage allow relations between a brother and his brother's wife, while leaving intact prohibitions against other illicit relations, such as those between a father and daughter. You might say, therefore, that saving your brother's wife's honor allows legitimate "incest" (i.e., *yibbum* – levirate marriage), and adultery allows incest. Levirate marriage keeps the souls of male members of fraternity within it as a form of endogamy. But, the levirate marriage set up to produce a body to contain the soul of a man who died without children is problematic: there is no absolute certainty that the man did or did not have children. Maybe the children he thinks he has are actually not his. Adultery, therefore, produces an exogamy of the souls of men: for those who did not give birth in their lives and *yibbum* – levirate marriage – was not carried out for them, their souls will need to come back to the body that is not in the possession of the male fraternity of Little Home.

What are the manifestations of endogamy and exogamy? Levirate marriage involves interrupting the linearity of generations and time: one brother becomes the father of the other brother. But because it is a positive commandment, the disruption in the time continuum does not disrupt the actual relationships. On the contrary, honoring the Little Home's Father and Mother and carefully following their instructions as well as maintaining the house clean, Mother's honoring of Father and following his instructions is the ideal situation of a home in a state of purity (and what is legitimate incest if not purity?) and vice versa in a state of impurity.

In a state of impurity, the borders which signal identities start blurring. Boys (biological and/or social) act like being their Fathers and treat their Mothers as their spouses, and the Fathers act like young ragamuffins, seducing their daughters (social and/or biological). If age categories start to blur, the same happens with the categories of gender. Situations, in which one cannot distinguish between young and old, male and female, the blurring, the deletion of the boundaries of time, place, and identity are the essence of menstruation in the eyes of the Father. Menstruation for the Father is associated with evil; in other words, with adultery and the Devil.

Since the house is, metaphorically, the body of a woman, then all those who come to the house, visitors and youths, are its fertility. Fertility has two modes, normal fertility and abortion. Even Father is included in fertility in two ways, pure and demonic. The first is like the soul of a pure righteous person, closest to the image of God, inherent in the woman's collective womb which is all women; and

the other is an unclean spirit, absolute egoism, pretending to be God.

As I previously explained, in the process of spiritual refining that a person undergoes, each rise in spiritual level also includes spiritual descent into deeper levels of impurity. The more righteous a man is, the more he touches impurity, and by overcoming it he rises to even a higher level of spirituality. Endogamy is, in light of this, the evolution of God's children, while exogamy is the evolution of the "Other Side," Satan. There is worldliness in spirituality and spirituality in worldliness; the exterior of the interior, and the interior of the exterior. How does this folding occur? For every mature man possessing a house and wife, guests (some of the latter are also "brothers") are an extension of the host's self. While the fraternal visits define male identity, they, however, also threaten it. A "brother" who comes for a visit is "homeless" – irrespective of whether he has "abandoned" his house in order to visit or is actually bereft of a home. Out of his natural order he is under influence of menstruation, that is, his essence is twisted, distorted. Under the spell of menstruation his personality is a falsehood, a switcher of identities. He is socially dead.

While pretending commitment to preserving his fellow, this shape-shifter – the paradoxical side of the honorable "brother" – actually harms him, acting as a guest who enters his host's home and behaves as if he was the householder, sleeping with the housewife as if she was his wife, and treating her offspring – the youth resident – as if he was their Father, thereby assuming his host's (his brother's) identity. He is a "brother" who takes on his brother's identity – a foreigner who disguises himself as *guard* of his "brother." A man can effect changes in his own identity even without actual fraternal visit, however. When he feels that his leadership is being threatened – whether in real or imagined terms – he can act as though his wife and daughters (biological and social alike) are prostitutes, behaving as though he is stealing his wife from himself.

It was then, when a group of young girls, band together in Little Home under the guidance of the Mother – a metaphorical pregnancy –, that Father started to complain about the undisciplined behavior of the youth and to perform ritual activity of repair the "abortive pregnancy."

Ritual Process

Rosh Hashanah is the first holiday in month Tishrei (usually around September), which starts a new year. The ten days which follow Rosh Hashana are

called the ten days of repentance, signifying their essence: an inner search for the *tikkun* (mending) a person needs to make with her/himself and a preparation towards the Great Day, the Day of Atonement. The next holiday, Sukkot, which commemorates the Exodus from Egypt and God's providence over the Israelites in the wilderness, is a time when guests (*ushpizin*) come for a visit – most prominently the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Sukkot is intimately linked to a further festival known as Shemini Atzeret or Simhat Torah. This is the period of a concentration of purity and the unification of a person's dispersed elements.

The month of Tishri (September) and the month of Nissan (April) are interlaced since a discussion is held amongst the sages of ancient Judaism concerning the question, when the world was created: Was it in Nissan, the month of miracles and redemption or in Tishri? In conclusion, it was decided that Rosh Hashanah (Tishri) is the beginning of the natural cycle, Nissan, on the other hand, is the beginning of the year of miracles. A half year divides the two calendar events, from the end of Tishri to the beginning of Nissan, "materiality" (natural beginning of Tishri) and "spirituality" (of Nissan).

The Father was anchoring his kabbalistic performance to these Jewish months of holydays, Tishri and Nissan, in a visual way (Tishri) and in an invisible way (Nissan). In Rosh Ashana, the first holyday month in Tishri, the Father asked his drunk "brother" to destroy the place in the yard he, the drunk "brother," has organized as *his* "commune" in order to allow the Father himself to reorganize that place as a place only for males under his leadership. And in Rosh Ashana, the Father also expelled a young man, Levi, a drug addict, who was defined by Father and Mother as "not Little Home" and who was supposed to guard the house against thieves like him. I suggest, that Levi "not Little Home" is to be associated with an unfaithful "brother," and his service under the Father is a display of the last power over menstruation mal influence. In Rosh Ashana, however, the Father expelled Levi in order to guard the home himself.

On the eve of the Day of Atonement, the Father went to visit his father's grave to ask forgiveness for the fact that he was going to "strip off his spirituality" in order to go down to the house – a women place – and lead the commune from the yard – the male place. At the end of Simhat Torah holiday, the last holiday in Tishrei, he held a small celebration in the yard, in which again and again he cried that he had waited many years for this moment of balance. He played and sang a song about Jacob, the Jewish forefather. The old and blind Jacob went thirsty in

the desert on his way to Egypt, while looking into the past, back to Abraham and the Creation, with the eyes of his spirit. When the Father finished the song, he said to his drunk "brother": "I've brought back" (i.e., from Jacob to Abraham).

Despite the dramatic announcement of this "moment of balance," for which the Father had yearned so long, daily life continued without being marked by any special occurrences. The Father just went up and down the house for coffee and food, to shower, to sleep at night, and it did not take a long time to dissolve the separation between the males outside the house and the females inside the house. The important question is: Why was there a segregation between women and men? On the surface it seems that Father intended to stop the physical degradation of the house, the menstrual fertility of the mixed multitude (*erev rav*) of the family who rebels, gets dirty, steals, etc. and, instead, to raise the home spiritually. The question is whether he indeed succeeded. If he announced at his father's tomb that he had descended into materialism, there was no announcement regarding his ascension from it. And in the same way one might ask, whether the symbolic establishment of a male zone in the yard, specifically in the area run by a drunken "brother," as well as taking the role of the drug addict guarding the door defined as "not Little Home," also was done to stop the impurity and to move the house to purity? Because here one can also ask whether he managed to get out of those difficult places that he had entered or whether he was left stuck in them? And these questions, these doubts, they are the essence of the ceremonial processes: a door carries a sexual connotation. Whom, then, did Mother take to her bed at night? "Not Little Home?" The visiting brother?, the drunk?, or her righteous husband? Was the sexual act performed in purity or impurity? Is Mother an adulterer?

The two options are valid:

a) "Nesting within purity (of separation between men and women) is always impurity, and the sexual act." The sexual act was performed in a state of impurity and, indeed, Mother had an affair, the man she took to her bed went and sank into sexuality. Later he even taught a foreign woman (the anthropologist) kabbalah in the light of day (he know her as anything someone beyond "a woman who is all women" bringing him questions and answers in kabbalah); studying the subject had an erotic connotation. He also taught the foreign woman kabbalah in front of his wife, inciting her jealousy and the destruction of the world as a result (the jealousy of a woman can lead to the burning of the world), and in my interpretation there even arose a fear of incest (symbolic). Father died socially.

b) “Nesting within impurity, however, is always purity.” Just as the sexual act was performed in a state of impurity, so too was it performed in a state of purity: on the eve of Yom Kippur, Father performed another activity apart from visiting his father’s tomb. He expelled a new girl who had arrived a few hours earlier to the feast before the fast. She had asked for too much food during dinner and was expelled. For two months from then on no new girls were accepted into Little Home. Finally, toward the end of the three months of the girls’ stay at the home, they informed me very excitedly, that they had sat together with the “new girl” for several hours, attempting to persuade her to go back home, since, in contrast to themselves, she had everything she needed there. In Little Home, the usual length of stay there for girls at risk is three months. But besides the actual girls’ group, there was a group of virtual girls: the “new” girl, in fact, is all the girls who, metaphorically, knocked on the door but were repelled.

As I mentioned earlier, six months separate the end of the month of Tishrei and the beginning of Nisan. Three months of the actual group are centered around the natural New Year, the month of Tishrei, and move toward the miraculous month of Nisan, at the same time that 3 months of the virtual group are centered around the miraculous Nisan, and move toward Tishrei. The actual group is the menstrual pregnancy of the Mother rising from the past, and the virtual group is the spiritual pregnancy of the Father, which comes from the future.

The dynamic developed amongst the actual girls during their stay merged the girls into one another and into the Mother. What kind of transformation did the “new girl,” being defined as different in essence, induce in this intensity which is the Mother? Mother has free will – is she ready to be the twin spouse intended from heaven for her husband? She has to decide if she is ready to assume the role of the empty “new girl” who did not participate in the merging dynamic of the actual group of girls. In other words, she has to choose whether to give up her self or not. If not, the Father can actually replace the Mother with a new woman. The universal woman never ends, though her particular face changes. In replacement of her identity, by giving the young visitor the nickname “new girl,” the Mother did submit herself to the Father’s authority by being more similar to him. Until the next time.

Does this construct of fertility have a history? Did any seeds of the cultural structure of insemination based of menstruation exist in the Middle Ages? While hints do appear of its formation in the Middle Ages, I suggest that the holism of traditional society has no need of such a construct. In contrast,

it appears to be intrinsic to modern society, at least from the nineteenth century onwards.

Middle Ages

In the later Middle Ages, when the church endeavored to strengthen the institution of the family and monogamy, the question arose of why the forefathers practiced polygamy. One of the explanations offered was that this form of marriage served them to create progeny and develop civilization, polyandry being a method of *reducing* populations. When neither of these strategies was necessary any longer, the Christian populace having reached sustainable proportions in relation to the non-Christian populations, it was possible to allow some members of the society to devote themselves to spiritual work rather than procreation (Biller 2000). I argue that menstruation, which carries within it the Other (or Alter), can serve as the foundation of the cultural construct of artificial fertility. When polygamy is practiced, unmarried Christian males turn to foreign women and “send” their seed through them into the foreigner house. Thus, while within the Christian community polygamy refines identity to the point of reification, polyandry creates a foreign “mixed multitude” in the Other beyond the boundary, distorts its identity, and lowers its quality, the mixture of seed creating an inferior breed. Thus, when polyandry is employed within the borders of the Christian populace, the women left without available Christian males turn to the polygamy of foreign men. In other words, on the one hand, there is a prohibited slippage of identity beyond the boundaries and, on the other, a forbidden penetration of foreign identity into the community. I suggest, polygamy and polyandry are both virtual configurations of a metaphorical menstruation, which move within and between monogamous families, in a way similar to Little Home brothers. From this perspective, it is interesting to examine the link with several medieval processes.

Alongside the female spiritual revival of the Middle Ages (Bynum 1982), Europe also witnessed the institutionalization of prostitution. Within the framework of the strengthening of the family unit, the church relaxed the “sins of the flesh” committed by unmarried men with prostitutes – as long as they were strangers to the local community. Sexual contact between two making them “one flesh,” prostitutes necessarily had to be “foreign,” in order to prevent the occurrence of incest. The church also greatly extended the scope of forbidden marital relations to include, for a period of time, seven gen-

erations. Scholars (Lynch 2003; Goody 1984) have sought the reasons for this difficult-to-implement policy. Seven generations, however, is the length of human memory.

Here we have two women – one inaccessible and representing the idea of the woman who stands outside present time, virgin-like, and the other accessible and immediate – the prostitute, whose foreignness places her beyond the boundaries of incest, outside the scope of forbidden marriages to the seventh generation. These two women are reflected in one another. While they are both innocent of incest, however, one is pure because she stands outside present time and the other, standing outside the scope of incest, is paradoxically impure. Her fertility being a mixed seed, she is the menstruation essence of polyandry and is, therefore, not eligible for marrying until she becomes pure – or until the foreign seed she carries in her womb is purified and refined. Indeed, during the Middle Ages female identity was in fact labile, a woman was able to devote herself to a career in prostitution and leave it to return to the bosom of the community and the marital framework. Rossiaud (1988) even claims that medieval prostitution was a ritual of transformation.

The romantic literature which developed in the Middle Ages was based on platonic love between knights, who in practice engaged in raping common women, and the wife of their patron. Denomy (1947) proposes the existence of a link between romantic love and heresy whose roots derive from Arab philosophy, according to which, while it is possible to descend to bestiality through the senses, it is also possible to be raised to spirituality through the love of a good woman. The connection between romantic love and the administration of the processes, which govern the purifying processes of fertility between the two female figures reflected in one another, is worth investigating. Especially, I suggest, its structural connection to the custom of exchanging children between families, either by sending a baby to a low-class wet nurse or as apprentice.

Nineteenth Century

In the nineteenth century, the model of the bourgeois nuclear family delegitimized the fluid forms of the working class family unit. The various marital formations of the latter – such as one woman married to several men, or sailors with a wife in every port, prostitution within a marriage, prostitutes living within a family home where all the members comprised part of the family – constituted an alternative to the bourgeois model (Walkowitz 1980). In

general, normal, church-sanctioned marriages were not common due to economic circumstances, while divorce was a function of time: the longer a separation continued, the greater the feeling was that a couple had become divorced (McLaren 1997). This fluidity threatened the middle class.

The nineteenth century also saw the establishment of a dichotomy between a-sexual and sexual women (women and non-women). Female purity and impurity reflected a class distinction. The clean woman came from the middle class or higher and was a housewife with children whom she was expected to release, well educated, disciplined, from the home into the big world (for children as the focus of the family, see Cunningham 1992; Nelson 2007). In contrast, the house of the prostitute – who was despised due to the duress of the middle class on the working class – was open and merged with the street. Between these two female figures, the pure wealthy woman and the impure lower-class prostitute, lay the decent impoverished woman whom doctors (Donzelot 1997) called upon to exert an influence upon her man, to bring her husband and children off the street and to remain together at home. Despite her poverty, this woman adopted the middle-class model of the home – which she literally cleaned. Economic success was regarded as deriving from and exemplary of morality. It may be claimed, thus, that as the size of the home grew in terms of number of rooms and servants, it moved away from the physical and human pollution of the city towards the suburbs. In correlation, the purity disseminated by the woman in the home increased (for the transition to the suburbs, differentiation in the number of rooms, and the place of servants in middle-class houses; see Tosh 1999).

A clean and pure woman “charges” her husband who returns from his day’s war-of-survival work in the evening in the city center with the measure of love and attention necessary to moderate his male aggression and to enable him to return to the battlefield the following morning (for femininity and masculinity as contradictory and complementary qualities modifying one another see Rotundo 1987; Desan 2004). If we translate the power of female purity (her influence over the man) onto a cognitive map of the place with a large female force of purity, the man can move directly back and forth between the home and his workplace without losing his way – despite the immense distance between the center of purity (the home in the suburbs) and his work in the center of the city. We could say that a home which becomes smaller, with a reduced workforce, is one which advances towards the city center and, thus, represents a place in which the woman’s

purity is in a state of recession – a home to which the husband fails to return in the evening because he is wandering the city streets. When the home shrivels, dissipates, and dissolves into the polluted city center, the prostitute appears for whom these streets constitute her home and the crowds thronging them her household.

These two types represent the two faces of the woman – and, in correlation, the boundaries of the home. On the one hand, they are closed, separating the outside from the inside, and allowing the exterior world to enter only after purification and, thus, assimilating the bourgeois family model. On the other hand, their two boundaries open up, turning internal into external. These two sides oscillate within one another. The power of female bourgeois purity in Britain was so great, that its representatives felt they possessed the ability to purify the whole country, to enlarge the suburb house not only by a greater distance from the center of the city but also in the opposite direction, toward the city, and to swallow through purification the dirty streets and their habitants into their clean houses.

They established schools for girls at risk in order to prevent them from becoming prostitutes and in which they extolled the model of bourgeois family living, subsequently employing the pupils as servants (Bartley 2000). Some of the girls, however, were unable to remain in such clean/pure houses and found their way back to prostitution, seducing, and stealing their masters. Such a home withers when impurity enters it – or, put conversely, is overpowered by the impurity of the prostitute.

Do we know, at any given moment, who of the two is the clean/pure woman and who is the prostitute – who has risen and who has fallen? This is an even more difficult task in the modest household of the lower bourgeoisie in which the housewife works shoulder to shoulder with her single servant.

While no actual crossing class division existed in reality, in the skein of these inverses – between purity and impurity, the diminution of the energy of purity of the middle-class woman deteriorating into prostitution and slipping into the lower class, and the lower-class prostitution passing through purity and rising to a higher level. The figure of the nanny formed an exception: the daughter of a middle-class family was unmarried and worked to support herself. Despite not being dependent on a man or being a mother herself, she exhibited female powers. Her purity can be viewed as the identity-creating dividing line between the lower and middle class along which the recursive movement occurred.

Discussion

I described the chaotic semi commune, “Little Home,” in which the ritual performed by the Father only kept the chaos underlying the life of the commune – understood as impurity or menstruation/female-authority – under check by joining its dark forces in their cyclical movement into relative order and purity. The relationship between purity and impurity, fertility and menstruation (aborted fertility, infertile sex) are therefore always in movement, forever dynamic. It is a dynamic upon which gender, family and community relations are heavily dependent.

The article unveils the underlying, probably not completely *conscious*, patterns and structures of behavior in a group, that are nonetheless shared and feel right in that social context. While I uncovered this structure, via participant observation in an Israeli semi commune at the end of the twentieth century, I also traced it at a macro level, hiding behind various practices and social structures in different historical periods – micro and macro, with God (Jewish or other) and without God – particular while universal. Based on gender and its significance as pure or impure, these patterns offer us a look at gender not as discourse but as *practice*.

These two points – consciousness and practice – require further elaboration. Let us begin with practice. From a macro point of view, I describe here a self inseminating body which nourishes itself from its own resources; a body which recycles itself in an intense action of self-eating and secreting. This is the body that deals with genealogy, with the potentials of fertility: menstruation is the destruction of potential of life and simultaneously, the condition for life. This is a structure of artificial insemination which produces excessive potential, waste, “surplus food” and stores them for future use, transfers potentials from one place or time, and recycles them in another time or place.

Let us look with a micro point of view, for a better resolution – that is, of Little Home: soul repair is ascent from the lowest *sefira* to the highest to whom the created able to climb. There are feminine and masculine *sefirot*, there are transfiguration of souls, there are incubation (soul enter into body already contain soul by birth), and indeed, as Laitman said (2006: 91): “Soul is something undefined, it is a will going through correction, change all the time and united with its other parts, other soul parts, eventually all the souls, after correction, are united, without difference, and filled with the creator. The distinctions between souls exist only in the feeling of un-repair souls.” In some individuals, I may

assume, such dynamic in which parts of souls, the identities of rabbi, student, friend which pop up and quarrel among themselves, may connected to mental illness. In Little Home, I argue, the madness is controlled.

The ritual process unfolds for about 3 months! During this long 3 months the ritualistic behaviors, such as going up and down the stairs for example, are hardly differentiated from every day routine and the Little Home inhabitants act and react intuitively, not in full consciousness. Even the high point – the symbolic wife exchange and rebirth of the husband – was almost un-notice (actual replacement of wives is simply the Little Home way of life, which may be called “serial marriage”). It takes time for the ritualistic acts to raise, little by little, the level of consciousness. There is a paradoxical nature to this play with conscious states.

On the one hand, the Father struggles to balance his commune, leading to male (spiritual) dominance that seems to be utterly dependant on female response. On the other hand, the female response is manipulated by Father. Since the entire ritual dynamic is based on planned provocation, surely the manipulator is aware of his doings? – especially if the very demonstration of the talent for manipulation *is* the criterion for success. But full awareness prevents success, especially if the ritual inspires to be repeated. Full consciousness will prevent the next ritual. *Thus, I argue, a mechanism of self-reducing/amplifying consciousness must exist.*

The possibility of madness, the question of consciousness and desires (the kabbalistic un-repair wills), lead me to consider some similarity with Deleuze’s philosophy. In the first place, Deleuze’s philosophy is not philosophy of the One as Ashlag’s theosophy. Body without Organ is not that of representation, of symbolism, of consciousness (but of pure consciousness, see Schroeder, 2006: 167–176), not that of signs. Signs, for Deleuze, are “solutions” to the “problem.” To sense a “problem” – that is, to sense the pre-individual, the virtual, the foreignness behind the routine life – has an important place in Deleuze’s theory – it forces thought to wander in unconsciousness and invent new “solutions,” signs, and identities. The structure I uncovered in Little Home changes the state of consciousness, reduces/amplifies encounters with the foreignness, and plays with desires – with molar and molecular. It does not, however, follow exactly Laitman’s thought in which every higher spirituality contains stronger new un-repaired desires waiting to be repaired until the end of all corrections. But instead of this verticality, every time the Father receives (symbolic or actual) a new, “virgin” girl, a new desire will follow. There

is no end for desires and their corrections in Little Home which located somewhere between Deleuze and the One.

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