

# THE ROLE OF RAHAB IN THE CONQUEST STORY OF JOSHUA: TOWARDS AN IGWEBUIKE THEOLOGY

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## Abstract

In this work, the author has argued that Josh 2 does not interrupt the plot of the conquest story, rather it progresses it. The narrator, by letting us see the psychological condition of the inhabitants of Jericho through the lens of a Canaanite prostitute, prepared the ground for the conquest. This shows that Joshua chapter 2 fits into the larger narrative context. After a close reading of the episode, we discovered that despite being depicted as an "other" and a woman of loose virtue, the focus of the episode swings onto Rahab and evaluates her positively as a woman of wisdom and faith, and God's tool of ironic deliverance. Thereby showing that despite her "otherness," she still has a place in God's global plan of salvation; a role that further foreshadows her as the future ancestress of Jesus in the New Testament. The role of Rahab, as established in this paper, further reminds us of a theological twist which Yehezkel Kaufman calls "dual causality" - a theological principle that emphasizes the human course of events in a story that is guided by the Word of God. The aim of this piece is to investigate the narrator's interest and the theological import of Josh 2, with particular attention to the role of Rahab in the plot of the conquest story. This will help us see how the role of Rahab in the conquest story exemplifies a true manifestation of *igwebuiké* theology. My approach will be synchronic; that is, taking the book of Joshua as a complete whole, I will try to argue for the place of Josh 2 in general and Rahab in particular to the literary unit called "the conquest story." I will also highlight how her role, from a literary point of view, becomes a prolepsis to an event which is to come.

**Keywords:** *Igwebuiké*, Theology, Rahab, Joshua, Conquest, Narrative, Synchronic

## Introduction

Reading the conquest story of Joshua, and particularly paying attention to the Role of Rahab in the capture of Jericho, the question that immediately comes to mind is whether Rahab is a saviour, a traitor, or a victim. If one cast a critical eye on the story, Rahab will definitely be labeled "a traitor" who orchestrated the genocide of her people. However, though the story as it is told appears to have been shaped for Israelite listeners with Israel's interests encoded; in the final analysis, it bespeaks an *igwebuiké* theology. *Igwebuiké* is an Igbo compound word, derived from a combination of three words: *Igwe - bu - ike*, which literarily translates as "multitude/population

(*igwe*), is (*bu*), strength/power (*ike*). Simply put, it means "there is strength in number." This is an existential reality that stresses, in the words of Anthony Ikechukwu Kanu, the proponent of Igwebuiké philosophy and theology, that "when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful and can constitute an insurmountable force."<sup>1</sup> As a theological reality, it emphasizes that any human being, irrespective of tribe, religion nationality, and even moral standings, can be an instrument in the hand of the divine for the global picture of salvation. It de-emphasizes those things that separate us.

With the above understanding in mind, the narrative of Joshua 2 recounts a spy mission. Joshua sends two Israelites to reconnoitre the "promised land" ahead of the Israelite entry into it via Jericho. While the story begins expectedly, the plot quickly twists, as Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, aids and abets the spies in their escape from the Jericho authorities. I agree with Hawk who opined that "the story of Rahab and the Israelite spies is arguably the most richly textured text in the book of Joshua."<sup>2</sup> It combines elements of irony, humour and inter-textuality to highlight the literary role of Rahab in the conquest story of Joshua. This, however, is not to veil the interpretative difficulty inherent in Josh 2. The first challenge the reader encounters as he engages the text is the prominent place given to a Prostitute in the story. Yair Zakovitch expresses this scandal better: "Why should the *Book of Wars of the Lord*...begin precisely at the house of a harlot?"

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<sup>1</sup> Kanu, I. A. "Igwebuiké as an Igbo-African Hermeneutic of Globalization," in *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 2 no. 1 (March 2016), 3; Kanu, I. A. (2016) "Igwebuiké as an Expressive Modality of Being in African ontology." *Journal of Environmental and Construction Management*. 6. 3; Kanu, I. A. (2016). "Igwebuiké as the consummate foundation of African bioethical principles." *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 2. 2; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuiké and the logic of African philosophy." *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3. 1; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuiké and the question of superiority in the scientific community of knowledge." *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3. 1; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuiké as a Complementary Approach to the Issue of Girl-Child Education." *Nightingale International Journal of Contemporary Education and Research*. Vol. 3. No. 6; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuiké as an Igbo-African ethic of reciprocity." *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3. 2; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuiké as an Igbo-African Philosophy for the Protection of the Environment". *Nightingale International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 3. No. 4; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuiké as an Igbo-African wholistic response to the problem of evil and human suffering." *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*. 3. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel L Hawk, *Joshua* BERIT OLAM (Collegeville, MN : The Liturgical Press, 2000): 35.

Why does the Jericho prostitute get such a prominent place... on the very opening pages of the books of the Former Prophets?"<sup>3</sup>.

My aim in this paper is not necessarily to answer the aforementioned questions, rather, I intend to investigate the narrator's interest and the theological import of Josh 2, with particular attention to the role of Rahab in the plot of the conquest story. This will help us see how the role of Rahab in the conquest story exemplifies a true manifestation of *igwebuiké* theology. My approach will be synchronic; that is, taking the book of Joshua as a complete whole, I will try to argue for the place of Josh 2 in general and Rahab in particular to the literary unit called "the conquest story." I will also highlight how her role, from a literary point of view, becomes a prolepsis to an event which is to come.

### **The Literary Context of Josh 2**

Scholars from historical critical stand point holds that the narrative of the mission of the spies and of Rahab's intervention sits oddly with the story of the settlement of the land as a divinely directed conquest; "it sticks out", says Boling, "like a sore thumb."<sup>4</sup> And Bernard Robinson would ask: "What room is there in the supernatural tale told in chapters 1 and 6 of Joshua for the covert human action of chapter 2?" As such, he opines that "it has been plausibly suggested that Josh 2 derives from a tradition about the fall of Jericho which attributed it to a betrayal from within by Rahab, rather than to the miraculous intervention narrated in chapter 6. Just as an inhabitant of Bethel shows spies the way into that city (Judge 1:22-26), so in this tradition Rahab will have used her scarlet cord to guide the Israelites into Jericho, perhaps by marking a weak point in the wall. So in his opinion, The Rahab stories as they stand are unlikely, therefore, to be historical."<sup>5</sup>

First and foremost, the episode in chapter two does not contradict the story of the settlement in the land as a divinely directed conquest. Contrary to what Boling and other scholars of historical-critical stock may think, in Josh 2 the narrator, through an act of *showing* and using the lens of Rahab, enables us to see the story as a divinely directed conquest. This is evident in

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<sup>3</sup> Yair Zakovitch, "Humor and Theology or the Successful Failure of Israelite Intelligence: A Literary-Folkloric Approach to Joshua 2", in Susan Niditch (ed.), *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore* (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1990), 76.

<sup>4</sup> Robert G. Boling, *Joshua*. Anchor Bible 6 ( New York: Doubleday, 1984): 150.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard P. Robinson, "Rahab of Canaan and Israel," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* no. 23 (2009): 259-60.

the words of Rahab to the spies in 2:9, "we know that the Lord has given you the land ..." Furthermore, it is important to note that the book of Joshua is not a history in the modern sense of the word, but a history in the narrative sense;<sup>6</sup> or as Von Rad would put it, a *Kerygmatic* or confessional history.<sup>7</sup> In his words:

The Old Testament writings confine themselves to representing Yahweh's relationship to Israel and the world in one aspect only, namely as a continuing divine activity in history. This implies that in principle Israel's faith is grounded in a theology of history... When we speak of divine acts in history, we are of course thinking of those which the faith of Israel regarded as such - that is, the call of the forefathers, the deliverance from Egypt, the bestowal of the land of Canaan, etc. - and not of the results of modern critical historical scholarship, to which Israel's faith was unrelated.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, narrative history shows the perspectives and the theological ideologies of the author. It lays out the ground for Israel's claim to the land of Canaan over and against rival claimants. According to Hawk, the book of Joshua argues that the Land of Canaan became the land of Israel because the God of Israel gave the Land to his people in fulfilment of promises to Israel's ancestors. The same God fought for Israel, defeated all opposing forces, and subdued the peoples of the land.<sup>9</sup>

As the book of Joshua opens, Joshua and the new generation of Israelites are re-poised to take the Promised Land. In chapter 1, the narrator is somewhat ambivalent regarding both Joshua and Israel. He emphatically identifies successful obedience as the goal, but leaves open that failure is a genuine possibility. Chapter 2 is actually Joshua's first opportunity to prove himself. The episode in chapter 2 is presented as a narrative master class. Aaron Sherwood observed, and rightly so, that several factors, or better still, features identify Josh 2 as an independent episode of scenic narration. It opens and closes with descriptive narration, covering much narrative time

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<sup>6</sup> Note that a Narrative reading does not inquire into Joshua's accuracy as a historical source

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* (Edinburgh, London: SCM Press 1975): 108.

<sup>8</sup> Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 106.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel L Hawk, "The Truth about the Conquest: Joshua as History, Narrative, and Scripture," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 66 no. 2 (2012): 134.

with comparatively little discourse".<sup>10</sup> These sections are marked out by the heavy use of *wayyiqtol*<sup>11</sup> forms in 2:2-4 and 2:21-24. In v. 1, the narrator sets the scene for the episode, and vv. 21b-24 function as a *coda*<sup>12</sup>.

However, despite its narrative beauty, some scholars argue that chapter 1 would have fitted smoothly with chapter 3 which sets the plot in forward motion, in obedience to the instruction of YHWH to Joshua in chapter 1. As such, they believe that chapter 2 interrupts the flow of the conquest story, and consequently, represents secondary insertion into the book of Joshua. According to Creach Jerome:

Joshua 2 seems to have been inserted between two stories that once went together. Indeed, Joshua 3:2 uses the temporal reference "after three days" to show continuity with Joshua 1, which mentions the same time interval (see 1:11). It has been noted further that the spy mission in chapter 2 would have taken longer than the three days that passes between Joshua's installation and the Jordan crossing (and Josh. 2:22 says the spies stayed three days in the hills after leaving Rahab). Even if these references to "three days" are meant figuratively, the Rahab story still appears to interrupt the logical connection between chapters 1 and 3.<sup>13</sup>

Without downplaying the importance of diachronic approach to biblical text, I think there is a coherence between chapter 2 and the conquest story in general. The account's location at the head of the conquest story hints at its, not only literary, but also theological significance. Because of features like suspense, sexual innuendo, and an underdog who triumphs, which a modern audience expects in a great story, Josh 2 can and should be appreciated for its literary artistry. This chapter is also in conformity with

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<sup>10</sup> Aaron Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading and a Prostitute's Profession: A Re-examination of Joshua 2," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31 no. 1 (2006): 46.

<sup>11</sup> In grammatical Hebrew Syntax, a *wayyiqtol* form is used in clauses depicting sequential events. It is a verbal form that usually appears in chain and communicates coordinated information, normally sequent to one another.

<sup>12</sup> The coda signals that the narrative has come to an end; it completes the narrative discourse. See Adele Berlin *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994): 107.

<sup>13</sup> Creach F.D. Jerome, *Joshua*, INTERPRETATION (Louisville, Ky. : Westminster John Knox Press, 2003): 31.

the theology of the book of Joshua, namely it is YHWH who gave the land of Canaan to his people Israel. As such, I would think that the episode as narrated in Joshua 2 is clearly intended to serve the development of the plot within this carefully structured story, and more particularly within the subdivision that is thematically focused on YHWH's entrance into Canaan. Joshua 2 is the link between YHWH's commissioning the entrance in chapter 1 and the actual entrance recounted in chapters 3 and 4. It is crucial to remember that in chapter 1, YHWH instructs his servant Joshua to cross the Jordan not to plunder or merely to pass through but to take permanent possession of a land long occupied by strongly entrenched squatter peoples. According to John H. Stek:

The central question raised for Joshua and Israel by the commission they received in chapter 1 is not Can it be done? Neither was that the question when Moses, upon YHWH's instructions, sent the twelve spies into Canaan (Num. 13). Both there and here, the question is the same: What are the conditions and circumstances we will confront when we cross over into the Promised Land? In other words, what is the situation and the terrain?<sup>14</sup>

In my opinion, I think this is the question chapter 2 tries to answer within the narrative framework of the conquest story of Joshua. It helps us see, through the eyes of Rahab, the psychological conditions of the inhabitants of Jericho. But before we see how this played out, let's pause a while to examine the designation of Rahab in this episode.

### **Rahab: A Prostitute or an Innkeeper?**

Rahab is the only *full character*<sup>15</sup> in the episode. She appears, explicitly or implicitly, in all the scenes and is given the majority of the dialogue. Some scholars, beginning with Josephus, have tried to soften Rahab's designation as a 'prostitute', arguing that she is merely an innkeeper, and that her house is an inn (rather than exclusively a brothel). However, I think there is nothing in the text that suggests such softened interpretation. The text

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<sup>14</sup> John H. Stek, "Rahab of Canaan and Israel: The Meaning of Joshua 2," *Catholic Theological Journal* 37 (2002): 30-31.

<sup>15</sup> See Adele Berlin, 23. Here *full characters* are defined as 'complex, manifesting a multitude of traits, and appearing as "real people"'. See also Jean-Louis Ska, *Our Fathers Have Told Us: Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1990): 83.

categorically tells us the two spies came to that city and "entered the house of a harlot" - ויבאו בית־אִשָּׁה זוֹנָה (cf. Josh 2,1), whose name was Rahab and stayed there temporarily. From the evidence we have in the text, it is obvious Rahab lived in a house on the city wall, perhaps near the main gate. She was also a recognized member of her family group (2:12-13,18). She is depicted as one who has knowledge of affairs beyond the city and national borders. A parallel may be found in the inn-keeper of Old Babylonian times. The inn (*bit sābi(ti)*) was kept by a man or woman who was required to notify the palace of any stranger, especially one engaged in hostile activity, who might come to it (see Laws of Hammurabi, § 109).

This comparison with the Babylonian *sābitu* would raise the question of semantics. Can we find the precise meaning of the Hebrew root *znh*? Josephus has Rahab not as a 'harlot' (*zona*) but as one who 'kept an inn' (*καταγωγιον*)<sup>16</sup> and in this is followed by the Targum and Midrash. While this could be attributed to the nature of his apologia or be considered 'a distinction without a difference,' it is striking that *zona* can be defined as having friendly dealings with alien persons or institutions. Given the semantic affinity of the root *znh* with the Arabic *zina*, a verb used especially in the Quran to describe illicit sex, I think *zona* most likely translates as "harlot" and not an "inn-keeper" as Josephus claims. *Zina* according to the Qur'an is sexual intercourse outside marriage between consenting adults, whether they are married or not. *Zina* is one of the forbidden deeds, one of the most serious major sins (*kabaa'ir*) after shirk and killing. (cf. Surah, al-Furqan 25:68-70). The Qur'an says, "And come not near to unlawful sexual intercourse (*Zina*). Verily, it is a faahishah [anything that transgresses its limits-a great sin] and an evil way [that leads one to Hell unless Allah forgives him]" (Surah, al-Isra', 17: 32). Therefore, given that the narrator, as a literary artist, works within a historically determined social milieu, it is most likely that his understanding of the word *zona* is *harlot*, and thus a necessary supposition for Rahab is 'the harlot'. As such, she functions as a marginal figure in the society, tolerated but despised. Furthermore, Sherwood observed that Since prostitution is a Deuteronomic metaphor for idolatrous apostasy, Rahab's profession strengthens her identity as a Canaanite and underscores the Canaanite's threatening practice of whoring after idols.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 6.2.

<sup>17</sup> Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading" 48.

Thus the narrator sets up the reader, ironically, to expect nothing positive from Rahab. But like every other irony, it is a call for surprises. Thus, having established that Rahab is not an inn-keeper, but a harlot, I will now do a close reading of Josh 2 so as to establish the literary role of Rahab in the conquest story.

### A Close Reading of Joshua 2:1-24

In Josh. 2:1 the setting changes to Shittim. The interest shifts from crossing the Jordan (cf. 1:11) to spying out Jericho (2:1). God commanded Joshua to "rise, cross the Jordan"; instead, in Josh. 2.1, Joshua sends spies with the instructions: 'go' (*lūkû*) and 'see the land' (*rü'û 'et-hä'ä<sup>o</sup>rec*). It is therefore surprising to read of the spy's response to this direct but simple order. Instead of 'going and seeing', "they go and enter the house of a prostitute" (2:1). These actions, according to Sherwood, "are the first indication something is amiss: the first instance of the command/fulfilment pattern in the book of Joshua, here as the book opens, *is prima facie* an instance of command/failed fulfilment".<sup>18</sup> I, however, wouldn't see it as a command/failed fulfilment pattern. Rather, it could be a literary ploy on the part of the narrator to heighten the tension in the mind of the reader, who wonders if this would be a failed mission, thereby creating a sense of uneasiness. Moreso, to "cross the Jordan," they needed to know the terrain they were about to cross into; this explains the sending of the spies. Through the use of negative language and imagery, the narrator cultivates a motif that we might label a 'calamity motif'. This motif is inherent in the expression: *wayyë'lkû wayyäbö'û Bêt- 'iššâ zônâ* ("And they came and entered into the house of a woman, a prostitute"). The Hebrew verb *bö'*, translated as "entered" can also refer to a man "coming to" a woman for the purpose of sexual intercourse (see Gen 6:4; 16:2; 30:3; Deut 22:13; 1 Sam 12:24 etc.). This connotation is made more plausible in this context with the apposition "... a prostitute" in the expression: "... and entered into the house of a woman, a prostitute". But this is not actually the information the reader expects from the narrator. We anticipate the narrator telling us of the spies clever manoeuvres to stay "undercover," of the sly deceptions they pulled off, of their courageous penetration of the king of Jericho's inner counsels, of their sharp observations of Jericho's defences - any or all of those kinds of things that undercover spies do to gather military intelligence and escape detection so as to get back to those who sent them.<sup>19</sup> He tells us none of these. As soon

<sup>18</sup> Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading" 49.

<sup>19</sup> Stek, "Rahab of Canaan and Israel," 39.

as our narrator has the spies in place in Jericho, he shifts his focus to Rahab, whose initiatives, it turns out, determine the whole outcome of this initial confrontation of the forces of Israel and the forces of Canaan.

Let's note the emphatic manner by which the narrator introduces Rahab. The MT designates her with three names: A woman, a prostitute, and her name, "Rahab". Commenting on this, Hawk says "As a woman of Canaan and a Prostitute, Rahab personifies the temptation to apostatize."<sup>20</sup> Prostitution is a metaphor often used in the Bible to describe Israel's violation of her covenant with YHWH (see Ex 34:14-16; Deut 31:16-18; Jer 3:1-10; Hos 3:3). As such, the name "Rahab," coupled with the epithet "Prostitute", in the sublime opinion of Hawk,

Reminds the reader that the goodness of the land itself may seduce Israel from covenantal obedience to YHWH. Prostitution (signifying) apostasy) thus serves as a motif which links the departure of the spies from Shittim, where the Israelites 'began to prostitute themselves' with the women of Moab (see Num 25:1), to their arrival at Jericho, where they enter the house of a prostitute.<sup>21</sup>

In as much as I agree with Hawk's interpretation, I also think the emphatic way in which Rahab is introduced as a "Prostitute" is meant to echo her sinful and insignificant status and highlight YHWH as the "Man behind the scene," who uses the weak and the insignificant unto his glory, thus, making it evident that it is he, YHWH, who gives Israel the Land. It is not by their power or military might.

### *Complication of the Plot: The Spies in Danger (2,2-7)*

<sup>2</sup>The king of Jericho was told, "Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." <sup>3</sup> So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land." <sup>4</sup> But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from." <sup>5</sup> At

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<sup>20</sup> Hawk, *Joshua* 41.

<sup>21</sup> Hawk, *Joshua* 41.

dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." <sup>6</sup> (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) <sup>7</sup> So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut (NIV)

The *hinneh* (look) clause in v. 2, which introduces the report of the coming of the spies, is very suggestive, particularly, in respect of the time the spies arrived Jericho: *halla<sup>o</sup>ylâ* (at night). If read along the grains of the wisdom of the sages in Proverbs 7:9-10: " In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night: And, behold, there met him a woman *with* the attire of a harlot, and subtle of heart." This means the spies entered the city at night, probably knowing quite well that it is the time when Prostitutes traverse the street, and perhaps met Rahab on the street and followed her to her house. This actually complicates the story. The fact that Rahab is a harlot is a dominant element in the story. As the spies enter her house, we were told at the end of v. 1, they "laid there" (וישכבו-שמה), instead of the similar, but the more sexual "lay with her" (וישכב אתה).<sup>22</sup> But a second incidence will intensify the sexual connotations. The king arrives at Rahab's house and instructs her "Bring out the men who came to you, who came to your house" (v 3) The duplication in the king's words ("came to you" and "came to your house") is meant to convey two possibilities that play on the term "to come to" (לבוא אל), which connotes sexual activity. The first possibility is that the spies arrived at Rahab's house for a sexual encounter ("came to you") and the second is that they came to her house simply to lodge there. Rahab, in her response to the king, implied the first: "True, the men came to me" - alluding that sexual intercourse has taken place between her and the spies. The apparent sexual intentions of the spies constitute, on the one hand, a good alibi for Rahab's claim that she did not know where they came from, but on the other, it complicates the spy mission.

The story complicates even the more when the narrator discloses that they have been unable to escape detection: "The king of Jericho was told, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land" (2:2). But how does the informant know that the strangers who followed the prostitute to her

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<sup>22</sup> See Gen 34:2; 35:22; Lev 19:20; 2 Sam 13:14

house are Israelites? How does he know their mission? The reason for the spies' quick discovery is a *blank* and not a *gap*.<sup>23</sup>

Just as Joshua sent the spies (v. 1), the king of Jericho *sends* soldiers to capture them: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land" (2:3). With this the scene rapidly shifts to Rahab's house. Again, the narrator selects the Hebrew word *bō'* that can function as common Hebrew sexual euphemisms. This leaves us with the impression that these two Israelites enter the land and immediately engage in forbidden activity with the very people who are to be destroyed.<sup>24</sup>

In verse 4, the narrator shifts abruptly to the spies. In v 3 the reader's tension is heightened in respect to the spies' safety, for he does not know yet whether Rahab will surrender them to the King. Though it is expected that she hands them over to her king since the mission of the spies poses a danger to her country, but surprisingly, she dashed our expectations by committing treasonable offence (2:4-7), choosing her *passing lovers* to the detriment of her own nation. After v. 5, there is suspense over whether the soldiers will leave, and over whether the hiding of the spies was rushed and inadequate. The parenthetical comment of v. 6 is even chronologically displaced (from v. 4a) to foster suspense until v. 7a. Before the reader learns whether the treasonable smartness of Rahab was effective, the narrator suspends the action to tell us where the men were hidden: "in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof" (2:6). After disclosing the spies' hiding place, the narrator returns to the protagonist of this episode, Rahab, and to the King's men. Without any response, the men left in vain attempt to capture the men who came to spy their land. Commenting on this twist of fate, Sherwood says that the narrator, "by placing Rahab in the role of a *deus ex machina*, the danger motif, instead of being followed through logically, is unexpectedly transformed into a deliverance motif."<sup>25</sup> So with this deliverance, the plot begins to head, gradually, towards resolution.

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<sup>23</sup> "Blank," consists of the omission of information that is completely uninteresting to the narrator and unimportant to the development of the plot. "Gaps" are relevant to the narration. Through a "gap" the narrator creates effect of surprise, expectation and suspense. Gaps are generally filled with "analepses" (the telling of events after the moment in which they chronologically took place (e.g. Gen 20:4,11,18). See Jean Louis Ska, 8-9.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel L. Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991): 62.

<sup>25</sup> Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 53.

*An Irony: Echoes of Scripture in the Prostitute's Speech (2:8-14)*

<sup>8</sup> Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof <sup>9</sup> and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.<sup>10</sup> We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. <sup>11</sup> When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. <sup>12</sup> "Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign <sup>13</sup> that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them--and that you will save us from death." <sup>14</sup> "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land." (NIV)

One thing that is obvious thus far is the energetic activity of Rahab which the narrator contrasts with the passivity of the spies. The narrator tells us in v. 8 that "she went up to them on the roof". Rahab still controls the situation, the spies will do little more than react. She addresses the spies in the same way she addressed the king's men, with a declaration of "knowing" followed by strong imperatives.<sup>26</sup> Having just told the King's men what she does not know ("... Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from" [2:4]), She now confesses to the Israelites what she does know: "I know that YHWH has given you the land, and that great fear of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you" (2:9).

In a manner similar to the ways in which the identity of Rahab's visitors shifts in unexpected ways throughout her story, Rahab's own identity as Canaanite prostitute is recast as a quintessential Deuteronomistic preacher

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<sup>26</sup> Hawk, *Joshua* 44.

in her speech to the Israelites spies (2:9-13), a complex of phrases and references found in various texts in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>27</sup> Even from the beginning of her speech, Rahab quotes almost verbatim from Miriam's Song in Ex 15: "the dread of you has fallen on us" (Josh 2:9; cf. Ex 15:16) and "all the inhabitants...melt in fear" (Josh 2:9; cf. Ex 15:15). As noted above, Rahab's words call upon the Deuteronomistic version of the account of the defeats of Sihon and Og, whom Israel "utterly destroyed" (Josh 2:10; Deut 3:6). This reference to Sihon and Og, which shares language with Josh 5:1 ("the kings of the Amorites beyond the Jordan" and "our hearts melted, and there was no courage left"), introduces a precedent for the possibility that Israel's conquest need not mean the total eradication of the native population.<sup>28</sup> Next, Rahab makes a confession worthy of the Deuteronomistic prologue to Deuteronomy (4:39) and King Solomon in 1 Kings 8:23, when she proclaims YHWH to be "God in heaven above and on earth below."

Furthermore, Rahab's solicitation of *hesed* for *hesed* ("deal kindly," 2:13) recalls a similar promise made to a resident of Luz by spies from the house of Joseph ("and we will do *hesed* with you," Judg 1:24) when he showed them how to gain entry into the city. These parallels informed Bernard's position, as stated earlier, that an earlier form of the Rahab/spies tradition "existed, which attributed the conquest of Jericho to a betrayal from within by Rahab, rather than to the miraculous intervention narrated in chapter 6."<sup>29</sup> But, be that as it may, one thing that is evident in the text without

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<sup>27</sup> Mark E. Biddle and Melissa A. Jackson, "Rahab and Her Visitors: Reciprocal Deliverance," *Word and World* 37 no. 3 (2017): 231.

<sup>28</sup> Biddle and Jackson, "Rahab and Her Visitors," 231-32.

<sup>29</sup> Bernard p. Robinson, "Rahab of Canaan and Israel," 259. Also see Avraham L. Dafna, "Did The Wall Of Jericho Collapse Or Did The City Surrender?" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 38 no. 1 (2010): 36-40. Avraham argued that the conquest of Jericho was not miraculous; it was simply a Psychological strategy. He juxtaposed the story of the spies in Josh 2 with the Spies in Numbers 13. In the former, the text is clear that Joshua sent spies to Jericho to get a feeling for the psychological condition of the people in the city: *And Joshua . . . sent out two men as spies secretly, saying to them, 'Go and see the land and Jericho . . . (2:1). They didn't have real contact with the people of the land. when the spies returned to Joshua to relate their mission, they say, for the Lord has delivered the entire land into our hands . . . and all the inhabitants of the land melt away before us' (v. 24). This information prompted Joshua to plan the special tactic that is described in Chapter 6. This tactic served to heighten the tension among the inhabitants of Jericho. This is brought to its climax when the trumpet blasted. The People trembled and the wall collapsed. This must not be understood literally, according to Dafna, it simply means "the men defending the wall (of the city) gave up - they surrendered."*

alluding to any earlier form of Rahab/spies tradition, is that the spies accomplished their objective to gain entry into the city with the assistance of a native accomplice. Even though the spies faltered by engaging in a forbidden activity with a Canaanite prostitute, thereby acting outside the script, God rode on their mistakes and failings and brought his purpose for the mission to fruition. This confirms the theology of the conquest: It is YHWH that granted Israel victory over the Canaanites, and it is he who gave them the land.

So, having told them what she knew about them as the people of YHWH which, supposedly, is the reason why she save them from the king's men, she demanded, in exchange for her act of kindness towards them, her safety and that of her family members. The spies agree to the pact: "Our lives for yours!" (2:14).

### **2:15-21: A Renegotiation?**

<sup>15</sup> So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. <sup>16</sup> She said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way." <sup>17</sup> Now the men had said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us <sup>18</sup> unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. <sup>19</sup> If any of them go outside your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them. <sup>20</sup> But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear." <sup>21</sup> "Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say." So she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.(NIV)

After the agreement has been secured, Rahab lowered the spies down through the window and let them escape. At this point, the narrator breaks in and divulge an important information to the plot of the story, particularly to the episode in chapter 6, when Jericho will fall. Namely, the location of

her house - in the city wall. The narrator accentuates this important fact by repeating it, "her house was in the city wall, and in the wall she was living" (2,15). This information moves the plot along. Furthermore, the action in vv. 15-16 interrupts negotiation. Scholars are at odds as to how vv. 15-21 should be interpreted, and whether the spies are renegotiating the covenant once out of danger. Hawk says:

Once outside the wall the spies regain a sense of confidence and attempt to seize the initiative themselves. Having made the pact, they now qualify it with restrictive amendments. Yet even here, they do not speak in the forceful language of imperatives but in the indicative mood."<sup>30</sup>

However, despite this implicit protest from the spies, Rahab remains in control since v. 4, where she sent away the soldiers *sent* to her house, and she later *sends* (v. 21) the spies away when she is finished with them. Twice the spies implore Rahab to conceal the incident of their presence (2:14,20), and she agrees, taking them by their own words, and rhetorically implying that because of their obligation she controls their situation.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, giving the spies' passivity, vv 17-20 is not a renegotiation but, "a 'cover-our-backside' clause: Rahab must demonstrate her Israelite allegiance to make clear that they are not covenanting with a Canaanite under the ban. This small disclaimer is hardly a reversal of power."<sup>32</sup>

The spies are yet to return to Israel, and the vast majority of narrative time is yet to pass, but through the ironic deliverance motif the narrator assures that the episode will end well. Still, lest the reader forget how poorly it might have gone, vv. 15-21a contain a number of negative echoes. In v. 16, the spies will "go" into hiding to avoid their pursuers. And Rahab must 'bind' the cord (vv 18-19). Some scholars also argue that the scarlet cord she ties may be akin to 'hanging out the red light' in modern times.<sup>33</sup> But overall the danger has passed and the situation has been redeemed: Rahab's conspiratorial cord can also mean 'hope', so that she hangs out the hope of her deliverance to approaching Israelites. So the "crimson cord" could constitute a double pun: "hope" which the pact has given Rahab, while the

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<sup>30</sup> Hawk, *Joshua* 47.

<sup>31</sup> Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 56.

<sup>32</sup> Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 56-57.

<sup>33</sup> See Phyllis A. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts", *Semeia* 46 (1989):130.

crimson colour beckons the two spies, reminding them, and indeed the Israelites, that the household of Rahab is exempted from the *herem*.

***Mission Accomplished: 2:22-24***

<sup>22</sup> When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them. <sup>23</sup> Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. <sup>24</sup> They said to Joshua, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us." (NIV)

The scene in vv 22-24 can be termed as the resolution. The spies have returned safely home, the mission is accomplished. The return to descriptive narration within this scenic episode is marked by the saturation of *wayyiqtol* forms. The narrator fulfils the ironic deliverance motif, in that the spies follow Rahab's instructions to a fault and are indeed delivered safely home. They relate their discoveries (v. 23), namely, what God has already told Joshua in chapter 1. In words that would easily stir the heart, they said to Joshua: "truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands; moreover all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us." The reader recognizes these words as the words of Rahab. However, they gave the report full of confidence that it sounds like a prophetic oracle. But, as Butler would say, "it has not come from the mouth of an Israelite prophet. It has come from experiences with a Canaanite prostitute. The prostitute had to give Israel evidence for her basic conviction."<sup>34</sup> Israel had, in the final analysis, to confess her own lack of faith, and has learned in the process of history to believe YHWH. Part of the knowledge came from most unlikely sources: "A prophetic prostitute gave Israel courage to carry out the divine command and conquer the land."<sup>35</sup>

**The Literary Role of Rahab in the Conquest Story of Joshua**

Unlike some scholars who cast Rahab in negative light and allude that Josh 2 interrupts the plot of the story of the conquest, and as such, suggesting that the story would still be meaningfully complete without the episode in

<sup>34</sup> Trent C. Butler, *Joshua* WBC 7 (Dallas : Word, Incorporated, 2002): 34.

<sup>35</sup> Butler, *Joshua* 34.

chapter 2; I think, from what we have seen thus far, the story of Rahab enhances the plot. She is a character linked strictly to the episode of Josh 2. She was introduced into the plot of the story after YHWH had commissioned Joshua to take the Land of Canaan, and she left the scene after divulging to the spies, information regarding the psychological state of the inhabitants of the land in respect to the impending invasion of the land by the Israelites. This information provided Joshua and the Israelites, not only the courage to carry out the divine command, but also the psychological strategy to employ in taking over the land. Thus, this makes Rahab an agent character with a functional role at the service of the plot.

This is probably what informed Avraham Dafna's conclusion that the wall of Jericho did not fall miraculously, rather, the people guarding the wall surrendered owing to the psychological strategy the Israelite used, a strategy informed by the information gathered from Rahab.<sup>36</sup> I would not like to dwell on the argument whether the wall fell miraculously or otherwise since it does not fall within the scope of this paper. However, it suffices to say that this highlights the role of Rahab in the conquest story. Also note how they arrived the city at night (Josh. 2:2) and left soon thereafter (v. 15) without coming into contact with anyone other than Rahab. From the conversation between Rahab and the men (vv. 9-11), during which only Rahab speaks while the men silently listen to her, it appears almost evident that the men were sent to discover the psychological state of the people of Jericho. Note the final words of her speech: "As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you" (Josh 2:11). This is further confirmed in the report of the spies to Joshua, evident in the last verse of chapter 2, regarding their mission: "Truly YHWH has given all the land into our hands; moreover all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us" (Josh 2:24). There was no any other military information given by the spies save this, suggesting, probably, that this was the main reason of their mission.

Usually, there is no place for faith and wisdom in the stereotype of the harlot, but here, in keeping with Rahab's unexpected and complex characterization and the irony of the episode, "the harlot as heroine involves a conflict of expectations".<sup>37</sup> It is because of her faith and wisdom that this

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<sup>36</sup> Avraham L. Dafna, "Did The Wall of Jericho Collapse or Did The City Surrender?" *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 38 no. 1 (2010): 37.

<sup>37</sup> Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine," 131.

Canaanite prostitute recognizes YHWH as the divine warrior, moving her to covenant with Israel and YHWH. Thus, YHWH *qua* divine warrior delivers not just the spies through Rahab, but also Rahab herself.<sup>38</sup>

We must not ignore the identity of this central character. Obviously, she was a woman, a fact that has not been lost in feminist readers of the Bible. Popularly, of course, she has long been known as "Rahab the prostitute." Her questionable "profession" no doubt did have something to do with why the spies sought out her house.<sup>39</sup> But aside this, it also tells us something about 'the man behind the scene' in the conquest story, namely, YHWH of Israel. He, using a woman, and more appalling, a 'prostitute' to give Israel access to the land of Canaan tells us that God is the brain behind the victory; it is He who fights the battle for Israel. This conforms with his *modus operandi*, at least in the Bible: "He uses the weak to shame the strong."

This role of YHWH in the conquest story is further confirmed by Rahab's profession of faith which frames the episode of Josh 2. She knows that YHWH, the God of Israel is the only true God and that the future of Canaan, and of the world of which Canaan is a part, is in his hands. No power in heaven or on earth can successfully resist the advance of YHWH's kingdom. At the centre, the hinge of her speech, Rahab explains both her personal confession and the disabling fear of the Canaanites: "We have heard " What have they heard? "How YHWH dried up the water of the Reed Sea before" the Israelites when they "departed from Egypt." They have heard how YHWH there showed himself to be Master of the cosmic waters and hence to be the Ruler over the world order, able to do whatever he wishes in the realm of creation. They have heard that YHWH is the Lord of human history, who is able to accomplish whatever he wishes in human affairs.<sup>40</sup> In this, the textual Rahab has virtually become the model; for the reader has watched her reading the situation as an Israelite, entering their ideological world and seeing the future lying in the power of the Israelite's YHWH. So, reading the story from Rahab's point of view, the reader discovers that the battle has already been fought and won by YHWH, Israel only need to claim the victory. Simply put, another literary role of Rahab is to let the reader see the role of YHWH in the conquest story.

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<sup>38</sup> Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 55-56.

<sup>39</sup> Stek, "Rahab of Canaan and Israel," 39.

<sup>40</sup> Stek, "Rahab of Canaan and Israel," 40-41.

In fact, this is akin to Judith Mckinlay view that the "conquest narratives may very well be the quite deliberate ideological discourses which put the stamp of distinctive Israelite identity upon those who would differentiate themselves from others."<sup>41</sup> If this is the case, no wonder Rahab sounds like an Israelite, for she is an Israelite construct and constructed as a pawn of the text which makes her into the all-important *Other*, and so a significant part of the justification for the dispossession of her people's land. She thus has a very necessary place in the "semiotic economy" of Israel. This, for Mckinlay, is the making of Rahab the heroine. And for her, "Rahab was not *Other* at all, but one of the *Us*, and therefore created *Other* in order to provide the *Us* with an identity."<sup>42</sup> Be that as it may, I think her role explains her inclusion among the *Us*. This will be clearer when we look at the *Fuller sense* of the story of Rahab as highlighted in different New Testament texts.

### **Rahab: A Case of Literary Prolepsis and a Manifestation of *Igwebuiké* Theology**

Rahab, apart from her role in the narrative context of the story of the conquest of Joshua, also has a place in what I call the *canonical narrative* of the Bible. Her role in the conquest story, providentially becomes a kind of *prolepsis*, a foreshadowing of the role she will play as the ancestress of the new "yühôšù", son of David, the Christ. So the story of Rahab links the later acts of God with the earlier into one history of redemption in which the later carries the earlier forward toward its culmination. From this *canonical narrative* perspective, I am inclined to suggest that God, as the principal author of the Bible who uses the instrumentality of the inspired human authors, shows us that there is a continuity between the ministry of Joshua son of Nun and that of Joshua son of David called "the Christ." In consonance with this, Stek observes that:

"What was fundamentally at stake in the ministry of YHWH's servant Joshua son of Nun is also what continues to be at stake in the ministry of YHWH's servant Joshua II son of Mary. Such is the canonically shown continuity of the history of redemption that later events disclose the fact that the earlier were fraught with foreshadows of the culminating events to come. For this reason, the earlier elucidates the later and the later illumines the

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<sup>41</sup> Judith E. Mckinlay, "Rahab: A Hero/ine?," *Biblical Interpretation* 7 no 1 (Jan 1999): 54.

<sup>42</sup> Mckinlay, "Rahab: A Hero/Ine?," 54.

earlier – thus disclosing the full meaning of the earlier within the advancing *Missio Dei*."<sup>43</sup>

This continuity of, and progression in, the outworking of the salvation purposes of God, as canonically proclaimed, provide the matrix within which the three meaning-freighted references to Rahab in the New Testament Scriptures find their warrant - as ancestress to the Messiah (Matt. 1:5), as a hero of faith who received the spies in peace (Heb. 11:31), and as one "considered righteous for what she did" - she is hailed as a great example of the necessary combination of works with faith because she welcomed the spies and sent them out by another road as an act of faith (James 2:25-26). This is even more interesting when we realize that Rahab, at least from Israel's perspective, is an "other." She does not belong to the community of Israel, and as such, not a candidate for divine use. However, the role of Rahab in this paper has shown that, even though she is an "other," she still has a place in the divine arithmetic called, "salvation history." This study challenges every separatist theology that tries to exclude people based on religion, tribe, ethnicity, nationality or moral ideology. It tells us from biblical perspective that "to belong" does not necessarily mean conformity to a particular standard or people. It simply means "to be" — to be available for the divine as part of the global family. For in this family, as Paul of Tarsus would say, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, no male or female (no gender discrimination); for we are all one ..." (cf. Gal. 3:28). Thus, *Igwebuike*, from a theological perspective, turns an acclaimed enemy (like Rahab) into a friend and breaks every wall of division.

## Conclusion

In this study I have tried to argue that Josh 2 does not interrupt the plot of the conquest story, rather it progresses it. The narrator, by letting us see the psychological condition of the inhabitants of Jericho through the lens of a Canaanite prostitute, prepared the ground for the conquest. This shows that Joshua chapter 2 fits into the larger narrative context. After a close reading of the episode, we discovered that despite being depicted as an "other" and a woman of loose virtue, the focus of the episode swings onto Rahab and evaluates her positively as a woman of wisdom and faith, and God's tool of ironic deliverance. Thereby showing that despite her "otherness," she still

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<sup>43</sup> Stek, "Rahab of Canaan and Israel," 36.

has a place in God's global plan of salvation; a role that further foreshadows her as the future ancestress of Jesus in the New Testament.

The role of Rahab, as established in this paper, further reminds us of a theological twist which Yehezkel Kaufman calls "dual causality" - a theological principle that emphasizes the human course of events in a story that is guided by the Word of God.<sup>44</sup> In the episode we just studied, God initiated the conquest in Joshua chapter 1 when he commissioned Joshua to lead the Israelites in the conquest to possess the Promised Land. After the commission, in chapter 2 God took the back-seat while human initiatives, as evident in the role of Rahab and the faltering of the spies, took the centre stage. But despite this, the place of God as the supervising and magisterial being with events occurring as a result of his will was well preserved in the story. Nothing escapes the God of the Bible!

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<sup>44</sup> Yehezkel Kaufman, *The Biblical Account on the Conquest of Canaan*, (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1985): 98. Also see Yairah Amit, "The Dual Causality Principle and its Effects on Biblical Literature," *Vetus Testamentum* 37 no. 4 (1987): 385 - 400.

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