

EDITORIAL

Launching *Hagar*: Marginality, Beer-Sheva, Critique

The launching of a new journal is generally a significant event in the life of an academic community. It is no different with *Hagar*, whose first issue is now in your hands. *Hagar* ishas finally been launched following an active period of collective deliberation and scholarly debates among colleagues associated with the Humphrey Institute at Ben-Gurion University. These deliberations revolved around broad issues of scholarship and politics, most notably in our well-attended and often controversial faculty seminars, and were more recently channeled into questions regarding the desirable content, scope and orientation of the new journal.

These 'Humphrey discussions' resulted in the concept of *Hagar* becoming the 'backbone' of the new journal. It emerged from the recent spirit of social sciences and humanities at Ben-Gurion University, as well as the changing discourses in both academia and society at large. The concept of *Hagar* harnesses some of the creative and critical energies fermenting at BGU and attempts to communicate and broaden the impact of these energies both in Israel and abroad.

What, then, is the *Hagar* concept? This woman appears both in the Bible and in Islamic texts (as Hajar). In the ancient texts, Hagar is portrayed as an Egyptian maid who was brought by the childless Sara for Abraham, and later became the patriarch's wife and mother of his first Son. The fouling of relations with Sara caused Hagar to be expelled to the Beer-Sheva/Hijaz desert, although she was repeatedly saved by 'the powers'. Thus Hagar crossed several cultural and geographical boundaries, repeatedly moving between center and periphery. Her story reveals the multiple possibilities embedded in most social settings, while at the same time reflecting the overriding impact of power and hierarchy.

Hence the figure of Hagar personifies the scholarly vista points from which the perspective(s) of the new journal emerge: marginality, mobility and changing power relations. She also brings together, in a symbolic way, a call for a critical outlook, born by her social, ethnic and gender circumstances, and the concrete geography of the Beer-Sheva region, where the journal is being edited and produced. That geography is not merely locational; it still echoes the story of Hagar as this southern region accommodates many minority and migrant communities, who often find themselves in positions of economic, social and political marginality.

...Sarai... had an Egyptian handmaid... She... gave Hagar unto to her husband Abram to be his wife... and she conceived; and ... her mistress was despised in her eyes... And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her face... And the angel of the LORD said unto her: behold, though art with child and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael, because the LORD hath heard thy affliction. Genesis 16 (1-15). Sarah... said unto Abraham: Cast out this bondwoman and her son; ... And Abraham... sent her away; and she departed in the desert of Beer-Sheva (Genesis, 21: 10-20)

Drawing on the narrated experience of Hagar, the journal aims to promote *critical scholarship*, with constant examination of systems, regimes and rules, and with a persistent challenge to the rationale, values and consequences of the 'the order of things'. We do not intend, however, to create an ideologically bounded space, nor a new homogenous discourse. Rather, we aim to create conditions for exchanges of perspectives and angles, driven by the scholarly endeavor of describing, interpreting, and learning.

The geography and symbolism of Hagar are also linked to other aspects of the journal's agenda. Her desert location and social instability may inspire the journal's authors and readers to think seriously about the periphery, not necessarily as a place defined, or denigrated, by 'the center', but as a zone with its own beat, rhythm and logic. It is the place from which we would like the journal's articles to 'gaze' at the world and analyze its unfolding complexities, movements and flows.

Further, the close kin relations which form the underlying social web in the stories of the biblical Hagar, and which involve Abraham, Sara, Ishmael and Isaac, all invoke the inevitably close – if often uneasy – relations between Muslims and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis, Arabs and Hebrews. The story of Hagar denotes the deep historical roots of these communities in the ancient land, and casts our minds to the variegated ways in which land and memory are simultaneously *contested and shared* by these groups. The journal, therefore, hopes to provide a site in which the evolving kin-relations associated with Hagar, and their contemporary legacies, can be analyzed and debated, studied and explored, as they unfold in contemporary Israel/Palestine. These can be used as both illustrations and building blocks for comparative and theoretical developments, drawing on the rich and painful histories of places and communities in this ancient land.

HAGAR¹

By: Alexander Penn (1947)

... The heat of the sun engulfed
And the sword of the east avenged
In the Beer-Sheva desert she cried
And her tears poured into the flask...

Who is seething in the heart of the desert
And piercing hole after hole?
Whose body is cracking
Against the dryness of the Negev?
Whose life molded into sand?
Ishmael, but also your brother, Isaac

... And Hagar heard Isaac's voice
And watered her son while laughing
She said: bless in the sky Abraham's God
Who provides water for brothers to bond

The name Hagar also provides the root for words in both Arabic and Hebrew which depict the journal's multiple perspectives: 'Hagira' and 'Muhajara' (immigration), Gerim (foreigners) and Hijra (Journey). Hagar thus evokes *the boundary*, the border region, the movement, and the peripherality which is often overlooked in mainstream social science. Accordingly, we envisage the journal becoming a platform for voices emerging from, or about, 'the south' and 'the east', the immigrant and the minor, in distinction to the fairly narrow – and mainly 'western' – agenda of many mainstream scholarly outlets. In the current settings, non-'western' scholarship often finds itself in specific 'enclaves', but we seek to provide a joint space for alternative voices, alongside more established perspectives, in a spirit of open, plural and equal engagement.

The grappling of the biblical Hagar with immigration and border zones also reflects the journal's agenda of *multidisciplinarity*. We are not necessarily interested in creating a new methodology or a new institutionalized setting for the creation of demarcated knowledge, but rather in providing a site for engagement between different disciplinary works which nonetheless 'connect' in their endeavor to examine the taken-for-granted 'order of things'. As such, we seek to facilitate debates and discourses using a variety of scholarly approaches

¹ Translated from Hebrew by Oren Yiftachel

and materials. More specifically, we see *Hagar* as a meeting place for the various social sciences, especially sociology, politics, geography, economics, anthropology and psychology, as well as a site for fertile debates with the various branches of the humanities and cultural studies. We hope to gradually create such a meeting place which will be constructed and shaped around the 'Hagarian' themes discussed above.

Hagar replaces "Israel Social Science Research" (ISSR) which was published for 13 years by the Humphrey Institute for Social Research. We believe that the new journal remains relevant to the readers of ISSR, and to the Israel Sociological Society. Like the ISSR it deals with societal issues and analyses, although it has moved its focus from an Israeli orientation to the international and multidisciplinary foci detailed above.

The first issue of *Hagar*, now in your hands, attests to the direction and quality of our new endeavor. It contains six papers and two shorter pieces which interrogate the issues of marginality, movement and power relations. The issue opens with Jean and John Comaroff's analysis of the 'border panic' engulfing the post-colonial state in general, and Southern Africa in particular, as they stagger into the new Millennium. The next two papers, written by Valentine Moghadam and Yehouda Shenhav, deal with the Middle East. Moghadam critically surveys the achievements and challenges of the women's movements and politics in a range of Middle Eastern and North African countries. Shenhav presents a counter-factual account of the immigration of Iraqi Jews to Israel, and of the debates surrounding Israeli attempts to construct a system of national accounting which would write-off most assets and possessions of both Palestinian-Arabs and Iraqi Jews.

In the next paper Nira Yuval-Davis outlines a new construct of 'multi-layered' citizenship, constructed mainly (though not solely) through the experiences of women, immigrants and indigenous peoples. Peter Marcuse then critiques the taken-for-granted overlaps between identity and territory, by linking both these concepts to the matrices of social and economic power(s). In the final paper, Kathy Ferguson and Phyllis Turnbull offer a critical reading of militarism in general, and its infiltration into the everyday tempo and consciousness of Hawaiian society in particular.

The issue is completed with two additional, shorter, pieces. Raef Zreik, in our 'Open Space – Perspectives', presents a cynical/sad account of a Palestinian-Bedouin 'illegal' village, which is transformed by the power of planning and legal frameworks to be 'here but not now', and 'now but not here'. Aziza Khazoom, in our 'Reviews' section, reflects on the contemporary movie *East is East* in which the characters, much like the mythical Hagar, digress borders and boundaries, contest gender hierarchies, and finally emerge transformed through their new cultural settings.

We feel the first issue of the journal marks, more than all, the *beginning* of a journey. Much like the story of the biblical Hagar, the destination and direction are yet to be fully defined, and our steps are hesitant and exploratory. We are

aware, of course, that our resources and powers are limited, and that our aims and hopes will only be, at best, partially fulfilled. Yet we feel confident that ours is a promising route, and invite writers and readers to join us on this voyage.

Oren Yiftachel
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Beer-Sheva