

LONGING FOR BELONGING BEYOND BELONGINGS: THE ECONOMICS OF SONG OF SONGS

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ABSTRACT

The intimate and “monogamous” eroticism in the Song of Songs can be considered as a critique of economic materialism where multiple women may be “bought” in some sense or another. It is the female lover, however, who regards the lovers as belonging to each other and visualises her beloved’s body as made up of precious metals and gemstones which she then owns. It therefore appears that this protest is partially self-subversive in that it equates the celebrated body with the very currency it sets out to denounce. Added to that is the body with its boundaries imaged as a building blocking out unwanted intrusions and so an expression of private property. This conflict of class psychologies might therefore contain an element of envy and the question can be asked which party is actually compensating by overinvestment for unmet needs.

INTRODUCTION

As much as one prefers to experience one’s personal connection with the Divine through poetry and music, as much is one discovering that the erotic Song also contains some psychological and ethical insights (including those related to economics) embedded in its aesthetic which can deepen one’s intimacy with a sexual partner.

Due to the traditional emphasis on either the religiosity or the eroticism of the Song its economic materialism as main conflict has been partially ignored. This study

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aims to demonstrate that two conflicting class psychologies are the reason for the current text.

After explaining the concept of economic materialism its elements in the Song will be identified, not only amongst the upper establishment, but also more subtly in the images of the lovers themselves. Thirdly, the distinction between the preferred single, “monogamous” relationship and the critiqued multiple, “polygamy” will be dealt with in terms of the materialistic elements in the Song, particularly as the two kinds of gender relations tie in with two different economic classes. This link can, finally, open insight into twenty-first century struggles with partner relationships, even other than heterosexual ones.

The focus here is not the cultural-historical particulars of the Solomonic gender relations but the psychological undercurrents of this conflict between two possibilities juxtaposed in the Song where the single and free relationship, despite its possible cultural impurities, presents as an emotional development.

The English translations of the Masoretic text are from the JPS 1917 edition.

MATERIALISM AS TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CONCEPT

Despite tension between psychology and economics about the psychology of money (Furnham 1984:501), there has been some research about the role of possessions in identity creation and its value in terms of their private and public meaning (Richins 1994:504).

While neither the Song nor its known background reveals any explicit psychology, the following present psychological research results will be transposed as if they are universally valid. This will serve as a temporary measure until sufficient and relevant information about the then context is found. The following insights have emerged from (modern) psychology:

- 1) Possessions have both instrumental value and symbolic meaning. The first refers to the sense of an extension of the body through the use of material objects. (Over)identification with possessions means a merging with possessions as if they

are extensions of the owner. The second can be either instinctual as reminder of anal eroticism or interactional.

- 2) Economic materialism as an excessive need to possess material objects has been distinguished in terms of personality traits on the one hand, and an enduring belief on the other (Richins 1994:504). Belk (1985:265) puts non-generosity, envy and possessiveness forward as the three personality traits for materialism.
- 3) The body is seen as a concrete object and instrument in a materialist culture resulting in more negative body-images. In a society where food is relatively scarce, fatter bodies are idealised as proof of success in acquiring wealth (Donne 2012:11). As peasants the lovers in the Song probably did not achieve the ideal reached by the upper class.

MATERIALISM IN SONG OF SONGS

The Song is very aware of material value as it is of bodily images.

Royal culture

Right from the start the female lover satirises the real king, Solomon, an archetypal symbol of wisdom, women and wealth (all symbolising status) by travesty: she makes her own humble hunk, a mere shepherd-lover, into a royalty. Through travesty she mocks what she enviously fantasises about and so indirectly voices her protest. On the other hand, as a form of idealism, fantasy serves a creative purpose to compensate for what has been destroyed through critique.

Already in the third verse she is aware that women like and perhaps even lust after her beloved. In the next verse “the king” seduces her into his chambers, perhaps his harem, together with other women. His wealth as suggested by ointments and wine is the background to this scene. These first few verses stand in sharp contrast to the second-last verse of this whole anthology or poem, where the female lover is dwelling in a garden.

Then suddenly she is shocked back into reality in the next verse when she

discovers she is only a labourer, shamed by the sun and the brothers in their vineyards which are, however, not for pleasure in the present but for products and profit. She also recognises her lover as a shepherd and realises that she balances on the edge of prostitution when she rhetorically asks why she should wear a veil. In this pericope the lovers find each other reflected in nature.

Yet the initial association with pomp recurs when she reminds the male lover of the royal steed in Egypt in 1:9. From the educated language and the jewellery which both the woman and the man are flashing, one senses an elitist setting in 1:10–11 and later again in the *wasf* (description) for the male lover in 5:11–15 (*vide infra*).

In the inclusive ritornello or rondeau (Lacocque 1998:165,181), as if to frame their love, the same issues stirred in the first chapter recur in the last. The same four elements can be found in both: vineyard, brothers, Solomon and keepers.

After the axiomatic peak statement about the value of love being more than life, **כִּי-עֲזָה כַּמּוֹת אֶהְבֶּה קִשָּׁה כְּשֹׂאֵל קִנְאָה: רִשְׁפִּיהָ--רִשְׁפֵי אֵשׁ שְׁלֵהֶבְתֶּיהָ** (for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave; the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very intense flame), and even within this orgasmic climax in 8:6–7, the argument against the material currency as forgery of the value of love is restated more explicitly in 8:8–12. Her brothers want to wall her in as their property and reinforce it even with a defensive but also flashy-silvery turret, hinting also at the “silver”, that is, monetary price and protection that a marriage would receive. There **הַשֹּׁמְרִים** (the watchmen), like those in 3:3 or **שֹׁמְרֵי הַחֲמוֹת** (the watchmen of the walls) in 5:7, will guard her, just as she had to be an alienated **נֹטְרָה** (keeper) of another’s property instead of her own in 1:6, just as others are **לְנוֹטְרִים** (to be keepers of [literally: for those keeping]) property they can use and perhaps even abuse in 8:11. In this gilded cage the woman as family capital is worth a lot on the body market. Moreover, any “door” found in her body as metaphorical building, any “punctures” or “leakages”, will be hidden and will make her to be enclosed by special fortifications in 8:9. Yet she wants **חַלּוֹנוֹת** (windows, as in 4:9) towards life where her special one can gaze in at her in admiration instead of keeping an eye on her. In fact, her body is already **חוֹמָה** (a city wall), but then to block her pretentious proprietors out, and instead of a turret she has a tower of pride looking

down on those who spoke condescendingly of her. With her beloved a different wall, one for a house, **כְּתֵלֵנוּ** (our wall, that is, a communal one), provides a homely intimacy; it is directed to the inside.

This challenge is, however, brought to an unexpected conclusion: her body cannot be bartered as if it were an object and property, or outsourced as if it were a project to be managed. She is not an estate transferred to her brothers during the absence of her father. Her body belongs to her.

The fact that the issue of money is mentioned in this climax, **אִם-יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת-כָּל-הוֹן** **אִם-יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶת-כָּל-הוֹן** (if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, he would utterly be contemned), means that it is a crucial point in the whole Song. The idea of **כָּסֶף** (silver) in 8:9 and 8:11. As Barbiero (2011:472) puts it so simply: “Love is a ‘flame of YHWH’, not a contract agreed by the families for economic reasons”.

In 8:8–9 the images of the brothers are military, combative ones and opposed to the peace which the female lover finds in 8:10. No authentic, profound peace can be found in practical marriages of convenience. Only real, mutual love brings deep inner peace. The two positions are poles apart.

If it is the male lover who speaks in 8:12 by saying that he has his own one beloved just as Solomon has his many (who, however, need to be guarded in 8:11–12!), then the female lover is owned by the male lover. This would confirm what the female lover has been repeating in the refrains: that she belongs to him and he to her. This ownership is then mutual and not a one-way objectifying way of possessing somebody, eating away at the independence as Lacocque (1998:186) believes. It is, however, more likely that the female is speaking here, as she is the only one who speaks of her own, in the first person elsewhere: her self (1:7, 3:1–4, 5:6, 6:12), her heart (5:2) and her vineyard (1:6), the last of which is virtually repeated in 8:12.

By the high frequency of the first person possessive suffix the belle monopolises her love. She herself is the one in charge of her own vineyard. Although she speaks of her lover-beloved in 2:8–10 in the third person, she is never spoken of in this way: she is not an object but the subject of her own life and body which cannot be externalised

by any bridal price.

Love is superior to everything and can therefore not be translated into pecuniary terms or converted into any currency. This is also why love is here a critique of the then marriage transaction and contradicts any allegorical interpretation. The latter is especially clear when it has to be applied to 8:7 which the allegorists usually regard as a mistaken interpretation by an “additor”-editor (Lacocque 1998:179).

The female lover rebels against all utilitarian functions of production and reproduction imposed by her culture. She will not be reduced to (functionality) or expressed by (bridal price) a medium but will freely “take possession of” herself and “own” her emotions. Significantly 8:11 speaks only impersonally of **כַּרְם** (a vineyard) of Solomon contrasting it to **כַּרְמִי** (my vineyard) in the next verse. The two verbs, **נָתַן** (gave) and **יָבֵא** (yields), in this same verse verge on insult objectifying the harem and degrading it to a consumable commodity, as if these women were transferable and replaced by money.

The **פְּרִי** (fruit) in 8:11–12 is also in direct opposition to the fruit that has been mentioned elsewhere throughout the Song (explicitly used to metaphorically celebrate sexual development in 2:3, 4:13, 4:16, but also implicitly elsewhere). Here it probably means financial gain or profit. No mention is made about love by the brothers in 8:8–9 or in connection with Solomon’s harem (except perhaps in 1:4 where the word **דְּרִיךְ** could mean “your love”, referring to the king as subject, but then seemingly different from the women who **אֶהְבֶּיךָ** [love you]). The quality of the relationships therefore differs according to the quantity of partners involved.

Passively possessing a harem might be simpler than the complexities of love which constantly struggle with the anxieties with which dependence on the other challenges each party.

Berquist (1998:96–97) asserts, “the very production of discourse about bodies and about sexuality controls bodies and their sexuality”. Whilst affirming authentic sexuality, there is also a subtle critique of, and protest against, the “father’s personal and financial investment in his daughter’s sexual purity”. This investment is used to partially determine male status (Berquist 1998:97 n. 10, and 115) and reduces all

“sexual ethics and body rhetoric to economic concerns” (Berquist 1998:99), although “the exchange of women pre-dates private property” (Berquist 1998:100n.17).

Peasant culture

Although the reader’s first thoughts are about the royal harem as a form of materialism suggested in the Song, possessiveness as one of its criteria immediately leads one to wonder if the very relationship celebrated in the Song, if it is a relationship at all, does not qualify as a form of materialism in itself. A cross-cultural study by Wallendorf & Arnould (1988:531), however, distinguishes this attachment to another person from possessiveness of material objects and from favourite object attachment which can be in terms of personal memories or social status, amongst others. They relativise Belk’s three criteria for materialism as culturally determined. Yet his claim (1985:270) that possessiveness is due to an anxiety about loss and therefore greater behavioural control of the possession seems to apply to the desperate search of the female lover in 3:1–4 which ends with the words **אָחַזְתִּי וְלֹא אֶרְפְּנוּ** (I held him, and would not let him go) and then replayed as a more intense version in 5:2–7 which does not end in such a happy way. This suspicion about the kind of relationship increases when non-generosity is the unwillingness to give or share possessions with others, as Belk defines it. As a naturally closed relationship, the teasing joke about the foxes which are trivialised as irritating competitors in 2:15 does not come as any surprise. Envy could be implied but remains only a possibility, if this collection of poems is not after all a fantasy trip about other people’s possessions, a fantasy of someone who enviously wonders about the pleasures that others are having but that are desired for her- or himself. For anyone who has been in love this kind of relationship seems natural but then one forgets about open relationships which have been in vogue ever since humanity started dating, even if it was not always that open – in public.

That there is so much comparison in the Song suggests envy and competition. The superlative in the title already claims a love-song about love greater than any other and the climax almost at the end in 8:6–7 asserts a love even superior to death. The male lover is **כִּי-טוֹבִים דְּדִידָה מִיָּיִן** (pre-eminent above ten thousand) in 5:10 and

(for [his] love is better than wine) in 1:2.

About the female beloved he sings: **כְּשֹׁשָׁנָה בֵּין הַחֹתָיִם, כֵּן רֵעִיָּתִי בֵּין הַכַּנּוֹת** (as a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters). When wisdom is also valued above all else in Proverbs 3:15, 8:11, 4:7; Daniel 5:17 and Wisdom of Solomon 7:7–14, it might seem to create a competitor for the first price, but the content of wisdom might be exactly the fact that love is above all else.

Materialism has been tempered but retained by transposing it to the very bodies of the lovers. The polemic against the then materialist values becomes self-subversive in that the material symbols are built into the idealised bodies, especially that of the male lover in 5:11,14,15 (*vide supra*). In this way the bodies are thus equalled and identified with the very currency which is being critiqued.

Not only are certain body parts almost fetishised but as virtual transitional objects representing and reminding of the beloved especially during the lover's physical absence they attain a similar meaning as and stands *pars pro toto* for the beloved. When certain body parts resemble deities as in the *wasf* (description) for the male lover in 5:11–15, they remind precisely of them with which the lover is therefore associated. The precious material is then not the primary focus. With the same **פָּז** (gold) of the male beloved's head in 5:11 the pedestal on which he stands in 5:15 (suggesting in this merismic way his whole body) and the female lover's jewellery (though the word **זָהָב** is used here) in 1:11 are also made. When the beloved's body is described in terms of the very material which cannot buy it, the distinction between these two poles is not that clear anymore: the body becomes these materials just as it does when these currencies replace the body in commercial transactions. The bodies are “elevated” to these materials and in that sense implicitly denigrating their real bodies.

According to Freud (1974:29–30) a fetish is an object onto which magical power has been projected as a substitute for the penis; such is the sculpture of a deity in 5:10–16. This attachment to and relationship with a material object might suggest the incapacity for abstract thought. The object becomes animated and bewitched for the devotee and a local habitation for a spiritual personality in a thing usually regarded as

lifeless. Any such object would then have been a subversion of the aniconic idea of the divine in the standardised religion of the Hebrew Bible. Modern thinkers regard them as disguising and yet mediating real relations between humans. This Marx (1930:56) recognised in the commodity fetishism of capitalism where they determine social activities by which they are also produced. Alfred Binet (1887:145) who was the first to use the concept in a sexual sense also regards it as a replacement of a person. Both views of fetishism replace but also represent through a part-object a person or the relationship with that person.

Some of the objects which might have had fetish features are **הוֹתָם** (a seal), mentioned twice in the climax of the Song in 8:6 where they serve as material reassurance, **הַמֶּלֶךְ** (myrrh) in 1:13, 3:6, 4:6, 4:14, 5:1, 5:5 and 5:13, **עֲנָקָה** (pendant) in 4:9 where it could serve as an amulet (Keel 1986:153). Added to that could be the aphrodisiacs suggested by various plant names as well as the jewels and gemstones which are all often considered as sacred or as amulets with virtual magical features amongst the Semites (Smith 1879:453). This disguised materialism raises the suspicion whether the critique does not stem from a lack of wealth which is then enviously attacked in others who do have it.

The Song's critique against the commercialisation of relationships becomes clear from the background atmosphere of judgement expressed by two sapiential words: on the one hand **יִבְזוּ** (they would despise) in 8:1 and in 8:7: **יִבְזוּ בּוֹז** (he would utterly be contemned) and, on the other hand **הוֹן** (wealth, sufficiency, substance) in the last mentioned verse where it is one of a variety of words with a similar meaning in the Hebrew Bible.

Kingsmill (2009:72) points out that the book of Proverbs, where the first of these two occurs either as verb or noun, almost always implies that the one despising is actually to be despised: the fool. The question can now be raised whether it would here in the Song therefore be the fool who despises a “man” (**אִישׁ**, not **אָדָם**) in 8:7. This question becomes more urgent precisely because the ancient Israelites interpreted wealth as a sign of God's blessing (cf. Proverbs 3:9–10, Matthew 19:16–30, Mark 10:17–31 and Luke 18:18–30).

Some thoughts relevant to the first conflict in the Song

Perhaps the critique against materialism and the reduction of bodies and love to possessions is why marriage is never explicitly concluded – despite it being mentioned in 3:11.

The love celebrated and idealised in the Song is, however, not about some kind of investment. It is not about collecting, restless hoarding and saving in an ever increasing and endless greed which ironically always remains unsatisfied and unfulfilled. Freud (1977:205) interpreted the relation to material possessions (as in reality symbols of faeces) as anal eroticism in the sense of the pleasure of retention and control. Ferenczi (1974:265) extended this view by regarding aesthetic production as sublimation thereof, but the lovers as aesthetic subjects in the Song are not products and give themselves to the other in genital bonding.

In the psychic economy anal eroticism is opposed and improved upon by phallic and later by genital sexuality as a higher development. Neo-psychoanalytic views move, however, from an instinctual intra-individual focus to an interactional one (Dittmar 1992:51). Withholding public access through private property seems centripetal and narcissistic compared to the sharing and linking attitude of love. Possession may, however, draw the attention of others and can serve social integration but then as a compensatory relief from anxieties due to distrust in the mother's continued affection. Possession substitutes trust in human relationships. Possessions in this way become the "door" through which interactions and belonging to a group is controlled. Deciding who can use one's possessions virtually controls social relationships. Emotionally they reflect the "love" of the giver, the subject, and the lovability (worth) of the recipient, the object (Dittmar 1992:52). Possession therefore implies an unequal and hierarchical relational structure.

This attitude contrasts with the essential freedom of love which voluntarily gives and surrenders itself to the lover as beloved, as the woman does in 7:13, for instance. Love cannot be bought (even if the woman herself got the money), it is simply too precious, it can only be given. Just as love cannot be paid for according to 8:7, so love cannot be produced for money as 8:11 seems to ironically suggest. Therefore the

keepers can be retrenched, they are redundant staff.

Holding-onto can be transcended by surrender. The lower but more basic needs in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy are superseded by higher ones: when there are enough belongings to ensure survival and security (through authority and power) the need for belonging surfaces. The king who already has power through his office does not want to feel dependent and helpless should a beloved reject him and so hides the risk of his rage and jealousy by owning his wives.

Bodies and money seem to be two sides of the same coin in many cultures and therefore never coincide. Embodied love cannot be bartered. Any such attempt is a falsification of embodied love (and what other love would be authentic?!) either by one party or by both. Love cannot become a tool for something of superior value.

In the Song the materialistic attitude towards women coincides with patriarchy but this is not a universal dependence, as Fromm (1976:76) believes about the having-mentality. Possession does, however, objectify and so transforms what is subjected to something dead. When one party is such an object, it leaves the subject isolated and lonely. The flow of energy has been brought to a standstill by capturing it in static objects. The subject's status therefore ironically depends on the object, which is transitory.

ONE VERSUS THE MANY IN SONG OF SONGS

It is important that this is not about monogamy versus polygamy as marriage is not an issue here. Neither is it about exclusivity versus inclusivity as relations with several women can also be exclusive. The question is, however, if intimacy can be achieved with several women as with one woman and, if so, whether this will be of the same depth with all of them. A follow-up question is whether intimacy is possible when the relation is primarily contract-based or commercialised.

Relations with several women

The Song reflects the ethos amongst the Jewish upper class following the third century

B.C.E. values of the Hellenistic Ptolemaic court of Alexandria. Only wealthy men could afford such a materialistic luxury where the body-politics, however, must have required constant renegotiation. This is perhaps why the multitude of women is connected to their being possessed as material objects.

The royal harem embodies the actual materialistic relation to women that is critiqued in the Song: in 1:4 where the first-person-plural occurs three times the king takes the many girls by whom he is loved and surrounded into **הַדְּרָיִי** (his bedrooms). This is contrasted with 2:4 where the male lover brings (only) his one beloved **אֶל-בַּיִת הַיַּיִן** (to the banqueting-house) who again in 6:9 is singled out as unique.

Once again framing the Song, like the commercialisation of gender relations, almost at the end of the last chapter, in 8:11, these women collectively seem to be the king's vineyard, a place where others can go and get "drunk" from the "wine".

The social satire in 8:8–10 "intrudes" into the flow of 8:7 and 8:11 in terms of form: quantity is opposed to quality: not only the many waters in 8:7 (cf. also Isaiah 17:12–13) but also Baal-Hamon, the "Owner of a multitude (that is, of money or of women in his harem)" are less (cf. Isa 7:23) than the one love (in 6:9) which endures. The figures of the thousand and the two hundred pieces of silver of 8:11–12 remind one of the sixty queens, eighty concubines and young women without number in 6:8 (Lacocque 1998:185), both passages recalling I Kings 11:3. In Isaiah 7:23 a thousand shekels of silver was the price of a thousand vines, the symbol for a woman in the Song. It is not clear how this income was derived but some exegetes speculate about high-class prostitution, perhaps disguised as a sacred service.

It is significant that all the characters, other than the two protagonists in the poem(s), are conspicuously plural and, although her male lover is open and invites his friends to the party in 5:1, she restrains her female followers to not interrupt her love or allow any such interruptions, and remains committed to the singularity of their love.

The numbers in the Song are expressions of both power and possession: **שְׁשִׁים וָשֵׁשׁ גִּבּוֹרִים** (sixty mighty men) in 3:7 refers literally to military or policing powers but also to the value of the property protected.

A single, exclusive relationship

The Song expresses a protesting voice, perhaps even a counterculture, critical of this upper class attitude. The desire for mutual, exclusive and total belonging runs as a theme through the Song. The adjuration refrains in 2:7, 3:5, 7:12 and 8:4 which are such important and prominent features of the structure of the Song, could be interpreted as exclusions of interferences by others, as Gordis (1974:82), Ringgren (1981:263), Fox (1985:110) and Viviers (1989:*passim*) have asserted.

That which is as precious as gold and silver needs to be guarded and protected. This exclusivity for the one partner and lover alone is several times expressed by mentioning some “private property”: in 4:12 גַּן נְעוּל (a locked garden), גַּל נְעוּל (a locked spring) and מְעִיָן חֲתוּם (a sealed fountain, reverberated twice in 8:6: כַּחֲתוּם (like a seal or signet ring). The nature of individualism as private sphere but also intimacy is revealed in these two verses and seems to involve a narcissistic self-indulgence where the other even becomes part of the self.

The vacillation between first-person (גַּנִּי, my garden) and third-person (לְגַנִּי, his garden) belonging both in 4:16 seems to suggest that being possessed by the lover allowed the beloved possession of herself as well. The first impression of wanting to possess the other is actually a disguised wish reaching out to be owned by the other as a transcendent reality greater than and including the self which, however, makes the anxiety of dependence bearable. The female lover is transported to another reality outside herself in 6:12: לֹא יָדַעְתִּי--נִפְשִׁי שְׂמַתְנִי מִרְכָּבוֹת עַמִּי נָדִיב (before I was aware, my soul set me upon the chariots of my princely people). That water is used in so many images might suggest the “flow” into which people find themselves who pursue a goal greater than themselves, such as in intimacy, when they lose a sense of time and of self and yet become more authentic (Csikszentmihalyi 2004:99–100). At the same time both lovers, by mirroring themselves in nature, see themselves as part of it, a part of a reality much greater than themselves, with which they become one. The Song regards mutual belonging as superior to being a possession.

This relationship is directly personal and individual, although it also seeks social acceptance and support (afterwards) as mentioned in 8:1. The logic of this polemic

becomes clearer when one realises that no emphasis is placed on offspring, even though Van der Zwan (2014:854) has previously pointed out that it is not altogether absent as has generally been assumed. The reason for contracts and the monetary element in marriages is only relevant when acquired wealth needs to be bequeathed to offspring, previously “owned”. Since offspring is not at the centre, there is no need for a pricing of this relationship in terms of its monetary value. In the same vein, there is no need for polygamy or polycoity (that is, having children from concubines) here, as this often compensated for the barrenness of a woman.

Love is reduced to its essence: direct personal affection and physical attraction. This exclusivity bans all other factors such as practical financial concerns. Love is “discovered” *after* it has appeared, so to speak, and not calculated *beforehand*. Yet there is anxiety about insecurity or possible risk against which one needs to defend as 5:6–7 proves. Love is here stepping forward in faith inspired by being overwhelmed, fragile yet progressive.

The question can be asked if this is really “wise” and if the Song can be read as wisdom literature. Is it not rather naïve and adolescent rather than mature love which takes all factors into account? This liberating separation of the erotic from economics might be another way to explain the objurgations in the refrains of 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4: “no artificial stirring up of ‘love’ from the outside, that is, by contract negotiations, please!” (Lacocque 1998:47n.114 referring to Franz Rosenzweig’s 1972 *The star of redemption*), which is the older interpretation of, for instance, Tromp (1985:89–95), Pope (1977:386–388) and de Villiers (1988:100–101) as well. The exclusivity in the Song pertains not only to competitors in love but also to all other external interruptions such as negotiators.

Perhaps it is significant that with the absence of such interruptions by negotiators, children and money, there is also an absence of guilt. There is no shame about the difference between the two lovers as in Gen 3:7 either. There is no need to hide as in Gen 3:8 and therefore no clothes mentioned in the Song either, except for the woman’s veil in 4:3 but questioned in 1:7 already, and her sandals in 7:2. That “guilt” in some languages is the same word for “debt” might derive from the economic origin of the

concept: **וְהִיבְתָם** refers to guilt in Daniel 1:10 and **חֹב** to debt in Ezekiel 18:7.

There is a second set of refrains, now asserting belonging to each other, in 2:16, 6:3 and 7:11. The latter verse's intertextuality with Gen 3:16 (**וְאֵל-אִשְׁךָ, תְּשׁוּקָתְךָ**, your desire shall be for your man) is not only an inversion but also a subversion by untying the bondage of the ancient curse: **וְעָלִי תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ** (and his desire is toward me). The shift in meaning between these two texts works as a kind of iconoclasm, asserts Lacocque (1998:85). It is as if a balance has been restored which results in equality, an important quality of intimacy, between the genders. The two sets of refrains are therefore crucial for understanding the Song: the main refrain critiques foreign intruders or intrusions and the other celebrates belonging.

CONTEMPORARY MATERIALIST SOCIETIES

The Song is therefore not only about sex but also about money and possessions, and this is becoming more relevant for its early twenty-first century recipients, as materialism is claimed to be increasing with globalisation (Kilbourne & Foley 2005:638).

It is not only the Western world which is trapped into materialism and its consequences for body-love. An example from elsewhere comes even from the Islamic world: “[B]ody surveillance is the most important factor” leading women aged 18 to 30 to conspicuous consumption in late modern Iran which is due to internalisation of external sexual objectification (Barzoki et al. 2014:160).

A conservative attitude that contractual “love” should pragmatically be calculated still persists in most parts of the world. The Freudian reality principle controlling the pleasure principle is after all not that realistic when it disregards the power of love which is praised by the Song to be so unique that it cannot be exchanged into or traded against another currency, nor can it methodically be mediated. Any such quantification would be a reduction to a finite nature which would be a falsification of its nature.

One may ask whether couples with children, opposed to the two lovers of the Song, are more materialistic due to the need to supply material provisions for their

offspring. Yet material possession such as savings or investment in dead matter such as a house or a car is obviously curbed by expenses on children.

Habendi libido (the lust to possess) has perhaps become a stronger compensating motivation when love turns out to be elusive and illusive. Perhaps it is the believed scarcity value or at least transitoriness of sex that makes at least some men want to possess as many women as possible. It is not about love being too pricy, as this would still allow access to it, but about property and power in lieu of love which requires surrender into uncertainty and most often, if not always, fails. Property creates at least a semblance of hope of control through clinging to something which unconsciously represents a person. When the other is experienced as unavailable and alien it is objectified, and intimacy is missed which is only possible between two subjects.

The question can also be asked whether the postmodern hyperawareness of plurality is not perhaps more advanced than the infantile monistic or at best dyadic view of relationships. When the eggs are not all in the same basket, the risk is less, but so is the fidelity. The eternal search for the new might seem like creative individuation, but could be due to distrust in commitment. As postmodernism has shown, endless multiplicity can logically not have a centre. In the constant restless need for new stimulation monogamy may seem monotonous but it might have more intimate meaning and depth than a wider but thinly spread horizon.

The critique that the Song raises is therefore becoming exponentially more relevant for (post)modern gender and love relationships in a civilisation where capitalism and consumerism are taken for granted because of their overwhelming power. Beyond the conflicts which the Song implies nothing brings so much peace as love: **קְמוּצַת שְׁלוֹם** (as one that found peace) in 8:10.

CONCLUSION

This study has been about the two conflicts closely linked in the Song: between the body and money, and between one versus many partners. The coincidence of materialism and polygamy in the Song is not coincidental. When the partner is

reduced to one piece of property amongst others, autonomy, authenticity and therefore intimacy are undermined.

In the first-mentioned conflict the two possibilities are poles on the same continuum. Although materialism for both opposites point beyond and away from the lovers, that of the upper class objectifies people, especially women, as body-possessions. This kind of materialism is critiqued in the Song to the extent that it has undermined the intimacy of a unique love relationship which is the crucial issue in the second conflict.

The foreground appearance of the single, loving couple protests against a background culture of luxury competing with these two lovers' humble yet more authentic relationship. The call to assert and respect "unbought" love is an appeal to grow into a greater, transcendent reality where the other is taken seriously in the sense that inner experiences count more than outer possessions. The two lovers and their love are more durable than any material object.

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