

Judges

A Feminist Companion to the Bible
(Second Series)

edited by Athalya Brenner

To the memory of

Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes

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LETHAL DIFFERENCES:
SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS VIOLENCE AGAINST OTHERS IN JUDGES 19

Ilse Müllner

Some day there will be a Somewhere in which the Other will not be *condemned to death*.
Hélène Cixous¹

1. *Disturbances*

In the course of her discussion of racism in the white women's movement, Christine Schaunberger observes that many authors begin their texts by manifesting anxiety about dealing with this subject.

I too feel anxious when I try to either write about the relationship between racism and sexism, or discuss racism in white feminist theology. I have to force myself to do this, because I'm aware that in this situation, 'everything I do could be wrong', and that my reasoning could be full of holes, unclear, even abusive.²

When I discuss sexual violence, it is especially difficult for me to speak about structures of oppression besides sexism. In feminist discussions of sexual violence, it would appear that offender and victim can be more easily differentiated than in any other field of feminist critique; guilt, it would seem, has a logic all its own. Any investigation into this 'logic' runs the risk of reproducing the all too familiar patriarchal pattern of violence against women: blaming the victim. Was her skirt perhaps too short? Was the look in her eyes too coy or inviting? Even if the term 'victim' were found to be helpful in breaking out of this pattern, its use would immediately be criticized. On

one hand, the term 'victim' both stigmatizes women who have experienced sexual violence, and alleges that they will repeat a certain behavioral pattern for the rest of their lives.³ On the other hand—the label 'victim' leaves no room for any capacity to act and, hence, makes resistance impossible. Therefore, in order to avoid these two pitfalls, the term 'survivor' has been introduced into the discourse. Christina Thünmer-Rohr makes a clear distinction between the critical situation wherein a woman is made a sexual victim on the one hand—that is a situation in which her struggle to survive is often cynically viewed as complicity; and, on the other hand, women's complicity in creating and maintaining structures that make sexual violence a possible and plausible phenomenon.⁴

Women's movements worldwide have made the analysis of sexual violence and the struggle for women's right to control the destinies of their own bodies a number one priority. The 'paradigm of rape' has become the basis for the analysis of violent behaviors in society as a whole.⁵ This paradigm, however, is dangerous insofar as, on the one hand, it reduces violence to sexual violence; and, on the other hand, it obscures the fact that the discussion on sexual violence may, in some aspects, serve the patriarchal system. In cases where the discussion of sexual violence reinforces domination, the question becomes one of other Others and one of differences other than sexual differences.

The view that sexual acts may be acts of violence did not originate with the women's movement. Patriarchal discourse too has seen sexual acts as acts of rape, which means that it is not women's subjective perceptions that have established the criteria for such a classification.⁶ In both narrative accounts of sexual violence as well as in the realm of societal mythologizing, it is quite clear that portraying the *other* man as rapist serves the interests of domination. A feminist analysis needs to look critically at the relationship between the myth of the Black

1. Quoted in C. Olivier, *Jokastes Kinder: Die Psyche der Frau im Schatten der Mutter* (Munich, 8th edn, 1993), p. 10.
2. C. Schaunberger, "'Das Recht, anders zu sein', ohne dafür bestraft zu werden": Rassismus als Problem weißer feministischer Theologie', in C. Schaunberger (ed.), *Wel wir nicht vergessen wollen... zu einer Feministischen Theologie im deutschen Kontext* (Anfragen, 1; Münster, 1987), pp. 101-122 (102).

3. T. Schmidt, 'Auf das Opfer darf keiner sich berufen': *Opferdiskurse in der öffentlichen Diskussion zu sexueller Gewalt gegen Mädchen* (Bielefeld, 1996), pp. 87-145.
4. Cf. C. Thünmer-Rohr, 'Frauen in Gewaltverhältnissen zur Generalisierung des Opferbegriffs', in Studienschwerpunkt 'Frauenforschung' am Institut für Sozialpädagogik der TU Berlin (ed.), *Militärschiff und Entdeckungslust* (Berlin: Orlanda Vauenbuchverlag, 2nd edn, 1990).
5. Cf. Thünmer-Rohr, 'Frauen in Gewaltverhältnissen', p. 32.
6. On the difference between subjective and objective criminal acts in German law, cf. A. Strathausen, *Ver-gewalt-igung: Zu Soziologie und Recht sexueller Machtverhältnisse* (Münster: DUV, 1989), pp. 109-152.

rapist and that of the highly sexually potent Black male,⁷ as well as to that of the Jewish rapist who is paradoxically labelled lascivious and unmasculine, which is one of the stereotypes of anti-Semitism propaganda.⁸ Additionally, that sexual violence in families most often occurs in the so-called underclasses is one of the most common prejudices in Western societies, one which equates sexism with classism, and which serves to conceal domination. Thus, feminist discourse on sexual violence is caught between the Scylla of reproducing the 'blaming the victim' schema and the Charybdis of allowing its own arguments to serve the interests of domination.

The debate over racism and anti-Judaism in the white Christian women's movement in the West has made it painfully clear that the necessity to concentrate on sexual difference as an analytical category should not be allowed to obscure the existence of other differences. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza uses the term 'patriarchy' in the differentiated sense in an attempt to take this challenge seriously. In her most recent publications she has even gone so far as to adopt 'kyriarchal' as a substitute for, or complement to, the perhaps somewhat vague term 'patriarchal'. She does this with a view to making it terminologically clearer that a feminist analysis should not only concern itself with the oppression of women by men, but also promote the development of appropriate resistance forms by coming to grips with the complex interrelationships between various structures of oppression.⁹ Thus, when Susanne Heine criticizes feminist theologians for an 'almost monomaniacal fixation on feminist ideas'¹⁰ that leads directly to anti-Semitism, she fails to take into consideration the pluralistic

nature of the approaches that critics of patriarchy have developed in the field of feminist theology over a period of many years.

Despite the complexity of the debate over sexual violence, I will attempt to discuss the acts of differentiation that lead Others to become outsiders within a society. I will also try to take a closer look at the tendency to equate various forms of oppression that have their origins in dissimilar social circumstances. In the analysis that follows I will be drawing on my research on non-anti-Judaic interpretations of texts from the First Testament that deal with violence, using results arising from the theological debate on racism. In light of recent German and Austrian history, it would not be appropriate to suggest that anti-Semitism can be put on the same level as racism:

Inasmuch as anti-Semitism cannot be reductively explained as social Darwinism arising either from racist ideology or a strain of (secularized) Christian anti-Semitism that subsumed nationalistic cultural anti-Semitism or from anti-capitalist economic anti-Semitism, it would appear to be a phenomenon that needs to be differentiated from racism.¹¹

Despite the fact that anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism and racism need to be analyzed as separate entities, I believe it is possible to point to basic similarities and comparable patterns in all three which, moreover, manifest themselves as behavior towards concrete Others.

2. *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Analyses of Violence*

There is little doubt that feminists who study the dominant system of violence can easily fall into the trap of underestimating and banalizing other forms of domination; or, alternatively, of becoming apologists for the present situation, perceived as dangerous, by comparing it to other social forms which are therefore stigmatized as being much more violent. Thus, historically oriented analyses of sexual violence contain references both to first testament narrations and especially to those texts concerning the law. As Susannah Heschel¹² observed in a brochure published by the Green Party of Northrhine Westfalia in 1989, texts from the Jewish tradition are sometimes used as sole historical reference, thus functioning as scapegoats.

7. Cf. S.L. Gilman, *Rasse, Sexualität und Seuche: Stereotypen aus der Innenwelt der westlichen Kultur* (Reinbek bei Hamburg 1992), p. 30.

8. C. von Braun, 'Zur Bedeutung der Sexualbilder im rassistischen Antisemitismus', in Inge Stephan et al. (eds.), *Jüdische Kultur und Weiblichkeit in der Moderne* (Literatur—Kultur—Geschlecht: Studien zur Literatur- und Kulturschichte Große Reihe, 2; Cologne, 1994), pp. 23-49 (28, 47).

9. E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices Of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), introduces the term 'kyriarchal'.

10. S. Heine, 'Die feministische Diffamierung der Juden', in C. Kohn-Ley and L. Korotin (eds.), *Der feministische 'Sündenfall'? Antisemitische Vorurteile in der Frauenbewegung* (Vienna, 1994), pp. 15-59. When Heine reproaches feminist theologians for using the undifferentiated term 'patriarchy' (a term which in her sense refers only to the hierarchical relationship between the sexes), and fails to take into account approaches which in various ways try to work out differentiations, I suspect that she is misusing the anti-Judaism debate as a forum for her anti-feminist position.

11. L. Siegel-Wieschkewitz, 'Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Sexismus', *Schlangenhaut* 43 (1993), pp. 15-18 (16).

12. Cf. S. Heschel, 'Konfigurationen des Patriarchats, des Judentums und des Nazismus im deutschen feministischen Denken', in Kohn-Ley and Korotin (eds.), *Der feministische 'Sündenfall'?*, pp. 160-84 (165).

Both the selection and the interpretation of the texts reflect the anti-Judaic pattern which misjudges the Judaic tradition as particularly patriarchal. Feminist analyses of violence have traditionally, and often, relied upon Susan Brownmiller's classic *Against our Will*, which was the first book to deal with sexual violence both in a broader context and on a theoretical and structural level. In Brownmiller's analysis of the First Testament, the issues of virginity and the offence to the dowry institution assume great significance. With a clearly marked price tag attached to her hymen¹³ could be taken as a linguistically insensitive *faux pas*. In reality, the statement '...for a piece of damaged goods could hardly command an advantageous match and might have to be sold as a concubine'¹⁴ is not to be found in any text. Brownmiller nonetheless sees the Jewish tradition as evolving in a positive direction, inasmuch as women who were raped gained increasing control over the social and economic consequences of this act.

Astrid Strathausen states in a study based on the history of legal rights: 'That a wife may be subjugated by her husband is made particularly clear in Jewish law'.¹⁵ To say that 'the abduction of women was quite usual'¹⁶ in connection with the—even to the community of narrators—repulsive and horrifying narration of Judges 19–21 is tantamount to taking seriously neither the difference between narration and history, nor the condemnation of those acts in the First Testament itself.¹⁷

More revealing than the statements made by feminist historians on this subject are, however, the observations they have not made. That Halachic texts—which, from a modern feminist point of view, are almost breathtakingly pro-woman—are never cited, can be explained by the fact that the Jewish sources are relatively inaccessible to researchers who do not read Hebrew or Aramaic. Moreover, a basic lack of understanding about interpretive pluralism in Jewish traditions has given rise to interpretations that lift quotes out of context in order to prove that the whole culture is misogynist. Non-Jewish feminist literature fails to take into account that the Talmud discusses the psycho-

logical effects of rape on women,¹⁸ that it discusses sexual violence not only in terms of the extent to which the woman resisted the act physically, but also in terms of whether or not she consented to it; and that the Talmud condemns marital rape:

Indeed, far from treating a wife as a piece of property or mere object for the satisfaction of the husband's sexual desire, talmudic law may be the first legal or moral system that recognizes that when a husband forces his wife the act is rape, pure and simple, and as condemnable as any other rape!¹⁹

Nonetheless, in the remainder of this article, I will be discussing the narrative, and not the legal tradition. The narrative I have chosen (Judg. 19–21) describes what is commonly seen as the most horrifying act committed against any woman in the entire First Testament: the rape of one woman by a horde of men, which leads to her death. Judges 19–21 tells also of war and 'abduction' (in reality mass rape), as well as untamed wilderness, boundaries and the crossing of boundaries. It is also concerned with group consciousness, and with alienation.

Efforts to avoid interpreting this narrative in an anti-Judaic way arise from two different attitudes towards the relationship with the Other. When discussing sexual violence, it is essential to perceive Others other than women in terms of differences other than sexual differences, and to look carefully at the interconnections within the dominant ways of dealing with differences. First, the text as Other should be taken seriously. In addition to that, the question of the relationships between various differences within the narrative world of Judges 19 has to be considered.

3. *The Text as Other*

As the cultural critic Tzvetan Todorov states, the European capacity to understand the Other, paradoxically, contains within it the danger of Eurocentrism. In seeking to gain a full understanding of the Other, the European risks giving in to the temptation of imagining the Other as a mirror of his/her Self and of his/her own suppressed Selves. The philosopher of religion Charles Long has coined the term 'opaque-

13. S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), p. 20.

14. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, p. 20.

15. Strathausen, *Ver-gewalt-igung*, p. 19.

16. Strathausen, *Ver-gewalt-igung*, p. 19.

17. Cf. K. von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings* (American Academy of Religion Cultural Criticism Series, 1, Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 95–96.

18. Cf. R. Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: An Exploration of Women's Issues in Halachic Sources* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), p. 245.

19. D. Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics, 25, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 114. Cf. Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, from p. 252.

ness' as a kind of antithesis to the term 'enlightenment'. 'Opacity' is used by Long descriptively regarding the self realization of the Blacks, who are constructed as Others. Subsequently the term is used normatively as relating to the perception of Others by the dominants, hence it describes the acceptance of the Other's opacity.

It is primarily a question of acknowledging the Other as a person whom we perhaps cannot know either completely or even partially.²⁰

This idea of otherness is carried over into the biblical text:

All attempts to mitigate this Otherness, for example by 'modernizing' the translation, amounts to abuse of those texts by another culture, an abuse that is structurally similar to Western racism.²¹

The biblical text should not be allowed to become a vehicle for peering into the experience of women from other cultures and historical periods, not only because these texts were probably written by men (some women think like patriarchs too), but also because it is not possible to extract the experiences of women either from evidence of texts originating in societies with narrators of both sexes, or through reconstruction of 'F voices'.²² Attempting to gain insight into the immediate experience of women is like peeling an onion in hopes of finding a pit. The difficulty of denying the need for this pit, which could provide the real and whole truth concerning women's experience, a need which lies beyond all methodological discretion, demonstrates that the analysis of Western thinking mentioned above is correct.

The experience of sexual violence has social origins also; interpreting and working through this experience, likewise, is governed by social construction. Certainly, indignation over the marital laws in the First Testament is understandable in light of today's experience, given the fact that marriage was expected to be the consequence of voluntary or forced sexual intercourse with any woman who was not engaged to be married (Exod. 22.15-16; Deut. 22.28-29). However, it is not possible to determine the effect of such laws (if they ever really have been in use) in women's lives; a first emotional reaction will have to be suspected as projection.

20. T. Wivrljet, 'Rassismus und Eurozentrismus: Historische Einblicke', in Silvia Wagner et al. (eds.), *(Anti-)Rassistische Irritationen: Biblische Texte und interkulturelle Zusammenarbeit* (Berlin: Alektor, 1994), pp. 189-200 (198-99) *x*

21. T. Veerkamp, 'Die Bibel: ein "fremdes Buch"', in Wagner et al. (eds.), *(Anti-)Rassistische Irritationen*, pp. 21-24 (21).

22. On this subject, cf. A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 1; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993).

In a horrific narrative such as Judges 19, acknowledgment of the text's opacity naturally gives rise to disagreement over explanatory interpretations. At the level of fable, the narrative is so fragmented that scholars have been trying for years to render this fragmentation coherent, at least at the textual level. But in so doing, they have not taken seriously the scandalousness of the narrated events actually present in the uneven Masoretic text.

The Septuagint has already tried to clarify one passage in the narrative that is ambivalent in its depiction of horror. Whereas the Hebrew text fails to make clear whether the wife is dead or alive when the Levite finds her, puts her on the donkey and then cuts her into twelve pieces with a knife, the Greek version clearly states that the woman is dead (v. 28). In the Masoretic text, the Levite is depicted as an accomplice to the murder of his wife; but the Septuagint resolves this tension, adopting the Levite's point of view as expressed in Judg. 20.5. Throughout the history of Christian exegesis, scholars in the tradition of higher criticism have searched for a coherent original, and—without acknowledging as much methodologically—have tried to gloss over the horror of difference expressed by the text.

A first difficulty presented by the text is the difference made between violent heterosexual passion and homosexual passion. The men demand that the male guest be handed over so that they can 'know' (וַיִּדְעוּ) him; after this, his wife is raped. One of the interpretations, for instance, solves the problem by understanding already the demand of the men as a request for the woman only;²³ another releases the tension by interpreting the verbalized intention as not a sexual one.²⁴ The idea that the structure of the plot denotes—to borrow a term from higher criticism—irreconcilable tension, admits the conclusion that the critics have particular attitudes towards homosexuality as well as rape. The view of homosexuality as an exclusive sexual orientation and a way of life first emerged in our culture in the nineteenth century. For these critics, sexual violence primarily is made up of sexuality and passion; and it is not within the power of men who sexually desire other men to suddenly begin acting like heterosexuals. However, what is lacking here is the realization that in this context sexuality is

23. Cf. already K. Budde, *Das Buch der Richter* (KHAT, 7; Freiburg/Bz. 1897), p. 131.

24. Cf. H.-W. Jüngling, *Richter 19: Ein Plädoyer für das Königtum. Stilistische Analyse der Tendenzzählung Ri 19, 1-30a; 21.25 (AB, 84; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1981)*, pp. 204-19.

being viewed as a violent weapon, despite the fact that the concrete relationship between sexuality and violence has yet to be determined.

The host's offering of his virgin daughter as well as the Levite's wife has led certain critics to alter the text. Hans-Winfried Jüngling²⁵ treats the Hebrew *uḏḏā* ('his wife') as a gloss, thereby rendering it unnecessary for him to account for and interpret the discrepancies between the three versions (the demand for the Levite, the offering of the two women, and the rape of one of the women). This view also makes it possible for him to see both the host and his guest as heroes. Even as venerable a practitioner of synchronistically oriented new literary criticism as Mieke Bal takes liberties with the text in order to render it coherent. Her basic thesis is that, in this text, a conflict between the older patrilineal and the more modern virilocal system of marriage is being acted out. This is a plausible interpretation which, nevertheless, is rendered problematic due to the fact that all differences in the text are reduced to this one conflict. In this interpretation, the host's offer is seen as indicating his acceptance of patrilineal marriage and his rejection of the Levite's virilocal marriage. Handing over the wife enables the host not only to protect the threatened guest, but also to purge himself of the guest's strange, modern and immoral way of life. At the same time, this act oppresses the Levite with the law of the father, as expressed in the patrilineal form of marriage.²⁶

4. Differences in the Narrated World

It is as seductive as it is dangerous to interpret this text exclusively from the viewpoint of the difference between the sexes. In her womanist interpretation of Judges 19, Koala Jones-Warsaw²⁷ takes exception to this attitude, linking the opposition of women as powerless victims and men as powerful aggressors to Phyllis Trible's interpretation.²⁸ Jones-Warsaw states that a white middle-class interpretation does not 'acknowledge other types of victimization beyond that which white middle-class females experience (that is, from male domina-

tion).'²⁹ This interpretation takes into account the fact that men, as well as women, are victimized. She thus also makes it possible for the reader to identify not only with the wife, but also with the wife's father, the Benjaminites and the Levite.

In my view, treating strangeness as a central category is the key to an interpretation that would attempt to clarify the differences contained in the text. Two words that the First Testament uses for foreigner/stranger need to be differentiated: *ṭā* and *ṭāḏ*. Both the Levite and his host in Gibeah are referred to as *ṭā*, a word that poses difficulties for the translator. Martin Buber translated the verb *ṭā* as *gasten*, and the noun as *Gastisasse*. In both the German translation and in the secondary literature, the word *fremd* ('foreign') is used alongside the word *Schutzbürger* (a citizen legally protected against violence). At first glance, the latter seems to indicate a positive social status and in any case has the same connotations as it does in the story of Judges 19—the vulnerability of the foreigner and the necessity to protect him. The fact that the laws in Deuteronomy are aimed not only at the *ṭāḏ* but also at widows and orphans, who were social groups especially in need of protection, tends to indicate that these groups were not treated this way as a matter of course. That those laws offered such protection indicates that such protection was not taken for granted, and that the members of these groups in all likelihood did not feel protected. The central problem in Judges 19 is not one of material need, which the laws were primarily concerned with, but of the stranger's general safety. In his wanderings, the Levite was accompanied by his servants and domestic animals; he also had a good supply of provisions, including food and wine for himself and his attendants, as well as provender for his domestic animals. He also carried a reserve supply that would enable him to offer food and drink to the host in Gibeah.

Gibeah is nonetheless not the first place where the Levite is a stranger: he is so named even in his own land as well as in the hill country of Ephraim, from which he is fleeing. As a tribe lacking their own inherited territory (only after the time of the narrative were the Levites granted their own cities), the Levites were one of the endangered groups within Israel. A Levite was not only called *ṭā*; Levites were also closely associated with the term *ṭā* in certain passages.³⁰ The term

25. Jüngling, *Richter* 19, p. 211.

26. Cf. M. Bal, *Death and Disymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 92.

27. K. Jones-Warsaw, 'Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic: A Reading of Judges 19-21', in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (The Feminist Companion to the Bible 4; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 172-86.

28. P. Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

29. Jones-Warsaw, 'Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic', p. 181.

30. E.g. this can be found in Deut. 14:29, 16:14, 26:12. Levites besides the three classic examples from Deuteronomy's socially disadvantaged, the stranger, the widow and the orphan.

וַי, 'stranger', expresses a relationship which is concerned primarily with lack of land and, by extension, with the notion of displacement. To treat strangers not, simply, as you would a native of your own land, but also to love them as yourself, is one of the central tenets of Israel's Torah (Lev. 19.34). This commandment of love derives from the experience that the tribes of Israel had when they themselves were strangers in Egypt.

Inasmuch as in Judges 19 the term וַי, 'stranger', is not associated with material need, it can only connote a state of relative powerlessness: powerlessness and displacement go hand in hand. The Levite's woman is in jeopardy not only because of her gender, but also because she is the wife of a stranger. The narrative expresses the danger she incurs in terms of her being displaced; she is classified primarily in terms of her having traveled a long distance.³¹ It is the undefined Outside, the Nowhere, that puts her in a dangerous position.

Indeed, the hazards incurred by the stranger as וַי are part of the consciousness of the narrative, but not of the consciousness of the narrated characters. The Levite reacts negatively to his servant's suggestion to stop over in Jebus, remarking that Jebus is a strange city (וַיֵּבֶן וַיֵּבֶן) where the people are not Israelites. The Levite's use of the term וַיֵּבֶן³² emphasizes the hostility towards the unfamiliar that underlies this image of a town full of non-Israelites. In so doing, however, he misinterprets the narrative situation. The so-called prejudice refrain (*Tendenzrefrain*)³³ 'And there was no king in Israel...' signals a historical situation of chaos, primarily characterized by a lack of solidarity among the tribes of Israel. The Levite is mistaken in his estimation of who in Israel was to be considered as Other. This error shows that social coding is an underlying factor in determining who is deemed Other, and that this code is not intelligible to all concerned.

31. Cf. Gen. 34; 2 Sam. 13.1-22. Both Dinah and Tamar leave their protected room. Cf. Meike Bal's (*Death and Dissymmetry*, pp. 169-96) impressive linkage of displacement in the Book of Judges with the Freudian term 'uncanny' (*das Unheimliche*).

32. This term is best translated 'foreigner' (*Ausländer*). The 'increasingly unfriendly behavior towards foreigners' arose from the overwhelming political and cultural influence of the Assyrians and later the Babylonians, which in turn led to the exiles in the eighth century in the Northern Kingdom and in the sixth century in Judah. See L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger, '... denn ihr seid Fremde gewesen im Lande Ägypten': Zur sozialen und rechtlichen Stellung von Fremden und Ausländern im alten Israel', *BilI* 2 (1990), pp. 108-17 (114-15).

33. Jungling, *Richter* 19, p. 59.

For the person who, unbeknownst to him or herself, is labeled as Other, this error can be lethal.

The confusing situation the narrative relates makes it virtually impossible for the reader to identify with one of the characters; and the fact that the characters described in the narrative are not given names has a distancing effect. However, all the characters are given positive and negative attributes, and all are both victims and offenders. Thus in this narrative, the usual assumption that victims are not guilty does not apply.

It is difficult to feel anything but sympathy for the Levite as stranger: he himself nearly becomes the victim of a violent act, and he also becomes a co-victim through the act of violence directed at his wife (v. 25). But he also takes on the role of offender when he thrusts his wife outside the house. In v. 29, shortly before the Levite cuts his wife into pieces, וַיִּחַן ('hold') is simply part of the narrative—whereas in 2 Sam. 13.11, 14 it is part of the description of a sexual violence act. This treatment must in any case be characterized as violent. The semantic parallelism with the binding of Isaac in Genesis 22³⁴ also sets up a contrast to the acts committed by the Levite. Whether the Levite actually does murder his wife remains unclear. This ambivalence is an integral part of the Levite's characterization, and makes it difficult for the reader to identify with him.

The Levite's wife has become the quintessential symbol of 'victim'. That a woman who was a victim of such a violent act bears no name is so painful to some readers that they have given her one:

I feel it not only acceptable but necessary to take some critical distance from the alienating anonymity of the character—without, however, losing sight of the structure of subjectivity that it signifies.³⁵

She is raped (almost?) to death by a horde of Gibeon men, after which her husband reduces her to the status of a mere sign, or symbol. Although she is depicted as a wife proper,³⁶ she is so important to the Levite correspond to that of a wife proper,³⁶ she is so important to the Levite

34. On this subject cf. Trible, *Texts of Terror*. וַיִּחַן וַיִּחַן וַיִּחַן ('and he took the knife') appears in this form only in Judg. 19.29 and in Gen. 22.10. Only in these passages is the noun וַיִּחַן used with the definite article.

35. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 43, concerning the giving of the name 'Bath' ('daughter') to the daughter of Jephthah. Bal calls the anonymous woman in Judges 19 'Beth' ('house'). J.C. Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (SOTSup. 163; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), from p. 176, calls this woman 'Bath-sheber', daughter of breaking.

36. The legal status of the וַיִּחַן is unclear. The word appears only in this

that after she leaves he sets out after her in order to bring her back. Nonetheless, the narrative does not hesitate to draw attention to her unusual ability to act on her own. The Levite's wife leaves her husband and goes back to her father's house. The text, however, expresses a negative attitude towards the morality of this act. I disagree with Bernadette Brooten's translation of the verb *וָיָרָא* (v. 2) as *zurmen* ('be angry with someone').³⁷ Moreover, I do not think this passage should be used to support the view that, in ancient Israel, it was to a certain degree possible for a woman to initiate a divorce. The current view is that *וָיָרָא* had connotations of sexual misconduct. However, it should not be taken to mean a transgression that is separate from the wife's act of abandoning her husband. The verbal clause that follows v. 2a should be understood as a subordinate clause. Moreover, the conjunction *ו* should be translated as 'inasmuch'. The Levite's wife's behavior falls into the category of 'sexual misconduct' (i.e. socially inappropriate) because she has left him.³⁸ Inasmuch as the narrative casts the Levite's wife's acts in a negative light, she is not constructed as a blameless victim.

The *host*, introduced into the narrative as a stranger who also comes from the region known as Ephraim, enters into a relationship of solidarity with the Levite. His hospitality towards the Levite makes him a sympathetic character in the narrative. Such behavior was quite unusual in Gibeah during this period and, as a result, the *host* comes close to achieving a hero status in the course of the narrative. However, it is he who suggests that the two women be handed over, an act which renders him considerably less sympathetic.

Even the way in which the *Benjaminites* are portrayed forces the reader to feel empathy with the fate that befalls them. Their refusal to hand over the guilty Gibeah inhabitants leads to a war and to the near-eradication of their entire tribe. The danger that, without women, their tribe will die out gives rise to countless women being subjected to further acts of violence countenanced by all of Israel (Judg. 21). Regarding black women, Jones-Warsaw writes: 'Like the Benjaminites we

must decide whether we should stand in solidarity with our brothers, and at what cost'.³⁹

5. *The Others and the Self*

The story has no heroes; nor does it allow the reader to differentiate clearly between offenders and victims. The violence portrayed is delimited by borders and differences. Violence is sexualized, and is not confined merely to sexual violence by men as offenders or towards women as victims. At first, the Gibeah men demand the Levite as an object of sexualized violence. The lethal difference between sexual violence committed by men against other men, and that committed by men against women, is that in the narrative the Gibeah men's demand remains at the level of narrated discourse and does not carry over to the level of narrated events. Thus, a feminist analysis of sexual violence must accept the impossibility of explaining away the disturbance caused by the same weapons against the foreign man and the foreign woman. However, do the differences between acts of violence against men on the one hand and women on the other hand, in this story, consist only of the difference between attempting violence and actually committing it?

When in 20.4-6, in order to persuade the other tribes of Israel to take up arms against Gibeah, the Levite briefly describes what has happened, he is clearly not talking about the Gibeah men's plans in sexual terms, but rather in terms of an attempted murder: 'They tried to kill me, but they raped my wife and she died' (v. 5). This statement is usually interpreted to mean that the Levite is exaggerating so as to justify the fact that he has handed over the woman. However, nowhere in his representation of the events does the Levite mention that he himself has thrust his wife outside the door. Thus, his justification of his actions is related to the events narrated in ch. 19, but not to his own account of these events.

If the sexualization of the violence with which the Levite is threatened is seen as the extreme humiliation of this man as Other, which consists of his being feminized, the reason for the non-sexualized nature of the Levite's description becomes clear. For the Levite, not only the sexual act but also the threat of it (in other words, being victimized by the act of feminization) constitute extreme humiliation,

narrative and in the narrative about the rape of David's *דְּוִיָּהּ* by Absalom (2 Sam. 16). However, I have decided to use the expression 'Levite's wife' because I like neither the very negative connotations attached to the word 'concubine' nor the condescending expression 'another wife'.

37. B. Brooten, 'Konnten Frauen im alten Judentum die Scheidung betreiben? Überlegungen zu Mk 10, 11-12 und 1 Kor 7, 10-11', *EoT* 42 (1982), pp. 65-80 (68).

38. Cf. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 179: 'A woman who asserts her sexual autonomy by leaving her husband... is guilty of sexual misconduct'.

39. Jones-Warsaw, 'Toward a Womanist Hermeneutic', p. 184.

which is why he fails to mention them in his own account. In this context, it is incorrect to interpret as homosexual desire the demand made by the men of Gibeah that the other man be handed over for the purpose of violating him sexually. The threat made by the foreign men is made less serious by means of feminization. Thus, being strange is transformed into another form of being Other. And it is this other form of being Other, being feminine, that makes it possible for the Gibeah men to get control over the Otherness by means of sexual violence. The stranger is cast out into a twofold border area, that is, into a state of total displacement characterized by strangeness and femininity. The strict refusal to blur sexual borders—as expressed in the prohibitions against homosexuality in Lev. 18:22–23, and as expressed even more clearly by the prohibition against cross-dressing in Deut. 22:5—creates the ideological background against which the Levite is threatened with feminization.⁴⁰

Sexual violence, as represented in this story, combines the two aspects of Otherness—being a member of the female sex and being a stranger—and thus multiplies, not only adds, these aspects of Otherness. Strangeness and femininity overlap in the sexualizing of violence in such a way that the Levite and his wife become interchangeable objects. The Levite's wife becomes a victim of sexual violence because she is both a foreign woman and the wife of a foreign man: these two aspects of being a victim must be viewed as part of one phenomenon. The men of Gibeah are primarily interested in doing violence to the Levite, but they achieve this goal by attacking his wife. Initially weakened by discursive feminization, the violent attack on his wife has a direct effect on him.

Just as the forced and actualized act of violence against the Levite leaves him a double Other, so does the text reinstate him as a self, inasmuch as it negates both forms of being the Other. The text meets the threat of feminization with the second act of violence committed against the woman, an act whose subject is the Levite himself. The cutting up of the wife⁴¹ negates the dynamic process of threat that, as it arises from femininity, brings this process to a halt:

40. Cf. T. Frymer-Kensky, 'Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible', *Semeia* 45 (1989), pp. 90–102, from p. 96. G. Braulik, *Deuteronomium*. II. Kap. 16, 18–34; 12 (NEB, 28, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1992), from p. 161, rejects the interpretation of this rule as sanctioning an assumed natural order. He relates this passage to the exchanging of roles by men and women in Caananite religious practices.

41. The parallels with both Saul's butchering of the oxen, which also gives rise to a war (1 Sam. 11:7), and with ancient Near Eastern texts, indicate that a custom related to warriors assembling in preparation for battle is being referred to here.

As a metonymy for that which has no fixed place, the sacrificed woman translates the disturbing, threatening, and dangerous back into the system, giving it a fixed position which does not take into account whether the normative order is being affirmed or attacked.⁴²

Through this act of semiotization, the body of the woman is desexualized, perfectly and repulsively. With this act of violence, the Levite affirms his solidarity with the attackers at the level of sexual difference and, in so doing, reaffirms his masculinity. With the call to arms against Gibeah, the Levite reinstates himself in the community of Israel and puts the men of Gibeah in the position of the Other.

Inasmuch as violence is committed against the woman two different times—once by sexualizing her, the other by desexualizing her—the text constitutes a way of dealing with the double threat of her twofold Otherness, namely, the elimination of the Other woman. Thus, the spiral of violence remains unbroken. It escalates to the point where it fits into the system of behavior towards differences constituted by the text, and perpetuates countless further acts of violence.

This interpretation shows that not enough has been said about the possibility of finding an alternative viewpoint that would bridge the gap between two issues: the 'rules of hospitality', and 'sexuality'.⁴³ It is precisely the mutual stigmatizing of various differences that perpetuates and forms the basis of patriarchal power relationships. It is still true today that the stigmatization of the other man through feminization, as well as the stigmatization of the woman through real or metaphorically constructed relationships between femininity and wildness, strangeness or nature, are paradigms of domination operating in countless realms of patriarchal society. For example, sexual violence among men in prisons is one of the most taboo problems in our criminal justice system. It is neither surprising nor accidental, then, who in such situations is made the victim and who is the offender. The victim is stigmatized; and the sexually 'passive' men are feminized, not only sexually but also by being forced to carry out activities that are unworthy of men. They are thereby degraded to the status of women. As a result, 'real' men refer to their victims as 'the girl', or give them female names. Thus, the masculinity of sexually

The closeness of the parallel of Judg. 19:29 to these other texts is a subject of debate: cf. Jüngling, *Richter* 19, pp. 236–41.

42. E. Bronfen, *Nur über ihre Leiche: Tod, Weiblichkeit und Ästhetik* (Munich: dtv, 1994), p. 321.

43. Cf. Budde, *Das Buch der Richter*, p. 131.

'active' men is not called into question but, instead, is proven by denying the masculinity of other men. In racist ideological systems, the feminization of other men is also used as a strategy to maintain domination: 'Stereotypes of femininity, Jewishness and Blackness are used to code one's opponents in order to undermine their credibility'.⁴⁴ The feminization of the Other as metaphor is a means for gaining control over the unknown and, thereby, over what is threatening. In the fifteenth century, the comparison of the newly 'discovered' continents to a woman to be abducted⁴⁵ went hand in hand with real sexual violence against other women.

The narrative of Judges 19–20 reveals the great similarity between the desperate behavior towards differences and the search for identity that consists of the attempt to construct the self by distinguishing it from Others. It is a male self in search of itself that needs to take cognizance of, and deny, Otherness as a threat.

REREADING THE BODY POLITIC: WOMEN AND VIOLENCE IN JUDGES 21*

Alice Bach

Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.
Sylvia Plath, 'Daddy'

Rape is a weapon.¹ Rape is a weapon to reassert the power of a man over an enemy. Rape is used to create fear in women. Across time, legend and history have mythified not the strong woman who defends herself successfully against bodily assault, but the beautiful frail woman who dies while protecting her 'innocence'. Victory through physical triumph is a male prerogative incompatible with femininity. Rape is a subject that has been exposed by feminist criticism in one literature after another. We have come to understand that rape is not so much a sexual crime as it is a means of physical, mental, and spiritual domination. So powerful is the impulse for feminists to identify rape, even within literary texts, that feminist literary critics have inscribed what Adrienne Rich has called, 'more than a chapter in cultural history', rather 'an act of survival'² in the process of analyzing rape narratives.

Exum challenges the biblical authors with her suggestion of female figures being raped by the pen—if not the penis.³ While this suggestion may seem to exist totally within the realm of metaphor, it

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2. Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Waken: Writing as Revision', reprinted in Barbara Charlesworth and Albert Gelpi (eds.), *Adrienne Rich's Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975 [1972]).

3. J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (SOTISup, 163; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 171–202.

44. Von Kellenbach, *Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings*, p. 21.

45. Cf. illustrations in S. Weigel, *Topographien der Geschlechter* (Kulturgeschichtliche Studien zur Literatur, Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), pp. 143–48.