

CHAPTER ONE

Abraham on Trial: Case for the Prosecution

FOR CULTURES influenced by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Abraham is symbolically the first patriarch. As Abram, his name meant something like “exalted father” or “the father is exalted,” and as Abraham, it meant “father of nations.” His story begins what are aptly called the “patriarchal narratives.” What better place, then, to begin an investigation of patriarchy?

Although feminists have long been concerned with patriarchy, no feminist theorist, as of this writing, has focused directly on Abraham.¹ Some feminist interpreters of the Bible have included the story of Abraham along with those of other biblical figures as if it were merely one story among others. A few have skirted it in their discussions of Sarah, Abraham’s wife, or Hagar, her handmaid, his concubine (e.g., Teubal, 1984, 1990; Tribble, 1984), but all have failed to recognize the centrality and the social weight of the story in Genesis 22.

The desire of some feminist interpreters to resurrect the voices of ancient women is important as no expression of their feelings exists in the text. Indeed, that is where I began. Although the Abraham story has bothered me since childhood, I began a serious investigation of it only after becoming a mother. It was easy then to imagine how Sarah might have felt when she discovered that her child was missing and learned what had happened. Imagining her reaction, however, could only register her pathos and her exclusion; it could not directly challenge the story, for, given the way the text is constructed, she can only react. I wanted to know why the story was constructed that way. I wanted to know why the foundational story is centered on a father, his son, and a male-imaged god. Is their gender merely accidental, or is it precisely the point?

When I told people I intended to analyze the story in terms of gender, most did not understand what that could mean. “But it is not about

women," some said, as if only women have gender. "The story of Abraham," others countered, "is about religion, about spirituality. What can it possibly have to do with gender?" Gender may seem irrelevant to those concerned with drawing out the spiritual message of the story, which, they further presume, could be addressed to anyone. But does the story have the same meaning for women, or is it inextricably entangled with meanings of masculinity, particularly fatherhood?

Gender *is* precisely the point. The religious content cannot be separated from notions of gender and notions of generativity, especially paternity. The importance of paternity has been missed by most scholars because they have misunderstood what it means; they have assumed that it means merely the recognition of the biological relationship between a man and a given child.² That is not so surprising—most people in the West assume that kin terms *mean* the biological relations that are established through sexual reproduction.

Rather than reflecting natural facts, the meanings of father and mother, paternity and maternity emerge relative to a *theory* of procreation. In this theory, the male role is construed as the creative one: he is the one who "begets" and by means of his "seed" imparts the life-giving essence that defines a child. The female role is to nurture the seed-child implanted in her and to give birth. I have elsewhere (Delaney, 1986, 1991) called this a *monogenetic* theory, as the *principle* of creation comes from only one source. Symbolically, it is the human analogue of divine, monotheistic creation. The life-giving abilities attributed to men allied them with God, and women became associated with what was created by God, namely the Earth.

The power to create life implies the concomitant power to destroy. God both creates and destroys; if he chooses, he has the right to destroy what he has created. Indeed, that is a pervasive threat in Genesis and in the Hebrew Bible more generally, as well as in the Qur'an. Men, with the help of God, were thought to bestow life; analogously they were also given power over it. That is what the story of Abraham enacts. God speaks to Abraham, Abraham speaks to Isaac. He does not tell Sarah where he is going or what he is about to do; he does not need to. Isaac is his, Isaac is Abraham's seed. The transaction is between Abraham and God on the one side and between Abraham and Isaac on the other. The story is about the deal these three struck: by relinquishing some of his power to God, Abraham received it back a thousandfold. When he submits to God's will, God's will flows through him and becomes identical with his; male authority is invested with sacred power.³

God is symbolically masculine, imagined foremost as Creator; his divinity could easily be imagined as a denaturalized and reified male-paternal generativity.⁴ In the natural world that he created, that creativity

is channeled through males and becomes part of the definition of masculinity. The religious aspects of the story lend an aura that naturalizes patriarchal power; it is seen as part of the natural order, an order that is, however, ordained by God. In other words, patriarchy is not just a secular social order, but an order at once sacred and secular, a point often missed in numerous social analyses, including feminist ones, that have focused on economics and/or politics and relegated religion to a peripheral or residual category. Regardless of the religious identities or affiliations of the analysts, there is a tendency to see religion as a reflex of social-structural arrangements or as a personal choice having to do primarily with one's spiritual concerns. There are, of course, notable exceptions, for instance the tradition beginning with Weber.

Gender is clearly not a peripheral or subsidiary aspect of the story, or of theology more generally, but an integral part of the theological meaning, and vice versa. Expressing the opinion of many who are opposed to female ordination, Michael Novak, a contemporary Catholic thinker and editor of the journal *Crisis*, says, "sex differentiation is not simply a trivial detail, to be discarded or altered without concern for consequences; it is essential to the story of salvation. Fundamental. Foundational" (Novak, 1993:29). Recent unprecedented changes in reproduction, such as chemical birth control and new reproductive technologies, not to mention surrogacy and legalized abortion, have begun to erode traditional meanings of gender and family. These changes strike at the heart of religious authority and portend the erosion of theological meanings and structures. It is no wonder that these are the issues at the center of contemporary religious and social debate.

This threat to religious authority is a crisis unlike any other. In the past the story of Abraham was offered to encourage people to keep the faith of Abraham; today the crisis seems to be about that kind of faith and about the values that are integral to the story: a particular definition of family and "family values," gender definitions and roles that derive from an outmoded theory of procreation, and a hierarchical social order that stresses authority and obedience. The struggle is between those who believe that the traditional definitions and values should be upheld at all costs and those, like myself, who feel that they are part of the problem. Today, both liberals and conservatives who speak about the "social crisis" focus on the breakdown of religious values as well as on the so-called breakdown of the family. Furthermore, they often imply that it is father-absence rather than the lack of emotional and financial support (as well as day care, health care, education, and opportunities) for the mothers that is the cause of juvenile crime, teenage pregnancy, drugs, and gangs. Such politicians and social scientists reinforce gender (as well as racial and class) stereotypes when they imply that "mothers can't control the

kids,” as if only fathers can instill moral values, demand respect, and provide appropriate discipline. Rather than accept that the “family as we know it” is not (and perhaps never really was) the norm, they call for a reinvigoration of the supposedly natural and traditional family. Instead of thinking of creative ways for helping people raise and support their/our children, they impose impossible demands on those who do not conform. At such a juncture, it is useful to return to the foundation story, not to ascertain its truth or falsity (as if that were possible) but to better grasp what it presupposes and implies.

ORIGIN MYTHS

When anthropologists study other cultures they usually include a study of the foundational stories or origin myths of that culture, for a myth “is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form” (Dundes, 1984:1). Anthropologists look to origin myths to learn something about a people’s conception of the world, of nature, of time and history, of male and female, of social organization, within which the identity of a specific group is situated. And given such conceptions, they ask what kinds of values and attitudes are implied by such a vision. In other words, anthropologists, at least since Malinowski, have tended to assume that “an intimate connection exists between the word, ethos, and sacred tales of a people on the one hand, and their ritual acts, moral deeds, their social organization and even their practical activities on the other” (Malinowski, 1954:96). Yet they do not apply this wisdom to their own culture. Fewer than a handful have turned their attention to Genesis, the preeminent origin myth of Western culture, to consider its structuring function.⁵ Ironically, just at the time when a number of “master narratives” are being challenged, the religious narrative remains relatively untouched.⁶

Myths of origin may not point to “real, true” historical origins, but they are important *representations* of origins: they provide a framework within which people situate and interpret their lives; they affect people’s identity and orientation in that world; and most important, they provide answers to the questions “Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?” Jews, Christians, and Muslims have been able to say, “We are the children of Abraham.”

For centuries, however, these children have been fighting over the patrimony, both theologically and in everyday life. Who is the true “seed” of Abraham and who will inherit the promises? That biblical myth still affects social life was tragically illustrated by the massacre in Hebron on 25 February 1994 at the Cave of the Patriarchs, allegedly the tomb of Abraham. The area continues to be one of the most fought-over places in

Israel. I often think that if these “children” would just look up from their battles, they might see that their common father is the source not just of their unity but also of their strife.

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM

Regardless of whether he ever lived, Abraham is considered the person through whom a new conception of the divine entered human society. According to tradition, the new conception was not just of a new god or gods, but of the one and only God. Although that conception entered history at a particular time, it was projected back to the beginning; a vision not just of the way things are but of the way things always had been, a picture “of the way things in sheer actuality are” (Geertz, 1973: 89). There could be no stories about struggles between the gods for preeminence, as in some of the neighboring Near Eastern traditions; the new conception of God rendered them senseless. There could be only a story of recognition, that is, of acknowledging and submitting to the one true God. Abraham is imagined as the vehicle for revealing God’s splendor to the world.⁷

Although the Bible begins with Creation, the narrative of Western cultural origins begins with Abraham. The creation of the world, of humans, of plants and animals, of language and its dispersion, and the Great Flood—that is, events of supposedly universal significance—take only eleven of the fifty chapters in Genesis. “The break between Primeval History and the story of the Patriarchs is sharper than is immediately apparent” (Speiser, 1964:liii). The primeval history has many parallels with material from other ancient Near Eastern cultures, for example, the order of Creation, and the stories of Cain and Abel and of the Flood.⁸ But the story of Abraham is unique. It is with Abraham that Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious traditions have their beginnings; it is the center of gravity, the pivotal story. A number of scholars believe that the Biblical editors borrowed much of the primeval material from their Near Eastern neighbors, reinterpreted it according to their guiding vision of the one and only God, and used it as a frame for the patriarchal narratives that begin with Abraham.

Abraham’s story begins when he first obeys the call from God to “Go forth from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). During his migration he is subjected to a number of tests or trials of faith.⁹ One of them concerns the covenant God made with Abraham (Gen. 17), the sign of which is engraved on male flesh: circumcision. “The last trial,” the one that established him as the father of faith, was the one in which he was instructed: “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the

land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen. 22:2). Abraham had so much faith in his God that he was willing to sacrifice his son when that God commanded.

That is the story at the foundation of the three monotheistic religions. The story is performative, for it is Abraham's action that gave shape and substantive reality to the God to whom the action was directed.¹⁰ Abraham's action established his faith as well as the traditions of faith it set in motion. But the meaning and explanation of the act has been the subject of considerable debate for millennia. At the same time only certain kinds of questions have been asked, and certain voices given expression. For example, if Abraham had wanted to prove his devotion and obedience, why didn't he offer to sacrifice himself? Speaking for him, some people assume that, of course, he would have been willing to sacrifice himself in order to save his son. However, if he had been willing to go that far (and that is purely conjecture on their part), why didn't he do *anything* to save his son? Why didn't he argue with God as he did when Ishmael was to be banished, or as he did to try to save Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction? Instead, he was silent.

Continuing the line of this argument, some go on to say that if Abraham had sacrificed himself, it would not have been the ultimate sacrifice, for he had to sacrifice the thing he loved the most. Yet it is one thing to relinquish something one values or to do without it; it is quite another to extinguish the life of a human being. The former sense of sacrifice is illustrated by the story of the two women (1 Kings 3:16–28), each of whom claimed the same infant as her own. Solomon judged that the one willing to relinquish the child, rather than letting it be divided in two, was the real mother. The primary value was the protection, not the possession, of the child. The sacrifice is the mother's; she protects the child even as she lets him go. Although this story illustrates a model of love and sacrifice different from that in the Abraham story, it has not been used to challenge it. Significantly, *it is not the foundational story*.¹¹ The conflation and rationalization by commentators of the different meanings of sacrifice obscures important implications and is, for me, the proverbial slippery slope.

A far more important question is never, or rarely, asked: *Is Isaac his to sacrifice?* What gives Abraham the right to take Isaac? To sacrifice him without consulting Sarah? (Or, in the Muslim version, Hagar?) Why is she excluded from this most important communication from God? One must ask either (a) why would God have asked only Abraham, or (b) what were the assumptions of the biblical writers about paternal rights that allowed them to portray the story this way, that allowed them to ignore the mother? Such questions must have seemed beside the point;

one does not question God. Commentaries begin with God's command. They take it at face value and do not see the exclusion of Sarah (or Hagar) as problematic.¹² Although theologians routinely give voice to Abraham (and even to God) in their interpretations, the voices of the mother and child have been muted. The mother and child have little place in the discourse, as the focus is on God and Abraham. As we shall see, mother and child also had little place in the modern courtroom. We need to think not only of the processes of their exclusion but also of the implications such processes have for interpretations. In this case it blinded subsequent interpreters from asking what allowed the biblical writers to portray the story as if Abraham had an unquestioned right to take the child.

If the child was thought to belong to Abraham in a way that he did not belong to Sarah or Hagar, then we need to know the reason. Those who pass off the question as reflecting patriarchy imply that patriarchy is self-explanatory and assume that patriarchal organization was already established and was/is separable from the beliefs that construct and support it; they overlook the possibility that patriarchy is conceptually and institutionally established on the basis of certain meanings and practices. The very word *patriarchy* includes a notion of father and so, too, does Abraham's name. That fathers are exalted is not a bad *description* of patriarchy, but we need to go further and ask *why*.

We need to ask why fatherhood is so important. Much of Abraham's story is taken up with his desire to have a son; only a son will fulfill God's promise that he would be a "father of nations." But why a son rather than a daughter? And why is the father exalted above the mother? When I asked myself these questions, gender and generativity began to seem central to the story, and terms that I had taken for granted, namely *father* and *mother*, began to seem less transparent. Instead, I became aware that the terms relate to and derive from the way procreation is understood, that is, to a specific *theory* of procreation. I had to ask what theory of procreation is embedded in the Abraham story, and what were the culturally perceived roles of male and female in the process. These questions, normally passed over by traditional as well as feminist scholarship, marked the turning point in my research.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF KINSHIP

My questions pushed me in the direction of anthropology, which had been involved with issues of procreation, kinship, and religion since its inception in the nineteenth century. Indeed, type of kinship system and

type of religion were often seen to go hand-in-hand and arrayed in evolutionary sequence (e.g., Bachofen, 1861; Durkheim, 1915; Morgan, 1870, 1877; Engels, 1884). Like these early anthropological theorists, I, too, believe there are integral connections between kinship, procreation, gender, and religion, but unlike them, I do not imagine the different integrations as stages on an evolutionary ladder. Instead, I imagine them as different cultural systems. The differences in our theoretical stances involve different assumptions about kinship and the nature of language. As I have dealt with these issues at greater length elsewhere (Delaney, 1986, 1991) I will not elaborate them here. Kinship theory is an extraordinarily complex topic and what follows is admittedly an oversimplification.

The traditional patriarchal family, according to these nineteenth-century theorists, was the bedrock of society; it was the real, true, and proper form because it was ordained by the Bible. But the biblical basis was being undermined from within and without. The idea that the Bible was a pastiche of stories from various times and places, pieced together by a few editors, cast doubt on the idea that it was the direct, literal word of God. Archaeological discoveries revealed ancient, sophisticated civilizations not mentioned in the Bible, and anthropological discoveries of contemporary "primitives" who had different notions of kinship, family, and religion raised questions about the basis of their own family systems. From another angle, women were challenging the system by demanding rights in marriage and the right to divorce. All these considerations prompted the theorists to seek a *natural* foundation for the family. As they did so, however, they incorporated a number of biblical assumptions about family and kinship into their theories.¹³

They became obsessed with origins—of family, marriage, religion, and the human species itself.¹⁴ They thought an investigation of origins (where or what they had come from) would provide some insight into who they were and what they had become. Like them, I, too, am concerned with origins, but unlike them I am concerned with people's *representations* of their origins, not for information these might "really" provide about the past, but about what they can reveal about the present—the concepts and values that underpin a people's view of themselves and their world.

Debates in the nineteenth century raged over whether human society was always patriarchally organized (as the Bible portrays it) or whether it had gone through various stages of cultural evolution beginning with primitive promiscuity or a matriarchal order and then simply switching to patriarchy with the "discovery" of paternity.¹⁵ Like their predecessors, most people today, if they think about it at all, probably assume that these are the only alternatives. Behind this assumption, however, is a prior one: that kinship is always and everywhere rooted in the natural

facts of procreation. Most people today, like the theorists of the nineteenth century (e.g., Bachofen, Durkheim, Engels, Freud, Marx, Morgan, and Smith), tend to assume that kin terms reflect biological relations and that, at the very least, the mother is always known. This idea fostered theoretical speculations that the original organization of society was matriarchal.¹⁶ For some of these theorists, the so-called "discovery" of paternity marked a great leap forward in human cultural evolution. Peoples who had achieved it were therefore considered intellectually superior. The family, as depicted in the Bible, could then be viewed as an advance over what they construed as primitive forms of social organization.

The progress from the maternal to the paternal conception of man forms the most important turning point in the history of the relation between the sexes. The mother's connection with a child is based on a material relationship, it is accessible to sense perception and remains always a *natural* truth. But the father as begetter presents an entirely different aspect. The triumph of paternity brings with it the liberation of the spirit from the manifestations of nature. . . . Maternity pertains to the physical side of man, the only thing he shares with the animals: whereas the paternal-spiritual principle belongs to him alone. . . . Triumphant paternity partakes of the heavenly light, while childbearing motherhood is bound up with the earth that bears all things. (Bachofen, [1861]1973:109–10)

Similar ideas, perhaps without the same flair, can be found in the work of thinkers such as Morgan, Marx, Engels, and Freud. Morgan was an American lawyer who initiated the anthropological study of kinship after coming into contact with the Iroquois in upper New York state. He soon became aware that they had a kinship system quite at variance from the one with which he was familiar. In order to make sense of the discrepancy, he began an exhaustive study first of other Native American peoples and then, by means of questionnaires sent out with missionaries and explorers, of numerous peoples around the world. He learned that there is a great variety of kinship terminology systems. The variety is not just a matter of different languages; the terms are structurally different—they do not always refer to the same sets of people. The explanation of these differences became the basis of the anthropological study of kinship; but to this day there is no consensus among anthropologists about the basis of kinship.¹⁷

Because Morgan assumed that his own (English) kin terms, such as *mother*, *father*, *son*, *daughter*, *aunt*, and *uncle* represented the true and accurate outflow of the streams of blood (Morgan, 1871:486), Morgan called kinship systems of this type *descriptive*. When he and other theorists came across peoples who had very different sets of kin terms, they were thrown into a quandary. Especially puzzling were what Morgan

called *classificatory* systems, in which one term was used to classify a number of people, for example, one term for all the women in the generation above me. Because of his assumption that kinship was necessarily about blood relations produced by heterosexual intercourse and legitimated by marriage, he leaped to several interrelated but erroneous conclusions. Either these others must be practicing different forms of marriage that implied they did not understand the real, true facts of procreation (namely paternity, as maternity was assumed to be self-evident) and thus could be stashed on a lower rung of the evolutionary ladder, or that the terms had survived from a prior time when people lacked that knowledge.¹⁸

Morgan's work had a great impact on Marx and Engels, for whom the so-called discovery of paternity marked "the world historical defeat of the female sex" (Engels, [1884]1972:120). As we shall see in chapter 8, Freud believed that the "discovery" of paternity was a great intellectual and cultural advance, and he, too, associated the achievement with males. The associations between fatherhood and the spiritual realm and between motherhood and nature have hardly disappeared, but it is clear, in the quotation from Bachofen, that paternity has meant far more than merely a recognition of a biological relationship.

THE MEANING OF PATERNITY (AND MATERNITY)

The discovery of peoples who seemed to get along quite well without a concept of paternity sparked a protracted debate referred to as the Virgin Birth debate after the title of a pivotal paper by Edmund Leach (1967).¹⁹ In that paper, he equated the Christian doctrine of the Virgin Birth with beliefs of the Trobriand Islanders (and others) that pregnancy occurred because of actions by spirits rather than as the occasional but necessary outcome of heterosexual intercourse. I have taken issue (Delaney, 1986) with his assumption that these beliefs are equivalent, primarily because the Trobriand women (a) were hardly virgins, and (b) did not consider their conceptions unique events in world history, as the Virgin Birth is considered by believing Christians. Instead, their notions of conception described the normal everyday way the process was assumed to occur. The debate over these issues represents deep and continuing divisions in anthropology, the social sciences, and Western thought more generally. The issue concerns theories about the nature of language (whether it is reflective or constitutive of reality) and whether there is one form or multiple forms of knowledge and truth (see Rosaldo, 1989).

Of course, sense perception tells us that babies come from the bodies of women. But sense perception tells us nothing about the meaning of that

observation, nor does it tell us about how a baby is thought to be related to the woman out of whose body it comes. To know that, we need to know what people say about what babies are made of and who or what contributes to their coming into being. In some places babies are considered reincarnations of gods or spirits, and the “mother” is imagined as merely the incubator for the baby, who comes from a god, a spirit, or an ancestor; in these cases, there is, according to Ashley-Montagu (1937) a physical relationship but not a biological one. It is not, therefore, a natural conclusion to assume that all peoples believe that the woman who bears a child is biologically related to it, for that demands, as a prior condition, a theory of biology.

The main point I wish to make here is that not even *mother* is self-evident. All that one can assert is that a child comes out of the body of a specific woman. *Mother* is a term relative to a specific theory of procreation; although we have presumed there is a biological connection between mother and child, we have imagined that connection differently from the one through the father, namely that the mother is the nurturer of the seed implanted by the father, the primary agent. Genetic theory has hardly eroded these popular images. As the meanings of *mother* are today being fragmented and challenged by new reproductive technologies and surrogacy, we might learn something from these “primitive” others.

What about paternity? Is it only the recognition that heterosexual intercourse is/was necessary for pregnancy to occur? That is what most people assume. They do not imagine that there can be a number of conceptual possibilities for the male role—all of which have been documented ethnographically in a variety of societies. For example:

1. In Trobriand (and Australian aboriginal) society the male may merely open the passage for a fetus/child to come by other means—in which case intercourse is necessary for pregnancy to occur but does not imply any notion of biological relatedness—and in some instances, sexual intercourse is expendable.
2. Again, in the Trobriands and elsewhere, repeated intercourse can be imagined as the act whereby the male feeds, or provides the nurture for, the fetus.²⁰
3. In China and some African societies, the male contributes a particular substance such as bones.
4. Or in the folk theory of our own society, the male is imagined as the primary, engendering, creative agent.

Only the last is what has been meant by paternity. It is tempting to add something like “in Abrahamic societies” or “in the West.” But that would completely miss the point I am trying to make. It is not that “paternity” is some kind of Platonic idea that each culture can fill in as it pleases, but

that there is no way to think about it outside of this construction.²¹ Because the contemporary meaning of paternity in the West is often reduced to its purely physiological or genetic sense, we lose sight that its wider meaning, illustrated by so many phrases, images, and laws, has constructed the male role as the life-giving role. It is this ability that symbolically allies men with divine creativity.

What has been so difficult for most Westerners to grasp is that the lack of a concept of paternity does not mean there is no role for the male in relation to a woman and the children she bears. It does mean that their roles and relationships are conceptualized differently, and that means that gender and procreation are also conceptualized differently. Conceptually, we have linked together physiological difference, sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and kinship, and the social consequences thought to result from them, such as marriage and the provisioning of the domestic group, because we think they go together naturally. These connections do not necessarily obtain elsewhere.

In Trobriand society, for example, they are constructed differently. All the men in the generation above my own would be called *tama*, but that does not mean they are all my fathers. There is no concept *father*. Nevertheless, a man will do a considerable amount of child care and express deep affection toward a child of the woman he lives with without the idea that it *belongs* to him, without the idea that it is his "flesh and blood." He feeds the child and helps to shape it, but the child is a reincarnation of a matrilineal ancestor. The child, whether male or female, is constituted from matrilineal flesh and blood as well as spirit (see Malinowski, 1929; Weiner, 1976, 1978; Montagu, 1983); the child belongs to, and inherits from, the matrilineal clan. In societies influenced by the monotheistic traditions, a person's soul is thought to be given by God, but through men. Children belong to their fathers and inherit their names, status, and property from their fathers.

To his credit, Malinowski, who brought the celebrated case of the Trobrianders to public attention, tried to show the *conceptual* basis of paternity. He said "the term 'father,' as I use it here, must be taken not as having the various legal, moral and biological implications that it holds for us, but in a sense entirely specific to the society with which we are dealing" (Malinowski, [1929]1982:4). He also recognized the intimate connection between the notion of paternity and Christianity: "The whole Christian morality . . . is strongly associated with the institution of a patrilineal and patriarchal family, with the father as *progenitor* and master of the household" (*ibid.*, 159, emphasis added). Furthermore, "a religion whose dogmatic essence is based on the sacredness of the father to son relationship, and whose morals stand or fall by a strong patriarchal fam-

ily, must obviously proceed by confirming the paternal relation, by showing that it has a *natural* foundation" (ibid., emphasis added).

Yet Malinowski did not take his insights to their logical conclusion to point out that there are not different meanings of the terms or concepts *mother* and *father*, instead there are different concepts of the male and female roles in the process of procreation and child rearing; clearly, if a spirit, god, or totem is thought to be involved, the roles are not limited to just male and female. The number and description of procreative roles are imagined differently in each culture and in each are linked to more general beliefs about coming-into-being.

Although Malinowski recognized that the Trobrianders had a different system, he believed there was a true doctrine of procreation. He confessed that in order to test the firmness of their beliefs he became "aggressively an advocate of the *truer* physiological doctrine of procreation" (ibid.: 158 emphasis added). Fortunately, Malinowski, unlike most other theorists, was quite explicit about what he meant by that. He "advanced the embryological view of the simile of a *seed* being planted in the *soil* and the plant growing out of the *seed*" (Malinowski, [1948]1954:223, emphasis added). The natives were understandably curious and "asked whether that was the white man's way of doing it" (ibid.).

Malinowski, unwittingly perhaps, had presented the millennia-old Western folk theory of procreation. From our perspective framed by the science of genetics, it is just as erroneous as the theory he was trying to refute. To reiterate, *maternity* and *paternity*, *mother* and *father* do not merely reflect biological relationships, they are concepts that derive their meaning from cultural understandings about the process of coming-into-being at both human and cosmological levels. It should be obvious that these cultural understandings vary. This brings us back to Genesis.

GENESIS AND GENDER

Although it may never be possible to know exactly what the theory of procreation was in Abraham's time, or at the time of the Biblical editors, there are clues in the text. In Genesis, especially, there are numerous references to *seed*, whether of plants, humans, or Abraham. For example, in reference to plants: "the herb yielding seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself" (Gen. 1:11); or to humans: "let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him that we may preserve the seed of our father" (Gen. 19:32); or to Abraham: "All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it and to thy seed forever" (Gen. 14:15).

The emphasis on seed can be immediately grasped, especially if one has a Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or King James version of the Bible, for the word (*zeraʿ*, *sperma*, *semine*, *seed*, respectively) occurs many more times in Genesis than elsewhere. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible, in an attempt to use nonsexist language, translates *seed* as children or progeny. Although the ancient writers may also have meant children or progeny, children were, nevertheless, imagined as the product of seed and only men had seed.²² This issue raises serious questions about efforts to make the biblical text contemporary and relevant. Attempts to make the language more inclusive may make some women feel more comfortable, but they simultaneously conceal the reasons for their exclusion in the first place. My position here is very close to that described by the Swedish biblical scholar Anders Hultgård, who wrote, "By projecting the modern image of a genderless and sublimated God back into the biblical times, it becomes possible to reinterpret a massively patriarchal body of text in more 'favorable' directions. This appears to me to be but an attempt to save the Bible as the canon of church and synagogue" (Hultgård, 1991: 35). Salvage attempts to change the language imply that gender had nothing to do with the theological concepts or spiritual message.

Implicit in the linguistic changes are assumptions both about language and about the meaning or message of the text. Those arguing for the inclusive changes appear to be saying that the real, underlying meaning has nothing to do with gender, that words such as *seed* are merely accidents of history. They might also be implying that the gendered meanings embodied in *seed* can be extended to women without changing the entire system of beliefs, practices, and institutional structure. Something similar is going on among those who think the image of God the *Father* is accidental, not integral, to the concept; some suggest replacing it with "Mother/Father God." It seems to me that this would further reify and reinforce the very meanings that are under question. In contrast are those who believe that meaning is not separable from the words in which it is expressed; words, they argue, do not reflect meaning but construct it.²³ God, or at least the ancient Hebrews, clearly had a constructivist understanding of language—after all, God created with the word. From a constructivist stance, the language of procreation creates the way it is thought about and the roles that men and women (and possibly God) play in it. It is not so easy to dismiss a theory of procreation as merely bad biology and assume that everything else can remain the same. Instead, one becomes aware of how deeply implicated are notions of procreation in gender definitions and theological conceptions.

Religious people and biblical commentators have long discussed *who* is the seed of Abraham, but they have not thought to examine *what* is

seed. As we shall see in chapter 6, they have focused on which group (Jews, Christians, or Muslims) is meant. Because they have not even noticed the gendered aspects of the concept of *seed*, they have totally missed the social and theological implications embedded in the belief that only men produce seed. In order to address this issue, we must get a more contextualized understanding of seed and its implications.

Genesis is preoccupied with the interrelated notions of seed, paternity, and patriliney: who begat whom. Only men produce seed and only men have the power to transmit the line. The line was conceptually eternal if each man had a son; thus the focus on fathers and their sons. The language of seed conveys an image of women as the material in which the seed is planted; like the earth, they provide the nurture that builds up the physical body. Not surprisingly, women were and are defined in terms of barrenness or fertility, words that are also applied to soil. The issue of barrenness is emphasized more in Genesis than elsewhere in the Bible; Sarah, Abraham's wife, is the first woman to whom the term *barren* is applied. Men's procreative ability is defined in terms of potency—the power to bring things into being. This power symbolically, at least, allies men with God; *Yahweh*, linguistically, appears to come from a root that means the power to call into being (a son), to create (Cross, 1973:66). The sign of God's covenant with Abraham, circumcision, was carved on the organ felt to be the fountain of generativity, the vehicle for the transmission of seed.

These images of seed are not confined only to the ancient past but continue up to the present day. They are deeply ingrained, even unconscious. A most graphic representation of this belief appeared in *Time* magazine (15 August 1994) in an article about the biological basis of gender. The illustration portrayed a man sowing seed—which looked like tiny sperm—into the ground; there was no comparable image of woman or of ova, instead the idea conveyed is that women are like the undifferentiated soil. When we use the word *inseminate* we convey, however subliminally, that the male put the seed in; and this concept is implicit in the phrase “she's having his baby.” This belief was horribly illustrated by the statements in the 1990s of Muslim Bosnian women who had been raped by Serbian soldiers: they said they did not want to have a *Serbian* baby. The horror of the rape is compounded by their assumption that the child's identity is bestowed by the man. In an episode of a popular television show, a woman learns that it is not her fault she has not become pregnant. She says to her husband: “You're the one who couldn't get the seed planted.”²⁴ David Koresh, the Waco cult leader, like Elijah Muhammad, seemed to have had little difficulty convincing a number of women and girls to carry his divine seed. The night of the tragedy, Koresh's ex-wife

was interviewed on television and said: "He thought he was God. His children were God's seed. How could they die? He believes they will be resurrected and will come back to repopulate the earth."

Nor is this language confined only to the context of procreation. We speak of seminal ideas and pregnant thoughts. A seminal idea is creative and, as several people have told me, "starts a whole new line of thinking"; a pregnant one is merely potential. Women may have seminal ideas, but the language implies that creative thinking is masculine in character. The controversial Korean feminist theologian, Hyun-kyung Chung, told me that Christian missionaries to her country imagine themselves planting the seminal word in the barren soil, figuring her country not only as female but also as empty, as having nothing of its own to contribute. And a seminary is that place where the divine word is implanted and nurtured.

Seed has been used theologically. Indeed, procreative imagery for conceptualizing the divine has been used for over two millennia.²⁵ Seed is the essence of the father, and his child is of the same essence. Because the seed "belongs" to the man, so too does the child belong to him in a way it does not belong to the mother. In addition to being of the same essence as the father, a male child additionally has the ability to reproduce that essence. Father and son *are* one. This is the Christian definition of God. In this theory of procreation I have outlined, mother and child are not one, they are not of the same essence, the same seed, even though they are literally of one and the same body for the period of pregnancy. In this theory of procreation, women cannot provide the image for God. Jesus was known by the term *Monogenes*, which meant "only begotten, begotten of the father." Mary provided the physical body, but she was not co-Creator.

In Genesis, the awareness of the identity between father and son is related to the issue of succession. But rather than a struggle among the gods over succession, as occurs in some other ancient Near Eastern texts, the issue is worked out through humans: who shall be chosen to carry on the divinely ordained line? The fact that the male child possesses the same generative power as the father, and will grow up to take the place of the father, also raises the issue of authority. An ethic of obedience would help to keep sons in line. Abraham's obedience to God is the model for the son's obedience to the father.

Devora Steinmetz, a Jewish theologian who has written a book about fathers and sons in Genesis, claims that "the son represents (for the father) both the ultimate promise and the ultimate threat, immortality and death" (Steinmetz, 1991:29). Neither she nor anyone else makes the same kind of argument about mothers and daughters, reinforcing the idea that they are not considered related in the same way as fathers and sons. She goes on to say that "Isaac can serve as the substitute for Abraham's act of self-dedication to God because he is in essence identical with Abraham."

But only, of course, within a specific *theory* of procreation in which a man identifies with his seed.

The Canadian psychologist David Bakan has also seen a connection between paternity and the story of the near-sacrifice of Isaac. The Bible, especially Genesis, represents for him the crisis precipitated by the discovery of paternity. "The essence of Judaism and Christianity," he asserts, "is the management of an infanticidal impulse" provoked by that discovery, "and a *binding* on the father against acting out the impulse" (Bakan, 1974:208, emphasis added). He sees in the *Akedah* (the term used by Jews for the story of the "binding" of Isaac) redemptive possibilities—the symbolic substitution is a means to mitigate and control these tendencies. But it seems to me that the substitution also perpetuates the idea that the child is the *appropriate* sacrifice.

Both Steinmetz and Bakan believe these social consequences follow naturally upon the "discovery" of paternity, which they see as true and inevitable. Neither of them understands that paternity is not merely the *discovery* of a physiological relation of a man to a specific child, but the *construction*, indeed the invention, of that relationship. If paternity were merely the recognition of a biological relationship, then similar issues would presumably confront mothers.

Steinmetz and Bakan, like so many others, assume that paternity means merely the recognition that sexual intercourse is necessary for pregnancy, a recognition that they presume automatically implies that the male has a physiological relation to the child.²⁶ They misunderstand the meaning and implications of paternity, for they never consider that there are a number of other conceptual possibilities for the male role. They never considered that it is a notion constructed in relation to an entire system of the world, not just the "discovery" of a biological relationship. Nor did they understand that the female role of *mother* is *simultaneously* constructed and relative to the notion of *father*. The female capacity to bring forth children would have a different meaning if conceptualized in the absence of the male role, or if the male role were imagined as secondary. In the theory I have been discussing, the female role has been understood as secondary, receptive, and nurturing; it associates women with nature, with what was created *by* God. God has no female partner in the monotheistic religions, instead Nature (the Creation) is symbolically female. Nature is in a dependent, subordinate position to God; so too have women been imagined in relation to men.

Gender, I believe, must be situated and understood within this wider cosmological framework. In the "monogenetic theory" of procreation, the principle of creation is symbolically masculine. Projected onto the cosmic plane, it came to be felt as inherent in the structure of the universe. Monogenesis and monotheism are, I suggest, two aspects of the same

symbolic universe manifested somewhat differently in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and each is inherently, not accidentally, patriarchal.

At the center is the story of Abraham. So too is gender and generativity. Although gender may have something to do with procreation, procreation is not just about sex, biology, and the natural. Instead, procreation has been imagined as the vehicle for channeling divine creativity to earth. And ever since Abraham, it is men who embody the power to do so. That is the basis of patriarchy.²⁷ These beliefs form the common ground of assumptions over which a variety of interpretations tread, yet few have taken the opportunity to look at what is directly beneath their feet.

From here, the reader may dig into the two chapters that present the archaeological and biblical evidence for and against the practice of child sacrifice in the ancient Near East, or leap ahead to the section devoted to religious interpretations. The following chapter, in contrast, presents the quandary in which a contemporary court found itself when confronted by a modern version of the story. In that trial, just as in the original and its voluminous commentary, the child disappears. The focus of concern and center of gravity is on the father and on the strange conjunction of insanity and faith. Cristos Valenti never admitted to murder; he claimed that what he did was a sacrifice ordained by God. That was his explanation, his excuse. In that sense the story of Abraham served as his alibi.

Critique for Contemporary Cell Biology,” in N. Tuana ed., *Feminism and Science* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press); Nancy Tuana (1989) “The Weaker Seed: The Sexist Bias of Reproductive Theory,” in N. Tuana, ed., above; Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Men and Women* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). These feminist scientists and philosophers have rarely addressed the wider, cosmological implications. Feminist theologians, on the other hand, have addressed the gendered images of deity, but few try to bring together these two realms (religion and reproduction) so often imagined as antithetical. For exceptions see Børrensen (1991); Buell (1995); and Hultgård (1991).

7. The man who raises the issue in the film is, in “real life,” a psychiatrist who has written about the story; see chapter 9. In addition to the film, Woody Allen wrote a short story about Abraham, as did Philip Roth and numerous other modern writers of fiction. Scott Turow’s comments on the story at the end of his book *The Laws of Our Fathers* (1996), closely parallel mine. I only became aware of this after my manuscript was finished, and wish to thank Thomas Slaughter for showing it to me.

8. The term *gate* is often used to refer to female genitals; if other lands or cities are intended by the phrase “thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies,” perhaps they are being figured as female—an allusion that is still very common.

CHAPTER ONE

ABRAHAM ON TRIAL: CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION

1. A variety of feminist approaches to the Bible have been proposed, e.g., Bach (1990, 1993); Bal (1986, 1987, 1988); Bird (1981); Buchmann and Spiegel (1994); Newsom and Ringe (1992); Niditch (1992); Pardes (1992); Schüssler Fiorenza (1985, 1992); Schwartz (1990, 1997); and Tribble (1984). But feminist interpretations have, by and large, passed over the Abraham story (e.g., Niditch [1992]; Pardes [1992]; Buchmann and Spiegel [1994]). The latter is a case in point. In their recent edited volume of essays by twenty-eight feminist interpreters of the Bible, not one of them discusses Abraham. *The Woman’s Bible*, a nineteenth-century feminist critique of the Bible, especially of Genesis, also does not discuss this story.

2. David Bakan, a psychologist whose work will be discussed more thoroughly in chapters 9 and 10, has recognized the importance of paternity for the story of Abraham, but he thinks the story represents the “discovery” of paternity rather than a particular construction put on the male role in the process of procreation. The difference between *discovery* and *construction* is vast, as will become clearer as we proceed.

3. Cf. Feldman who claims that because the “Hebrew Bible channels all its

'paternal energy'. . . into the image of the heavenly father, it leaves little room for paternal authority within its human drama" (Feldman, 1994:16). However, she does not consider the way Abraham is a channel for God's power—he is assimilated to it so that his acts (and those of other fathers) are imbued with supernatural power.

4. There is, in Jewish tradition, a strand that acknowledges a feminine *aspect* of God, referred to as *Shechinah*.

5. Leach (1961, 1969) and Dundes (1988) are among the very few who have dared to deal with Genesis; a few others have looked at Biblical themes (Douglas, 1966; Feeley-Harnik, 1981; Paul, 1996). Even fewer have considered the way in which Genesis may have provided the paradigm for anthropology, albeit in secularized form. George Stocking's unpublished lecture in the Anthropology Department at the University of Chicago in the early 1980s, "Genesis: Anthropology's First Paradigm," suggested that Genesis could be imagined as the paradigm for some of anthropology's concerns, especially the early focus and concern with origins. Genesis incorporates important notions about genealogy and kinship that, I feel, have served as models for constructing genealogies of languages and of human origins, not to mention the anthropological study of kinship as practiced, for example, by Morgan, Rivers, etc. Yanagisako and I (1995) argue that these secular and scientific concepts are transformations from the biblical model.

6. It is not so surprising that it is also precisely the one that has moved in to fill the gap created by the collapse of some of the others, especially the Marxist-communist vision.

7. This idea is commonplace but the use, specifically, of *splendor* is attributed to the Babylonian Talmud, where it is found in a number of places. See Wilken (1976:69) and Spiegel (1969:117, note 148).

8. A particularly engaging and easy-to-read discussion of the parallels is Sarna's *Understanding Genesis* (1966). See also Pritchard (1950); Speiser, (1964).

9. The trials of Abraham have been elaborated primarily in Jewish midrash and will be discussed in chapter 5. There are a number of different lists, and some include material that is not in the Bible, but all of them include circumcision and the sacrifice story.

10. Scholars have argued that the patriarchs could not have been monotheists because the idea did not develop until later. That does nothing to undermine my argument because my point is that monotheism frames the entire biblical story, "In the beginning God created . . ." It was within this guiding framework that the story of Abraham was redacted and given its theological significance.

11. Nor is the story of the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11:29–40) foundational (cf. Tribble, 1978). A story closer in sentiment to that of the two women judged by Solomon is the story of Moses (Exodus 2) where the mother relinquishes her son, the daughter watches what becomes of him, and Pharaoh's daughter rescues him and arranges that he be nursed by his biological mother.

12. This is an example of what Spivak is trying to get at in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak, 1988). That is, how does one go about reading texts in which certain voices do not appear? A number of feminist theologians attempt to fill in the absent voices, to reconstruct possible dialogues, or, at least, to register the way women might have reacted.

13. See Yanagisako and Delaney (1995) for an elaboration of this idea. My thinking on this matter was sparked by a lecture given by George Stocking; see note 5.

14. Following are just a few of the relevant books published in the last half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but they give an indication of the concern with origins: Darwin, *Origin of Species* (1859); Lubbock, *Origins of Civilization* (1871); Morgan, *Ancient Society* (1877); Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1878); Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884); Kohler, *Prehistory of the Family* (1897); Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915); and Westermarck, *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas* (1917).

15. Cultural evolution is not to be confused with biological evolution, but means instead an idea that there is some ideal trajectory for human culture to which all cultures will and must conform. It is the kind of theory that permits people to say *preliterate* rather than *nonliterate*, as if literacy were dictated as part of evolution. There are other arguments with the theories of biological evolution.

16. Non-anthropologists often conflate matrilineal with matriarchal, but the two are not equivalent. There are a number of matrilineal societies, but the notion of matriarchy is problematic, most notably because it assumes a reversal of patriarchal society in which women, not men, hold positions of power. This view does not take into account the very notions of hierarchy and power that are supposedly endemic to patriarchy. More important, however, it presumes a notion of "mother" as prior to "father" (I argue that they are simultaneously constructed within a specific theory of procreation) and falls prey to the idea that matrilineal and patrilineal are the only possibilities for thinking of descent.

17. Kinship is an enormously complicated study, and debates continue among anthropologists. For very different views the reader might consult Fox (1967), Schneider (1960, 1972, 1984), and Scheffler (1972).

18. McLennan (1896:273) was a lone voice suggesting that kin terms are merely terms of address; nevertheless, he still believed that kinship *itself* was a matter of sex and blood.

19. For background to this debate, see the bibliography in Leach's paper. Cf. Malinowski (1927); Ashley-Montagu (1937); Jones (1924); Spiro (1968); and my critique of the debate, Delaney (1986).

20. A woman in Madagascar told anthropologist Gillian Feeley-Harnik that the "penis water" is like food that feeds and strengthens a child, like vitamins (personal communication).

21. Marilyn Strathern has said something quite similar with regard to the taken-for-granted division between “nature” and “culture” (1980). Nature has meant something quite specific in the West; I would say it has meant the created universe, created by God. It has a special relationship and specific meaning in monotheistic cultures that also allowed it eventually to be treated as merely the material, physical world by scientists. In other cultures where what we call the *natural world* has different ontological status and place in an overall system, there could not possibly be the dichotomy “nature-culture” as we have come to think about it.

22. If there were alternative theories, they are all but suppressed in the text. Jay (1992) believed she discerned evidence for a matrilineal descent system, but does not speak of what the procreation theory may have been. Her analysis is flawed, however, because she too often conflates kinship with biology. Beginning with the premise that the “mother is always known,” she does not ask the further question: what is meant by “mother” and do all peoples have the same concept?

23. Theorists who have been major influences for this position are Saussure (1966), Whorf (1956), Sapir (1951), Benveniste (1971), and Langer (1942). For example, Saussure used a notion of a piece of paper in which one side represented the verbal image and the other the concept, and he noted that you cannot cut one without cutting the other. Moreover, he suggested that the meaning of words emerges in relation to other words; it is not a matter of reference. More recently interest has focused on context, but that hardly excludes the linguistic environment. The work of Fernandez (1986, 1991), Friedrich (1979, 1986, 1991), and Lakoff (1980) on ways that metaphor figures in the imagination is pertinent. David Schneider’s work on kinship also loosened the notion that the world we live in is the same world cross-culturally; translation is not merely a matter of changing the labels—different cultures construct different conceptual worlds. See also Handelman (1989) who contrasts rabbinic-Jewish and Hellenic-Christian modes of interpretation.

24. Shelley made that statement to her husband, Holling, on the popular television program *Northern Exposure*. The imagery of seed was further reinforced by his taking up gardening at that time and getting obsessed with the seeds he was planting.

25. Denise Buell’s (1995) doctoral dissertation at Harvard is a detailed study of the theological uses of procreative imagery in Clement of Alexandria. She also refers to similar practices among a number of ancient theologians, both Jewish and Christian. Others, notably DuBois (1988), have worked on procreative imagery among Greek philosophers.

26. Another recent example of this thinking can be found in Frymer-Kensky’s book *In the Wake of the Goddesses* (1992). For her, paternity means only the awareness that males had a role in procreation, and she dates this discovery to about 9,000 B.C.! She has misunderstood the meaning of *paternity* and thus its relevance to biblical structures and values.

27. Many cultures appear to be male dominant; whether they are really *patriarchal*, having to do with the power of the idea of father, needs to be examined in each case. An article by Seth Mydans in the *The New York Times* (6 May 1997) showed that although men dominated in certain areas of Papua New Guinea, there was no idea that the male was the agent in procreation or that he had any biological tie to the child. Regarding patriarchal societies, we might also consider whether the notion of the male as the primary agent in procreation swept across many cultures at roughly the same time but was incorporated somewhat differently, depending on what had been the prevailing theory among each group.

CHAPTER TWO

ABRAHAM AS ALIBI? A TRIAL IN CALIFORNIA

1. As noted in the introduction, anthropologists are required to disguise the identities of the people they study. *Cristos Valenti* is a pseudonym; it has an unspecifiable, non-Anglo-Saxon ethnic character. A discussion of ethnicity would no doubt have made this a more richly nuanced study and would have explained some of the stereotypes and feelings of the jurors, but it is not the focus of this essay, nor did it ultimately affect the verdict. Neither the deed, nor the reactions to it, are the preserve of any particular group. The specific time and place of the deed and trial have been similarly disguised.

2. An exploration of the historical, archaeological, mythological, and religious interpretations of the story formed a major part of my study at Harvard Divinity School (1973–76) and resulted in an article, “The Legacy of Abraham,” in 1977. I intended to write a book on the topic at some time in the future. With this case, that time seemed to have arrived. As I was finishing this book, two similar cases came to my attention. Robert Blair, of Concord, New Hampshire, killed his son (and wife) on 25 March 1996 because “God wants me to sacrifice him to Him—like Abraham and Isaac” (*Concord Monitor* [New Hampshire] 22 October 1996). He, like Valenti, said he “walked in God’s grace” because he had done the right thing. Avi Kostner, of New Jersey, killed his two children (25 June 1996) by slowly (over fourteen hours) gassing them in his car. He did it after his divorce because he feared his ex-wife would convert them to Christianity. “I killed them because I loved them and didn’t want them to grow up to hate me and Judaism,” he said (quoted in Israeli paper, *Yediote Ahronote*, 7 March 1997, p. 21; translation by Sandra Razieli). It was the judge, Jonathan Harris, who made the reference to the Akedah and likened Kostner’s son Ryan to the angel who stayed Abraham’s hand. The child had called out repeatedly pleading with his father to stop. The Judge said he “violated every commandment in Judaism, in whose name he supposedly acted, in order to justify the murder to himself.” (*Yediote Ahronote* 23 May 1997, p. 41).

3. Descriptions of trials are very rare in the anthropological literature. James



A B R A H A M

O N T R I A L

T H E S O C I A L L E G A C Y
O F B I B L I C A L M Y T H

Carol Delaney

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