

# RE-MEMBERING THE MOTHER OF THE SEVEN IN 4 MACCABEES

**Johannes N. Vorster**

Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies  
University of South Africa  
vorstjn@unisa.ac.za

## ABSTRACT

Few rhetorical genres so vividly demonstrate how the past can be revived for contemporary political purposes, as the epideictic or encomiastic. Dead bodies are not excluded from this genre. The comforting 'rest in peace' never really happens for the dead body when it can be deployed as site of contestation. I argue that the suffering of the mother as portrayed in 4 Maccabees functions as a strategy to demonstrate the superior masculinity of the Jewish male, in its comparison with what the Roman Empire had to offer. The problem is, however, that instead of a shift from victimhood to heroic status, the subversion is not successful owing to the powerful strategies of Graeco-Roman hegemonic masculinity. In continuity with the theme of this volume concerning 'memory' this article demonstrates how collective memory may politically perform as epideictic, not only in the making of bodies, but especially also to serve the solidarity agenda of a community.

**Keywords:** 4 Maccabees; mother in 4 Maccabees; rhetoric of body; epideictic rhetoric; masculinity; Roman female body; habituated body; gender in antiquity; collective memory; memory and politics; memory and praise



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## INTRODUCTION

Demonstrating the materiality of rhetoric, Carole Blair enquires the effect of American memorial sites on the visitor. Although she finds rhetoric always to act ‘on the whole person – body and mind’ and then also on the whole person in its communal interaction with others, ‘memorials (and other constructed sites)’ she writes, ‘do perhaps even more obvious work on the body. They direct the vision to particular features, and they direct – sometimes even control – the vector, speed, or possibilities of physical movement’.<sup>1</sup> Unlike reading, you actually also have to move your body to visit the site, an act which simultaneously locates and displaces the body of the visitor, rendering it more vulnerable to the compelling persuasive discursive constraints activated by the physicality of the site.

Although the origins of 4 Maccabees in terms of authorship, historical circumstances (even place of writing) remain rather obscure and vague despite thorough research (De Silva 2006; Van Henten 1997), 4 Maccabees 17:7-9 cannot but evoke a memorial site as imaginary space for the performance of this writing.<sup>2</sup> Reference is made to an epitaph in 17:8 which introduces the first *peroratio* of this treatise, thereby clearly leading his audience into a conclusion. He indicates it would have been fitting to write on their epitaph the following: ‘Here lie buried an aged priest, an elderly woman and seven sons on account of a tyrant who wanted to destroy the polity of the Hebrews, who indeed avenged their nation, kept their gaze fixed on God and endured tortures to death’ (17:9-10). Although there is the tendency to view 4 Maccabees as close to philosophical discourse and not really interested in political institutions, propagating instead the adherence to a Jewish way of life,<sup>3</sup> the political dimension cannot be denied. As a matter of fact, although this writing consists for the larger part of remembering the martyrdom of these nine persons, the

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- 1 There is a dichotomy in Blair’s presentation of rhetoric which derives from the difference she makes between rhetoric’s linguistic and material effects (see in this respect also her conclusion 1999, 50). This is however unnecessary when rhetoric is located within the sphere of discursivity, where ‘discourse’ should not be restricted to the linguistic but should be seen as the product of diverse relations of power – Carole Blair. ‘Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality,’ in *Rhetorical Bodies* (eds, Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 50.
  - 2 On the fictitious nature of this reference and its literary function, see Jan Willem van Henten. ‘A Jewish Epitaph in a Literary Text: 4 Maccabees 17:8-10,’ in *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy* (eds, Jan Willem van Henten and Pieter W. *Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* Vol.21. Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1994), 45.
  - 3 This is especially the case with Van Henten, although not in complete denial of the political – see Jan Willem van Henten. *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees*. (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997).

fictitious inscription of the epitaph already locates it within a political setting. If we take into consideration that traces of the Athenian funerary orations can be found in this writing, its intention to politically empower should not be underestimated.<sup>4</sup>

My focus in this article will be on how the mother of the sons was remembered. I want to argue that her remembrance forms part of a collective memory which functions as political strategy to consolidate Jewish subversion of the Roman Empire. As a minority culture there was little hope for armed resistance, as Jewish versus Roman military excursions had by this time already been experienced. However, that did not preclude the possibility to demonstrate Jewish superiority in alternative modi. It is against this background that the mother of 4 Maccabees was deployed within collective memory as a mechanism for the materialisation of Jewish masculinity as superior to that of Rome; was used to shift from victimhood to the realm of the heroic. However, if the manner in which her body was constructed is taken into consideration, that is, if it is taken into consideration that collective memory serves to transmit cultural values, it is doubtful whether this shift was successful.

In the first section, attention will be paid to theoretical aspects attempting to show how collective history can also be integrated into the rhetorical tradition, specifically as far as a rhetoric of the body is concerned. In a second section, the mother of 4 Maccabees will be presented against the background of how the female body was constructed in the Graeco-Roman world.

## MEMORY AND A RHETORIC OF THE BODY

Few rhetorical genres so vividly demonstrate how the past can be summoned for cultural and political contemporary objectives as the epideictic or encomiastic.<sup>5</sup> The mere fact of its existence as a genre, that is as an institutionalised form of oratorical and persuasive practice, already testifies to a medium that has gained societal status owing to its repeated use in a variety of contexts. The *officia*<sup>6</sup> of the epideictic genre were to either praise or blame, and although a wide range of topics were available

4 Identifying 4 Maccabees as belonging to the epideictic genre of Classical Rhetoric, linking it with the Athenian funerary orations and pointing to its political agenda, see J.C.H. Lebram. 'Die Literarischen Form des Vierten Makkabäerbuches,' *Vigiliae Christianae* 28 (1974), 81-96.

5 Within Classical Rhetoric the past is usually explicitly linked to the *genus iudiciale* (forensic genre) whose function is that a decision must be made on a particular past event (Lausberg 1998, 32, 63). However, there is a danger lurking in the rigid deployment of classical rhetorical categories, a dimension already acknowledged in antiquity (see Lausberg 1998, 33 on whether the epideictic exclusively focused only on the *certum* or whether it cannot also be seen as incorporating the *dubium* as subjects of speech). As such, making use of classical rhetoric to inform interpretative strategies should serve more the availability of 'cue-providing' mechanisms, of interpretive alerting devices than of rigid classificatory tools. The discourse of 4 Maccabees presents itself as epideictic, but there is a deliberative appeal that should not be ignored.

6 These are the 'duties' or the compulsory obligations for a discourse to be constituted as a genre; in this case the epideictic.

where human beings were concerned, time, the past in particular, was seen as a contributing structuring principle.<sup>7</sup> To praise or to blame, however, must happen on the basis of some acknowledged, conventional, communal or societal system of values that may allow a decision in favour of one of these options. Putting it a bit differently: activating memory need not necessarily be linked to a specific and precise past incident, but its revocation from the past is constantly accompanied by a valorising communal system of values that has been stored in memory.

It should be kept in mind, however, that classical rhetoric from which the rhetorical genres originated, was firmly embedded within male, patriarchal hegemony. If a particular genre such as the epideictic was therefore deployed to praise and to blame, praising and blaming were conducted according to an engendered hierarchy of values submitted by adult, elite Graeco-Roman males. Women were integrated into this system relative to their participation in and subjection to what males regarded as of social value. With the exception of a few, the repertoire of common places that could have been excavated for the praise of women mainly derived from the household and was restricted to the degree of her conformity with the normativities that regulated the household and reproduction.

There was also another side to the coin, in particular where the epideictic genre was summoned as practice for vilification or blame. Within this sphere, it was especially the body of a woman, her sexuality and the prevailing stereotypes concerned with her uncontrollability that acquired a prominent space within this discursive practice. Within phallogocratic society with its insistence on the body of the male as normative, as ideal, and several surveillance techniques to regulate, the female body could be used as source of vilification.

From the perspective of New Rhetoric the past acquires prominence with respect to several spheres of argumentation, but pertinent to this enquiry is the interaction between past acts and the construction of person. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 292-305) argue that the construction of a person takes place by the structural importation of past acts. Constructing a person requires that a selection of acts from a person's past is called into memory and these function in a stabilisation process to contour personhood. It is obvious that not all acts can be usefully and appropriately utilised to construct a person, which makes both immediate context, but also metaphysical system principles of selection.

There are a few aspects that should be taken into consideration. First, acts that are used to structure a person lend a particular stability which could attain such fixity that it even allows for the formation of identity and may function in aid of predictability (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 294). If a person for example continuously shoplifts, such a person assumes the identity 'kleptomaniac' and the outline of a pathology may be detected that allows future transgressions to be predicted. There is a 'durability of being' that comes into place in the construction

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7 See Lausberg 1998, 33,102-108.

of the person that also provides coherence to other aspects and dimensions (1969, 295). Second, the stability achieved by recourse to past acts consists of a relative fixity. This can be seen by an increasing rigidity of structure, the further we move into the past. As a matter of fact, the further into the past acts may be recalled, the more solidified the construction of the person would be (1969, 297). However, the stability of personhood is never absolute, can always be modified owing to different emerging contingencies, a change in metaphysical or value-system, or the disclosure of other acts previously unknown. For example, the relentless pursuit of British colonial interests by a Cecil John Rhodes that has served the construction of a heroic person, may quickly be toppled and yield a villainous person when a politics of decolonialisation emerges that allows the exploration and articulation of discriminatory, oppressive and imperialistic strategies. Third, the interaction between past acts and the construction of a person is constituted by an exchange and transference of values (1969, 297). Neither act, nor person exists as factual, neutral and innocent entities, but both are given meaning and maintained by discourses that function to transmit power differentials encapsulated in hierarchies of values. The implication is that the 'value we attribute to the act prompts us to attribute a certain value to the person' (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 297), and consequently also allows for a categorisation of the person. Fourth, the construction of a person can in effect also be inverted when the valorised construction of that person not only serves an imitable reputation, but also allows the infusion of earlier acts with the reputation achieved by the construction of the person. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 304) submit that this solidarity between person and acts may function to enhance the appeal made in argumentation; it feeds upon the prestige of the person constructed by acts highly valued by the community. They specifically refer to argumentation by sacrifice which 'becomes more powerful thanks to the enhanced prestige of those who have sacrificed themselves' – there is a 'snowballing' effect which adds value to the cause for which the sacrifice has been made and their 'prestige itself cannot fail to grow following their sacrifice' (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 304).

It becomes possible to speak of a politics of collective memory that consists of a solidarity; a continuity that is constructed between past acts and personhood. The 'continuity' or solidarity is determined less by historical factuality, than by cultural valorisation and as cultural product it can strategically be deployed for a reproduction of a normative, ideal of personhood.

We need to take this a little further. What Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca provide us with is a terminological apparatus to understand how the category of 'person' is constituted by an incorporation of past acts that have been socially valorised and have been maintained in collective memory, most probably owing to their repetitive appropriation. Furthermore, their focus on the interrelatedness between person and acts opens possibilities not only for the use of the category 'person' in argumentation, but also for the purposes of analysing argumentation.

However, although their treatment of the category ‘person’ should not be restricted to the sphere of the juridical but can be expanded to include all argumentation, and assist in interpreting the transfer of social values in the interaction between person and acts, the absence of the body and bodiliness precludes also the radicality with which collective memory foists itself upon the processes in which the body is materialised. The main problem with Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca is that the category ‘person’ is still to a large extent caught up in what can be seen as tension between essentialism and an emerging philosophy of interaction (Vorster 2000, 109),<sup>8</sup> and there remains the nagging suspicion that the constituting acts function as properties, albeit exchangeable and invested with the capacity for agency, producing an essential person who may then again operate as subject that coheres phenomena within its spheres of existence.

How collective memory emerges as one of the constituting components of a rhetoric of the body, can clearly be seen in the work of Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu the habituated body is the product of a collective memory with a history that has exerted itself with such power on the body as to continue its existence also in the ‘unconscious’ of the person. He writes: ‘The “unconscious” is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of “habitus”’: and then he quotes from Durkheim (1938): ‘...in each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday’s man [*sic*]; it is yesterday’s man [*sic*] who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. Yet we do not sense this man [*sic*] of the past, because he is inveterate in us; he makes up the unconscious part of ourselves’ (Bourdieu 1977, 79).

The detail of history, the ‘facts,’ their chronological alignment, the *bruta facta*, have disappeared, but its social significations, its re-significations, the practices that have derived from history have been objectified and have been built into a *habitus* that produces, maintains and regulates bodies without a specific conscious awareness of its compelling forces. Cultural values, deep underlying structuring principles, transformed normative remnants constitute a collective memory, implanted upon

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8 For example: the interaction between a person and acts (and it is quite regularly ‘his’ [*sic*] acts), can be seen as an analogy of what exists as ‘essence’ and ‘its manifestation’ (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 293). What should be noted to their credit is the departure from consciousness as primary constituting component of personhood, of memory as residing within the consciousness of the subject determining recognition of self-identity – for an example of this perception of ‘personhood’ with consciousness lingering as its constitutive component within the judicial world (see Fabre 2006, 11-16). To her credit however, is the manner in which embodiment is seen as an integral part of person. She defines a person as ‘an embodied and individualized being, is conscious, is aware of his [*sic*] continued existence (that is, is aware that he [*sic*] occupies the same body as, and is psychologically continuous with, some individual at some past time), and, finally, has the capacity for rational and moral agency’ (2006, 16).

bodies, habituates bodies without a self-awareness of the processes involved. With such pervasive force do practices, institutions and discourses embody cultural principles, crystallised from a mutual history, that the body itself can be seen as ‘a memory’ to be entrusted with the ‘fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of the culture’ (Bourdieu 1977, 94); as a matter of fact, ‘values [are] given body, *made* body by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy’ (Bourdieu 1977, 94). Bodies can therefore be seen as the products of a rhetoric of the body, of which the compelling, concealed persuasive force is such that it materialises bodies that respond to cultural normativities as if those are ‘natural’. The range of this persuasive force extends to the minutiae of life, that is how to dress, etiquette, what and how to eat, bodily postures, movements, bodily decorum,<sup>9</sup> politeness, impoliteness. Another example of how the body functions as site of collective memory is in his views on belief and the body (Bourdieu 1990). Here he indicates that ‘enacted belief’ is to such an extent implanted upon the body by childhood education, that it ‘treats the body as a living memory pad, an automaton ‘that leads the mind unconsciously along with it’, and as a repository for the most precious values...’ (Bourdieu 1990, 68). For the maintenance of a particular social order, symbolic power appeals to those ‘linguistic and muscular patterns of behaviour’ that have been invested in the body, made the body and regulates the body without conscious thematisation and articulation (1990, 69). It happens as if this is the ‘natural thing to do’.

The material or physical effect of collective memory’s intervention in the production of bodies, should not be underestimated. As ‘memory pads’ the bodies of a society do not simply memorise the past, they *enact* the past (Bourdieu 1990, 71). Moving away from the mind versus body dichotomy, memory is not simply a cognitive process but a bodily index that determines the practices of everyday life.

## THE MAKING OF THE MOTHER

In this section I will illustrate how the masculinisation of the mother in 4 Maccabees is constantly kept in tension with the construction of the female body as deficient male body, that is, the audience is not allowed to forget stereotypical Graeco-Roman womanhood, and this is done exactly by what can be called, the habituated female

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9 A beautiful example of how a particular dress code can be taken as the normal or natural owing to habituation can be found in Thomas Mann’s representation of the superficialities that formed the everyday life of German aristocracy during the beginning of twentieth century. The setting is a family supper. At a particular moment the trivialities of table talk concern dress code and the ignorance that may accompany inappropriate dressing. Kunz, the elder brother, competitively taking the cue from his younger brother Siegmund who referred to someone who did not know the difference between dress clothes and dinner jacket, responds by mentioning an even ‘more pathetic case – a man who went out to tea in dinner clothes’ upon which Sieglinde, twin sister of Siegmund, promptly exclaims in exasperation: ‘Dinner clothes in the afternoon!...It isn’t even human!’ ([1907] 1936, 302).

body of antiquity. To put it a bit differently, the ‘masculinated’ female body of the mother never veers too far from the ‘domesticated’, which should then also not make the appearance of the domestic scene in 18:6-19 too much of a surprise. I also argue that the masculinisation of the mother in 4 Maccabees is completely absorbed and subservient to the prevailing Graeco-Roman masculine hegemony of antiquity. As a matter of fact, it serves competitively to demonstrate the superiority of Jewish masculinity in its opposition to the Roman Empire.

Concluding the first *peroratio* (De Silva 2006, 242) in 18:1-2 the audience is exhorted by referring back to the main thesis of this writing, namely that ‘pious reason is the despot [the master] of the passions.’<sup>10</sup> The manner in which ‘pious reason’ rules the passions has been explained in the first part of the writing (1:1 - 3:18), where it has been argued (already in the *exordium* 1:1-12) that the mode of control by reason does not imply a destruction of the passions, but a restraint in order for the virtues to flourish.<sup>11</sup> The passions are then divided into main types, namely those concerned with pleasure and those with pain (4:20), and although it is indicated that a strict division can be transgressed (4:24-27), the exponent of pleasure is desire and that of pain, fear (4:21-23). The focus in 4 Maccabees concerns how pious reason controls the onslaught of pain specifically in its resistance of fear. It is the resistance of fear in the assured anticipation of bodily pain, and the self-control demonstrated when pain is inflicted that are foregrounded as quintessential features of masculinity.

When the first *peroratio* is concluded, and the thesis again repeated, a distinction is made between ‘passions not only from within, but also from outside’ (18:2). After the first scene of torturing, namely that of Eleazar, the main thesis was repeated and the torturing scene was held as a demonstration of how ‘reason...masters even the sufferings inflicted from outside’ (6:34). The different scenes depicting the torturing of the seven sons can all be seen as examples of these ‘sufferings inflicted from outside’. It is only *after* the section where the mother features as main character that reference is again made to ‘sufferings from within’.

The manner in which the performing of gender in antiquity presented the interiority of the female body as problematic should not be ignored as an engendered strategy that problematised female bodily interiority as problem for control. It should,

10 See also 4 Macc 1:1,13,19,30; 6:31,33-34; 16:1.

11 Reference is here made to the cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, courage (which should actually be translated as ‘manliness’), and moderation (1:6 where prudence has been omitted; 1:18; 2:23 where prudence is again omitted in favour of self-control and goodness is added; 5:23-24 where prudence is omitted in favour of the structural marker piety). Owing to the insistence on ‘reasonableness’, prudence (discriminatory capacity), is given highest position in a hierarchy of virtues. Slight variations in the presentation of these virtues were customarily – see specifically Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. ‘The Emperor and His Virtues,’ *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 30.3 (1981):300; for their pre-Platonic origins and development see D. Loenen 1960, *Eusebeia en de Cardinale Deugden: Een Studie over de Functie van Eusebeia in het Leven der Grieken en Haar Verhouding tot de Ethiek* (Amsterdam: N.V. Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatscappij 1960), 56-69.



therefore, come as no surprise that the first anticipatory remark concerning the mother is a reference to the ‘maternal womb’. This maternal womb is seen as a passive site which functions as humus for the implantation and growth of an ‘affectionate brotherhood’, that traces its origins within the framework of patrilineality to a divine providence, that was apportioned to the fathers, and continued in the brotherly relationship of the brothers. The womb, even before the mother is properly introduced, has already been placed within a man’s world. The womb functions as site for the cultivation of a continued male solidarity, but also for the imputation of a binding ‘sym-pathy’ (13:19-23). Even before the mother assumes the role of protagonist, the audience has been introduced to her womb, her interior body, subservient to male hegemony within household discourse where reproduction defines the role and meaning of being woman.

In order to understand why the interiority of the mother’s body has been foregrounded we have to take a short detour into the construction of the female body in antiquity before returning to the mother of 4 Maccabees.

Guiding principle for the construction of the female interior body was the superior male body. The body of the free, adult Graeco-Roman male functioned as normative, whereas the bodies of so-called barbarians, slaves, women and even animals were all regarded as inferior versions. Using Galen as point of departure, Laqueur (1990, 25-62 specifically) has indicated that antiquity was dominated by what can be called a ‘one-sex model’. This model which strategically functioned for the maintenance of social hierarchy, proposed the male body as normative ideal with the female body as an inversed inferior version, thereby also continuing Aristotle’s view on woman as defective man, always in terms of a ‘lack’, a material cause in need of the efficient cause (Laqueur 1990, 29), raw material requiring cultivation. As such the binary formulation into ‘man’ and ‘woman’, which has in contemporary society been attacked from the perspective of identity politics, has not yet been expressed. In antiquity ‘man’ and ‘woman’ displayed precisely the same similarities but in a continuum of degree with the body of the elite, adult Graeco-Roman male as the criterion, as the normative ideal according to which other bodies should be measured, and with the female body on the other end of the continuum.<sup>12</sup>

A variety of discursive practices, such as the rhetorical, moral and philosophical, household and health, functioned to transmit and maintain the notion of the female body as deficient male body. I want to focus on one of these. As a discursive practice, medical knowledges located the heart of female inferior interiority in both her moistness and porosity. Various theories existed, but prevailing throughout

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12 See also L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 25-26; see also Jason von Ehrenkrook, ‘Effeminacy in the Shadow of Empire: The Politics of Transgressive Gender in Josephus’s *Bellum Judaicum*,’ *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 101 (Spring 2011): 147-148 for its presence also in Judaism.

antiquity the interaction between the cosmic substances fire, air, earth and water and the fundamental bodily qualities, expressed in the contraries of heat, coldness, dryness and moistness constituent, was used to construct the nature of human beings; and more specifically the interiority of the body, not only in a physical but also in an emotional sense. The body was seen as a microcosm constituted by the same fundamental qualities as the macrocosm of which it was a part, as a matter of fact, it was made up of the same fabric as the universe. Although the skin formed a boundary and demarcated body from environment, *poroi* allowed for an interaction which made interior body a representation of the space outside the body and produced a complete climatology inside the body. Winds from the north and south, carrying wet and dry, cold and hot air, traversing over mountains, seas and rivers, seasons of the year, not only in their regular cycles, but also in their changing diversity, regions, subjected to fixed climatological locational forces, all penetrated human bodies, producing not only individuals, but even entire nations with specific bodily characteristics.

Although these bodily qualities were present in every human being, they were differently engendered and valorised. Different configurations were designed, but there was little dispute that the elements fire, air, water and earth manifested in the bodily qualities of heat, coldness, dryness and moistness and that an appropriate, but engendered differentiated blending of these constituted the human body (Martin 1995, 8-9; Padel 1992, 43-44; Singer 1997, Galen, *Mixt.* 1-2, see also x). The valorisation of these bodily qualities represented engendered social categories. Although there was some dispute, heat, with its kinetic, energising and vitalising qualities was infused with masculinity, thereby giving prime natural position to the culturally constructed notion of the active male; dryness, with its curb on excesses, its aggressive harshness and stability, followed in the wake of heat and was equally infused with what was taken to be male. Coldness, on the other hand, with its quality to enforce passivity and its association with death, winter and discomfort became the natural quality to accommodate the cultural construct of the passive female. However, it was moistness, or wetness with its potency to transgress boundaries, to overflow, to create disorder and chaos, to be uncontrollable and unrestricted to place, that was to be feminised, thereby naturally placing cultural constructions of woman as one in need of control, inclined to excess and a potential force of disorder and chaos. Moistness became the primary constituent of the female body and the visible signs of menstruation, lactation, vaginal discharges, and lochial expenditure all contributed to betray her inherent, innate wetness (Carson 2002).

In close proximity to moistness as primary characteristic of female interiority, was the porosity of her body. We have already seen that the link between interior and exterior body happens by means of *poroi*. This feature of the body is common to all human beings, but the porosity of the female body should not only be seen in terms of entrance and exit, but also in terms of the potency to absorb (Carson 2002, 79; King 1998, 28-37; Martin 1995, 15-16; Padel 1992, 83-84). Infusing the female

body with porosity was fundamental to the nature of being woman because this explained also physiologically why a woman was regarded as 'wetter'. Precisely because of the loose texturedness of their flesh they were able to retain moisture. While a man's flesh could be likened to a cloth, a woman's was compared to a fleece with much more absorbent potential (see also King 1998, 29). But this absorbency of moistness allows woman's inside to be seen as 'formless content', as inclined to swell over and beyond laid down boundaries, as prone to excess stretching the limits of its potential to absorb (Carson 2002, 79-80).

Owing to this porosity of her body, the body of woman was more mutable, changeable and in lack of completion. Owing to both the fluidity and the porosity of the female interior body, the female body is inherently instable and unfixed in a natural state of incompleteness and imperfection. Owing to this uncontrollable fluid interior of the body, it stands to reason that an excessive outpour of emotions would be associated with women. At the same time, since emotion could be associated with excessive moistness it could be threatening when absorbed by another – it could disturb the mind. Understanding was seen to be the 'work of the pure and dry air' whereas moisture was viewed as a restriction for intelligence (Carson 2002, 81).

We should again be aware of the politics and spatial rhetoric involved in making porosity, sponginess and mutability an essential part of the interior female body. High social status in the Graeco-Roman world required the capacity to protect the boundaries of the body from any form of invasion, even from something as innocent as a touch, or as unreflected as a glance, explaining why inferiors addressed their superiors with downcast eyes.<sup>13</sup> For a free adult Greek or Roman male occupying the top of social hierarchy, impenetrability implied the ability to retain total bodily integrity. Impenetrability was not in the first instance a characteristic of all males, but only of those at the top of Roman social hierarchy (Walters 1997, 32). Male slaves, the men of conquered nations, boys could all be penetrated since they could not aspire to higher echelons of social hierarchy. But penetrability was a characteristic of all women to such an extent that the penetrated male was seen as to have experienced *muliebra pati*, which can be translated as 'having a woman's experience' or suffering womanly things (see Walters 1997, 30). It is against the political background of recognising the power of those who have the capacity to protect boundaries against invasion, that porosity was imputed to the interior of the female body.

Owing to this changing landscape of the female body, a rhetoric of spatiality fixed her social destiny. Her porous sexuality, her inherent moistness and innate inclination to the transgression of boundaries had to be brought and kept under

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13 See Carlin Barton. 'Being in the Eyes: Shame and Sight in Ancient Rome,' in *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power, and the Body* (ed., David Fredrick; Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 221, 223-224, who discusses the manner in which the 'gaze' was an interactional phenomenon, consisting of, on the one hand, the desire to display and be observed in display, but on the other hand running the risk of being 'desouled' by the uninhibited gaze.

control. But how can this inherent instability be controlled, how was it possible to control the psychological outflow of moistness in what can be called excessive emotionality, how to control and manipulate tears, how was it possible to control madness and depression owing to excessive flows of blood to the brain, lethargy and passivity, owing to excessive flows of blood to the heart? A map has been drawn and it appeared that all the roads led to reproduction within the environment of the household and marriage. This was the answer to all the problems of women!

The *oikos* or *domus* became the place where woman could be bounded, where the boundaries for the consistent, nudging, inclination towards wetness could be erected. This was the place where the inherent instability of the female body could be brought under control, where it can be manipulated in fulfilling the role nature has bestowed upon her. The household demarcated a particular area for women where her instability can be controlled and her raging sexual lust owing to excessive moistness can be brought under control. This is the place where the space of the *polis* could be represented on micro level, fully substantiated by nature. Once a young woman has entered the space of the household, a whole configuration of regulations was written on her body...she had demarcated space and moving outside of that space would imply a betrayal of her nature. Carson has put it aptly: ‘since woman does not bound herself, she must be *bounded*. The celebrated Greek virtue of self-control...has to be defined differently for men and for women’ (2002, 86). Where self-control meant for men rationality and resistance to excess, for women it meant ‘obedience and consists in submitting herself to the control of others’ (Carson 2002, 86).

Although it may appear as if the representation of the mother in 4 Maccabees has been shifted on the gendered continuum to not only approximate but even exceed the position of ‘true man’, her embodied history, that is, the engendered cultural history that produced and shaped the female body, still constrains how she is remembered. When introduced to the audience the habituated, constrained and defective female body hovers in the subconscious when she is presented as an object of amazement, exceeding the ‘natural’ limitations of her body. Such is the power of male engendered reasonableness that its dominance can ‘even’ affect the mind of a woman (4:11)! There is the possibility offered that woman can move upwards towards masculinity, but in the possibility offered, the habituated body is affirmed. There is a collective memory subconsciously at work in the representation of the mother that performs also to replicate the habituated body and submit ‘even’ the body of this mother to the safe haven of male control. Her affirmation to move her upwards on the gendered continuum is performed by a negation that keeps ‘putting her in place’. But it is at the same time also this habituated female body that functions as the resource for citation by means of which her gender is made to perform in order to promote superior male Jewish masculinity.<sup>14</sup>

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14 For citationality as the necessary requirement for any performativity see Judith Butler. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex.’* New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

A few examples will suffice. That the interiority of the female body functions as the locus of contestation and suffering can be seen in explicit reference to the innards of her body from where ‘sym-pathy’ is attracted, exhibiting itself in parental love (14:13). As an affection, as an emotion, parental love is the product of the physical viscera. The interior body, more specifically the womb, was also the site for the cultivation of ‘sym-pathy’ that expressed itself in brotherly love. In both cases this ‘sym-pathy’ contains the risk of thwarting the objectives of ‘pious reason’, but in the case of parental love, it is precisely the habituated interior female body that presents a threat owing to the intensity of the pains reminiscent of childbirth (15:4-7), yet even exceeding them (15:16). There is a weakness that can be assigned to the interiority of the female body that is associated with her capacity to give birth (15:5). From this threat the father is excluded (15:4). The interior female body is evoked and presented as a naturalised state or condition of possible disorder owing to her engendered ‘sym-pathy’ for her children.<sup>15</sup>

The association of this disorder with the moistness of the female interior body should not go unnoticed. Representing the inner turmoil and the temptation to resist the passion of motherly love, three metaphors are evoked. All three refer to the spaces usually occupied by males, namely the council chamber (15:25) and the sphere of the spectacle (15:29). The third, however, summons the ark of Noah to portray resistance and conquest of turbulent floods and strong winds, thereby reflecting the chaotic but powerful onslaught of the passions in their rage in the interior body of the mother (15:32).<sup>16</sup> Finally, the externalisation of the interior, inferior, disorderly, habituated female body, inclined to excessive moistness, can also be seen in the references made to lamentation and crying (15:19,20; 16:10,12).

However, collective memory, unobtrusively – yet compelling – and empowered by constant repetition, did not only remind of woman’s deficient condition related to her moistness, but also to the permeability of her bodily texture in a politics of the body. Her permeability became her vulnerability, and her body permanently open to invasion. At the same time, it ‘naturally’ restricts her capacity for self-control while exposing her vulnerability to be controlled. Immediately following the general apostrophic outcry referring to the ‘naturalness’ and untamed nature of motherly

15 It is explicitly expressed in the apostrophic ‘O natural, sacred and love (love charms?) of parents, and deep affection for offspring and nurture and untamed emotion of mothers’ (15:13) - the possibility to translate *philtre* as ‘love charms’ should not be excluded, since the utterance appears to convey a kind of surrenderedness, being under a spell, a condition of being out of control, of being dominated by passion that is stereotypically characteristic of women.

16 See also De Silva (2006, 228) who refers to Philo reading this story as an allegory concerned with the soul’s struggle for virtue, the difference being that the ‘streams of the mind’ are there opened by a list of vices, whereas the concern in 4 Maccabees is the distracting power of motherly love as uncontrollable passion.

emotion (15:13), an *ekphrasis*<sup>17</sup> follows in which her sensorial experience is utilised to vividly portray the intensity with which the suffering of her sons impacted upon her (15:14-22). In sentence after sentence it is illustrated in graphic, gruesome detail what she saw (5:14,15,19,20,24), eventually also what she heard (15:22).

Although more theories concerning vision were possible in antiquity, widespread was the Empedoclean-Epicurean theory that fine particles (*simulacra*) exude from the object that is viewed, penetrating the viewer (Gordon 2002, 91-92). It stands to reason that this was not the only theory as the possibility to objectify with the gaze also informed several practices and gestures in antiquity (Barton 2002, 224-225), but it cannot be denied that the possibility of penetration by being gazed upon was also widely circulated as can for example be seen by the attempts of Lactantius to secure for the eyes an impenetrable position (Lactantius, *De Opif* 8:6-9:10). A direct link with this particular theory need not be established owing to its well-established presence in the collective imaginary, but in combination with the engendered, habituated porosity of the female body, the invasionary dimension suggested by theory may well be in operation in the presentation of the mother's experience. As such it serves again to affirm the construction of woman as deficient male constantly lacking the constituents of the normative elite adult Graeco-Roman male.

A final example of how the mother was remembered according to the prevailing habituated female body of the Graeco-Roman world, pertains to her consistent association with the household and with the cultivation and maintenance of Roman *pietas* within this environment. The household environment is taken for granted and no explanation is required because this is what is expected from the life of a woman.<sup>18</sup> The caring, nurturing and protecting obligations are 'naturalised' by the comparison with the animal world (14:14-19). Owing to a body that has been materialised as 'mother', the emotional anguish that accompanies a mother when her children are in danger is portrayed as a constant 'threat' (15:2,4-11,13-16,22-27; 16:5-11,16-25; 18:6-19). However, it simultaneously portrays her as 'normal' in the fulfilment of societal obligations, just as the education of her sons also demonstrates. Subconsciously, however, the boundaries of the household are affirmed as the space where 'woman' is performed.

Owing to this restriction, the mother is the only victim who has not been given an opportunity to address the tyrant Antiochus, not even when summoned to assist

17 An *ekphrasis* is a vivid, detailed description held together by the simultaneity of the occurrence and is therefore quite often used to present an eyewitness version – see Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study* (transl. Matthew T. Bliss, Annemiek Jansen, David E. Orton. Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1998, 359).

18 See in this regard Mary D'Angelo's pioneering study on Imperial Roman *pietas* and how both in Judaism and Early Christianity dispositions of accommodation and resistance determined the recipience and implementation of this 'virtue' – Mary D'Angelo. 'Eusebeia: Roman Imperial Values and the Sexual Politics of 4 Maccabees and the Pastorals.' *Biblical Interpretation*, no.11. 2003, 139-165.

her with her stubborn son (12:7). When she speaks, it is to address her sons and as such kept within the closed circle of the household (16:16-23; 18:6-19). In the second *peroratio*, her speech addressed to her sons then serves also to demonstrate her identification with the domestic discourse of the household.

It is against the background of this habituated female body that the masculinisation of the mother takes place. Moore and Anderson (1998, 252) submit that the ‘prime exemplar of masculinity in 4 Maccabees, is a woman’. However, the preceding has already indicated that one should perhaps formulate more cautiously, as also becomes clear at a later stage of their inquiry, especially when reference is made to the final ‘domestic scene’ and the gender continuum is summoned to explain her ‘masculinised’ position as lower than that of her husband, yet higher than the position of Antiochus (1998, 273). According to Moore and Anderson (1998, 273):

[m]asculinity is both a process and a product; it is a moral state achieved and maintained through a sheer act of will (subjugation of the passions) and as such is independent of anatomy. Yet women are also predestined (by anatomy?) in 4 Maccabees to be subservient to men.

Although they also recognise the ambiguity and tension in the remembrance of the mother, the question is whether the radicality with which the mother has been implicated in the Graeco-Roman phallographic hegemony has adequately been highlighted. True, masculinity in the Graeco-Roman world was indeed always a process and a product, always something that had to be achieved, and always carefully monitored and subject to surveillance. True, masculinity in antiquity was not determined by what a contemporary understanding of ‘anatomy’ would be; there was indeed no gender binary based on biological criteria. But on that continuum, within the paradigm of the one-sex model should the compelling, sedimented bodily differentiations – based on valorised bodily qualities and supported by humoral theories – not be given recognition? ‘Sex’ as normative ideal was not informed by a heteronormativity supported by biological knowledge yielding an anatomical rhetoric that naturalised a gender binary. But if ‘sex’ as normative ideal was informed by a one-sex model, a continuum that was also ‘naturalised’ by a variety of discursive practices to constitute a habitual body, why would a deliberate masculinisation of a woman have yielded anything but an implicated version of the prevailing hegemony? In the absence of any other discursive possibilities, but in the presence of discursive practices that have repeatedly transmitted and maintained engendered social hierarchies of power to such a degree as to have assumed a state of naturalness, a materiality that was not disputed, is it at all possible to speak of ‘a moral state achieved...through a sheer act of will’? As a matter of fact, is it possible to homogenise the ‘oppressed’ as if an equivalent degree of oppression could be established between mother and others? Is it not more credible to see in this act of remembrance something of the violence exerted by history on the body, its destruction by the pen of history in order for the

emergence of the cultural body to serve the political ends of its time, something Foucault (1998: 375,378,380,382) has reminded us of?

We have seen to what extent ‘woman’ was identified with the interior body. Effectively masculinising the mother would therefore require re-gendering the interior body. It is in this respect that 15:23, immediately following on the *ekphrasis* which has emphasised visionary and auditory perception and has opened the possibility of bodily invasion, reflects the interior body as site of transformation. It is explained that ‘devout reason, filling her viscera with manliness in the midst of those emotions, stretched over, to overlook her parental affection for a period of time’.<sup>19</sup> Three metaphors, following this explanation, transform her interior body into sites of male contestation, the first being a council-chamber (15:25), the second the sphere of the spectacle or arena (15:29) and the third the ark of Noah (15:31). In all three, the principle of competition functions in order to signify an eventual winner. The mother has effectively entered the world of men as ‘man’.

A few examples will follow, illustrating her masculinisation. Unlike in some apocryphal material from Early Christianity, the mother of 4 Maccabees has more radically been turned into a male owing to the transformation of her interior body. For that reason it is repeatedly emphasised that she did not cry when confronted with the torturing of her sons. Mourning specifically belonged to the domain of women, yet despite vividly experiencing their suffering, and despite her loss of what can be termed symbolic capital,<sup>20</sup> pious reason prevented her submission to pain. On the contrary, she endured.

Although the term ‘endurance’ was initially associated specifically with the suffering of being woman, referring to her construction as passive, but also to the pain suffered during birth, this was a term that was masculinised during the development of the Roman imperial regime. The reasons for this development are not easy to detect. One may be the emergence and rise of the Imperial cult. Owing to the rising status of the Emperor and the declining authority of the Senate, as well as the relative ending of wars that led to the formation of an Empire, it was as if ‘manliness’ itself was in decline. As control was gradually slipping from the hands of the elite Roman male, self-control, the quintessential ingredient of manliness, was also disappearing. Another may be the concomitant development of the spectacle’s popularity and the growing celebrity status of gladiators. Whatever the case may be, the term ‘endurance’, especially in the case of voluntary suffering, was gradually brought within the domain of masculine self-control, allowing a Seneca to differentiate between ‘courageous endurance’ and ‘endurance’ – the former

19 My translation, which is an attempt to be as literal as possible in order to link up with the context in which variations of ‘to see’ abound, but also to indicate how ‘devout reason’ offered a protective screen preventing the possible invasion of images. ‘Viscera’ can easily be translated with ‘heart’.

20 See her loss not only in terms of social recognition for being *matrona* in superlative degree, but also her sureties for the future (17:6-11).



associated with manliness and self-control, the latter with womanhood and passivity (Shaw 1996, 295).

Although perhaps not as universally widespread and as intense a change or a shift in the materialisation of male bodies, as Brent Shaw<sup>21</sup> would have it, endurance of pain, of suffering, evolved into recapturing a normative, masculine ideal of nobility that was gradually slipping away and eluding males. Endurance is, according to Shaw, a value that cuts across a divide between values that marked the free, elite, adult male; values such as ‘voice, activity, aggression, closure, penetration, and the ability to inflict pain and suffering’ and values that were regarded as womanish, such as ‘silence, passivity, submissiveness, openness, suffering – the shame of allowing oneself to be wounded, to be penetrated, and of simply enduring all of that’; values that were regarded as ‘morally bad’ (Shaw 1996, 279). It would be possible to add that it also countered values of instability, fluidity, wavering, hesitance that formed quintessential features in the manufacturing of the gender ‘woman’ in the Roman world. The point is, however, that endurance allowed for reclaiming manliness owing to the implied self-control, self-mastery, even when subjected to the most severe forms of pain infliction and suffering. Far from countering Roman hegemonic masculinity, it can be seen as a radicalising of it, a popularising of the engendered normative ideal of self-control as one of the virtues constituting manliness.

Bodily the mother with the notion of ‘endurance’ allows her to share in the normativities that constructed ideal masculinity. It comes, therefore, as no surprise that the mother is integrated into the martial and agonistic metaphors that pervade the writing.<sup>22</sup> However, in the juxtaposing of nobility and endurance, she is portrayed as ‘more persevering in her pursuit of nobility’, exactly the opposite of what would be understood as behaviour stemming from *malakia*, that is the moral weakness, the softness that accompanies femininity, and she is also more ‘manly than men’ with regard to endurance (15:30). This is again confirmed in 16:14 when she is hailed as ‘mother of a pious army, soldier, elder, and woman’, a conqueror of the tyrant and found to be ‘stronger than men in both words and deeds’. Her integration into this ‘pious army, this team in the agon is again recaptured when the narrator summarises in 17:11-16.

In tune with a world where the interior body was seen as a microcosm of the macrocosm and where the interiority of the body can be read, not only on the exterior of the body, but also in bodily behaviour, the mother’s viscera are seen to have been filled, provided with, augmented with manliness (15:23). Her ability to conquer,

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21 Brent Shaw finds in the capacity to ‘endure’ a ‘new value’, constituting a ‘moral revolution’ and enabling a ‘moral oxymoron’ in its juxtaposition with ‘nobility’ (1996, 278), but also see the critique of Moore and Anderson (1998, 257).

22 She is described as ‘law avenger’, ‘shield-bearer’, ‘prize winner’ (15:29) – the ‘activeness’ of the mother should not go unrecognised: she avenges the denigration of the law, piety makes her a fighter, and she conquers on the side of masculinity over her natural inclination as mother.

to resist the onslaught of passions, of natural female inclinations, of woman- and motherhood, reflects to what extent she has indeed been masculinised.

There are several other instances demonstrating her masculinity. However, it is her consistent association with the esteemed, honourable patriarchs that demonstrates to what extent she has been absorbed within the world of Jewish masculinity. In 14:20 the control of her interior body, her soul, is seen as similar to Abraham's. In the context of displaying her endurance she is referred to as the 'daughter of Abraham' (15:28) thereby again evoking the possibility of Isaac's sacrifice. This is immediately followed by an epithet, calling her the 'mother of the nation' (15:29, but see 16:20 where Isaac is seen as the 'father of the nation') and a winner of the contest that raged within her interior body. In 17:6 she is depicted as continuing the lineage of Abraham. The consistent association with the patriarchs, specifically Abraham, the references to both herself and Abraham, as well as Isaac as mother and father of the nation and the militaristic references to herself as 'mother of a pious army', 'soldier' (16:14) 'avenger of the law', 'shield-bearer' (15:29) and conqueror of the tyrant (16:14), indicate that the masculinisation of this mother was not simply to replace control over others with control over the self. Body politics was here deployed as political strategy to define the relationship with Imperial Rome. It is for that reason also that the mother is constantly figured within agonistic context. In their relationship with Imperial Rome, the objective is to portray Jewish masculinity as superior to that of Rome, since 'even' the interior of a Jewish woman's body displayed a self-control exceeding the claims of masculine Rome. Re-membering the interiority of the mother's body serves to display the superiority of Jewish masculinity.

## CONCLUSION

There appears to be an ambiguity, a tension in the representation of the mother in 4 Maccabees. On the one hand she can be seen as representative, as model of the habituated Graeco-Roman woman whose 'womanhood' was restricted to the dark, turbulent, emotion-generating interiority of her body, 'naturally' making it necessary for her to enter the calming, protective environment of the Graeco-Roman household where reproduction functioned as the integrating principle. Her portrayal has not departed from this model, and the materialising constituents that formed part and parcel of an engendered collective memory are still at work in the remembering of this woman. Although epideictic rhetoric is at work in the desire to raise from victim to hero, gendered victimhood has not been left behind as her portrayal features within Graeco-Roman-Jewish male hegemony. On the other hand, her masculinisation cannot be seen as subversion, resistance or deconstruction, because the mere fact of 'masculinisation' already implicates her within ancient male hegemony. There is no counter-attack, with an alternative voice raised, but rather a Jewish ventriloquising of Graeco-Roman masculinity. Using the same 'voice' a claim to superiority is made.

As such, instead of subversion or resistance, the habituated female body has been radicalised. The unstable, habituated female interior body has not been subverted, but it has been lent stability and self-control by the extraordinary capacity of masculine pious reason. It is pious reason which functions to enable and empower that quintessential virtue of normative manliness, namely self-control, that has entered the unstable interiority of her body, that has inhibited the turbulent turmoil of raging emotions, that has remedied an innate weakness. The masculinity informed by this reasonableness displays its powerful superiority not only by enabling the inherently deficient interiority of a woman to respond to the normative ideal of being a ‘man’, but it also exposes what in fact parades as a man to be a woman. This superior masculinity is that of the Jewish male and it allows collective memory to turn victims into heroes.

Re-membering her, therefore, serves not the mother, not women, but ethnic solidarity to resist the Roman Empire. Although collective history has apparently turned the victimhood of the mother into the status of a hero,<sup>23</sup> the cruel irony is that victimhood has been radicalised – political history has destroyed her female body for an affirmation of hegemonic phallocratic Graeco-Roman-Jewish culture – she was re-membered as ‘he’ for the sake of ‘him’.

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23 For how collective memory functions to restore heroism to victimhood, see Massimo Rosati. *The Making of a Postsecular Society: A Durkheimian Approach to Memory, Pluralism and Religion in Turkey* (ed., Alessandro Ferrara; Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 70-80.

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