

Maternal Sacrifice in Jewish Culture:

Rethinking Sacrifice from a Maternal Perspective in Religion, Art, and Culture

CERMOM-INALCO - Ca' Foscari University, Venice

Paris, October 22-24 2019

Organizers:

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Call for papers

The phrase “maternal sacrifice” combines two complex terms entangled in an even more complex dynamic. First of all, “sacrifice”, a word whose definitions have been considered inadequate to describe the multiformity of practices and meanings it evokes as a ritual, as a narrative, and as a metaphor. James Watts distinguishes between “narrative traditions about killing people”, oriented towards an evaluation of killing and murder, and “the ritual killing of animals”, focused on the social functions of ritual and religion (Watts 2011, 8). To those categories a third level can be added that is related to the metaphorical use of the notion of sacrifice as the act of giving up something in order to attain a higher goal.

Secondly, “maternal” is another word that could arouse the same skepticism, were it not for what Samira Kawans describes as a recent “body of scholarship that simultaneously insists on the particularity and specificity of motherhood while at the same time rejecting any notion of a fixed or essential aspect of maternal experience, desire, or subjectivity.” (Kawans 2011, 972) Moreover, the ambiguity of this phrase resides in the possibility of reading it both as an objective and subjective genitive. The expression can then lead to the exploration of the sacrifice performed by the mother on several objects, including herself, or performed by others on the mother or the potential mother, i.e. matricide or the sacrifice of the virgin-daughter. These two perspectives can be then developed with respect to sacrifice as a ritual, as a narrative, and as a metaphor.

Rethinking Nancy Jay’s opposition between sacrifice and childbirth in what she defines a “remedy for having been born of woman”, the conference aims to explore new approaches to the maternal sacrifice as a ritual, as a narrative, and as a metaphor. Especially welcomed will be proposals that highlight how it is possible to rethink sacrifice from a maternal perspective, which role can have the maternal thinking in the development, and the uses of sacrifice and its rhetoric. Proposal can refer to any methodology, as well as cultural contexts and historical periods in the context of the Jewish culture.

Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- The role of the mother in the rhetoric, ritual, or narrative of sacrifice
- Mothers performing sacrifice as a ritual
- Sacrificial maidens
- Maternal narratives of sacrifice
- Metaphorical uses of maternal sacrifices in the arts
- Rewritings of sacrificial narratives from a maternal point of view

The conference will take place in Paris, **22-24 of October 2019**.

Please send a 250-word abstract and the use of sacrifice it entails (ritual, narrative, metaphoric)

and a one-page CV before the **30 of March 2019** to the following address:

[elisa.carandina@inalco.fr](mailto:elisa.carandina@inalco.fr) .

Participants will be notified of acceptance by the **30 of April**. Selected papers will be published in  
a peer-reviewed volume.