

Who is my Brother? An ironic reading of Genesis 19:1-11¹

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the Tangale presupposition relating to the concept of brotherhood. It argues that the concept underscores the significance of the virtue of solidarity and togetherness within the Tangale traditional kinship setting. The Tangale background develops a new appreciation for the interaction between brotherhood and kinship and opens up a new perspective of exegesis of Genesis 19:1-11—using irony as the hermeneutical lens. This assessment of biblical passage, hospitality as the interpretive context of the passage, provides a theological and ethical understanding of the concept of brotherhood that transcends ethnic boundaries. Such understanding, it is argued, has significant implications on the theological-ethical reflections that might help the Tangale and Kaltungo/Shongom ethnic nationalities to have a rethink and resist the negative persuasions that had resulted in the ongoing inter-tribal armed rivalry.

KEYWORDS: Kinship, Irony, Hospitality, Tangale, Otherness

A THE ETHNIC AND TRIBAL IDENTITY OF TANGALE, KALTUNGO, AND SHONGOM

The Tangale people, (comprising Billiri Local Government, Akko Local Government, Kaltungo Local Government, and Shongom Local Government) live in the southern part of Gombe State, Nigeria. West Africa. They live about 40-75 kilometres from Gombe, the state capital. The language spoken by these people is called '*Po Tangle*' (literally "the mouth of Tangle). Nereus Yerima Tadi reports that "'Tangale represents a dialectical cluster consisting of the two principal dialect areas, that is Western Tangale or Billiri and Eastern Tangale or Kaltungo—together with Ture and Shongom, both deviating considerably in some respect from the Kaltungo type'... Hence the language is spoken and understood by all the seven clans of Billiri and Akko Local Government areas and also the Kaltungo and Shongom people".² Tangale, Kaltungo and Shongom

* Submitted: 07/08/2018; peer-reviewed: 09/11/2018; accepted: 05/02/2019. Friday S. Kassa, "Who is my Brother? An ironic reading of Genesis 19:1-11," *Old Testament Essays* 32 no. 1 (2019): 84-100. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/23123621/2019/v32n1a6>.

¹ I am immensely grateful to Prof HL Bosman for his guidance, reading the article severally and making recommendations. However, I take responsibility for errors and should not be held against the reputation of the esteemed professor.

² Tadi, *Sam Kwi Bolji*, 7-8.

along with several other tribes in the southern region of Gombe State, North East Nigeria shares a similar history of migration. Researchers³ report that the oral tradition has it that the Tangale ethnic group and other neighbouring ethnic groups such as Tula, Tera, Waja, Bolewa, Longuda, Kare-kare, etc. migrated in stages from Yemen around the 12th and 13th Centuries. The Tangale, Kaltungo, and Shongom eventually settled on the Dikki and Tungo hills. The settlement in the two hills

[...] reflected a rift in the group—‘a division whose cause and therefore origin then was not known. The Tungo hills were occupied by the Ture, Shongom and Kaltungo clans while the Dikki hills were occupied by Billiri, Bare, Tal, Todi, Tanglang, Banganje and Kalmal clans’ [...]⁴

Evidently, the Tangale, Kaltungo, and Shongom had a common origin. Adam Higazi and Jinam Lar also report that these groups are linked through some shared historical experiences through exchange relations, kinship ties and adaptation to the mountainous environment. Hence, there are commonalities in some of the material cultures and certain shared political aspirations. However, despite these, still, there are prominent ethnic boundaries.⁵

In November 1990, Tangale and Kaltungo/Shongom witnessed a new beginning of an old sad history of *kei Shongom*⁶. The perennial nature of the conflict between these tribes, which preceded the coming of Christianity, is such that had elicited a proverb by the Tangales that ‘marriage is like *‘kei Shongom*’ implying that it has no end. John Stuart Hall lamented the sad reality that “war with its many attendant evils, was yet another of the disturbing and darkening elements of the old days in Tangale.”⁷ However, Hall’s monograph demonstrates the impact of Christian faith on the Tangale and Kaltungo/Shongom ethnic groups. Yet there is a sad development of armed

³ Tadi, *Sam Kwi Bolji*, 4.

⁴ Tadi, *Sam Kwi Bolji*, 5. The members of the present generation are completely in the dark as to the origin and cause of the first war. The only available narrative is that the two communities had a long history of war. However, the recent upsurges are connected to land and boundary issues. This explains why the beginning of every farming season has always witnessed loss of lives and properties.

⁵ Adam Higazi and Jimam Lar, “Articulations of Belonging: The Politics of Ethnic and Religious Pluralism in Bauchi and Gombe States, North-East Nigeria,” *Africa* 85(1) 2015:109. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972014000795>.

⁶ *Kei Shongom* is the term that was used by the Tangale people in telling the young generations of the past history of the war between them and the neighbours Kaltungo/Shongom.

⁷ John S. Hall, *From Cannibalism to Christ: A Story of the Transforming Power of the Gospel in Darkest Africa*. (Toronto: Evangelical Publishers, 1944), 9. Hall’s use of ‘Tangale’ is inclusive - it shows how closely linked the ethnic groups are related (cf. Higazi and Lar, “Articulations of Belonging”, 109)

conflict which is a concern to the young generation who have been influenced by the coming of Christian faith, a generation that has peacefully coexisted until in recent times when peace in the area was subjected to frequent disruptions.

There have been several attempts by government, traditional rulers, and religious bodies to bring about reconciliation among these neighbouring communities, yet there has been a continued resurgence of armed conflict, which usually erupts at the commencement of every farming season. This article is therefore aimed in part at joining in the call for peace and reconciliation of these brotherly communities of Tangale and Kaltungo/Shongom. The Article argues that the idea of kinship which is pervasive in the Old Testament provides a window of orientation for these ethnic groups that are bound together in various ways including ethnic ties to adapt the God-given way of living as highlighted in kinship relationship — as *molle*. Employing irony as the hermeneutical lens, hospitality which is the narrative framework becomes the interface which orients the reader towards reconceptualising kinship relationships. However, before the analysis of the concept of brotherhood in the exegesis of the passage, there is a need for an understanding of kinship which is the basic social structure of ancient Israel’s society.

B UNDERSTANDING KINSHIP IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

The basic element of understanding the society of ancient Israel is the kinship unit.⁸ *Bêl’āb* (lit. “Father’s house”) is the biblical term that describes the kinship unit.⁹ It is the smallest and most intimate and distinctive social structure of Israel’s community and it designates an extended family.¹⁰ *Bêl’āb* is derived from two Hebrew nouns: *bāyit* (house) and *’āb* (father). *Bāyit* refers not just to a specific structure in which people live, it encompasses everything associated with the structure. Thus, the meaning of the word shifted to the content of the house. In the case of family, *bāyit* describes the familial relationship, either immediate or the extended family.¹¹ *’āb* on the other hand, “highlights both the

⁸ See Rainar Kessler, *The Social History of Ancient Israel: An Introduction*. (trans. Linda M Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 57, 78.

⁹ Cf. Köhler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, and Benedikt Hartmann, “בֵּית-אָב,” *HALOT*, 125; Ernst Jenni, “בֵּית,” Pages 332-337 in vol.1 of *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Edited by Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann eds., (trans. Mark E. Biddle). Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 335.

¹⁰ Cf. Shunya Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family (beit’ab) from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy*, vol. 7 (ed. Emunah Katzenstein; Jerusalem: Simor, 1996), 1; Avraham Faust. “The rural community in ancient Israel during Iron Age II,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*. (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1357482>, 2000), 29ff; Sandra L. Gravett, Karla G. Bohmbach, and F.V. Greifenhagen, eds. *An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible: A Thematic Approach* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 98.

¹¹ Cf. Gravett & et al., *An Introduction*, 98ff; Jenni, בֵּית, 335.

centrality and the authority of the male head of the household”.¹² Closely related to *bêṭ’āb* is the word *mišpāḥā*, literally translated as ‘clan’. It carries the idea of extended family, i.e. a group in which there is a felt blood-relationship (Deut. 29:17). It is a subdivision of *šēbēṭ* or *māṭṭē*—tribe (1 Sam 9:21; Num 36: 6) of *‘ām*—people (Num. 11:10).

The ‘family’ or ‘clan’ is not a hierarchical social structure with superiors and subordinates, rather they are characterised by economic, legal and religious autonomy.¹³ The head of the family or clan, the *’āb* is the one who is burdened with the responsibility of maintenance of the ethics and the control of the economic, legal, and religious affairs of the *bêṭ’āb* or the *mišpāḥā*.¹⁴ Reiner Kessler observes that

[...] people dwelling in such settlements—especially the somewhat larger one—belonged to several different clans. In those cases, both kinship and neighbourhood played a role in identity and social relationship.¹⁵

Most activities, whether social, economic or religious, are marked by their personal character (*cf.* Deut. 14:22–26; 15:19–20; Judg. 11:2–11; 1 Sam 2:27–33; Isa 3:6).¹⁶ Shunya Bendor remarks that patriarchal narratives are communicated in terms of the *bêṭ’āb*. She says “History, the people of Israel (Gen. 12:1; 20:13; 24:7), and even survival of the human species in the story of the Flood (Gen. 6:18; 7:1, 7) are conceived in terms of *beit’ab* and *mišpāḥā*”.¹⁷ Frank M. Cross explains that “[...] Kinship relations defined the rights, obligations, the duties, status, and privileges of tribal members [...]”.¹⁸ These rights, obligations, and duties include, but not limited to: protection of a kinsman, upholding the welfare of a fellow kinsman, redeeming of either or both the kinsman and the property of a fellow kinsman, loyal and loving behaviour toward one another. Love, in the ancient Israel worldview, is not an abstract concept. It is a practical kind act demonstrated through a generous gift. It includes a form of gracious or altruistic behaviour to the ‘other’— one who is not part of a kinship.

¹² Gravett & et al, *An Introduction*, 102.

¹³ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 19 *cf.* Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel*, 1; Faust, “The Rural Community”, 19; Kessler, *Social History*, 54.

¹⁴ Gerstenberger, *Theologies*, 19. Kessler, *Social History*, 59. Gravett & et al., *An Introduction*, 102.

¹⁵ Kessler, *Social History*, 54.

¹⁶ Gerstenberger, *Theologies*, 88.

¹⁷ Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel*, 46.

¹⁸ Frank M. Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3.

Inherent in this rights, duties, and obligations of kinship relationship is the idea of solidarity—common life with common concerns and responsibility¹⁹. However, growth and development in Israel’s society gave rise to different needs which resulted in reconfigurations and formations of new complex social structures.²⁰ Consequently, several challenges emerged such as separation, segregation, and a need for privacy especially between the different nuclear family and this has potentials for strife.²¹ “The kinship bonds that give unity and cohesion to the lineage and family in tribal societies became attenuated as tribal societies become more complex”.²² Nonetheless, kinship remains the most significant basic social unit of the society²³. The pervasive nature of kinship is seen in how kinship vocabulary permeates important theological, social and political discourses in the Hebrew Scripture. Take for instance covenant theology, kinship relationship and vocabulary provide the context and language of expression (respectively) of covenant relationship.²⁴ In this regard, one would remark that kinship and covenant perform a heuristic function in the study of the Old Testament. They enhance one’s understanding of the dynamics of relationships thereof.

1 Solidarity in kinship relationship

The idea of solidarity, which is inherent in kinship relationship, is an important concept in the Old Testament. Covenant relationship, which is infused with kinship vocabulary, contains the idea of solidarity to non-kinfolks or non-Israelites. First, it serves as a legal mechanism for the incorporation of non-kin into a kinship group. It is through this kinship covenant establishments that judicial processes were developed which later developed into *tôrāh* of Yahweh through what Eckart Otto calls ‘theologization’.²⁵ This development informs

¹⁹ See G. W. Grogan, “The Old Testament concept of solidarity in Hebrews,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 49/1 (1998): 159. Solidarity is discussed briefly below.

²⁰ See Gerstenberger, *Theologies*, and Kessler, *Social History* for a detailed discussion of Israel social history. Gerstenberger outlines and discusses five different stages of Israel’s development: the family and clan, village and small towns, the tribal alliance, the monarchy and, the confessional and parochial community. Alliances were formed between tribes to deal with external threats and internal pressures that threaten the peace and security of the tribes.

²¹ Cf. Faust, “The Rural Community,” 20. Gravett & et al., *An Introduction*, 100.

²² Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 7. The situation just described leads to the development of different ideologies and theologies for maintenance of status and resistance to oppressive powers respectively.

²³ Cf. Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 7.

²⁴ Cf. Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 3. Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfilment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 37.

²⁵ Otto, “Law and Legislation”, 370. *Tôrāh* originally means direction, instruction, and law (Köhler, *HALOT*, 1710).

Israel's understanding of itself as corporate personality²⁶—*‘ām-YHWH*²⁷—the people of Yahweh (Num 11:29; 17:6; Judg 5:12, 13; 1 Sam 2: 24; 2 Sam 1:12, 21; 2 Kgs 9:6; *cf.* 2 Chron 7:14; Isa 1:2-3), elsewhere they are referred to as 'sons of Yahweh' (Deut 14:1; 31:5; Jer 3:9; Ps 82:6). Correspondingly, Israel viewed Yahweh as a 'divine kinsman' in terms of kinship association.²⁸ G.W. Grogan succinctly explains Israel's understanding of itself as Yahweh's kinfolks which portrays the idea of interrelatedness and solidarity:

In the wider family, the terms 'father' and 'son' may refer to any in the line of direct descent (Nu. 1:10; Jos. 21:4, 5, 10). 'Seed' can refer not only to progeny but to kinsmen generally, including collateral connections (Est. 10:3). A 'brother' was any male relative (Gn. 16:12; Nu. 25:6), a member of the same tribe (Nu. 8:23-26; Judg. 18:2, 8) or nation (2 Sa. 2:27; Je. 34:9ff), even simply another person (Gn. 9:5).²⁹

The research takes this (Israel's self-understanding as a corporate personality which also conveys interrelatedness and solidarity) as a point of departure to examine the concept of brotherhood in the Old Testament, and to examine how the text appeals to the kinship motif in the hospitality sphere.

2 Brotherhood as solidarity in the Old Testament

Brotherhood is a social and theological concept in the Old Testament. Socially, brotherhood describes the interestedness and solidarity of kinfolks. Theologically, it embodies the idea of obligations to maintain harmony, offers mutual social and practical support, and to defend family interest.³⁰

²⁶ John W. Rogerson in his article "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: A Re-Examination," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 21/1 (1970): 1-16, critically analyses the concept, "corporate personality" and observes that the term is ambiguous and should be employed cautiously. He notes that the sense in which the term could be defined and retained in Old Testament studies must relate to lineage or descendant groups. "These groups consist of descendants of a common ancestor; [...] sometimes they act as a body in blood feud, and sometimes they hold land which cannot be alienated by an individual" (p.14). The article employs corporate personality as a term which relates to the Hebrew's idea of the community's unity as constituted out of personal relations (*cf.* p.13).

²⁷ *Cf.* Jenni "אָמ," Pages 140-145 in vol.1 of *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann; trans. Mark E. Biddle; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997), 145.

²⁸ Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), 6. Hahn, *Kinship*, 42.

²⁹ Grogan, "Old Testament Solidarity", 161.

³⁰ *Cf.* Reidar Aasgaard, "Brother, Brotherhood," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006): 505.

In the Old Testament, *'āḥ* ('brother') and the feminine form *'āḥôt* ('sister') prototypically describes biological relationship.³¹ The word designates blood brother or half-brother (Gen 4: 2, 8-11; 9:22; 25:26; 44:14; 1 Sam 17:28; Judg 9:1ff; 2 Sam. 13:4, 26; 1 Kgs 1:10). It is used for other relationships besides blood brother/half-brother such as Abraham and Lot (Gen 14:12, 14, 16; 29:15; Ruth 4:3). *'āḥ* in a broader sense refers to kinsmen (Lev 19:17; 25:25, 35; Deut 15:12; 17:15). It also designates members of the same tribe (Num 16:10; Judg 14:3) or relationship between tribes such as the brotherhood between Judah and Israel (Zech. 11:14). In a metaphorical sense, *'āḥ* is used in the Old Testament to describe unrelated persons. Genesis 19:7 is an example of such use (also Gen 29:4; Judg 19:23; 1 Sam 30:23; 2 Sam 20:9; 1 Chron 28:2).

In view of these usages, this author argues that the use of *'āḥ* in the Old Testament, either within the narrow or broad and metaphoric sense, has a strong ethical imperative to provide special care for and to protect one from harm. Such obligation, through "theologization", became obedience to Yahweh's covenant demands. Ernst Jenni reinforces the importance of the usage of *'āḥ* that it relates to the more general and metaphorical usage. "Ethical reflections concerning proper brotherhood in daily life, both within the Bible and without, accentuate brotherly affection, dependability, willingness to help etc."³² Victor P. Hamilton points out some of the unfortunate situations of frictions between brothers, caused by envy, anger, pretence, tyranny, violence, jealousy, and false claims.³³ Those were instances where one might say the primary importance of the concept of brotherhood and the significance of kinship alliance did not have any positive impact on perpetrators of the evil.

Ernst Jenni continues by stating that the term *brother* receives its theological colouring at its earliest Deuteronomic usage especially in the command to love one's neighbour (Lev 19:1; 25:35, 39, 46-48). The word receives religious undertone in the context of inculcation in the command especially in the emphatic usage with the suffix. The religious undertone of the term is reminiscent of the concept of neighbour—*rēa*.³⁴

Almost all the incidences with the emphatic suffix in Deuteronomic code (Deut 12-25 except 13:7 and 25:5-9), involve specific family regulations. Usages of the term elsewhere in "Jer 34:9, 14, 17 directly reflect Dtn usage; Chr history

³¹ Köhler, *HALOT*, 29. Jenni, "אָח," 140f. Victor P. Hamilton, "אָח," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE)* 1:345; "אָחוֹת," *NIDOTTE*, 1:352.

³² Jenni "אָח," 144.

³³ Hamilton, "אָח," *NIDOTTE*, 1:347.

³⁴ Cf. Jenni, "אָח," 144-145.

uses 'brother' in the metaphorical sense almost exclusively in the pl. [... example] Neh 5."³⁵

The Deuteronomic usage developed from Israel's understanding of itself as corporate personality. According to Ernst Jenni, "The people is the family writ large, which forms a unity. The use of brother as a constitutive element of the people's concept also equalizes [...]"³⁶

C IRONIC UNDERSTANDING OF GENESIS 19:1-11

Genesis 19:1-11 is one of the scenes in the second act of a narrative unit of Genesis 18-19 within an Abrahamic narrative cycle (Gen 12-22). Scholars³⁷ are in consensus about the demarcation and unity of Genesis 18-19. Genesis 18-19 narrates two stories of the divine visit in which hospitality practice was involved in each case. A close examination of the narrative reveals smaller units (scenes), most of which must have originated from independent sources and later collected into a unified whole.³⁸

The question one may ask then would be, who composed the text, when and why? Researchers³⁹ show a gradual shift from the traditional argument of source-critical theory. The focus is rather directed to a two-vision perspective of the Priestly ('P') and non-priestly ('non-P') traditions. These two traditions which characterised Pentateuch have been considered as reactionary to each other. And this is important in understanding the intention of the final redactor.

A study of the social and cultural texture of the larger unit (Gen 18 & 19) shows various socio-literary streams which are pointers to the social realities of the text's history. The characteristics of the socio-literary streams of the text in its extant form show that it is a final product of the early postexilic Persian

³⁵ Jenni, "אָהַב," 145.

³⁶ Jenni, "אָהַב," 145.

³⁷ Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis: New Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2009. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (trans. J. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House), 1985. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50: Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books), 1994. Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: the Jewish Publication Society), 1989.

³⁸ Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*; Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Day in Mamre, Night in Sodom: Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995); and Arnold, *Genesis*.

³⁹ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 570; Eckart Otto, "Scribal Scholarship in the Formation of Torah and Prophets: A Postexilic Debate between Priestly Scholarship and Literary Prophecy – The Example of the Book of Jeremiah and its Relation to the Pentateuch." in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding its Promulgation and Acceptance* (ed. Gary Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 171-184, 172.

period.⁴⁰ The characteristics resonate with the different modes of historic existence in *Yehud* at that period—characterised by the rise of competitive powers, group crisis and identity crisis⁴¹. The different modes of historic existence influence the formation of the Pentateuch. Different traditions formulate different perspectives on the history of Israel to favour and legitimise their political, religious or economic ideologies.⁴²

The formation of Pentateuch goes beyond a compromise hypothesis of an imperial authorisation of the Torah. Eckart Otto proposes a third group with which the author concurs that scribal sage theologians could be responsible for giving a new perspective of Israel’s history and theology in the Pentateuch.⁴³ These scribal sage theologians did not just produce an entirely new document, but they maintained most of the characteristics of the individual traditions, hence the existence of doublets that is seemingly ambiguous, incongruent and contradictory. In view of the theological interest of both ‘P’ and ‘non-the P’—institutionalisation of the monotheistic religion of Yahweh and the unification of Israel—it would be considered detrimental to the community to have such an incongruent text. These complex characteristics invite a reader to go beyond the surface meaning of the text. Therefore, this author proposes an ironic reading of the pericope.

Irony, according to Edwin M Good, is difficult to define. He says it is a means of statement or suggestion rather than a plain statement, and a stance of truth from which perceptions develop.⁴⁴ In another dimension, Caroline J. Sharp says “Irony is a cultural phenomenon whose possibility blurs the lines among multitudinous possibilities for how to speak, how to hear, and how to understand.”⁴⁵ In this regard, irony is an important literary strategy as it is often implicit or explicit criticism. This research is not intended to analyse in detail the selected pericope, but the focus is the critique of the concept of brotherhood in the selected unit. It, therefore, argues that the concept of brotherhood is employed by the sage theologian as a social and theological phenomenon to

⁴⁰ Cf. Westermann, *Genesis*, 276 & 300; William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 167.

⁴¹ Paula M. McNutt, *Reconstructing the society of ancient Israel* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 200f.

⁴² Louis C. Jonker, *Defining All – Israel in Chronicles: Multi-levelled Identity Negotiation in Late Persian-Period Yehud* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 73; Otto, *Scribal Scholarship*, 172.

⁴³ Cf. Otto, “Scribal Scholarship”, 172.

⁴⁴ Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (2nd ed; Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1981), 31.

⁴⁵ Caroline J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 7.

critique the readers’ constructed social, cultural, religious and political boundaries.⁴⁶

Genesis 19:1-11 records the actions of the men of Sodom against Lot’s hospitable reception of the two guests. The composer records the account of Lot’s hospitable reception of the two messengers of Yahweh. A closer look at Lot’s hospitable welcome (Gen 19:1-3) suggests that his hospitality is as good as that of Abraham.⁴⁷ However, the problem begins with the arrival of the men of Sodom in Genesis 19:4. After the feast that Lot had provided, the story continued that “Before they lie down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom surrounded against the house, from young to the old [...]”.⁴⁸ The charging of Lot’s house indicates the violent intention of the men of Sodom and this is a violation of the law of hospitality which erases the limit between private and public, the secret and the phenomenal, the home and the violation of the impossibility of the home.⁴⁹

Obviously, the significance of the cultural practice of hospitality as modelled by Abraham’s story (Gen 18:1-8) is one of the key issues here. Lot’s story contains several inconsistencies. His ambiguous characterisation left so many questions unanswered in the text. And these are the gaps that the ironic reading of the text might help the reader to fill as the intended theological message of the sage theologian who compiled the stories.⁵⁰

Lot sets out to protect his guests, he came out of the house and shut the door behind him —putting himself in a vulnerable situation —“And he said to them ‘do not, please my brothers, do evil’.” The actions of the men of Sodom did not take the reader by surprise. The reader was already alerted to the extreme

⁴⁶ These boundaries are certain codes which are often institutionalised in the form of religious, ethnic, or political ideologies that tends to separate Israel into categories of the inside and the outside—those who belong and those who don’t. Cf. Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996), 86.

⁴⁷ Cf. Wenham, *Genesis*, 55, 64. Russel R. Reno, *Genesis: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 186. John E. Hartley, *Genesis: Understanding the Bible Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 185f. Hartley does not agree that Lot’s treatment of the guest (meal) measure up to the “sumptuous feast Abraham had prepared”, however, he agrees that Lot acted righteously towards the strangers.

⁴⁸ Personal translation. The verb form נִסְבְּבָה , *nifal qatal 3mp* before the preposition עַל , indicates surrounding the house with the intention to attack or to ‘come against’ it (*HALOT*, 739).

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Hospitality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 65.

⁵⁰ Derrida describes this resultant effect of the law of hospitality as paradoxical. When one examines Lot’s action against his family in the quest to protect his guest, it raises the question whether hospitality is worth practising. However, contrasting the two stories leads the reader to conclude that Lot’s story is ironical (*Of Hospitality*, 65).

wickedness of the city (Gen 13:13; 18: 23-32). The first irony here is the way Lot addressed the men of Sodom as *’ăḥăy* — my brothers (Gen 19:7). This is one of the situations where *’ăḥ* is used and the relationship does not involve blood ties. The story generates tension regarding common kinship privileges and obligations. Evoking kinship tie—the interrelatedness of Lot and the men of Sodom being members of the same community—imply the sharing of mutual obligations and responsibilities. But Lot's brothers were just doing the opposite.

Secondly, the men of Sodom, on the contrary, did not consider Lot as being at one with them. Even after being with them and could sit with them at the city gate, he remains a *ḥā’ēḥād bā’ āgûr’*—this one came to sojourn (Gen 19:9). The term they used in describing Lot indicates that they did not accept Lot as one of them. It is a reminder of his alien status. He is without a legal right to landed property, protection and participation in other social, political, juridical and economic activities.⁵¹ But the question is how was the story, particularly the kinship motif that was evoked in this scene, understood by the readers at the time of the composition? This author holds that the Deuteronomic religious undertone of the concept of brotherhood was brought to life which as highlighted above, is reminiscent of the concept of neighbour—*rēa’*.⁵² The question now is who are Lot’s brothers? Sarna rightly observes, that “[t]here is a touch of irony in this, for Lot had, by stages, integrate himself into Sodom’s society. First, he merely ‘pitched his tent near Sodom’ (13:12). Then ‘he had settled in Sodom’ (14:12) [...] Yet, despite his best efforts, he cannot fully assimilate into Sodom”.⁵³ Ethnic boundaries was still kept by the men of the city.

As the head of his household, Lot’s primary responsibility is to protect the member of his *bêṭ’āb*. There is an intertextual link showing a contrast between Lot’s action and that of Abraham in Genesis 14. When Abraham (then Abram) heard that his nephew was captured, he responded swiftly and rescued him.⁵⁴ In contrast, Lot’s effort in protecting his guests, although it “underscore[es] the seriousness with which he treats the value of hospitality”,⁵⁵ violates the primary purpose of a kinship group in the Old Testament—the restoration of harmony and wellbeing of the kinship horde. Thus, Abraham's hospitality presents what one may be describe as a normal and noble practice of hospitality. Lot's actions against his family are inconsistent. It is a caricature of hospitality. The inconsistencies in portrayal of Lot’s character are preserved as a rhetorical strategy, portraying Lot’s hospitality as ironic compared to his vulnerable subjection of his daughters to be raped by the mob. Thus, it should be

⁵¹ Köhler, *HALOT*, 201. Sarna, *Genesis*, 136.

⁵² Cf. Jenni “אָח,” 145.

⁵³ Sarna, *Genesis*, 136.

⁵⁴ Cf. Arnold, *Genesis*, 178.

⁵⁵ Sarna, *Genesis*, 136.

understood as an ironic critique of kinship responsibility because it challenges uncritical practices which pose threats to one's group and humanity.⁵⁶

Genesis 19:10-11 records the intervention of the guests in saving Lot from the mob. According to Thomas M. Bolin, hospitality has great potential of transforming a stranger/foreigner from being a potential threat to become an ally.⁵⁷ Had the men of Sodom stood with Lot as "brother", one would argue, they could have averted the divine judgment against them (*cf.* Jonah. 3-4).⁵⁸ But one might also ask about the inherent risk of exposure to dangers from the unknown stranger. To this, the ironic reading of the passage invites readers to "overcome a naïvely realistic reading"⁵⁹ into a critical engagement with the text. In this text it shows the paradoxical nature of the highly valued custom of hospitality in

⁵⁶ One might possibly argue that Lot's action was culturally, socially and ethically acceptable if viewed from the perspective of the history in the text (so Thalia Gur-Klein, "Sexual hospitality in the Hebrew Bible." *Lectio difficilior* 2 (2003): 1-34). Gur-Klein remarks that the custom seems strange but that reports of travellers from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia records such a practice and that the "[f]requency of occurrences of sexual hospitality show the custom to be a consistent template and not a series of isolated events" (p.1). She continues that the Social structure of the then world dichotomised social life "between affiliated brothers and foes; and if a stranger is accepted, he shares the privileges of brotherhood" (p.1). The patriarchal nature of the society, coupled with the culture of honour and shame, the high regard for hospitality and the honour of the host derived through satisfaction of the stranger leads to a situation that might override the chastity of women. The incident of Lot's hospitality echoes this practice. However, the history of the text provides a different context (see paragraph 3 of this section (D) above). At this time, Israel's ethical system was fully developed they are fully aware of certain prohibitions especially as found in Leviticus 18 and 20. Frank D. Wulf remarks that the prohibitions are social, human and not theological as such "it is reasonable to assume that the set of prohibitions developed out of the needs of the kinship group crystalized overtime, and was not a premeditated composition...the variety in the length and focus of the biblical list suggest development in Israel's thinking about acceptable sexual conduct" (F.D. Wulf. "Incest". In *Eerdmans dictionary of the Bible* edited by Freedman, DN *et al* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WB. Eerdmans, 2000), 635). Genesis 19 is silent about Lot's action. This article assumes is a rhetorical strategy (ironic) which allow the listeners to make the moral judgement of such cultural and ethical practice of sexual hospitality especially as contrasted to the story of Abraham's hospitality in Genesis 18.

⁵⁷ Thomas M. Bolin, "The role of exchange in ancient Mediterranean religion and its implications for reading Genesis 18-19," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29/1 (2004), 45.

⁵⁸ The mercy and grace of Yahweh are cardinal theological lessons that the writer intends to communicate. The repetition and patterns of verbs of doing in the chapter —'to do evil' (19:7,9), 'to kill' (19:19), 'to sweep away' (19:15,17), 'to destroy' (19:13,14,29), 'overthrow'(19:25,29), 'to lift, forgive'(19:21), show that there is evil, judgement, and mercy/forgiveness.

⁵⁹ Sharp, *Irony*, 9.

relations to the concept of brotherhood, thus, enabling the reader to develop a new appreciation of the interface between 'brotherhood and kinship.'

The religious undertone of the concept of brotherhood in the selected passage invites its reader at the postexilic period, a period in which temple does not exist, to reconsider the role of being 'brothers' in the social, religious, economic, political and cultural reconstruction of the society. The ideological construction of boundaries that excludes the 'other' poses threat to the nation-building effort that was witnessed after the exile. The brotherhood of all the tribes of Israel evoked in the passage, invites Israel in the postexilic Persian period to be united as brothers. It also Challenges them to reconsider their mission as 'ām-YHWH to the 'other'—"all nations" (Gen 12:1-2; 8:18-19). In the social, economic, political cultural/religious reconstruction of their world, Israel should exhibit acts of brotherliness toward one another and together extend hospitality to "all nations". The inherent threat highlighted by the writer regarding the practice of hospitality calls for a "hermeneutic of hospitality" as a theological response to the practice. Hermeneutic of hospitality provides a bridge between identity and 'otherness' consequently, enhancing a mutual relationship.⁶⁰

D CONCLUSION

The ironic reading of Genesis 19:1-11 shows how the writer uses 'āḥāy to critique Lot's hospitality as a caricature and the attitude of the men of Sodom as contrary. The intention, as has been clearly made manifest in this study, is to challenge the inhabitants of *Yehud* in the post-exilic period to be responsible and accountable toward both kinsfolk and the vulnerable 'other'. Reading the passage in the light of the preceding story of the hospitality of Abraham highlights the incongruence in the story of Lot's hospitality. The article argues that these inconsistencies are part of the rhetorical strategy presented in an ironic style which invites a contemporary reader to rethink or review their tribal and ethnic boundaries and endeavour to go beyond kinship ties.

Like many other tribal affiliations, the Tangale people use irony to highlight discrepancies in certain situations and to create humour. A person uses irony as a sarcastic way of condemning a behaviour or circumstances Nereus Yerima Tadi's *Sam Kwi Bolji*⁶¹ contains several Tangale expressions that can be termed ironic. For example, the saying, "*Kwaturem dauthug nuntho wegom ya?*" (Lit. "Didn't the guinea fowl that abused its mother see?"), is ironic in the sense that a person who laughs at his/her mother for being bald, later develops

⁶⁰ Richard Kearney. "Hospitality: Possible or Impossible?" *Hospitality & Society* 5/2-3(2015): 173-184.

⁶¹ Literally, *sam kwi bolji* is a saying that is upside down. It is a Tangale term that expresses what in English may be classified as 'proverbs, maxims, idioms, aphorisms and sayings (Tadi, *Sam Kwi Bolji*, 46).

baldness. Also, the saying "*Mo sa sau, sau ku sanu*"⁶² expresses an ironic situation whereby a person thinks that he is exploiting someone whereas he is being exploited by the other person in the actual sense. Irony can be used to express change or transformation as in the Tangale proverb "*Apipithu yag wije*" (a venous snake suddenly becomes a harmless snake)⁶³. It is ironic in the sense that the powerful is now powerless as if to indicate that we should expect changes in life. An ironic situation is equally conveyed in the Tangale proverb "*Kulthuk kulthuk tare mu ne ka sa'an teme pono sa'an doji*."⁶⁴ This implies dashed hope or deferred expectations, meaning that appearance is not always reality, another way of saying "all that glitter is not gold".

Irony in Tangale can thus be a source of mockery or a way of creating humorous discourse. Some ironies can, however, point out the paradoxical nature of life, its vicissitudes, and can also be for the sole purpose of adorning speech. The concept of *molle* relates to brotherliness, oneness, togetherness, solidarity, and love. The issue is whether this is the lived experience or whether it is now ironic to use the concept in relation to the Tangale people.⁶⁵ This article invites the reader to consider the potential of the practice of hospitality. The hermeneutical lens used calls for discernment in the obedience to the laws governing hospitality. According to Richard Kearney, the laws that govern hospitality is an "equal reciprocal relationship demanding trust, a laying down of one's weapons, a conversion of hostility into hospitality".⁶⁶

In their study of identity politics in Nigeria, Higazi and Lar note the remarkable influence of religion in the Tangale ethnic groups. They explain that most families and ethnic groups are religiously mixed such that it results in "social ties that extend to their co-religionists from other ethnic groups, going beyond narrow visions of indigeneity."⁶⁷ The majority of the Tangale people are Christians and this helped them and the other ethnic groups in the area to "gain

⁶² Tadi, *Sam Kwi Bolji*, 147.

⁶³ Tadi, *Sam Kwi Bolji*, 66.

⁶⁴ Tadi, *Sam Kwi Bolji*, 109.

⁶⁵ The focus of the article has been on the inter-ethnic relationship between the Tangale, Kaltungo, and Shongom. However, this is not the only challenge facing these ethnic groups. The dysfunctional inter-religious relationship, and the current Fulani herdsmen killings are major challenges. The same question can be asked whether the concept of *molle* is ironic or lived experience. This article invites government agencies, individuals and groups to consider the potentials of hospitality as employed in the critique of kinship and to engage in a meaningful conversation such that it will create a healthy relationship that cut across kinship ties and tribal/ethnic boundaries. Nothing has been said in this research on how this ironic critic of hospitality challenges patriarchy. However, it is hoped that this article might stimulate further research which would look into this important implication; that "brother" also includes "sister".

⁶⁶ Kearney, *Hospitality*, 179.

⁶⁷ Higazi and Lar, "Articulations of Belonging," 105.

a lead in Western Education".⁶⁸ The situation among the ethnic groups does not indicate that this religious affiliation had any impact in terms of strengthening the ties between the ethnic groups. Divisive ethnic politics seems to characterise the communities.

However, in this global age, there exist so many reasons why these communities should live together in harmony (Ps 133). For example, Higazi and Lar report that

The surge of localized communal conflicts across Nigeria is in large part a result of high levels of deprivation amongst the general population on the one hand, and a deeply corrupt, kleptocratic political elite on the other that is focused on power – not for a wider public good, but for the diversion of state resources for itself.⁶⁹

The southern part of Gombe where the Tangale now lives is made up of multiplicity of minority groups that are decentralised and without any overarching political authority. This, however, is an unfortunate reality. Higazi and Lar lament that even though the people of southern Gombe had the advantage of Western education over the rest of the state, "it is arguable whether this has been matched by a proportionate number of top bureaucratic positions"⁷⁰ The sad reality, this researcher argues, is largely brought about by the rift between the ethnic groups especially in the case of Tangale, Kaltungo, and Shongom.

This article discusses the Tangale concept of brotherhood. It highlights the significance of the virtue of solidarity and togetherness as an inherent constituent that underscores the value of the concept. The Tangale cultural background opens up a new perspective of doing exegesis of Genesis 19:1-11. It employs Irony as the hermeneutical lens to interpret the text. The analysis of biblical passage within the narrative context shows how hospitality provides an interface for a theological and ethical understanding of the concept of brotherhood as that which transcends ethnic boundaries. This understanding provides a window of orientation for the readers' theological-ethical reflections towards their social, religious, political life.

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⁶⁸ Higazi and Lar, "Articulations of Belonging," 108.

⁶⁹ Higazi and Lar, "Articulations of Belonging," 103.

⁷⁰ Higazi and Lar, "Articulations of Belonging," 107-108.

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